

Hammer ^{OF} THE Gods

by JOHN YORK CABOT

To the tribe the God Hammer was the symbol of authority, but to Tokar it was more. It was worth attaining kingship to pry out its secret

DEEP in the jungle the tribal drums were throbbing with savage passion, their pulsating rhythm carrying clearly to the ears of the gigantic, superbly muscled barbarian who moved in great strides along the tangled underpath.

He was a handsome creature, this barbarian. Handsome as the panther is handsome, or the man-killing tiger. Strong features, cruelly chiseled, were beneath his mat of fierce hair. His body was hard and brown, clad in the skin of a jungle cat. And yet for all the strength and power of him, he moved through the twisted underbrush with the stealthy swiftness of an animal.

Across his back, carried as carelessly as though it might be but a load of twig kindling, was the still bleeding carcass of a freshly slain boar. Food for the tribal feasting. The smell of the animal's blood, hot and sweet in his nostrils, made the barbarian grin in anticipation.

"Ayi," he thought with savage satisfaction, "I, Tokar, return to the tribal campfires with meat for the bellies of my people."

And he grinned again in wolfish glee at the thought he had half-whispered in the murky twilight. For this very evening he, Tokar, The Mighty, would gain supremacy among his tribal fellows, would gain the honor of Tribal King. He, Tokar, would gain all this by overthrowing Orlo, the present tribal king.

"Ayi," he told himself righteously, "do I not bring the most meat to the tribal kettles? Am I not the swiftest of foot and the quickest in battle? Am I not Tokar, The Mighty? It is only right that I wrest the rule of the tribe from the weak hands of Orlo!"

The thought made Tokar feel good inside, and he took up a savage humming chant as he strode along, unconsciously moving to the rhythm of the booming jungle drums. For Tokar was not only thinking of the honor which he had long felt was due him, the honor of tribal kingship. He thought, too, of the spoils that would be his when he had slain Orlo.

Orlo had rich compounds, and Orlo, as befitted a tribal king, had strong women to work for him. All these would go to Tokar. All these and something else—The God Hammer.

At the thought of the God Hammer, the gigantic barbarian ran his tongue across his lips, shivering involuntarily. For was not the God Hammer a magic thing? Was it not glittering and shining in its magic power? Was it not the most prized trophy of the campfires?

"Ayi," Tokar wet his lips in anticipation at the thought, "the God Hammer, too, will be mine. Before the campfires are cold in the murk of morning, it will be mine!"

A QUARTER the length of a man's arm, cold and hard, with a hammer-like head on one end—that was the God Hammer. But, unlike war dubs, it was not of stone. It was of some magical substance, smooth and solid. Tokar had touched it once, unobserved by Orlo, and he shivered now, remembering the feel of it.

At the blunt end of the God Hammer there was a sort of magical ring, the very sight of which filled Tokar with a burning primitive curiosity. Again and again he had turned over the mystery of this ring in his mind, and again and again had found no answer. His desire to possess the God



Then, Tokar, bellowing wildly, plunged in on Orlo, his club smashing through the king's guard

Hammer was increased to a feverish intensity because of his insatiable curiosity over the magic ring. The possession of such magic would be worth even more than Orlo's rich compounds and strong women.

Thus Tokar reasoned, while he hummed his savage chant and strode lightly along the tangled trail to the rhythm of the jungle drums.

All day, as he had stalked the wild boar, the thought of the God Hammer had been in his barbaric mind. And now, as his great strides bore him toward the village campfires at the end of day, the very drums seemed to throb his desire. The God Hammer. The God Hammer. Tokar, Tribal King, Possessor of The God Hammer.

The huge barbarian quickened his step, eager to gain the village. Already he was anticipating with raw relish the challenge he would fling at Orlo. On and on he moved, while the twilight deepened into dusk, and the dusk into night.

At length, through the tangled foliage of jungle growth, Tokar saw the first flickers of the flaming tribal fires. The path he trod grew wider and more clear, until at last he had view of the village a scant few hundred yards ahead.

By now the jungle drums were booming, thundering, in his ears, and the shrill cries of the dancing women came clearly to him. He smiled, knowing that the ceremony for the Feast had started, that Orlo was already at the campfires.

Dogs came dashing up to him from the village, yapping and nipping at his heels, followed by children of the tribe who squealed joyously at the sight of the freshly slain boar he carried.

Tokar was grinning widely now, his sharp white teeth shining like wolfish fangs, and he strode forward toward the campfire circles where his fellows awaited him. The campfire circles, where the drums throbbed and the women danced, and Orlo sat unsuspecting—holding the God Hammer.

Alone, Tokar made his way to the largest of the campfire circles. The Circle of the Braves, where Orlo presided over the wise men and tribal elders. Where Orlo ruled with the God Hammer in hand. Tokar was conscious of the admiring eyes of his fellows as he strode into the center of the circle.

With a grunt, Tokar swung the slain boar down from his thickly muscled shoulder, dropping

it to the earth. The cries of acclaim that came from his fellow tribesmen were music in his ears. Then the old crones, babbling happily, came from their kettles to group around the carcass of the kill. They stood there, motionless, while the campfires roared approval and Tokar, in the custom of the tribe, drew his stone knife, hacking off the left hind leg of the slain beast.

The drums were pounding wildly, now, while Tokar wrenched the leg free from the carcass, holding it aloft triumphantly, sinking his fanged teeth into the raw meat. Fresh blood ran down the sides of his cruel mouth.

BUT even as he gnawed the boar's leg, Tokar's glittering eyes sought out Orlo. Sought out Orlo, who squatted in state on a mud dais less than twenty yards from him, holding the God Hammer as a king might hold a sceptre.

Orlo, too, was huge and heavily muscled. But he was of lighter complexion than Tokar. His hair was light, while Tokar's was dark. And Tokar knew that he need have no fear of Orlo, for he, Tokar, was faster, stronger, than the man who held the God Staff.

Tokar dropped the boar's leg, holding his great arms high for silence. The wild cadence of the drums ceased abruptly, and Tokar faced Orlo directly, his wolf fangs exposed in a menacing grin.

Loudly then, Tokar trumpeted his challenge. Bellowed it so all could hear.

He saw the startled incredulity that leaped to Orlo's eyes, knew, with intense satisfaction, that he had caught him unprepared. Tokar grinned again, moved cat-like toward Orlo's dais.

Orlo had risen from the dais, God Hammer still in hand, surprise still stamped on his face. After the first shocked silence that fell over the campfires at Tokar's challenge, a throaty, savage murmur was rising from the tribesmen. A guttural growl of delight. There would be battle to give zest to the feasting.

Those around the fires remained motionless, according to tribal custom, making no attempt to interfere on either side. Tokar was going to fight for kingship. If he won, he would lead them. If not, Orlo would slay him. It was as simple as that. Tribal tradition gave any brave the right to challenge for kingship.

The drums had started again, and the fires leaped higher as men threw wood on them to better illumine the battle scene.

Tokar and Orlo were less than four feet apart, now, and were starting the preliminary circling, looking for openings. Orlo still held the God Hammer, and Tokar, seeing this, drew his stone knife again. He could read the fear in Orlo's eyes, and knew that the other could not depend on the magic of the God Hammer to aid him.

Then Tokar, bellowing wildly, lunged in on Orlo.

His great paws found Orlo's waist, and his thickly-muscled shoulder drove hard into his adversary's stomach. With his free hand, Orlo seized Tokar's mat of black hair, and with his other he tried to bring the God Hammer club-like down on his opponent's skull.

But Tokar had thrown him off balance, and now they were both pitching to the earth. Tokar had one hand free, now, and was driving his stone knife again and again into Orlo's shoulder, feeling the hot blood run stickily against his own throat.

They pitched wildly back and forth on the ground, first Tokar, then Orlo, gaining top position. But as they struggled, Tokar drove his stone blade home again and again wherever he found flesh. By now, some of Orlo's blood was in Tokar's mouth, and the taste filled him with triumph and strength.

Again and again, Tokar managed to roll free from the blows of the hard God Hammer, and at last he was able to seize Orlo's arm, bending it back until it snapped like a dry twig. The Hammer fell uselessly to the ground, and Tokar heard Orlo's grunt of pain. Then he sprang to his feet, seizing the God Hammer as he did so.

Orlo was slower rising, but Tokar permitted him to do so while the wild hammering of the drums and the babbling roar of voices from around the circle filled him with a heady intoxication. In his hand was the cool, hard, club-like weight of the God Hammer. In his heart was the savage certainty of victory, for Orlo was badly wounded.

TOKAR watched him pull himself to his feet, grinning at the sight of the blood that soaked his opponent's body. Orlo had been slashed by the stone knife at least twenty times, and his right arm

hung broken and useless by his side.

The tribesmen were screaming for the kill, screaming for Tokar, their new king. And Orlo, dazed, bloody, and beaten, swayed drunkenly before him. Tokar stepped in, raising the God Hammer high above his head.

Orlo was too late in putting up his hands to ward off the blow of the God Hammer. Tokar brought the shining, hard Hammer down on Orlo's skull with crushing force. Orlo started to slump to the earth, and Tokar raised the club again and again, beating him across the head with it until Orlo lay motionless and crushed on the bloodstained mud.

And then the savage cadence of the drums became a wild, hysterical rhythm, while Tokar, licking his lips and baring his fanged teeth in wolf grins of triumph, held the God Hammer high above his head, waving it back and forth as a symbol of victory.

The flames leaped weirdly around the circle, throwing into sudden brilliance victor and vanquished, and the drums pitched into an incredible frenzy. Around the campfires a harsh, barbaric chant began, taken up by the voices of all the tribesmen until it was a wild, maddened song of blood and triumph.

Tokar made his way to the mud dais which had been Orlo's throne until now, head held high, chest thrust out, strutting like a peacock, the wild shouts of his fellows ringing in his ears. The women started a tribal dance, and crones brought food and drink to him.

But Tokar paid scant attention to all this, for his eyes were fixed lovingly on the God Hammer. It was his now. Ayi! His to control, his to work magic with. And he could find out, now, its secrets. Even to the magic ring.

In rapt fascination, Tokar inspected the God Hammer, his fingers touching the ring as he turned it about in his hands. There were queer symbols on the staff of the Hammer, evidently God Writing. Tokar's brow creased in perplexity. The God Writing was unlike the picture symbols which the wise men of his tribe inscribed on cave walls. Indeed, these were God Symbols.

He shook his head, looking at the symbols. They were strange, perfectly cut in the staff of the Hammer.

Tokar grinned, licking his lips foolishly in

bewilderment. Perhaps, later, he would let the wise men of the tribe attempt to decipher these symbols. But now—there was the ring.

Inspecting the ring closely, Tokar saw that, by pulling it, he could release a pin at the base of the Hammer's head. Grinning in savage excitement, Tokar pulled the ring.

Tokar, the Mighty One, was momentarily conscious of a blazing, blinding, searing,

explosion. An explosion which insured the fact that Tokar would never be conscious of anything again. . . .

Never would the wise men of his tribe have the chance to decipher the strange, evenly cut God-Symbols which Tokar had seen on the base of the God Hammer. The symbols that read—

“Krupp Munitions Works, 1940, Hand Grenade”