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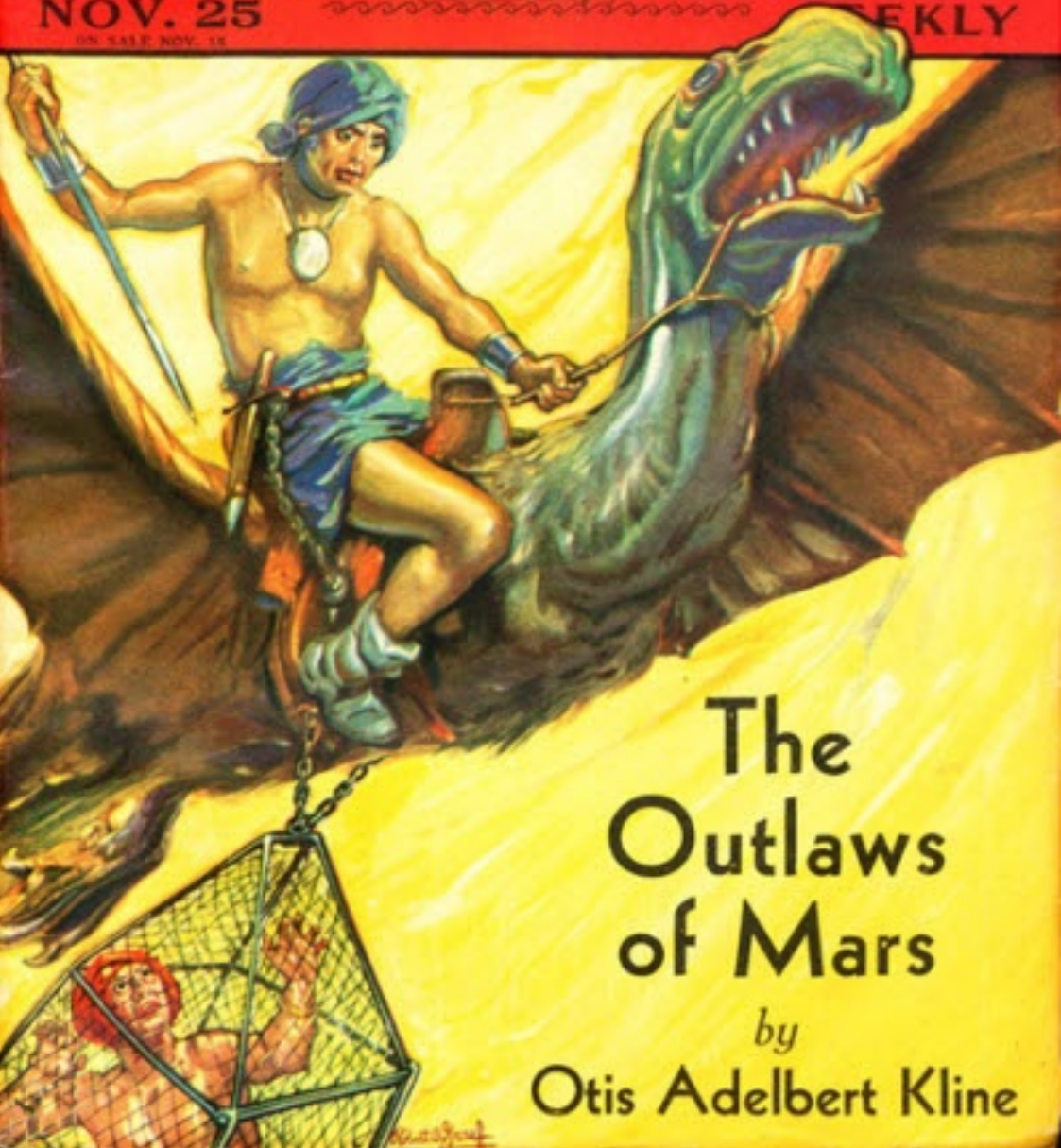
Sport, Mystery Novelettes

# ARGOSY



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WEEKLY



## The Outlaws of Mars

by  
Otis Adelbert Kline

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## **DERRING-DO IN A WORLD OF ALIEN DANGERS**

Interplanetary adventure in the grand old style was never better handled than by Otis Adelbert Kline. And in **THE OUTLAWS OF MARS** he has written a thrilling novel that will thrill every science-fiction adventure reader.

Jerry Morgan, fed up with Earthly frustrations, found plenty to occupy him when he swapped bodies with a hot-headed Martian from that red planet's era of glory. For Jerry's first moment there involved him in a costly mistake which was to throw him into conflict not only with the forces of evil and Mars' many monsters but also against the trained weapons of a haughty empire!

**THE OUTLAWS OF MARS** is out-of-this-world excitement.

## OTIS ADELBERT KLINE: In Tribute

Edgar Rice Burroughs, creator of Tarzan of the Apes and John Carter of Barsoom, has never had a peer. He stands unsurpassed as a master of fantasy-adventure, and so it shall always be.

Yet there was one who came so close that many consider him to have equalled the old master himself. He was Otis Adelbert Kline, superb fantasy author, and creator of Jan of the Jungle and Grandon of Terra, the Prince of Peril.

Surely Kline and Burroughs had much in common. They both wrote because they loved to write, they wrote the same type of stories for more or less the same magazines, and they probably influenced each other greatly.

In 1933, Kline introduced the readers of *Argosy* to Jerry Morgan, the swashbuckling hero of *The Outlaws of Mars* and it was an instant success. "Excitement, vivid imagination, and strong human conflicts make up this full-length fantastic novel of an Earthman's adventures on the Red Planet." So said the editors then and now, nearly thirty years later, their description is still valid.

—CAMILLE CAZEDESSUS, JR.  
Editor, *ERB-dom* Magazine

# THE OUTLAWS OF MARS

by  
OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

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## CHAPTER I

As the powerful car plunged up the mountain road, Jerry Morgan wondered what sort of reception awaited him at the end of this drive. Would the mysterious, eccentric man who was his uncle, and who lived in this mountain retreat which his nephew had never been permitted to visit, turn him away now?

It was not until he had reached the highest limit of timber growth that he came upon a log habitation built against the mountainside which rose steeply behind it, rugged and bare of vegetation. He stopped the car in front of the log porch, off the road enough to avoid blocking it. No one was around; no one appeared as he slammed the car door shut, climbed the steps and crossed the veranda. No one answered his knock; the door swung open at the impact and Jerry entered.

He found himself in a large living room, finished and furnished in pioneer style, the walls decorated with trophies. Despite the chill at this altitude, there was only cold, gray ashes mingled with bits of charcoal in the fireplace. Jerry had the feeling that the place had not been lived in for some time.

Exploration confirmed his initial impression. Shelves in the kitchen were empty save for a few dishes and utensils. There was no sign of food, and a thin film of dust had settled over everything, even the sink.

Puzzled, he returned to the living room and seated himself on a birch settee before the cold fireplace. Obviously, though this was the nominal residence of his uncle, Doctor Richard Morgan did not really live here. Where, then, did he live? As far as Jerry had been able to see in every direction there had been no sign of a building of any kind, save this one.

As he sat there, reflecting on these mysteries, he suddenly heard the door open, and turning, saw his uncle.

Like his nephew, Richard Morgan was tall and powerfully built. The remaining black among the silver hair and beard was as jet as Jerry's, and though he did not look like a military man, his presence radiated authority. His forehead was high and bulged outward over shaggy eyebrows that met above his aquiline nose; and he wore a pointed, closely cropped Vandyke.

"Glad to see you, Jerry," boomed the doctor in his resonant bass voice. "I've been expecting you."

Jerry Morgan stared in amazement as he took his uncle's proffered hand. "Expecting me? Why, I told no one—intended to surprise you. It sounds almost like thought-transference."

"Perhaps you are nearer the truth than you imagine," replied the doctor, seating

himself.

Jerry brushed this aside, mentally, as he groped for the proper words with which to frame his next speech. "I'm afraid you're not going to like what I have to tell you, Uncle Richard," he began. "The fact is, I've disgraced . . ."

"I know all about it, Jerry," said the doctor gently, and then proceeded to give a detailed account of the episode the young man had been about to tell. He ended with: "You knew the colonel would never believe a story about your being framed in a manner reminiscent of nineteenth century melodrama, so you had no choice but to resign. What you didn't know was that it was not Lieutenant Tracy, your rival, who arranged the affair but Elaine herself."

"Impossible, uncle . . ."

"Think, Jerry. Had you told anyone—anyone but Elaine—that you were not going directly back to your quarters as usual, but were stopping at the drugstore in town first? Someone had to know you would be in town at a certain time that night in order for the plan to succeed. It couldn't have worked in any other place, although it could have happened at a later time. And Lieutenant Tracy was in the field that night, and could not have been privy to it. In fact, he knew nothing of it at all."

"Then I misjudged them both—Tracy and Elaine."

"Not too badly in Tracy's case, I should say. He just wouldn't have done it that way though. He couldn't have been as sure of the colonel's reaction as the colonel's daughter was, you see. Well, don't fret about them, my lad. They're two of a kind and they richly deserve each other. . . . And now will you believe me if I tell you I know everything you've done since? Good." He stood up. "You have guessed that I don't live here—that this place is only a dummy habitation to keep the folk who live hereabout from prying into my affairs. Follow me."

He led the way through the kitchen, and thence down a stairway into the garage. At the back was a tier of shelving. The doctor reached behind a shelf and pulled. Instantly, the whole tier swung back from the wall, revealing a dark passageway, hewn from the rock, leading into the mountainside.

"Enter," said the doctor.

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At the end of the tunnel they came to a sliding door, which the doctor pushed back. Behind it was an automatic elevator. They entered; Morgan touched a button and they rose noiselessly. At the end of the ascent, they stepped out into a large, airy hallway, into which filtered sunlight streamed through irregularly shaped skylights of frosted glass.



“Seen from the outside, those skylights simulate the drifts and ridges of snow which surround us,” said Morgan. “We are now at the peak of the mountain, and this building is so constructed that, viewed from near or far, it appears to be a part of it.”

“Amazing!” exclaimed Jerry. “I pictured you in a little cabin, perhaps with a small laboratory.”

“I have other surprises for you,” said the doctor. “In the meantime, Boyd will show you to your room. He has already installed your luggage and drawn your bath. I’m sure you will want to freshen up after your journey. See you at breakfast.”

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“Before I tell you of my life’s work,” said Morgan, as they attacked the viands before them, “let’s talk about you. I know precisely how you feel. You have lost your career and the woman you wanted, and you have come to me for the rest of your patrimony, with which you expect to embark on a certain desperate adventure. The odds are a thousand to one against your coming out alive, but this means little to you the way you feel now.”

He proceeded to relate full details of Jerry Morgan’s plans.

“You seem to read my innermost thoughts, uncle, as if they were a printed page spread before you. I can’t imagine how you know all this, but you are right.”

Morgan sighed. “If you are determined to go on with this, I’ll do all in my power to help you. Yet it is my hope that I may be able to offer you a new interest in life—new adventures that will serve a most excellent purpose, and beside which the one you have planned will pale to insignificance.

“You have said, half in jest, that I appear to read your mind. I do; I have always read your mind, since the death of your parents put you under my guardianship—which took place after I had perfected my experiments with telepathy. Telepathy, one of the most remarkable powers of the objective mind, is not affected by time or distance. It acts instantly, once contact has been established.

“I started out trying to build a device which would pick up and amplify thought waves. This led to contact with a man on Mars who was experimenting in transmitting thought-waves—but not the Mars of today,” he added, seeing the expression on Jerry’s face. “Lal Vak, the Martian, spoke and still speaks to me from the Mars some millions of years ago, when a human civilization *did* exist there. We found that personalities could be exchanged between certain Martians and Earthmen who were nearly doubles physically, and whose brain-patterns were similar. Since that time, we established contact with a Venusian, Vorn Vangal who is contemporary with Lal Vak. I am presently in contact with both of these men who, to our niche in space-time have been dead for millions of years. I was able to send two Earthmen to

Mars and two to Venus, through personality exchange. The two men on Venus are still alive, and in communication with me. Of the two I sent to Mars, only one remains; the other, who was a criminal, was slain by his fellow-Earthman. This leaves me with only one representative on Mars.”

Had it not been for the demonstration he had already received in relation to Morgan’s intimate knowledge of his own affairs, Jerry Morgan would have been far from credulous. Under the shock of what he had learned, it seemed somehow believable. “It sounds interesting,” he said, trying not to be carried away. “How about sending my personality to Mars.”

“Lal Vak, Vorn Vangal and I have worked out improvements,” Morgan said. “I am now prepared to send you on a journey through time and space in the flesh.”

“Then you must have some sort of space-time vehicle.”

“Follow me, and I will show you,” replied the doctor, rising.

## CHAPTER II

In the center of the high, dome-roofed shed stood a huge globe, more than fifty feet in diameter. It was covered with thick asbestos, held in place by a meshwork of steel cables. A circular metal plate, studded with bolts, and apparently the lid of a doorway or manhole, was on the side facing them.

“I am indebted to the people of Olba, a nation on Venus, for the mechanism which makes this space-time vehicle possible,” said the doctor. “I do not pretend to understand it myself, and can only tell you that it has made several trips successfully—though without any human cargo. The power which propels it either comes from or is tapped by the human brain, and what you may have heard of as telekinesis is as good an explanation as any. I already have contact with the mechanism. Now watch the metal plate and see what happens.”

Jerry watched, then uttered an exclamation as it began to turn swiftly, projecting farther and farther from the surface of the sphere with each turn. It was threaded, and when it unscrewed itself for a distance of about five feet, it suddenly fell forward with a loud click, and hung suspended by a heavy metal hinge, revealing a dark hole in the sphere. Then a ladder of flexible steel cable uncoiled itself from the dark depths, and dropped to the ground.

Jerry sprang up the ladder and crawled into the hole. After following a narrow passageway for about twenty feet he came to a small circular room about ten feet in diameter. The walls, floor, and ceiling of the room were thickly padded and suffused with soft light. He turned as a shadow blocked the light from the tube.

“How do you like it?” asked Morgan.

“Fine,” replied Jerry. “Why not let me start now?”

“I had that thought in mind when I brought you here. However, landing on Mars will have difficulties because of the rarer atmosphere—not as rare as the Mars of today, but noticeably more so than what you’re accustomed to. Because of this, and the lesser gravity, your heart and lungs will have to make readjustments, and it will take time to become acclimated. Go slowly, when you leave the sphere.”

“How long will it take to get there?”

“I cannot calculate precisely, but it will not take long.”

“And do you know on what part of the planet I will alight?”

Morgan nodded. “While you were crossing the United States by train, Lal Vak was traveling from his home in the city of Dukor, to Raliad, largest city of Mars. He is now housed in the imperial palace of Raliad, and is in contact with me—so the globe, directed by our minds, will travel straight to the palace. When you arrive, he

will be there to greet you, and to teach you the language of Mars. After that, you will have to shift for yourself.”

“Fair enough. But what do you want me to do on Mars? I gather that I can be of help to science, or something of the sort.”

“If you succeed in living on Mars, you will be the first Earthman to do so in the flesh. After that, my thought-recorder will be in contact with you, day and night, making a record of what you see and do. Alighting in Raliad, greatest city of Mars, you will communicate much valuable knowledge regarding this mighty city. From the moment you land, you will be an explorer, automatically relating your adventures to us here.”

The doctor raised the lid of a case which Jerry had previously noticed, fastened against the wall. It contained a repeating rifle, a Colt forty-five in a shoulder holster, a hunting knife, a camp axe, a canteen, and a number of boxes of ammunition and provisions.

“For emergency,” said the doctor, “just in case you should happen *not* to alight at the imperial palace in Raliad.” He closed the lid and secured it. “Now let me strap you to the center of the floor, and you will be ready to start.”

A few minutes later, warm farewells had been made, the doctor departed, and the outer door screwed into place.

The globe lurched unsteadily for a moment, then Jerry found himself forced suddenly against the floor as it shot swiftly upward. Gradually the intense pressure against his body grew less, and was followed by a feeling of lightness. This feeling lasted for only a few moments; then he felt himself growing heavier, but the sensation was most peculiar. For instead of pressing against the floor, his body was now pulling away from it—tugging against the straps as if in an effort to rise toward the ceiling.

The strange pressure of the straps gradually lessened. Then he felt a slight jolt, and the floor began wobbling unsteadily beneath him. Evidently the globe had landed—but on what?

Hastily unfastening his straps, he got to his feet, but the effort shot him up against the ceiling of the cubicle. When he stood on the swaying floor again he saw that the door was unscrewing itself. A moment later it dropped down from the opening, and bright daylight came in through the hole.

His first look outside convinced him that he had really landed on Mars. The sun, though it appeared much smaller than when viewed from Earth, blazed brightly with a peculiar, blue-white light. It hung just above a horizon of weird and grotesque plant growths. Looking downward, Jerry saw that the globe had alighted on the shallow,

sandy margin of a small lagoon, and its rocking was occasioned by the wash of waves driven by a stiff breeze.

His heart pounded wildly as he gazed about him at this strange landscape, and a giddiness assailed him. Believing this to be due to the lessened gravity of the planet on which the globe now rested, he waited for his circulatory system to adjust itself. Slowly, cautiously, he inhaled the air. It was cool and sweet, but somehow it did not satisfy him. He filled his lungs to capacity, again and again, but his heart resumed its wild pounding; there was a feeling of pressure in his eardrums. A gray haze obscured his vision, he fought against it, but to no avail.

He fell back, gasping for breath, then all went black.

## CHAPTER III

Jerry's senses returned slowly.

His lungs ached from their unwonted exertions, his throat was dry and parched, and his heart was drumming in his ears.

Slowly, cautiously, he sat up. His fingernails, he saw, were still quite blue, evidence that he had escaped suffocation by a very narrow margin. The sun had risen at least twenty degrees, proving that he had been unconscious for more than an hour.

For some time he sat there, inhaling the cool, sweet air; then he got up cautiously, and went back into the cubicle. Here he opened the case which contained his weapons, equipment, ammunition and provisions. He loaded the rifle and pistol, and filled his pockets with ammunition for both weapons. The balance of the ammunition and provisions he placed in a heavy canvas bag provided for the purpose, and fitted with straps so it could be slung over his back.

After strapping the pistol, camp axe, knife and canteen in place, he slung the pack over his back, took up the rifle, and creeping through the narrow passageway, turned and descended the ladder. The shallow water at its foot only came to his ankles, and he splashed up onto the sandy beach.

As he stood there, scanning the strange trees and shrubbery before him, he heard a sharp click. The ladder had been withdrawn into the globe, and the door was screwing itself into place. A moment more, and it was tight; then the globe rose, water dripping from beneath it. It soon became a tiny speck which rapidly faded from view.

Resolutely he turned away, and climbing the sloping beach, strode in among the strange, treelike growths which fringed the shore. Now Jerry felt an exhilarating sense of lightness and freedom of movement. The weight of his supplies, equipment and weapons was but trifling; and it seemed as if the metal parts of his rifle were made of aluminum rather than steel.

As he passed through the first fringe of trees, Jerry found that he had stepped into a cultivated garden, laid out with paths of resilient, reddish-brown material as springy as rubber, which wound among beds of bright, weird blooms of grotesque forms and patterns, clumps of shrubbery, and shady groves of trees.

After walking for a distance of about a mile he reached the edge of the garden, bounded by a wall about fifty feet in height, which stretched in a gradual curve to the right and left, as far as he could see. It was constructed from immense blocks of translucent, amber-colored material, fitted together so cleverly that the seams were

all but invisible. At regular intervals, curving stairways led up to the top of the wall, and he made his way to the nearest one.

A short climb brought him to the top of the wall, which was more than a hundred feet thick. He walked across it and peered over the edge, then drew back dizzily. He was looking down on the busy streets of an immense city, so far below him that the scurrying people and speeding vehicles looked like tiny insects. The wall on which he stood edged the roof of what was the largest building in sight, and the roof itself was covered by the garden through which he had just come. As far as he could see, there were other buildings formed from translucent blocks of various colors, taller by far than the mightiest skyscrapers on Earth, and all topped by roof-gardens.

From his point of vantage, Jerry now surveyed the garden through which he had just passed. He saw many scattered individuals at work, caring for the plants and harvesting the fruits—muscular, nut-brown men who were naked save for turban-like head-pieces, leather breech-clouts, and high boots with the tops rolled down below the knees.

Except for their strange apparel and the fact that their chests were, on an average, larger than those of Earthmen, they did not show any marked difference from terrestrial peoples. He descended to the garden once more and walked in the direction where he had last seen the nearest worker.

He had not gone far when he found himself face-to-face with a girl. She was slight, slender and white-skinned, with large brown eyes, raven-black hair, and an ethereal beauty of face and form. A fillet of woven gold links set with polished bits of lapis lazuli bound her glossy hair. A band of the same materials supported her small breast shields of beaten gold. And from a belt of gold links powdered with amethysts, depended a tight cincture of shimmering peacock blue fabric with a texture like that of satin.

Though Jerry was merely startled at this sudden meeting, he saw by the look in her eyes that the girl was frightened. She half-turned as if about to flee, but evidently reconsidered, and once more faced him resolutely.

Resolving to try to calm her fears, he said, "Good morning."

Then he smiled, and started what was meant to be a step in her direction. But the result, instead of a mere forward step, was something in the nature of a leap which landed him not two feet in front of her.

The effect of this performance on the girl was instantaneous. Before he had recovered his equilibrium, she screamed and shrank back.

Scarcely had he regained his balance, when Jerry's attention was attracted by a new sound—a terrific roar which came from a huge beast that was bounding toward

them along the path. With a yawning, tooth-filled mouth as large as that of an alligator, a furry black body fully as big as that of a lion, short legs, and a hairless, leathery tail, paddle-shaped and edged with sharp spines, the oncoming monster certainly looked formidable.

Jerry thought and acted swiftly. His first duty was to get the girl out of the path of the charging monster.

Gripping his rifle in his left hand, he bent and encircled her slender waist with his right arm. Then he leaped to one side, just in time to avoid those gaping jaws. But the spring he made carried him clear over the hedge, and into a carefully-tended bed of tiny flowering plants.

For the first time since he had landed on Mars, he realized the tremendous advantage of his Earth-trained muscles. The short-legged beast, unable to leap over the hedge, was crashing through it. So he turned, and still carrying the girl beneath his arm, bounded away with tremendous leaps.

The slender form of the girl was feather-light, and impeded him scarcely at all. On Earth she would have weighed about ninety pounds; on Mars she weighed about thirty-four.

Glancing back over his shoulder, he saw that although he had a good start on the beast, it was following him with a speed that was amazing in a creature with such short legs. Soon the stairway loomed before him, and he bounded up it, five steps at a time. As soon as he reached the top of the wall he put the girl down and turned to face their pursuer, which had meantime reached the steps.

Snapping his gun to his shoulder, he took careful aim between the blazing green eyes, and fired. Without a sound or a quiver, the beast sank down on the steps.

At the sound of the shot the girl had sprung erect. For a moment she peered down at the fallen beast. Then, her eyes flashing like those of an enraged tigress, she turned on Jerry with a volley of words that were unmistakably scornful and scathing.

Suddenly her hand flashed to her belt and came up with a jewel-hilted dagger. Jerry noticed that the blade was straight and double-edged, with tiny, razor-sharp teeth. For a moment he did not realize what she intended doing; but when she raised her weapon on aloft and lunged straight for his breast, he caught her wrist just in time.

As he stood there holding her wrist to keep her from reaching him with that murderous blade, he became aware that men were coming through the garden, converging on them from all directions and scrambling up the stairways. These brown-skinned men, whom he had previously seen working as gardeners, were all armed with saw-edged, straight-bladed swords and daggers, and heavy maces with



disk-shaped heads.

There was no chance to escape, so he stood his ground, still clutching the struggling girl's slim wrist with one hand, and leaning on his rifle with the other.

Suddenly the girl wrenched her wrist from his grasp, and sprang nimbly away from him. And in a moment he was surrounded by a circle of menacing, saw-edged sword blades.

## CHAPTER IV

As he stood there, ringed by hostile swordsmen, Jerry thought rapidly. Obviously, the brown men understood that his rifle was a dangerous weapon, for they were approaching him cautiously. Accordingly, he bent and laid it at his feet. Then he unstrapped his other weapons, piled them on top of it, and raised his hands above his head in token of surrender.

Instantly two men leaped in and took possession of the weapons. A third cast a loop of tough, flexible leather around his wrists and drew it taut.

The girl spoke to one of the men, evidently an officer, who saluted her by holding both hands before his eyes, and issued a sharp command to the others. Then she turned and descended the steps to where the dead beast lay. As his captors dragged him after her, Jerry was surprised to see her stoop and throw her arms around the great shaggy neck. When she arose, tears were trickling down her cheeks.

She led the way through the garden. Behind her, walking at a respectful distance, was the officer; following him was the man who held the thong which bound Jerry's arms. On each side of the Earthman strode a brown warrior, sword in hand, and behind him walked two more, bearing his arms and equipment. The others dispersed.

They followed a path of the resilient brown paving material which presently led to the mouth of a tunnel which yawned from one side of a tree-covered mound. At either side of the tunnel mouth stood a white-skinned guard, who in addition to sword, dagger and mace, was armed with a sheaf of wicked-looking multi-barbed javelins.

At sight of the girl, these guards saluted respectfully. Then one hurried into the tunnel and emerged a moment later, followed by a vehicle which made Jerry gasp in astonishment. It moved smoothly and silently on six pairs of jointed metal legs shod with balls of resilient reddish-brown material like that used in paving. In lieu of seats, it supported twelve saddles, set three in a row. And in the foremost row, at the extreme right, sat the driver, who manipulated the multipied conveyance by means of two vertical levers, on either side of his saddle.

The girl climbed into a saddle beside the driver, and Jerry was placed in the central saddle of the next row, a guard on each side of him. The man who held the thong that bound his wrists, and the two who bore his equipment, seated themselves in the next row. The vehicle started as the driver pushed the two levers forward.

The tunnel which they entered led downward in a steep spiral. It was lighted by small globes filled with a thick, luminous liquid which he later learned was derived

from a radioactive substance called baridium. They were suspended on short chains from the ceiling, and shed a mellow, amber light. Swiftly they sped down that spiral ramp, and Jerry caught flashes of small level platforms at regular intervals, leading to arched doorways. Presently, the vehicle slowed down and came to a sliding stop before one of them.

The girl sprang out onto the platform, and Jerry was dragged after her by his captors. She led the way to a tremendous arched door before which stood a score of armed and uniformed guards. These guards were white. They saluted respectfully, and parted their ranks to let the party pass.

The splendor of the room they now entered left Jerry spellbound with awe. It was a tremendous circular audience chamber, at least a thousand feet in diameter, and as high as it was wide. Its ceiling of burnished gold was supported by huge pillars, fifty feet in diameter, each seemingly cut from a single piece of pale blue crystal.

The floor was of hexagonal, orange colored crystal blocks, between the interstices of which molten silver had been poured, and the whole polished to a mirror-like luster. Suspended from the ceiling on thick golden chains, and hanging about two hundred feet above the floor, were huge light globes, twenty feet in diameter, filled with the luminous liquid he had previously observed.

At spaced intervals around the circular wall, uniformed guards stood, leaning on their tall spears.

In the center of the room, toward which they were walking, stood a circular dais, consisting of three disks placed concentrically one above the other. The top disk was of blue crystal, the middle one of orange crystal, and the bottom one of black.

Suspended above the center of the highest disk, on four thick golden cables, was a massive golden throne, upholstered in blue. And on this throne, Jerry saw a big man, with handsome, regal features that were as expressionless as stone. His thick, iron-gray beard had been braided into five long plaits which hung down to his wide golden belt, in which a thousand jewels sparkled. His arms and torso were bare, save for his jeweled golden armlets and wrist-guards, and a gem-encrusted medallion which hung on his chest. A close-fitting casque of burnished gold was on his head, and a single huge gem blazed above his forehead with a blue-white light.

Two young white men wearing blue, one a blond and the other a brunet, stood on the top disk at either side of the throne. Below these, on the orange disk, stood a tall, broad-shouldered fellow with nut-brown skin, his clothing orange trimmed with blue, and a girl slightly lighter colored, who likewise wore orange and blue. Jerry

saw that she was slight, slender and beautiful.

On the lowest disk were a score of white-skinned men and women who wore orange trimmed in black. And surrounding the disks were at least a thousand more who exhibited a variety of colors, though the majority of them wore black. But every one, other than the warriors from the garden who had captured the Earthman, and the man and girl who stood on the middle disk, was white-skinned.

Those who stood around the throne stepped aside and saluted respectfully as the girl came up with the guards and prisoner. But she ran swiftly up the steps and threw her arms about the monarch's neck, tears streaming from her eyes.

The big man picked her up as easily as if she had been a doll, and seated her on the wide throne beside him. For some time they conversed. From time to time she looked at Jerry as she talked, and he knew the conversation related to him.

Presently, in the midst of her story, the girl stepped down from the throne and took Jerry's rifle from one of the brown guards. She brought it to her shoulder, exactly as he had done, and he was alarmed to see her finger on the trigger.

"Wait!" he cried, and sprang forward, to snatch the rifle away from her. But at the moment the weapon went off. The girl was hurled backward by the unexpected recoil of the heavy rifle, and fell to the floor. The bullet struck one of the crystal pillars.

Instantly, pandemonium reigned. The girl was picked up by the monarch, who hastily sprang down from his throne as she fell. Then, still holding her feather weight in his arms, he issued a sharp command.

Jerry was astounded to see a circular section of the floor rising before the throne, supported by three stout pillars. When it had risen to a height of about twenty feet, another floor was disclosed beneath it. As this one came to rest, three huge black men stepped from it, carrying a large circular rug made from the resilient reddish-brown material. They spread this on the floor.

Then two of them seized Jerry and dragged him to the center of the rug, where they forced him to his knees. The third, who carried an enormous, two-edged sword in a sheath strapped to his back, drew the weapon and looked inquiringly at the monarch. The latter nodded.

## CHAPTER V

Half-stunned, Jerry waited for the executioner's keen blade to descend. But at that instant the blond, blue-clad youth who had stood beside the throne rushed up, sword in hand, and struck aside the blade of the executioner.

A moment later, another man came running up—a white-haired man who wore orange and black; and on his beardless countenance was a look of calm benignity. He smiled encouragingly at Jerry, then turned and addressed the poker-faced monarch. The latter issued an order to the two black giants at the Earthman's sides, whereupon they permitted him to arise.

In the meantime the girl in the monarch's arms revived, and he put her on the floor, where she joined in the discussion. Jerry noticed that there was considerable wonder written on her face, as the white-haired man talked to her and the ruler. Four others joined in the discussion, the two young men in blue who had stood at either side of the throne, and the dark-skinned girl and man who had stood on the central dais.

Although he could not understand a word that was spoken, Jerry saw that this latter personage was urging his execution. The girl, however, evidently sided with the white-haired newcomer and the blond youth.

Presently, the ruler rumbled a curt order. The thongs were removed from Jerry's wrists, and the white-haired man, after saluting the ruler, took the Earthman's arm and led him away.

"You are Dr. Morgan's nephew, are you not?" he asked in English.

"I am," gulped Jerry, "but how did you know? And who are you?"

"I am Lal Vak," was the reply. "I was unavoidably delayed. As I am a stranger in Raliad, and there is a revolt in the provinces, I was accused of being a spy. My arrest came this morning, and I had some difficulty in clearing myself of the charge, despite my credentials from the Vil of Xancibar. A stranger is usually accounted guilty until he is proven innocent."

While they talked, they threaded numerous passageways, and Jerry noticed that every one they met stared curiously at his army uniform.

Presently they came to a spiral runway, and Lal Vak, stepping out on the signal platform, pulled a cord which unhooded a large light globe overhead by drawing up the four quarters of its metal covering as the petals of a flower open. A moment later one of the vehicles skidded to a stop before the landing.

Then they climbed into the saddles, the scientist spoke a word to the driver, and they shot swiftly upward. After passing eight platforms, the vehicle came to a stop

before the ninth, and they got out. Threading another hallway, they came at length to a large door which an attendant, on seeing Lal Vak, threw open for them.

They entered, and Jerry found himself in the central room of a large and luxurious apartment, lighted by a single circular window that extended from floor to ceiling, its crystal panes opening outward to admit the afternoon breeze. The furniture, consisting of chairs, divans, and a table, was legless, and suspended from the ceiling by flexible, silk-covered cables.

“Let us sit on the balcony and talk,” said Lal Vak.

Jerry stepped through the window and followed Lal Vak out onto the balcony. He looked over the railing. Far below him was a broad street, thronged with darting multiped vehicles and scurrying people. Other balconies, he observed, jutted out above, below and around this one, and from the buildings across the street.

Seating himself on the bench beside the scientist, he mechanically took out a cigarette and lit it. A look of astonishment crossed the features of Lal Vak.

“What’s wrong?” asked Jerry.

“For a moment I thought you were on fire,” replied Lal Vak. “I remember Dr. Morgan’s telling me about this curious custom of Earthpeople, but it startled me. Tell me, why do you do it?”

“Just a habit, I guess. But a habit I won’t have very long,” said Jerry, looking at his half-empty cigarette case, “as I don’t suppose there is such a thing as tobacco on Mars. May as well quit now.” He was about to toss the case over the railing when Lal Vak caught his arm.

“Wait,” he said. “Save those little white cylinders. They may prove valuable to you.”

“How?” Jerry wanted to know.

“As evidence of your advent from another world. The Vil of Kalsivar suspects that you are an enemy spy, who arrived on the palace roof with an outlandish costume and strange weapons in order to deceive him in case of capture. It is thought that your purpose was to kidnap Junia, daughter of Numin Vil.”

Jerry said, “Just a moment. Let me get this thing straight. I take it that Numin Vil is the ruler, who sat on the throne.”

“That’s right. He is what you might call, the Emperor of Kalsivar, mightiest nation of Mars.”

“And that girl I rescued from the wild beast is his daughter?”

“She is. The Sovil, or Imperial Princess of Kalsivar. Unfortunately, you did not rescue her from a wild beast. It seems that you met her on the roof garden, and attempted to abduct her. Her favorite dalf came to her rescue, and you slew the

beast with one of your strange weapons.”

“What’s that? You mean the creature I killed was a pet?”

“Not only was it a pet, but she loved it almost like a member of the family. She got that dalf when a cub, and raised it herself.”

“Hm. Sort of watchdog, eh? I’ll apologize to the lady, of course, and if possible, get her a new dalf.”

“Apologize, yes, but don’t mention a new dalf. She has many, but to speak of replacing this one would be almost equivalent to offering to replace her brother after you had slain him.”

“I think I begin to understand.”

“You certainly succeeded in getting into plenty of trouble, and you are far from out of it yet. With the assistance of Her Highness, Junia Sovil, I was able to get you a forty-day stay of execution, but at the end of that time you must stand trial. The Vil granted this clemency so you would have time to learn the language, and thus be able to speak in your own behalf, as well as to hear your accusers.”

“What accusers?”

“I mean, in particular, Thoor Movil, Junia’s cousin, who is head of the spy system of Kalsivar. He is the tall, dark-skinned fellow who wore orange trimmed with blue. Blue, on Mars, is the exclusive color of royalty. A Vil, or his descendants of unmixed royal blood, may wear it with gold. A noble, closely related to the royal family, may trim his orange garments with blue. Thoor Movil is the son of Numin Vil’s younger brother.”

“He appears to be of a different race,” said Jerry.

“His mother was of the brown race,” Lal Vak explained, “which is a mixture of the black and white races, according to our ethnologists. It is believed that Kalsivar was founded by a black race, which was later conquered by a white race, that intermarriage occurred for many generations, and the brown race resulted. A few of the blacks, however, retained their racial purity. Within historical times, about five thousand years ago, Kalsivar was reconquered by a white race which did not intermarry with the other two, and whose leader was the founder of the present dynasty.”

“And this revolt you speak of. Who is fomenting it?”

“The origin of the leader is shrouded in mystery,” replied Lal Vak. “For at least a thousand years there has been a prophecy among the brown people to the effect that a man of their own race, of the old royal blood, would arise to lead them to victory over their white rulers. Less than a year ago a stranger appeared among a large group of them, who had gone into the desert to perform religious rites as is their

annual custom. This person wore a hideous mask, fashioned in the likeness of the chief of their ancient gods, Sarkis the Sun God, and claimed that he was the reincarnation of that god, returned to lead them to ultimate victory.

“Many fell down and worshiped him, remaining to form the nucleus of a rapidly growing army of outlaws, who raid our agricultural districts, and harass our shipping. Many punitive expeditions have been sent out against these outlaws, but they invariably break up into small bands which scatter over the trackless desert, to reform later at some unexpected point for fresh raids. Their mysterious leader has come to be known as Sarkis the Torturer.”

“Does this Sarkis constitute a menace to the present ruler of Kalsivar?”

“Decidedly,” was Lal Vak’s reply. “His ranks are being rapidly swelled by deserters from the imperial army. And the roving desert tribes, many of which are of the brown race, have unanimously espoused his cause.”

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At this moment a brown-skinned slave appeared in the window opening and spoke with Lal Vak. Then the latter turned to Jerry. “I doubt not that you are hungry, and our regular time for eating has arrived. Let us go inside.”

They went in and sat down on one of the swinging divans. The slave brought a large bowl, mounted on a tripod, which he set before them. The bowl was divided into six segments, and in each segment reposed a different kind of food. Mounted on a single shaft in the center of the bowl was a small, circular disk, on which stood a flask and two cubical cups, all of gold, exquisitely carved and set with sparkling jewels.

The servant poured a steaming liquid into the cups. It was pink in color, and gave off a fragrant aroma.

Lal Vak took up a cup and extended it to Jerry. “I believe you will find it easy to like our favorite Martian drink, though you may find it difficult to accustom yourself to some of our foods.”

“What is it?”

“We call it pulcho,” Lal Vak replied. “Taken in moderate quantities it is a pleasant stimulant. When drunk excessively, it is intoxicating.”

The Earthman took a sip, and found it as the scientist had said, both pleasing and stimulating.

The brown-skinned servant hastened forward to refill his cup, and the Earthman noticed that he took it up in such a way that for a moment the palm of his hand was held over it.

The man handed him the brimming cup, but before he could raise it to his lips,



Lal Vak snatched it from him. Springing to his feet, he whipped out his dagger and presented its point to the breast of the servant, addressing a few sharp words to him.

With a trembling hand, the fellow took the cup and drained its contents at a single gulp. A dull, glazed look came to his eyes. He slumped to the floor, then lay still.

“I thought I saw him drop something into your cup,” said Lal Vak, “but I wanted to make sure. As you see, I was right.”

“You mean that the fellow tried to poison me?”

“Precisely,” Lal Vak replied. “He is only a tool, of course. You have an enemy in Raliad, it seems, and one who occupies a high place.”

“But who could it have been?”

“That is what we will try to find out—later,” the scientist told him, turning toward the door. “I go now to call the guard. Under the circumstances, we had best keep our own council. I beg you, for your own good to remember, after I have taught you our language, that this impudent fellow had the bad taste to commit suicide in our presence.”

## CHAPTER VI

Studying assiduously under the efficient tutelage of Lal Vak, Jerry rapidly learned to read and write the Martian language. The scientist also instructed him in Martian manners and customs, and described to him the immense city without.

“Raliad,” Lal Vak told him, “is truthfully called the ‘City of a Million Gardens.’ Here every house, from the imperial palace down to the lowliest hovel, has its roof garden. It is so immense that, within its confines live more people than make up the entire nation of Xancibar, whence I come. Its resident population is well over a hundred million, and its floating population daily numbers at least twenty-five million more. More canals verge here than in any other six cities on the planet, and the canals are the main arteries of travel and commerce.”

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Some five days before the date set for his trial, Jerry was enjoying his evening meal in company with Lal Vak, when the latter told him:

“I have arranged a surprise for you. Her Imperial Highness, the Sovil, when I told her that you had mastered our language, and that you had a petition for her ears, graciously consented to grant you an interview.”

“Great! When do we start?”

“Patience, and finish your meal,” smiled Lal Vak. “We have plenty of time. A guard will be sent for you at the appointed hour, for you are still a prisoner, you know. To show proper respect for her highness, I think we had best dress you for the audience.”

“This Army uniform is getting rather seedy looking,” said Jerry.

“On Mars we dress according to our stations in life. I understand that you are of noble blood.”

“On the contrary,” Jerry replied, “there are no nobles in the nation from which I came. We have our great men—our leaders in finance, in war, in science, and in the arts—but no nobility.”

“That I know. Yet Dr. Morgan told me he was descended from the nobility of another nation—Ireland, I believe he called it. This will entitle you to wear orange, trimmed with black, on Mars.”

“True. I had forgotten that my first American ancestor was an Irish viscount. But he renounced his title, so that lets me out.”

“It doesn’t change the blood.”

“That’s true, but I think I’ll be loyal to his ideas, just the same.”

“Then you will have to wear the plain black of a commoner.”

Lal Vak summoned a servant, and ordered that a suit of commoner's clothes be brought. Some time later, Jerry surveyed himself in the burnished gold mirror. He wore a cincture of glossy black velvet, which left his legs bare. On his feet were black boots of soft leather.

There was a broad belt of woven silver links about his waist, from which depended an empty sword scabbard on his left, and a dagger sheath on his right. The weapons had been removed because of his status as a prisoner. His arms and torso were bare, save for a pair of silver wrist guards, a pair of armlets of the same metal, and a medallion which depended from around his neck. On his head was a black turban, held in place by a band and chin strap of finely woven silver links. This turban was made of a tenuous but extremely strong and wind-proof material, which could be unbound and dropped about his shoulders to form a cloak that would reach to his knees.

A few moments later the guard flung open the door and a page entered.

"Her Imperial Highness, Junia, Sovil of Kalsivar, commands the presence of Lal Vak and Jerry Morgan."

They returned his salute, and followed him out into the hallway, where two armed guards fell in behind them.

The page led them to the nearest runway, where they took a multiped vehicle to the second floor above them. Here they walked back along an almost identical hallway, and Jerry realized, as they paused before a blue-curtained door guarded by two warriors, that Junia's apartment was directly above his own.

The page went in first, to announce them, then returned and bade them enter. In a large, magnificently furnished room, Junia reclined on a swinging divan of blue plush, surrounded by a bevy of her ladies.

As Jerry stood before her and rendered the royal salute by holding both hands before his eyes, he caught his breath at sight of her loveliness.

"I shield my eyes in the glory of your highness's presence," he said.

She returned the salute by raising one slender hand before her eyes—the salute rendered to those of other than royal blood. Then she turned to Lal Vak.

"You have made a mistake, I believe," she said. "This afternoon you requested an audience for a nobleman from another world, and I granted it. Now you bring a commoner before me—an affront which even the Zovil, my brother, would not have dared."

"I can explain in a few words, your highness," said Lal Vak. "Jerry Morgan's noble ancestor renounced his title. Though nothing can rob him of his noble blood, he hails from a country where there are no titles, and so prefers to appear as a

commoner.”

“It is a churlish preference I should expect in him, after his actions when first we met. It seems he would add insult to injury.”

Lal Vak was about to reply, but Jerry forestalled him.

“I fear your highness misapprehends my intentions. Since I came to apologize for those same blundering acts of mine, I wore the black of a commoner in token of humility.”

“Why, this is better,” she said, with a faint smile. “I had not expected so quick a wit in one whose blunders have been so lamentable.”

“It is charitable of you to allow them to pass as blunders.”

“Had I not accounted them so, you would not have been granted this interview,” said Junia.

“You lead me to hope that the forgiveness for which I have come to sue will be granted.”

“It is already granted.”

“I am profoundly grateful,” he said with almost undue eagerness.

She said no more, but her brown eyes dropped, and a slow blush suffused the lovely features.

For a moment Jerry stood thus, unconscious of everything about him save the allure of this maiden. Then Lal Vak touched his arm, and the spell was broken.

“Come,” he said softly. “The interview is ended.”

As one in a daze, Jerry saluted and withdrew, accompanied by the scientist and followed by the two guards.

Lal Vak speaking English so the two guards who followed would not understand, said, “I saw that look which passed between you two. If you would live, even to the day of the trial, you must never attempt to see her again; never let any one know the depth of feeling which you have betrayed and to which she involuntarily responded this evening.”

“To know that I should never see her again would be to lose all zest for life. But why do you say I must put her from my mind?”

“Because to do otherwise will be to align yourself against forces that can only compass your destruction. Already you have made one powerful enemy, whose name I believe I can guess. And now, would you align Manith Zovil, your friend and protector, and even the Vil himself against you?”

At this moment they entered their apartment, and the two guards took up their positions before the door.

“As I have previously told you,” Lal Vak went on, “Manith is the Zovil of Nunt,

one of the major powers of Mars with which Kalsivar is on friendly terms. He was sent here by his father, Lom Harr, Vil of Nunt, for the express purpose of courting Junia Sovil. And I have been given to understand that the two young people are not at all averse to the idea.”

“That does put me in an awkward position. I can’t prosecute my own interests without interfering with those of my friend and benefactor.”

“Precisely. And although we have not definitely discovered the identity of your secret enemy, I believe that he will come out into the open very shortly. Strangely enough, what he believes to be his own interests, are opposed to those of Manith Zovil, as well as to your recently awakened desires.”

“And his name?”

“Thoor Movil, whose father was the Vil’s brother, but whose mother was a sovil of the ancient royal family of the brown race. He urged your instant execution on the day Manith saved you. There are but two people between him and succession to the throne of Kalsivar—Shiev Zovil, Junia’s brother, and Junia herself. If he could accomplish the death of one and marry the other, his succession would be assured, save for one thing—that no man of the brown race has occupied that throne since the conquest by the white race, five thousand years ago. However, it appears that Sarkis the Torturer is the tool of Thoor Movil, as he demands, that Kalsivar shall be ruled by a man of the ancient brown royalty.

“The entire plot is clear enough to me, but Numin Vil would not believe me. And Thoor Movil would quickly set his assassins on my trail if the Vil should fail to act against me.”

“And just where do I fit in?”

“I have tried to make it plain,” said Lal Vak, “that Thoor Movil is both fearless and unscrupulous. What, then, would happen to you if you were to reveal your true feelings toward Junia, and such revelation were to come to his ears? He would treat you as a pestiferous insect which one crushes beneath his foot.”

At this instant one of the guards at the door drew back a curtain and announced: “A messenger from His Highness, Thoor Movil.”

Lal Vak paled beneath his coat of tan. “It has come, and sooner than I expected,” he told Jerry in English. Then he spoke to the guard in the Martian tongue: “Admit him.”

A brown-skinned page entered.

“His Highness, Thoor Movil, is entertaining His Imperial Highness, Shiev Zovil, at gapun,” announced the page, “and commands the attendance of Lal Vak and Jerry Morgan.”

“Await us outside while we make ready,” Lal Vak told the page. The latter stepped out beyond the curtains, and the scientist spoke in English: “Let me warn you, my son, that Thoor Movil bids you to a more dangerous game than that of gapun. You will best be able to defeat him by being scrupulously careful to offend no one, and by passing unnoticed any insults save only those which may amount to an actual challenge, and which no Martian gentleman may ignore and retain his honor.”

## CHAPTER VII

As he and Lal Vak followed the page into Thoor Movil's large and luxurious apartments, Jerry saw that the party was a small and select one, consisting of about twenty men. Three of them, Shiev Zovil, Manith Zovil and Thoor Movil, wore the blue of royalty. The others, with the exception of the Earthman, wore the orange of nobility.

Four gaming boards set on a large swinging table served the gapun players. These boards contained numbered holes, and the game consisted of rolling Martian money—small engraved pellets of gold, silver, and platinum—into the holes, the first pellet into the highest numbered hole winning the entire stake from each roll.

Pulcho, which was being imbibed by the gamblers, was being poured by a dozen brown slaves.

As Jerry knew Thoor Movil for his enemy, he was surprised when the latter did them honor by rising to receive them. The brown prince found a place for Lal Vak first, then he turned to Jerry with a sarcastic smile, and said in the hearing of all the company: "You are our latest and most distinguished gambler, since you wear the darkest clothing of any one present."

Jerry returned his sarcastic smile with a cheery one. "That I am the latest is plain to be seen," he said, "but I protest that I am not the most distinguished. You do me too great an honor."

"How so?" asked Thoor Movil.

"It is your highness who is our most distinguished gambler, since you have the darkest skin of any present."

The two princes, Shiev and Manith, laughed uproariously and some of the nobles ventured to smile, but most of them looked exceedingly grave. And gravest of all was Lal Vak.

"Is it customary in your country for a guest to insult his host?" asked Thoor Movil, fingering his sword hilt.

"On the contrary," Jerry replied, "I should say that it is as great a rarity as for a host to insult his guest."

Thoor Movil's frown deepened, but Manith Zovil interposed. Taking Jerry's arm with one hand, and that of the brown prince with the other, he said, "Come. You two are delaying the game. Let us on with the play."

Before they could seat themselves, however, a tall, broad-shouldered player who wore the orange and black of the nobility, rose and said: "I, for one, do not care to play, so long as this commoner is present. His appearance is offensive

enough, but his manners are a stench and an abomination to sensitive nostrils.”

Jerry paused and regarded him coldly. “I have not the honor of your acquaintance.”

At this, Lal Vak plucked at his arm, and said in English: “Beware. This is the trap Thoor Movil has set for you. This man is the most dangerous swordsman in all Kalsivar.”

“I am Arsad, Rad of Dhoor,” said Jerry’s new-found enemy. “You are standing in my way.”

Recalling his preceptor’s warning to avoid a quarrel at any cost, Jerry stepped aside.

But again the fellow turned and faced him. “Have I not said that you stand in my way?”

With this, Arsad struck the Earthman a sharp blow on the cheek with the back of his hand.

Jerry saw red, and he struck out straight from the shoulder, his fist landing full on the mouth of his adversary. Arsad stumbled backward and crashed across the gaming table, sending the gapun boards flying. For a moment he lay there as if dazed. Then he sprang up with a roar, spat out three teeth and a mouthful of blood, and whipped out his sword.

Jerry felt a jeweled hilt thrust into his hand, Manith Zovil, Crown Prince of Nunt, had again befriended him, this time by lending him his sword.

Swiftly Jerry came on guard, parrying a thrust for his heart. He found his own return thrust parried with ease, and soon realized that he was up against a master swordsman. But Arsad must have come to recognize this at the same time, for he began to fence very cautiously.

Meanwhile, the spectators, who had formed a ring around the two contestants, were treated to such an exhibition of swordsmanship as they had not seen for many a day. For, though Arsad was known as one of the best swordsmen on Mars, Jerry had likewise been regarded one of the best swordsmen in the American Army.

Arsad had not exhausted all his tricks. And Jerry learned a new one just after he had parried a particularly long lunge to his body. For the Rad of Dhoor, in recovering, turned the edge of his saw-toothed blade against Jerry’s side, and as he drew it back, cut a deep gash from which the blood spurted freely. It was a trick which could not have been performed with any but a saw-toothed Martian blade.

Clutching his side to stanch the flow of blood, the Earthman now took the offensive with such vigor that time and again his opponent was forced to give ground in order to save himself. Still Arsad remained unwounded.



But the Martian had, by this time, discovered that he was in danger of losing his life. Snatching his turban-like headcloak from his head, he hurled it into Jerry's face, blinding him for an instant. Then he lunged.

Jerry's earthly muscles saved his life by a split second, as he leaped back a full ten feet. Then he brushed the blinding fabric aside and gave a fierce leap forward, sword out, straight at the charging Arsad. In sheer surprise the latter tripped and fell, an easy target for the Earthman's point.

But instead of administering the coup de grâce, Jerry struck the sword from the hand of his tricky opponent, then presented his point to his breast.

"Wait! Would you kill an unarmed man?"

"Unless you yield!"

But Arsad sprang backward, and to one side; he seized the weapon which the Earthman had beaten from his hand, and coming up to catch Jerry with his blade low, slashed swiftly for his neck.

Jerry dived straight forward, under that whistling blade, at the same time extending his point. The sword of Arsad flashed harmlessly over his back, but his own plunged clear through the body of the Martian, projecting a full two feet from his back.

With a look of horrified unbelief on his face, the Rad of Dhoor dropped his sword and slumped to the floor.

Two surgeons, who had been sent for at the beginning of the duel, now came forward. One pronounced Arsad dead. The other dressed Jerry's wound by drawing it together and covering it with a thick gum called jembal which quickly hardened into a flexible, porous covering that was antiseptic, permitted drainage, and kept out infection. A slave took the bloody sword from Jerry's hand, cleansed it, and returned it to him.

His wound dressed, the Earthman returned the sword to the Zovil of Nunt. "For the second time I am indebted to your highness."

"A trifle," Manith Zovil replied. Then taking a cup of pulcho from a slave who waited nearby, he handed it to the Earthman. "Drink," he commanded. "It will help to restore your strength. You have lost much blood."

Jerry tossed off the beverage and felt refreshed. In the meantime, the body of Arsad had been taken away, and all traces of the duel removed by the slaves. The gapun boards were replaced on the table, and several of the nobles resumed their interrupted gaming, drinking and laughter as if nothing had happened.

Most boisterous of all was Shiev, Zovil of Kalsivar. The crown prince was a slight, spare youth, and something of a fop. That he had drunk overmuch pulcho was

plainly evident.

“Come,” he cried, beating on the board with a handful of platinum pieces. “Let us on with the game. I would see if this black-clad commoner can play gapun as well as he can fence.”

“If it pleases your highness,” said Jerry, “I should prefer not to play tonight. I have lost much blood, and feel the need of repose.”

Shiev flushed. “You refuse the honor—refuse to play with the heir to the throne of Kalsivar? You are exceedingly impudent for a commoner.”

“And you are exceedingly ungracious for a prince.”

His words were like a bombshell in the room. The face of Shiev Zovil went deathly white. His hand flew to his sword hilt, but ere he could draw the weapon, Manith Zovil had interposed.

“Wait, Shiev,” he said. “This man is from another world, and does not know our customs.”

“Then he needs teaching.”

“Not with the sword,” Manith answered. “He has demonstrated that on the body of Kalsivar’s greatest swordsman.”

“Now, by the wrath of Deza!” exploded Shiev. “Are you intimating that I fear to fight this clumsy oaf? Have a care how you presume on our hospitality, or it may be that only your ashes will be back to Nunt.”

“Do not presume too much on the fact that I have come to woo her highness, your sister. I am your royal equal, and my sword shall answer further insinuations from you.”

At this, Shiev lurched drunkenly to his feet and whipped out his blade. Manith Zovil drew his own weapon, but to Jerry’s surprise, Lal Vak stepped between them.

“Before you go on with this duel, highnesses,” said the white-haired scientist, “I beg you to pause and consider the consequences. Many things are done in the heat of anger that bring regret when the blood cools. If you fight, one of you may be killed. You are both brave men and fearless, and this does not weigh with either of you. But no matter which one dies, there will be an immediate result—a war between Kalsivar and Nunt that will cost millions of lives and use up the resources of both nations.”

At this, the nobles immediately sided with Lal Vak, and begged the two princes to sheathe their swords. Jerry, who had joined those attempting to cool the wrath of Manith Zovil, noticed there was one man in the room who held aloof from all this—as soon as he saw that the swords were to be sheathed, he added his voice to those of the others in crying for peace.

The two princes were brought to the point of saluting each other, though the eyes of both still flashed ominously. Then Manith Zovil saluted his dark-skinned host, thanked him for his hospitality, and took his departure. Jerry and Lal Vak did likewise, and came upon the prince as he waited for a multiped vehicle on the signal platform.

“Again I have your highness to thank for interposing in my behalf,” said Jerry. “Won’t you join Lal Vak and me in our apartment for the rest of the evening?”

“Sorry, but I am going now to take leave of Numin Vil and quit this country,” replied Manith. “Junia is glorious, worth fighting and dying for, but I am not of the stuff that can brook these constant insults from her popinjay brother.

“As for the obligation, my friend, there is none. I only did that which any man worthy of the name might do under similar circumstances. This is not the first time Shiev Zovil has insulted me, and I am convinced that it is because his cousin has poisoned his mind against me. Unfortunately, I can find no pretext for seeking a quarrel with Thoor.”

At this moment, a multiped vehicle stopped at the platform. Manith Zovil bade Jerry and Lal Vak farewell when they reached their platform, and invited them to visit him in his own palace. He would be leaving, he said, as soon as he could pay his respects to Numin Vil.

When they arrived at their apartment, followed by Jerry’s two guards, Lal Vak suggested that the Earthman retire immediately, as he would need rest after losing so much blood. As for himself, he was going to visit a friend in another part of the palace, and would probably return quite late.

The scientist gone, Jerry removed his headcloak, and was about to do the same with his other clothing, when a guard drew back the curtain and announced: “A page from Her Highness, Nisha Novil.”

Jerry replaced his headpiece, and said: “Let him enter.”

A brown-skinned page stepped into the room, saluted, and said: “Her Highness, Nisha Novil, commands the immediate presence of Jerry Morgan.”

“Bear my excuses to her highness,” replied Jerry. “Tell her that I am weakened from loss of blood—that I . . .”

“This is a *command*, Jerry Morgan. There can be no excuses.”

Jerry pondered for a moment, and heartily wished that Lal Vak was here to advise him what to do. Because Nisha Novil was the sister of Thoor Movil, he sensed a trap of some sort. Yet the page would accept no excuse—apparently had been so instructed.

He turned to the page, and said: “I am ready. Conduct me to her highness.”

## CHAPTER VIII

The roomy apartments of Nisha Novil were furnished with a splendor that was almost barbaric, and Nisha herself was the most ornate object of all. Lying on a swinging divan upholstered with alternate stripes of orange and blue plush, she shot a languishing smile at Jerry from beneath her long, curved lashes, as he was ushered in before her.

The only cloth upon her shapely body was a silken cincture of orange trimmed with blue. Her small breast-shields were of blue and amber beads. By any standard she was undeniably beautiful.

With a wave of her hand she dismissed the page. Then she spoke, her voice low, with a purring quality, like that of a kitten that is being stroked.

“You are prompt, Jerry Morgan, but why have you brought the bodyguard? Were you afraid I might injure you? As you see, I am unarmed.”

“Your highness forgets that I am a prisoner under suspended sentence of death. The guards . . .”

“Yes, to be sure. I had forgotten.” She addressed the two. “My slaves will give you pulcho in another room. Wait there until I send for you. I will be responsible for your prisoner.”

With respectful salutations, the two guards followed a brown slave-girl through a curtained doorway. Then Nisha waved a slim hand, and the other slave-girls who stood in attendance behind her filed out of the room. As soon as they were alone, the princess rose with feline grace, and stood before Jerry, smiling up at him beneath languorous lids. She was no bigger than Junia, and much like her in appearance. Yet there was something about her, an untamed feral something in her every look and gesture.

“Come,” she said, taking Jerry’s hand and leading him to the divan. “You must be weary after your dual with Arsad. Come and rest here beside me while we talk.”

“I did lose some blood,” Jerry replied. “That was why I was about to ask your highness’s indulgence . . .”

“But since I am dispensing with formality,” she cooed, drawing him down upon the divan, “you may rest here as well as in your own apartment. And what I have to say cannot wait, for there are those who plot against your life, and I would save you. Tomorrow will be too late.”

“Your highness is most generous to take an interest in my life.”

She snuggled against him. “On the contrary, I am most selfish. From the very day when I first saw you, standing before the throne of Numin Vil, I have desired you.

“I heard of the suicide of the slave in your apartment, but did not grasp the significance at the time. However, when I learned of your duel with Arsad today, I knew that you had done something to displease my brother, and that where Arsad failed, another of Thoor’s tools would eventually succeed. So I had a talk with my brother.”

“I don’t know what I ever did to him,” said Jerry, “except that I turned one of his own sarcastic remarks against him, this evening.”

“That had some weight, but it is not the true reason for his bitterness against you,” she told him. “It began when our cousin, Junia, begged your life from Numin Vil after you had slain her dalf. I may add that those of whom Thoor becomes jealous never survive long.”

“It seems that I have been exceedingly fortunate, then.”

“Your skill with the sword saved you tonight,” she answered, “but other means of compassing your death have already been planned. Thoor Movil’s spies are everywhere, and when he heard of the look which Junia gave you in her apartment today, you were marked for death.”

“And just what can you do about all this?” Jerry asked.

“Everything,” she replied. “I have made a pact with my brother. Your life is to be spared to me on condition that you never again cast your eyes toward our fair cousin.”

“So you have arranged the whole thing between you. Thoughtful of your highness. But did it not occur to you that I might have some ideas of my own on the subject?”

To his surprise, she flung her arms around his neck—pressed her warm lips to his.

Had he never seen Junia, it is quite possible that the Earthman might have capitulated. Gently he disengaged the clinging arms from around his neck, and arose.

Nisha fell back on the divan, panting. Then she sprang straight for the Earthman. Screeching curses, she beat upon his breast, scratched his bare flesh until the blood welled forth. And through it all he stood immobile, hands at his sides, teeth clenched in a grim smile.

Her fit of fury passed almost as suddenly as it had begun. With horror in her eyes, she stood limply before him.

“Deza help me!” she moaned. “What have I done?”

“Have I your highness’s leave to go?” he asked, with studied calm.

“No, wait! You must not leave me thus!”

She turned and ran into another room, reappearing a moment later with a basin

of water, a handful of soft moss, and a bottle of jembal. Jerry stood like a statue while she washed away the blood and applied the healing gum to the scratches she had inflicted. Her ministrations finished, she looked up at him, tears swimming in her large black eyes and pearly long lashes.

“Forgive me, my dear lord,” she begged, contritely. “Strike me! Break me with those strong hands of yours! But do not leave me with anger in your heart. Only say that you forgive me, and Deza will grant me strength to go on, knowing that I may some day win your love.”

“It is I who should ask forgiveness,” Jerry told her, “since you have only wounded my body. But I, it seems, have unwittingly wounded your heart.”

“You are generous, my lord,” she cried, and flinging her arms around his neck, crushed her lips to his. “Now go. But remember—Nisha loves you, and will be waiting.”

Without a word, he turned and left the room. He had taken the multiped vehicle to his own floor, the one below, before he noticed that his two guards were not following him. But he reasoned that they knew the way to his apartment as well as he.

Passing into the apartment, he hooded all the baridium light globes but one, preparatory to retiring. But, strangely enough, he no longer felt tired or sleepy. Feeling that a breath of air would do him good, he pushed open the two lower segments of the window, and stepped out onto the balcony. The night was unusually cold, even for Mars at that season.

Jerry threw back his head and inhaled a great lungful of the cold, sweet air. But he checked the inhalation with a gasp of amazement, for he saw, looking down from the second balcony above him, the lovely face of Junia. As she stood there, wrapped in her light, soft furs, he wished that he might bridge the gap between them.

She smiled, and Jerry returned her smile. Then she turned away and he saw her no more. But a plan had come to him. He could bridge that gap, with the aid of his Earthly muscles. Less than eight feet above his head hung the tough coils of the vine which decked Nisha’s balcony. And he could see, by craning his neck outward, that the vines on Junia’s balcony hung even lower.

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A few moments later, he stood on Nisha’s balcony. Fortunately for his plan, the vines on Junia’s balcony hung lower, and he was able to reach the lower most of these by a vertical jump, thus avoiding the necessity of running past the window.

The loop held and he easily made the balcony above. Like the other two, it was edged with potted plants, and at first he did not notice the figure standing at the

opposite end in the shadow of an aromatic sebolis. But as he crept over the railing, he noticed a slight movement in the shadow, and his heart leaped to his throat. Could this be a guard—and he unarmed?

Jerry was unable to more than make out a muffled form standing immobile before him. Silently, he crept forward, and as silently sprang, flinging one hand about the arms and body of the figure and clapping his left hand over the mouth.

To his astonishment, he found that he clasped a woman. A muffled scream came from the girl as he dragged her out into the full light of the nearer moon.

“Junia!” he exclaimed, releasing her and standing shamefaced before her. “I thought you were a guard.”

“Just what are you doing on my balcony?” she asked. “And why would you have attacked a guard of mine?”

“I had to see you. There was no other way to see you alone. Oh, Junia, it seems that I am doomed to blunder each time I approach you—that the fates have conspired to make you hate me.”

“I—I don’t believe I could ever bring myself to hate you, Jerry Morgan,” she said softly. “But you are so clumsy. One scarcely knows what to do with you or how to restrain you.”

As she stood there looking up at him in the moonlight, Jerry reflected that this girl could do more to him with her eyes alone than could Nisha with her arms and lips—with her whole body.

“You have said that you had to see me,” she told him presently. “Why?”

“Because I love you.”

“You are bold to approach me thus, and bolder still to make such a declaration,” she said. But there was no hint of anger in her eyes.

“You are right, highness,” he said dejectedly. “With your leave I will depart, and never trouble you more.”

But as he turned away, she laid her hand on his arm. “Wait, Jerry Morgan,” she said. “What if I were to tell you that I also care?”

“Junia! You can’t mean it!”

“But I do, Jerry Morgan.”

Gently, reverently, he took the tiny, fur-clad form in his arms. She raised her lips.

A moment they stood thus—a moment during which, for Jerry, all time stood still. Then she drew away.

“You must leave me, now. It grows late, and we may be discovered.” There was a catch in her voice that sounded like a stifled sob, as she added: “May Deza keep you safe, and bring you back to me, unharmed.”

Then she stepped into the darkness of her apartment.

For a moment Jerry stood there looking after her. Then he lowered himself over the railing, went down the vines hand over hand.

He found the apartment deserted, just as he had left it. Going to the door, he parted the curtains to see if his two guards had returned. They had not, and he was about to turn back when a man wearing the blue of royalty suddenly came running around a bend in the hall toward him. With a start of surprise, he recognized Manith Zovil. The Prince of Nunt carried a bloody sword in his hand, and blood was trickling from a wound on his breast.

Springing forward, Jerry caught him and helped him inside.

“What has happened, highness?” he asked. “Were you attacked?”

“Attacked, yes!” panted Manith. “I have just slain that drunken fool, Shiev Zovil. For the love of Deza, help me get rid of this blood, or my life will be forfeit, and there will be a war more vast and deadly than Mars has ever seen before!”



## CHAPTER IX

With water and a handful of moss, Jerry cleansed the wound of Manith Zovil. Then he closed it with jembal. As it was only an inch in width, and centrally located, the Prince of Nunt was able to hide it completely with the heavy medallion which hung on his chest.

Having cleansed his benefactor's sword and returned it to his sheath, Jerry mopped up several drops of blood from the floor, then went out onto the balcony and flung the telltale moss over the railing, and far out to his left, so no one below could accurately judge from which balcony it had fallen.

This done, he returned to where Manith sat panting on a divan, and poured him a cup of pulcho.

"Drink this, and try to compose yourself, highness. There is no cause for alarm, now. You and your weapons are free of blood, and your wound is dressed and concealed. Rather a bad one, too. A little more to the left, and you would not be alive."

Manith tossed off the drink and put down the cup.

"You are right, my friend," he said. "I met the drunken popinjay in the hallway. He was carrying his sword in his hand, and evidently bound for your apartment. As soon as I came near him, he lunged at me without a word of warning, and before I had a chance to so much as grasp my hilt.

"As you see, his design failed. Having dodged away that treacherous stroke, I drew my own sword and thrust him through the throat with as little compunction as if he had been a dalf."

"And you are sure he is dead?"

"If not, he soon will be."

"But why should any blame attach to you? You killed him in a fair fight, after an unprovoked assault."

"Because there were no witnesses. A duel with witnesses is legal; without them, it is murder."

"Did you meet anyone in the hallway before or after the duel?"

"No one."

"Then you are safe. Only you and I know what occurred, and I pledge you my word that I will never tell."

"I believe you, for though you wear the black of a commoner, you are a gentleman."

"And now," continued Jerry, "the best thing for you to do is to go on as if nothing

had happened. You have taken your leave of the Vil, and were about to depart for your own country. I suggest that you go on, unhurriedly, as planned. In that case there should be no suspicion . . .”

He halted his speech suddenly, as the tramp of feet and the clank of weapons sounded without. Then rising, he seized the pulcho flask, and filling two cups, handed one to Manith and took up the other. Behind him, he heard the steps of men entering the chamber, but disregarding it, held the cup aloft, and said: “A safe and pleasant journey to you.”

A sword flashed out from behind him, striking the cup from his hand and spilling the contents on the legs of Manith Zovil. Turning, he looked into the glittering eyes of Thoor Movil. Behind the brown prince stood a dozen warriors, swords in their hands.

Jerry forced himself to smile at his enemy. “Rather a boisterous way to announce your visit, highness,” he said, picking up the cup, “but you are welcome, nevertheless. Manith Zovil and I were just drinking to his safe and pleasant journey. Won’t you and your men join us?”

“It comports with your every action since you first came to Kalsivar, that you should choose to be facetious at a time like this.”

“Since your highness chose to be playful, I merely fell in with your mood,” Jerry replied, still smiling. “Courtesy to a guest, you know.”

“But I am not playful, as you will learn soon enough. I am in deadly earnest. Where are your guards?”

“How should I know?” Jerry replied. “They were set to guard me, not I, them.”

“What were you doing in the hallway a few moments ago?”

“Nothing. I have been in my apartment for some little time. Manith Zovil and I have been sitting here chatting. He is leaving for Nunt, you know, and dropped in to say farewell.”

Thoor turned to the visiting prince.

“Did you notice anything unusual in the hallway when you came here?”

“Nothing,” Manith replied. “Why?”

“Because Shiev Zovil has just been murdered there.”

“Why, that’s ghastly,” said Manith. “I must tender my condolences to the prince’s father and sister. Who do you think did it?”

“I believe,” said Thoor Movil, “that the spy who occupies this apartment is the one who committed the crime.”

“That would be impossible,” said Manith. “He could not commit a murder and sit here talking to me at the same time. And I believe you do him an injustice in

calling him a spy.”

“How was the prince slain?” Jerry asked.

“Stabbed through the throat, as you well know,” replied Thoor Movil.

“Perhaps you have not noticed that I am without weapons.”

“True. But you may have a sword concealed about the apartment.”

“I invite you to search it.”

“We will do that without your invitation. Ho, men, see if you can find the weapon for me.”

The soldiers went to work peering behind all movable objects and ripping upholstery, but the search was futile.

“Just as a matter of form,” said Thoor Movil to Manith Zovil, “may I look at the blades of your sword and dagger? I do not suspect you, of course, but I must be thorough in the line of my duty.”

“I understand perfectly,” Manith replied, and tendered his weapons.

Thoor Movil examined the sword minutely, and returned it without comment, gave the dagger a cursory glance, and handed it back, also.

“They are clean, and your highness is absolved,” he said. “But there is something suspicious about your friend, here. I go now to make further search, but I will leave four men on guard. Would you care to go with me?”

“Of course,” Manith Zovil replied. “I must go back to his majesty the Vil, at once, to offer my sympathy before I leave.” He turned to Jerry. “Farewell, my friend. I am sure you are innocent, and that his highness, here, is sure to find the guilty one and clear you.”

He departed with Thoor Movil, and Jerry heard the dark prince post guards outside. He sat down on the ripped and rumpled divan to think.

Unless he could find some way to escape from Kalsivar, Jerry reasoned that nothing could save him except the intervention of Nisha in his behalf. And he did not want to feel obligated to her.

There was one, however, in that vast nation, in whose good graces Jerry particularly wished to remain. He felt sure that, sooner or later, Thoor or his agents would go to Junia with insinuations regarding him. Best go to her himself, he thought, ahead of any one else.

Once more, Jerry went out on the balcony. It had become colder as it grew later. And the farther moon had risen in the east, while its nearer, swifter companion, hurtled forward from the west to meet it, the two making visibility much better than before.

He leaped up, caught the trailing vine, and pulled himself up to Nisha’s balcony.

But scarcely had his feet touched the floor when a heavy cloak was thrown over his head, strong arms pinioned his arms to his sides, and he was half carried, half dragged through the window. He kicked and struggled in an effort to free himself from his unseen assailants, but in vain. His hands and feet were swiftly and skillfully bound, and with the cloak still over his head, he was deposited on a divan.

Then something sharp pricked his side, and a gruff voice said: "If you know what is good for you, you will remain quiet."

## CHAPTER X

Jerry succumbed to the inevitable and gave up his struggles. Then suddenly, to his surprise, he heard a throaty contralto voice that was strangely familiar—the voice of Nisha.

“Remove the cloak, Jeth,” she said, “and cut his bonds. My brother’s men have gone.”

The cloak dragged from his head, Jerry blinked in the unaccustomed rays of a light globe which hung above him, and flexed his numb limbs. He was in a small chamber, evidently the dressing room of Thoor’s sister.

A burly, brown-skinned guard stood beside him, and another stood watch at the door. Nisha, herself, was looking down at him.

“I hope my men have not injured you,” she said solicitously. “They acted in the emergency, under my commands, in order to save your life. The emergency has passed, but you are still in great danger. However, if you are willing to do as I tell you, it may be that I will be able to save you.”

“You have been most kind,” Jerry told her. “What do you want me to do?”

“Thoor’s men are searching the palace—in fact, the whole city—for you. I guessed that you would try to escape by way of the balcony, and set my two faithful men, here, to watch for you and bring you to me unharmed but incapable of attempting to escape. And it is well that I did so, because Thoor’s soldiers came through my apartment a moment later and searched the balcony. By telling them I had not seen you, which was true enough, I prevented their searching this dressing room.

“I have planned an escape for you, but it will involve a complete change in your appearance.”

Going to a dressing table nearby, she selected two small flasks which she handed to Jerry. “This,” she said, indicating the first, “will dye your hair jet black. And this,” pointing to the second, “will make your skin the same shade of brown as my guards’. I will go outside while they help you.”

As soon as she departed, the two men assisted Jerry to strip from head to foot. Then one set about applying the black dye to his sandy hair, while the other painted his skin with the brown liquid. Gazing into the burnished gold mirror, Jerry was astounded at the transformation; he was, to all appearances, a racial brother of the two brown men.

One of them brought him a coarse gray breech clout and headcloak, and a pair of gray boots—the clothing of a slave. Quickly donning these, he again surveyed

himself in the mirror. He looked exactly like one of the thousands of browned-skinned slaves he had seen employed in the palace. A small blue and orange emblem, stitched to all of his garments, announced that they, and their wearer, were the property of Nisha Novil. After he had transferred the contents of the pouch attached to his former belt to the plain gray pouch he now wore, he was ready.

One of the guards went out and a moment later Nisha entered the room. She dismissed the other guard, and glanced at Jerry.

“Your disguise seems perfect,” she said after a careful inspection. “Your name is now Gudo. As Gudo, the slave, you’ll shortly be conducted hence in a band of fifty of my slaves, who go to work on the new canal that Numin Vil is building. Every slaveholder in Kalsivar is required to send one-tenth of his male slaves to work for one senil, or tenth of a Martian year, on the project. It fortunately happened that they were to leave tonight, to relieve the fifty who have been working there for the last senil, and who will return to my service.”

“Your highness is most kind,” said Jerry.

“At the end of the senil,” she went on, “you will be returned to my country estate on the Corvid Canal. I will be waiting there for you, and together we will make plans for the future. Please understand that I am not pretending altruism or a disinterested friendship. I would rather see you dead than in the arms of another. You will have one senil in which to think it over.”

She spoke so calmly that Jerry could scarcely believe this was the girl who had alternately caressed and clawed him a short time before. She handed him a full flask of the black dye, one of the brown stain, and a third which contained a clear liquid.

“You may find it necessary to change your disguise,” she said. “A few drops of this liquid added to a basin of water will make a solution that will instantly restore your hair and skin to their natural color.

“In a moment more you must leave. You will be going into danger, perhaps to your death, though Deza knows I have done everything possible for your safety.” She moved closer. “Can you—will you take me in your arms—hold me for just a moment? Let me feel your lips on mine just once—willingly? A senil is so long—and if fate should take you from me, there will be, at least, this memory.”

“I can and will, Nisha,” he replied, suiting his actions to his words. “I like your candor. You’re a girl in a million. It is a pity that love is not a thing we can command like a slave, or call to heel like a dalf.”

“I know,” she replied. Then she turned and called the guards. When they entered she said: “You have your instructions, and will carry them out at once.”

“Come, Gudo,” said one, taking Jerry’s arm.

“Goodby, highness,” said Jerry.

“Farewell. I will always love you,” she replied, with a look of longing in her eyes. Then he passed out the door between the two warriors.

Jerry’s conductors led him through a series of rooms and corridors into a large chamber, where an aggregation of gray-clad, brown-skinned slaves waited, guarded by a company of white warriors. A scribe took down his assumed name and the name of his owner, and he was herded in with the others.

They were kept standing there for some time, their ranks constantly swelled by newly arrived slaves. But presently Jerry noticed some sign of activity at the other end of the hall. Then he saw that a group of soldiers was painting a number on the foreheads of the slaves, with red pigment, and thrusting them, feet first, into a hole in the wall.

He was greatly puzzled by this at first, but presently his own turn came, and the riddle was solved. With the painted number still wet on his forehead, he was thrust into the dark hole. Instantly he shot downward at a steep angle, with a rapidly increasing acceleration, in an incredibly slippery tube about four feet in diameter.

At first he descended in a series of spirals, but presently this changed to a steep, straight incline. Then, gradually, this leveled out, slowly checking his momentum, until he presently shot out under the roof of a low shed, to land on a padded platform. Here two guards, waiting to receive him, glanced at the painted number on his forehead and turned him over to another guard, who conducted him to a place where a group of his fellows waited.

By the dim light of the farther moon—for the nearer, brighter luminary had now set—he saw that they were on a dock which fronted a canal. Moored to the dock, directly in front of him, was a strange craft. It was long and low, and roofed over in the manner of a whaleback steamer, but with blocks of translucent material through which the rays from its baridium globes shone forth. But the strangest thing about it was its propulsive mechanism, the visible part of which consisted of eight pairs of huge-jointed metal legs, each tipped with a webbed foot like that of a duck. Obviously the craft actually swam on the surface of the canal like a waterfowl.

He saw a demonstration of this a moment later when a similar boat passed, and was astounded at the smoothness and speed with which these mechanical legs could propel the craft over the water.

For some time he and his fellow slaves stood shivering on the dock. But presently they were herded aboard the vessel and into several large compartments, each of which was heated by a globular contrivance which stood in the middle of the floor.

As soon as they entered, there was a rush to get near the heating globe, and those who succeeded lay down to sleep in its genial warmth. Jerry, wearied by his adventures and exertions and weakened by his wound, was glad to curl up against the outside wall and close his eyes.



## CHAPTER XI

Jerry was awakened by a sharp kick in the ribs. A guard was standing over him. "It is time to eat, slave," he said gruffly.

Following the guard came a line of slaves bearing large trays of food and drink. The food consisted of a stew in which were combined fish, flesh and vegetables cut into small pieces and seasoned with a peppery condiment. The beverage was the omnipresent pulcho. Jerry ate his stew in the manner of his companions, by drinking the thin gravy and scooping up the rest with his fingers. Then he slowly sipped his cup of pulcho, and was ready with the others to hand cup and bowl back to the slaves who came to collect the dishes.

The heating globe had been turned off, but its place was more than taken by the sun, which was already halfway to the zenith.

Jerry arose and looked curiously out at the passing scenery. On one side of the canal he saw a wall, topped by small buildings at regular intervals, and patrolled by sentries. On the other side a series of broad terraces led downward to another canal, and another series progressed upward to a third. The terraces were covered with cultivated gardens and orchards, and dotted here and there with cylindrical buildings, evidently the dwellings of the Martian agriculturalists.

The purpose of these three canals in a single excavation was plain enough. The two upper and outer canals each watered the system of terraces below it. The total excavation was about fifteen miles in width. Each canal was approximately a mile in width, and each system of terraces six miles.

The canals were dotted with craft of various sizes and kinds. All of the larger boats were propelled, like the one on which he rode, by mechanical webbed feet, but some of the smaller ones had sails, and others were paddled like canoes. The smaller craft seemed mostly to be engaged in the occupation of fishing, in which nets, lines and spears were all employed. And Jerry was startled to see some of the fishermen leave their boats, carrying their spears or nets with them, and walk on the surface of the water.

Presently, when he came near enough to one to observe how it was done, he saw that the fellow wore inflated, boat-shaped water shoes, on which he glided about with the ease of a skilled terrestrial ice skater.

The sun had reached the zenith when the canal on which they were traveling suddenly came to a junction with another. Jerry judged that they must be quite near the equator, and verified this by looking at his shadow, which had shortened to almost nothing. The junction of the triple canals was effected by connecting the two

upper channels of each by means of four viaducts in the form of a square. These viaducts, each fifteen miles in length and a mile in width, were supported on tremendous arches high above the terraces and the two intersecting drainage canals.

The boat on which they rode turned to the left in the farthest transverse channel, and after skirting the wall for several miles drew up at a dock. The doors were flung open and the guards herded the slaves out onto the wharf, where they were turned over to a new group of guards who had evidently been waiting to receive them. Here an officer took the records and called the roll.

This done, they were marched through a tunnel in the thick wall. They came out on a rather fragile wooden platform, fully two miles above the ground. Directly below them was the waterless central channel of a great triple canal, still under construction.

As far as Jerry could see, this tremendous excavation stretched northward. He saw men at work on the terraces, evidently leveling them off and getting them into shape. But the excavating, at this point, had all been completed.

Supported and reënforced by thick steel cables, a causeway of the resilient red-brown material used in paving, slanted down from the platform to the bottom of the depression; on this some twoscore multiped vehicles waited. Under the direction of the guards, the slaves mounted the saddles; when all were aboard, the vehicles scampered down the swaying, trembling causeway.

Despite the skill of its driver, the one in which Jerry rode would have been jounced off into the jawning abyss beneath had it not been for the cables which formed a protecting railing on either side. He heaved a sigh of relief when they were once more on solid footing. They were now in the dry bed of the central drainage canal, which was composed of solid rock, so smooth that it looked almost as if it had been planed. And here, the multiped vehicles gave an example of the speed of which they were capable. The banks of the canal, and the terraces with their busy workmen, literally hurtled past them.

Mile after mile of dry channel and barren terraces reeled past them with a monotonous sameness, until mid-afternoon. Then the vehicles suddenly slowed down and Jerry caught his first glimpse of the digging of a Martian canal.

At first he thought he saw two lines of huge beasts converging from the center of the excavation in a huge, extended V, snapping and tearing at the wall of earth, rock and sand before them. But in a moment he saw that they were not beasts, but machines, with jointed metal legs and mighty steel jaws. These huge machines, each operated by a single slave mounted in a saddle on its back, bit and swallowed until they had filled their capacious interiors, then turned and climbed the banks to

disappear over the tops, while others returned empty and voracious once more.

Interspersed among the machines at regular intervals were armed overseers, directing the work, each driving a small six-legged vehicle.

Behind the line of devouring metal beasts was another row with the same type of body and legs, but with shovel-shaped, underslung lower jaws. These jaws created a terrific din as with sharp, rapid blows like those of trip hammers they planed off the jagged fragments. When filled, they, like the others, backed away from the line and climbed the slope to get rid of their loads, while other, empty machines scuttled in to take their places.

Some distance behind the scene of operations and pitched upon the newly planed terraces at either side of the central channel the work camp was situated. It consisted of about a thousand large, round portable dwellings with dome-shaped tops, made from furry pelts which would turn back the heat at night.

The vehicle in which Jerry rode turned and scrambled up the bank to the tent city at the right. It was followed by nine others. The remaining machines climbed the left bank.

They came to a halt in front of a tent, before which a man wearing the orange and black of nobility sat on a swinging divan. An officer handed him a sheaf of papers, which he coned for a few moments. Then he returned them and waved his hand.

Instantly, the guards ordered all the slaves out of the saddles. Then they were drawn up in squads and marched through the camp, up the side of the terrace to the very top. Here they crossed a temporary bridge, stretched on steel cables across the empty upper channel. There were four more similar bridges for the use of the digging machines, which swarmed across them in endless chains. They emptied their loads of rubble on the outer bank by the simple expedient of opening their metal mouths, lowering them, and tilting their bodies up at the rear. This done, they turned about and scampered back for more provender.

The Earthman and his companions were issued implements and put to work at once, reducing and leveling the piles of rubble regurgitated by the machines. The implement given Jerry was a heavy pole about eight feet in length with a thick iron disk on one end. This was used like a rake or hoe, to spread the material about. Then, with the shaft held perpendicularly, it was employed to tamp and pack the surface.

It was hard work, even for Jerry with his Earth-trained muscles. And he could realize how much more difficult it must be for the slaves around him. The sun's rays beat down relentlessly upon them, and the guards urged them on with spear points

whenever they lagged.

Men who dropped from exhaustion and were unable to rise were kicked down the embankment, to be buried beneath the constantly growing deposit of rubble.

Jerry worked at the end of his squad, every member of which was a brown man. Next to him was a squad of white men, and one of them, a tremendous fellow over seven feet tall and muscled in proportion, was his nearest neighbor. This powerful giant made play of his work, laughing and chatting with guards and workmen alike. Presently he called out to Jerry:

“Ho, slave of Nisha Novil. At last you palace dalfs will have to do a man’s work.”

Jerry grinned back at him. “It must be that you like it, since you call it man’s work.”

“Not I,” said the giant, “but because necessity compels. . .”

He paused in the midst of his speech and looked upward, a startled expression on his face. At the same instant a shadow darkened the sun above them. Then something struck Jerry behind the knees and he fell backward into a large net with metal meshes. The giant turned to flee, but the net caught him also, and he was swept back on top of the Earthman.

As the two men sought to disentangle themselves, the ground receded rapidly beneath them.

Looking up, Jerry saw that the net which held them hung from two chains which depended from both sides of a grotesque flying monster with membranous wings, a fur-covered body, long legs covered with yellow scales, and a flat, duck-like bill armed with sharp triangular teeth. The chains were fastened to the sides of a saddle of gray metal, on which sat a brown warrior who was hurling javelins at the guards below.

A glance around showed that at least five hundred of these flying monsters had attacked the camp, and all were now rising with slaves and guards struggling in their nets.

“What is this? Where are they taking us?” Jerry asked his companion.

“A slave raid,” the latter replied. “Deza help us, for we are in the clutches of Sarkis the Torturer!”

## CHAPTER XII

The raiding party flew rapidly away, its victims dangling helplessly in the nets. "I have heard of this Sarkis the Torturer," Jerry said. "An outlaw, I believe. But what can he want with us?"

"He wants fighting men, and victims for sacrifice. This raid will provide both."

"How both?"

"The captives will be put to the test. Those who can use a sword and are willing to join the outlaws and worship the Sun God will be spared. The others will be reserved for sacrifice. But why do you ask all these questions?" He glanced sharply at Jerry for a moment, then exclaimed: "Ah, I see the reason now! You are a white man in disguise. Who are you?"

Jerry looked down at his chest, and saw what had betrayed him. Two of the strips of jembal applied by Nisha to the scratches she had made on his body had been rubbed off in the scuffle. And along the edges of the scratches his unstained white skin showed. "Since you know this much, I may as well tell you all," he said. "I am Jerry Morgan of the planet Earth, which you call Dhu Gong. I got into trouble in the palace, and had to leave hurriedly in this disguise."

"I have heard of you," said the big man, a look of admiration in his eyes, "and of your duel with Arsad, Rad of Dhoor. Since you slew the best swordsman in all Kalsivar, I do not think you will have difficulty qualifying for the service of Sarkis—that is, if you care to join the outlaws."

"I hadn't thought of it," Jerry told him, "but it might not be a bad idea. I'm an outlaw, myself, sentenced to be flayed alive and sprinkled with fire powder, whatever that is."

"Fire powder is a material we use to light fires with," said the giant. "It is made from baridium, the same substance used in manufacturing our lights, and ignites when wet."

"Odd stuff," replied Jerry, "and scarcely a comfortable thing to have sprinkled on one. But tell me, who are you, and how did you happen to be doing a slave's work?"

"I am Yewd, the fisherman," said the giant, "and was accused of stealing a boat. I was innocent, but an enemy brought false witness, and the seven judges sentenced me to work a year on the excavations with the band of felons you saw me with."

"Then I presume that you have no cause to love the government."

"You are a man of sound judgment and rare discrimination," laughed Yewd. "In a nation where justice is a mockery, on what side should any real man fight? But

unfortunately, I have not the skill with the sword which is likely to save me from becoming a sacrifice to the Sun God.”

“Perhaps I can find a way to save you from that fate,” said Jerry. “And I hope you will be willing to forget that I am Jerry Morgan, and remember that I am Gudo, the slave.”

“That I will,” said Yewd, heartily. “But what are you going to do about those white streaks?”

“I’ll fix them easily enough,” Jerry told him. He took the bottle of brown liquid from his pouch and stained all the white lines. “How does it look?”

“A perfect match, Gudo,” said Yewd. “That is great stuff if you want to change your complexion. At present I am satisfied with mine.”

His disguise completed once more, Jerry looked down at the landscape beneath them. It was a vast rolling desert of ochre-yellow sand, sparsely dotted by patches of thorny creepers with large red flowers. “Wherever they are taking us,” he told his companion, “it must be a long way into the desert.”

“The Torturer and his outlaws have many secret lairs,” said Yewd, “and some of them must be in the desert. But gawrs require much water, and I’ll wager that this time we are being taken to one of the wild marshes of the district.”

“Gawrs?”

“Yes. The creatures that are carrying us. Have you noticed their webbed feet? They swim as well as fly.”

It soon became evident that Yewd’s prediction was correct, for the flock sailed over a sheer precipice which edged what had evidently once been the shore of an ancient ocean. Now it was a sloping sandy beach which led down to a marsh, in which a number of small lakes reflected the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. Around the shores of several of these lakes were the portable fur huts of a large armed encampment, dimly seen through a haze of smoke from the thousands of cooking fires.

The lakes were dotted with swimming gawrs with their wings chained down to prevent their flying away. Armed sentinels were posted on the bluffs and in a wide circle all about the camp. And a score of them constantly soared high overhead, keeping watch.

At sight of the returning raiding party, a great shout went up from the camp. Then a number of warriors caught up their spears and hurried to an open space among the huts, where they formed a large ring. One of the raiders dropped to the center of this ring until the net rested on the ground, while the gawr hovered overhead.

Two soldiers, who had detached themselves from the ring, came forward and

ordered the three captives out of the net. One by one the gawrs descended, hovered and flew away, until all the nets had been emptied.

The captured men were a motley group, consisting of white, brown and black men. But the spearmen who surrounded them were equally diversified as to color, and more so as to their clothing and ornaments. Jerry noticed, however, that they had one thing in common. Hanging suspended on the chest of each was a clear crystal disk about six inches in diameter.

The Earthman nudged his giant companion. "What are those disks for?"

"Symbols of their religion," Yewd replied, "and magic instruments with which they light their fires in the daytime. They are worshipers of Sarkis, the Sun God. At night they must use fire powder like the rest of us."

Magic instruments—and for lighting fires. Jerry instantly recognized them for large magnifying glasses, but he said nothing to his companion. He noticed a stir in the crowd behind the spearman, and heard cries of:

"Way for His Holy Majesty! Shield your eyes from the blinding glory of Sarkis, Lord of the Day and Vil of the Worlds."

A path opened up in the crowd of warriors, all of whom instantly raised their hands before their eyes to salute a most repulsive-looking thing. It was on a divan that topped a gilded platform, borne on the backs of a score of slaves. The thing was obviously a man, large and muscular. But his face was concealed by a most hideous mask of burnished gold, fastened to a headpiece on which a thick mat of golden threads formed a bristling, leonine mane.

The sharp hooked nose of the mask was covered with red lacquer, and the lips were blue against a background of yellow fangs. From behind the oval slits in the black-ringed eye-sockets a pair of glittering eyes looked forth. The garments were of royal peacock blue, and those parts of the body which would normally have been exposed—torso, legs, arms and hands—were covered with a finely woven golden mesh. He wore a richly jeweled, gold hilted sword and dagger. And on his chest there hung a large crystal disk, fully twelve inches in diameter.

At a sign from the masked figure on the divan, the slaves lowered the platform to the ground and stood with folded arms on either side of it.

The Torturer rose, and standing in front of his divan, spoke in weird, sepulchral tones that echoed hollowly in the golden confines of his mask.

"The sacrifice comes first," he said. "Then we will make trial of the prisoners."

At this, a number of the spearmen herded the prisoners back to a spot at the left of the divan. Then a lane opened in the lines opposite it, and through this came a hundred slaves, staggering under the weight of a large metal platform on which five

broad steps had been built. On each step reclined a man, bound in place by chains tightly drawn around neck, waist and ankles. Suspended above them on two poles by means of short shafts which allowed it to be turned in any direction, was a tremendous crystal disk.

This disk, as the slaves lowered their burden to the ground, had its edge turned toward the sun. But as soon as the platform had been placed in position, the Torturer raised his hand, and at this signal two men in yellow robes sprang up beside the poles and swung the disk around, manipulating it until they had focused the sun's rays in a brilliant spot of blue-white light, on the floor of the platform just in front of the lowest step.

This done, the masked figure raised both hands. Instantly the surrounding multitude began a slow, eerie chant which reminded Jerry of a dirge. The metal floor of the platform had already become red hot at the point where the light focused.

With an expression of horror on his features the man on the lowest step watched the oncoming spot. As it drew close to him, his skin was seen to redden from the heat it radiated. Suddenly he shrieked, as the white-hot light touched his side. The chanting grew louder, and in a moment more the agonized shrieking ceased, as the concentrated sun rays burned through a vital spot.

The brilliant, blinding spot traveled onward. One after another the remaining men shrieked and were silent. The chanting ceased. The smoking platform with its grisly burdens was carried away.

The two yellow robed men advanced so they faced both the masked figure on the platform and the sun.

"Thus, O Sarkis, Lord of the Day and Vil of the Worlds, do thy humble servants greet thee at thy rising, hail thee at thy meridian, and speed thee at thy setting, in accordance with the ancient custom," they said, raising their hands before their eyes.

The Torturer dismissed them with a gesture. "Now we will examine the prisoners," he announced, seating himself once more upon the divan.

Four men, bareheaded and naked to the waist, emerged from behind the platform. They stepped in front of the divan and saluted. Two were white, one wearing an orange cincture trimmed with black, and the other a plain black cincture. The third and fourth men were brown-skinned and wore the gray of slaves. A short, squat black man, also wearing the gray of a slave, now approached the man in orange and black, and held out to him a sheaf containing a dozen swords. The fellow selected one, and Jerry saw that its sides, instead of being saw-edged, were smooth and dull, while its point was tipped by a small oval bulb. The black passed similar swords to the other three men.



In the meantime, one of the captives, a brown slave, was marched up in front of the Torturer. He saluted, and took a sword from the black.

The Torturer leaned forward and looked at him appraisingly.

“We have here swordsmen of the first, second, third and fourth grades,” he said. “If you would avoid the sacrificial altar you must defeat at least a fourth grade swordsman. This will make you a common warrior, and you need go no farther. But if you are ambitious and would be an officer, a harb, then you must defeat our swordsman of the third grade. Defeat the swordsman of the second grade, and you will be made a jen. And if you can best our swordsman of the first grade, you will be made a jendus. Defeat at any stage will render you a victim for the sacrifice. Which swordsman do you choose to fight first?”

“I choose the swordsman of the fourth grade, may it please your holy majesty.”

And as soon as the two contestants had crossed their weapons Jerry saw that there was good reason for the slave’s diffidence. His antagonist had him at the second thrust, marking him over the heart with a spot of red pigment which squeezed out of the bulb on the end of the sword.

“To the sacrifice pens,” ordered Sarkis, in his hollow, sepulchral tones, “and bring the next prisoner.”

Man after man was brought forward. Some were unable to defeat the swordsman of the lowest grade, and so went to the sacrifice pens. Most of those who won the first duel were satisfied to stop there and enlist in the army of Sarkis as common soldiers. But there were a few who aspired to higher honors. One of these became a harb, and stopped there. Another aspired to be a jen, but was defeated by the swordsman of the second grade.

When the fourth grade swordsman had fought ten duels, he was replaced by another. The swordsmen of the upper grades had so little fencing to do that it was unnecessary to relieve them. Some fifty-odd men had fought, and a sixth swordsman of the fourth grade was testing, when Yewd, who stood just in front of Jerry, was called.

“Farewell, Gudo, my friend,” he whispered. “If it were to be a spear or javelin, I would have a chance. But with a sword I am all but helpless.”

A shout went up from the crowd at sight of Yewd’s giant thews, but as soon as he had a sword in his hand, his unfamiliarity with that weapon was instantly apparent. His brown-skinned opponent grinned, played with him for a moment, and then marked him twice on the chest.

Jerry’s turn was next. The surrounding warriors hooted him as derisively as they had Yewd. But when he selected a weapon, tested its balance, and whipped it about

with the ease and grace of a practiced swordsman, they grew silent.

The swordsman of the fourth rank advanced with weapon in readiness, but Jerry held up his hand. "Wait. I would not waste the time of his holy majesty."

"What is this, slave?" asked the masked figure on the throne.

"With your majesty's permission, I will engage only the swordsman of the first grade. I have seen the fencing of these others, and they would furnish but poor sport for me. But none has yet tried the mettle of this jendus."

"Why, this is bold talk," said Sarkis. "But braggarts who cannot make good their boasting do not long survive among us. Have at him, then."

## CHAPTER XIII

Jerry found his antagonist a swordsman of unusual talent. And as he fought, there were many times when he was only able to save himself from the touch that would have sent him to the sacrifice pen by the agility which his Earth-trained muscles afforded him on Mars.

And it was this same factor which, in the end, gave him the advantage. For his opponent, evidently fearful of the derision of the horde, pressed so fiercely that he tired himself. Soon Jerry was only playing with the man who had been the idol of the Torturer's warriors. But he quickly put an end to it by marking the chest of the jendus just above the heart.

The face of the latter was a study in mixed emotions—surprise, chagrin, and hurt vanity. But Jerry's attention was distracted from him by the voice of the masked man on the divan.

"You have made good your boast, slave," he said, "and we are ready to appoint you a jendus in our army if you will prove your devotion to our cause by truthfully answering any questions I may put to you. Fail to do so, and there is still the sacrifice pens. What is your name?"

"Men call me Gudo, the slave."

"Slave of whom?"

"Of Her Highness Nisha Novil."

"Ah! And you mean to tell me that her highness would send a swordsman of your ability to work on the canal?"

"That was where she sent me, your majesty."

"Are you of the brown race of Kalsivar?"

"If I am not," said Jerry with a smile, "what am I?"

"That is what I mean to find out—in a moment," said Sarkis. He turned to a slave and issued a curt order. The latter dashed away, returning a moment later with a large basin of water. The Torturer took a small flask from his pouch, and uncorking it, poured several drops of a clear liquid into the water. After stirring it with his dagger he beckoned to Jerry. "Come and stand before me," he commanded.

The Earthman did as directed.

Taking the basin from the slave's hands, Sarkis commanded: "Remove your headcloak."

As soon as he had complied, Jerry was drenched from head to foot by the contents of that basin. To his surprise and horror, he saw that wherever the water had touched, his skin had resumed its normal color.

“And now,” said the Torturer, a note of exultation in his hollow tones, “who are you?”

“I am Jerry Morgan of Earth.”

“And not the slave of Nisha Novil?”

“No.”

“Nor yet a member of the brown race of Kalsivar. Nor do men call you Gudo. You have lied to me, and you know the penalty. To the sacrifice pens with him. And see that he is the first victim to greet the great Lord Sun at his rising tomorrow.”

Jerry was hustled away through the jeering crowd to the gate of a large inclosure, surrounded by a stone wall thirty feet in height. A guard opened the gate, and he was hurled through by his burly conductors.

A big hand reached out to help him. It was the hand of Yewd, the fisherman.

“I did not think to see you here,” said the giant, “and with your rightful color restored. This Sarkis must be a wizard, in very truth.”

“At least he is a good guesser,” replied Jerry, “or what is more probable, is someone who saw me at the court of Numin Vil.”

“There may be some truth in that. I have heard that the Torturer spends much time away from his army, and that he comes and goes alone in his great metal flying machine. Each time he leaves, he flies straight toward the sun until his craft is lost to view, and gives out that he is returning to his home in the sun.”

“I’m afraid he would need a better insulated suit and mask than the ones he is wearing for a visit to the sun,” said Jerry. “Can his people actually believe he goes there?”

“Many of them do,” replied Yewd. “Others, I am convinced, only pretend. They have joined forces with him because he has always been victorious, and because his raids afford much loot.”

While they were talking the last of the victims from the raid was thrust into the pen. And shortly thereafter, night fell with the suddenness common to Mars, where there is little light refraction in the thin dry atmosphere, and no perceptible twilight. The pen was plunged into instant darkness.

In the deeper shadow of the wall, Jerry was carrying on a whispered conversation with Yewd.

“You say the pen is on the edge of the lake, and that the gawrs swim riderless only a short distance from the shore?” he asked.

“If they remain as they were before I was brought hither. But I don’t see how it will be possible for you to leap to the top of the wall.”

“That is a detail you must take on faith. In any event, we are all doomed men,

and an attempt to escape cannot put us in worse case.”

“You are right,” agreed Yewd. “Let us then pass the word among the others, and see who is willing to make the attempt with us.”

“Tell them to take off their belts and give them to you,” Jerry said, “and I will do likewise. Twenty belts will easily reach over the top of the wall and to the ground on the other side. I’ll meet you here when we have made the rounds.”

A few moments later Yewd and Jerry collided in the darkness. “Have you some belts?” asked the Earthman.

“More than we need,” the giant replied. “I have twenty-seven.”

“And I have thirty-two,” Jerry told him. “We will construct two lines. Every man is coming with us, and thus we will be able to get them over the wall with more speed.”

As soon as the two long chains of belts had been fastened together, Yewd cleared a path for Jerry. Absolute silence had been enjoined upon all, but there was a subdued murmur of wonder as they heard the Earthman run and spring, and a moment later saw him outlined against the stars as he drew himself up onto the wall.

The end of each chain of belts had been hooked to the back of his own belt. But he left them there for a moment, as he paused to cast a swift, cautious look around him. There were no guards between him and the water’s edge. Most of the campfires had burned down to beds of glowing coals, but the sounds of revelry were loud and there was the mixed medley of songs, and drunken quarrels.

Assured that the way was clear, Jerry swiftly unhooked the two chains of belts, and lowered one on each side of him until ten belts had passed each hand and he knew that the ground had been reached. Then he gave one line a gentle shake, after which he gripped it with both hands and braced himself on the opposite side of the wall. A heavy weight was thrown on that chain of belts, but Jerry’s powerful Earthly muscles were more than capable of supporting it. And in a few moments Yewd was on the wall beside him.

Yewd jerked a signal to the men beneath him, and as soon as the line grew taut, descended on the other side, where he grasped the ends of both lines.

Retaining his seat on the top of the wall, Jerry directed operations by signaling to those below each time a man had reached the top of the wall on either line, until he had counted sixty, and the pit was emptied. Then, drawing up the ends of the lines, he dropped them on the outside, and letting himself down as low as possible by hanging onto the outer rim of the wall, dropped after them.

Silently the men resumed their belts, and then, forming a great human chain by clasping hands in the dark, they silently advanced to the water’s edge. Here they

paused for a moment, while Yewd whispered the final instructions.

“Remember, not a sound or a splash,” he cautioned. “It may be that we will become separated from one cause or another. If so, our place of rendezvous will be the southern end of the Tarvaho Marsh. Pass the word along, then swim out, seize the gawr nearest you, and fly straight north.”

The human chain broke into its units, with the exception of Yewd and Jerry. Because the latter knew nothing whatever about managing a gawr, the two had decided to attempt to make their escape on the same bird-beast.

A short swim brought them to the side of a great bird-beast which snorted and shook its head as the two men climbed to its back. Yewd, seated in front, unsnapped the ends of the two chains which trammelled the creature’s wings by being hooked through perforations in the membrane around one of the wing-bones. The double purpose of these chains became evident to Jerry when, a moment later, the giant fisherman snapped one to his own belt and the other to that of the Earthman.

“It is customary for a rider to attach both chains to his belt each time he mounts a gawr,” explained Yewd, “to prevent his falling to the ground in case he slips from his saddle. But since there are two of us, we must be content with one chain each.”

There was a light rod, fastened at one end to a short rope which was hooked around the gawr’s neck, and at the other, to the pommel of the saddle. The giant now raised the rod, whereupon the great bird-beast swam swiftly forward, then took to the air with a mighty flapping of wings. This was the signal which had been agreed upon for the others to take off. And their advent into the air was followed by a mighty splashing and flapping all about them.

It was followed, too, by shouts from several of the sentinels who had heard the noise and thought the bird-beasts had been attacked by some of the monster saurians which were known to inhabit the marsh.

But before the mounted guards had reached the remainder of the herd, the sixty stolen gawrs were silently winging their way northward in the darkness, high above the marsh. Pursuit parties were instantly organized, to fly in all directions, as it was impossible to tell which way the fugitives had gone.

In the meantime Jerry and his party flew steadily toward the north, unable to see each other in the darkness and guided solely by the blazing stellar constellations overhead, with which every Martian is familiar.

Presently, however, the nearer moon popped above the western horizon, and by its light Jerry saw that the gawr which he and Yewd bestrode had fallen quite a distance behind the other bird-beasts.

“Looks as if we are going to be late for the rendezvous.”

“The creature has a double, nay a treble burden,” replied Yewd. “I weigh as much as two average men, and you are not small, by any means.”

They lagged farther and farther behind until their fellow fugitives were out of sight. Shortly thereafter the beast fluttered groundward despite Yewd’s frantic tugs at the guiding rod. Although they were now flying over the desert, far to the north of the marsh where Sarkis was encamped, the bird-beast had selected a small, tree-covered oasis at which to land.

As soon as it alighted it folded its wings, ran in under the trees and splashed into a shallow pool, where it knelt, taking sips of water and refusing to rise or move.

Yewd unsnapped the ends of the chains from his and Jerry’s belts—then fastened them to the gawr’s wings.

“We may as well dismount and get some rest, ourselves. It will not stir from this place until it has fully recovered from its fatigue.”

They accordingly got down from the saddle and stretched themselves out on the sand beneath the thick canopy of trees. Scarcely had they done so when Jerry saw baridium torches flashing overhead, and looking up, saw a large party of flying warriors.

“Deza be praised!” exclaimed Yewd. “We have been preserved from capture by the sudden weariness of our bird-beast, and the thick foliage above this oasis. Had it continued to fly with us at the rate we were traveling we should soon have been overhauled.”

When the last of their pursuers had passed, Jerry settled down once more in his bed of sand.

He was awakened by a slanting shaft of bright sunlight, which had penetrated the surrounding foliage and shone directly in his face. Sitting up and looking about him, he saw that Yewd had already arisen and was standing beside the pool looking at the gawr, which had slumped over in a most unnatural position.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Come and see for yourself,” Yewd told him. “We are in sore straits.”

Hurrying to the giant’s side, Jerry saw that the bird-beast was dead. Blood had drooled down from the corners of its beak to form a congealing, bluish red pool upon the bank.

“What killed it?” Jerry asked.

Yewd pointed to the place where neck and body joined. From this spot several sharp spines projected through the skin.

“It swallowed a dagger fish. Must have been dying when we mounted it back at

the marsh. The wonder is that the creature carried us this far.”

“Looks as if we’ll have to walk the rest of the way,” the Earthman observed.

“It looks as if we are doomed. For between us and the Tarvaho Marsh is an immense stretch of trackless desert, inhabited by fierce beasts, hostile tribes and deadly insects.”



## CHAPTER XIV

Jerry smiled grimly. "Last night we were in the sacrifice pen of the Torturer," he said. "Every man in that pen considered himself doomed. Don't give up hope."

"Although I can see no ray of hope, you somehow give me courage," said Yewd. "At least we have weapons. There is a sheaf of javelins fastened to the saddle. I modestly confess that few men are my equal with spear or javelin. One has to be quick and accurate to spear fish."

He climbed up, removed the sheaf of javelins from the saddle, and after passing one of the multi-barbed weapons to Jerry, slung the rest over his back.

"It is unfortunate that we have no water bottles to take with us," said Jerry. "But we had best drink our fill from the pool before we start, blood or no blood. And now shall we start?"

"I am ready," said the giant.

And so they set off across the rolling dunes of ochre-yellow sand.

When noon arrived both men were tired and thirsty, but there was no sight of an oasis and pool.

Presently they came to a gently sloping hillside, strewn with gray boulders, and by mutual consent, decided to pause for a rest.

Jerry sank down on one of the boulders, and to his surprise, found it soft and yielding. With suddenly aroused curiosity he pricked it with the point of his javelin and a clear viscous liquid welled forth.

"Look, Yewd!" he exclaimed. "Here is a stone that bleeds."

The giant looked, then dipped a finger into the sticky liquid and tasted it.

"Deza be thanked!" he exclaimed. "These are not stones, but fungoid plants that we call torfals. Had you not made this discovery we might have died from hunger and thirst in the midst of plenty. But this liquid supplies a balanced ration of food and water."

Jerry tasted the liquid. It was sweet and slightly acid, with a syrupy consistency, and a flavor that reminded him both of bananas and muskmelons. Pressing on the skin around the incision he had made, he drank his fill. Yewd, meanwhile, had tapped another torfal, and was drinking thirstily.

When both had finished they arose, refreshed, and each taking as many medium sized torfals as he could conveniently carry, they plodded on into the afternoon.

The sun was midway toward the horizon when suddenly, upon crossing an unusually high ridge of sand, they came to a large oasis where the waters of a small lake gleamed among the tree trunks. With glad cries, they hurried toward it. But they

had scarcely entered its grateful shade, when they heard shouts, cries, and the clash of weapons from some distance beyond. They judged from the sounds that a considerable force of men was engaged in some sort of cavalry battle, but because of the intervening trees and shrubbery, were unable to see the contest. Here was a serious situation for Jerry and Yewd. They were hidden for the moment, but they were in grave danger of being discovered.

Cautiously Jerry and Yewd crept forward in the concealment of the shrubbery, until Jerry, parting the branches ahead of them, saw two parties of warriors, each numbering about a thousand men, in deadly combat.

Those nearest the oasis were mounted on the backs of large, two-legged creatures that were neither true birds nor reptiles. They stood about five feet high at the shoulder, but their long necks, covered with bright green scales, held their ugly reptilian heads to a height of ten feet. These heads were much like those of large serpents, except that they were tipped by crests of curling white plumes and there was a sharp, straight horn on the snout of each. Their birdlike bodies were covered with thick yellow down, and the legs, like the necks, were armored with bright green scales. The wings were merely short bunches of white plumes attached to tiny useless stubs.

They were fitted with saddles somewhat similar to those used on the gawrs, and equipped with large quivers that held the javelins of the riders.

The riders were obviously of the white race, though well tanned by the sun. Their clothing consisted of cloaks, evidently made from the downy hides of creatures like those which they bestrode, headdresses of the white plumes, which were attached to the back of the head and spread out, fan-wise above the face, and cinctures and boots of leather. Their thighs, arms and torsos were protected by scaly plates, evidently made from the leg coverings of their mounts. And in addition to javelins, sword, dagger and mace, each was armed with a long shaft like that of a lance, but tipped with a pair of sharp tongs.

Their enemies were similarly mounted and armed, with the exception that their mounts had black plumes instead of white, and they used these for their headdresses. All the riders of both warring factions wore the crystal disks which marked them as worshipers of the sun.

The battleground was strewn with dead and dying warriors, whose comrades on both sides fought above them. Although they were using every type of weapon, their favorite seemed to be the strange shaft tipped with tongs. With these, riders on both sides seized their enemies and dragged them from their saddles, the sharp points piercing them deeply.

The chief purpose of the things, as was plainly evident, was not to kill, but to capture enemies. On each side, Jerry noticed a detail of warriors guarding wounded prisoners who had been dragged from their mounts to the back of the lines.

“Who are these people?” Jerry asked his companion.

“Wild desert lorwocks,” Yewd replied. “They are ferocious fighters and slave-raiders. Perhaps you have noticed that the tuzars, the long weapons they carry, are admirably adapted for slave taking.”

“Rather hard on the slaves, I should say. But when those things once grip them, they have to come.”

While they watched, the battle surged nearer and nearer the oasis. Jerry’s attention was attracted to one of the white-plumed lorwocks, evidently the chief. And though his force was being driven steadily backward by their black-plumed opponents, he charged again and again into the lines of the enemy, each time dragging back a limp, bleeding prisoner at the end of his tuzar, while he fended off hurled javelins with his sword blade.

But presently, as he returned to the fray, a cloud of javelins descended upon him simultaneously from many directions. Some he parried and some he dodged, but there was one that pierced his neck, whereupon he went limp in the saddle. His mount wandered erratically for a moment, then turned and charged straight into the bushes where Jerry and Yewd were concealed. They leaped aside just in time, but the thing stopped and looked inquiringly at Jerry as if asking him to relieve it of its limp burden.

Yewd sprang in and caught the guiding rod, while Jerry examined the stricken chieftain. He was quite dead.

“Here are weapons, and a mount for one!” exclaimed Yewd. “If we only had another rodal, we would not need to walk or fear to encounter armed enemies.”

At this instant, another riderless mount dashed into the bushes. With a swift spring, Yewd seized the guiding rod and leaped into the saddle.

“Come, let us be off before the warriors see us,” he said.

“No, wait. I have a more ambitious plan,” Jerry told him.

Swiftly he removed his own clothing, and stripping that of the dead chieftain from him, donned it, along with his weapons. The tuzar had been lost, but the other weapons were intact.

“By the power and glory of Deza!” exclaimed Yewd, when he had finished and leaped into the saddle. “You seem a very lorwock chief. But come, let us start before we are detected.”

“I have a better plan,” Jerry told him. “From what I have seen, I am convinced

that we could not travel far without being traced by these tribesmen. But if we join them they may accept us as friends and allies. Will you follow me into that battle?"

"With all my heart."

Jerry handed him all of the javelins but two from his own quiver.

"You prefer javelins—I the sword. Follow closely, keeping off enemies from my sides and back. I will attend to those in front. Let us see if we cannot turn the tide of battle."

By this time the black-plumed lorwocks had driven their closely pressed adversaries into a defensive semicircle by executing an encircling movement at each end of the line. And the horns of the great crescent thus formed were swiftly drawing together.

One horn of the crescent had just reached the oasis when Jerry pushed forward on the guiding rod. His rodal charged.

The Earthman steered his swift mount so that instead of charging with the other white-plumed warriors, he was riding behind the attacking line of black-plumes. As these warriors had their tuzars extended toward the line of white-plumed warriors, they could not use them on him, but could only turn in their saddles, snatching out their swords or javelins for defense.

Some who thus turned their attention away from enemies in front of them were instantly dragged from their saddles by the tuzars of the white-plumes. Some fell beneath Jerry's flashing blade; the others were pierced by the javelins of Yewd.

As a result, the line of black-plumes was thrown into confusion. In less than five minutes the entire right horn of their crescent had been shattered and put to rout. But Jerry continued on through the center and around to the left horn, cutting and thrusting as he rode, while the deadly javelins of Yewd kept off enemies from his sides and back.

The Earthman's unexpected coup completely turned the tide of battle and won the day for the white-plumed lorwocks. With shouts of triumph they pursued the shattered remnant of their fleeing enemies, dragging them from their mounts with their tuzars, while others captured and herded together the riderless rodals. Jerry estimated that at least seventy-five per cent of the black-plumed warriors had been killed or captured. The rest were fleeing for their lives.

When the last enemy and rodal had been rounded up, the white-plumed warriors and their lesser officers crowded around Jerry and his giant companion. Then one of the jens, who had evidently been constituted spokesman by his fellow officers, said:

"Though we know not who you are nor whence you came, riding the rodal of our jendus and wearing his garments, my comrades and I salute you and your slave,

and bid you welcome.” So saying, he raised both hands before his eyes, and all the others followed his example.

“There has been a prophecy among you that a fighting man would come to lead you to victory,” said Jerry. “An impostor, who hides his face behind a mask, and blasphemously calls himself the reincarnation of Sarkis the Sun God, has gathered a considerable following. But I tell you now that I am he who has come in answer to your prophecy. I learned the art of war on another planet; I am that leader for whom you have been waiting.”

When he had finished he calmly took out his cigarette case, selected a cigarette, and lighted it. The effect on the lorwocks when they saw smoke issuing from his mouth and nostrils was instantaneous. To a man, they clapped their hands over their eyes and bowed to their saddle horns.

“As I told you,” said Jerry, when the warriors ventured to look up once more, “I do not claim to be the reincarnation of Sarkis. I am Jerry Morgan of Dhu Gong, and will be so called. I have come to gather the desert hordes beneath my banner. And those who ride after me now will have the honor of being the first to do so. For the present, I ride north.”

So saying, he wheeled his mount, and with Yewd following close after him, rode away. To a man, the lorwocks fell in behind him with their prisoners and captured rods.

## CHAPTER XV

Two days after he had achieved command of the white-plumed lorwocks, Jerry led them down the side of a steep declivity and across an ancient, boulder-strewn beach, to the shore of a small lake at the southern end of the Tarvaho Marsh.

“This,” he told his jens, “will be our chief camp for the present. From here we will send messengers to the desert hordes, announcing that a new leader has come, and that the days of the Torturer are numbered.”

At the opposite side of the lake, Jerry saw the gawrs that had been captured by the escaped prisoners. And on the shore, in their improvised camp, he saw the prisoners themselves. He called Yewd to his side. “Ride around the lake,” he commanded, “and tell our comrades to cross the lake and join us.”

A half hour later the two forces were joined, and Jerry found himself in command of eight hundred mounted lorwocks, fifty-nine gawr riders, and three hundred prisoners. After a conference with his jens, he called the black-plumed prisoners together and addressed them, telling them he was going to release them and send them as messengers of good will to the black-plumed tribes, inviting them to join him. After he had made his speech he smoked a cigarette to impress them, and sent them on their way.

In ten days, his forces augmented by thousands of desert tribesmen and escaped slaves, Jerry made his first raid on the central camp of Sarkis. Five thousand of his newly recruited men crossed the marsh with water shoes in the dead of night. Then, while a number of the Earthmen’s lorwocks created a disturbance on the bluffs above the Torturer’s camp, Jerry’s men mounted and escaped with five thousand gawrs. As he had anticipated, Sarkis had placed a guard around the sacrifice pens, but had thought his flying bird-beasts safe.

When the Torturer learned that it was Jerry Morgan’s men who had raided his camp, he swore that he would bring the Earthman and all of his followers to the torture platform; and on learning of his camping place, set out with a huge armed force to crush him.

But Jerry’s flying scouts quickly reported the movement of Sarkis’s immense army, and when the Torturer reached the Tarvaho Marsh he found it deserted.

The Earthman’s forces reassembled at a new rendezvous, but not before they had raided two of the Torturer’s lesser camps, in one of which they captured, in addition to many slaves and much rich loot of all descriptions, fifty large metal flying machines. Each would accommodate fifty warriors in addition to the pilot. The glazed windows could be opened to admit the air, or covered with metal shutters to

keep out enemy projectiles.

When he reached his new rendezvous and distributed the loot, Jerry found, among other things, several thousand suits of clothing. Among these were many outfits of rich black material intended for sale to wealthy commoners. The Earthman selected a number of outfits that suited him as to size and cut, with appropriate silver mounted weapons and silver trappings. And though he might have worn the peacock blue of royalty, he chose rather to be known as the Commoner.

He also caused pennons to be made of black material, each edged with silver fringe and centered with a single silver star.

As the days passed, Jerry's army swelled rapidly. Not only was he joined by the desert hordes, escaped slaves, outlaws, and deserters from the Torturer's army; even the great nobles of Kalsivar, who were dissatisfied with the policies of Numin Vil, began throwing in their lot with him. The fame of his exploits spread rapidly, all over Mars.

But despite his rapid rise to power and unprecedented series of victories he was still an outlaw, with a price upon his head. Numin Vil now believed the Earthman to be the murderer of his son, and even Junia was convinced by the evidence Thoor Movil had brought forth, Jerry heard.

Numin Vil, further angered by the desertions of many of his nobles, gave orders that the army of the Earthman should be crushed, his followers slain without quarter, and himself brought in, dead or alive.

Though he might have brought the expedition sent against him to grief, Jerry rather chose to avoid it. Deep in his heart was the hope that some day he might again be in the good graces of Junia—that he might be able to prove to her that he was innocent of her brother's death.

The Torturer, who had no such scruples as Jerry regarding the imperial forces, met and surrounded the first expedition, then annihilated it, killing or capturing every man and officer present. In this battle the Torturer kept himself well out of sight and ordered the black-and-silver standards of the Commoner to be shown. Then, at the conclusion of the battle he permitted several prisoners to escape to Raliad with the story that the army had been crushed by the forces of the Earthman.

Among those in the imperial palace who listened with bated breath to the recital of each new exploit of the Commoner, was Nisha Novil. The princess had never for a moment given up hope of making him her own.

Accordingly she ordered her luxuriously appointed flying machine one bright morning, giving out that she intended to visit her estate on the Corvid Canal. But before she started she had a brief conference with her brother, Thoor Movil.

“I will make a bargain with you,” she said. “Accompanied by your spy, Wurgul, to show me the way as we had planned, I will visit this Commoner in his main camp. If he accedes to my wishes I will spare his life. If not, I will use my dagger. But in case I spare his life, you are to intercede for him with the Torturer and the Vil. And when you have become Vil of Kalsivar, you are to spare him. Do you agree?”

“On the one condition that you persuade him to give up his command and go with you to your country estate. As long as he has an army at his back he remains a menace.”

“I will accept that condition. And now, farewell.”

“Farewell, and may success reward your undertaking,” said Thoor, rising and walking to the door with his sister. But he smiled to himself, for he had already issued special instructions to Wurgul, who was to conduct her to Jerry’s camp.

Nisha was amazed at the size and orderliness of the outlaw camp. It was a city of portable huts, laid out around a central plaza from which all streets radiated like the spokes of a wheel. And in the middle of this plaza was a large hut of black fur.

As soon as the flier had passed over the bluff, two others out of a score circling above the camp flew up and challenged them. When the colors of the princess were shown, her pilot was ordered to descend at a cleared place on the edge of the camp.

The machine alighted, then came to a stop. The ladder was dropped, and Nisha Novil stepped out, followed by Wurgul the spy. She was met by an officer and a squad of men, who accorded her the royal salute. In answer to her inquiries, they told her that the Commoner was in camp, conferring with his jens, and summoned a multiped vehicle for her.

Accompanied by the officer and Wurgul, she rode along one of the streets of the camp until they came to the central plaza. Here they were challenged by a guard, who insisted that both the princess and her follower deposit their weapons with him before going farther.

Nisha protested, but when she saw that it would be impossible to proceed without complying with this order, surrendered her jeweled dagger, and ordered Wurgul to give up his sword, dagger and mace.

A soldier raised the silver curtain which draped the central doorway of the black hut. And the officer who had come with the two visitors, announced: “Her Royal Highness, Nisha Novil.”

Nisha swept into the room with Wurgul at her heels, and caught sight of Jerry. Seated among his officers, his black clothing and plain silver trappings contrasted oddly with their brightly colored garments and their gold, platinum and flashing



jewels. Yet, as he rose to greet her, she saw that he was easily the most striking figure in that assemblage.

“This is an unexpected honor and pleasure, your highness,” he said, rendering her the royal salute. “May I present my nobles and officers?”

“Later, Jerry Morgan. At present I am wearied by my journey. And I have a message for your ears alone.”

“It shall be as your highness wishes,” he told her. Then he addressed his men: “The meeting is adjourned until I send a new summons.”

The nobles and officers arose and filed out, each saluting the princess as he passed her. When the last man had gone, there remained only Jerry, Nisha and Wurgul. The Earthman looked significantly at the spy, whereupon the princess ordered him to wait outside the door for her.

“Won’t you be seated and have some pulcho?” invited Jerry. He indicated his own swinging divan and a small taboret beside it on which stood a steaming flask of freshly brewed pulcho, surrounded by a dozen jewel-encrusted, platinum cups.

Nisha sat down and Jerry filled a cup for her. After she had accepted and tasted it he filled another for himself, and stood before her.

“You need not be formal, Jerry Morgan. Come and sit here beside me.”

“Indeed, I prefer to stand for a while,” he replied. “I have been sitting in conference all morning. And now won’t you tell me in what way I may be of service to you?”

“You—you make it so difficult for me, with your formal ways.”

“I’m sorry,” he answered. “My intentions are quite the reverse.”

“When last we parted,” she told him, “you were to think over a certain matter, for the space of one senil. At the end of that time we had arranged for a rendezvous at my country place on the Corvid Canal. But the rendezvous was not kept, nor have you vouchsafed me an answer. I have been so lonely for you—so hungry for even a small sight of you.

“Once more I offer you all that any man might desire—myself, my love, and the wealth, position and power which will fall to the lot of my husband. Think, Jerry Morgan. Before another senil has passed I will be sister to the Vil of Kalsivar. Give up this futile life of outlawry and come with me to my country estate. There we can be quietly married, and I can promise you that within a senil your power in Kalsivar will be second only to that of the throne, itself, for you will be the brother-in-law of the Vil.”

“I hope you will believe me, highness,” replied Jerry, “when I say that it grieves me more than I can say to decline your offer. As you say, I am an outlaw, under

sentence of death. And furthermore, I am indebted to you for life itself. But somehow, marriage is a thing I have always associated with love. And unfortunately, love is a thing which cannot be coerced or commanded. Where love enters, *it* commands. We who are its subjects can only obey, no matter where its dictates lead us.”

At this Nisha’s black eyes flashed and Jerry expected another outbreak. But it did not come. Instead, she arose and said meekly: “Then this is the end. It is farewell forever. Let us not part in anger.”

Slowly she walked up to where he stood, arms outstretched.

“One last kiss,” she whispered.

Her hand hovered above the silver mounted hilt of his dagger. With a sudden, snake-like movement she seized it, wrenched it from its sheath, and lunged for his breast. But the Earthman was too quick for her. He caught her wrist in a grip of iron, wrenched the weapon from her grasp.

In the meantime Wurgul, who had been standing outside the silver curtain, engaged the guard who stood there in a conversation. While they conversed, he managed to move against the curtain in such a way as to push it back, permitting him a glimpse into the room. He saw that Jerry was standing with his back to the doorway, holding the wrists of the raging princess.

For an instant, he fumbled in the folds of his headcloak. Then, with one hand still concealed, he raised the other and pointed skyward. “What strange craft is that?”

As the guard looked up, Wurgul’s other hand came out from beneath the folds of his headpiece, clutching a short, straight dagger. The blade flashed downward—plunged into the guard’s back up to the hilt.

Wurgul turned, flipped back the curtain, and ran noiselessly up behind the Earthman. Nisha saw him coming, but save for a widening of her eyes made no sound or sign. He lunged straight for the unprotected back of the Earthman.

## CHAPTER XVI

As Jerry held the raging little princess away from him, he suddenly noticed that her eyes had gone wide, as if she had seen something startling behind him. He flung her back across the divan, and whirled around just in time to see Wurgul lunging at him.

There was no time to seize a weapon, but Jerry blocked the stroke with his left hand against the wrist of the assassin. Then he drove a smashing right to the point of Wurgul's jaw. The spy slumped to the floor, unconscious. At the same moment an officer and a half dozen guards rushed into the room.

"This murderer just slew Shuvi, the guard," cried the officer. "Stabbed him in the back."

"Put him in the prison pen. I'll attend to his case later."

As two warriors carried out the still unconscious Wurgul, Nisha came to her feet. "I suppose I, too, must go to the prison pen," she said defiantly. "Or perhaps you will order my execution at once."

Jerry smiled grimly down at her. "Neither," he answered. "You sought only to take that which you once saved for me—my life. I have not forgotten, and I am not ungrateful. You are free to go."

At this Nisha laughed bitterly.

"You are a generous fool, Jerry Morgan," she said. "If you were wise, you would keep me here—make me your slave. I warn you that once I am free, I will leave no stone unturned to compass your ruin."

Jerry turned to the officer, who stood with his four men, awaiting orders. "You will conduct her highness to her flier."

Nisha walked out with head held high, and in her black eyes was the feral gleam which the Earthman knew meant trouble.

Jerry sat among his officers, conferring on future plans of campaign until a late hour. One thing they had all urged upon him was that he should select from among his followers two men who would be his constant companions night and day, in addition to the regular guard.

He chose Yewd, the giant fisherman, and a black dwarf named Koha, a queer, misshapen creature whose brawny arms were longer than his legs, and whose great shoulders were as broad as those of the giant. He could throw daggers with deadly accuracy, and carried a heavy, long-handled mace with which he had bested many a swordsman by the simple expedient of smashing through guard and skull.

The Earthman had dismissed his officers, and was preparing to retire for the

night, with Koha stretched across his doorway, and Yewd standing guard behind his divan, when a messenger came running up to the doorway.

“A herald has arrived from Sarkis the Torturer,” he announced.

“Admit him,” said Jerry.

With Yewd standing on guard at one side of his divan, and Koha at the other, Jerry awaited the herald, who said: “I bear a challenge from His Holy Majesty, Sarkis, Lord of the Day and Vil of the Worlds. Tomorrow afternoon, when the great Lord Sun has spanned three-fourths of the sky, his holy majesty will leave his entire army on the Heights of Zokar, which overlook the Plain of Ling, and will ride along to the center of the plain.

“If Jerry Morgan is the leader that he claims to be, he will leave his own army on the Heights of Lokar, which overlook the plain from the opposite side, and ride down alone to do battle with the Lord of the Day. And there, within sight of the two hosts, let the issue of single combat determine who is the true leader foretold in the prophecy, and who the imposter.”

“You will await my answer outside,” said Jerry. Then, as the herald passed through the curtained doorway, he turned to the giant fisherman. “What think you of this, Yewd?”

“Though my poor wits fail to read the riddle,” replied the giant, “they plainly tell me that there is one. Perhaps this Sarkis honestly believes he can beat you in single combat. But it is not his way to take such a risk.”

“And what think you, Koha?” asked Jerry, turning to the dwarf.

“I think the Torturer wishes to bring the two armies together so there may be a great battle, which, by some trick, he is confident of winning, though there be little difference in strength,” said the black man.

“And yet,” said Jerry, “I cannot do otherwise than accept this challenge. To fail to do so would smack of cowardice.”

“That is true,” agreed Yewd.

“It would seem that the Torturer has put us in a position where we must walk into his trap. Let the herald remain outside, and call a conference of the officers.”

This was done, and for some time Jerry was cloistered with his men. Then he sent for the herald. When the fellow entered, he said: “Tell Sarkis that Jerry Morgan accepts his challenge.”

The herald saluted and departed. But as soon as he had gone, the camp began to dissolve away in the moonlight. Piece by piece, the portable fur huts came down, were rolled up and stowed on the backs of the pack-rodals, along with all other camp articles and utensils.

Before the night was an hour older, a vast cavalcade, shadowed by a flapping host of gawr riders, climbed up onto the plain, and started in the direction of the Heights of Lokar.

“Always do what the enemy expects you not to do,” Jerry had told his officers. “Sarkis will expect us to leave tomorrow morning, so we will leave now. Thus, we will be the first on the field, and in a position perhaps to thwart him, or to leave if a trap is revealed.”

Jerry’s army reached its objective without incident, and pitched camp. Save for the sentinels on duty, all the men were permitted to sleep late the following morning, so they would be fresh for battle. But to Jerry’s surprise, morning and noon came and went without a sign of the Torturer.

Presently, however, near midafternoon, his gawr sentinels announced the approach of a vast horde. Shortly thereafter the army of the Torturer took up its position on the Heights of Zokar, facing them across the Plain of Ling, and the black cloud of gawr riders which accompanied it settled to the ground.

After a delay of more than two hours, during which the Earthman watched with bated breath, a lone warrior mounted on a rodal came trotting down the hillside toward the center of the plain. The slanting shafts of the late afternoon sun were reflected by the burnished gold of his mask.

Yewd had his rodal and weapons in readiness, and it was but the work of a moment to mount and ride down the hillside at full charge toward the gold-masked champion.

The latter, on seeing Jerry, halted his beast near the middle of the plain and waited, evidently in no hurry to begin the engagement. He carried a tuzar, but Jerry, who had not mastered this weapon, carried a long, stout-shafted lance, instead.

As soon as the Earthman came within a hundred feet of his enemy the latter lowered his tuzar and charged. Jerry couched his long lance, and with it pointed at the breast of his adversary, urged his beast forward.

The masked rider, however, swerved his mount, and while Jerry’s lance encountered only empty air, the sharp points of the tongs clamped into the Earthman’s hips. He was jerked from the saddle, and his enemy rode swiftly toward the enemy lines, dragging Jerry over the rugged ground.

A mighty cheer went up from the lines of Sarkis, at sight of this easy victory for their champion.

In the meantime, Jerry seized the tongs and dragged himself to a standing posture. Then, still clinging to a tong with his left hand, and sailing over the ground with tremendous leaps, he unhooked his heavy, saw-toothed mace from his belt and

brought it down with all his strength on the shaft of the tuzar.

The tough wood cracked, but the long fibers still held. Again and again Jerry hacked at that stubborn shaft. It seemed ages before the last fiber snapped, and he fell free, his mace flying from his hand, while the tongs released their hold and clattered after him.

Half stunned and covered with blood, bruises, scratches and dust, Jerry lay on his back, breathing heavily. From the corners of his eyes he saw his adversary wheel his mount, and flinging away his useless shaft, draw a sharp, multi-barbed javelin from the sheath at his back.

Cautiously, the masked man rode toward his fallen and motionless antagonist, his javelin in readiness. Jerry was breathing more easily, now, and felt his strength returning. Suddenly he saw the javelin arm fly back—the deadly barbed missile hurtling straight toward him.

In a flash he had rolled over, just out of reach of that keen point. And then, before his enemy had divined what he was about, he sprang to his feet and bounded straight for the hideously masked figure. The mounted warrior reached for another javelin but before he could withdraw it from the sheath the Earthman had sprung up behind him and caught him with an elbow crooked about his armored neck.

Now it was the turn of the masked man to be jerked from his saddle. Jerry, while they fell, had released his hold on his enemy and alighted catlike on both feet. He whipped out his sword and turned to face his adversary. The latter got up and drew his own sword.

For some time both contestants fenced cautiously. Then Jerry, after a swift feint, found the opening he sought, and lunged straight for his opponent's breast. His point went true to the mark, but his blade bent double and snapped in two. In an instant he realized that the masked man wore a metal breastplate. With a triumphant laugh his enemy drove a savage blow.

Jerry saved himself from death by a quick leap to one side. Then, before the masked man could draw back from that lunge, he struck again with the broken stump of his sword. But this time, he plunged it with unerring accuracy, through the right eye-slit of the golden mask—through the eye and into the brain of his enemy.

At this, a tremendous shout went up from the army of the Earthman. It was answered by jeers from the army of the Torturer, and Jerry, looking in the direction of this strange demonstration, saw the reason. For the Torturer himself was being borne on his platform of state, straight down toward the front of his own lines.

Jerry wrenched the stub of his sword from where it was wedged in the bony orbit of his fallen foe. Then he tore the mask from the lolling head. The dead face

that looked up at him was that of the jendus he had defeated in the Torturer's camp.

Hurling the hideous mask from him, Jerry turned and walked back toward his own lines. Two riders dashed down to meet him, Yewd and Koha. The white giant led a saddled rodal. The black dwarf brought him a new sword and a flask of steaming pulcho.

After a copious draught from the flask, he mounted and rode back to his headquarters. Here his chief surgeon awaited him, and cleansed and dressed his wounds while he held conference with his officers.

Despite the furious anger of his men, however, Jerry ordered his officers to hold the men in check.

"Have I not always counseled you," he said, "to do what the enemy expects you not to do? If we go into battle with the army of Sarkis now, we will be doing precisely what he expects us to do. We will sit quietly for a time—and see what happens. When the time comes, we will make some plans of our own."

Scarcely had he finished this pronouncement when one of his gawr scouts came sailing down out of the sky. Dismounting, he ran up before the Earthman and saluted.

"Numin Vil is coming up behind us with a vast host," he cried excitedly, "which outnumbers our force at least two to one! We are trapped between two mighty armies!"

## CHAPTER XVII

There was consternation on the face of the officers, but Jerry, standing in their midst, smiled confidently. "Just as I suspected. It is well that we did not attack the army of Sarkis, for then, weakened by our losses, we should have fallen an easy prey to the forces of Numin Vil."

As a matter of fact, this was the last thing Jerry had suspected. But now he must think, and think fast, if his command was to be saved from annihilation. He knew, also, that his men must be given something to do to keep up their morale.

"Pack equipment," he ordered, "but do so in such a way that the enemy will not notice. For the present, leave the huts standing. But have them ready to pack at a moment's notice."

As his officers hurried away to carry out his orders, Jerry sat down and poured himself a cup of pulcho.

"Why not march south or north?" suggested Yewd. "We are only hemmed in from the east and west."

"You surprise me, Yewd. What do you think our enemies would be doing, in the meantime?"

"I don't know."

"Nor do I. But I believe they could and would march south or north as fast as we, in the meantime gradually converging upon us from both sides. And they might corner us in a much worse place than this hilltop, where we have some advantage of position."

"But even our lofty position will not avail us against such superior numbers," said Koha.

"If it could, we should have no problem," Jerry said. "But since we have a problem, I am seeking to solve it. Fetch me a gawr, and I'll have a look about."

The dwarf waddled hurriedly away, returning a few moments later with a saddled bird-beast. Jerry mounted, pulled up on the guiding rod, and soared aloft. First he flew out over the Plain of Ling, and had a look at the army of Sarkis. There was considerable activity among the hordes of the Torturer.

He turned, and soaring higher, flew back across his own camp toward the forces of Numin Vil. As he urged his great flapping bird-beast onward, the sun dipped suddenly beneath the horizon, and the rolling desert below him was lighted only by the pale rays of the farther moon.

Presently, he described the advancing army of the Vil of Kalsivar. It was a formidable host, and he knew that it would be disastrous to pit his smaller force



against it. He calculated that, unless Numin Vil struck with his aerial forces first, he would not be able to attack, for at least a half hour. Accordingly, he turned and flew back to his own camp as fast as his bird-beast would carry him.

Before he reached his headquarters the farther moon had set. But campfires had been lighted both in his own camp and in that of the Torturer, and by these he was able to locate his own hut, and descend.

Here he found his chief officers clustered, more panic-stricken than before. But he had made his plans, now.

First, he ordered all fires quenched. Then the huts were dismantled and packed with the other equipment. As soon as this had been done, all in pitch darkness and with a minimum of noise, he formed his little army into a great triangle, with the pack-rodals in the center, the rodal cavalry forming the three sides, and the gawr riders and metal fliers flapping in wedge formation overhead. Though he might have ridden on a gawr, or in one of the metal flying machines, he chose rather to lead the main body of his army, and so rode at the point of the triangle which faced the position of Sarkis, with Yewd riding close at his left, and Koha at his right.

It was difficult for the men to see each other's positions in the gloom, and there were some collisions as they charged straight for the position of the Torturer. Scarcely had they crossed the plain when the vanguard of Numin Vil appeared on the heights they had just deserted, carrying his baridium torches.

Urging his men to greater speed, Jerry led them up the hill. At any moment, he expected a counter-charge from the forces of Sarkis, and was puzzled when it was not forthcoming. The twinkling campfires were burning as brightly as ever, and he could see men moving back and forth before them. But as he drew closer, he saw the reason. Not one of the vast city of huts which had been there that afternoon was standing, nor were there any rodals in sight.

The giant Yewd saw the situation almost as soon as the Earthman, and burst into noisy merriment.

"By the might of Deza! The Torturer played a neat trick on us. And had you not decided to give him battle, we would now be back on the Heights of Lokar, vainly striving against the powerful forces of the Vil."

"We haven't escaped yet," said Jerry. "Numin Vil is close behind us, and the nearer moon is due to rise soon." He called to the officers who rode nearest to him. "Pass the word along to break up into small groups, and scatter. Let all lorwock warriors return to their own tribes, and remain with their families and friends for the space of ten days. At that time, our meeting place will be the Marsh of Atabah. Let those who have no tribes or families to return to, live where they will in small groups

until the time for our rendezvous arrives.

“I go, now, to the Atabah Marsh, with my fliers.”

He signaled a large airship which had been flying overhead, and it settled swiftly to the earth before him. Then he dismounted and entered, accompanied by Yewd and Koha.

Swiftly and quietly his orders were carried out. So that by the time the forces of the Vil had passed the Heights of Zokar and the nearer moon had risen, the trail they followed had split up into many, which spread out fan-wise, and gradually grew more tenuous as they advanced, until there were a thousand small trails, no single one of which it would be worth the while of an army to follow.

Jerry led his flying contingent straight to the Atabah Marsh. A few portable huts which had been stowed in the airships were set up. But most of the gawr riders bivouacked under the clear sky, wrapped in their furs. Later, their pack-rodals, if uncaptured, would be in with the rest of the huts and supplies.

As the Earthman sat in his hut, eating a meal which Koha had hastily prepared, and sipping his pulcho, the more he thought about it the more he was convinced that the Torturer had some purpose beyond that of involving him in a battle with the forces of Numin Vil.

Accordingly, he called in the jen of his scouts, and ordered that a hundred gawr riders take the air at once, flying in all directions, to bring him news as to the locations of both Sarkis and Numin Vil.

As soon as the jen of scouts had gone out, he sent for his jen of spies. After a brief conference it was decided that twelve spies, each starting alone and leaving at irregular intervals, should fly to Raliad and attempt to learn what was taking place there.

Early the following morning Jerry was awakened by the black dwarf, who proffered him a cup of steaming pulcho, and said: “A spy has just returned from Raliad with important tidings. Will you see him now?”

“Admit him,” said Jerry.

A small, mild-mannered brown man in the garments of a slave entered on Koha’s invitation. “What have you learned, Eni?” asked Jerry.

“Sarkis is in Raliad.”

“What! You mean he has been taken prisoner?”

“Far from it. While Numin Vil was pursuing our army, the Torturer led his forces to the west gate of Raliad. His appearance was a signal for those in sympathy with the revolution to fall upon the loyal soldiers and guards who remained. The gates were thrown open to him by traitors, and he marched straight to the palace with

almost no opposition.

“All the members of the white nobility who were unable to escape were either slain or made prisoners. The brown nobility have been assigned their ranks, titles and estates, and the brown prince, Thoor Movil, has been proclaimed Vil of Kalsivar.”

“But Junia! What of her?”

“She is a prisoner in the palace. And the Torturer has offered her the choice of marrying Thoor Movil, or dying under the burning disk.”

“And has she made a choice?”

“That I have not heard.”

“But what of Numin Vil?”

“He returned to Raliad late last night, but the gates were closed to him, and the warriors of Sarkis manned the walls. He attacked repeatedly, but each time was driven off with heavy losses. Early this morning he withdrew his forces and pitched his camp on the Plains of Lav, within sight of the city.”

“You have done well, Eni,” said Jerry, “and I will see that you are suitably rewarded. Await my further orders outside.”

As the spy saluted and backed out of the doorway, Jerry turned to his two guards and counselors.

“At last we begin to see the depth of the Torturer’s cunning,” he said.

“This time it seems he has outguessed me, though I was able to defeat part of his plans. It was his intention to dispose of me, to wipe out my army, and to weaken the army of Numin Vil, all this while he was capturing Raliad.”

At this instant a guard drew back the curtain and announced: “Algo the spy, from the camp of Numin Vil.”

“Let him come in,” said Jerry.

A tall, soldierly white man of middle age, dressed in the uniform of the Palace Guard, entered and saluted.

“Eni has told me what befell last night,” Jerry told him. “Who set Numin Vil on our trail?”

“It was Nisha Novil,” said the spy. “Yesterday afternoon she came hurrying into the audience chamber, and asked for an immediate hearing on a matter of grave importance. It was granted, and she told the Vil a slave of hers, returning from her country estate on the Corvid Canal, had flown near the Heights of Lokar on his gawr, and had seen your army encamped there.

“Numin Vil sprang down from his throne, ordered a force assembled, and set out at the head of it, bent on annihilating us.”

“She said nothing about the force of Sarkis being encamped opposite us on the

Heights of Zokar?”

“Not a word.”

“Ah!”

Jerry sprang up from his divan.

“That will be all, Algo. You may return to the camp of the Vil, and report in two days.”

As Algo saluted and withdrew, Jerry turned to Koha.

“Fetch me the clothing of a palace slave, I am going to the Imperial Palace in Raliad.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

Disguised as a brown-skinned palace slave with the crystal disk of a sun-worshiper on his breast, and mounted on a swift, sturdy gawr, Jerry flew toward Raliad, unheeding the picturesque scenery which unrolled swiftly beneath him.

On sighting the imperial palace, Jerry soared high above it in order to select the best place for a landing. He saw that the Torturer had stabled a number of his gawrs in the lagoons of the palace roof garden, something Numin Vil had never permitted. However, this made it easier for Jerry to reach his objective; he decided to land on the roof of the palace itself.

He accordingly selected the lagoon which was nearest that side of the edifice on which he knew Junia's apartments to be situated, and soared down to the sloping beach. A brown-skinned attendant, who wore only a leather breechclout, came hurrying up.

"You cannot alight here, slave," he said, gruffly. "Only the warriors of Sarkis and Thoor Vil may stable their gawrs in these lagoons."

Without replying, Jerry untied and tossed him the thong which held the end of the guiding rod to the saddle. Then he sprang to the ground.

"Have I not said that you cannot land here?" demanded the attendant.

"Fool!" said Jerry. "I'm the bearer of important tidings for his holy majesty. Would you like it known that you have delayed me? For such as you there is the burning eye of the Lord Sun."

"Forgive me, my lord," said the attendant, abjectly. "I did not know you for a messenger of the holy one."

"See that my mount is well fed and watered, and hold him here in readiness for my coming, as I may be leaving soon, in a hurry."

"I hear and obey, my lord," replied the attendant, saluting respectfully.

Jerry swaggered away in the direction of the nearest vehicle tunnel. But as soon as a turn in the walk took him out of sight of the attendant, he slipped off through the shrubbery toward the thick wall that edged the roof. Here he mounted a stairway, and, going to the edge of the wall, peered over the balustrade.

It took him but a moment to identify the balcony of Junia, which was in the upper row, by the swinging divans with their golden chains and cushions of peacock blue, flanked by taborets of gold inlaid with lapis lazuli, which could only adorn the apartments of the Vil or his immediate family.

Reaching beneath his headcloak, Jerry now took out a coil of light, tough rope. Going to a point directly above one end of Junia's balcony, he made one end of the

rope fast and dropped the coil. It fell among the potted shrubs, and the Earthman noted that it reached all the way, with a good twelve feet to spare.

After a swift glance around, to make sure that he was not observed, he swung over the balustrade and slid down the rope, alighting on the balcony without a sound. Cautiously, he made his way among the plants to a point opposite the window, and peered between them into the apartment.

His heart pounded wildly as he caught sight of the girl who meant more to him than life itself. Junia was seated before a small taboret, loaded with a variety of dainties. A brown-skinned slave girl was urging her to eat, but she would only sip a little pulcho from a tiny jeweled cup.

As he crouched there in the shrubbery, deliberating as to the best way to approach her, he suddenly saw a look of loathing come over her features. She was gazing toward another part of the room which he could not see. Someone had entered, an armed man, evidently, for he distinctly heard the clank of weapons.

Then Jerry recognized the hollow, sepulchral tones of Sarkis the Torturer.

“I have come for your decision, princess. The great Lord Sun nears the zenith, and the time for the noon sacrifice is near at hand. You will give me your word, now, that you will wed with Thoor Vil at once, or you will go beneath the burning eye.”

Again there was the clank of weapons, and the Torturer stepped into view before Junia. Behind him came two burly black warriors.

The girl stood up, and said defiantly: “You have asked for my answer. Take it then, nameless one who hides behind a mask lest his face be identified with his own evil deeds. I will not marry the false Vil, my cousin, and your puppet. You have offered me two choices, but Deza presents a third.”

So saying, she suddenly turned and sprang through the window.

“Seize her!” shouted the Torturer. Before she was halfway across the balcony one of the burly blacks had her.

At this Jerry whipped out his sword and sprang from his hiding place. A single bound brought him directly in front of the astounded guard, and a sweeping cut sheared through the fellow’s head from crown to chin.

“Courage, highness,” he said, as Junia jerked her arm free. He whirled to confront the second warrior, who ran at him with his point extended. Deftly the Earthman parried the thrust, then caught the charging black on his blade.

The masked Torturer was now running toward the door which led to the hallway, bawling for the guard. Jerry snatched his mace from his belt and hurled it with all his might. It flew straight to the mark, smashing into the rear of the golden helmet and flattening the Torturer upon the floor.

Leaping over his foe, Jerry reached the door and shot the bolt, just as a considerable body of men came rushing up from the outside. When they found the door locked they began hacking at it with their weapons, but Jerry knew it would be some time before they could break through.

Sheathing his sword, he caught up his mace and replaced it in his belt. He was tempted to tear the mask from the face of the recumbent Torturer, but knew that he must make every second count in order to carry out his plans. Snatching a blue-and-gold curtain from a doorway, he ran out onto the balcony. Junia was standing near the railing.

“Who are you?” she asked. “Don’t come near me or I’ll jump.”

For answer, he cleared the space between them at a single bound and flung the curtain over her.

“I know you now, Jerry Morgan,” she said, “for there is no other man on Mars who can jump like that. Release me.”

“You must trust me, highness,” he said, bundling the fabric more tightly about her slender figure, “for I have come to save you. If you resist you will only put us both in peril.”

“How can I trust the murderer of my brother?”

But Jerry had no time to reply. Flinging his bundle over his shoulder, he hurried to where the rope trailed on the balcony. With his dagger he cut off a twelve-foot length, and quickly made a sling by which he swung the girl across his back. He could hear the door of the apartment splintering as he started to climb, hand over hand, toward the balustrade above.

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The attendant, seeing the strange bundle upon his back, looked surprised, but Jerry said, sharply: “Bring me my mount quickly, fellow! Can’t you see I’m in a hurry?”

Evidently still puzzled, yet afraid not to obey him, the man waded into the shallows and led the great bird-beast out onto the sand.

Jerry climbed into the saddle, made the thong of the steering rod fast, and, unhooking the safety chains from the gawr’s wings, hooked them through the rings in his belt. At this instant there was a shout from the nearest tunnel mouth, and a group of warriors came running out.

“Stop him!” called an officer. “Stop that slave! He has stolen the princess!”

The Earthman lifted the guiding rod and the huge bird-beast, after running clumsily along the beach a few feet, spread its great wings and took to the air.

As soon as he was out of javelin range above the palace roof, Jerry turned his

mount's head toward the Plains of Lav beside the Corvid Canal, where he had heard that Numin Vil was encamped. He planned to restore Junia to her father, then escape before his identity was discovered.

Scarcely had he flown across the palace area when a score of warriors mounted on gawrs rose in pursuit. The Temple of Mercy lay directly in his path, and on this he saw that one of the Torturer's immense burning glasses had been placed. This was surrounded by a group of yellow-robed priests, who were encircled by a company of brown warriors, some of whom led gawrs.

As he flew straight toward them, one of the warriors chanced to look up. Instantly he called the attention of his companions, and in a moment they had mounted and soared aloft to head off the Earthman.

Jerry was now faced with the necessity of flying across the city, almost at right angles to the course he would have chosen. Some time passed before they flew over the great wall which marked the edge of Raliad. Jerry knew that sooner or later, with his doubly laden bird-beast, he would be overtaken and slain unless he could reach a body of his own flying warriors. Accordingly he tried, by turning the head of his mount a little at a time, to steer a course toward the Marsh of Atabah.

He had flown thus for some time when he suddenly noticed that the sun no longer beat down upon him. Looking up, he was astounded to see that it was obscured by the upper fringe of an immense, reddish-brown cloud which, trailing backward and downward like a ragged, twisted garment, reached clear to the ground.

Never, in all his experience on Mars, had Jerry seen a cloud, but he had been told of the terrific sand storms which sometimes swept the face of the planet.

There could be little question but that the cloud now bearing down upon him with such amazing speed was a cloud of sand and other debris picked up from the surface of the land by tremendously powerful winds. He saw a ragged streamer creep up on his pursuers. It caught them. For a moment they were tossed about like leaves in a gale, then the cloud swallowed them up.

Swiftly Jerry let down his headcloak and drew the transparent, flexible mask with which it was equipped across his face. Tucking the cloak down around the precious bundle on his back, he awaited the onslaught of the storm. He noticed that his mount dropped a transparent inner eyelid over each eyeball, and a thinly perforated membranous flap over each nostril.

There was a roaring, rumbling noise behind him now, that swiftly increased in volume until the sound was deafening. Then the storm struck.

At the first impact of that giant force the gawr turned completely over, and for a



moment Jerry hung from his safety chains. Whirling, hurtling particles of sand beat against his clothing and mask, sifting into the interstices and getting into his eyes, ears and nostrils. The gawr righted itself, and he dragged himself back to the saddle, gripping the horn and clinging with all his strength.

The world above, below and around him was blotted out by a maelstrom of flying sand.

Hours passed thus, and still the storm showed no sign of abating. Presently the gawr began fluttering weakly, and turning over and over, sank rapidly groundward.

Suddenly it struck a solid object with a terrific impact. Jerry was hurled forward with such force that the safety chains tore out his belt rings.

## CHAPTER XIX

When Jerry regained consciousness someone was shaking him, calling his name.

“Jerry Morgan, speak to me! O Deza, grant that he still lives!”

He opened his eyes and looked up into the frightened face of Junia, bending over him as he lay on his back in the sand. The slanting rays of the afternoon sun shone brightly down from a clear sky.

“Junia!” he exclaimed. “Are you all right?”

“Yes. And you?”

He sat up and his head throbbed painfully. Exploration with his fingers revealed a lump that was sore, but not dangerous.

“Apparently I collided with something as hard as my head,” he said, getting dizzily to his feet, “but there are no permanent injuries.”

Junia did not reply. As soon as she had learned that he was not badly hurt her manner had altered perceptibly. And Jerry guessed the reason. She could not feel other than antagonistic toward the supposed murderer of her brother.

“Highness,” he said, “I wish I could prove to you in some way that I am not guilty of the—the crime which you seem to think I committed.”

At this she turned on him and said, almost fiercely: “I wish to Deza that you could! But mere assertion proves nothing.”

He walked over to where the bird-beast was lying, half-buried beneath a drift of sand. It was breathing heavily, with its great membranous wings outspread, and its head stretched out upon the ground. He pulled up on the guiding rod, but when he released it the head dropped back as before.

With the flat head of his mace he scooped the sand away from one side. Suddenly he noticed blood in the sand around the wing, close to where it joined the body. An examination revealed the fact that the bone was snapped asunder. The gawr would never fly again, and he realized that it must be suffering horribly.

Resolutely he walked to where the head lay on the ground and, raising his mace, drove the keen saw-teeth down through the creature’s skull into its brain. “We will have to walk,” he called to Junia.

“Apparently,” she replied, “since you have just destroyed our only other means of transportation.”

“If you will look at the gawr’s left wing you will see the reason.”

At first she seemed determined to do nothing of the sort, but presently her curiosity got the better of her, and she walked over and looked.

“Oh, the poor creature!” she cried. “And you slew it to end its suffering. Forgive

me, Jerry Morgan.”

“Willingly,” he answered. “And now have you any idea where we are?”

“I’m afraid I can be of no help,” she said, “for this terrain is as strange to me as to you. And the desert, after all, is much alike all over Mars.”

He removed the sheaf of javelins from the saddle of the bird-beast and slung it over his shoulder. Then he rolled up the hanging in which he had carried the girl, wrapped the rope about it, and slung it beside the sheaf.

“Come on,” he said. “Let us climb to the highest sand dune we can find. Perhaps we will be able to sight something besides desert.”

The highest dune in sight lay to the northwest of them, and toward this they plodded through the soft sand. Upon mounting to its top they made out, far to the south, a chain of low hills sparsely dotted with vegetation. In every other direction there were only barren dunes of ochre-yellow sand.

“Where there is vegetation there may be food and water,” said Jerry. “Our best plan will be to go south.”

A walk of some five miles brought them to the foot of the hills they had descried from a distance. On close inspection they did not look so inviting. The sparse clumps of vegetation were mostly thorny shrubs that offered neither food nor shelter. And there was no sign of water.

They reached the top after a short climb, and Junia cried out in pleased surprise at the sight which lay before them. They were looking down into a green valley, through which a narrow stream meandered. Here was water, and perhaps food, for plants and shrubs which grew along the banks of the stream made it probable that there would be edible fruits or nuts.

With renewed hope in their hearts they hurried down the hillside, and made straight for the stream. Rinsing his folding cup, Jerry offered it to Junia. But she declined it, and drank from her cupped hands. They remained beside the stream for some time, drinking and bathing their faces in the cold water. Then Jerry arose.

“I think we had best be going,” he said. “The sun is low, and as yet we have found neither food nor shelter.”

Without a word she arose and followed him along the river bank. Presently, he noticed a fin cleaving the water near the shore. He drew a javelin from his sheath and cautiously stalked it. Presently it came close under the bank, and he drove the multibarbed weapon straight down through the water in front of that fin. It struck something solid.

But scarcely had he driven the point home when the half was wrenched from his hand. An immense and hideous head on a long scaly neck reared itself high above

him, taking the javelin with it, and he saw that he had speared the neck of a huge saurian.

The giant water lizard opened an immense mouth that was armed with a triple-row of sharp, back-curved teeth, and, with a loud hiss, darted straight for this thing which had had the presumption to annoy it with a javelin.

For a moment Jerry stared, too astounded to move. But when he saw it darting toward him his Earth-muscles carried him straight back in a tremendous flying leap to where Junia stood.

The saurian floundered up out of the water on two immense flippers, hissing angrily, and dragging an amazingly huge body out onto the bank.

Jerry caught Junia up as if she had been a child and, turning, sprinted away at his best speed. The saurian turned back toward the river, still hissing its anger and shaking its neck to dislodge the annoying javelin.

When he had placed a good mile between himself and his pursuer, Jerry stood Junia on her feet once more, and paused for a short breathing spell.

"I thought I had speared our dinner," he said, "but I came near furnishing a dinner, instead. What do you call that thing?"

"It is a histid," she replied. "They are quite common in wild marshes and lakes."

"Well, this histid has made a vegetarian out of me," said Jerry. "I no longer have the craving for fish that I had a few moments ago."

They moved on once more, following the curving bank of the stream. Presently the ground grew soft and boggy beneath their feet, the water oozing up around them at each step. Then suddenly, with a peculiar sucking sound, a round trapdoor in the bog flew open just in front of Jerry, and a long, slimy thing as large as a boa constrictor darted out. At the end of the thing was a white sucking disk, which clamped itself to the Earthman's chest. He was lifted off his feet, then dragged downward to the very rim of the hole beneath the trapdoor, which was about three feet across.

Jerry bridged himself across that hole. The slimy thing that had seized him thrashed about beneath him, almost tearing the skin from his chest in its efforts to drag him down. Then he heard a scream from Junia.

Supporting himself with his knees and left hand, he snatched his long dagger from his belt with his right. Then, with the keen edge, he cut through his slimy enemy, just below the sucking disk, and sprang erect. Junia was being fought over by two of the things, which had both seized her simultaneously.

Transferring his dagger to his left hand, Jerry whipped out his sword with his right, sprang forward, and simultaneously severed the two snaky necks. Then he

sheathed his dagger and, throwing Junia over his shoulder, ran across the sucking ooze toward the higher ground.

The two severed disks still clung to Junia, one on each side of her waist. Drawing his dagger, he slit one from side to side with the point, then peeled it away. Beneath it, the blood had begun to ooze through a thousand little punctures in the soft white skin. Swiftly he removed the other, and then slashed and ripped off the one that clung to his own chest.

Taking a bottle of jembal from his belt pouch, he applied the antiseptic gum to her wounds. Junia was pale and trembling.

“Once again you have saved my life, Jerry Morgan,” she said. “If only . . .”

“Yes, I know. Somehow, some day, I’m going to prove to you that I am innocent.”

“Deza speed the day!” she said. “And now, let me dress your wound.”

She took the bottle from his hand and deftly applied the liquid gum. She had finished dressing his wounds and was handing him the bottle when suddenly her eyes went wide.

“Look! Look behind you!” she exclaimed.

## CHAPTER XX

At Junia's cry Jerry whirled around, then gave a low whistle of amazement. A monstrous thing was wading toward them across the narrow stream. As he gazed, it emerged upon the bank, a gigantic and hideous bird, fully forty feet in height.

Its long lean neck and scrawny body were leathery and bare of feathers. On its huge head was a waving crest of plumes. Its beak, which was four feet in length and two in width at the base, was hooked like that of an eagle. The short wings were covered with sharp spines in lieu of feathers. The long scaly legs were adaptable either for wading or swimming, and there were leathery webs between the toes, which were armed with immense, sickle-shaped talons.

"What is it?" Jerry asked.

"A koroo," Junia told him. "The aquatic cousin of the koree, the great man-eating bird of the desert. Like its desert relative, it is fond of human flesh. But the koroo is much larger and considered far more formidable."

"It's certainly big enough," he replied. "We would just make about one mouthful apiece for it. Do you think it has seen us?"

"I think not. Let us move away as slowly and quietly as possible, and seek a place of concealment."

Slowly, cautiously, they crept up the stony bank. Jerry, meanwhile, kept a sharp watch on the monster, which raised its plumed head to its full height and cocked an eye in the direction of the fleeing couple. At sight of them its crest rose and its horny wings, which had been hanging at its sides, were suddenly elevated to a horizontal position. Then, with a peculiar booming cry, it charged swiftly toward them.

"It sees us!" said Jerry excitedly. "We may as well spring for it, now."

He caught up Junia, flung her over his shoulder, and started up the hillside with huge leaps that almost matched the giant strides of the bird.

Jerry ran as he had never run before. But the fifteen-foot legs of the monster koroo shortened the distance between them with alarming rapidity. Soon the Earthman could hear it stertorous breathing behind him. Then he noticed a dark hole in the hillside, just in front of him. Like a hunted animal seeking cover, he plunged into it.

He took his baridium torch from his belt and unhooded it, flashing it about to assure himself that there was no formidable creature lurking there. He was in a roughly circular cave, about thirty feet in diameter, with a twelve-foot ceiling. Swiftly he ran to the opposite side of the cave and faced about.

The koroo was now peering into the hole, its head cocked to one side. Seeing

its intended prey standing in the back of the cave, it lunged forward. But its long neck would only negotiate about half of the distance, and the opening was not large enough to admit its shoulders.

Temporarily baffled, the monster backed out and began scratching and tearing at the opening with its immense talons. After it had enlarged the hole considerably, it again lunged forward. This time its shoulders passed through.

Jerry took a javelin from the sheaf he carried and, running up close to the hideous head, plunged it into one huge, glaring eye.

With a squawk of pain the koroo backed out of the cave, shaking its head and clawing at the shaft of the weapon in an effort to dislodge it. The barbs held, but the shaft was snapped off like matchwood. Blinded in one eye, the man-eater again hurled itself into the hole. Once more Jerry ran forward, and this time threw a javelin with all his strength into the other eye.

Again the giant bird backed out, shaking its head and clawing at the shaft. Then it lost its balance and rolled end over end down the steep hillside, loosening a small avalanche of stones and gravel. About halfway down it brought up against a huge boulder with a crash, and lay still.

Drawing his sword, Jerry half slid, half ran, down the hillside to where the koroo lay. He pricked it with the point, but it did not respond. Sheathing the larger weapon, he took out his dagger, and, after laying back a section of the leathery skin on the breast, cut out a large slab of meat. With this he returned to where Junia waited in the cave mouth.

“At last we have food,” he said, depositing the meat on a flat boulder.

“I have never heard of anyone eating koroo,” she said.

“Nor I,” replied Jerry, “but I’m hungry enough to eat crushed rock.”

Swiftly he gathered a pile of dry brush and dead leaves, and powdering a small quantity of the latter, lighted them by focusing the rays of the setting sun on them with his crystal disk. Soon he had an efficient cooking fire crackling, and when it had burned down to a bed of glowing coals, grilled several slices of the meat.

Politely he passed the first slice to Junia. She attempted to bite off a piece, but was unable to so much as dent it with her teeth. Jerry tried another with similar results. It tasted like a slab of sole leather flavored with fish oil, and was neither palatable nor chewable.

“There seems to be an excellent reason why you never heard of anyone eating koroo,” he told Junia.

“Apparently,” she replied. “Yet the flesh-flies seem to enjoy it.”

She nodded in the direction of the carcass, and Jerry, following her gaze, saw

that virtually nothing remained but the picked skeleton. A half dozen huge insects still walked about it, as if looking for stray morsels.

“They are welcome to my share,” he said. “After all, I believe I should prefer to tackle crushed rock. But if we may not eat, we can at least sleep. The sun is low, and we had best make our preparations for the night.”

When Jerry awoke in the morning his first thought was of Junia. How little and helpless she looked, sleeping there wrapped in her blue curtain! A fiercely protective feeling surged up in him as he turned to face this strange and hostile world.

Cautiously he removed a stone or two of the barrier he had erected the night before, and peered out. But there were no enemies in sight, so he soon had the opening cleared out.

The sound of his labors awakened Junia, and she quickly joined him. Together they went down to the stream to drink and wash.

“Shall we hunt upstream or down?” Jerry inquired. “I think we would do well to keep near the water.”

“Down,” Junia voted. “We would be going in the general direction of Raliad.”

Their hopes rose as they rounded a bend in the little stream, for it emptied into a large river. In the middle of the river was a very sizable island, and Jerry scanned the shore attentively.

“Junia, does that look to you like a boat?”

“I believe it is.”

“That means human beings, and food. I’ll swim across and find out.”

“Don’t leave me behind!” she pleaded; she followed him into the water, leaving the curtain robe behind.

They struck out firmly for the island, breasting the slight current, and landed near the object they had spied from the other shore. It proved indeed to be a boat, wide, flat and wooden. In it lay two wooden paddles, a net, and a multi-pronged fishing spear. And there was the remnant of a narrow path leading up from the shore, where the ground was so packed by footsteps that the weeds which had grown over it were stunted.

“Maybe the people who left this boat here also left an empty dwelling we can use,” said Jerry. “Shall we investigate?”

“By all means,” Junia replied. “It will be bitterly cold after sunset, and neither of us is equipped for it. If there is a dwelling of some sort, we can at least build a fire and keep warm.”

They were suddenly startled by a terrific roar, followed by a crashing in the underbrush. Then a huge black dalf burst into view, and charged at them with bared



fangs.

Stepping in front of Junia, Jerry whipped out his sword and awaited the beast. But when it came quite near him, it stopped suddenly, sniffing in his direction and growling softly. Then he noticed that it had a tarnished, gold-plated collar around its neck, on which was the inscription:

Neem, the dalf of Thaine

Evidently, thought Jerry, this beast was half minded to be friendly.

“Quiet, Neem,” he said.

The great beast pricked up its ears and ceased growling.

“Come here, Neem,” Jerry went on, lowering his sword and holding out his hand.

The dalf came forward slowly, evidently still suspicious. Then Junia spoke to him, at the same time stepping from behind Jerry. As soon as he saw her, Neem gave violent manifestations of an exuberance of joy. Soon she was rumpling his head, while Neem stood, leaning lightly against her, with his eyes half-closed, the picture of contentment.

“I must resemble his former mistress,” said Junia. Then she went on musingly: “I wonder who this Thaine could have been.”

“Perhaps we can solve the riddle if we find the house of Thaine,” said Jerry. “The sun is due to set in a very short time. Let us start searching.”

He led the way up the path, with Junia and the dalf following closely behind. But presently, when he emerged in an open glade in the center of the wood, the trail disappeared entirely. And a careful look around disclosed no sign of a house.

## CHAPTER XXI

As Jerry and Junia stood in the little sunlit glade, Neem, the great black dalf, stood between them, gazing up at, first, one and then the other. Apparently he wondered why they had stopped.

“No sign of a house here,” said Jerry.

At the word “house,” Neem pricked up his small ears. Then he seized a fold of the headcloak which Junia wore, and began tugging gently.

“Go ahead. Show us the house, Neem,” she said, encouragingly.

At this, the beast turned and trotted toward a vine-covered mound, his flat, spiked tail proudly elevated. He led them through a small opening in a leafy screen of tangled vines, and behind it they saw a door cut in the supposed mound, which turned out to be an irregularly shaped house covered with vines and creepers.

“The place is certainly well concealed,” said Jerry. “Thaine must have been hiding for some reason.”

Rearing up, the dalf pressed on the latch with one huge paw, then shouldered the door open and went in. Jerry and Junia followed him into a large room, comfortably furnished with swinging chairs and divans. There were three circular doorways cut in the walls, leading to the other rooms. And at one end was a large fireplace, around which were various utensils, and beside which a shelf held a number of dishes, cups, and the like, all of which were of gold, skillfully engraved and set with jewels. A shelf on the other side held a number of covered jars, such as the Martians use for the storage of foods.

“Evidently the lady was quite wealthy,” said Jerry. “Those dishes and jars look as if they came from a palace.”

“They did. On each is the mark of the royal house of Xancibar. It must be that Thaine had some connection with the house of Miradon Vil.”

“Or perhaps with a gang of burglars. In any case, we eat!”

And eat they did. It was some time before they troubled to examine the three other rooms. One was obviously the sleeping room of a man—a mighty huntsman, judging from the weapons and the collection of trophies.

The second room was used for storage. In it they found considerable quantities of dried and preserved provisions, as well as boxes of clothing, sleeping furs, fire powder, and other necessities.

The remaining room was unmistakably the boudoir of a girl, with its many chests of feminine apparel, and its dainty jeweled boxes of cosmetics. There were weapons here, also, but smaller and lighter than those in the sleeping room of the man.

Junia immediately took possession of this room, and Jerry retired to the room of the hunter. He bathed, then took the bottle of depilatory which he had long since substituted for his razor and went to the mirror to remove his beard. Putting down the depilatory, he returned to his belt pouch, and getting the bottle of clear liquid, filled a jeweled gold basin with water at the bath box, added a few drops of the chemical, and removed the dye from his skin and hair.

He got out the bottle of black hair dye, and with it re-dyed his hair and eyebrows and stained his beard jet black. Then he opened several chests until he found what he wanted—boots, cincture and head-cloak of brown, pliable leather like those worn by huntsmen. These he speedily donned.

His toilet completed, Jerry opened the door to the living room and saw, to his surprise, that Junia was there before him. She had kindled a fire in the grate, and had a pot of fragrant pulcho brewing. Like Jerry, she had chosen huntsman's leather in preference to the blue and gold raiment which was at her disposal. She was bending over close to the fire, preparing a pot of hunter's stew, a mixture of dried meats, berries and vegetables.

Hearing the sound of his footsteps behind her, Junia turned, took one look at him, and uttered a piercing scream. Instantly, Neem the dalf, who had been lying stretched near her, sprang up with a roar, and plunged straight for the Earthman.

Neem, after charging up to within three feet of Jerry, suddenly stopped, sniffing the air. Then he hung his head, the bristles on his back receded, and with a most crestfallen manner he returned to his place by the fire.

"Sorry to have startled you," said Jerry. "I thought I made sufficient noise coming into the room."

"It wasn't the noise, but the change in your appearance," Junia said. "I should never have known you."

"Then perhaps my plan will work," Jerry told her, continuing: "Junia, I want to take you back to your father, and when I do, I would like to remain and help him. Without my help, and that of my army, it is probable that he not only will never be able to retake Raliad, but that the Torturer may completely crush his army."

"Just what is your plan?"

"I would go as I am, disguised as a huntsman from Xancibar, who found you in this marsh. As a reward, your father should be glad to give me a post in his army. I am a soldier by profession—have made a study of the art of war. With my help, and that of my warriors, who I am sure I could persuade to reënforce the Vil's army, your father will be able to drive the Torturer from Raliad and retake his empire."

"I suppose you realize," she said, "that if my father should recognize you, or if

you should be betrayed by someone else, he would have you put to death without compunction. And even with the—the barrier that stands between us, I should not want that to happen.”

“I know,” he agreed. “And for a crime I did not commit.”

“That remains to be proved,” she reminded him. “And I have prayed every night that you may prove your innocence.”

“Bless your heart!” For a moment Jerry laid his large brown hand over her small one.

They sat there before the fire, toying with their pulcho cups and making their plans for the morrow.

“I found a map which shows our location,” said Junia. “We are in the midst of the Takkor Marsh, on the rim of which is situated Castle Takkor. The Raddek of Takkor is within the Empire of Xancibar, and subject to its ruler.”

“Then how far are we from Raliad?” asked Jerry.

“I have computed the distance at four thousand jahuds,” she replied.

“May I see the map?” he asked.

She rose and went into her room, presently reappearing with a roll of waterproof silk, which she spread on the taboret. “Here is our location in the center of the marsh,” she said, pointing to a tiny red dot on a small island.

He looked at the map more closely. “It appears that we are about two hundred jahuds from the Corvid Canal,” he said. “That will take us straight to Raliad. We are five hundred jahuds from Dukor, capital of Xancibar, and only fifty from Castle Takkor. Why not go to the castle and ask the Rad for the loan of a couple of gawrs?”

“I am surprised at you, Jerry Morgan,” she said. “Have you forgotten that Sarkis is in Raliad, and that Thoor has been named Vil?”

“We know not what treaties may have been concluded between Kalsivar and Xancibar during our absence. It may be that the Rad of Takkor would place us under arrest and send us to Raliad. Perhaps Thoor and Sarkis have offered a fabulous reward for our return.”

“I bow to your superior judgment,” he said, “and apologize for being so thick-witted. Naturally, if it would not be wise to go to Castle Takkor, it would be equally unwise to go to Dukor. But if we go straight to the Corvid Canal, disguised as a huntsman and his sister, it may be that we can take passage on one of the boats for Raliad.”

“Have you thought of the matter of passage money?”

“No,” Jerry admitted. “And I suppose the boatmen won’t take promises.”

Perhaps we'll have to steal a boat.”

“Fortunately not,” she replied. “I found a well-filled purse in the bottom of a chest in Thaine’s sleeping room.” She put a small, gold-embroidered silk bag on the taboret, and opening it, disclosed a considerable sum of gold and platinum pieces stamped with the mark of the Vil of Xancibar.

“Take the purse,” she went on, “and if we succeed in reaching my father I will learn the whereabouts of this Thaine, and reimburse her.”

Jerry pushed the purse back to her. “You take charge of it,” he said. “And now, how about what I asked you? Will you permit me to assist your father in my character as a huntsman?”

“I’ll sleep on that,” she told him, rising and yawning prettily. “Good night.”

## CHAPTER XXII

The Earthman arose early, and went down to the bank of the stream to prepare the wooden boat for their journey across the marsh.

The fragrant aroma of boiling pulcho greeted him as he opened the door, and Junia cheerily called him to breakfast. This consisted of several kinds of dried fruits, which she had stewed, and the inevitable pulcho.

Their breakfast over, they carefully selected the provisions and supplies which they would take with them, with a view to keeping their packs as light as possible, for they would have to walk across the desert a distance of about seventy miles before reaching the Corvid Canal. Then it might be necessary to walk ten or fifteen miles farther before reaching a boat station.

When they had loaded and strapped on their packs, with a rolled sleeping fur attached to each, Jerry went into the huntsman's sleeping room and got his weapons. After replenishing his supply of javelins from a large sheaf on the wall, and pouching a half dozen bottles of fire powder, he was ready.

Neem accompanied them down to the boat, and when they were ready to push off, Jerry called to him. But instead of getting in with them, he took the tie-rope in his mouth, and plunging into the water with it, pulled them out into the middle of the stream, then stopped, looking back at them.

"Why, I believe the beast wants to tow us!" exclaimed Jerry.

"Of course," Junia told him. "That is what all marsh-reared dalfs are trained to do. I'll guide him."

She sat down in the front of the boat, and unrolling the map, spread it over her dimpled knees.

"To the right, Neem," she said.

The dalf obediently turned and started away, dragging the boat after him with a speed which Jerry could never have equalled with a paddle.

A two hours' ride through the marsh brought them to a wide sandy beach strewn with boulders, behind which towered a row of rugged, frowning cliffs.

"The desert starts at the edge of those cliffs," said Junia, glancing at her map. "And a hundred and forty jahuds beyond lies the Corvid Canal."

They left the boat on the beach, and shouldering their packs, climbed up among the boulders to the base of the cliff. Here they consumed a laborious hour in scaling the precipice, then emerged into the desert.

After a brief rest, they started off across the ochre-yellow sands. Presently, a growl from Neem attracted Jerry's attention, and he looked in the direction toward

which the dalf was gazing. He saw that several rodals were coming swiftly toward them.

They were riderless, and had obviously run thus for some time. It was apparent that these were the survivors of a clash between desert tribesmen. The rodals came to a halt a short distance away from the travelers. Jerry turned to the girl.

“Suppose you wait here with Neem to guard you, and I’ll see if I can catch a couple of rodals. I’m accustomed to handling them.”

The nearest rodal had stopped at a patch of sand flowers about half a mile away, and Jerry walked slowly toward it. As he drew near, he saw that it was engaged in hunting the large insects and small rodents and reptiles which make up the diet of these desert steeds. It raised its plumed, snaky head at his approach, and stood staring at him. At this, Jerry made a sound used by the desert lorwocks to call their mounts, while he continued to saunter closer.

The rodal was puzzled. It looked around several times, as if half minded to sprint away. Again Jerry called. This, and his slow, careless approach seemed to reassure it. Almost before the creature was aware of it, the Earthman had his hand on the guiding rod, and had vaulted into the saddle.

Once on the rodal’s back, Jerry was in complete command. And the matter of capturing a second mount for Junia was easily accomplished. Soon they were speeding across the sands on their tireless desert steeds, with Neem loping along beside them.

At noon they halted in a small oasis for rest, food and pulcho. Then they pressed onward, and late that afternoon sighted the black stone wall which, topped by sentry towers at intervals of one jahud, or approximately a half mile, guarded the Corvid Canal.

They now took a course parallel to the wall, and just out of sight of the sentries, until they came to a tower above which was a small replica of a ship. This indicated that it was a station where boats stopped for passengers and freight. Here they abandoned their rodals and waited until sunset.

A short walk in the dim moonlight brought them to an arched opening in the wall. A sentry on the wall above the gate flashed his baridium torch in their faces and challenged them.

“Who are you, and what do you want?”

“I am Jandar the Hunter, with my sister Thaine, and her dalf. We have left our hut in the Takkor Marsh, to seek passage for Raliad.”

“Have you passage money?”

“We have saved a little from the sale of our furs,” replied Jerry, “and would see

the wonderful sights in the greatest city of all Mars.”

The sentry called to someone below him, and a moment later the two massive doors beneath the archway swung outward. A voice called: “Enter.”

They went in side by side, with Neem trailing at their heels, and traversed the dimly lighted passageway which led through the wall. This brought them up before a corpulent, red-faced officer in the uniform of Xancibar, at whose back stood two stalwart guards. The officer sat on a swinging chair before a taboret, with a baridium torch dangling above his head. A scroll of waterproof silk was unrolled before him. Beside it was an ink pot, and in his hand was a writing brush.

“Name?” he rasped at Jerry.

“Jandar the Hunter.”

“From?”

“Takkor Marsh.”

Dipping the brush into the pot of ink, he made the entry on the scroll. Then he turned to Junia with the same questions. She replied that she was Thaine the Huntress, also from the Takkor Marsh.

Having entered this, he glanced at the name plate on the dalf’s collar, and wrote it down on the scroll. This done, he said:

“It is not strange that there should be two dazzlingly beautiful Thaines in Xancibar, nor yet that there should be two black dalfs named Neem. But that there should ever have been two such Thaines, each with a black dalf named Neem, is passing strange. Also, I have heard it said that her highness, the Vil’s adopted daughter, lost her black dalf Neem in the Takkor Marsh some time ago. I wonder if this could be the same beast.”

“I see nothing strange in the fact that my sister was named after her highness, nor that she should name her black dalf after the beast which belonged to the Vil’s adopted daughter,” said Jerry. “And,” he continued, laying his hand on the hilt of his sword, “I resent the insinuation of theft which your words seem to imply. I wait to hear you retract them.”

“You take a strange tone for a mere hunter,” said the officer, looking the Earthman over with the practiced eye of a military man. And though the officer was not accounted a bad swordsman, the cool self-assurance of the young man who stood before him did not make him at all anxious to press matters further. He sat down heavily, and continued: “But after all, hunters have their rights, as does every citizen of Xancibar, however humble, under the just rule of our mighty Vil. And as his majesty’s representative, it is my duty to see that you get justice. I, Hazlit Jen, retract the insinuation, and wish you and your sister a pleasant trip to Raliad. Shortly after



the rising of the nearer moon a large passenger boat going your way will dock here. In the meantime, there is a small cabin boat tied at the wharf. If you care to pay the price, it might be that you could charter it for the trip.”

Jerry removed his hand from his hilt and saluted. “We are beholden to you for your kindness. Come, sister. Let us interview the boatman at the dock.”

At this, the bulky officer arose.

“Permit *me* to interview Padrath for you,” he said. “I know the fellow. If he thinks you are in a hurry, he will want to charge you double or perhaps treble fare.”

Intuition instantly told Jerry there was something amiss. “Don’t trouble yourself. If we find the boatman unreasonable, we will wait for the passenger ship.”

“Ah, but I insist,” wheezed the officer, crowding past them and waddling down to the dock, where a small narrow craft with a cabin of iridescent crystal was moored.

With a whispered warning to Junia to remain quiet and keep the dalf with her, Jerry softly stepped upon the deck, and tiptoeing to the cabin door, crouched there, listening. For the most part, the conversation was indistinguishable, but he did make out the words: “Junia, Crown Princess of Kalsivar,” “Thoor Vil,” and “a reward of ten thousand platinum tayzos.”

Noticing that one of the bulky shadows inside had gotten up, he quickly stepped back to the dock.

A moment later, the door opened and the red-faced officer squeezed through.

“All is settled,” he wheezed, “and at a great bargain for you. I, myself, am going with you and will pay half of the charge, which my friend Padrath has made very nominal for my sake. I had intended going tomorrow, but tonight will do as well. Bear with me but a moment, and I will be with you.”

He waddled off hastily in the direction of the tower.

“What did you hear? What does it all mean?” asked Junia.

“It means,” replied Jerry grimly, “that the fat, red-faced jen has recognized you, and has conspired with the boatman to take us to Raliad, that they may collect the reward of ten thousand platinum tayzos which Thoor Vil has offered for your return.”

“And knowing this, you mean to go with them?”

“We have no choice in the matter. To attempt an escape over the wall, patrolled as it is, would be extremely dangerous and would only put us back where we started if successful. This way the danger will be equally great, but at least we will have the satisfaction of knowing that we are drawing nearer to our destination. And some opportunity for escape may present itself before we reach Raliad.”

## CHAPTER XXIII

So far as physical comforts went, Jerry and Junia were pleasantly installed on a pile of cushions in the cabin of Padrath's swift little boat. The boatman himself sat in the front of the cabin on a saddle-like seat, manipulating the two driving levers which controlled both the speed and direction of the craft. The corpulent, red-faced officer occupied a cushion across from them, and Neem, the black dalf, snoozed at their feet.

Under any other circumstances it would have been pleasant to glide swiftly and smoothly over the placid waters of the canal, leaving a wake of ripples that sparkled in the mellow light of the farther moon.

Presently, some time after the nearer moon had risen, Jerry said: "You are weary, little sister. Close your eyes and sleep."

"And what of you, big brother?"

"I would watch this strange scenery," he told her.

"It is no more strange to you than to me, and not a bit less interesting."

Near midnight, Hazlit Jen brought a pan of charcoal, ignited it with a pinch of fire powder and a splash of water, and brewed pulcho. After passing a cup to the boatman and one to Junia, he filled one for Jerry and handed it to him. But the Earthman noticed that before he picked it up, he held the palm of his hand over it for a moment. Accordingly, he held the cup without tasting it, and then as the officer filled his own cup, said:

"A whim of mine, Hazlit Jen. Among huntsmen it is a custom for good friends to exchange cups." He pressed the cup into the officer's left hand and took the one he had poured for himself.

The man's face grew redder, and he flashed a suspicious look at Jerry.

"To a swift journey and a safe arrival," said the Earthman.

Having gone this far, Hazlit Jen was forced to raise the cup which Jerry had handed him. But as he did so, it slipped from his hand.

"Clumsy of me," he wheezed, catching up the cup and hurling it through the porthole as if his temper had got the better of him. Then he filled another cup.

Shortly thereafter, Hazlit Jen settled back among his cushions and was soon snoring lustily.

"We must get some sleep," Jerry whispered to Junia, "for a long journey lies ahead of us. You sleep first, and I will watch. Then, when you awaken, I will get some sleep."

When the Earthman awoke, the sun was at the zenith. And Junia was busily

engaged over the charcoal pan, preparing their noon meal. The appetizing odors made Jerry ravenous, and he did full justice to the meal, paying extravagant tribute to the skill of the cook.

They invited Padrath and Hazlit Jen to join them, but both declined, saying that they were not hungry, and would prepare their own food later.

After they had eaten, Jerry and Junia went out on deck where Neem was basking in the sunlight, and fed him the remainder of the anuba steaks. Then they sat down to enjoy the sunshine and the scenery that was slipping past them.

Far below them was the drainage canal, swarming with boats and fishermen. And across the thirteen mile chasm was the other irrigation canal which watered the opposite terraces, its larger craft plainly visible in the clear air.

At intervals of about two hundred jahuds, cross canals bridged the chasm on tremendous arched structures of metal and stone, connecting the two upper canals and making it possible for boats to cross directly from one to the other without using the slower systems of locks which occurred at equal distances, and connected both with the lower drainage canal.

The sun was low in the west when Padrath turned into one of these transverse channels and crossed to the irrigation canal on the opposite side.

As they turned into the other canal, the sun set, and night fell suddenly with its blaze of sparkling stars in a black velvet sky, and the pale farther moon preparing to follow the sun beneath the western horizon.

Lights flashed on in the teeming craft that swarmed on the canal, the houses that dotted the terraces, and the watch towers upon the wall. And Padrath unhooded the baridium torch that lighted the small cabin. The boatman then rose, and turning over the control levers to Hazlit Jen, sauntered out upon the deck, closing the door after him.

For a time he stood looking at the passing towers and stroking his bushy beard. Then he said: "We should make the border of Kalsivar before the farther moon sets. I suppose you two have passports."

"Why, no, we haven't," replied Jerry. "I didn't know they would be required."

"They are. But a few platinum pieces will serve as well. I know an officer."

"How much will it cost?" asked Jerry.

"Five tayzos should be enough."

"My sister carries our money," said Jerry. Then he turned to Junia. "Pay the boatman five tay . . ." he began. But at that instant something descended upon his head with terrific force, felling him to the deck. Fortunately for him, he had coiled the leather lasso inside his headcloak to conceal it, and this saved him a crushed skull.

Almost as soon as the blow fell, there was a low growl from Neem. Then the big dalf, with a quickness that was surprising in a creature of such great bulk, leaped straight over the fallen Earthman. There was a muffled shriek, and a crunch of shattered bone. Then Padrath fell to the deck with the dalf on top of him, his head crushed like an eggshell.

Jerry sprang dizzily to his feet, and grasping Neem by the collar, pulled him off his fallen assailant. A single glance told him that the boatman was beyond all human aid.

Feeling sure that Hazlit Jen, who had tried a more subtle method of assassination only a few hours before, was in on the plot, Jerry tiptoed to the cabin door and softly opened it. The officer sat at the controls, looking straight out through the front windows and piloting the craft through the canal traffic with undiminished speed.

Jerry quietly closed the door. Then he returned to where the corpse lay, and tearing off a piece of the headcloak, heaved it into the water. With the fabric he mopped up the blood, then dropped it overboard.

He turned to Junia.

"I am going into the cabin to try to learn the plans of Hazlit Jen," he said. "First give me five tayzos. I will leave the door open. If you see me raise my hand to my head, rush into the cabin, saying that Padrath has snatched your purse with a thousand tayzos in it, and leaped overboard."

"But what are you going to do? He may kill you."

"Have no fear, and trust me," said Jerry, pressing her hand as she passed him the money. "Is all clear?"

"Yes."

Jerry went to the cabin door, and opened it noisily. Then he walked in, and toward the front.

"I dislike to trouble an officer with what must seem a most trivial matter," Jerry began, "yet to a poor hunter a matter of five tayzos is of considerable importance. To me it represents many dangerous hunts, and many trips to the City of Takkor, where the grasping fur merchants pay us less than a tenth of the prices they receive from the tanners in Dukor. I hope that you understand."

"I understand fully, my poor fellow," said Hazlit Jen. "Go on."

"I have not forgotten that you warned me against the cupidity of our boatman," continued the Earthman. "Just a moment ago he approached me and asked if we had passports. Since we had none, he said he would have to have five tayzos with which to bribe the officials at the border in order that we might pass into Kalsivar. He claimed he was well acquainted with one of the officers, and could arrange

everything for us.”

“The amount he mentioned was correct. But if he told you he could arrange things with the officials, he lied. Only I can do that. And it is to me that you must pay the money.”

“Indeed I am glad I consulted you in this matter,” Jerry told him, handing over the five platinum pellets with a look of relief.

The officer dropped the money into his belt pouch. “Leave everything to me, and you will be safe and sound in Raliad before sunup.”

Jerry raised his hand, as if to adjust his headcloak. This movement was followed by a most convincing scream from Junia. Then she rushed into the cabin.

“What happened? What’s wrong?” asked Hazlit Jen, paling.

“The boatman!” she panted. “He snatched my purse and leaped overboard. Our life savings—our thousand tazyos—are gone with him.”

Jerry sprang to his feet, simulating anger, but the anger of the red-faced officer was not simulated. Moving both levers back to neutral, he turned and asked: “Where is the scoundrel?”

“He must be on shore, and well away with the loot by this time,” said Junia.

Hazlit Jen plunged across the cabin, through the door, and out upon the deck. Jerking his baridium torch from his belt, he flashed it over the placid waters.

“Gone!” he wheezed angrily. “Gone with a thousand platinum tazyos! Oh, the blackguard!”

“After all,” said Jerry dryly, “there are more platinum pieces where those came from. The fool has only cheated himself.”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“Since the low-born villain has decamped, there is no reason why two officers and gentlemen should not be perfectly frank with each other,” said Jerry in a confidential tone. “Let us drop all pretense. I realized that you had recognized her highness, from the start. What you have evidently not realized is that I am in the employ of His Majesty, Thoor Vil. Of course she doesn’t know that. And I thought it best not to tell her until we arrive. She might offer absurd objections, or attempt to escape.”

“Quite right,” said Hazlit. “But what of the reward?”

“I’ll split it with you,” Jerry told him. “I had intended dividing with you and the boatman. But since he took the purse, there remain larger portions for both of us. It is he who is the greatest loser.”

“Why, so he is,” said the officer. He was still holding his baridium torch, unhooded, and the rays were shining on the deck. For a moment, the little pig-like

eyes paused and widened at sight of a small, red splotch.

Jerry saw it too, and quickly looked up to see if the jen had noticed it. But the officer looked away unconcernedly.

“Let the fool boatman go with his ill-gotten gains,” he said. “We will have ten thousand tazyos to divide between us.”

He hooded his baridium torch, and replacing it in his belt, started toward the cabin.

During this conversation, the boat had been drifting slowly forward under its own momentum, the driving mechanism having been set at neutral.

“We are almost at the Kalsivar border,” said Hazlit Jen, resuming his seat between the two control levers. “You two had best remain in the cabin. I will dock the boat and attend to interviewing the officers, alone.”

He pushed both levers forward a little way. A cunning look came into his eyes as he smoothly guided the boat up to the international dock. He drew the levers back to neutral, and stood up.

“Await me here,” he said, “and leave everything to me. I won’t be long.”

## CHAPTER XXIV

Jerry kept his place among the cushions in the cabin when Hazlit Jen went out to moor the boat. But he had no intention of leaving the officer unwatched.

The Earthman watched through a porthole while Hazlit Jen tied the boat to the dock and walked to the tower doorway. As soon as the officer entered, Jerry strolled unconcernedly out on the deck and across the dock after him. Guards were stationed at regular intervals along the dock, as well as upon the black wall, and in the open windows of the tower. And there were four swift patrol boats of Kalsivar anchored at equidistant points across the canal, facing four similar boats belonging to Xancibar.

Instead of entering the tower doorway, Jerry paused just outside it, and a little to one side. Hazlit Jen, with his back toward him, was standing before the commander of the border guards, who sat on a swinging chair with writing materials on a taboret before him.

“The hunter murdered the boatman,” Hazlit Jen was saying, “and threw his body into the canal. Then he told me his victim had robbed his sister and leaped overboard. I will take the girl on to Raliad, for she is innocent, but I should like to have you hold this assassin here until I come back. Then I will return him to Dukor in chains, to stand trial for murder.”

“I don’t know why you wish to leave him with me, instead of the Xancibar officer,” said the commander, “but since you have paid me five tayzos, I can see no objection to holding the assassin for you.” He turned to a soldier who stood behind him. “Take six men and arrest the hunter on the small boat at the dock,” he ordered.

Jerry waited to hear no more. Springing across the dock, he whipped out his sword, slashed the tierope, and leaped aboard the boat. Then he plunged into the cabin, seized the two control levers, and pushed them forward as far as they would go. The boat tore away from the dock with a rush, just as the two nearest guards came running up.

Jerry kept his eyes ahead and his hands on the control levers, while Junia watched from the rear deck.

“The patrol boat is drawing up to the dock,” she said, “and Hazlit Jen is getting aboard. Now they are starting after us.”

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It looked as though their capture would be only a matter of minutes, when Jerry, who had noticed the farther moon just ready to settle below the western horizon, suddenly thought of a plan. Zigzagging through the traffic toward the outer bank, he

presently reached a position only a few feet from shore. By this time the patrol boat was but two hundred feet behind them, its prow lined with warriors ready to leap upon their afterdeck.

Presently the moon dipped below the horizon. Instantly Jerry hooded the baridium torch that lighted the cabin, plunging the boat into darkness. Then he set the levers so the craft would turn about in a narrow circle. Grasping Junia's hand, he hurried her out onto the deck.

The dark bulk of the shore loomed beside them, and the boat began curving away from it. Gathering the girl in his arms, Jerry jumped, his Earth-trained muscles easily carrying him beyond the water's edge. Swiftly he ran up the bank in the darkness. And a moment later, he knew that part of his plan had worked out, for there was a terrific crash, and the shouts of men struggling in the water, as the small boat, turning in a circle, rammed the large craft amidships.

There were stairways for the use of defending warriors at regular intervals along the inner side of the wall, and Jerry presently groped his way in the dark to one of these. Climbing it without noise, he saw a guard approaching, outlined against the sky. At this moment, Jerry, who had completely forgotten Neem the dalf, felt a wet muzzle pressed against his arm.

"Get him, Neem," he whispered.

While Jerry and Junia crouched in the shadow, the great shaggy beast crept over the edge of the wall. The guard saw him and raised his javelin. But ere he could draw it back for a thrust, the furry body shot through the air, the huge jaws closed on his head with a single crunch, and the sentinel expired without a sound.

Jerry caught up Junia once more and ran to the edge of the wall. Uncoiling the rope beneath his headcloak, he passed it around her slender waist and let her over the edge. The lasso did not grow slack until most of its length had been paid out, so he knew there was a drop of about thirty feet beneath him.

"Release the rope," he called down to Junia softly.

She instantly complied, and fastening it around Neem, he pushed the beast over the edge, snubbing the lasso on the parapet in order to hold the great weight of the dalf.

As soon as the beast had alighted, Jerry let himself down as far as he could by hanging from both hands, then dropped, alighting in the soft sand without injury.

Recovering the rope, he caught up Junia and hurried away.

For some time the darkness favored them. Then the bright nearer moon suddenly popped above the western horizon, almost at the point where the farther moon had set, flooding the desert with light. By this time they were more than a mile



from the wall, and Jerry found that by keeping to the hollows behind the sand dunes, they could travel without danger of being seen by the enemy.

The bright nearer moon was high in the heavens when a black shadow suddenly swept across its face and fell upon the fugitives. It was followed by another and another, and Jerry, looking up, saw that a party of a hundred gawr riders was passing high overhead.

Junia, who had also been watching the fliers, clutched his arm. "They've seen us! What shall we do?"

"I'm afraid there is nothing we can do," he replied. "It is too late to hide, we can't outrun them, and it would be hopeless to try to fight a hundred warriors."

The sound of flapping leathery wings grew louder as the flying warriors spiraled lower, and in a few moments they had landed in a circle completely surrounding the fugitives.

Stationing himself in front of Junia, Neem bristled up, and ominous rumblings issued from his cavernous throat.

Then suddenly the leader of the warriors flung himself down from his steed. He was short and bow-legged, with long ape-like arms and tremendously broad shoulders. Instead of a javelin, he carried a heavy, long-handled mace.

"Koha!" Jerry exclaimed.

"I hoped it would be you, master," the black dwarf cried, saluting. He turned to the others, whirling his mace aloft. "Ho, warriors! It is the Commoner!"

At this a cheer broke from the throats of the entire company.

"We have been searching for you day and night, since your disappearance, master," continued Koha.

"The lady with me is Her Imperial Highness of Kalsivar," said Jerry. "You will salute her, and provide a gawr for each of us."

Instantly the entire company sprang from their saddles, rendering the imperial salute to Junia and proffering their mounts. Jerry selected one for the princess and another for himself.

Mounted on their swift bird-beasts, it took them less than a half hour to reach Jerry's camp, where he and the princess received a tremendous ovation. Here, after providing Junia with a portable hut, and recommending that she get some sleep, the Earthman called his officers together.

"It is highly probable," he said, "that there will be desperate fighting for all of us in a few days. And strange as it may appear to you, we will probably be fighting as allies of Numin Vil. As you all know, the Torturer is in Raliad, and has put the dark-skinned prince on the throne for his puppet. By joining forces with Numin Vil, we

will be assisting him in combating a mutual enemy, and if we win, there will be suitable rewards for all. Are there any questions or objections?"

No one spoke.

"There being no objections," Jerry continued, "you will send out riders at once to summon the tribesmen, and the other units of our army that are in hiding. Let the Atabah Marsh be the rendezvous, and be ready for marching orders by tomorrow. I go now to inspect the work of our armorers and smiths."

Rising, he strode through the circle of officers, followed by Yewd and Koha, and crossing the sandy, boulder-strewn beach to the base of the cliff, entered a dark doorway.

Unhooding his baridium torch, he followed a winding passageway deep into the cliff. He emerged in a tremendous natural cave, where a night shift of two thousand men was at work, forging and welding small octagonal metal turrets, each large enough to hold one man. The turrets were fitted with thick crystal panels, each of which could be opened or closed by a lever in the hands of the occupant.

"How many are ready?" Jerry asked.

"Eight hundred are finished," Koha replied. "And there will be two hundred more by morning."

"Good! And now let us see what the workmen in the next cave have accomplished."

As they passed through the huge workshop, Jerry paused from time to time to inspect a turret or say a few words to a workman. A second passageway led them into another tremendous cave, where five thousand workers, men and women, were busy. The men were molding hollow metal shells of cast iron. The women were filling them with measured quantities of fire powder, and inserting small, stoppered globes of water. Some of these were fitted with percussion plungers which would break the globes on contact, and others with tiny clockwork mechanisms that would jerk the stoppers from the glass globes in from one to ten seconds, depending upon how they were set.

"You made the tests as I ordered?" Jerry asked, turning to Yewd.

"All of them," replied the giant. "The large globes, when dropped, excavate holes in the ground that will contain a hundred mounted men. The smaller ones make craters proportionate to their size."

"How many are finished?" Jerry asked.

"A hundred thousand of the small, and ten thousand of the large."

"You have done splendidly, all of you," said Jerry. "Keep it up, and if nothing happens to prevent, I will return tomorrow. I go, now, to return the princess to her

father, and to perfect our alliance with him.”

Yewd said: “Deza grant that you may find Raliad a safer place this time than you ever have before.”

## CHAPTER XXV

As he drew near his own camp, some hours later, Jerry saw that the preparations for war which he had ordered were well under way. Already the city of portable huts had grown to thrice its former size, and his forces were still being swelled by large companies of rodal cavalry, and by thousands of flying warriors. The lakes were black with swimming gawrs, and the entire end of the marsh had been turned into a vast community of fur-covered dwellings.

Challenged by a strange flying guard, Jerry gave the password, "On to Raliad," and was permitted to alight in the square before his hut. Here the guards and officers recognized his disguise, and rushed up to greet him. Among them was Yewd.

"You are back sooner than we expected you, my Viljen," said the giant.

"Find Koha," Jerry replied, "and bring him to me. I would hold council with you two."

Two guards parted the silver curtains that veiled the doorway of the black hut, and Jerry went in. Since the need for his disguise was at an end, he removed it, and exchanged his huntsman's garments for a commoner's black and silver. A slave brought pulcho, set it on a taboret at his elbow, and withdrew. And a moment later Yewd strode in with Koha waddling behind him.

"What news, master?" asked the dwarf. "Do we join the Vil's army today?"

"Not today, or ever," replied Jerry dejectedly, pushing the pulcho flask toward his two sturdy henchmen. "I have failed in my mission—failed miserably and completely. The Vil would have none of me as an officer. He has made an alliance with Manith Zovil, marital as well as martial. And to top it all, my disguise was penetrated by one of his courtiers, so that I barely escaped with my life—he still deeming me the murderer of his son."

"Why, then, that leaves us free to harass the Torturer in our own way," said Yewd, drinking deeply. "And with the new weapons we should be able to more than hold our own."

"You forget that the Torturer and his puppet sit in Raliad," said Jerry. "He is no longer an outlaw, but the power behind the throne. Numin Vil, if he does not retake his capital, will himself be the outlaw. And even with the help of Manith Zovil, I do not believe he can do it. With our assistance it might be done, but he would renounce his kingdom forever rather than accept my aid."

"If we could only find the man who slew Shiev Zovil," said Koha, "the rest should be easy."

"Ah, but the irony of fate prevents even that!" exclaimed Jerry.

“Then what are we to do?”

“Do? Why, I will found a city of outlaws, here on this spot, that will defy all the armies of Mars. So long as Thoor remains Vil of Kalsivar with the Torturer pulling the strings, we shall be a thorn in their sides. We will . . .”

He was interrupted by a guard, who drew back a silver curtain and said: “Algo the spy is here with an important message.”

“Admit him,” said Jerry.

The spy, resplendent in his uniform of the imperial guards, hurried in.

“What news, Algo?” Jerry asked.

“The princess has been abducted.”

“What!” Jerry sprang to his feet. “When? By whom?”

“Only a short time ago. And by agents of the Torturer.”

“Impossible! Wasn’t Neem the black dalf with her? And was she not surrounded by the Vil’s army?”

“Neither,” Algo replied. “She was circling above the camp on the swift gawr you gave her, accompanied by two guards. Suddenly four brown warriors plunged down from high above them. Three slew the guards with their javelins. The fourth dropped a noose around the neck of her highness’s gawr, so that it was forced to follow his bird-beast or strangle. Then he flew off in the direction of Raliad, followed by his three companions. I managed to bring you this message by pretending to follow the abductors.”

“Back to your post, then, Algo,” said Jerry. “And from now on you rank a jendus for bringing this news.”

The spy saluted smartly and departed.

The Earthman whirled on Koha.

“Have the saddles been prepared with the chains and hooks, as I ordered?”

“They have, master; four thousand of them.”

“Good. See that the gawrs are saddled, and their riders ready. And have two thousand more flying warriors prepared to join them.”

As Koha waddled away, Yewd asked: “What are you going to do?”

“First I will lead a raid upon the canal excavating crew,” he said. “Then our watchword shall become our war cry: ‘On to Raliad!’”

## CHAPTER XXVI

Seated in his black hut, Jerry summoned his officers and called for a scroll, brush and ink. Then he wrote the following note:

### TO SARKIS THE TORTURER, THOOR THE FALSE VIL, AND THE PEOPLE OF RALIAD:

Today, when the sun reaches the zenith, my army will enter Raliad through the Gate of Victory, march down the Avenue of Triumph, and take over the Imperial Palace. All citizens are warned of the danger of congregating at any of these places at that hour.

THE COMMONER.

“Cause five hundred copies of this notice to be made,” he told his jendus of fliers, “and see that they are dropped along the Avenue of Triumph and upon the roof of the Imperial Palace, at once.”

“I hear and obey, my Viljen,” replied the officer, saluting.

Jerry turned to his jendus of cavalry. “Mobilize all riders at once, and start for Raliad. By hurrying, you will be able to meet the flying contingent in front of the Gate of Victory, shortly before noon. See that the riders who carry grenades are in the front ranks.”

“To hear is to obey, O Viljen,” the officer answered.

Having given detailed instructions to his other officers, Jerry went out on a brief tour of inspection. The turrets which had been manufactured in the cave were being rolled out into the sunlight and stacked. Fire-powder grenades were being issued to both flying warriors and members of the first contingent of rodal cavalry. The heavier bombs were passed out to a picked group of fliers, who were also given a few small grenades.

His inspection completed, Jerry mounted his gawr, took his place at the head of the raiding party, and set off for the canal work-camp. An hour’s flight brought them directly above their objective.

As soon as the party of raiders was sighted a general alarm was sounded. The digging machines stopped work and their drivers were ordered off of them and into the work-camp, where they were surrounded by the guards, for it was believed that this was a slave raid. It suited Jerry’s purpose to let them think so. And so he continued to circle until all of the slaves had been herded into the compound with their guards massed around them.

Then he swooped down, and with a thousand riders armed with grenades, formed a line between the camp and the abandoned machines. Another thousand riders dismounted behind them, and each ran to a machine. Meanwhile, the four thousand remaining riders maneuvered until four gawrs hovered above each machine. Then the riders each dropped two hooks suspended on heavy chains fifty feet in length. The men on the ground swiftly fastened the hooks to the sides of the digging machines.

As soon as the guards realized what the raiders were about, they charged the line of warriors which Jerry had posted on guard. But a few fire-powder grenades hurled among them wrought such havoc that they beat a hasty retreat.

Before they could rally, a thousand of the machines were dangling high above their heads, each carried by four gawrs. And in a moment more the rest of the raiders, led by Jerry, had taken to the air.

Straight back to the camp they flew. Here the machines were lowered to the sand, their supporting gawrs still hovering above them, and were swiftly fitted with the turrets which had been built to their exact dimensions to protect the drivers.

In less than a half hour every turret was in place with its shelves lined with grenades and an experienced driver in the saddle.

And now, at a command from the Earthman, the entire flying force took to the air. Jerry flew in the lead, flanked on either side by Yewd and Koha, and immediately followed by the contingent of fliers who carried the heavy bombs. Those who carried the converted digging machines were in the center, and were guarded on either side and at the rear by warriors armed with grenades. Behind these came the large metal flying machines carrying foot soldiers.

The sun was two-thirds of the way to the meridian when Jerry caught up with his cavalry, about two jahuds from the Gate of Victory. As he had anticipated, a heavy force of the Torturer's fliers circled above the gate. And the walls were lined with warriors, ready for the attack.

The Earthman sent his flying orderlies to carry his final commands to his various officers, then urged his bird-beast forward. Instantly, those who carried heavy bombs fell in behind him, forming an immense triangle in the sky. About five hundred feet above them, and leading them by approximately the same distance, flew a similar triangle of those who carried grenades.

At this, the flying warriors of the Torturer formed a single wedge, much larger than either of his, and came hurtling toward them. In accordance with their instructions, Jerry's men in the upper wedge did not throw their grenades until the foremost enemy was within javelin range. Then they began hurling them with deadly

accuracy. The fire-powder exploded with sharp detonations like those of cordite, and the havoc wrought among the enemy fliers was appalling.

There was, however, a drawback to this mode of warfare in the air. Some of the shell fragments did considerable damage in his own ranks. He was about to order his warriors to cease throwing grenades and use their javelins when the command was made unnecessary by the enemy warriors themselves, their swift charge was turned to an ignominious and disastrous rout.

A moment more and Jerry was passing above the Gate of Victory at a height of about two thousand feet. The force above him still retained its V formation, but the bombers now drew together in a long, straight line, with the Earthman at the head. As he had expected, the Torturer had virtually packed the Avenue of Triumph with his cavalry and foot-soldiers arranged in succession so he could hurl them in alternate waves at any enemy that might be able to pass the gate.

He flew on, his bombers strung out behind him at intervals of about five hundred feet, following the Avenue of Triumph straight to the palace.

In the meantime, the Torturer's flying force continued its disorderly retreat, until it reached the palace, where Sarkis himself was waiting. Jerry saw the glint of his jeweled golden mask and armor on the roof, and a moment later saw him take the air on the back of a gawr.

He instantly reformed his forces, but Jerry had attained his objective.

Unhooking a bomb from its rack in the front of his saddle, he dropped it to the packed street below, then awaited the result. It struck between two warriors. There was a terrific detonation, and the warriors, together with those around them, disappeared in a cloud of dust, smoke and debris.

The concussion was quickly followed by a series of similar explosions, which, in the space of a few seconds, traveled clear back to the Gate of Victory. And when the smoke and dust cleared away, no living thing, either man or beast, was left on the entire length of the avenue. There were only huge craters in the paving where the bombs had struck.

Leaving his bombers to hold their position above the Avenue of Triumph, Jerry now soared upward to lead the other contingent against the hosts of the Torturer. But this time he cautioned his warriors to fly above the foe.

There was a brisk, sharp engagement, and again the forces of Sarkis were broken up. But the main body was driven back to the palace roof, and with them was the Torturer himself. Jerry hurled a grenade at him, but he forgot to set the time mechanism; it struck the neck of Sarkis's mount, it bounded off and rolled harmlessly to the roof.



A moment later the Torturer dismounted and disappeared into the mouth of one of the tunnels which led to the lower levels, followed by several hundred of his officers and men. Others of his force found haven in other tunnel mouths. But at least half of those who alighted on the roof never lived to reach them.

Leaving the main body of his men to guard the room and tunnels, Jerry, accompanied by Yewd, Koha and a score of his best fighters, flew straight to the balcony of Junia. As his bird-beast came to rest on the balcony, he heard the scream of a girl in mortal terror.

Springing from the saddle, he sprinted through the open window just in time to see Junia carried through the door on the back of a hideous, masked figure, clothed in woven gold links. The door slammed shut, there was the sound of a bolt sliding into place, followed by the noise of retreating footsteps in the hallway.

Yewd and Koha came through the window, and the other warriors began crowding in after them. But Jerry ordered them all back. Then, standing just outside the window, he hurled a percussion grenade at the door, and dropped below the sill. There was a sharp explosion; when the Earthman raised his eyes above the sill he saw that a jagged hole had been blown in the door. Dashing forward, he plunged through that hole, followed by Yewd, Koha, and the other warriors.

In the meantime, back at the Gate of Victory, Jerry's officers were carrying out his orders. As soon as the last heavy bomb had exploded, clearing the avenue of the Torturer's warriors, a small squad of gawr riders flew low over the gate and adjacent walls, hurling grenades which swiftly wiped out the massed defenders.

Following them came the gawrs carrying digging machines at the ends of long chains. These were set down in the street, four abreast, and the hooks released.

Behind them, two huge flying machines discharged foot soldiers upon the walls and into the gate towers. These quickly drove out the remnants of the defenders, and taking charge of the control levers, swung the gates wide just as the sun reached the zenith. At this, Jerry's fierce desert tribesmen, mounted on their rodals, poured through. Half of them followed the converted digging machines in their march along the Avenue of Triumph to the palace.

Sarkis had stationed warriors in the windows and upon the roofs of the buildings on either side to hurl javelins down upon the army of the Commoner. But as fast as these showed themselves they were treated to grenades, hurled by the Earthman's fliers.

The other half of the rodal cavalry split in two parts, and accompanied by the large metal flying machines containing the foot soldiers, began a systematic circuit of the wall, killing or capturing the guards who did not flee, and installing the men of the

Commoner in their places.

Swiftly, the blood-red pennon of the Torturer was torn down from each captured gate tower. And in its place was hoisted the black standard of the Commoner, with its single silver star. At the points where the numerous canals entered the city, solid walls were built up from the terraces to a common level, and there were tremendous barred gates which could be dropped in the channels to block navigation.

All these had to be captured and invested, as well as the land gates and sentinel towers.

As the last armed rider passed through the Gate of Victory, the jen in charge ordered it closed. Then, chancing to look out of the tower window, he uttered an exclamation of surprise and turned to the warrior who stood at the control levers.

“Look, Tarjus!” he exclaimed. “A vast host approaches across the Plains of Lav! And the sky above it is black with gawrs! Who do you think that could be? Now who could that be?”

Tarjus looked out of the window for a moment, then cried out in dismay. “We are in for it now, Deza help us!” he exclaimed. “A force the size of that one can be none other than the combined armies of Numin Vil and Manith Zovill!”

## CHAPTER XXVII

When the first cross street was reached by the improvised tanks, there was a fierce charge of rodal cavalry from both sides against the advancing machines. The drivers of the machines hurled grenades into the foremost ranks of enemy cavalry, then made a swift countercharge.

The huge steel jaws which had been designed to bite through solid rock now snapped like living animals at the fighting men and their mounts. Warriors were bitten completely in two, and a single snap was sufficient to kill or maim a rodal. Around the edges of the melee the flying warriors of the Commoner continued to hurl their grenades, harmless to the men in the metal turrets.

The sanguinary engagement was soon ended, with the scattered remnants of the Torturer's forces dashing off down the side streets.

At the next cross street a charge of foot soldiers met the advancing forces. But these were even more easily scattered than the cavalry. After that there was no more opposition until the palace was reached. Here Sarkis had concentrated the bulk of his most seasoned fighting men.

The army of the Commoner did not attack at once. Instead, it split into two columns, which went to the right and left, circling the palace until it was completely surrounded. Now a thousand metal fighting machines faced the building from all sides.

When all was in readiness, the machines advanced first. Some of them charged up to doorways, others straight up to the wall. But no matter what was in front of them, they went to work to remove it, biting out and swallowing great chunks of the wall, and eating away the tremendous arches that framed the metal doors.

Swiftly, machines excavated tunnels through the base of the wall. And as rapidly, others tore away the door frames and arches. Presently one machine ripped out a huge metal door, and charged through into a closely packed mass of defenders. Behind it came Jerry's foot-soldiers, hurling grenades as they went. As soon as they were through the doorway, the rodal cavalry charged in after them and deployed to the right and left. At almost the same time other machines were breaking through the walls and tearing down the doors, to encounter similar resistance and employ like measures. And soon the greatest battle ever fought in all Kalsivar was raging within the huge palace itself.

In the meantime Jerry, followed by Yewd, Koha and a score of his warriors, met with a check as he plunged through the hole in the door of Junia's apartment in pursuit of her masked abductor. For Sarkis had posted a considerable body of

fighting men in the corridor, and these outnumbered the Earthman's little band at least five to one.

Jerry, wielding his sword, was in the front and center as the two forces clashed. At his side was the giant Yewd, using by preference in these close quarters, a short, thick-shafted spear. At Yewd's left, Koha the black dwarf swung his huge mace with great, smashing blows that snapped sword-blades, crushed skulls like eggshells, and bit through bone and sinew alike. Behind them the small squad of the Earthman's picked fighters used such weapons as best met the emergency or suited their fancy.

Fully half of their number were cut down before the Sarkis warriors realized that it was sure death to step in front of the spear of the white giant, the sword of the Commoner, or the mace of the black dwarf. But once this realization came to them, they fled more swiftly than they had come to the encounter a short time before.

Bleeding from half a dozen small wounds, and panting from his exertions, Jerry paused and leaned on his dripping sword, while one of his warriors applied jembal to his injuries. Yewd and Koha also had their wounds dressed. Then his eyes chanced to fall on one of the brown warriors who had been felled by the mace of Koha.

Apparently it had only struck him a glancing blow, for he was moaning and attempting to rise. "Fetch me that warrior," Jerry ordered.

Two of his men removed the fellow's weapons, picked him up, and laid him at the feet of the Earthman.

"Give him pulcho," said Jerry.

A soldier produced a flask and put it to the man's lips. He drank deeply and brightened perceptibly.

"Get up," the Earthman ordered.

He got to his feet, swaying unsteadily.

"Where has the Torturer gone?"

"I don't know."

"You lie!" grated Jerry. "Throw him on his back and open his mouth."

Swiftly, the warriors carried out his orders. Jerry took a small bottle of fire-powder from his belt pouch, and standing over the prisoner, leisurely removed the stopper.

"A few grains in the eyes might make you talk," he said. "I will try that first. If it fails, then the mouth."

Jerry let a single grain of the powder fall upon his perspiring cheek. It flared up, and the man screamed as it seared his skin.

"Stop! Wait! I'll tell you!" he shrieked.

“Ah, that is better,” Jerry told him. “I am more than just, for I am merciful. If you tell me the truth this time, you will be spared.”

“Before he went,” said the prisoner, “I heard the Lord Sarkis tell our jen to meet him in the central audience chamber.”

“Is that all he said?” asked Jerry.

“He said that in case the battle went against us, he had a hostage for the sake of whose safety the Commoner would grant us all our freedom.”

Jerry corked the fire-powder and replaced it in his belt pouch.

“To the central audience chamber,” he said, “and bring the prisoner with us, until we make sure he has told us the truth.”

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When they reached the main floor platform they heard the sudden deafening clamor of battle. Jerry went cautiously to the door to reconnoiter, and saw that his fighting machines had broken into the palace. Behind them, his foot-soldiers were hurling grenades into the massed defenders, creating fearful carnage among them. And a moment later his rodal cavalry charged in. From that time on, only cold steel was used.

In a moment the wave of battle had reached the door where the Earthman stood, as the forces of the Torturer fell back before the fierce onslaught of the desert tribesmen. Foot by foot, the forces of the Torturer were cut down or forced back, until Jerry’s men were at the very doors of the audience chamber, and the remnant of Sarkis’s army was inside it.

Suddenly the clarion notes of a trumpet sounded from the center of the vast room. In the military language of Mars, they were a request for a truce.

Looking up, Jerry saw the herald standing on the lower step of the central dais. But at the top stood the masked Torturer. He was supporting Junia with his left arm. And in his right hand gleamed a dagger.

Instantly the Earthman called for a herald, and when he came running up, ordered him to sound the “Truce granted.”

As the silver tones broke over that vast assemblage, the din of battle ceased as if by magic. Then the sepulchral tones of the Torturer floated across the room to Jerry, sitting his rodal in the doorway.

“Desperate situations call for desperate remedies. We do not ordinarily sacrifice women with the dagger, but the moment one armed enemy sets foot within this room, Junia Sovil dies.”

“My men will respect the truce so long as yours do,” said Jerry. “What do you want?”

“Freedom,” replied the Torturer. “You will immediately order that a gawr for me, and one for each of my men, be saddled, provisioned and made ready on the palace roof at once. And in earnest of your own good intentions, you will lay down your arms and join my other prisoner, to be kept as a hostage until we are ready to depart.”

“Release the princess now, and I pledge you my word that you and your warriors shall all go free and unharmed,” said Jerry.

“Do you take me for a fool?” the Torturer roared. “I am not so gullible as all that.”

“Very well,” said Jerry, “I will accept your terms. But if you attempt any tricks, you and those with you will never leave this palace alive.”

Vaulting down from his saddle, he removed his weapons and handed them, one by one, by Koha and Yewd. While he did so he rapidly issued instructions to them. Then, as he handed his dagger to the black dwarf, a courier came running up.

“What is it?” asked Jerry.

“Numin Vil and Manith Zovil are at the Gate of Victory with a vast army,” said the messenger. “They demand that we immediately throw the gates open to them, and say that failing in this, they will take the city by assault and slay all of us.”

“Tell them,” the Earthman replied, “that pressing business here at the palace prevents my meeting them and escorting them hither. Tell them I have weapons that would destroy their armies as easily as they did that of the Torturer. But say that I invite them to come here and meet me for a friendly conference, guaranteeing them safe conduct. Then, if they consent to come, bring them in my swiftest metal flier. But see that none of their flying warriors are permitted to pass above the walls.”

Jerry whispered a final, “Don’t forget the signal,” to Yewd and Koha. Then he turned and marched weaponless through the doorway.

The Torturer’s warriors opened their ranks to let him pass, and fearlessly he strode up to the dais.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

As Jerry walked up to the dais on which the Torturer stood with Junia, he saw that the princess was tightly bound, hand and foot.

Sarkis greeted him with a chuckle from the depths of his hideous mask.

“Now I have you both where I can kill you. I will die content.”

“What do you mean?” asked Jerry. “Do you think you could do that and get out of here alive?”

“Since this defeat, I have nothing left to live for,” said the Torturer. “I lured you here only for the purpose of revenge. First you shall see your beloved die; then you shall share her fate.”

He raised his dagger aloft, clutching the princess by her glossy black hair as she struggled in his grasp. At the same instant Jerry lifted his hand to his head—a signal his men would understand. Then he sprang straight for the top of the dais.

The Earthman’s remarkable jumping powers were something Sarkis had overlooked; the startled Torturer turned to defend himself. As Jerry alighted he gripped the dagger wrist of Sarkis with his left hand, and with his right dealt him such a buffet on the side of the head as must have made his ears ring inside the golden helmet.

The Torturer released the girl and focused all his attention on the Earthman. The two struggled for a moment on the narrow top of the dais, then lost their balance at the edge, and toppling, rolled over and over to the floor.

At the same instant pandemonium broke loose within that vast chamber. Jerry’s men opened hostilities by hurling grenades into the packed mass of their foes. Then they charged. At this, some of the Torturer’s men turned and ran toward the dais. But to their utter astonishment they saw that a square section of the floor, supported on four metal shafts, had risen in front of the throne. Through the opening squirmed a white giant, followed by a black dwarf.

And after them poured a steady stream of the Commoner’s fierce fighting men.

In a few seconds the dais was completely surrounded by a ring of Jerry’s soldiers, whose numbers were constantly augmented by those who poured through from beneath. And now, the pitiful remnant of the Torturer’s army threw down their arms and surrendered.

Not so the Torturer. He wrenched himself free from Jerry’s grasp and with his dagger aimed a blow at his heart. But the Earthman kicked the weapon from his hand and sprang back.

“Give me a sword,” he told Koha, “then cut the princess free and stand guard

over her. But see that no one molests the Torturer. He is mine alone to deal with.”

As the black dwarf pressed his sword into the Earthman’s hand, Sarkis drew his own weapon.

“Some days ago,” said Jerry, “you challenged me to a duel, but did not appear. Though I slew your substitute, I do not consider the affair settled. What is your opinion?”

“It will be settled when I have killed you,” grated Sarkis, lunging.

Jerry deflected the lunge with ease, then before his opponent could recover, raked him across the chest with his point, cutting a long gash in his garment of golden mesh and revealing an expanse of shining steel beneath.

“Ah, a breastplate!” said Jerry. “We must remove it.”

Again they engaged, and again Jerry slit his enemy’s golden covering, so that one corner hung down. A third slash, and Sarkis wore a golden apron which flopped about his legs as he moved.

But Jerry had only begun. Systematically, he began undressing his opponent with his point. At the fourth slash, the Torturer was plainly revealed as a brown-skinned man. With his golden disguise cut away from him, his torso was naked save for the breastplate. Then the Earthman cut the straps that held it, and it clattered to the floor.

At this Jerry heard a hearty laugh behind him, and turning for an instant, saw Manith Zovil, who had just come up with Numin Vil. The Vil was clutching the collar of a great black dalf, who was growling thunderously and seemed anxious to leap forward to the aid of the Earthman.

“Back, Neem,” said Jerry quickly.

Though the Torturer fought desperately, he was now badly hampered by his heavy golden garments, which he was compelled to hold up with one hand to keep them from slipping down around his legs and tripping him.

Suddenly Jerry avoided a lunge, and springing in, struck upward so that his pommel caught beneath the hooked nose of the hideous mask. It flew off revealing the features of Thoor Movil. Before his enemy could recover, Jerry turned and brought his blade down upon that of the brown prince with such force that the weapon was knocked from his grasp.

At this sudden revelation of the identity of the Torturer there were cries of amazement from the onlookers, and shouts of “Kill the false Vil! Slay the Torturer! Pierce his rotten heart!”

“Yield or die,” said Jerry, presenting his point to his enemy’s breast.

“I yield,” replied Thoor Movil.

“Take charge of the prisoner,” said Jerry, sheathing his sword. Two of his



warriors sprang forward to do his bidding, and he turned to salute his royal guests. Junia had joined her father, and the Vil stood with his arm around her slight figure, while she fondled the head of Neem, the dalf.

Manith Zovil smiled broadly as he acknowledged Jerry's salute.

"That was rare entertainment you just afforded us, my friend," he said. "I'm glad you invited us here to witness it."

"But I didn't," replied Jerry. "I hoped to have it over with by the time you arrived."

"Then Deza be thanked that you miscalculated. I wouldn't have missed it for a million tayzos."

Numin Vil was more brusque. "Now that you have seized my capital, what do you intend doing with it?"

"I believe you offered the hand of your daughter to the man who would recapture it for you," Jerry replied.

"That offer was made to my friend Manith Zovil, and not to the murderer of my son," thundered the Vil.

"One moment, majesty," interrupted Manith Zovil. "It seems that between us we have done my friend Jerry Morgan a grave injustice. He did not kill your son."

"Then who did?"

"I slew Shiev Zovil in self-defense," replied the Prince. "I met him in the corridor near Jerry Morgan's apartment, and he lunged at me without a word of warning, when my sword was sheathed. I leaped back, and only the fact that the point was stopped by my breastbone saved my life.

"Then I drew my own weapon, and we had it out."

The poker face of Numin Vil showed nothing of his feelings, but his rumbling voice grew suddenly tremulous. "I—I cannot understand why Shiev attacked you thus."

"I can explain that, also," replied Manith Zovil. "Thoor Movil poisoned his mind against me. He wished to marry Junia himself, and after putting you and the crown prince out of the way, to make himself Vil of Kalsivar. As you see, his plans underwent some slight changes through circumstances, but his central purpose has ever been the same."

"It seems," rumbled Numin Vil, turning and fixing the prisoner with his expressionless eyes, "that my nephew is responsible not only for the death of my son, but for all of our troubles and misunderstandings. Were he my prisoner . . ."

"He is your prisoner, majesty," interrupted Jerry. "I wish to turn him over to you, along with your capital and your empire, which I will tell you frankly that I do not

want. All I ask is that you legally free those of my followers who have been slaves, pardon those who have broken your laws, and permit us all to go in peace.”

“Then you have no ambition to rule Kalsivar?”

“None whatever.”

The Vil again regarded his treacherous nephew. “Thoor Movil,” he said, “I sentence you . . .”

At this moment there was an interruption. No one had paid any attention to the slight, brown-skinned girl attired in a gray slave habit, who had unobtrusively wormed her way through the crowd to a position behind Thoor Movil. Jerry’s first inkling of what was taking place was when he saw the glint of light on the blade of a dagger which she slipped into the prince’s right hand.

The feel of that weapon galvanized the desperate prince to sudden action. Before the two warriors who stood guard at either side of him had any idea what was taking place, he sprang forward, seized the Vil by his braided beard, and raised his dagger to plunge it into the monarch’s heart.

To all save Jerry this development was so unexpected, that they could only stand, gasping and helpless. But the Earthman had caught the glint of the dagger just in time. And so, when Thoor Movil leaped, Jerry was but a fraction of a second behind him. With a single, sweeping motion, his sword flashed from its scabbard and described a glittering arc. One moment the bystanders saw the brown prince standing with dagger raised for the death thrust; the next, they saw the upraised arm and sneering head leap upward and fly through the air, both severed by the same terrific blow.

Behind him Jerry heard a female voice screaming—cursing. He turned and saw Nisha Novil, wearing the gray of a slave girl, struggling in the grip of two of his warriors.

“What is this?” thundered Numin Vil. “Has my niece become a slave?”

“It was she who passed the dagger to Thoor Movil, majesty,” volunteered one of the men.

“Then she shall have the sentence I intended for her traitorous brother,” rumbled the monarch. “Nisha Novil, you are stripped of your royal rank, your wealth and lands. You have chosen to wear the habit of a slave girl as a disguise. Wear it now as your future apparel. And tomorrow you go on the auction block.”

He waved his hand, and the two warriors dragged her away, still kicking, cursing, biting and scratching.

“Deza help the man who buys her,” said Manith Zovil dryly.

The Vil turned to the Earthman.

“Jerry Morgan,” he said, “you have not only restored my daughter and my empire, but have saved my life. The rewards which I promised you on the Plains of Lav shall now be yours. A million tayzos and the Raddek of Dhoor.”

At this Jerry’s heart turned bitter within him. For a moment he was minded to hold the empire which lay within his grasp—to make Junia his own, despite the evident reluctance of the Vil to give his daughter to a commoner. But he remembered that the princess had agreed to marry Manith Zovil, and he did not want the empire; it was only Junia he wanted—Junia and his freedom.

“I care not for your riches nor your titles,” he said. “The free, adventurous life of your deserts and marshes suits me better than your crowded city existence. I would sooner sleep beneath the jeweled vault of heaven than in a palace with a golden roof set with the most precious gems; would rather watch the sun rise over the sand dunes or through the morning mists that hang over the Atabah Marsh, than over the most ornate building in your vast city. I want to go back to my wild tribesmen—to ride and hunt and live and . . .”

“And love?” asked Junia, coming quickly to his side and looking up at him with starry eyes, eloquent with a meaning which he could not mistake.

“And love!” he replied, taking her in his arms and possessing himself of her eager, upturned lips.

“Then take me with you, my Commoner,” she murmured.

He looked up at the Vil.

“On my world,” he said, “it is a custom for outlaws to say, ‘Your money or your life!’ You know that I hold all Kalsivar in the hollow of my hand. And I, the outlaw of Mars, now say to you, ‘Your empire or your daughter!’ It is up to you to choose.”

For a moment the Vil glared at him, speechless. Then the suspicion of a twinkle came to his usually expressionless eyes as he replied: “Since she, herself, has chosen you, take her, my boy, and may Deza bless you both.”

So Jerry Morgan, though he had renounced the throne of the greatest empire on all Mars, was very well content.

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## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Outlaws of Mars* by Otis Adelbert Kline]