

Tumithak in Shawm

A SEQUEL TO
Tumithak of the Corridors

by
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In this sequel we see Tumithak of the Corridors in a new role. In the preceding story he showed his powers as an individual warrior and indicated what the inhabitants of the Corridors could do against the enemy on the surface of the earth. Now he appears as the leader of his followers in a contest against the evil powers that have been holding them in the Corridors. The contest is an impressive one and is vividly described by the author.

Foreword

Five thousand years have passed since the shelks, leaving their home planet of Venus, invaded the earth and drove mankind from the Surface into the Pits and Corridors that were to be his home for twenty centuries. When at last he did emerge, a new Heroic Age was born, and we of to-day look back upon the leaders of that great rebellion as little less than demigods.

And of all the distorted, exaggerated traditions, perhaps the one most filled with magic and wonder is that of Tumithak of Loor. The first and actually the greatest of a long list of Shelk-slayers, men have, from the first, been tempted to attribute to him supernatural, or at least, superhuman powers, and to claim for him, even, the direct supervision of the Deity.

However, by using the knowledge that we have gained through recent archeological research, it is possible to roughly rebuild the life of that great hero into a rational possible story. Shorn of its prophecies, its miracles and its wonder, it becomes the tale of a young man who, inspired by stories of the great deeds of the past, determined to risk his life to prove that the shelks were vulnerable and could yet be conquered. The story of how he proved that to his people, the writer has already presented to the public—the story of the deeds that followed, he now presents in this continuation of the adventures of “Tumithak of the Corridors.”

CHAPTER I - Shawm

The long corridor stretched almost as far as eye could see its beautiful marble sides gleaming under the many varicolored lights which, carefully concealed in the walls, cast over the hall an effect of creamy mellowness. The pictures and geometrical figures that were carved in the soft white stone of which the walls were composed seemed to have been designed to cooperate with the lights to produce a single harmonious effect of surpassing beauty. Here and there, ornate doorways appeared, with great bronze doors on which scenes and figures had been cast that rivaled those of the walls for beauty. A few of the doorways lacked these doors, and these were covered instead with great drapes and tapestries, heavy with threads of gold and silver, and dyed with every color of the spectrum.

But the beauties of this splendid hallway were wasted, for in all its length not a human being appeared to appreciate them, and indeed, the thick dust that covered the floor and the many spider webs on the walls gave evidence of the months that must have elapsed since it had been deserted. Not for several years, in fact, had anyone entered this part of the corridor, not since one from far below had emerged from a well-like opening in one of the apartments and passed through this hall on his way to the Surface of the earth, far above. Even before his coming, the ponderous dwellers of this corridor had always feared this hall of the pit and avoided it, for it led to the pits of the “wild men,” and in the sybaritic life of the Esthetts, the least suggestion of danger was a thing to shun. And so this hail, in spite of its exceptional beauty, was always utterly deserted.

But now, after so long a time, sounds were breaking into the silence of the corridor. Soft rustlings, guarded whispers and muttered ejaculations were coming from one of the apartments, and after a few moments, a savage face peered out of the doorway; then, seeing the hallway quite deserted, its owner stepped into view, he looked up and down the hallway as though fearing an attack by some unseen enemy,

but, after looking searchingly through several of the apartments and convincing himself that the passage was really deserted, he sheathed the huge sword which he had held in his hand and returned to the door from which he had emerged.

The Interlopers of the Corridor

He was a huge, savage-looking fellow, this inter-loper, over six feet in height, with a great hairy chest and huge shoulders and with a chin that was covered with an immense growth of red beard. He wore a single garment, a rough burlap-like tunic that fell to his knees, into the cloth of which were sewn dozens of bits of metal and of bone, the latter stained in various colors, and worked into a crude pattern. His rusty-red hair was worn long and around his neck was a neck-lace made of dozens of human finger bones threaded on a thin strip of skin.

He stood for a moment longer before leaving the hallway and then, reentering the apartment, he called softly.

He was answered by a low hoot and then another man joined him, a taller, younger man who was dressed quite differently. This newcomer wore a tunic made of cloth of the finest texture imaginable, sheer gauze that was dyed in the most delicate shades of nacreous pinks and green and blues. It was not a new garment, but worn and torn and sewn, as though it were highly prized by the owner, who had determined to wear it until it fell apart from old age. It was caught up about the middle by a wide, many-pocketed belt with an enormous buckle, a belt from which dangled a sword and—strange anachronism—a pistol! Around the head of its wearer was a metal band not unlike a crown, a band such as was worn by the chiefs of those enemies of mankind, the shelks. Although this second man had not the other's tremendous strength and physical perfection, he was far above the average man in size and muscular power, and the poorest reader of character could tell at a glance that he was the more intellectual of the two. And one could feel, too, that together these two would make a combination capable of facing anything with a good chance of winning.

They stood silently staring up and down the passage for a while and then at last the second man spoke to his companion.

Tumithak of the Corridors

"What think you of the Halls of the Esthetts, Datto?" he asked. "Are they not as wonderful and as beautiful as I have described them?"

"They are truly wonderful, Tumithak," the other answered. "Though of what use these strange pictures can be, I cannot tell. Nor can I understand why the curtains of the doors should be so elaborate." He paused and then his eyes brightened as he went on: "But there is a splendid idea in those metal doors. We must carry some of them back to the lower corridors. With one of them in his doorway, a man might well defend himself against a hundred enemies."

"Our only enemies now are the shelks," reminded Tumithak. "And do not think that metal doors would keep those savage beasts out, Datto."

Datto grunted and continued his disparaging appraisal of the corridor. It was obvious that he lacked the sense of beauty that stirred, even though feebly, in Tumithak's breast.

"Which way leads to the Surface?" Datto asked, tersely, and when Tumithak pointed it out, he continued: "Let us call the others. No doubt they are waiting impatiently for the signal." Tumithak agreed, whereupon his companion reentered the apartment and gave again the low call that he had given before. There was a pause, and then men began to emerge from the rear room, men who had been waiting eagerly at the bottom of the pit concealed in that room, and who now, at Datto's call hurried up the ladder to the level on which their leaders stood.

The first to emerge was a lean young man with a hawk-like face, a young man whose close-cropped hair and wide, pocketed belt marked him as a citizen of the same town as Tumithak. Nikadur, this young man's name was, and as Tumithak's boyhood companion, he had been the first to swear to follow the Shelk-slayer wherever he might lead. This young man was closely followed by another, and if Nikadur bore evidence of being a follower of Tumithak, this other as obviously showed a similar relationship to Datto. Thorpf was this

one's name, and he was the nephew of Datto, and helped him to rule the halls of the city of Yakra far below the surface.

And behind these two came many others: Tumlook, the father of Tumithak; Nennapuss, the chief of the city of Nonone, with his sons and nephews; and then man after man of lesser importance in the cities of the lower corridors, men who had never distinguished themselves, and whose only claim to fame lay in their undoubted loyalty to their chiefs. And here and there among them were members of a tribe upon whom the people of the lower corridors still looked askance: the savages of the dark corridors, their eyes wrapped in fold after fold of cloth, to keep out the brilliant light which was so painful to their sensitive optic nerves. These latter were slaves now, only recently subdued by the men of the lower corridors, but already the plentitude of food had made them willing servants.

Tumithak's Company of Warriors

In all, over two hundred men emerged from the pit and drew up in formation in the corridor, awaiting the word from Tumithak that was to start them on their raid on the Esthetts. They stood silent while Tumithak outlined to them briefly what he knew of the halls and corridors of this vicinity and then, at a softly spoken word, the entire party moved swiftly down the passage.

This raid on the Esthetts was the first of its kind that the people of the lower corridors had attempted. Since Tumithak had returned from the Surface to become their chief, two years before, he had spent most of his time in consolidating his government. There were some malcontents among the Yakrans and even among the Loorians and these had been made to feel the heavy hand of the new ruler, and, when the three cities were at last one in their allegiance, there were many little groups or "villages" in the side corridors that had to be brought under the Loorian's sway.

And when, at last, all the lower corridors unhesitatingly acknowledged Tumithak as their chief, the people had swept into the dark corridors, and in a short while the savages were conquered and enslaved, and all the pits below the Halls of the Esthetts bowed to the new leader.

It was then that Tumithak decided that the time was almost at hand to begin the raid on the halls of that race of ponderous artists that gave their worship and allegiance to the shelks. The Loorian was under no illusions as to what this meant. Although he failed to realize the exact relationship that existed between the Esthetts and the shelks, he knew that these obese creatures looked upon the shelks as their masters, and would not hesitate to call them to their aid if danger threatened. And Tumithak realized, therefore, that an attack on the Esthetts was equivalent to an attack on their masters.

The shelks had "domesticated" the Esthetts and used them as we do cattle, lulling their suspicions with hypocritical lies and flattery and breeding them for bovine stupidity and trustfulness.

A Raid on the Domesticated Esthetts

Tumithak had postponed this raid, therefore, until the entire lower corridors were united, but once that was accomplished, he saw no reason for hesitating longer. He called for two classes of volunteers, those who were brave enough to aid in an attack on these creatures of the shelks, and those who would follow wherever led, even to the Surface. Tumithak knew that a volunteer army was the only type that he could take with him, and so when, of the thousands of people in the lower corridors, only some two hundred warriors responded, he perforce satisfied himself with this group, and started on his way. Fortunately, it seemed to him, the two classes of volunteers were identical, almost to a man.

And now this dauntless two hundred were swarming through the Halls of the Esthetts, their swords bared and their war cries trembling on their lips, waiting for the moment when Tumithak should give the word to attack. That leader, however, saw no cause for hurry, he led them on and on through the corridor, his chief desire being to get as close to the center of the town as he could before he was discovered. And then at last, satisfying himself that he was not far from the Great Square of the Esthetts, he gave the word, and, in a trice, pandemonium broke loose in the Halls of the Esthetts.

The Raid Was a Massacre

There is little need to describe the ensuing battle. After all, it was not a battle but a massacre and, were

it not for the absolute necessity of it, Tumithak would have dispensed with fighting the Esthetts at all. But he remembered Lathrumidor, the artist who had attempted to betray him on his way to the surface before, and so, realizing the treacherous nature of the huge Esthetts, he determined that they must die.

And die they did, to the last one; and when the band of victors assembled at the upper end of the Esthetts' corridor some forty hours later, it was a motley crew indeed. Many wore the delicate gauzes of the Esthetts, others still dressed in the rough tunic of their native halls. Some carried the swords they had brought with them, some carried other weapons, swords and spears that the Esthetts had fashioned, not indeed for weapons, but merely for their artistic beauty. And they were weapons now, as were many other of the creations of the artists. One man even held in his hand a delicate statuette of bronze, its end clotted with blood and hair where he had struck down some Esthett with it.

And to these men Tumithak spoke, and again told them of the necessity of immediately going on. The shelks often visited the Esthetts, he said. No one could tell at what moment they might come again. And rather than have the shelks surprise the pitmen, it were well if the pitmen at once moved to the Surface to surprise the shelks! "And so," he finished, "all who would follow me, be ready after the very next sleep, for then I intend to lead my party out to the attack." He dismissed the warriors and retired, himself, to try to secure a much needed rest.

After the sleep, Tumithak was pleasantly surprised to find that not more than ten men desired to remain in the Halls of the Esthetts. These he placed under the authority of Thurranen, a son of Nennapuss; and then, with nearly two hundred men following him, he set out for the Surface and—the shelks!

The Campaign Against the Shelks

They came at last to that narrow hallway of jet black stone that told Tumithak that they were perilously near to the Surface. He called his chiefs together and held a council of war. It was a momentous council, for this was the first time, probably, in nineteen hundred years or more, that men had deliberately planned a campaign against the shelks. The most important thing that the pitmen lacked, the council decided, was knowledge of the Surface and of the ways of the shelks. This lack of knowledge, they felt, must be overcome at once, or any chance of victory would be lost at the very start. It would undoubtedly be necessary to send scouts up to the Surface to find out what the conditions were up there.

At this suggestion (which had been offered by Nennapuss), Datto the Yakran laughed loud and scornfully. In two thousand years, he said, only a single man had been found brave enough to face the dangers of the Surface. And now Nennapuss talked of sending out scouts, as though they were about to raid another passage of the dark corridors! Would Nennapuss suggest, perhaps, to whom he intended to offer this position of scout?

Nennapuss was about to reply with some heat, when Tumithak interrupted him.

"Datto," stated the Loorian, "when the people of one corridor invade the halls of another, the position of scout or spy is a dangerous one yet not overly important or honorable. But in this war of ours, the scout is all important, for not only our lives but the very future of man depends on what information he can bring up. Now, but one of all this body has ever looked upon the Surface, and if that one feels that he should surely lead the scouts that must go ahead of this army, can any one deny him the right?"

The lesser chiefs were astounded.

"But we need you to lead the army, Tumithak!" They protested. "Never before has a chief taken such chances of leaving his men leaderless. Why, if you should die, the whole of the Great Rebellion would collapse!"

Tumithak smiled.

"Call the army together then," he suggested, "and ask for volunteers to go on to the Surface, *ahead of me!*" The chiefs were silent. Even they, themselves, would not be willing to face the Surface alone, though they would have cheerfully died *following* Tumithak.

The Leader of the Scouts

The Shelk-slayer waited a moment and then spoke:

“You see? It is clear that I must lead the scouts. And for the same reason it must be the chiefs the leaders that make up this party of scouts. It is from you my council that I must call for volunteers.”

Instantly a dozen swords were thrust out, hilt first, toward Tumithak. Every member of the council will-ingly agreed to follow the Shelk-slayer, where not one had been willing to precede him. Tumithak hesitated and then picked out three men. Nikadur he chose, his boyhood companion, for he felt he knew this Loorian so well, that he could anticipate his reaction to any event. Then, too, Nikadur was an accomplished archer, and possessed the only weapon known to the pitmen that could slay at a distance. Datto he chose, and this for the Yakrans hard, practical sense and unfailing courage, as well as for his immense, untiring strength. And lastly he chose Thorpf, the nephew of Datto, for the same reasons that he chose the Yakran chief.

So, a few hours later, these four were moving up the narrow, black-walled corridor, swords in hand and packs on their backs; while behind them, the army, in charge of Tumlook and Nennapuss, waited anxiously for their return.

The Approach to the Surface

The came to the narrow flight of stairs, ascended it, and saw in the distance the opening that was the entrance to the Surface. But to Tumithak's sur-prise, no reddish light appeared, as it had on his previ-ous visit. In fact no light at all shone down into the hall from the Surface! Tumithak was puzzled. He motioned the other three to wait there, and then crept softly to the opening that was the goal of the long trek through the corridors. Cautiously, the slayer of the shelk raised his eyes above the level of the pit and looked about him. It was true, as he had thought, all the Surface was in darkness! He felt a pang of fear. Had the shelks discovered the approach of his men and somehow plunged the Surface into darkness, he wondered. Were they even now in hiding, waiting for the men of the lower corridors to emerge, that they might slaughter them?

Involuntarily, Tumithak drew back into the corridor and there he stood, lashing his failing courage. Once again, as in the days when he had come this way alone, his cold, fanatic reasoning overcame his emotions, as he remembered that all the legends that he had ever heard of the shelks told of their hatred of the dark. Indeed, his wonderbook, that manuscript that he had found when a boy, had told him that the shelks had originally come from a land where there was never darkness and that story—combined with the vague legends of his tribe which said that no shelk would ever, from choice, do battle in the dark—convinced him that the darkness could not be of the shelk's contriving.

So, once again he returned to the pit, and, greatly daring, leapt out of it and stood upon the Surface!

The Great Darkness and the Stars

After a short while, it seemed as if his eyes began to adapt themselves to the darkness, and faintly he could see certain forms in the distance. The trees, those pillars whose tops were covered with strange green billows, he could see as dense black blobs against a background only slightly less dark. A few hundred feet away and directly in front of him, rose the homes of the shelks, obelisk-like towers, leaning at crazy angles, silhouetted against the sky. And, looking up into the sky, Tumithak was amazed to see that that ceiling, as he thought it, was covered with hundreds, yes, thousands of tiny pinpoints of brilliance, twinkling and glittering unceasingly, yet giving off so little light that the dense darkness could hardly be said to be diminished at all by them.

For some time the Loorian stood there and then, as nothing happened to disturb the stillness and calm of the night, he returned to the pit and called to his friends. In a few minutes Datto emerged from the pit, closely followed by Thorpf and Nikadur. They looked around them, obviously worried by the darkness, but afraid to ask questions, for fear that the sound of their voices might betray them. So they stood, awaiting an order from Tumithak, until in sudden decision, the Shelk-slayer fell on his face and began to crawl slowly in the direction of the towers of the shelks, motioning them, as he did so, to do likewise.

The trip to the towers took some time, for the slightest whisper of wind in the trees would frighten the pitmen and cause them to lie motionless for many minutes at a time, but at last they arose and stood in the

shadow of one of the towers. They were panting, not so much with the exertion of wallowing through the grass, as with the realization of the frightful danger they were facing, but after many minutes of tense listening, they grew bold enough to look around and take an interest in their surroundings. It was a strange building in whose shadow they found themselves, composed of some strong metal that was strange to the pitmen; a four-sided building that rose nearly—a hundred feet high—and was not more than fifteen feet square at the base. And it leaned at an angle of nearly twenty-five degrees in the direction from which the men had come. Towering over them, it seemed that at any moment it must fall and crush them, yet when they looked at its firm strong base, they realized that it might stand thus for centuries.

Having come this far, the waning courage of the men of the pit forbade their penetrating further into the town of the shelks, and so, undecided, they stood for many minutes, wondering what to do next. And though they stood in utter silence for long, in all that time they heard no sound of shelk, nor did they see a moving form.

But at last, Nikadur spoke softly in Tumithak's ear.

"Something is happening to the wall of the Surface on our right, Tumithak," he breathed. "It seems to be giving off a faint light."

Light on the Surface

Tumithak started. It was true! A faint, uneven light dimly shone in the sky at his right. Even as he gazed at it, he realized that the glow was penetrating all over the Surface. He could distinguish the faces of his comrades and make out details on the ground! And Datto and Thopf were commenting softly on the amazing wonder of the trees, which were now sufficiently visible to be distinguished separately.

Tumithak addressed his comrades: "The light is returning, or another is being prepared. It is strange, for it is in the opposite side of the Surface from the light which I saw when I came here before."

"Soon it will be light enough for the shelks to be about," whispered Datto. "Had we better retire to the pit, Tumithak?"

The Loorian was about to reply in the affirmative when Thopf gave a gasp and, trembling violently, pointed to a spot under the trees beyond the pit. There, faint forms were visible, moving toward the towers, and to them from the distance came the sound of clacking voices! A group of shelks were moving toward them!

In a moment, the terrible fear that was almost instinctive in man had seized the four. Panic-stricken, they looked about them for some means of flight. To return to the pit was impossible - already the group of spider-like creatures had passed it. To attempt to flee to the trees on either side was equally impossible—they could not fail to be seen almost immediately. But a single direction offered possible protection, and the hair of all four rose at the thought of taking that direction. Yet if they did not do so, and at once, discovery would be inevitable in another minute, so they fled around the side of the tower, further into the Shelk City, intent only on avoiding the present evil, and leaving the future to take care of itself. Even as they did so, rustling noises and here and there a clacking voice, told them that the city was beginning to awake. Utterly beside themselves with fear, they hugged the walls of the tower—and then, suddenly there was a door before them, an old, badly dilapidated wooden door, and Tumithak had pushed it open and was hustling them into the interior of the tower.

Had there been an enemy within, he might have easily slain them as they entered, for the transition from the rapidly increasing light without to the dismal interior gloom made the room seem dark as Erebus. But before long, their eyes adjusted themselves and soon they could distinguish faintly the details of the tower. And great was their belief as they realized that this could hardly be one of the inhabited homes of their enemies.

The Web of Ropes in the Tower

The floor was uncovered, just bare earth, queer, thickly packed dust that covered all the floor of the Surface; and there was no furniture of any description visible, unless a pile of straw in one corner might pass as a bed of sorts. But here and there about the room hung ancient frayed ropes, and looking aloft, Tumithak could notice dimly that these ropes led up to where, about twenty feet above, a great mass of twisted cables,

ropes and cords crossed and recrossed the entire interior of the tower. It was a veritable nest of ropes, a web, he thought, as the similarity of the shelks to spiders again came to him. And, indeed, he was not far from wrong, for the shelks used the towers only as sleeping quarters and, at night, retired to the upper parts of them, where, in a bed made of hundreds of cables and ropes hanging criss-crossed from the sides, they slumbered the dark hours away. Fortunately, this tower in which Tumithak and his companions found themselves was an old one, no longer considered *fit* for occupancy by the builders, and the use to which they now put it, we shall soon see.

The frightened pitmen stood for several minutes in the narrow confines of the tower, and their hearts were just beginning to again take up their normal beat when once more there came the ominous clacking voice of a shelk, this time almost without the door. It grew louder and the men knew suddenly, without a doubt, that the shelks were approaching this tower! They glanced wildly about them for a place of concealment, but even as they looked they knew there could be but one, and an attempt to hide in the maze of ropes and cables above the small room on the ground seemed tantamount to voluntary surrender. Nevertheless, no other alternative was possible, so in a moment, they were scrambling up the ropes and losing themselves in the thick maze of twisted cords and cables above. The criss-crossed ropes were not numerous near the ground, but some ten feet beyond where they began, they were so thickly placed that it would have been impossible to detect anyone hiding in them, from below. So here the adventurers halted their climb, and reclining in the thick web, lay listening to the sounds that were now immediately without the door. Indeed, by parting the ropes that concealed him, Tumithak found that he had an almost unhindered view of the floor beneath. That they had not concealed themselves a moment too soon was evidenced by the fact that hardly were they comfortably fixed among the ropes when the door was opened and a strange party came into view.

CHAPTER II - The Hounds of Hun-Pna

A shelk was the first to enter and Tumithak felt the ropes, on which he and his companions lay, shake as the other pitmen trembled with fear at this, their first sight of one of the savage beasts from Venus. The creature was a fair representative of its kind; about four feet high, and ten long spicier-like limbs and a head that, save for the fact that it was hairless and noseless, might have been that of a man. Held high in two of its limbs, as a man might hold a twig between thumb and forefinger, this shelk held a rod of metal, the tip of which glowed with a brilliant light. On its back was a queer-looking box, from which a hose emerged that was coiled up and ended in a long rod that was set into a sort of scabbard fastened on the box.

Following him came another, that might have been his twin, and bringing up the rear of this strange party were *two men!* And the strangeness of these men made the party above gasp with astonishment. The men were tall, taller even than Tumithak; in fact, the larger of the two must have been nearly seven feet in height. It was not their height though which astonished Tumithak and his friends; it was their incredible thinness and the savage look on their faces. Their legs and arms were long and stringy; their thighs, indeed, being little bigger around than Tumithak's arm. Their waists, too, were surprisingly narrow, their necks were lean; but their chests were enormous, as were their hands. Not that all these members were out of proportion, no, there was something about them that made one feel that for certain purposes, these men might be better proportioned than even Datto, that colossus of the corridors. But, in comparing the two, it would be evident that these men were of another race, just as it had been clear that the Esthetts were. If one should compare a picture of those ancient dogs of the Golden Age which were called greyhounds with our dogs of today, one would be able to understand the difference between the men of the corridors and these creatures of the shelks.

Tlot and Trak

These men were clad only in a single garment, a cloth wrapped around their middle and dropping to their knees; but over this cloth a belt was strapped, and from this belt dangled a sword. In their hands, each held a vicious looking whip made from the hide of some animal; and, as if all this were not enough to distinguish them, their hair and their luxurious beards were *black!* The pitmen, who had never seen hair of any other color than their own fiery red (save the yellow of the Esthetts), would not have been more surprised if their hair had been green.

These men followed the shelks into the room and at once cast themselves down on the beds of straw. The shelks muttered something to them in a low clacking whisper, and then, extinguishing their lights, they

turned and left the tower. The men remained, lying on the straw in a manner that clearly indicated fatigue. After a moment, one of them spoke languidly.

"I have seen real hunts in Kaymak, Tlot," he said, and there was a decided sneer in his voice. "I have known the time when three and even four of the wild ones would be bagged before night fell. You should see some of those hunts in the great city, Tlot."

The man called Tlot grunted.

"When you see a hunt in Shawm Trak, you know that you are really flushing a wild one. Those so called wild ones that you hunt in Kaymak are domesticated, and bred for the purpose, and you know it."

Trak looked crestfallen and turning to his bed, produced a small jug from within the straw. He poured some oil from it into his hand and began to oil his whip. Presently he made bold to speak again.

"Not for nothing is Hun-Pna called the cautious one," he remarked. "Never have I seen a hunter proceed with such caution. One might almost think that he expected one of the wild ones to turn and kill us. We might have brought down that one we pursued and reached Shawm before dark last night, had it not been that he feared to let its out."

Tlot sat up in his straw, and looked across at his companion. It was obvious that he shared the other's opinion of the shelk that was their lord and master.

"When you have belonged to Hun-Pna as long as I have," he stated, "you will be more used to his ways." He rummaged in the straw, pulled out another larger jug, and after drinking from it noisily, went on: "I have seen him give tip a chase and call us off after hours of pursuit, because the wild one showed fight when cornered!"

"Why, they always show fight when cornered, don't they?" asked Trak, who was evidently the younger man and deferred to the other's knowledge.

"Only about one in five really fights," answered the older one. "The others struggle weakly, but make no defense worth worrying about. They have sense enough to know that, if they showed signs of defeating us, the shelks would immediately finish them."

The speakers were silent again, for a while, and above them, four silent watchers wondered in perplexity over what they had heard. Presently the older man spoke again: "But I have seen quite pretty vicious battles put up by some of the wild ones. The women of the Tains are notorious for their fury. I am reminded of a hunt which I had about two years ago. That was the hardest battle I ever did have. It was a woman, too. But *she* didn't get away, like this one did, yesterday. Her scalp is decorating Hun-Pna's tower, right now."

Tlot looked interested.

"Tell me about it," he suggested.

A Great Hunt

"Well," began the other, and there was a certain boastfulness about his manner that infuriated the pitmen who were listening from above, "You see, Hun-Pna was having a great feast to celebrate the Con-junction, and half the shelks in Shawm were invited. Nearly a hundred shelks were there, even old Hakh-Klotta himself; and, of course, one of the main features of the feast was to be the sacrifice to the mother planet. They don't sacrifice Esthetts at the Con-junction Ceremonies as I suppose you know, and so we were taken out to see if we could get some wild ones alive.

"Well we decided to look for Tains; Hun-Pna always hunts Tains because their corridors are so near the Surface. To go down into some of the deeper corridors, would be too much like risking his head, to suit the cautious one. He just drove us into the entrance to the pit and sat down to wait until we flushed some of the wild ones and chased them out to him.

"So I, with two other Mogs, started down into the corridors of the Tains. I had a sword, of course, and my

whip and so had each of the others, for that is plenty of protection against a Tam. They're smart, the Tains are; but they're afraid of their own shadows.

"Well, it wasn't long before one of the other Mogs had spied a Tam and soon had him running to the Surface, and just as they disappeared up the corridor, I ran across a woman with a baby in her arms. Now, that was some find, as you'll agree; the shelks are always pleased to have you capture a live cub. So I bore down on her, expecting to find her an easy prey, but she turned on me like a wolf. She had a club in her hand, and before I could raise my whip, she had struck me a dizzying blow on the neck and was off in a flash, running toward the Surface. She must have been beside herself with fright or she would never have taken that route, for there wasn't a side passage or a branching corridor, all the way to the Surface. I was stunned by her blow, and stood for a moment, gathering my wits, before I took after her.

"I followed her, without hurrying greatly, to the entrance. I expected the shelks would seize her the minute she appeared, but unfortunately they were busy with the male Tam that the other Mog had flushed; and when I reached the open, I saw, to my dismay, that she had cleared the crowd and was running like mad into the forest. I shouted to Hun-Pna for help, and dashed in pursuit, never once glancing back to see if they were following. Naturally, I supposed they were.

"Well, the Tam had quite a start on me, and you know how hilly and stony it is in the neighborhood of the Tam's pit. So it was that even my legs refused to carry me fast enough to catch up with her until she began to get winded. But at last she threw herself down by a rock on the hillside and faced me, snarling viciously. I approached her with care, for I still remembered that I must catch her alive, if possible. I turned to see how far behind the shelks were, and to my surprise, I found they were nowhere in sight! For a moment, I began to fear that I must give up my quarry, for none of us are used to fighting without a shelk at our back, you know, but at last I made a bold decision. I would attack and conquer this Tam single-handed. And so I approached her as diplomatically as possible.

The Single-Handed Attempt to Capture the Tam and Her Baby

She stood there panting with fatigue and still clinging to her baby and as I approached her she began to swing her club about her in circles.

'Give up, you fool,' I said, 'I'm not going to kill you. I want to take you alive.'

"Alive!" she sneered. "For what purpose? Mate or meat?"

"I didn't answer. What was the use? I wouldn't mate with one of those wild ones, if I died for not doing it, and if I told her I wanted her for the sacrifice, that wouldn't help any. So I lashed out with my whip, and the battle was on.

"And it was a battle, too! As we struggled there, minute after minute, I took more than one blow from that infernal club of hers, while she was a mass of blood from where my whip had cut her skin. At last an idea came to me, and I began to direct the blows of my whip not at her but at her child! After that, it seemed that my victory was going to be an easy one. She was so taken up with protecting her child that she had not time to devote to hurting me. Presently she began to sob, and to curse me. Said I was a demon, and that I didn't deserve the name of man. You know what I mean, you've heard the wild ones give the same kind of talk. Well, that sort of stuff has never bothered me. I was born a Mog, and a Mog I'll die. But I knew, when she began that, that she had almost reached the breaking point, and I began to have new hopes of bringing in the mother and the baby, both of them alive.

The Death of the Baby and Its Mother

"But just as I expected her to cower down and give in, she suddenly shouted 'No!'—and raising the child over her head, she dashed it to the ground and brained it with a club. Then she rushed at me in a fury, clawing, biting and spitting, until in sheer self-defense, I was forced to use the sword on her.

"I returned with nothing to show for my hunt but the scalp of the woman, but Hun-Pna hung it up among his trophies and it's there yet."

The speaker was silent at last, and, pulling some straw over him, apparently prepared himself for a nap.

The other man, after a moment evidently decided to follow his example, but his preparations were rudely interrupted by the decision that had been reached by the pitmen in the ropes above.

While this gruesome tale was being related, the watchers had listened in horror. That men could exist, so low and base as to hunt their own kind for the pleasure of the shelks, had never entered their heads. They had been prepared for the fact of the existence of the Esthetts by the story that Tumithak had told them, but here was a race of shelk-worshippers even lower in the scale of humanity than were the Esthetts!

As the tale progressed, the horror of these creatures grew in the minds of Tumithak and his companions, and as Tlot finished his story, the same thought showed clearly in the eyes of each of them. These creatures had surely lived far too long, they felt. Black, unreasoning anger choked the pitmen, and without a word, with only a questioning look from Datto and Thopf and an affirmative nod from Tumithak, the four dropped suddenly to the ground in front of the astonished Mogs, intent on bringing an end to their foul existence.

There is no doubt but that the continued victories that had attended the men in the corridors had made them over-confident. The savages of the dark corridors had capitulated to the force of their arms, the Esthetts had succumbed without a struggle, and in the minds of the four was the idea that this would not be so much a battle as an execution. With the advantage of four to two and the added fact that the attack was a surprise they expected to dispatch the Mogs on the instant. But once on the ground, it took but a matter of seconds for them to realize their error. Almost before they knew it, the Mogs were standing back to back; swords in hand, were defending themselves so valiantly that the outcome of the battle seemed for a moment in doubt. And as they fought, the Mogs shouted—shouted loudly for their masters to come and help them!

The Folly of the Attack on the Mogs

Tumithak realized the folly of their attack almost as soon as it was accomplished, yet even in the realization, he could not help but feel that somehow they were justified. And, if they could but slay the Mogs, their lives would not be sacrificed in vain.

One of the tall, black haired creatures was down now, and Thopf pounced upon him and finished him with a vicious thrust at his throat ; but in the brief moment that the attention of the other two was diverted by this, the other Mog turned and sped like a deer past Datto and out the door, still bellowing for the shelks.

Datto roared with anger and would have sped after him, but Tumithak laid a restraining hand on his shoulder.

“Quick, Datto, we must hide again!” he whispered excitedly. “Up the ropes! Quickly!”

Without an instant's hesitation, Nikadur leaped for the ropes and began to climb, and the other three immediately followed his example. Without, the clickings and clatterings of shelk-talk were rising higher and the Loorians were hardly well-concealed by the strands of cables when the Mog rushed into the room, followed closely by a group of shelks. The creatures were all armed, each carrying the box and hose such as the shelk had worn, which had entered before. Only now the long, queer nozzle had been removed from the scabbard and was carried in two of the limbs.

The shelks looked about them in amazement for a moment, and then one of them pointed aloft. The pitmen had not ceased their climbing, apparently the web of ropes continued to the top of the tower, and so they climbed on, intent only on getting as far as possible from the savage masters of the Surface. But escape was utterly impossible, they felt, and what tiny grains of hope remained to them was lost when two of the shelks sheathed their weapons and with incredible agility began to follow them tip the ropes.

Above, the four desperate pitmen could see little to do but to continue their hopeless climbing and to pray for some miraculous means of escape. Nikadur continued to be in the lead, closely followed by the agile Tumithak; hut the great bulks of Datto and his huge nephew were handicaps to them and they were soon several feet below the Loorians.

The mazy web of ropes and cables became thicker and thicker as the men ascended, until it was impossible to see the ground but the sounds from below left no doubt that the shelks were rapidly drawing nearer. Suddenly there was a cry from below Tumithak—a human cry, a cry of agony. And then there was a wild thrashing, a sound of bodies tumbling through the ropes and a crash! Tumithak looked back, but the

thick tangle of ropes obscured his view, until they suddenly parted and Datto's fierce face appeared, its deadly pallor contrasting oddly with the red of his beard and hair.

Thopf and the Shelks

"Thopf!" he cried, in agonized tones, "They've got him, Tumithak, my nephew, Thopf! It was who fell. They leaped upon him and tried to tear at his neck with their infernal fangs! He struck back, but he lost his hold and fell. But he took them with him! He took them with him! You are not the only shelk-slayer now, O Lord of Loor!"

The huge Yakran was weeping as he climbed, for his nephew had meant much to him and would have been his successor as Lord of Yakra. Tumithak, too, felt an ache in his heart at the realization that Thopf was gone, but he made no answer to Datto, reserving all of his remaining breath for the climb. And then, Nikadur, who had been lost to sight in the web above, gave a cry and momentarily, Tumithak's heart sank in increased despair. Was he to lose this friend, too? Had the shelks somehow attacked them from above? He hastened his climbing, wondering if he would reach his friend in time to aid him.

He parted the ropes above him, climbed higher, and saw a dim light filtering down through the web. A moment later and Nikadur's form came into view, dimly against this new light. The light shone from one of the walls, and as Tumithak drew himself up beside his friend he saw the reason for his cry.

The light came from a small circular window set in the very top of the tower, and Nikadur had cried out involuntarily as he had looked out and beheld his first view of the Surface in the full light of day. As Tumithak raised his eyes to the level of the window's ledge, it was all that he could do to keep from crying out himself.

The little window looked down upon the shelk city, and from its ledge a cluster of strong ropes hung. The other end of each rope was fastened to the window of another tower; apparently the shelks used these ropes to go from tower to tower without returning to the ground. Below, Tumithak could see the bases of the other towers, and an ever-increasing crowd of shelks, with here and there a lean, hairy-faced Mog.

It was not the crowd below, nor the connecting cables, not even the vast view from the window that had caused Nikadur to cry out in surprise, however. It was his first view of the sun! Even in his desperate straits, that object had been the thing that most impressed him as he looked for the first time on the fully lighted Surface of the earth. And indeed, Tumithak, who had seen the sun before, was hardly less surprised. For the sun he had seen before had been a dully glowing ball of red, setting in the west, while this great orb, dazzling in its intense, white brilliance, hung in the exact opposite side of the heavens. For a moment, he was puzzled, but he quickly thrust his amazement to the back of his mind, and strove to concentrate on some means of escape.

The metal walls that fell away from the window's ledge were as smooth as the brown glassy walls of his own home corridor—there was no chance of escape there. Indeed, could he have clambered down the side of the tower, it would have availed nothing, for the crowd of shelks below had by now grown to such proportions as to cover the ground, and Tumithak could see them pointing and gesticulating, exactly as a crowd of humans would do under similar circumstances.

Datto Joins the Other Two

Datto suddenly drew himself up between the two Loorians, leaning his huge form upon the ledge of the window. His eyes were still filled with the tears that had sprung into them at the death of Thopf, but he spoke nothing now of his grief. His mind, too, was filled with the problem of escape.

"They are coming Tumithak," he said. "Other shelks are coming up through the ropes. What shall we do now? Turn and fight them?"

The Loorian's heart felt a glow as he realized Datto's willingness to fight the shelks. This was one man, at least, who had learned the lesson that Tumithak had preached so long and earnestly to the pitmen. He shook his head at Datto's proposal, however, and continued to look out of the window. There did seem one course of escape left, but so small was it that Tumithak was loath to suggest it. At last, however, he heard sounds not far beneath him, and knowing that the pursuing shelks would soon reach the window, he determined to put his desperate plan into execution.

The far ends of the cables that hung from the window ledge, extended to towers that were, most of them inhabited. Tumithak could see the faces of shelks at the windows, and in one, even, the hairy face of a Mog was visible. But two of the windows were empty and toward the nearer of these, Tumithak pointed.

"It is our only chance," he said, and tried to conceal the despair in his voice. "It is a slim chance, but perhaps we can get across and escape some way out of that other tower."

Nikadur, who held the best position at the window, seized upon the idea at once and, climbing into the window's opening, swung out upon the cable. Hand over hand he passed out on the rope, and Tumithak motioned to Datto to follow him. The big Yakran shook his head.

"This is no time for heroics, Lord of Loor," he said. "The lower corridors need you far more than me. The chances are slim enough for escape, now, without increasing them. Go you, and I will follow and guard from the rear."

This arrangement was hardly to Tumithak's liking and for a moment, he felt inclined to argue, but the increasing danger made him realize that time was precious and so he took his place at the window and followed Nikadur hand over hand across the cable.

The Escape from the Tower—Datto's Sacrifice

Tumithak gave one look down as he swung ape-like along the rope but the vertigo that immediately resulted caused him to look hastily upward again. He found himself not far behind Nikadur and hesitated in his crawling pace long enough to look back to see if Datto was following him. The sight he saw in the brief glimpse he had was something that remained in his memories for years.

The shelks had arrived at the window's opening and Datto had been forced to turn and face them. As Tumithak looked, he saw the huge chief of Yakra, with one shelk clawing desperately at him from behind, pick up another and hurl him, clattering and squeaking from the window. Then he drew his sword and called to Tumithak.

"They have me, Tumithak," he cried, "I can't hold them off. There are many—" he hesitated and then, as if an idea had suddenly occurred to him: "Hold fast the rope, Tumithak!"

The Loorian chief gazed in puzzled despair as Datto swung his sword. Again the Yakran cried: "Hold fast the rope!" and then the blade struck down the cable, half severing it. Fearful, at a loss to understand Datto's reason for his actions, Tumithak gripped the cable even tighter, and then the sword struck again, cleanly cutting the cable from its fastening at the window.

Tumithak caught a single glimpse of Datto being jerked back into the tower, even as he struck; and then the Loorians were falling away from the tower. Nothing but death was in Tumithak's mind, yet some inward instinct made him obey Datto's last command and cling like grim death to the rope. He saw, the ground approaching with terrible swiftness, saw that they were swinging toward the tower to which the other end of the cable was fastened; and then there was a terrific jolt, and beyond, he heard Nikadur scream fearfully. The rope had swung past the leaning tower, its end, weighted with the Loorians, acting as a huge pendulum and then the ground, which had approached with sickening closeness, was dropping away again!

Dimly conscious that they had somehow escaped death, the two had hardly realized it when Tumithak's precarious grip on the rope began to slip. He grabbed at the nearest object, which happened to be Nikadur's leg; heard his companion scream again, and then they were turning over and over in the air, to land, a second later, in the branches of a huge tree that stood beyond the group of towers.

Their Landing

Dazed and bruised though they were by the fall, the Loorians, nevertheless, hesitated not a moment in taking advantage of the opportunity for escape that had come to them. Instantly they were tumbling through the leafy branches, and although Tumithak wondered vaguely at the strange object in which he found himself, the fact that it was not inimical was sufficient to enable him to ignore it and to focus his attention on the

business of fleeing from his enemies.

That the shelks had been amazed by the quick succession of events was obvious from the fact that they did not at once attempt pursuit. The Loorians were out of the tree, in fact, before the cries and clatters from the towers told them that the shelks had organized a pursuit. They looked about them, vainly hoping to spy their own pit, but it was far to the right, and hidden by the trees; so, calling to Nikadur to follow him, Tumithak plunged deeper into the forest, away from Shawm.

Breathless, bruised, with the brave thoughts of conquest utterly driven from their minds, like rabbits through the brush the two pitmen fled, while behind them, ever louder, sounded the tumult of the pursuit.

CHAPTER III -Tholura the Tam

It is hard for a writer of the present age to attempt to reproduce the thoughts that passed through the heads of the Loorians as they fled in hopeless panic through the woods. Three thousand years separate those heroes from the world of today, years of almost continued change and progress, and, in the safe, almost uneventful life that we lead, there is little to enable us to reproduce their overwhelming emotions. We can, of course, easily understand that fear, black, unreasoning fear, such as comes to us sometimes in nightmares, was probably uppermost in their minds. But there must have been other sensations, other feelings, too.

What, for instance, did they think of the trees that rose around them in such abundance? Strange forms of life, indeed, these must have been to those creatures of the underworld, in whose lives there had never been so much as a legend of vegetation. What did they think of the frightened cries of the birds, or of the sudden appearance, perhaps, of a rabbit, startled by their crashing flight? What would their reaction be to the sight of a brook or a thicket of brambles that clutched and tore at their clothes? Or to the great round sun that shone through the trees, glowing ever brighter and rising ever higher over their heads? We can well imagine that all these made but little impression on the Loorians in their flight, but that they had some effect was undeniable. And rising over all the tumbled thoughts of their minds were the sounds of the pursuing shelks, ever growing closer.

It was fortunate, indeed, for the Loorians that the shelks were too amazed to follow them quickly. By the time that the party of pursuit was organized the pitmen were lost in the deeply-wooded section just beyond the edge of the town and it was fully five minutes before the Mogs, which the shelks called out, had picked up their trail and started after them. By this time Tumithak and his companion had climbed the stony, gradually rising hillside that rose in front of them and were descending down the other side.

They fled in the last stages of terror, fled without thinking, the one idea in their minds was to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the town of their enemies. The trees thinned out on this side of the hill, but as they descended, it became increasingly difficult to make any progress, due to the tall grasses and bushes which grew here. Had they known the contour of the country, they would have realized that they were now in the valley of a broad shallow river that flowed not far from Shawm. This river was normally but a few hundred feet wide and several feet deep, but the spring rains had come and for a few days it would be a tumbling, turbid torrent that cut a deep curve through the valley on its way to the sea.

Toward this stream the Loorians were speeding, and before long, they dashed into the thick growth of willows and alders that grew along its banks, hoping against hope that the dense vegetation would conceal them from their pursuers.

The Fugitives Are Seen

As they entered the brush, Tumithak was bold enough to cast a hurried glance behind him. Far up the hill, he could see the pursuing party already rising over the top and rushing down into the valley. There were at least a dozen shelks, the majority of which carried the strange boxes with the hoses attached, and in the forefront of the band, he saw a group of the hairy-faced hunting men, the Mogs.

Even as he looked, one of the Mogs spied him, and with a hoarse bellow, called the attention of the others to the quarry.

Despair was in Tumithak's heart, for never, since he had begun his adventuring, had the Loorian been in such a dangerous predicament as this. And had you told him that the situation could be worse, he would not have believed it. Yet even as he turned and plunged into the deep thicket of willows, he heard Nikadur, ahead of him, give a cry of startled dismay! He pushed hurriedly forward, wondering what new disaster had befallen, and saw that his companion had stopped his flight. Stopped because he had come to the brink of the river and could go no farther!

To the despairing men of the corridors, this was the last straw. The two saw no escape at all, for the river swung in a curve around the point on which they stood, and there was no possibility of fleeing to either the right or the left. And at their back, they could hear the bellowing of the Mogs and the strange, inhuman voices of the shelks.

Never, in all man's history, was there a time when the phrase "between the devil and the deep sea" was more truly applicable.

On the River's Edge

Like some small animal cornered at last by a beast of prey, Nikadur cowered on the bank and buried his face in his arms. Tumithak would have given any-thing for the ability to surrender and feel the relief of utter resignation which he knew that Nikadur felt, but some inner part of him urged him to die fighting. He drew his pistol, with the three precious bullets that still remained from the day when he had slain his shelk; in his mind the consoling thought that if he must die, at least he could die fighting the enemies of man, an honor not often accorded to a Loorian.

Had the two but known it, though, neither was destined to die in this way for many long years. For several days before they arrived at this spot, Nature had been preparing the way for their escape; for the spot on which they stood was a few feet above the level of the river, it was a high, crumbling bank and the waters of the spring flood had washed away at it until the spot on which the two stood overhung the water by several feet. The added weight of the Loorians had weakened it until the slightest jar would be sufficient to break it off and hurl it into the flood. And even as they stood there, as the shelks and their hunting men began to push through the thicket to take them a huge log that had been caught in an eddy and swept shoreward, struck the bank a resounding thump—and the work of erosion was completed! Tumithak felt the ground dropping suddenly from beneath his feet; the whole world, it seemed, rocked crazily about him; and then he had splashed into the icy-cold water and was gasping and struggling and apparently certain of drowning. He still held his pistol with a deadly grip, some strange, sublimated idea of self-preservation causing him to cling to it tightly through all the strange events that followed.

In the Icy Cold Water

When Tumithak rose to the surface of the water after that first chilling splash, his arms struck out in an instinctive attempt to keep from sinking. He knew nothing of swimming, in fact in all his life he had never before seen enough water to swim in, but some deep instinct caused him to thrash about, and in so doing his hand struck the log which had been the cause of his sudden advent into this amazing world of water, he grasped the log, threw an arm over it, and drew himself up on it. The hand that held his pistol struck a wet red-haired head and to his surprise, his eyes met the pallid, fear-stricken face of Nikadur, who had apparently managed to seize the log and raise himself to the other side.

By the time the two Loorians had ceased to gasp and sputter and had gained sufficient control of them-selves to take notice of their surroundings, they found that the log had left the eddy into which it had drifted and was again floating down the stream and getting farther from the shore every minute. For a moment, hope rose in their breast—they were no longer in im-mediate danger of death from the shelks—but a brief reflection made them realize that they were no better off here; indeed, what might have been sudden, merciful extinction now threatened to be a death that was long and lingering. Yet they continued to cling to the log desperately, though it was only the instinct of self-preservation that kept them fighting at all.

They watched the shore with apathetic eyes as they were washed farther and farther away from it, and when they had almost reached the center of the stream, Nikadur gave an inarticulate cry and pointed to the spot where they had been precipitated into the water. The shelks had emerged from the thicket and stood in amazement, wondering where the pitmen had gone. Presently a Mog spied them and shouted the news to

his masters. Tumithak saw the shelks unlimber the strange hoses with the long nozzles and point them in his direction. Little spurts of steam leaped from the water about a dozen yards from him but apparently the range was already too great for the weapons to do much harm. Once, indeed, he felt a fiery breath, as though from a furnace, beat upon his face, but it was no more than a passing discomfort, and, shortly after, the shelks gave up their attempt and stood watching until the Loorians had disappeared around the bend in the river.

The Escape

As they continued to be washed along in the main current, the Loorians found time to look about them and to observe the amazing details of this new world in which they found themselves. The current was fairly swift; yet as they moved along with it, its swiftness was not noticeable to them; in fact, the only discomfort they felt was the gradually increasing fatigue in their arms. They watched the shore, marveling at the trees and bushes that seemed to stretch endlessly along the banks, and wondering how they would ever be able to find a way through their seeming impenetrability, if they should win to the shore. They gazed at the sky, and were amazed at the clouds, which they were now able to study for the first time. And most of all, they were amazed at the sun, which by this time had reached the zenith, leaving no doubt in their minds that this astounding light of the Surface really did move slowly across the sky.

An hour passed, and still the pitmen were floating down the river with the floating log, and still the problem of reaching the shore was as unsolved as ever. Tumithak had attempted to climb up on the log and sit astride it; but at his first attempt, he had almost lost his companion when the log suddenly turned, so he had abandoned the idea at once and now continued to cling with weary arms, as he had since he had first been precipitated into the stream.

Another hour passed and with aching arms and water-soaked bodies, the Loorians were beginning to feel that even flight from the shelks might be preferred to this. Tumithak was beginning to wonder what would happen if he let go the log when he felt his feet touch something, float off and then touch it again! He re-leased his grip on the log a little, and knew that it was the bottom of the river that he touched. The log had reached another huge bend in the stream, and unnoticed had approached the shore at a spot where a sand bank stretched out into the river. Tumithak cautiously released himself, sank slightly, and stood up to his neck in the water. He looked about him, and seeing the shore so near, let go of the log entirely and, calling out to Nikadur to do likewise, turned and waded to the shore. His companion followed his example, and in a few moments the two staggered across the sand-bar and fell, fatigued and water-worn, into the brush beyond.

On Land Again

Once concealed in the weeds and willows, they bent every effort to discern whether they were followed. They looked out over the broad river for long, and jumped with fright at every small sound that came from the woods behind them. But as time went on and no savage shelk appeared to slaughter them, nor did the clacking cries come to their ears, they at last decided that they had succeeded in evading their pursuers. Then it was that their over-taxed bodies began an insistent clamor for rest, and so, unable to resist further, they gave in to exhausted nature and in a few moments were asleep.

"The sleep of utter exhaustion" is a phrase that is often used to denote sound, undisturbable slumber. That afternoon, the Loorians were to learn what anyone who has ever been utterly exhausted can tell, that the sleep of an extremely tired person is anything but sound. Time and again, one or the other of the Loorians would start into wakefulness as some wood-sound startled them; time and again, their over-wrought nerves would tense, and they would find themselves sitting up and staring into the woods with throbbing alertness, and at last, toward evening, when they did begin to find some slumber, dream after nightmarish dream kept their minds in a turmoil. But rest came to them at last, and when the next morning came, it was a refreshed and vigorous Tumithak that opened his eyes and looked about upon the world which had re-cently shown him so much terror.

The sun was just rising and its light was reflected gloriously upon the swollen river; the birds were be-ginning to sing; and over Tumithak's head, the branches of a huge old pear tree showered down a million petals. A morning breeze was blowing, and rosy clouds scudded before it in the east; it was a perfect spring morning, but its beauty was lost upon Tumithak, for his mind was taken up almost entirely with wondering which of these many things might prove to be inimical, and just when he might expect them to become dangerous. At last, he turned and awakened Nikadur. The latter sat up, looked about him and then sank

down again in despair.

It Seemed Like a Dream of Terror

I had thought it was all a dream, Tumithak," he said mournfully.

Tumithak smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"Unfortunately it was not," he said half-bitterly. "We are far from the safety of Loor, Nikadur."

He had removed the pack that was still strapped to his back as he spoke, and now he seated himself and removed from it a packet of food-cubes. He offered half of them to Nikadur, and for a while the two were silent as they partook of their simple breakfast, the first meal that they had eaten since emerging from the pit.

The meal finished, they fell to examining the details of the wonderful place in which they found themselves. The soil interested them most for a while, for they were unable to decide whether it was a thick coarse dust that had settled here or whether the original rock floor had crumbled and decayed. The question was abandoned, however, in the light of further mysteries; for wherever they looked they found new wonders to occupy their minds. A bird flew overhead, and although they were familiar with bats in the corridors, they wondered at the strangeness of this Surface creature, and at the perfection of its flight.

The flowers that were scattered in profusion through the woods excited their admiration now, but even as yet, they could not account for the fact that though these things certainly appeared to be living creatures, yet they were harmless and unable to move about. Twice they spied small animals, one of which fled from them, while the other peered curiously at them from a hole beneath a rock; but Tumithak had reached a point where he had some control of his fear, and he felt that he was at least the master of these small Stir-face creatures.

They had been examining this amazing world for over an hour when Nikadur voiced a thought that had been bothering Tumithak for some time.

"How are we to get back to our corridors, Tumithak?" he asked.

"Have you given any thought to which way we must go?"

Tumithak considered.

"If we could walk in the direction from which we were carried by the hurrying of the water, we should find ourselves near enough to the shelk city to enable us to search for home. But perhaps the shelks are still seeking us. Do you feel that you could brave the dangers of Shawm again?"

The Duty of the pitmen Waiting in the Hall of the Esthetts

Nikadur trembled, but his answer showed Tumithak that the events of the past two clays had somehow revived in Nikadur some trace of the ancient spirit of courage, for he answered bravely: "Nennapuss and our warriors wait in the Halls of the Esthetts. Is it not our duty to try to return to them?"

The shelk-slayer smiled, and clapped his comrade on the back.

"Come then," he said, and they arose and started on their journey, keeping as close as they could to the banks of the river and praying that no new and un-known danger would confront them. They had not gone far, however, when it began to be increasingly evident that it would not be possible to follow the stream for long. The banks grew steeper and the vegetation grew denser and denser, until at last the Loorians gave up the attempt to remain close to the river, and struck off into the woods in the hope of finding a more open section. They had gone but a few dozen yards when they came to a well-marked trail leading in the very direction in which they wished to go. So ignorant were they of wood-craft or any similar art that the idea that this was a path made by the shelks never entered their heads. They at once turned into the path and continued on their way, sublimely unconscious of their increased danger.

For over a mile, they walked on without incident to distract their minds. A dozen times they congratulated themselves on the fortunate discovery of the path, and their hopes were beginning to run high that they might

succeed in reaching their pit again, after all, when suddenly, as they topped a slow rise, they heard a distinct commotion in the little vale beyond. They at once darted into the brush, and froze into silence; then after a little while, they crawled slowly to the hill top and, lying there on their faces, looked upon an amazing scene.

A Fight Between Humans Watched by the Shelks

It was the scene of a battle—and just such a battle as they had heard described by Tlot, the Mog, when they had hidden in the ropes and cables of the shelk tower. There were seven figures in the little vale, three of which were shelks and four, humans. Three of the humans were Mogs, armed with short, heavy javelins not unlike the ancient Roman *pilum*; the other was a woman—a woman whose back was against the bole of a great tree, and who lashed out furiously at the Mogs with a long, needle-like sword that was, apparently quite capable of protecting her from the savage three. And the sight of three broken whips that lay at her feet showed that the battle had already occupied some time, and was evidence that the girl had been giving good account of herself.

The three shelks were taking no part in the fight; they stood well back and encouraged the Mogs with sardonic, clucking chatter. Two of them appeared to be unarmed, the other carried the now familiar box and hose, the long nozzle of which he held between two of his limbs, as a man might hold a pencil between his thumb and forefinger. He was watching the combat closely, and Tumithak knew that if the battle seemed to favor the brave girl too greatly, he could bring it to an end at once by slaying her.

Behind the shelks was a queer vehicle, a long, narrow, two-wheeled car that balanced strangely on its wheels, and that had a high, V-shaped transparent shield in front of it, behind which were a bewildering number of controls. Apparently the shelks and their attendant Mogs had been traveling some place in this car and had stopped long enough to enjoy the slaying of this girl.

The Strange Vehicle—The Fight—The Arrow of Nikadur

Tumithak's brief survey of the machine noted also a box that sat on the rear of the machine, a box with a number of white and shining rods of metal in it. These rods, it seemed, were made of a metal similar to that of the plates that illuminated the corridors. That they were not exactly the same was apparent from the fact that their light was not brilliant as was that of the plates, in fact, it was little more than a luminescence.

Tumithak's interest in the vehicle was but a passing one, just a single hurried glance, yet when his eyes returned to the fight, his heart leaped to his throat— I or he saw that one of the Mogs had struck the girl's sword a particularly vicious blow, and before she could return to the defense, another Mog brought down his sword weapon, and then—There was a swish in the air, close to Tumithak's head, and before the Mog could finish his blow, he jerked violently forward and fell to the ground with an arrow in his heart!

Tumithak turned to see Nikadur, risen to his knees in the grass and already fitting another arrow to his bow. He comprehended instantly what his comrade had done, and chuckling in mingled amazement and delight at Nikadur's new-found courage, he drew his pistol and turned his face again to the battle. The shelks were filled with amazement at the sudden, unaccountable death of the hunting man, and the instant in which they stood in puzzled confusion had sufficed to give the Loorians that half second necessary to win. As Tumithak turned, he saw the armed shelk already raising his long-nozzled hose—and then to his surprise, the bushes to the right of him, at which the nozzle pointed, burst into flames!

The Marvelous Hose of the Dying Shelk

Instantly Tumithak's pistol spat, and, miraculously enough, the bullet struck the shelk squarely in the body. It gave a peculiar cry, its limbs went limp, and it collapsed on the ground, the hose dropping from its grip. As the hose fell, Tumithak became aware of a marvelous thing. The hose's long nozzle, in falling, described a vertical circle, and wherever it pointed, the vegetation immediately burst into flames! To the left, and high in the trees swung the flaming path, over their heads and back beyond the shelks; and then, as the nozzle came to rest on the ground, a long streak of blackened earth appeared, starting at the nozzle's mouth and stretching away into the forest. Somewhere a huge branch, severed from its trunk by the heat ray, fell crashing to the ground, and then Tumithak jerked his mind back to the scene of the battle, just as another of the shelks reached for the hose. Again Tumithak fired his revolver—and missed! He was about to fire his last remaining bullet when he again heard the twang of Nikadur's bow, and the second shelk fell to the ground, its

limbs feebly twitching and attempting to claw at the arrow that had pierced its body.

Only two Mogs and a single shelk remained now, and the advantage was still with the Loorians. The re-remaining shelk made a dash for the weapon of its dead brother, but even as it did so, Tumithak and Nikadur, flushed with the fever of battle, dashed forward to prevent its reaching it. Halfway down the hill, both stopped to discharge their weapons, and when they reached their destination they found but a single Mog to oppose them. For the two hunting men had been so intent upon the battle with the girl that they had hardly been aware of the events going on behind them, and just as Tumithak and Nikadur reached the bottom of the hill, the girl, with a lucky stroke, had dispatched the second Mog and so the remaining one had turned to appeal to his masters. The sight of them stretched upon the ground was quite enough for the astounded Mog; with a howl, he abandoned the battle and fled.

Tumithak was at first inclined to let him go, but a second thought brought to him the memory of that other Mog who had escaped, in the shelk-tower in Shawm; and so he gave a quick order to Nikadur, and a swift arrow sped forward and overtook the hunting man, silenced his howling forever. Then the Loorians turned and approached the girl.

She still stood with her back to the tree, her chest was still rising and falling with the exertion of the battle, and her long hair, which was as black as that of any Mog, was tumbled about her shoulders and was damp with the perspiration brought out by the fight. Her dress was a long tunic, not unlike the belted dresses of the Loorian women, save that her people apparently possessed the secret of some dye, for its color was a brilliant blue. Tumithak felt that he had never before seen any woman with half the animation, half the determination shown by this strange girl. The shelk-slayer, Tumithak, approached her diffidently, for the first time in his life consciously bashful before a woman. He spoke not at all; in fact it was Nikadur who finally broke the silence.

Addressing the Girl in Friendship

"We are friends," he said, and indeed, it was well that he said it, for the girl was holding her sword at the guard, uncertain of how she would be treated by these newcomers. At Nikadur's words, she lowered her sword slightly and relaxed her tense pose.

"Who are you?" she asked, and there was a touch of amazement in her voice. "Who are you who slay shelks and Mogs alike with strange weapons of thunder?"

Tumithak struck his chest importantly. He had regained his composure and at the girl's words, that queer vanity of his again swelled within him.

"I am Tumithak, slayer of shelks!" he announced. "Tumithak Lord of Loor chief of Yakra and Nonone, Master of the Dark Corridors and of the Halls of the Esthetts! I have come to the Surface to slay shelks, and to teach Man to again battle for his ancient heritage! This companion of mine is Nikadur—who also slays shelks," and as he spoke, it seemed to dawn on Tumithak for the first time that he was no longer "The Shelk-slayer," that now this honor was one that must be shared with his comrade. He turned to Nikadur and clasping him by the shoulders, kissed him on the cheek.

"You, too, are a shelk—slayer now, old friend," he said. "Quick, take the heads, that we may show them to our friends, when we return to our corridors." And so, as Nikadur, obeying, turned and busied himself with the bodies of the shelks, Tumithak returned to the now friendly girl.

Tumithak and the Girl Now Friends—The Tains

"These places of which you speak," she said, as she thrust her sword through a ring at her belt, "I have never heard of them before. Can it be that you come from some other pit?"

This explanation seemed plausible enough for Tumithak, for never, in his own pit, had he seen anyone with hair colored as was this girl's. "I suppose you are right," he answered, "What do they call your pit, and what is your name?"

"I am Tholura the Tam, and my pit is the pit of the Tains," and the girl pointed to her throat, where a blue, six-pointed star was cleverly tattooed. "This is the mark of all the Tains," she said.

"But what are you doing on the Surface?" asked Tumithak. "Do your people often dare to come out on the Surface, and face the shelks?"

There was a world of scorn in the girl's voice as she replied.

"Never in my life have I heard of a Tam who would voluntarily face even a Mog." she replied. "The Tains are a race of rabbits! They cower in fear, deep in the lowest corridors of our pit, and when the shelks and foul Mogs conic hunting them, they either flee in panic, or sacrifice one of their own people, that the rest may live."

"But you—" insisted Tumithak, "How did you have the courage to leave the pit ? How do you happen to be on the Surface

"I do not know," Tholura answered, vaguely. "I have always been a little different from the other Tains. It has seemed to me a most degrading thing to flee ever from one's enemies. Many of my people have thought me mad because I believed that it would be nobler to die than to flee. But even I never dreamed of venturing upon the Surface until three days ago, when a party of hunting Mogs raided our part of the corridors and slew my sister.

The Death of Tholura's Sister – Her Revenge

"I tried to induce my father and my brothers to follow them for I felt sure that they could be over-taken before they left our pit. But like the craven cowards that all the Tains are they cowered in our apartment and told me I was mad to think of such a thing. Perhaps I was, for I took tip my father's sword and turned my face toward the Stir face vowing that I would follow and never return until I had taken vengeance on the murderers of my sister."

She paused as Nikadur drew near and threw the heads of the shelks at Tumithak's feet. She glanced at them for a moment in fascinated curiosity and then with a little feminine grimace of disgust she turned her head and went on: 'I pursued my way to the entrance of the pit hut saw no more of the Mogs who had slain my sister. So I continued my way out to the Surface and today after wandering for a long, long way, I came upon this other party. I might have tried to avoid them, but they spied me before I could hide. So I faced them, hoping only that I might slay Mog or two before I died.

"But I little dreamed that a hero existed who would not only prevent my slaughter at the hands of the Mogs, but would slay their savage masters, too," and the look she gave Tumithak, as she finished speaking caused Nikadur to smile discreetly and to turn away and busy himself with studying the various possessions of the shelks.

CHAPTER IV - The White and Shining Rods

For some time, Tumithak and Tholura sat con-versing beneath the great tree, telling each other of the lives they had lived in the corridors. Tumithak was filled with wonder at the idea of finding this girl whose mind was such a strange parallel to his own and he plied her with dozens of questions concerning her past. And of course, she questioned him too, and Tumithak recounted the great adventure which had first brought him to the Surface from his home corridors, so far below, and you may be sure the story lost nothing in the telling.

Nikadur, meanwhile, had made several discoveries that interested him greatly. The weapon which cast the ray of heat still lay where it had fallen, and now the line of burnt and blackened earth which streaked from the nozzle had begun to glow redly with the intensity of the heat. And some distance away dense smoke arose, where the green vegetation smoldered and burned. Nikadur approached the shelk-weapon diffidently, wondering how it could be possible for such a cool thing as the hose appeared to be to give out such intense heat. But this was a puzzle far beyond his in-tellect and so, placing it in his mind simply as a shelk wonder, not to be understood by men, he turned his attention to the long narrow car.

The machine was about twenty feet long, low and streamlined and made of some strange yellow metal. It still stood balanced on its two wheels, and as Nikadur drew near to it he could hear from within it a subdued, throbbing hum. He inspected the controls, but was unable to comprehend them and so he turned to the rear

of the car where lay the box of white and shining rods. He stooped over them, half-expecting them to be white-hot, but feeling no glow of heat from them, he finally picked up enough courage to take one of them in his hand and found out to his surprise that it was quite cool.

Nikadur examined it curiously. About four feet long it was, and a little over half an inch in diameter, and as he swung it about his head, Nikadur was struck with a brilliant idea. These rods of metal would make excellent ax handles. He thought of how proud he would be to possess such a beautiful weapon. And then, at the thought of the word weapon, his eyes instantly returned to the box and hose lying to the right of him. There, indeed, he thought, would be a real weapon, if a way could only be found to control the heat or to turn it off and on as the shelks apparently could. For the first time it dawned on Nikadur that this weapon in the hands of a man might be as dangerous to a shelk as it had hitherto been to humans. It was an epoch-making thought, and Nikadur must be given full credit for it. He turned to where Tumithak and the girl sat, still talking, and called to the Loorian chief.

"What shall we do with the shelk weapon, Tumithak?" he asked. "Think you there is some way to stop this terrific blast of heat as the shelks do? Perhaps we might find a way to control it and to keep the weapon for our own."

Tumithak was about to answer when Tholura gave a vexed little laugh and started for the weapon.

"How silly of me," she exclaimed, "I should have noticed it before." And picking up the long nozzle, she snapped back a small lever—and the weapon was harmless! The Loorians gasped.

"You know how to operate such a weapon?" cried Tumithak. "Where did you learn? What else do you know of the ways of the shelks? "

The girl smiled. "I know little of the ways of the shelks," she answered. "But of the ways of our ancient ancestors, I think I know far more than you. What you have been telling me of Loor and of your corridors shows that **you** have little or no knowledge of the wisdom of the ancient ones. There, at least, the Tains excel. For many hundreds of years, they have kept the traditions of the great wisdom of our wise ancestors, and in our museums, which are also our worshipping places, we have many tools and machines that were once used by those wise ancestors, and they are always kept in perfect repair by the priests. But alas; the fuel, the power that makes them operate, is unobtainable, and so the Tains are no better off than the most ignorant of those blind savages of which you have been telling me. Yet if the day should come when we again learn the secret of that lost power—" Tholura paused, her eyes shining. "There is something to which you might well devote your life, O Shelk-slayer!" she cried. "Could we but find the secret of that lost power, we might face the shelks on equal terms. And then—"

"And then," cried Tumithak, catching her enthusiasm and grasping the shelk weapon from her, "a raid on that stinking shelk-hole of Shawm Fire-hoses blasting down tower after tower! Foul Mog and savage shelk alike fleeing in screaming terror to the woods! "

A Sudden Alarm from the Distance

He was not finished with his fantastic dreaming, yet he stopped suddenly as a sound came to him distantly from the woods in the direction of Shawm. Nikadur heard it too, and laid a warning hand upon his arm. The three were instantly silent, straining every ear, listening. Unmistakably, from afar came the faint clattering of an approaching band of shelks, and quite clearly it was no small party. From the heights of their dreams, Tumithak and Tholura crashed to the depths of reality. Their human natures betrayed them and instinctively they turned to flee in the direction opposite to that from which came the sound of the voices. Strangely enough, it was Nikadur who caused them to hesitate. He had not yet brought to Tumithak's attention the white and shining rods that he had discovered, and a certain tenacity of purpose, that was characteristic of him, made him determined to take some of them with him as he fled, So he seized Tumi-thak by the arm and restrained his flight.

"Are you going to leave without taking the shelks' heads, Tumithak?" he asked. "And wouldn't these rods make excellent ax handles? Let us at least take a few of these rods with us, back to our pit."

Tumithak paused at once, rather ashamed of his sudden panic. He picked up two of the shelk heads and fastened them to his belt, while Nikadur picked up the other. Then he approached the car and for the first

time, took a good look at it and at its contents. He was struck at once, as Nikadur had been, with the beauty as well as the utility of the shining rods of metal. So each of the Loorians took up about a dozen of the rods, and then Tholura, with a practical eye to the future, carried the remaining rods some distance away from the path and buried them in a pile of leaves. Then the three fled, leaving the path and running in a direction pointed out by Tholura.

"This way lies the pit of the Tains," explained the girl. "You could not now return to your own corridors without passing around the party of shelks which we hear approaching, and that would be a heedless and unnecessary danger. And perhaps, in their own pit you can, by example, instill some courage into those craven cowards, the Tains."

Tumithak's Caution in the Face of Danger

Tumithak was anxious to return to his own pit, but in spite of all his brave and boastful talk, he still retained enough instinctive caution to wish to avoid contact with a large group of shelks. He was no superman, he well knew, and just at present it seemed the better part of valor to seek safety some place below the ground where conditions would be more familiar to him than they were in this amazing Surface world. His companions back in the pit of Loor could probably take care of themselves for another day or two, without his help, in fact, it was most probable that they had already given him up for dead and returned to their own cities. So it was that Tumithak decided to turn and direct his footsteps toward the pit of the Tains.

For a while, the three ran swiftly through the trees while the sound of the shelks' voices came to them ever more distantly. At last they could be heard no longer and the adventurers slowed down their pace to a hurried walk. The Loorians took time now to make a pack of the shining rods and to fasten them on their backs so that their hands might be free. Tumithak also fastened the shelk's fire-hose to his back, and then they continued their journey in high spirits, for well they knew that in this day they had already accomplished more than any other man had accomplished in a dozen preceding centuries.

The Afternoon Rest—The Alarm Is Over

By mid-afternoon, they had covered quite a distance and the party of shelks was almost forgotten. Tumithak amused himself by familiarizing himself with the operation of the fire-hose, and many a sapling and small bush burst into flame as he directed the heat-ray upon it. Presently the forest thinned and was replaced by a park like expanse, thinly wooded, through which they were able to make much better time. At last the trees disappeared entirely and they came to a broad shallow valley of meadow land, and here, by the side of a great glacial boulder nearly eight feet high, the three sat down to rest and to eat from Tumithak's diminishing supply of food-cubes. They munched their food in silence for awhile and then Tholura spoke softly: "Much may be accomplished with the shelk weapon we have, Tumithak. I think we had better con-stilt about it with Zar-Emo, the leader of the priests of the Tains. He is very wise in the wisdom of the ancients, and he can advise us how we may best use the power that has fallen into our hands. We should go to him at once when we reach the pit that is my home."

Tumithak agreed and again they fell into silence. They were tired from their long walk, the warm after-noon sun fell on their faces, and in the fresh spring air, there was a drowsiness that seemed to soak into them and permeate their very souls. Their heads drooped and Tholura, who had slept very little if any, the night before, had even fallen into a little nap when suddenly Tumithak sat up, every sense alert, his finger to his lips to caution Nikadur to silence. Unmistakably, from the other side of the boulder had come a familiar scratching sound! Some creature had moved, on the other side of the rock; was it shelk, man or some lesser animal?

Silently, the two Loorians stood there, immovable, until the sound was repeated. Evidently the creature or creatures had just arrived and had no knowledge of the party on the other side of the rock, for they were making no effort to avoid producing a noise. Tumithak unloosed the shelk weapon which he had on his back, took the nozzle in his hand and tiptoed to the side of the rock. Reaching the edge of it, he cautiously lowered his head and slowly, slowly peered around the corner. There was a sizzling spit, Tumithak jerked his head violently, and the grass a few feet beyond him burst into flames. Tumithak clapped his hand to his head, where a great singed spot of hair bore witness to the narrowness of his escape. Before he could speak or so much as warn the others, a shelk leaped into view, a fire-hose in its claws and a look of savage fury in its cold eyes!

A Shelk Attacks Tumithak

Now there is no doubt at all that if such a meeting as this one had occurred a dozen or so years later, when Tumithak as Lord of Kaymak had made his name a name of wonder and hate throughout shelkdom, there would have been better chance for the Loorian chief. But at this early day, the shelks were still the lords of all the earth and the idea of a man being on equal terms with a shelk was unthinkable. Therefore, the shelk, seeing Tumithak dodge behind the stone, thought of nothing but the sport of killing a man, and so immediately gave chase. It exhibited no caution in pursuing him, it probably felt that at most he could only be armed with a sword or perhaps a bow and arrows, and so it leaped around the edge of the rock—swinging its heat-ray, it leaped—straight in front of the fire-hose that Tumithak held in his hand. The Loorian snapped the lever, there was a hissing crackle of sound, a clattering cry, and the shelk was no more, another enemy of man had gone to join its fathers in that legendary land upon the mother planet.

Tumithak's mind was calm, yet it was functioning rapidly. Almost immediately, he decided that his best course was to pursue the advantage he had gained, and suiting the action to the thought, he again started around the rock, his weapon, this time, playing before him. He rounded the edge of the huge stone, half expecting to see the entire party that they had heard earlier in the day, but instead, the sight that met his eyes caused him to smile broadly and to mentally give himself several pats on the back. There were no more shelks, but about a hundred yards away, two Mogs were fleeing rapidly, dodging from tree to tree; while on the ground lay two strange cocoon-like bundles, quite evidently abandoned by the hunting men when they had seen the death of their master.

Tumithak Frees the Captured Datto and Thopf

Tumithak turned and motioned his two companions to follow him and then, seeing that the two fleeing Mogs had already fled beyond the range of the fire-hose, he ignored them and approached the strange bundles. He eyed them carefully, their size and peculiar shape making him decidedly suspicious of what their contents might be. Halfway toward them, he stopped fearfully—he had caught a glimpse of a human face on the far side of one of them—he was right, there were men in these bundles! And then almost immediately, his half-uttered cry of alarm turned to one of surprise and delight and rushing to the bundles, he began to hack at their binding threads and cords like a madman.

Nikadur and Tholura, timidly following Tumithak round the boulder, heard his cry and started back, then, realizing that it was not a cry of fear they heard, hastened to see what had caused their leader such surprise. They had hardly come within sight when Tumithak called: "Nikadur! Come and help me!" and Nikadur, drawing his sword, rushed forward just as Tumithak cut the last of the binding cords from the body of—Datto, the Yakran!

For a dozen seconds, Nikadur's mind was a hodge-podge of jumbled thought. Tumithak had found the Yakrans! How did they come to be here? Were they alive or dead? Why had the shelks brought them here? He was recalled from his amazement by the voice of Tumithak: "Unbind Thopf, Nikadur! They are weak from the tight bindings of the cords. They will be all right in a few minutes."

Nikadur hastened to obey and shortly the Yakrans were freed of their bonds and Tholura was pouring water down their throats, while Tumithak and Nikadur rubbed their limbs to restore the circulation. It was a long while before the Yakrans showed any signs of interest in their surroundings, indeed they seemed to be in a semi-conscious daze, but at last Thopf, sitting up and beginning to rub his own arms, said in a comically solemn tone:

"There are those in Loor and Yakra, Tumithak, who hold that you are a superman. Never before today have I thought as they do, but how else your presence here, with shelk heads at your belt and shelk weapons in your hands, can be explained, I do not know. Tell me quickly how you came here, ere I suspect you of being a god."

Tumithak Tells His Story to His Rescued Companions

Tumithak laughed. There was nothing more pleasing to that strange vanity of his than such a speech as this, but he had no intention of adding to his prowess by making himself into a mystery. So he answered at once, giving the Yakrans a fairly detailed account of his adventures and introducing Tholura as he did so. Datto and Thopf were amazed at the idea of another pit, this being one idea that had never entered their

heads before. To them, the world had been the pits of Loor and Yakra, which, so legend said, opened to the Surface, and the Surface, to their minds, was merely a larger and roomier pit with more conveniences and luxuries. But when they heard of the pit of the Tains, they agreed at once that the best thing for all concerned would be a visit to that pit and an attempt to form an alliance with its people. The Loorians and Tholura were anxious to start, but the Yakrans were so stiff and sore from the hours that they had spent wrapped with the binding cords, that they implored the others to give them a few minutes at least to rest and restore their strength.

So it was agreed to wait awhile and as they rested, Tumithak suggested that the Yakrans tell how they had come to be in this place, for of course the Loor-ians were as amazed at the Yakran's presence here as the latter had been at theirs.

The Two Yakrans Tell Their Story

Datto, who seemed to be feeling a little better than Thopf, acted as spokesman. "When I severed the rope that you were swinging on, Tumithak, I had no chance to see whether I had saved your life or only brought you to a more merciful death, for the shelks were swarming over me, and though I fought with all my strength, it was sheer numbers that overcame me. They were not able to use their weapons among the ropes and cables where we clung, and to that I attribute the fact that they did not kill me at once.

"But when they had brought me to the ground, they had apparently thought the matter over and decided that they would not kill me until they had given their chief a chance to see me. I was amazed and overjoyed to see Thopf alive and but little hurt, standing before me, when I reached tile ground, held hand and foot by four Mogs. I was at once put in the care of four more Mogs, and, at a command from the shelks, we all left the tower and proceeded to tile center of the city.

"You may be sure I looked about for signs of you as soon as we reached the outer air, but there was nothing at first to tell what had become of you. One of the Mogs, however, was evidently aware of your escape for he showed me a large party of shelks, armed and rushing away from the scene of our battle, and he pointed out the direction in which they were going.

"They pursue your friends, Wild Man,' he said, with a sneer, 'Your friends will soon rejoin you. Half of Shawm is pursuing them, even now.' I didn't answer him, Tumithak, for I thought in my heart that he was right, that it was only a matter of time until you, too, would be with me.

"And so, after a while, we came to a tower that was taller than the rest and made of a different metal. We were brought inside and sat down on the ground, and presently a shelk dropped from the ropes above, a shelk who wore upon his head a crown such as you wear, Tumithak, and from that I knew him to be the leader of this city of shelks. The group of shelks who had captured me spoke to him and for a while they talked back and forth in their vile shelk speech, and I knew nothing of what they said. Then the chief shelk spoke to Tlot the Mog, whom we had fought with.

"Tlot,' he said, 'I am told that one of these wild men, who is now being hunted in the woods, wore a crown such as mine. Is that the truth?' The Mog cringingly admitted that it was.

'Is it also true that it wore clothes such as the Esthetts wear?' The Mog nodded another affirmative, and the anger of the chief shelk was terrible to see. He turned to Thopf and me.

The Death of the Governor-Inferior of Shawm

"Three years ago," he said, in his clucking voice, "The Governor-Inferior of the town of Shawm was slain at the entrance to a man-pit and his head cut off and carried away. Certain superstitious shelks claimed that it was done by a wild man from the depths of the pit, but they were laughed into silence. No man, we felt, had ever been born with the courage to do that. It seems now that they were right and we were wrong. Whence came you, wild men? Tell us the way to your pit, that we may wipe out the menace that confronts us."

"I was about to answer him, Tumithak, for I was trembling with fear and terribly afraid that I would die, but suddenly it seemed that a courage was born of my very desperation. I must die anyhow, I thought, should I die giving my enemies aid in slaughtering my relatives and my friends? I answered the shelk and I must have surprised him mightily with my answer, for I surprised even myself.

“Foul spider,’ I said, ‘Too long have my people quailed and fled before you! If I choose not to answer your question, how can you force an answer? Go and ask of your Esthetts whence came the doom that has befallen them! Perhaps they will satisfy your curiosity.’

Tumithak burst into laughter as did Nikadur, and Tholura looked as if she could not believe her ears.

“You told him *that?*” chuckled Tumithak, as his laughter died. “What did he then, Datto ?”

The Anger of the Shelk at Datto’s Rejoinder

His anger, if possible, grew even greater. He clacked out an order, and several shelks left the room, hastening, I doubt not, to see what had happened to the Esthetts. Then he gave another order, but with this order several of the other shelks seemed to disagree. For some time they talked, and one of the foul Mogs, to frighten me I suppose, explained that the chief shelk, whom he called Hakh-Kiotta, desired to slay me at once, while the others believed that we should both be sent to a place called Kaymak, the great town of this part of the Surface, for here there were shelks that could force us to divulge all that we knew, even though we would rather die than tell. And at last these shelks prevailed over old Hakh-Kiotta and we were taken from the great tower and thrown into another, with a shelk and a dozen Mogs to watch over us.

“We stayed there for many hours, and the dark time came again, and while the shelk slept, the Mogs took turns at watching over us. When again the light came, Thopf and I were led out and brought before the great tower again. We waited awhile and then there appeared a great wonder—a huge machine that flew in the air like a bat, Tumithak! It came over the shelk towers and settled down on the ground near us and then the door opened and we were hurried toward it. Shelks emerged from it and dragged us in, and then, to our horror, the machine again rose into the air and flew away with us

The Flying Machine Brought Down by the Captured Datto

“We had not flown very far when Thopf noticed a wonderful thing. One of the shelks sat in the front of the little cabin in which we were and he looked constantly out of a window in the front. In his claws he held the end of a little stick, the other end of which disappeared in the top of a box set by the window. When he moved this stick to the right or left, the flying machine turned as he moved it. And when he pushed the stick down, the machine went clown also! Thopf called my attention to this fact and a desperate plan came to me. Without even acquainting Thopf with the details of my plan, I gave a sudden lunge that tore me from the grasp of the Mogs that held me and threw myself upon the shelk that held the stick.

“As he fell with me on top of him I seized the stick and pushed it downward as far as it would go. The shelks screeched with fear and all leaped upon me, I rose to my feet, hurling them right and left and then there was a crash and I knew no more... When I recovered my senses, I was tied up as you saw me and the Mogs were carrying Thopf and me through the forest. Then you came, and the rest you know.”

“The flying machine was wrecked so that it was useless,” spoke up Thopf, who apparently had seen more of the crash than Datto had. “Two Mogs were killed and three shelks, leaving only one shelk and the two Mogs that escaped from you. The remaining shelk must have decided to return to Shawm and await the coming of another flying machine, for he gave orders to the Mogs to carry us back to the city. They tied us up thoroughly, to make certain that we could do no more harm and then the shelk gave orders to them to begin the march. We had marched about four hours, I think, when, tired and worn out from carrying such heavy loads, the Mogs insisted that they take a rest beside this huge rock, where you found us.”

“Did you learn much of the customs of the shelks?” asked Tumithak. “How they operate their strange machines, or what other weapons they have? How they live, or what they eat? More and more I feel that the greatest handicap that men have is the lack of knowledge of our enemies.”

Datto’s Story About the Shelks

Datto hesitated. “I learned little enough about them, O Lord of Loor,” he answered. “But one thing I noticed that may help us in the future. Do you remember how silent and deserted the town seemed to us when we first saw it? And how with the coming of the light, the town at once awoke? Well, when the light of the Surface again sank below the floor, and darkness came, a silence again came over the city. For a while,

Thopf and I were at a loss to understand what had brought that silence, and then at last we understood. These dark periods, Tumithak, are used by the shelks as sleeping times, and all the shelks in the town go to sleep until the light returns, save only a few who remain awake as guards. If ever the time comes when we return to our own pit, and can attack the shelks, we must be sure to attack them during the time of dark-ness."

"A discovery that may prove of value, too," said Tumithak, and was about to make some further remark when Tholura interrupted him.

"These discussions, Tumithak," she said, "Could they not be continued later? The light sinks toward the floor, and we are still some distance from the pit of the Tains. Let us be going."

Tumithak saw the wisdom of her suggestion and in a few moments the party was moving off across the broad plain that led to the foothills in the distance. Nikadur had armed himself with the fire-hose of the slain shelk, and had given his bow to Thopf, who was no mean archer, while Datto had taken up a short sword which had been dropped by one of the Mogs in his hasty departure.

On the Way to the Pit of the Tains - An Interruption by the Shelks

They traveled for several hours and were, according to Tholura, within a very short distance of the pit's opening when Thopf gave a cry of fear.

"Look behind, Tumithak!" he cried. "We are pursued!"

Sure enough, in the distance behind them was a large band of shelks, a band that was rapidly drawing closer. The pitmen were amazed at the speed with which the beasts approached. They did not run, but came on in great springy leaps that carried them over the ground at a terrific speed. There was little doubt that it was the same party that they had heard earlier in **the** day, probably turned from their original journey by the Mogs who had escaped during the fight at the rock. There was no doubt that the shelks were pursuing them. Tumithak uttered an exclamation of vexation and despair and half turned to face them, but Tholura dragged him on.

"Quickly!" she cried. "We are almost to the entrance to the pit. We can make it, and once in the pit, perhaps we can elude them in its maze of corridors."

So they turned and fled into the low foot-hills, and for half an hour they ran wildly behind the girl in blue. But ever, as they glanced behind them, they saw the shelk party drawing nearer. At last, when it became evident to Tumithak that they must either turn and face the shelks or die fleeing, the girl suddenly stopped.

"Quick! Behind this stone!" she exclaimed, and looking where she pointed, Tumithak saw a narrow cleft between two rocks. "Inside," she panted. "Perhaps we can yet elude them."

But Tumithak knew that any attempt to escape facing the shelks was now hopeless. The spidery creatures were not a hundred yards away, and already, as the party leaped into the pit, he saw the fire-hose in the claws of the foremost shelk point in his direction. He raised his own hose, sent a blast of heat toward the shelks and then sped into the cave-like pit-mouth himself.

The Party Ordered to Divide at the Tains' Pit

"We are too close to them," he called to Tholura.

"Datto, Thopf and you must take Tholura on, to her people. Nikadur, you and I are armed with shelk weapons; we must stay here and attempt to drive off this party of shelks. If we all fled now they would follow us to the town and wipe out the whole city of the Tains. Conic, Nikadur," and Tumithak stepped back toward the entrance.

For a moment, the others hesitated. Then Nikadur stepped to his chief's left, his fire hose ready in his hand. And to Tumithak's surprise, Tholura took her place at his other side.

"I cannot leave you, Tumithak," she said, "Not while you prepare to die for me and my people."

Tumithak gave a gesture of impatience. "I am not so foolish as to die for a city of people of whom I know nothing, Tholura. This will not be as hard as you think. I am well protected, here in the entrance, and am armed as well as they; while they are in the open and are ignorant of the fact that I possess and can operate one of their fire-hoses. See, I will soon wipe them out."

He raised his fire-hose as he spoke, and sent a blast out of the pit mouth. A clattering screech of surprise broke from the shelks without, and Tholura, glancing over his shoulder, saw them suddenly break for shelter. Three of them already lay upon the ground, one quite dead, the others hopelessly burned. Tumithak laughed, and again his fire-hose spat its invisible ray toward them. A fourth shelk dropped, and then he darted back, and the wall at one side of the cave glowed for a second and hot splinters of rock flew off and scattered about them. When they ventured to look out again, the shelks had managed to conceal themselves behind rocks and trees, and the battle settled down into a game of waiting. Presently Nikadur uttered a soft pleased ejaculation and raised his hose. One of the huge trees began to splutter, close to the ground, where his heat-ray touched it, and then, with a clacking cry of anguish, a shelk sped from the shelter which the heat had made untenable and fled for a nearby rock. Halfway there, Nikadur's ray met him, and he fell, an unrecognizable cinder.

The Loorians' Laughter as They Fight the Shelks

The Loorians laughed again. So successful had the day's fighting been that they were beginning to underestimate the shelks, beginning to believe that these enemies were not as dangerous as they seemed. But now something was to happen that was to revive their respect for the shelks, to make them realize that after all they knew little of the uses of the shelk weapons, and that it would be many a day before they could really meet the savage beasts on even terms.

The first knowledge they had of anything strange happening was when Tholura pointed to the roof of the cave. It was glowing, a dull red, where the fire-hose of some invisible shelk was playing on it. There was little danger to them, Tumithak thought, for it was several feet above their heads, but nevertheless the shelk persisted in his burning of the roof... And then—Tholura screamed, and seizing Tumithak by the shoulder dragged him backward into tile cave.

"Back, Loorians, quickly," she shouted to the others, and it was only the old instinctive timidity in them that enabled them to rush back quickly enough. With a crash and a roar that almost deafened them in the closely confined corridor, the entire entrance collapsed and fell inward. Had they been but a second later, they must have all been crushed beneath the rock as it came tumbling down.

CHAPTER V - The Wisdom of Zar-Emo

The narrowness of their escape temporarily shook the entire party. Thopf and Nikadur both had several small cuts where flying bits of rock had struck them, and for a little while, Tumithak was frankly dazed. Presently Tholura gave a trembling little laugh.

"We still live, Loorians," she said. "Truly, I am beginning to believe, Tumithak, that you really do bear a charmed life. The shelks evidently meant to crush us beneath the rock of the entrance, but they have defeated their own ends. We are not only alive and almost unhurt, but we have escaped from them, at least for the present."

The men made no reply to this. They did not share the relief of Tholura, for they realized that even if they were cut off from the shelks, they were also effectively cut off from their return home; marooned in a corridor whose occupants might even yet prove to be inimical. Presently, Tholura turned and began the descent of the corridor. The others followed in silence, still shaken from their recent adventure, but presently they began to observe the corridors that they were passing through. Such a maze of blind alleys and false apartments, Tumithak had never seen, and his head was soon spinning with the attempt to remember the way that he had come. They had walked for but little more than an hour when they began to notice signs of occupancy of the apartments. Tumithak was amazed. He had heard, first from the conversation of the Mogs in the tower, and later from Tholura herself, that the pit of the Tains was very shallow; but that people would be living only an hour's walk or so from the Surface seemed foolhardy in the extreme. No wonder the shelks preferred to hunt in the pit of the Tains. Compared with a hunt in this pit, a raid on Yakra would take on the appearance of an extended expedition.

In the Pit of the Tains—The Great City

However, Tumithak was to learn that the Tains had some small protection at least, in this labyrinthine maze of corridors. Tholura led them for at least two more miles through a series of pits and corridors that left them hopelessly puzzled. At last she paused as they reached the bottom of a ladder that led into a long, broad corridor.

"Here begins the city of the Tains, Tumithak," she said. "I think I had better go on ahead to tell of your coming. You wait here until—" She broke off with a gasp as a figure suddenly burst from a nearby apartment and hurled itself upon Tumithak. It was a boy, a youngster of perhaps sixteen, armed only with a short sword, but so fierce was his attack that for a moment Tumithak was hard to put to defend himself.

"Flee, Tholura," cried the lad, his sword sweeping and darting through the air with amazing skill, "flee while I can hold them from you! " And then to the Loorians "Foul Mogs! You shall never touch my sister while I live! Defend yourselves before I slay you!"

Datto was about to smite the boy with his sword, his only thought to protect Tumithak; but Tholura stopped him with her next words.

"Stop, Luramo," she cried. "Stop, I say! These are friends! "And then to Tumithak: "Oh, don't hurt him! He is my brother!"

Tumithak and Datto dropped their swords, and after a moment, the boy followed their example, a sheepish half-smile coming to his lips.

"This is my brother Luramo," announced Tholura, placing her arm about the youth's shoulder. "He is the youngest of my brothers, but I think he is also the bravest."

Luramo grinned happily.

"You bring strange friends, Tholura," he exclaimed, "These are not Tains, nor are they Mogs, I see now. Tell me, who are they? "

"Greater than Tains or Mogs are the ones that are here," answered Tholura. "This is Tumithak, Slayer of Shelks, and his companions, who have also slain shelks! I was out upon the Surface, Luramo, and there I was beset by three Mogs and three shelks! And while I fought with the Mogs Tumithak, with but one of his friends to help him, slew all six of them and saved me! Behold the evidence of his greatness! "and she turned Tumithak around that Luramo might see the shelk's beach that hung from his belt.

Luramo stared in awe. For fully a minute he stared, and his thoughts can better be imagined than written. Then slowly he held his sword out to Tumithak in the age-old symbol of allegiance. Tumithak smiled a little and touching the sword lightly accepted he boy's fealty. Though he thought little of that act at the time in after years he was to value that allegiance over almost any other's, and Luramo became one of Tumithak's bravest warriors.

The Allegiance of the Boy, Luramo

And now Tholura was looking at Luramo anxiously, "What was it, brother," she asked, suddenly, "that brought you here to the edge of the city? Is all well with them at home?"

"Well enough, I suppose," answered Luramo, scorn-fully. "Father still cowers in his apartment and be-moans the fact that his two daughters have died at the hands of the Mogs, for of course he thinks you dead, too. And Larger and Bathlura try to comfort him, and swear that you will be avenged if the Mogs ever come to the city again. But they make no attempt to follow you, though they know that when you left the pit you went to almost certain death.

"I spent many hours trying to stir them up to go in search of you, Tholura; but they found one excuse

after another to remain at home, and so at last I decided to find you myself. You see," he made his confession somewhat shamefacedly "I didn't dream that you would actually go all the way to the Surface. I thought you might wander here in the corridors and that here I would find you. —I think I would have been afraid to venture on the Surface by myself."

Tumithak suddenly laughed and gripped the lad's hand in his.

"Luramo" he said, in a delighted tone, "surely I have found two after my own heart, in you and your wonderful sister. Do not be ashamed of what you have not done. I doubt if there is another man, in all the city of the Tains, who would be bold enough to do as much as you have."

Luramo smiled a trifle proudly, and as Tholura turned to resume the interrupted journey, he sheathed his sword and fell in behind Tumithak, taking his place with the Yakrans and Nikadur. After a while, Tholura called to him and said: "It would be well, Luramo, if you were to hurry ahead of us, to inform the people that we are coming. If you do not, some one else may make the same mistake you did and trouble may ensue."

So Luramo ran ahead, and in a few minutes disappeared from sight around a bend in the passage. Some fifteen minutes elapsed, during which the party strolled slowly down the corridor, and then Luramo was seen approaching at the head of a great crowd of people. The crowd moved cautiously, half fearfully as was the custom with men, but one could see that they were very curious, and all excited at the new wonder of which Luramo had told them. In the midst of them, an old man strode, a man dressed in a tunic all of white, and whose long, thin beard reached almost to his waist.

"Zar-Emo," whispered Tholura pointing at him, "There is the priest of the Tains, the wisest of all the Tains in the wisdom of our wise ancestors."

The High-Priest, Zar-Emo

He came, his right hand extended upward and out-outward, a sign of peace which Tumithak recognized and returned. The party of Tains halted a short distance away, and for a while the two groups stood, appraising one another. Then Tholura spoke.

"I have been to the Surface, Zar-Emo, and I return bringing guests. No doubt Luramo has already told you of how these men saved me, slaying shelk and Mog alike with their strange weapons. This one is Tumithak, their chief and the greatest shelk-slayer, behind him stands Nikadur, Datto and Thopf."

Zar-Emo acknowledged the introductions and then said: "Welcome to the city of the Tains, strange ones. It is many generations since one came here from without, other than foul Mogs and savage shelks. Yet we have had for long a prophecy that some day a hero would come from the Surface to teach us again the use of our ancestors' mighty weapons. is it possible that you are he? "

Tumithak shook his head ruefully.

"No, Zar-Emo. I have heard of our wise ancestors' great wisdom, but I know far less of it than you do, if what Tholura tells me is true. Nevertheless, by a lucky chance, I have with me this shelk weapon. Per-haps from it you can learn something of the machines and weapons of old."

He unstrapped the fire-hose as he spoke and held it out to the old priest. The latter was about to take it, when his eyes fell upon the white and shining rods that Tumithak still carried strapped to his back. As he looked at them, the priest's eyes grew large with wonder, and his hands, which had been extended for the fire-hose, dropped empty to his sides. He was silent with a sort of awe, and then at last he spoke.

The Story of the Rods Found in the Car

"There is something that you carry, O Shelkslayer, that is mightier and more potent than either the shelk's head or the fire-hose! Whence did you get those white and shining rods? "

Tumithak told him briefly of the battle that had resulted in Tholura's rescue, and of the finding of the rods in the car, after their victory. Zar-Emo nodded.

"I do not think I can be wrong," he said, a trifle dubiously, and then, taking the fire—hose from Tumithak's still extended hand, he turned the screw in the long nozzle, opened a cap at its end—and drew out from its interiors the half consumed end of one of the white rods!

"Behold the Power!" he cried, dramatically. "The fuel by which the shelks operate their machines! And you, O Tumithak, are truly the one spoken of in our prophecy, for you have brought the one thing needed to enable us to operate the many machines that we have in our museums!"

As he spoke, his many followers bowed their heads in worship and in awe, and Zar-Emo stood, waving the stub of the rod at Tumithak while he continued in almost a frenzy of fanaticism: "With these can the Tains power the fire-hoses which we keep in our museums! With these, we can power the strange machines that blast the corridors into the ground! We may make new corridors, far deeper than the ones we now live in, corridors so deep that the shelks and foul Mogs will never reach us! With these the Tains will know safety at last."

With these," interrupted Tumithak, waving the priest to silence, "we will teach the savage shelks that man still knows his destiny. With these, we shall drive the shelks from their stinking towers at Shawm, and with these, at the last, we shall slay, to the last one, the beasts that have for so long attempted to rule the earth."

Behind him, the boy Luramo gave a cheer. Datto slapped his chief resoundingly on the back, while Tholura nodded her head eagerly in approval. Zar-Emo and the other Tains looked as if they could scarcely believe their ears. Tumithak decided that now was a favorable time to convert them to his beliefs, and so he launched into a speech, much as he had done many times before in Loor and Yakra.

Tumithak's Speech

He told of his own life, and of his mission; he told of his first long journey through the corridors; and lastly he told of how he had slain his first shelk and of his subsequent elevation to the lordship of the lower corridors. Then he begged the Tains to look at him, to realize that he was but an ordinary man, and that what he had done, any man could do. And in the end, the result of his speech was just as it had always been. The Tains looked upon him as something more than human; from Zar-Emo down, they swore allegiance to him; but almost to a man, they refused to believe that it was possible for them to even attempt to fight against the shelks.

At last Tumithak turned to the old priest and asked that he be assigned an apartment.

"I shall probably be here for some time," he said. "For the road to the Surface is blocked and I see no way to return to my own people until it is opened again. And it will be many sleeps before that can be accomplished."

"Perhaps less than you think," answered the priest. "I do not want to raise your hopes, but there may be a way to your corridors without returning to the Surface. I shall tell you more when I am sure of it," and turning, Zar-Emo led the way into the inhabited corridors,

For a period equal to three days, Tumithak lived in the city and the Tains lavished upon him their hospitality. He was astounded at their food, for the Tains had preserved the method of making their synthetic food—cubes *taste*, and for the first time in his life, Tumithak found that eating could be a pleasure, rather than a mere dull duty. Indeed, not only he, but Datto, Nikadur and Thopf as well, were in danger of stuffing themselves into a state of indigestion.

Life Among the Tains

Most of the time when not employed in eating or sleeping, Tumithak and his companions spent in the great temple or museum corridor, studying the wonderful machines that had been built by the ancestors of the Tains. The Tains had kept them in perfect condition, and they were all in perfect working order, even after so many hundred of years. Zar-Emo powered a fire hose and a disintegrating machine, and showed the party how well they still worked. These two machines were of especial interest to Tumithak, for the one he knew

how to operate and the other had been mentioned frequently in that famous book that he had found, so long ago, in the deserted corridor in Loor.

But these were not the only' machines that the Tains had preserved, or that Zar-Emo knew the use or mean-ing of. The priest showed the strangers marvelous weapons that slew with shrill sounds ; others that, so he said, turned the very air into a deadly poison that killed all who breathed it; and then, too, there were machines that helped man, among these being the machines that made the cool white lights that illuminated these corridors.

And all of these could now be used again, although sparingly, for even the rods that the Loorians had brought with them could not last forever. These rods were composed of a metal that had been activated by treatment which caused its atoms to break down at a terrific rate. And when it was exposed to a certain ray created in the machines its collapse into energy was greatly' increased. But, although this method of securing energy allowed an enormous amount of fuel to be stored in a very small space, eventually even the white rods were burned up and gone. So Tumithak decided that he must have a talk with Zar-Emo concerning the best use that the rods might be put to, in order that the greatest advantage might accrue. He suggested to the priest that he and his companions arm themselves with fire-hoses and attempt a return to their pit. Zar-Emo shook his head.

A Possible Alliance Suggested

"It would be a great danger to attempt to fight your way back to the pit from which you came, Tumi-thak," he said gravely. I think I can help you in a way that will not only remove all the danger, but will bring your people and mine into an alliance that will be closer than you have dreamed.

Puzzled, Tumithak asked the Tam to explain himself, but Zar-Emo only shook his head.

"I am not at all sure that I can do what I hope to do," he explained, "and until I am, I prefer not to raise hopes that I may not be able to gratify."

But the next day, the old man called Tumithak and Nikadur to him and led them to a deserted corridor where a strange machine was set tip. It was a ma-chine far too complicated for Tumithak to understand. In appearance it was a metal box five feet high with a number of strange transparent tubes on the top of it, inside of which tubes there glowed strange lights. Out of the side of this metal box extended a long arm, at the end of which a great soft pad was fastened, apparently by suction, to the wall of the corridor. Zar-Emo pointed down the corridor, and there, approximately a hundred yards away, was another machine, identical in every respect to this one.

One of Zar-Emo's lesser priests was seated on a little stool that was fastened on the side of the metal box, and now, at a word from his master, reached up and placed on his head a strange piece of apparatus that en-tirely covered his ears. Then he turned a small knob on the box, and turning, called to the man that con-trolled the farther machine. The latter also placed the strange headgear on his head, and brought his own machine into play.

Trying a Sounding Machine in the Corridors

For several minutes, the two turned and twisted the little knobs and at each twist they listened intently, as though they could hear some distant sound that was inaudible to the others. Then the nearer of them turned to Zar-Emo.

"There is a different tune here, Zar-Emo," he said, 'How are we to tell what it represents?"

The priest motioned him to get up from his seat, and then told Tumithak to take his place. Hesitatingly, the Loorian did as he was requested, and gingerly put the headpiece over his ears. As he did so a strange tone suddenly filled his ears, a continuous monotonous hum. Tumithak took the headpiece off and looked at the chief priest inquiringly.

'The machine, Tumithak," explained Zar-Emo, see-ing the puzzled look in Tumithak's eyes, "was used by our ancestors to detect underground veins of metal, or water or even underground caverns. It is based on the principle of the echo. One part of this arm which is fastened to the corridor wall sends out a sound into the

rock, a sound of so high a pitch that human ears cannot detect it. This sound travels through the rock until it strikes some different substance and there a portion of it is reflected back to another part of the arm, a receiver which picks it up and so alters it that it can be heard in the earpieces fastened on Coritac's head.

Now this sound is not like the sounds that we are used to thinking of. As I have said, it is far too shrill to be heard by human ears, and such sounds act quite differently from common sounds. In the first place, these sound waves can be sent in a beam, as light waves are; and in the second place, they are slightly altered by the density of the material that reflects them. Thus it is possible to tell in just what direction the reflecting material is, and whether it is liquid, solid, or, say, a cavern or hole.

"Now it has been my thought, Tumithak, that if with this we could discover a long straight cavern running through the ground we could be fairly sure that it would be your home corridors and thus we would know in just what direction they lie. And by the help of another machine, some distance away, we could tell the exact distance of your corridors from here."

Locating the Loorian Corridors by Sound

Tumithak had listened in a daze. Vaguely he had understood some part of what the Tam had said, but this last was too much for him. It was necessary for Zar-Emo to explain to him the mystery of the two angles and an included side in great detail before he finally saw how it would be possible to measure the distance to his home from this far-off corridor. And when he did understand his wonder was increased.

"Truly, Zar-Emo," he cried, "the wonders of our ancestors were unending. But tell me, why have you gone to all this trouble to locate my home corridors?"

The Tam smiled proudly as he moved to take his place on the seat from which Tumithak, in his excitement, had moved,

"Have you forgotten the disintegrating machine?" he asked. "Tumithak, I intend to drive a new corridor from the pit of the Tains to the pit of the Loorians!"

The hours that followed were exciting ones. Time and again, the workers thought they had discovered the distant corridor, only to find on further examination, that their discovery was only some small cavern or underground stream. But at last they detected what, from its straightness and regularity, could be nothing other than a man-made corridor. Then Zar-Emo and his men began a series of tests and problems that ended, at last, with the verification of the exact distance and direction of Tumithak's home corridor.

The party returned to the inhabited portion of the pit and jubilantly prepared for the work of the next day. The disintegrating machine was taken to the spot where the detectors had been and there set up, a queer, monstrous thing with a great trumpet-shaped ray projector in front, and with three seats on the back of it to accommodate the men that worked it. Zar-Emo left his men working over it and, taking Tumithak with him, returned to the city for supper.

"I feel that you should be one of the men to take the machine through the rock, Tumithak," he told the Loorian, as they finished the meal. "Not only because the honor surely belongs to you, but because it may be necessary to have someone to convince your friends that our mission is friendly. You will have little to do with the operation of the machine and that little will not be hard to learn."

So, after the time of sleep was over, the party assembled in the ball that contained the disintegrating ray machine. Nikadur and the Yakrans, who planned to follow Tumithak as quickly as possible, were each given one of the ancient fire-hoses, as was the boy Luramo, who insisted that he be considered one of Tumithak's party. And to Tumithak's surprise, another insisted that she, too, be considered a warrior - none other than Tholura, who declared that she would not let her new friends go forth to any danger without also going along. So at last it was decided to let her go with them, and then Zar-Emo approached Tumithak, who already was at his seat on the machine, and proceeded to instruct him in his duties.

The Operation of the Machine

See here, Loorian," explained the priest. "Behind you on this wall is a large white cross. Looking

through this eyepiece in front of you, you will see another cross painted on this mirror in which you will also see a reflection of the first cross. As long as the reflected cross is superimposed on the other, your machine is going in the right direction. Should it vary by even so much as a hair's breadth, you must at once call it to the attention of these other men who work the machine. That is all that is necessary; my men will attend to all the rest. Your party will follow you as soon as the rock becomes cool enough to walk on. Goodbye, and let us hope that everything turns out as we have planned it."

He turned as he spoke and gave an order to the men seated with Tumithak. One of them turned a lever, there was a blinding flash of light, and as it dulled to a faint violet glow, Tumithak saw a great hole appear in the side of the wall toward which the trumpet-like projector pointed. The other man now pulled back on his lever, pushed a button of some kind, and the great machine moved slowly into the hole it had made. As it moved the hole grew deeper, and a hot gust of queer-smelling air swept out of it. Again the machine pushed into the hole, and again the further wall retreated. Tumithak and his friends were successfully engaged in an act that had not been performed by men for nearly two thousand years!

Boring the Tunnel

For hours thereafter, Tumithak kept his eyes fixed to the eye-pieces of the machine. It was tedious work, for it was not often that the machine varied from the straight path on which it had been set. Once in a while, it would strike a new vein of rock, and this might cause it to change its direction slightly, but then Tumithak would call this to the attention of the others and the fault would be at once corrected.

The huge white cross which Zar-Emo had painted on the back corridor wall grew smaller and smaller as the machine crept away from it, but when Tumithak could no longer see it clearly he focused the center of his own cross on the distant mouth of the new corridor and the machine continued on its way.

The heat was terrific. Sweat was soon streaming down Tumithak's face and the faces of the two priests. At last after what seemed to be hours of continuous moving they unanimously agreed that they must call a temporary halt. The machine was stopped and all three lay back in their seats for a much-needed rest.

After about an hour they started the machine again. "We are probably more than half-way there," said one of the priests, "but this second half will seem much worse than the first. It is not so easy for the heat to escape now as it was when we were close to the city."

He was right. Never had Tumithak felt such heat before, and never had time dragged so. It seemed days, days of scorching merciless misery before one of the men announced that they were at last nearing their goal. Tumithak became eager now, and so, of course, the time began to pass more rapidly. And then, at last, a strange hollow roar began to sound from the rock in front of them, and in a moment, a small hole appeared that rapidly widened and as the priests hastened to shut off the power of the machine, Tumithak leaped from his seat and found himself in an old familiar corridor.

A Corridor Familiar to Tumithak—A Letter from His Father Scratched on the Wall

He stood in a section of that roughly unfinished corridor that lay between the Surface and the Halls of the Esthetts. Not far from here, he had once watched a group of shelks slay a group of Esthetts, and trembling with horror, had wondered why they did so. And not more than two miles down this corridor, if memory served him right, his band of warriors should be waiting. "Were they still there," he wondered, "or had they given his party up for dead and returned to Loor and Yakra? Or had the shelks discovered them and slain them all?" Tumithak remembered with sudden misgivings the fact that Datto had told him of boasting to the shelk chief of having raided the Halls of the Esthetts. And the shelk chief had ordered an investigation! Unable to control his anxiety, thinking of a thousand and one things that might have happened, he beckoned to the two priests to follow him, and sped down the corridor.

As he neared the spot where his party should be, his anxiety increased, for a silence reigned that told him that the corridor was deserted. At last, he reached the place where his men should have been, to find that his fears were verified. But on one side of the wall a message had been scrawled, a message from his father

"Tumithak," it read, "Our guards have reported the approach of a band of shelks. The savages of the dark corridors have offered to conceal us in the clefts and caverns of their home, and so we are leaving this place.

If you ever return, seek for us in the dark corridors Tumlook.”

Tumithak, at first, was for starting for the dark corridors at once, but on second thought he decided to wait until the coming of the party that would soon be arriving from the city of the Tains, for he knew that they would follow as closely as possible. So he and the two priests sat down and ate some of the food they had brought with them and then, entering a concealing apartment, they prepared to take a much-needed sleep.

The Meeting

They were awakened by sounds in the corridor without, and emerged to find Nikadur, Tholura and all the others who had arrived while they slept and had been much worried over their disappearance. Nikadur had discovered Tumlook's message, at last, and was about to make the attempt to lead the party down into the dark corridors when Tumithak and his companions were discovered. The party, reunited now, decided to begin at once the attempt to find Nennapuss and the other warriors, and so they began the descent; but they had not gone a mile when they came upon the entire party, warily returning to their former camping place. They had hidden in the dark corridors while the shelks held an investigation in the corridors above, and when they felt sure that the latter had again re-turned to the surface, they had boldly set out to return to the Halls of the Esthetts.

Nennapuss and Tumlook, who were leading them, were overjoyed to see their comrades safe again, and they eagerly plied them with questions. Tumithak related their story briefly and told of the wonderful machines that they had managed to procure. The enthusiasm of the Loorians and Yakrans knew no bounds; they even so far forgot themselves as to give a cheer that echoed again and again through the corridors. And then the leaders sat down and began to formulate a plan of attack upon the city of Shawm.

CHAPTER VI - The Whelming of Shawm

The ensuing hundred hours were busy ones for the people of the pits. The six or seven miles of new corridor became a teeming thoroughfare, through which Tains, Loorians and Yakrans hurried busily back and forth, trading the captured beauties of the Esthetts for the wonderful food that was the secret of the Tains, and for the ancient weapons that were now so precious.

Tumithak returned to the city of the Tains and brought Zar-Emo through the new corridor to confer with his other chiefs on the possibility of attacking Shawm. For several days they plotted and planned, and at last a feasible method was devised. Nikadur, with Tumlook, Nennapuss and the Loorians and Nononese, would remain in the home corridor, while Tumithak, with Datto, Thopf and the Yakrans, was to go through the corridor and the pit of the Tains, and, re-turning over the Surface, was to attack the town from the other side.

The ones who remained in the pit were to wait for fifty hours, and then, in the third hour of the night following the expiration of the fifty hours, they were to attack. Thus if their plans went well the two attacks would be simultaneous unexpected and they hoped, overwhelming. The shelks would be caught between two fires and, so the pitmen hoped, wiped out to the last one. The city of Shawm would be in the hands of men, together with all its wonderful engines and machines, and man would again have a place in the sun, on the Surface of the world.

It was a proud Tumithak that led his bravely singing Yakrans through the city of the Tains and up the labyrinthine corridors to the place where the entrance had been blasted shut by the shelks. They paused for a time, while a Tam with a small disintegrating machine opened the way for them again, and then they resumed their march, out over the Surface. And here Tumithak was halted by a party of Tains who had followed them up the corridor. There were about ten of them and leading them was the boy, Luramo.

Wait, Tumithak,” he called, ‘Here are a few more warriors to go with you. Not all the Tains are the cowards you seem to think them.’ He turned and beckoned the party to advance, and Tumithak perceived that the majority of them were mere boys, youths who had not yet completely developed the terrible fear that was so much more noticeable in the older folk. His eyes roved over the group and suddenly halted in surprise.

“You, Tholura?” he exclaimed in amazement. “You are going with these warriors? I fear this war party is no place for a woman, Tholura.”

The girl answered him indignantly.

"I hope you spoke without thinking, Tumithak," she said, "Surely, if you but think, you will remember that of all the Tains, I was the first to dare look upon the Surface. Have you forgotten how you said that I was one after your own heart? And would such a one cower in the corridors while others went to fight the enemies of man?"

Tholura Is to Fight with the Warriors

Tumithak smiled. The girl had convicted him by his own words, and now that he stopped to think, he wondered why he had suggested that she re-main behind. He only knew that he felt a sudden unexplainable feeling that it would be terrible to live in this world if Tholura were slain in the fight. He had sought to protect her in the easiest way - by ordering her back to the corridors.

But now he knew this was impossible, and so, with a shrug, he motioned her to take a place beside him, along with Datto and Thopf.

The party left the foothills and marched across the grassy plain without incident or adventure. Once in the forest, Tumithak felt safer, especially as night was approaching and he knew that, although this would make marching much slower, nevertheless, there would be practically no danger at all from the enemy. Dawn found them close to the spot where the other white and shining rods had been hidden, and soon after, to their great delight, they came upon them, still hidden in the leaves where Tholura had concealed them.

They realized that they could not be far from the city of Shawm now, and it was a cautious group of warriors that moved slowly behind Tumithak as he darted from tree to tree or crept along through the underbrush, whenever it was thick enough to conceal him. At last, they reached the summit of a rocky, sparsely wooded hill and looked down across the wood at its base to see the towers of Shawm in the distance.

The needle-like towers, with their connecting cables and gleaming metal sides presented a strange ap-pearance to the pitmen, but the day had been so lull of strange appearances that the only feeling they had was one of satisfaction that here was their goal. Tumithak continued to look out over the towers as if in search of something, and presently uttered a pleased cry.

The Entrance Opening to Loor

"Look there, Datto!" he cried. "See there, the opening to our pit?" and sure enough, beyond the group of towers could be faintly distinguished the shallow hole that held the opening to the vast corridors that led to Loor. Somewhere, not far below, Tumlook and Nennapuss waited with their army for the moment to arrive when they could sweep out and begin the con-quest of Shawm.

Tumithak pointed out the pit-mouth to the others, Tholura and Luramo being especially interested in the location of the hole. While they were still looking at it, a cry arose from one of the Tains and turning, Tumithak saw him pointing up into the sky. The Loorian looked and gave a cry of fear, for sweeping down on them was one of the shelks' flying machines, a huge one, one that must have, concealed within it, at least a dozen shelks!

In a moment, the scene was one of indescribable con-fusion. Gone were the brave thoughts of conquest, the minds of the men were taken up only with the great hereditary fear that had for so many generations op-pressed them. The Tains, and indeed most of the braver Yakrans, broke from the group and fled, vainly trying to hide themselves behind rocks, trees, bushes or whatever seemed to profuse shelter. Ere two minutes had passed, the only ones who remained with Tumi-thak were Datto, Thopf, Tholura, the boy Luramo and three other Yakrans. These, all of whom were armed with fire-hoses, stood their ground and watched the on-coming flyer. Like a huge bird, its wings outspread, the machine hovered for a moment and then sank to the ground. A door in its side opened—and Tumithak sent a blast from his fire-hose into the opening! There was a clattering cry and the door closed again. Tumithak smiled grimly and motioned the rest of the party back. A large rock stood about twenty yards away, and to this he led them hurriedly, taking a position behind it and awaiting further movement from the shelks.

Now it was fortunate for Tumithak that this flyer was a freighter and as such was not equipped for fighting. Several of the shelks within it were armed, of course, but there were no guns mounted on the out-side, nor was it possible to use a fire-hose from within, when the doors were closed. So the shelks could not attack the men from within, and, strange as it may seem, it never dawned on either Tumithak or his companions that the plane was absolutely at their mercy. For so many years had the weapons of man been directed only at their enemies, that the idea of destroying the shelks by burning down flyer and all never entered Tumithak's head. And so the battle seemed to have reached a deadlock.

The Flying Machine Captures Tholura and Two Others

And then, suddenly, as though a decision had been reached within, the shelk flyer rose about fifty feet and swung above the rock that concealed the little party. It hung there for a moment, and then from beneath its hull, a huge claw-like hand of metal reached out, the car dropped with dizzying suddenness, and the claw closed over three of the party and swept them aloft! Tumithak gave a wild cry, as did the others, for one of the three who were seized was Tholura!

The thoughts that swept over Tumithak as he watched the flyer swing aloft again were puzzling in the extreme. He saw, in his mind's eye, the battle in which he met Tholura; he remembered her bravery and her beauty; he thought of how dull and uninteresting his world would be if she were suddenly taken out of it— and then, suddenly, he realized that he loved her. And she was being taken from him! Madly he cast about in his mind for some method whereby he might save her. Now the idea of blasting the flyer with his fire-hose came belatedly to him, but already it was so high that if he attempted this, Tholura was almost certain to be killed in the crash. While he sought some means of rescuing her, he saw the flyer sweep down over the forest and disappear among the towers of Shawm. Tholura, if not already dead, was a prisoner of the shelks!

For awhile, Tumithak gave way to grief. Little Luramo came up to him and took his hand, and Tumithak saw great tears in the lad's eyes, yet when the Lorian looked at him, the boy forced a smile and said bravely: "There is still work for us, Tumithak. Let us mourn my sister after we have avenged her."

The brave words gave Tumithak a new grip on himself. Luramo, he knew, truly loved his sister, yet the lad remembered their mission was one that called for sacrifices even greater than this, if possible. It behooved Tumithak to remember it also.

Tumithak's Grief and His Recovery to Fight

So, a few minutes later, Tumithak was his old self again; and calling back to him such of the Yakrans and Tains as could be found, he berated them roundly for their cowardice and urged them to redeem themselves as well as they might in the coming battle. Then he called to Luramo, and pointing to the distantly seen pit mouth of the Lorian pit, he asked: "Do you think that you could find your way through the forest to the pit mouth, Luramo?" And when the lad answered in the affirmative, he went on: "You must go straight-way and inform Nikadur that the attack must begin at once. The shelks in the flyer will surely warn Shawm of our presence, and so we can no longer delay the attack. Meanwhile, we who are here will attack at once. So hurry, Luramo!"

The little Tain sped off down the hill, and in a moment, disappeared into the wood at its base. Then Tumithak gave the command and the party moved to the attack of Shawm.

Strange events had been happening in the shelk city of Shawm. It was not a large town, nor an old one, as towns go; it was little more than a recent settlement in this wild unsettled land, which had for many centuries been abandoned by the shelks. Yet in all the history of the town, nothing similar to these recent events had been heard of. From somewhere deep in the corridors, a race of men had made their appearance that were apparently wild and decidedly vicious. First had come the strange slaughter of a Mog with the accompanying pursuit and escape of the creatures that slew him; then close on the heels of that strange catastrophe had come the news that a party of shelks and Mogs had been slain by their own weapons in the woods beyond Shawm. The party that went to investigate had been wiped out almost to the last one, those who escaped returning to tell of men armed with fire-hoses, who had fled into the pit of the Tains. And this was most puzzling, for one of the wild men, who had been captured and supposedly sent to Kaymak, had intimated, while captured, that he had come from the pit that held the Halls of the Esthetts.

The shelks had at last begun to make preparations to invade both of the pits and make certain of their

safety by completely wiping out all traces of men in them, when a flyer arrived in the city, telling of a large force of men armed with heat-rays, which were near the city, and bringing three armed specimens, in its claw, for proof.

At once the wildest excitement prevailed. The shelks rushed hither and thither, arming themselves, taking posts in various portions of the city where a watch was maintained on that part of the wood from which the danger might be expected to appear, and getting ready all the strange weapons that the little town could boast. Hakh-Klotta, the Governor-Inferior, unable to believe that men could actually be intelligent enough to use heat-rays, called together a group of trained hunting men, and sent them off in the direction from which the flyer had come. He watched them from a tower as they crossed the cleared space between the towers and the trees, and smiled a savage smile as he noticed them near the trees in safety. Certainly, if there had been any wild men in the woods they would have burned down the Mogs before the latter reached the comparative protection of the trees, he thought. But hardly had these thoughts taken form in his mind before he saw a burst of smoke from the ground in front of the Mogs, and then another, and another; and before his very eyes, his Mogs fell to the ground, and slowly burned to cinders beneath the heat-rays directed on them from the forest.

A Real Danger Threatens the City

This convinced Hakh-Klotta that the danger was a very real one, and made him more cautious in his movements. He began to wonder if it would be possible to attack these strange men at all, seeing that they were hiding among the trees at a distance beyond the reach of the heat-rays. He knew that the pitmen dared not leave the shelter of the trees, but then, the shelks dared not leave the shelter of the towers. And so it began to seem as if the battle might take on the appearance of a siege.

But, meanwhile, the idea of a siege was very far from Tumithak's mind. He knew that he would be unable to approach Shawm from this point, for there was a broad open space of nearly four hundred yards between the forest and the towers; but the Loorian remembered that at the point where he had first escaped from Shawm, the trees had approached almost to the towers, and so, leaving a detachment of men under Datto and Thopf to besiege this portion of the town, Tumithak, with a dozen others, set off to attack the town on that side where the trees were closest to it.

The Attack

It was fortunate for Tumithak that he formed the idea when he did, for the mind of old Hakh-Klotta was not slow and the thought of this danger came to him almost as soon as it came to Tumithak. As soon as he thought of it, he immediately dispatched a group of shelks to defend the spot, and so, as Tumithak and his warriors approached through the trees, they saw the shelks wending their way through the towers.

Instantly, Tumithak called his men to attack, while at the same moment, several blasts of heat flashed at him from the party of shelks. He darted behind a tree, calling to his men to likewise conceal themselves, and then, turning on his fire-rose, he directed its beam at one of the towers beneath which the shelks were cowering.

The shelks at once turned their rays upon the bases of the trees behind which the men were concealed, their idea obviously being to burn down each tree and then strike the man behind it. But Tumithak had been seized with a better idea, and so he called softly to his men to direct their fire at the towers to the right and left of the shelks, burning only those sides that were nearest the group. The others grasped his idea and at once began to carry it out. The trees were filled with the sap of early spring and so they heated slowly, but metal towers absorbed the heat rapidly and before the heat-rays could burn through the trees, Tumithak's object had been accomplished. Two of the towers, one to the right and one to the left of the shelks, suddenly collapsed, their foundations melting beneath them, and down they came with a crash, burying the entire group of shelks beneath them. Most of the shelks were killed outright, others were seriously injured, and the only one that was apparently unhurt, turned and sped like lightning farther into the city. The men looked on in amazement, unable to believe their eyes. Yet, incredible as the fact was, they were actually looking at a shelk, fleeing from a group of men. For a space, they stared in wonder and then it dawned on them that their brush with this party of shelks had been successful. The de-fenders were all dead or dying, and the way into Shawm was opened!

It was not the plan of Tumithak to dash recklessly into the city, however. He at once gave orders that

began a steady, methodical burning of the towers in this portion of Shawn. One after another tile towers crashed to the ground, their foundations blasted away by the terrific heat of the fire hoses in the hands of the Yakrans.

The Towers Fallen, the City Exposed

And as the towers fell, the pitmen moved forward into the ruins, and, concealing themselves, began the destruction of towers farther within the city. But they were not to continue their work of destruction for many minutes. Before a half dozen towers were destroyed, they found new parties of shelks opposing them, and in a moment of carelessness, two of tile Yakrans were slain before they could property con-ceal themselves.

Within the city, now, the men from the Pit were at an advantage. The shelks, however desperate, did their best to slay their enemies without destroying their homes, while the men had no such compunction, and would have gladly destroyed all Shawn to kill a single shelk. And so, in spite of a number of casualties, Tumithak and his men moved forward until he reached a spot where he could attack, from a little elevation, the party that was defending the town from Datto and his men.

Then the huge Yakran chief, his even huger nephew, and their savage warriors, dashed across the open space before the city and in a moment were in the town. With wild cries, they attacked the shelks, for-getful, now that they were at close grips with the creatures, of either fire-hose or disintegrating ray. And indeed, at such close quarters, the rays became double-edged weapons, liable to slay friend and foe alike, and even the shelks seemed to realize their danger and ceased to use them. Strange knife-like weapons ap-peared in their claws, sharp disks of steel mounted on sticks and rotating rapidly, like a child's pinwheel; dangerous weapons, indeed, for whenever they touched an arm or leg or head, it was sheered off instantly.

And so the battle raged in hand-to-hand conflict, like the battles of the ancient world, before the dawn of modern knowledge. For the first time in nearly two thousand years, Man was facing his enemies on equal ground, and a good showing he was making, too. The shelks already were yielding ground to the men, when a cry from beyond them told Tumithak that Nikadur and the Loorians had emerged from the pit. He gave a triumphant answering cry and attacked the shelks with renewed vigor.

To tell all the details of the battle would require a story longer than all of this one. It had become a vast series of individual encounters, and in such a fight, heroes are made by the dozen. Thurranen of Nonone first distinguished himself in this fight, as did several others, who were afterward to become famous knights in Tumithak's kingdom; Luramo verified Tumithak's belief in him; while the others, Datto, Nikadur, Thopf, Nennapuss and Tumlook and their ilk showed added prowess by the fearful way in which they brought down shelk after shelk.

The Battle Reaching Its End

Twice Tumithak faced old Hakh-Klotta himself twice lesser shelks bravely died to allow the old governor a chance to avoid the leader of the pitmen. It was astounding to Tumithak to see how willing the shelks were to die defending this old ruler. It was his first contact with that strange social instinct that was afterwards to enable him to gain such great advantages over tile shelks. He was in after years to learn that a battle with the shelks was somewhat like a game of chess - capture the king and you capture all.

But now the Loorian was ignorant of this fact and so when Hakh-Klotta avoided him he was content to attack some lesser shelk. And the battle continued, while shelk after shelk died in a manner that must have seemed strange beyond telling, to them. Imagine a man dying in a battle with sheep and hogs, with sheep and hogs that used guns, knives and that united together to destroy a village! That is probably as close an analogy to this strange raid as we of today can con-ceive.

We must not suppose that the battle was entirely with the pitmen. In places the shelks would be tem-porarily victorious and dozens of men would die under the whirling knives of the shelks. In places, too, men would be isolated from the main battle, and then a fire-hose, wielded by some shelk, would blast them to cinders before they could flee.

But for every man that died beneath the shelks' whirling knives, two shelks would perish beneath the swords or the arrows of the men; and for every group that died under the fire-hoses of the shelks, another perished beneath the fire-hoses of the men of the Pits.

Retreat to the Flying Machine

Until at last, as the sun sank low in the heavens, the last group of shelks gathered close to the huge flying machine that lay in the center of the village, and attempted to make a last stand. They had hoped, much earlier in the day, to enter the flyer and escape, in order to bring help from the large city of Kaymak, some distance away; but Tumithak had forestalled them by ordering one of his men to play a fire-hose across the entrance from the protection of a nearby tower. And so they had been balked of their desire. They had made their last stand here however hoping that some last minute accident would enable them to enter the flyer and escape.

It seemed that there would be little chance for them now. It would be but a moment until they were cut down. And then the Loorian, who had been guarding the entrance to the flyer, gave a cry and fell backward, his head burned to a cinder by the heat-ray of some concealed shelk sniper. Nikadur immediately directed his own fire-hose in the direction from which the ray had come, and had the satisfaction of seeing a burned shelk tumble screaming from the window of the tower, but the few seconds during which the door of the flyer was unguarded enabled fully half of the remaining shelks to enter the flyer and swing shut the door. Hakh-Klotta was the first to enter, needless to say, and then, as the door swung shut, the few remaining shelks died instantly under the rays of the Yakrans. Tumithak was just about to order the fire-hoses to blast the flyer to molten metal when a terrifying thought came to him. Tholura and the two captured Yakrans had not been seen in any part of Shawm during the fight. Was it possible that they were still in the flyer? If they were, to blast the flyer would mean their certain death. Tumithak turned sick at the thought of how close he had come to giving the order that would have slain them. He ordered his men back from the flyer and waited in anxiety to see if it would rise, bearing away with it the shelk chief and the one in all the world that Tumithak loved most. But as moment after moment passed, and the flyer did not move, he gained renewed hope. Perhaps the flyer was injured in some way, and could not rise.

Tholura Is Now a Slayer of Shelks

Perhaps the shelks were so seriously wounded that they could not operate the machine. And then, just as he was about to give an order to attack the machine and try to get within it, the door of the flyer flew open and a disheveled, white-faced figure stood in the doorway. It was Tholura; and on her head was a golden band such as the Governor-Inferior of Shawm had worn. And in her hand was a charred and dripping head—the head of Hakh-Klotta of Shawm!

“Tumithak!” she called weakly, and then, spying him rushing toward her: “Tumithak,” she cried. “Take me. I love you and now I am worthy of you . . . and I too am a slayer of shelks.”

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CHAPTER VII - The Walls of Shawm

Tholura's story was soon told. As the flyer had swept toward Shawm, she and the two Yakrans had been drawn up into the body of the machine, disarmed, and thrown unceremoniously into a corner, where they had cowered in terror, wondering what was coming next. The excitement caused by the news which the shelks in the flyer told on their arrival, and the tumult of the battle which immediately followed, evidently caused the shelks to entirely forget them; and so they remained locked in the flyer all during the fight. Toward the last, Tholura so far regained her courage as to begin a search of the flyer. She went looking around here and there, examined the controls and decided that they were too complicated to experiment with, looked here, there and everywhere in search of some sort of a weapon, and finally, to her surprise and delight, found the very arms which had been taken from them earlier in the day. The shelks had evidently tossed them carelessly into a chest used for storing baggage, and it was here that the girl found them. It was obvious that here, as all through the battle without, the shelks had under-estimated the intelligence of the men against whom they were fighting, and here, as in the fighting without, they were to pay dearly for their mistake.

Grimly, Tholura strapped the box to her back and sat down at the entrance to await the return of the shelks. When the door opened, she hid herself until the entire party was safely within the cabin, and then she opened fire on them with the heat-ray. The shelks did not have a chance, but in her excitement, Tholura forgot how the use of the fire-hose in such confined quarters would raise the surrounding temperature. She and the two Yakrans also had almost been overcome by the heat, before they could manage to get the door open and escape to the cooler air of the outside.

The Battle Was Ended—The' Last Shelk Was Killed

But now the battle was over, the shelks were dead to the last one, Tumithak and Tholura were united again, and the pitmen had cheered themselves hoarse when Tumithak announced his intention of marrying Tholura at the earliest opportunity.

Then Tumithak, at Datto's suggestion, allowed the warriors to disband and turned the city over to them for looting; while he gathered together his others to discuss ways and means of properly protecting the city proper.

Next morning Nennapuss approached the Loorian chief with a very business-like air and asked permission to read a list he had compiled. Tumithak nodded permission and the Nononese cleared his throat, and, in the oratorical voice that was so characteristic of him began:

"This is a list of all the engines and machines that have been captured in the taking of the city. I took the liberty of ordering all men who had obtained these machines to make a report of them, and the following is a summation of their reports. We have secured twenty-seven fire-hoses, which, added to the forty-four which the Tains provided, makes seventy-one in all. We have two hundred and fifty rods of the power metal, a cache of which was found in the tower of the chief shelk. Twenty-six small machines of the type that makes nothing of things, four strange going-machines which no one can make to go, one machine with strong arms that seems to be made for lifting large objects, one machine to fly through the air, and seventy-two machines of which at present we know not the use."

Tumithak smiled at the formidable list which the chief of Nonone had so carefully compiled, and then considered seriously for a moment.

"The fire-hoses," he announced at last, "and the rods of metal may become the property of those who found them. The machines of which we know not the use shall remain in the possession of those who have them until we find out their use. But the disintegrating machines shall become the property of the council, to be used for the protection of the city. Tell Datto and Zar-Emo to report to me."

The two chiefs came and Tumithak laid before them the plan which he had conceived for the protection of the city. Enthusiastically, Zar-Emo and Datto departed and busied themselves in setting up the disintegrating machines in the manner agreed upon. A huge circle was drawn on the ground all about Shawm and then, at equal intervals about this circle, the machines were set up, and Tains spent some time teaching the use of them to warriors who were assigned to operate them.

For a guard, one of the many that Tumithak had placed in the towers and on the higher elevations of land beyond the city, came rushing to the chief to announce, in a voice laden with terror, that a number of great bird-like shapes had appeared on the distant horizon, and were moving rapidly toward Shawm.

"They are shelk-flyers, Tumithak!" he cried in fear. "Let us flee to the Pits at once, Tumithak."

The shelk-slayer silenced him with a stern gesture, and, turning, ordered a messenger to summon the other chiefs. When they arrived he began at once to give them instructions for the defense of the city. Messengers were sent rushing to the guards who main-tained a constant watch at the disintegrating machines, others assembled the possessors of fire-hoses in the center of the city, while still others busied themselves with the work of herding the women and children into the Pits, that they might be safe in the event that the battle went against the defenders.

By the time that all these preparations were completed, the shelk fleet (which, although Tumithak could not know it, was probably little more than a group of freighters, ignorant of the conquest of Shawm, which were bringing supplies to the little city from some larger metropolis), had reached a point not over a few miles from the town. Standing on the little elevation near the center of Shawm, Tumithak, with Tholura at his side and his chiefs behind him, watched its approach. The shelk flyers were ornithopters and the lazy flap-flap of the metal wings caused them to flash intermittently in the sun.

On they came, suspecting nothing, until they reached a point but a few hundred yards away from the city and then they began to descend. The clattering hum of their engines could be heard plainly now, and Tumi-thak began to look anxiously toward the ground beyond the city. Would his plan work, or were the

pitmen about to participate in a desperate battle that would question their very existence?

The End of the Fleet

And then, just when the Loorian had given up hope, came the event that he had been waiting for. There came a splitting roar from the foremost of the flyers, it gleamed momentarily with a brilliant a dazzling light—and then it was gone! There was a clap of thunder as the sound of air rushing in to take the place of that destroyed by the ray reached their ears and that was all.

Tumithak smiled a relieved smile and turned to Tholura.

“The disintegrating machines” he explained. “They have been set up so as to form a huge cone of rays over Shawm through which nothing can pass until we shut off our machines. There is a watch over the machines, day and night, and whenever anything strange appears in the sky, the power is immediately turned on.”

He turned and watched the remaining flyers. The main body of the machines, about seven of them, had been flying immediately behind the leader, and had not attempted to stop when the leader was struck. They had no cause to believe that the machine had been attacked from the ground, and apparently those who noticed its collapse credited it to some accident within the flyer.

And so, before they could help themselves, they, too, had moved on within reach of the rays and in less than a minute they, too, had roared into oblivion. One straggler, indeed, managed to avoid the general fate for a few moments, and Tumithak watched it anxiously, fearful that it might succeed in escaping entirely, and reach some distant shell center from which it could bring an army that would wipe out the pitmen entirely. But fortunately this was not to happen, the men who controlled the disintegrators, considering it a point of honor to completely wipe out the entire shell fleet, directed the whole battery of sixteen machines against it and under such a barrage escape was impossible. The last flyer exploded noisily (the disintegrating rays were weak at that distance) and a fine rain of dust over the forest marked the last of the fleet.

The breeze that had sprung up at the moment of the turning on of the disintegrators, and which had grown until it was a brisk wind, died down now, and Tumithak turned to Tholura and gave her a kiss of triumph. Then he gave a sigil of fervent relief, for he had been uncertain as to how this method of defense was going to work.

“We have triumphed once more,” he said softly, and then: “But they will come again, Tholura, they will surely come again . . . But when they do, we will be ready for them.”

THE END.