

《The Warlord of Mars》 Chapter 15 - The New Ruler

The flier upon whose deck Dejah Thoris and I found ourselves after twelve long years of separation precision tanks leaked badly. Her engine would not start. We were helpless there in mid air above the arctic ice.

The craft had drifted across the chasm which held the corpses of Matai Shang, Thurid, and Phaidor, and opening the buoyancy escape valves I permitted her to come slowly to the ground, and as she touched, Dejah Thoris and I, hand in hand, turned back across the frozen waste toward the city of Kadabra.

Through the tunnel that had led me in pursuit of them we passed, walking slowly, for we had much to say. She told me of that last terrible moment months before when the door of her prison cell within the Temple opened between us. Of how Phaidor had sprung upon her with uplifted dagger, and of Thuvia's shriek as she had reared back like a fallen goddess.

It had been that cry that had rung in my ears all the long, weary months that I had been left in cruel doubt. I had not known that Thuvia had wrested the blade from the daughter of Matai Shang before it had touched her.

She told me, too, of the awful eternity of her imprisonment. Of the cruel hatred of Phaidor, and the tenderness of Thuvia when despair was the darkest those two red girls had clung to the same hope and belief--that John Carter would save them.

Presently we came to the chamber of Solan. I had been proceeding without thought of caution, for I was confident that my friends would be waiting for me. My friends were both in the hands of my friends by this time.

And so it was that I bolted into the chamber full into the midst of a dozen nobles of the court of Salensus Opar on their way to the outside world along the corridors we had just traversed.

At sight of us they halted in their tracks, and then an ugly smile overspread the features of their leader.

"The author of all our misfortunes!" he cried, pointing at me. "We shall have the satisfaction of a partial vengeance. Behind us here the dead and mutilated corpses of the Prince and Princess of Helium.

"When they find them," he went on, jerking his thumb upward toward the palace above, "they will realize that no man costs his enemies dear. Prepare to die, John Carter, but that your end may be the more bitter, know that I shall mete out a merciful death to your princess-- possibly she shall be preserved as a plaything for my nobles."

I stood close to the instrument-covered wall--Dejah Thoris at my side. She looked up at me wonderingly at the sight of us with drawn swords, for mine still hung within its scabbard at my side, and there was a smile upon my lips.

The yellow nobles, too, looked in surprise, and then as I made no move to draw they hesitated, fearing a blow. When they had come almost within sword's reach of me I raised my hand and laid it upon the polished metal of the wall. Still smiling grimly, I looked my enemies full in the face.

As one they came to a sudden stop, casting affrighted glances at me and at one another.

"Stop!" shrieked their leader. "You dream not what you do!"

"Right you are," I replied. "John Carter does not dream. He knows--knows that should one of you take arms, Princess of Helium, I pull this lever wide, and she and I shall die together; but we shall not die alone."

The nobles shrank back, whispering together for a few moments. At last their leader turned to me.

"Go your way, John Carter," he said, "and we shall go ours."

"Prisoners do not go their own way," I answered, "and you are prisoners--prisoners of the Prince of Helium."

Before they could make answer a door upon the opposite side of the apartment opened and a score of yellow nobles entered. For an instant the nobles looked relieved, and then as their eyes fell upon the leader of the new party the yellow Prince of Helium, and they knew that they could look for neither aid nor mercy at his hands.

"Well done, John Carter," he cried. "You turn their own mighty power against them. Fortunate for Okar that he was not their escape, for these be the greatest villains north of the ice-barrier, and this one"--pointing to the leader of the new party--

e himself Jeddak of Jeddaks in the place of the dead Salensus Oll. Then indeed would we have had a more villain who fell before your sword."

The Okarian nobles now submitted to arrest, since nothing but death faced them should they resist, and, u, we made our way to the great audience chamber that had been Salensus Oll's. Here was a vast concourse

Red men from Helium and Ptarth, yellow men of the north, rubbing elbows with the blacks of the First Friend Xodar to help in the search for me and my princess. There were savage, green warriors from the dead and a handful of white-skinned therns who had renounced their religion and sworn allegiance to Xodar.

There was Tardos Mors and Mors Kajak, and tall and mighty in his gorgeous warrior trappings, Carthorin Dejah Thoris as we entered the apartment, and though the lives and training of royal Martians tend not toward that they would suffocate her with their embraces.

And there were Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark, and Kantos Kan, my old-time friends, and leaping and tearful of his great love was dear old Woola-- frantic mad with happiness.

Long and loud was the cheering that burst forth at sight of us; deafening was the din of ringing metal as every Martian clime clashed their blades together on high in token of success and victory, but as I passed among the dead warriors, jedds and jeddaks, my heart still was heavy, for there were two faces missing that I would have given Thuvia Dihn and Thuvia of Ptarth were not to be found in the great chamber.

I made inquiries concerning them among men of every nation, and at last from one of the yellow prisoners I had been apprehended by an officer of the palace as they sought to reach the Pit of Plenty while I lay imprisoned.

I did not need to ask to know what had sent them thither-- the courageous jeddak and his loyal daughter. They were now in one of the many buried dungeons of the palace where they had been placed pending a decision as to their death.

A moment later searching parties were scouring the ancient pile in search of them, and my cup of happiness being escorted into the room by a cheering guard of honor.

Thuvia's first act was to rush to the side of Dejah Thoris, and I needed no better proof of the love these women showed me and sincerity with which they embraced.

Looking down upon that crowded chamber stood the silent and empty throne of Okar.

Of all the strange scenes it must have witnessed since that long-dead age that had first seen a Jeddak of Jeddaks, I could find none more fitting than that upon which it now looked down, and as I pondered the past and future of that land and its people I thought that I saw a brighter and more useful existence for them among the great family of friends from the south pole almost to their very doors.

Twenty-two years before I had been cast, naked and a stranger, into this strange and savage world. The planet was raised in continual strife and warring against the men of every other land and color. Today, by the might of the friends my sword had made for me, black man and white, red man and green rubbed shoulders in peace. The nations of Barsoom were not yet as one, but a great stride forward toward that goal had been taken, and now the yellow race into this solidarity of nations I should feel that I had rounded out a great lifework, and repaid the immense debt of gratitude I owed her for having given me my Dejah Thoris.

And as I thought, I saw but one way, and a single man who could insure the success of my hopes. As it had been then as I always act--without deliberation and without consultation.

Those who do not like my plans and my ways of promoting them have always their swords at their sides for disapproval; but now there seemed to be no dissenting voice, as, grasping Talu by the arm, I sprang to the throne of Salensus Oll's.

"Warriors of Barsoom," I cried, "Kadabra has fallen, and with her the hateful tyrant of the north; but the throne is now yours. The red men are ruled by red jeddaks, the green warriors of the ancient seas acknowledge none but a green ruler. The south pole take their law from black Xodar; nor would it be to the interests of either yellow or red man were there a ruler of Okar.

"There be but one warrior best fitted for the ancient and mighty title of Jeddak of Jeddaks of the North. It is yours, Talu, the rebel prince of Marentina!"

And then a great cry of rejoicing rose among the free men of Marentina and the Kadabran prisoners, for they would retain that which they had taken by force of arms, for such had been the way upon Barsoom, and the throne was now theirs by an alien Jeddak.

The victorious warriors who had followed Carthoris joined in the mad demonstration, and amidst the wild cheering, Dejah Thoris and I passed out into the gorgeous garden of the jeddaks that graces the inner co-

a.

At our heels walked Woola, and upon a carved seat of wondrous beauty beneath a bower of purple blooded us-- Thuvia of Ptarth and Carthoris of Helium.

The handsome head of the handsome youth was bent low above the beautiful face of his companion. I longed, and as I drew her close to me I whispered: "Why not?"

Indeed, why not? What matter ages in this world of perpetual youth?

We remained at Kadabra, the guests of Talu, until after his formal induction into office, and then, upon the ship so fortunate to preserve from destruction, we sailed south across the ice-barrier; but not before we had withstood the grim Guardian of the North under orders of the new Jeddak of Jeddaks.

"Henceforth," he said, as the work was completed, "the fleets of the red men and the black are free to cross as over their own lands.

"The Carrion Caves shall be cleansed, that the green men may find an easy way to the land of the yellow dragon; the apt shall be the sport of my nobles until no single specimen of that hideous creature roams the frozen north.

We bade our yellow friends farewell with real regret, as we set sail for Ptarth. There we remained, the guests; and I could see that Carthoris would have remained forever had he not been a Prince of Helium.

Above the mighty forests of Kaol we hovered until word from Kulan Tith brought us to his single landing place. For a night the vessels disembarked their crews. At the city of Kaol we visited, cementing the new ties that had bound Helium, and then one long-to-be-remembered day we sighted the tall, thin towers of the twin cities of Helium.

The people had long been preparing for our coming. The sky was gorgeous with gaily trimmed fliers. Everywhere spread with costly silks and tapestries.

Gold and jewels were scattered over roof and street and plaza, so that the two cities seemed ablaze with magnificent stones and burnished metal that reflected the brilliant sunlight, changing it into countless glorious hues.

At last, after twelve years, the royal family of Helium was reunited in their own mighty city, surrounded by the palace gates. Women and children and mighty warriors wept in gratitude for the fate that had restored their beloved vine princess whom the whole nation idolized. Nor did any of us who had been upon that expedition of indescribable adventures or plaudits.

That night a messenger came to me as I sat with Dejah Thoris and Carthoris upon the roof of my city palace. He caused a lovely garden to be made that we three might find seclusion and quiet happiness among ourselves, away from the busy life of court, to summon us to the Temple of Reward-- "where one is to be judged this night," the summons came.

I racked my brain to try and determine what important case there might be pending which could call the Jeddak of Helium on the eve of their return to Helium after years of absence; but when the jeddak summons no man delays.

As our flier touched the landing stage at the temple's top we saw countless other craft arriving and departing. A great multitude surged toward the great gates of the temple.

Slowly there came to me the recollection of the deferred doom that awaited me since that time I had been banished to Arras for the sin of returning from the Valley Dor and the Lost Sea of Korus.

Could it be possible that the strict sense of justice which dominates the men of Mars had caused them to condemn me out of my heresy? Could they ignore the fact that to me, and me alone, was due the rescue of Carthoris from the clutches of the Tardos Mors?

I could not believe it, and yet for what other purpose could I have been summoned to the Temple of Reward of Tardos Mors to his throne?

My first surprise as I entered the temple and approached the Throne of Righteousness was to note the messenger who came was Kulan Tith, Jeddak of Kaol, whom we had but just left within his own palace a few days since; there he came--how came he to Helium as soon as we?

There was Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark, and Xodar, Jeddak of the First Born; there was Talu, Jeddak of Helium; and among them I could have sworn was still in his ice-bound hothouse city beyond the northern barrier, and among them were the thirty-one, with enough lesser jeds and jeddaks to make up the thirty-one who must sit in judgment upon their fellow-men.

A right royal tribunal indeed, and such a one, I warrant, as never before sat together during all the history of Mars. As I entered, silence fell upon the great concourse of people that packed the auditorium. Then Tardos Mors spoke. "John Carter," he said in his deep, martial voice, "take your place upon the Pedestal of Truth, for you are the representative of the great tribunal of your fellow-men."

With level eye and high-held head I did as he bade, and as I glanced about that circle of faces that a moment ago had been my friends, I saw no single friendly glance--only stern, uncompromising

A clerk rose and from a great book read a long list of the more notable deeds that I had thought to my credit twenty-two years since first I had stepped the other sea bottom beside the incubator of the Tharks. With the clerk one within the circle of the Otz Mountains where the Holy Therns and the First Born had held sway.

It is the way upon Barsoom to recite a man's virtues with his sins when he is come to trial, and so I was so my credit should be read there to my judges--who knew it all by heart--even down to the present moment. 3