

# Darya of the Bronze Age

by Lin Carter



Part One

PRINCESS IN PERIL

## Chapter 1 KIDNAPPED!

Darya of Thandar struggled helplessly in the iron grip of the giant Moor, Achmed, as he bore her through the jungles of Zanthodon. Thorny boughs whipped the naked thighs and kicking legs of the captive Cro-Magnon princess, sharpened leaves scored her bare shoulders and panting young breasts. She writhed furiously, but in vain, against the powerful arms of the Moor which encircled her slim body and against whose burly strength she was as helpless as a babe.

Events had transpired so swiftly that Darya was still dazed by the suddenness of her transition from freedom to captivity. One moment she had been torn from the safety of her tribe by the wily Xask and the treacherous Fumio-the next instant the Barbary Pirates had seized her from her captors and now bore her hastily through the jungles of the Underground World to the safety of their ship, the Red Witch.

All too well did the Cro-Magnon cavegirl know what fate awaited her aboard the red-sailed galley. Only the courage and daring of her young fellow tribesman, Jorn the Hunter, had rescued her from the lustful embrace of the pirate chieftain, Kairadine Redbeard. To be recaptured so soon- after winning her freedom was cruel . . . and where now was Jorn the Hunter? Where, for that matter, was the mysterious black-haired man from the Upper World who called himself Eric Carstairs?

Who, in all of the Underground World, could save her from slavery in the harems of the savage corsairs? Her heart sank within her breast as she contemplated the grim destiny which lay before her ....

Achmed grinned triumphantly, white teeth flashing in his swarthy visage. The mighty Moor had been assigned the task of recapturing the Cro-Magnon girl when she had so curiously vanished from the galley. Her escape had aroused the rage and fury of Achmed's captain, Kairadine Redbeard, as much as her youthful and vibrant Loveliness had aroused his lust and desire to possess her.

Privately, the burly Moor thought little of this assignment. To his way of thinking, the differences

between one woman and another were minimal-and the fortress isle of El-Cazar, mountainous stronghold of the Barbary Pirates, held many beautiful women . . . not the least of whom was the voluptuous and passionate Zoraida, Redbeard's mistress, and Achmed's chief rival for closeness to the Prince of the Barbary corsairs.

To devote such time and energy to regaining one skinny, freckle-nosed, golden-haired savage girl seemed ridiculous to Achmed. Still, he had thought to himself with gloomy resignation and a philosophical shrug, an order is an order. And such as Kairadine Redbeard, master of El-Cazar and seventh in direct succession from the feared and ferocious Khair ud-Din of Algiers, do not view insubordination as a light offense.

As for Fumio, the renegade Thandarian warrior, whom his men had taken captive at the same time as Darya, Achmed had certain reservations. But Kairadine Redbeard had commanded the Moor to fetch back both the Cro-Magnon cavegirl and her young jungle sweetheart-for so he had assumed Jorn the Hunter to be-and Achmed did not dare to disobey.

He was aware by now, was the Barbary pirate, that his second captive was another than the boy Jorn, whom Kairadine ravished to punish for his untimely interruption of the ravishing of Darya, and also for the almost unthinkable crime he had committed, for the jungle boy had sprung upon Redbeard and almost throttled the life out of him before taking flight with the girl.

But Achmed the Moor had not survived this long in the dog-eat-dog world of El-Cazar without developing cunning. And, having never more than glimpsed the boy Jorn, and that from a distance, he believed that he could safely get away with the pretense that, having captured the man in company with the girl, he took it for granted that the Cro-Magnon warrior was in fact Jorn.

He was clever, was Achmed; and he was a born survivor.

He was a magnificent figure of a man, was this Achmed of El-Cazar. Although his fellow pirates disparaged him for his "taint" of Moorish blood (being themselves mostly descended from pure Arab stock), he was swarthy rather than ebon-hued. Only his thick lips and kinky beard attested to his Negroid heritage. Beneath his voluminous turban, his bullet-head was clean-shaven; gold hoops bobbed in the lobes of his ears. Gold armlets clasped his burly arms; charms and fetishes, many of precious metals were strung on gold chains about his thickly-corded throat and fell upon his deep chest; he wore an open vest of red felt with gold froggings and loose, baggy pantaloons of pale green silk, whose bottoms were tucked into the tops of his calf-high boots of scarlet leather with up-curved toes. A wide sash of mustard-yellow and vermilion was wound about his thick waist; therein were thrust a long, curved scimitar very much like the cutlasses of the Spanish Main, a brace of wickedly-hooked daggers, and a fat purse of green leather fashioned from the hide of giant reptiles.

He was a towering man with broad, sloping shoulders and heavy, apelike arms, a figure of barbaric splendor. Cruelty showed in the curve of his thick lips; avarice marked his hooked nose with the flaring

nostrils; but intelligence and loyalty could be read in his sharp eyes.

Such was Achmed of El-Cazar, first mate of the Red Witch and crony and confidant of Kairadine Redbeard himself, dreaded Prince of the Barbary Pirates.

And into such hands had Darya of Thandar fallen a helpless captive . . .

In the forefront of the band of corsairs which Kairadine had dispatched to bring back the fleeing Cro-Magnon girl was one Tarbu—a lean, famished-looking rogue whose longjawed, lank-cheeked, clean-shaven visage was rendered vicious and sinister by the jagged, zigzag knife scar which stretched from the corner of one eye to one corner of his thinupped mouth, causing a perpetual, menacing leer. He wore a loose, torn blouse of white silk open to the navel, whose voluminous sleeves flapped about his scrawny arms, while his bony shanks were clad in tight trousers of fawn-colored leather, much stained with seawater and blotches of spilt wine and scabs of dried gravy. He wore high-heeled seaboots with silver buckles upon the instep, and in one thin, strong hand he clenched the hilt of a cutlass whose blade was nicked and dented.

This Tarbu suddenly raised one arm for attention, halting the pirates behind him.

"What transpires, O Tarbu?" growled the Moor, his arms full of struggling naked cavegirl.

"The jungles end here, my chieftain," panted Tarbu, peering through the curtain of foliage. "Beyond lie the beaches upon which our longboats were drawn."

"Is aught in sight, then?" demanded Achmed.

"I see no one," admitted the other.

Without further ado the Barbary Pirates left the jungle and dragged their longboats from under the cover of thick bushes where they had been concealed against chance discovery.

They began to board the vessels.

Before them stretched an astounding vista: steamy seas which extended into the misty distance where there uprose, instead of the blue and open skies, a titanic rocky wall which rose beyond the ability of the human eye to perceive its ending. And, in very truth, it did not end: for this was Zanthodon, the Underground World, a time-forgotten land far beneath the Earth's crust into which had fled for refuge from a thousand ages and millions of years the last survivors of their kind . . . the mighty dinosaurs of the primal Dawn . . . the shaggy cavebears and burly aurochs of the Ice Age, and their contemporaries, the hairy-pelted Neanderthal savages and the tall, handsome, blond Cro-Magnon warriors who were their perpetual foes . . . and other strange survivals, too, from lost eras, like the Barbary Pirates themselves, hounded from the Mediterranean by the avenging fleets of Europe . . . and the mysterious

Dragonmen of Zar, who were the last surviving colony of lost Minoan Crete, the very original of fabulous Atlantis itself.

Some strange trick of phosphorescence causes the domed roof of the subterranean world to glow with a ceaseless luminosity that is not unlike the golden radiance of late afternoon. Below that eternal daylight "sky" stretch unknown rivers, trackless jungles, impassable mountain ranges, vast plains where roam herds of mastodons and woolly mammoths-and the enormous expanse of the Sogar-Jad itself, strangest and most unique of all of the seas of this world-the Underground Sea, upon whose watery surface have never gleamed the light of sun or moon or stars.

And there, moored in a deep lagoon formed by the sheltering arm of the jungle-clad promontory wherefrom the corsair band had just emerged rode at anchor that proud galley, the Red Witch!

It has been many generations, even centuries, since such a vessel plied the foaming waves of the Upper World. Gone from our seas and receding into the history books are such galleys as the Red Witch, with her booming sails and lean black hull and rigging that sings like harpstrings in the winds.

No less a survivor from lost ages than the mighty beasts that roam and rule the savage jungles of the Underground World was the Red Witch . . . a vision of breathtaking romance would she have seemed to you or me, like some craft come a-sailing out of the golden pages of Treasure Island or Captain Blood or Porto Bello Gold ....

But to Darya of Thandar she was a thing of horror, like a floating prison. For all that the beautiful young Cro-Magnon girl knew and loved lay behind her in the vast plains and mighty jungles of the subterranean continent.

And all that lay ahead for her from this moment was a dreadful fate in the lustful arms of Kairadine Redbeard and a miserable and degrading captivity in the harems or dungeons of El-Cazar.

As the longboats left the beach and the oars plied the foaming waters of the Sogar-Jad, Darya cast one mournful and despairing glance behind her as the jungle-clad continent receded into the mists of the distance.

Then unbidden tears blurred her vision, and the unhappy girl could see no more.

## **Chapter 2 THARN THE AVENGED.**

It was the cruelest irony that, even in the nadir of her hopelessness and despair, the blond cavegirl knew all too well that help and rescue were not far away.

Only recently had the black-haired soldier of fortune from the Upper World, Eric Carstairs, led the captive warriors of the two Cro-Magnon tribes of Thandar and Sothar into freedom from their dire

captivity in the cavern city of the Gorpaks and the Sluaggh. Only a little while before the Barbary Pirates had carried off Darya had she and her people emerged from the caverns of the Peaks of Peril, to taste-in her case, but briefly-the daylight, the open air and freedom.

At the very moment the longboats left the beach and crossed the misty lagoon to where the Red Witch rode at anchor, Eric Carstairs and burly Hurok of Kor, Jorn the Hunter, and her mighty sire, Tharn the jungle monarch, Omad of Thandar, were not very far away. That they were searching for her at that very instant was her firm conviction.

And it was quite true. The warriors of Thandar and Sothar were even then combing the jungles of the promontory in search of Xask and Fumio, who had carried off Darya and my friend, the elderly scientist, Professor Percival P. Potter, Ph.D. At that moment the warriors had not yet discovered the corpse of the brutal Neanderthal, One-Eye, and had no idea that Darya and the Professor had eluded the clutches of Xask and Fumio, to run straight into the arms of Achmed the Moor and his band of corsairs. The time yet lay some little ways in the immediate future when we would discover the corpse of One-Eye and would surmise that it had been the Barbary Pirates who had carried off the Cro-Magnon Princess just after she had concealed Professor Potter in the tree where we later found him.

Help and rescue were, then, almost at hand. Only moments divided the blond cavegirl from the arrival of her stalwart friends.

But-as she knew all too well-we had no way of sailing out upon the steamy waters of the prehistoric ocean, or of either following or attacking the corsair galley.

And that sealed her fate ....

At the point in time when Darya of Thandar was carried off by the Barbary Pirates while the rest of us remained behind, shortly to pursue her rescue, my narrative of these adventures parts into two separate but parallel courses. One of these courses I have already followed at length in the third volume of these memoirs of my experiences in Zanthodon the Underground World. This volume traces my pursuit of Darya with a small band of warriors, which resulted in my capture by the Dragonmen of Zar and the many perils and adventures which transpired during my captivity in the Scarlet City, and of those which occurred to my friends Hurok and Jorn and the others who sought to free me from the grasp of Zarys the Divine Empress of the ancient Minoan colony.

The second course, which consists of the dangers experienced by Darya herself in the corsair stronghold of El-Cazar, the present volume will trace. But it will be obvious to the reader of these adventures that the narratives, while separate in viewpoint, occupy the same interval of time.

It has, then, already been told how we emerged at length from the cavern city, having slaughtered the vicious Gorpaks, exterminated their loathsome masters, the vampiric Sluagghs, and freed the pallid and listless cavern people, their slaves. And it has also been told how we learned of the carrying-off of

Darya, how we sped in pursuit of the stolen Princess, discovered the corpse of One-Eye whom Achmed had cut down, rescued the Professor from his tree, and followed with all haste upon the trail of Darya and the pirates, only to be diverted by the Dragonmen of Zar.

When the warriors of the twin tribes of Thandar and Sothar came out of the cavern city, they also followed on the trail of the kidnapped Princess. That same third volume of these memoirs gave an account of how young Yualla, daughter of Garth, was borne away by a thakdol (as the men of Zanthodon call that grisly flying dragon of Earth's remotest dawn, the dreaded pterodactyl), and of how the Sothar tribe parted company with the tribe of Thandar, the Sotharians heading across the great plains of the north toward the mountainous rampart which guarded the secret access into Zar in order to find Yualla, while the tribe of Thandar continued their pursuit of Darya and the corsairs.

The mighty Tharn, Omad or High Chief of Thandar, determined to follow the coastline of the underground continent in the same direction taken by the Red Witch. So very recently had his long-lost daughter and heir been recovered, only to be thieved from him again, that the jungle monarch with stubborn and redoubled resoluteness swore to follow upon her trail to the very ends of the world, rather than give over the quest.

He and his warriors traversed the promontory, gained the northern plains, and followed the coastline as it meandered "north." When in the fullness of time the tribe of Sothar sundered their common path with their brother Cro-Magnons, he remained grimly determined to continue the quest alone, if needed. If his daughter had been slain by her cruel captors, at very least he could avenge her murder by the slaughtering of "The-Men-Who-Ride-Upon-Water"- which was the name by which his people termed the Pirates of Barbary.

The Red Witch had set sail upon the steamy waters of Sogar-Jad, the Underground Sea, her crimson sails filled with the lusty winds, her sharp prow cleaving the waves. For too long had the Pirates been absent from their island stronghold of El-Cazar, busied with raiding the Cro-Magnon villages of the coast and the dwellers upon the isles of the Sogar-Jad. The hold of the galley was full to bursting with plunder looted from the savages, and with slaves taken during such raids.

Also was it full of stores of food. For the rocky island of El-Cazar presents a stony soil too hostile, too scourged by the salt winds, to raise crops. In order to survive, the corsairs must loot the granaries and orchards and hunting grounds of the Cro-Magnons that shared this subterranean world with them. For they are great hunters, the blond and stalwart savages of tribes such as Thandar and Sothar: the plump and timid uld (or eohippus) fall to their arrows, as do the ungainly half-feathered reptile birds, the zomaks (or archeopteryx). But favored as game above all other of the bestial denizens of the Underground World, the Cro-Magnon huntsmen prize the mastodon and the woolly mammoth, whose titanic bulk provides rich feasts for an entire tribe at one kill. And the Barbary Pirates have grown very fond of mammoth steaks ....

Because of the burden of such plunder, the pirate galley rode low in the water and but sluggishly were

its full sails impelled by the gusting winds. For a time, therefore, were the pursuing warriors of the tribe of Thandar able to perceive, however remotely, the bright red sails of the corsair vessel-tantalizingly near but elusively distant.

Soon, however, it vanished in the mists which the cold winds of the upper cavernworld roof drove from the fetid and slimy waves. Nevertheless, by this point, the eagle eyes of the Thandarian scouts and hunters had discerned the direction of its voyage, and the pursuit continued at a relentless pace.

Could Tharn the Avenger have known what was transpiring within the corsair galley, he would have driven his warriors forward at an even more relentless pace.

For as soon as the captive Cro-Magnon girl had been carried aboard by Achmed the Moor and his band, the longboats were stored away and the ship itself, weighing anchor, set forth on its voyage to El-Cazar, and Kairadine Redbeard repaired to his cabin to enjoy the long-delayed consummation of his desires.

The Prince of Pirates had many wives and concubines, but Darya of Thandar was something refreshingly and deliciously new to his experience. While the women of El-Cazar (with the single exception of the dancing-girl, Zoraida) were soft and pliable and complaisant, zestlessly yielding to the demands of their master and monarch, the bronzed and supple teenager had fought him with the ferocity of an adolescent virgin Amazon. This intrigued the captain of the Red Witch, and goaded his jaded lustfulness to a pitch of excitement rarely in recent months attained.

Beyond that, the girl was irresistible in her loveliness. My beloved Darya was truly the most beautiful woman I have ever seen or known-temptingly youthful, with long slender legs, lithe and supple, her tanned and golden body tantalizingly bare; her face the soft and oval face of a pubescent child, with sweet full lips the color of rose petals, wide, dark-lashed eyes the innocent blue of rain-washed April skies, her long curling mane the ripe gold of cornsilk. And her proud, firm, tip-tilted breasts were flawless in their utter perfection.

As soon as the Red Witch was well under sail, Kairadine Redbeard turned over his quarterdeck to his first mate, Achmed the Moor, and repaired to his cabin. He entered the long, low-ceilinged room to find the exquisite Cro-Magnon maid bound and spread-eagled, her slim wrists tethered to the beams of the ceiling, her legs spread also, with ankles chained to rings bolted to the floor.

The tall, saturnine pirate chieftain looked over her slim nakedness with a slow, deliberate, gloating gaze before which the helpless girl colored crimson with fury.

But not with shame! For the Cro-Magnons have never developed the pervertedly Puritanical pruderies which have oppressed us of the western world. In their humid jungles they indifferently bare their bodies before each other, when necessary, and think little of the exposure. Even when clothed, their garments are brief to the point of being X-rated: the men generally wear little more than a bit of fur twisted about the loins and buskins upon their feet, or, at most, an abbreviated apron-like garment upon the loins.

While the women commonly wear the same, with a length of fur covering one breast and shoulder, leaving the other bare.

Nakedness is a condition into which all of us are born. It is natural to the human animal. Shame of one's body, on the other hand, has to be carefully taught, and learned.

But no woman enjoys being looked at as Kairadine was then looking at Darya. For this reason she colored with fury, but not with shame.

The tall, turbaned man grinned at her evilly, white teeth flashing in his swarthy visage. He toyed with the trim little edge of beard which fringed his lean jaw and which was either naturally red or dyed so, in imitation of his famous ancestor, Khair ud-Din, called Barbarossa, or Redbeard. And he sent a level, mocking glance into her furious, stormy eyes.

"You have been brought back to me, savage girl, so that we can continue that which was begun in this cabin ere yet the savage boy interrupted our pleasuring. You are alone and helpless and totally in my power; there is nothing else you can do but submit to my every wish, to my slightest whim . . . and submit you shall, whether you will or no, for I am stronger than you, and every man on this ship is mine to command," he said, in her tongue.

"I shall never submit to such as you," hissed Darya of Thandar between clenched teeth, her eyes smoldering with blue volcanic fires.

Kairadine laughed.

Then he came at her-and if Tharn the Avenger had known, he would have roared with vengeful fury like a tortured beast.

### **Chapter 3 TERROR FROM THE DEEP**

As for Fumio of Thandar, he was hauled aboard the Red Witch in bonds, dreading the worst. The tall, powerfully built Cro-Magnon had not the slightest notion as to why he had been captured, nor by whom, for he knew nothing of the Barbary Pirates, as these "northerly" parts of Zanthodon were heretofore unknown to him.

Fumio was a brave warrior, a mighty hunter, and a veritable devil with the ladies. Until Jorn the Hunter had fortuitously (or unfortuitously, depending on your viewpoint) chanced upon the scene in time to rescue Darya from being raped by Fumio, whose nose was broken in the process of that rescue, the stalwart Thandarian had been accounted a remarkably handsome man.

His height, strength, prowess and former good looks notwithstanding, he was at heart a coward and a bully. Thus he possessed few resources of character which would otherwise have enabled him to endure



his present captivity by an unknown people with stoicism and fortitude.

Fumio had never seen or imagined a ship such as the Red Witch. He had, it was true, heard of The-Men-Who-Ride-Upon-Water, but had previously dismissed such tales as idle fabrications, on a par with tales of ghosts and goblins. Therefore, his present circumstances were such that he quailed in the depths of his soul, and would gladly have given an arm-well, a hand, perhaps; or at least a few fingers-to have been very far from the scene when the pirates seized their golden-haired prey, Darya, gomad or Princess of Thandar.

And what they could possibly want with him Fumio could not imagine. But he had dire suspicions ....

Boarding the corsair galley, Achmed's men dragged the naked girl into the captain's cabin and bound her to wrist and ankle rings set into the cabin's floor and roofbeams for exactly that purpose. Fumio they booted into the stinking hold and bolted the hatchway securely, leaving him to crouch miserably in the fetid darkness.

Nothing had been going right for Fumio recently. First he had found his god, Xask, when that Minoan Machiavelli had miraculously felled a mighty drunth with a single bolt of magic fire from the thunder-weapon. (And, as a drunth is the Zanthodonian name for the stegosaurus, a giant saurian which tips the scales at about the same tonnage as a Mack truck, I assure you to kill one with a single bullet from a Colt .45 is truly miraculous!) Then, no sooner had he become a delighted and devout convert to Xaskianity then he had lost all faith in his newfound divinity when the same being had run into the giant spiderweb of a monstrous, albino vathrib and had become helplessly entangled in its adhesive strands.

Even gods lose credibility when they cannot extricate themselves from spiderwebs, no matter how large those webs might be ....

Crouched miserably on his hunkers in the stenchful darkness of the hold, Fumio groaned from the bottom of his being, contemplating an unknown but certainly gruesome future.

His weapons had been stripped from him; save for a bit of fur about his loins, and high-laced buskins, he was naked and unarmed. For all the remarkable strength of his superb physique, it seemed to Fumio's way of thinking that there was naught which he could do to free himself from these mysterious men who floated upon the Sogar-Jad in something weirdly like a fabricated wooden island.

He wondered hopefully if he had not, perhaps, found a new pantheon of gods to replace the de-apotheosized Xask of Zar.

He decided that it was unlikely: gods do not take prisoners. Or at least, Fumio did not think they should. But his experience with divinity was very slight.

The Cro-Magnons of Zanthodon have little in the way of religious convictions, and hardly anything in

the way of formal religious observations. Surely, the ghosts of their heroic ancestors migrate to inhabit the great trees or mountains or even, in some cases, beasts of the Underground World; surely, it is only prudent to propitiate their wrath by never naming them aloud once they have transmigrated; but, beyond these simple precautions, the Cro-Magnons leave religion strictly alone. They have, after all, enough to occupy their thoughts in merely staying alive.

After a while, bored with feeling sorry for himself, and weary from his exertions during the long "wake," Fumio fell into a fitful doze.

When he aroused some little time later, he became uncomfortably aware of a yawning and empty void somewhere in his midsection. Search his mind as best he could, the tall warrior could not remember when and under what conditions he had last devoured a decent meal.

Surely his captors did not intend him to starve? There were, after all, so many quicker, easier, and more sanguinary ways to terminate his present existence, than starvation.

After awhile, Fumio got to his feet and prowled around. It was hard to find one's way through the darkness-a condition rarely encountered at all in the Underground World, due to the eternal luminosity of its glowing skies-but ere long Fumio's outstretched hand found a ladder leading upward. Daring greatly, he ascended the ladder, and found the roof of his prison, which is to say, the underside of the deck.

The heavy, seasoned timbers resisted his strength, but in time he found a small trapdoor other than the large hatch through which he had been tossed like a sack of grain. This trap also differed from the hatch in that it was not padlocked. Fumio pried it open and peeked out.

The light of day daze dazzled his eyes due to their long immersion in the blackness of the hold, but before very long his blurred vision cleared and he was able to perceive objects clearly.

The object nearest to hand, when he was able to perceive it, was not at all what he wanted to see. It was the booted feet of Achmed the Moor, the corsair who had captured him in the jungles: he recognized them from the scarlet leather from which the boots had been fashioned.

The Moor was standing spread-legged against the roll of the ship between the slightly-opened trapdoor and the deckrail of the Red Witch.

Beyond lay the misty waters of the primeval ocean itself, and amidst those steaming and fetid waves the sharp eyes of Fumio observed yet another object which he desired to see even less than the feet of Achmed.

It was the head of a gigantic monster, rising dripping from the waves

Having delivered his two captives to their separate fates, Achmed the Moor returned to his duties and saw the ship safely underway. The jungle-clad promontory receded into the distance and was swallowed by the mists which arose from the Sogar-Jad. The Red Witch left the lagoon and gained the high seas again, following the curve of the shoreline "north" along the edge of vast and seemingly endless plains.

Although he had successfully accomplished the mission which Kairadine Redbeard had assigned to his command, the Moor felt curiously unelated. There was a reason for this.

Achmed of El-Cazar was the seventh son of a seventh son, and according to the folklore of his superstitious people, such as he are born with a sixth sense-the ability, at times, to perceive coming events yet unborn in the womb of the future. And from the very moment when his Captain had made him seek out and recapture the fleeing Cro-Magnon girl, Achmed had felt distinctly uneasy.

He could not have told you exactly what it was that he feared would happen, because he himself did not have the slightest inkling. All he had was a vague, uneasy premonition of coming danger and ill fortune ....

Now, straddling the deck, staring moodily out to sea, with one scarred and capable hand caressing nervously the worn and sweat-stained hilt of his scimitar, he felt that uneasiness grow and blossom into something closely resembling . . . fear.

And Achmed of El-Cazar, despite the sins which burdened his soul-and they were very, very many-did not know the meaning of the word "fear." His bravery in the face of danger or battle was well known among his fellow corsairs. It had long ago earned for him the personal regard and trust of his Prince and leader Kairadine Redbeard.

So, for such as Achmed to feel fear, meant that a deadly danger lay close at hand, and that his earlier premonitions were about to be proven valid.

Which was not an eventuality to contemplate with anything like complacent curiosity.

The giant Moor stared gloomily upon the tossing waves as the pirate galley followed the meanderings of the shoreline. All seemed normal out to sea; everything was exactly as it had always been . . .

Turning to look about the decks, he saw his corsairs clambering about in the rigging, making fast the lines and unfurling the canvas. Above, a vigilant Cairene clung to the rail of the crow's nest, scanning the horizon. Here and there, swarthy, turbaned men coiled lengths of tarred cable or swabbed the decks. Everything seemed to be normal aboard ship, and exactly as it should have been . . . .

Yet still Achmed's soul felt a queasiness and a tension, as if something unexpected and disastrous were about to happen. It was a feeling distinctly unsettling, and the Moor did not enjoy it. But he could not with impunity disturb his prince at his pleasures over anything so flimsy as a mere feeling ....

Then it was that the slimy waves of the Sogar-Jad broke in an explosion of foam right before Achmed's eyes.

There came lifting into view a hideous snaky head, but larger than any snake's head had a right to be.

The head rose and rose at the end of a thick but tapering neck that seemed of endless length. It rose until the head of the enormous serpent stood as tall as the crow's nest, which was the height of the ship herself.

And then-at last!-Achmed knew the name of the shadowy fear that had for so long plagued him.

The name was yith.

And, as yith is the name by which the mariners of Zanthodon call the great plesiosaurus, the original Sea Serpent of legend, the Crusher of Ships, the Devourer of Men, the Terror of the Deep, it would seem that Achmed's fears were very well grounded, indeed.

## **Chapter 4 - FANGS OF DOOM**

Panting, the cavegirl watched as the corsair princeling advanced toward her, grinning.

He was a superb figure of a man, was Kairadine Redbeard, although this fact did nothing to assuage the fear and loathing which seethed within the breast of Darya of Thandar. Tall and lean and swarthy he was, hawk-faced and imperious. There was nobility and breeding in the fine lines of his face and high brow, and intelligence shone in the depths of his dark, liquid eyes. His strong jaw was fringed with a trim line of crisp, curling beard either naturally red or dyed that hue in emulation of his notorious ancestor, the feared Barbarossa of the Seven Seas.

A commanding figure he was, clad in his barbaric finery. Upon his chest he wore an old-fashioned corselet of overlapping bronze scales over which was drawn a loose robe of coarsely woven cloth striped with alternating bands of orange and cobalt blue. A sleek turban of scarlet silk was knotted about his brows; his lower limbs were clad in tight breeches of canary yellow and upon his feet he wore gleaming boots of polished leather with up-curling toes.

A wide leather girdle, embossed with arabesque designs, cinched in his narrow waist. Jeweled rings flashed upon his long, coffee-colored fingers. A slender scimitar of glittering steel was thrust through a loop fastened to his girdle, the blade slapped his lean thigh whenever he moved. All in all, he was an imposing personage of gorgeous, if unfamiliar, splendor.

All of this, however, was belied by the gloating and lustful cruelty visible in his smirking smile, and by the tigerish ferocity which burned in his febrile gaze.

Helpless to move or to resist, the naked girl hung there in her bonds as the corsair chieftain advanced upon her. She gritted her teeth as his subtle hands explored her nude flesh.

Her nostrils wrinkled as she inhaled the heavy scent of the perfumes of his beard. The sweet odor sickened her, and, coming from his body, it seemed instinctively to be unmanly.

"By the Beard of the Prophet, wench, but you are as luscious as the fruits that grow in the garden of Paradise," he breathed hoarsely, fondling her bare breasts.

"And as slim and graceful as the palm trees which grow beside the Sacred Well of Zemzem," he added, as his hands glided down her slender waist to caress her tanned and naked thighs.

Biting her lip, the girl endured it as best she could as his clever hands insulted her body.

Then she could endure no more-

Although her ankles were fastened to rings set in the deckflooring of the cabin, these permitted of a certain slack.

Darya used every fraction of an inch afforded by this slackness as her firm and rounded knee rose and drove with every ounce of vigor she possessed directly into the Arab's groin.

He spluttered an agonized curse and fell staggering back, clutching at his genitals, his swarthy face paling to a sickly hue.

Then he sagged to his knees and writhed, gagging and gasping, the spittle running from the corners of his thin-lipped mouth to besplatter his crisp trim beard.

Darya threw herself into furious contortions, striving with all of the strength in her slim, sinewy body to wrest herself free of her bonds. Every second counted, and the respite from the caresses of Kairadine Redbeard might be only momentary.

Strive and struggle as she did, it proved impossible to even so much as free one wrist or one foot from her bondage.

At length she relaxed and hung listlessly, panting, her blue eyes blazing like those of a trapped beast through the golden tangles of her loose, disheveled hair.

Kairadine groaned and climbed unsteadily to his feet. Holding his injured parts tenderly, the master of the Red Witch limped to a wall-shelf and poured himself a goblet of strong red wine from a silver-

stopped carafe.

The juice of the vine might be, and was, forbidden by the Prophet of Islam, but there were times when a man needed a powerful restorative. Anyway, the sins of Kairadine, of El-Cazar were as scarlet as his beard ....

Recovering himself, the corsair turned upon his helpless captive a gaze as cold and malignant and deadly as the stare of a basilisk. Violent and sudden were the caprices that ruled the heart of this Son of the Desert: in mere instants the lust for pleasure could be transformed to the lust to inflict pain.

"You have spirit, wench, if you have not wisdom," he hissed between his teeth. "We shall see if we cannot find an implement able to break and tame that spirit. . ."

Striding to the far wall of his cabin, the corsair chieftain selected and removed from its peg a long coiled whip of braided black leather with a handle of worked silver.

Then, smiling a small and menacing smile, he went behind where the girl hung in her chains. For a long, breathless moment Darya saw or felt nothing.

Then the man slowly and savoringly ran his caressing hand down her bare back to cup and finger her round and naked buttocks.

He gave voice to a thick, gloating chuckle.

Then Darya heard a sharply intaken breath-

In the next instant a line of liquid fire seared her bare bottom and curled about her loins.

Darya leaped in her bonds as every muscle in her slender body convulsed to the unbelievable agony of the touch of the lash. She sucked in her breath and held it to prevent losing any involuntary cry, which would doubtless have given pleasure to her tormentor.

An endless agony of suspense followed as, with tensed and trembling muscles she awaited the next stroke of the whip.

Kairadine laughed silkily.

"You did not respond to the touch of my hands, but I notice that you shudder under the kiss of the lash," he said.

A second stroke of the leather whip followed, this time curling about her shoulders to just flick with the

tip of the whip the nipple of her left breast. The agony was even more terrible than before, but Darya did not utter a sound.

"I was wrong, wench. You have courage as well as spirit," Kairadine said softly. "But the whip can break both in time . . . ."

Then he came around to stand in front of her, looking her body over thoughtfully as if deciding where next to brand her with the lash. Darya eyed him resolutely, but her small chin quivered and her eyes were filled with the tears of pain. She said nothing, for there was nothing to say.

His eyes crawled slowly down her nakedness to fasten greedily upon her perfect breasts. They rose and fell to the impulse of her panting breath, and the pink-tips were crisped in fearful anticipation.

He licked his lips with a pointed tongue.

"The breasts, I think . . . but not enough to scar them for life. 'Twould be a pity to mar such loveliness . . . ."

But even as Kairadine Redbeard lifted his arm to strike his captive, a yell of hoarse alarm sounded from the deck. It was followed by the thud of running feet and by the harsh clangor of the alarm gong. Fists pounded urgently upon the cabin's door.

Spitting a curse, Kairadine flung his whip into a corner and strode across the room to unlatch the door. A frightened corsair's face peered in, mouthing something that sounded like "Yith! Yith!"

At the sound of that dreadful name, even the dark features of Kairadine paled and he licked his lips uncertainly. For there was no danger more dreaded upon the high seas than the Terror of the Deep, and even Darya's folk knew and feared that awful name.

Leaving his captive still helplessly bound, the Redbeard gained the deck and found his men in disciplined turmoil. Even as he gained the deck, the snaky head of the plesiosaur flicked forward like the head of a striking cobra, to pluck the screaming lookout from the crow's nest. For a moment, no more, the legs of the hapless corsair kicked and struggled in the grip of those terrible jaws.

Then there sounded the crunch of snapping bones and a horrible gulping as the yith swallowed its kill.

But one man-morsel was far from being enough to satisfy the Dragon of the Depths. The ghastly head darted down to glide after a fleeing sailor: squalling with panic, the fellow sprang to the rail and dived into the restless waters of the Sogar-Jad, obviously preferring the unknown dangers of the sea to the horrible death that awaited him between the monster's hungry jaws.

"Unlimber that catapult, you dogs!" Kairadine roared furiously, brandishing his scimitar. For his men,

although carefully trained in the procedure, were taking what seemed an ungodly amount of time in removing the tarpaulin which covered their only defense against the terrible yith.

Perhaps it was that sudden thunderous voice, or the flash of the waving blade, but something caught the attention of the hungry reptile and attracted his soulless and flaming eyes to the tall booted figure of the Pirate Prince.

"O reis, beware!" wailed Achmed the Moor from the middeck.

The huge head swung about and came darting down upon the captain of the Red Witch, jaws yawning to engulf him, fangs as long as cavalry sabers glistening as they fought to rip and mangle his flesh-

Kairadine sprang nimbly backwards with a vicious snarl of defiance. Villain though he was, the lean desert princeling was no coward. And hopeless though the contest between man and monster reptile certainly was, Kairadine Redbeard would not die without a fight.

He whirled the slender blade up and swung it down with all of the coiled and steely strength which slept in the sinews of his shoulders. The blade whistled down and cut into the scaly snout of the yith. It drew back, voicing an earshattering hiss of rage or surprise or pain-perchance, all three.

Kairadine seized upon his momentary respite to spring backwards again, in order to put the cabin door at his back and gain a more secure footing. No acrobat could have moved more nimbly, but the desk was shrouded with the halfdisengaged tarpaulin, and it was slimy with salt spray from the waves which broke against the hull.

His booted heels slipped upon the slick, stiff fabric, and he fell sprawling over backwards.

As he did so, the head of the yith darted forward again to seize him, jaws snapping like castanets.

Kairadine screamed as the fangs of those terrible jaws closed upon the muscled flesh of his right arm near the shoulder ....

## **Chapter 5 THE BRINK OF DEATH**

After a march of some "wakes" and several "sleeps," Tharn of Thandar reached the northern extremities of the subterranean continent. Here the shoreline broke into scattered rocks and islets, washed by the slimy waves of the Sogar-Jad, which foamed and broke about their slick, wet sides. Nowhere could the jungle monarch perceive the slightest token of human habitation: beyond the shore lay further islands, large and small, drowned in veils of floating mist, beyond which stretched, presumably, the unbroken sea to the very walls of the cavern-world.



To his "east" lay the immensity of the northern plains, a vast expanse of grassy flatlands roamed by the timid uld and the burly mastodon. Just at the limits of human vision there arose a mighty rampart of mountains that formed, although Tharn knew it not, the walls of Zar, beyond which, amid the waters of the inner sea, the Scarlet City rose upon its island.

He had reached an impasse, had Tharn of Thandar. And if ever a man was entitled to feel despair and hopelessness, it was he at that moment. In which direction to go, where to search, and-for what?

He decided to call a council of his chieftains, to draw upon their pooled wisdom and experience. Squatting on their heels in a wide circle, the Cro-Magnon primitives conferred on what next to do. The ideas brought forward were sparse and seemingly futile. Some counseled continuing along the coastline, others spreading out to comb the vastness of the plains. No one notion appealed to them all. Finally, Ithar, a chieftain of the huntsmen of Thandar, and a seasoned veteran whose judicious advice Tharn had more often than not found reliable, spoke up.

"The-Men-Who-Ride-Upon-The-Water must do so for a reason," he pointed out. "What better reason, than that their home lies upon one of the islands in the 'northern' sea? Unless they found a means to traverse the waves of the Sogar-Jad, they would be forever marooned upon their island home."

"Therefore, it is the counsel of Ithar that we search the watery expanse of the sea?" queried Tharn skeptically.

His chieftain nodded silently. It was ever his wont to speak seldom, but then briefly, and ever to the point.

"And how does Ithar suggest that we do this?" demanded another of the chieftains. "Since we lack the great floating log upon which the folk we seek may ride in safety . . . ."

"There are many fallen logs which we may ride," countered Ithar. And he reminded the chieftains of Thandar of the dugout canoes in which the Drugars of Kor had attacked the mainland from their own island home of Ganadol.

"Are we any the less skillful or intelligent than the accursed Drugars?" he asked simply.

"But there are no trees hereabouts which may be felled and hollowed out for the purpose Ithar suggests!" protested one of the scouts. The chieftain shrugged.

"Then the Omad would be wise to take us where many trees grow," he said. "There are forests to the south, along the borders of the Peaks of Peril."

"That would mean retracing our path for many wakes," Tharn reasoned. Again, Ithar shrugged.

"My Omad is unfortunately correct. But, having reached the grove and felled and hollowed out the trees, could not the host make good time by sailing 'north' along the coast? There is no need to march this way again overland, dragging the logs behind us."

Much argument followed, but it was in vain, for the arguments of Ithar were reasonable. After the host of Sothar parted from their brother tribe, in order to search for the girl Yualla whom the pterodactyl had carried off in the direction of Zar, the men of Thandar decamped and marched south to where the trees grew by the Peaks of Peril. Their stone axes quickly felled the towering boles, and with smaller axes they trimmed away the branches. The women built bonfires of the branches and bark, which were covered with sand once they were fully ablaze. Shortly thereafter the sand was raked aside, disclosing beds of glowing coal. These were packed into shallow places scooped out by stone knives along one surface of the logs.

It would seem from this that the Cro-Magnons were not ignorant of the methods employed by their distant cousins, the Neanderthals, to fashion crude dugout canoes. Although their own home, Thandar, lay inland far from the seacoast, and its rivers were small and few, it would seem that the Cro-Magnons were keenly observant, for they had deduced the methods used by the Apemen of Kor from a mere glimpse or two at their dugouts.

All of this took longer in the doing than in the telling, of course, as is the way with writing. But in time a fleet of crude but serviceable dugouts was prepared in sufficient numbers to carry the entire host of the Thandarians. Once the trees were felled, and while the women and children and oldsters were burning them hollow with heaped coals, the warriors and huntsmen prepared rude paddles. Fortunately, a stand of Jurassic bamboolike treeferns grew near the edges of the grove, and these made excellent paddles.

Once launched upon the waves, the canoe fleet began negotiating the waters along the coast. Their craft were sluggish and unpredictable, lacking such stabilizing elements as rudders or outriggers, but sail they could and sail they did.

North, ever north, they guided the clumsy fleet.

Somewhere in the northern sea lay El-Cazar, the island stronghold of the Barbary Pirates.

And there they would find Darya, if anywhere . . . .

Perspiration glistened on Achmed's shaven brow and dripped from the edges of his beard as he guided his men with a steady hand.

"Now!" he boomed.

The great catapult soared into the air with a whump!, hurling its burden, a heavy and jagged boulder of flinty stone, with terrific velocity.

The missile whistled through the air and struck the monstrous yith at the base of the neck, just above the shoulder. The impact was staggering: the whole ship shuddered to the blow.

The plesiosaur released its victim in order to give voice to a shrill screech of pain. From the way it flopped ungainly, huge paddle-like flippers churning the slimy waves into froth, Achmed guessed that the impact of the flung boulder had either broken the yith's shoulder-if yiths had shoulders, that is!-or had dislocated whatever it was they possessed in place of shoulders.

As a matter of fact, the impact had broken the long spine of the monster. Releasing its hold upon the ship, and screaming all the while in mingled pain, outrage and frustration, the huge serpentlike thing sank sideways into the churning waves, its long tail whipping the water madly.

Then it sank from view and the corsairs breathed easier again. Easy enough, in fact, to raise a cheer for their first mate. But Achmed had no ears for their cheering now.

He sprang across the deck to where his prince lay in a pool of blood and knelt to swiftly examine, with hands that shook only a little, the terrible wounds inflicted by the fangs of the yith.

The muscles of the upper arm and perhaps the shoulder seemed to have been cleanly severed, but they would mend with time and care. The immediate danger was that Kairadine Redbeard would bleed to death, for great arteries were punctured. Scarlet fountains arced in the misty air, and the face of the unconscious Redbeard was pale as wax.

Hastily the Barbary Pirates came to the aid of their chief. Salt water cleansed the ghastly wounds, and the mangled arm was tightly bound with clean bandages and splinted with belaying pins, for the bone of the upper arm seemed to have snapped. Tourniquets were applied and the injured man was borne tenderly to his cabin, where the wondering eyes of Darya took in the scene.

"Cut the wench down," growled Achmed, as he bore his chief to his bed and put water mingled with wine to the waxen lips.

"Does the reis still live, O Achmed?" one of the corsair, a fat-bellied Turk named Kemal, inquired fearfully.

"He lives, O Kemal, but barely," muttered the Moor. "He is standing on the brink of death . . . ."

"Will the reis not lose the arm, then?" asked another pirate named Haroot, a lank, dour, delicate-featured Persian.

Achmed of El-Cazar shrugged. "That lies with the will of Allah," he said fatalistically. "Fetch me that water bucket, and more clean cloth-"

With hands as gentle as a woman's, he bathed the sweaty brows of Kairadine with a wet cloth and moistened his lips with wine and water again. The Redbeard seemed sunken deep in a coma, although his lips twitched and his shut eyes moved from side to side like one suffering in the clutch of a nightmare.

Was there venom in the fangs of the yith? Achmed did not know: never before, in all the annals of El-Cazar, had a man escaped with his life from the bite of the yith. The jongleurs would make songs of this, if Kairadine lived, he thought.

"What shall we do with the savage girl?" one of the sailors asked.

Achmed rubbed his brow with a groan. The wench was already proving to be more trouble than she was worth-which was next to nothing. One beautiful young woman alone on a ship filled with woman-hungry men was a source of potential riot and mutiny-and if any of the crew touched her, and Kairadine lived to know of it, there would be hangings ....

"Cover her body," he growled curtly. "Take her to my cabin and chain her to the centerpost. Then lock the door and bring the keys to me."

The corsair saluted sketchily and bore Darya unprotestingly away.

All the next "sleep," Achmed the Turk alternated between tending to his wounded captain and seeing that the ship was kept steady on her course to El-Cazar. With so many tasks to be seen to and so many decisions to be made, there was no time for Achmed to snatch so much as forty winks for himself.

But that's the trouble with being first mate, he thought to himself wryly. None of the pleasures of captaincy, and much of the responsibility ....

The momentary flash of humor did little to relieve his gloom. For Achmed had been born and raised among the Barbary Pirates, and he knew how deeply they were torn into rival factions, and he knew that only the adhesive loyalty to the authentic descendant of the great Khair ud-Din of Algiers, Kairadine's ancestor, held the feuding corsair chieftains together in some sort of unity.

Lacking that loyalty, with Kairadine dead, the fortress city would explode into civil war, destroying them all.

"Live, O my reis . . . live!" he prayed between his teeth to the unhearing skies.

Part Two

## PIRATES OF ZANTHODON

**Chapter 6 THE VOYAGE OF THE RED WITCH**

Darya composed herself upon the floor of Achmed's small cubicle of a cabin, but with no thought of slumber in her mind. A length of bedding taken from Kairadine's bunk covered her nakedness. She had drawn it about her slender body like a loose robe, and used the remainder of it to cushion the planking of the deck beneath her.

By one ankle was she securely tethered to the center post which supported the afterdeck overhead. After several busy minutes spent futilely attempting to free herself, the cavegirl gave the task up as a hopeless one. Now, stoically but with an inward fear she strove to conceal, she awaited whatever fate was to be hers, determined to sell her life dearly, and her maidenhead no less dearly.

When the corsairs had brought her into the first mate's cabin, she had taken in her new surroundings with a swift, all-encompassing glance. The mate's cabin was naturally smaller and less luxuriously appointed than was the cabin of the Pirate Prince of El-Cazar. A rude bunk was built into the wall, with shelves and drawers beneath it. One small porthole admitted light and fresh air, but even Darya knew all too well that it was too small to permit her to squeeze through it, should she be fortunate enough to set herself free from her bonds.

Even a woman as brave and daring as Darya of the Bronze Age may be forgiven for the despair which settled upon her valiant spirit. True, she had miraculously escaped being ravished by the Captain of the Barbary Pirates, but could that fate be long delayed? If he died beneath the fangs of the terrible yith, no longer would the fear of him restrain his sailors from visiting upon their helpless captive the brutal indignities she dreaded to contemplate . . . and from the appearance of his wounds, the girl thought it certain that the Redbeard was near death.

The worst thing about it was, quite simply, that Darya of Thandar had utterly no means of defending herself or of escaping from her present predicament. In fact, she could not even speak or understand the language in which her captors conversed—a bastardized and degenerate form of Algerian Arabic with a thick intermixture of Moorish and Bedouin terms.

This question of language was a source of puzzlement to the cavegirl. All of the peoples of the Underground World shared a common tongue, which Professor Potter once identified as "proto-Aryan," the direct ancestor of ancient Sanskrit, and, therefore, of the entire family of Indo-European languages which includes Latin, Greek, French, English, Spanish, German and many more. It was the theory of the Professor that this was the original language of man, first used by our remote Cro-Magnon ancestors before the Ice Age.

But the Barbary Pirates had a language all their own, and this notion was strange to Darya. The only people that she had ever met who spoke a language different from the universal tongue of Zanthodon

were the Professor and I. But surely these strange Men-Who-Rode-Upon-The-Water were not from the Upper World as she had been given to understand we were, for they did not resemble the scrawny scientist and me in speech, dress, customs or appearance.

Shrugging, the Princess of Thandar put the mystery aside as insoluble. And, also, as irrelevant, since it had no bearing upon the problem of her present state of captivity.

Long moments had passed, and no one entered the cabin. After a long while, her tension eased; she relaxed her vigilance a trifle. Whatever doom was before her, it evidently was not yet to befall.

Before long, her weariness overtook her consciousness. It had been an exhausting sequence of events, all that which had transpired since Eric Carstairs had led her and the other prisoners forth from the cavern-city of the Gorpaks. She felt very weary.

After a time, she slept.

Fumio crouched, sniffing miserably, in the dank and fetid darkness of the hold. The Thandarian renegade was feeling very sorry for himself. And with fairly good reason.

When Fumio had earlier peeked through the small trapdoor he had stared directly into the hungry eyes of the enormous yith as its terrible head rose dripping from the waves of the Sogar-Jad. With a yelp of terror, Fumio had instantly dropped the lid with a bang, and half-clambered, half-fell back down into the deeper parts of the hold, there to cower, trembling, expecting that each moment would be his last.

The sounds from the deck above had come to him muffled and distorted as they filtered through the thick planking of the deck above his head. Eventually, however, it dawned upon the hapless Fumio that the yith had either gone away of its own accord or had been driven hence by the Barbary Pirates.

When it became apparent to Fumio that he was not going to be devoured by the sea-dragon, he stole forth from his hidey-hole and sought once more the small trapdoor.

Unfortunately, this time it was battened down securely, which left the caveman with no recourse but to squat in the stinking darkness and await whatever hideous form of death his mysterious captors were reserving for him.

After a time, he, too, fell into a fitful and uneasy slumber.

But not for long.

Suddenly, the hatch creaked open, flooding the hold with the dazzle of day. Swarthy, sinister-looking crewmen clambered down to drag Fumio from his corner and shove him up the steps to the swaying deck. There incomprehensible commands were growled at him in the most menacing manner

imaginable. When the caveman failed to understand what was wanted of him, one of the huge, dark-skinned men fetched him up alongside the head with a clout that left Fumio reeling. Thereupon, he learned and very quickly what they wanted him to do.

The attack of the yith had taken the lives of a few crew members too many, and the Red Witch was left shorthanded. Recalling the presence of his second captive aboard the galley, the first mate ordered him pressed into service. Under the sharp eyes of Tarbu and Kemal, the miserable Fumio was set to work swabbing the deck, coiling ropes, repairing torn rigging, and performing, however unwillingly and without understanding what exactly these things were, a variety of other menial tasks which freed more experienced hands for more important duties elsewhere.

Soon, Fumio developed an aching back and a fine collection of ripe blisters upon his hands. He also collected a fine set of purplish bruises from the blows rained upon him by exasperated sailors, few of whom could speak more than a word or two of Zanthodonian.

That "night," after a hearty but half-cooked meal, Fumio fell into the deep sleep of exhaustion, to be roused by booted feet thudding in his ribs to another round of vile, degrading tasks.

Nowhere did he espy Darya of Thandar.

In time he began to doubt if she was still aboard the Red Witch . . . although where else she could be the caveman could not imagine.

Perhaps, these fearsome ogres had thrown her overboard, to feed the yiths . . . !

Shuddering, Fumio bent with redoubled vigor to his tasks. He cared not a whit for Darya, who had been nothing but a continuous source of disastrously bad luck to Fumio-or so it seemed from his point of view. But he cared very, very much about what was going to happen to Fumio, and he resolved to work his fingers to the bone in order not to be flung to the yiths.

He was a gallant and unselfish chap, that Fumio.

For many wakes and sleeps the Red Witch sailed "north" along the coast of the subterranean continent, eventually gaining the sea wherein many small and rocky islands rose from the foaming waves.

Here the mists which arose from the surface of the Sogar-Jad clung in milky veils about the fang-like rocks and small, jagged islets, obscuring one's view. These scattered islets of the archipelago formed a natural barrier, protecting the pirates' stronghold of El-Cazar from the attack of any potential enemies foolish enough to attempt to invade the pirate kingdom. The rocks and reefs also made navigation very tricky; true, Redbeard's cabin contained detailed charts of the safer courses through this barrier, but always before Achmed had only conveyed the orders given to him by his captain, while Kairadine studied the charts.

Achmed sweated it out. The basic problem was that while Redbeard could read, Achmed could not. The carefully inscribed markings and instructions and warnings on the master chart were as Greek to him.

Shoals scraped the keel of the ship, where the water was perilously shallow. Rocks rasped along the shuddering hull. Time and time again, only an instant's warning enabled the sailors to swing aside from an impending collision with a half-glimpsed mass of rock that could have torn the hull asunder and sent the pirate galley to the bottom of the sea.

Achmed fervently wished that his captain were well enough to resume the command of the galley. True, Kairadine was mending with remarkable speed, as his natural vigor and sheer animal vitality repaired the ravages done to his health by the terrible fangs of the giant plesiosaur.

But he was still partly delirious from a raging fever, and in no condition even to do so much as to interpret the charts to his first mate.

At length, however, they emerged into open sea again. The sea mists parted; daylight lit the magnificent vista before them, and the pirates cheered at the first glimpse of their island kingdom they had enjoyed in many months.

And Darya's heart sank. Soon, she would be borne a captive behind that impregnable fortress, and would be alone and helpless amid a thousand enemies.

For . . . who could rescue her from the stronghold of El-Cazar?

## **Chapter 7 EL-CAZAR**

Sheer from the foaming sea lifted the cliff walls of El-Cazar. Long combes broke in shattered and flying spray against those rocky ramparts. Lean corsair galleys rode at anchor in the shoulders of sheltering, granite quays.

The walls of El-Cazar were partly natural cliff, partly man-made masonry. They seemed towering and formidable to such as Darya and Fumio, who had never envisioned a structure made by human hands of a complexity superior to log huts.

Winding zigzag stairways cut from the living rock of the cliffs ascended from the harbor quays to tall gates set in the ramparts. Beyond the massive walls of El-Cazar sprawled the labyrinth of the town itself, a maze of crooked alleys and slovenly lean-to houses, mostly of adobe or rock faced with plaster painted in gaudy hues-lavender, canary, cream, azure, jade-green, scarlet-but some of the structures were of neatly dressed and fitted logs, tightly caulked with tarry pitch and roofed with sloping rows of red tile.



Cartagena must have looked like this, in the high, roaring days of the Spanish Main ....

As the captives were led into the city itself, a bewildering variety of noises, smells and scenes assaulted their senses. Crippled beggars whined from alley-mouths; painted slatterns wheedled and beckoned from second-story balconies, railed with elaborate wrought iron; drunken corsairs snored or brawled on the narrow streets, which were cobbled and which reeked of offal.

The town . . . roared . . . howling to the skies. From a thousand aleshops and wine-bars and gaming halls and pleasure-houses came the sounds of barroom fights, bawdy singing, laughter, carousal.

The stench which ascended from El-Cazar was frightful. The isle was solid rock, hence there were no sewers; in their place, a deep groove had been cut through the middle of the meandering, cobbled streets, through which there trickled sluggishly a vile and slimy stream clotted with refuse.

They passed inns or hostels which bore swinging signs in an almost Elizabethan manner, with names like The Crusader's Head and Bucket o' Blood and Jolly Rogues. From the smell of raw grain spirits and cheap wine which exuded from the swinging doors of these establishments, one could have correctly assumed that the Prophet's admonition against the partaking of spiritous beverages was completely ignored in El-Cazar, or perhaps forgotten.

Such was El-Cazar, the pirate kingdom. From curtained balconies, veiled Eastern women peered down, slim and lissom in their long kabbilays, watching for the arrival of their masters, or their lovers, perhaps-sometimes, for both. Orange trees grew in walled private gardens, their snowy blossoms sweetening the odor-thick air. Fountains splashed and gurgled. They passed chandlers' shops, warehouses, the establishment of merchants, streets devoted to gemsellers, goldsmiths, mapmakers, and coffeeshops where turbaned gentlemen reclined at their ease on soft carpets under striped awnings, sipping the potent black brew.

Such was El-Cazar . . . .

With Achmed leading the way, the corsair crew of the Red Witch swaggered up the steep, ascending ways to the top of the town, to High Street, where uprose the imposing edifice which was the residence of the Barbary Prince.

They were accosted along the way by carousing comrades, who shouted hoarse expletives, rude inquiries, bawdy invitations. To which the corsairs of Kairadine's crew responded readily enough, and in kind. It was perhaps a blessing that Darya of Thandar could not understand a word of what was said, for all of it was vulgar and most of it was obscene.

Since this was, after all, the cavegirl's first taste of "civilization," had she been able to comprehend the meaning of the hoarse calls and crude remarks, they might have soured her on civilization forever.

Four sailors bore the litter on which reposed Kairadine Redbeard. He was conscious at last, but weak and pale, having recovered during the long sea voyage from the taint of his infection and the resultant fever. Weak and pale and listless, he responded but feebly to the comments given by the throng. With a languid lifted hand he acknowledged the salutes of the captains whom he passed. They seemed amazed to see their prince so seriously incapacitated, and that boded ill, to Achmed's way of thinking.

But there was nothing that could be done about it, reasoned the Moorish first mate. Under the perpetual afternoon skies of Zanthodon, it would be impossible to smuggle the wounded prince into the fortress city under cover of darkness. Now every rival for Kairadine's authority, and every potential challenger, dissatisfied by his laws or his leadership, would know that their chief was bedridden with a serious wound and would doubtless be so for weeks to come. And this worried Achmed.

Darya and Fumio stared about themselves with stark amazement and even a kind of awe. They would not have been quite so impressed had they seen the Scarlet City of Zar to the remote "east," for that metropolis of the surviving colony of Minoan Crete was a far more splendid collection of edifices. At about the same time as Darya and Fumio were brought into El-Cazar, the Professor, Xask and I were being penned up in our luxurious prison suites in Zar, and the two Cro-Magnons did not share our experiences. But they were impressed enough, although Darya wrinkled up her pert little nose at the stench of the trickling sewage and at the mounds of collapsing and rotting garbage which choked every alleymouth and many doorways.

Putting a bold face on things, Achmed led his party through the city to the tall buildings at its height. Along the way, various members of the crew of the Red Witch fell back to seek their own homes or to drink with cronies. A very loose discipline was maintained here in the pirate city, for little more was needed, actually, as El-Cazar had its own defenses (those erected by nature) and no real enemies.

In fact, the island fortress had never been invaded in living memory, and was deemed impregnable by its ruffianly inhabitants.

As wiser men have commented before me, pride goeth before a fall ....

The massive portals of the princely residence opened before their approach, since servants had long been apprised of their arrival. They entered through cool, shadowy corridors into a center courtyard which was like a garden. Walled about in a rectangle by open balconies was this garden, and therein fountains splashed and small artificial streams meandered between banks of green turf and flowering bushes. Herein grew plants otherwise unknown to the biosphere of Zanthodon: flowering, dark-leaved, glossy magnolia, flaming hibiscus, tall feathery palms, fragrant lilies.

Whether these plants had been brought into Zanthodon as seedlings was unknown. Even the Barbary Pirates had forgotten their provenance, but as their ancestors had fled hither with all haste, running before the merciless advance of disciplined European troops, it is to be questioned whether they had bothered to bring aught more than seeds with them, and that in itself was probably accidental.

Kairadine Redbeard on his litter was carried into his own apartments, there to be tended by his women and his mutes. The two prisoners were immured in another part of the huge buildings, secured under lock and key but no longer bound. Achmed was delighted and relieved to be free of his two charges, but in particular of Darya, for the golden beauty of the adolescent Cro-Magnon girl had tempted him severely, although he had rigidly abstained from touching her and had, in fact, ignored her presence in his cabin in so far as was humanly possible.

Whether it was from simple loyalty to his chief, or from equally simple fear of that chief's raging fury, even Achmed could not say. At any rate, Darya had shared the cramped quarters with him without molestation or the slightest affront to her own dignity. But Achmed was male and human, and had felt her nearness keenly. He was delighted to turn her over to Kairadine's servants, who would be responsible for her from that point on. As for Fumio, he cared little.

The Arab women fluttered about Darya, cooing and giggling and chattering their comments to each other in their own tongue, which the blonde cavegirl did not understand, perhaps luckily. Then they stripped her of her garments and bathed her in a huge tub of beaten brass. Never before had the Cro-Magnon maiden experienced the bliss of steaming hot water, foamy soap, and lavish perfumes. She may, I believe, be forgiven if she wallowed and luxuriated under the novelty of the experience.

Then they dressed her hair, clothed her in gauzy Oriental raiment, and left her to her own devices.

The cavegirl stared around her at the sumptuous apartment in which she was penned. Low, carven tabourets bore copper or silver bowls of ripe fruit and candied comfits. Beakers of wine, or honeyed fruit juices stood about in carafes of cut crystal. Hangings of woven cloth adorned the walls in the Oriental manner. There was no other furniture worth speaking of, but then Darya of Thandar was unaccustomed to furniture of any kind and did not really miss it. The silken carpets underfoot fascinated her, as did the nest of soft and richly colored cushions, upon which she reclined blissfully.

Perfumed smoke seeped from hanging pierced lamps. Arched doorways, veiled in floating draperies, led to other, more intimate, chambers. Low tables were littered with jars and pots and phials of perfume, kohl, unguents, and other cosmetics, but in the employment of these she was of course completely ignorant. She sniffed and sampled and tasted, but did no more.

Suddenly was Darya roused from the doze into which she had fallen in a nest of soft, plump cushions. There was a murmur of excited voices from the corridors beyond her luxurious cell, and squeaks of alarm. She rose lithely to her feet, ready for almost anything.

What appeared in the doorway, however, was something she could not have expected.

It was a woman every bit as beautiful as herself, and in a furious rage.

This, she reasoned, could only be the dancing-girl, Zoraida, who until her arrival upon the scene had been the favorite concubine of Kairadine Redbeard.

## Chapter 8 FLAME OF ARABY

Zoraida of El-Cazar was a few inches taller than Darya of Thandar, and a few years older, perhaps. Instead of the glowing tan of the golden-haired cavegirl, the dancer's sleek body was the rich hue of milk chocolate, denoting her descent from a mixed but mostly Moorish parentage-for she and Achmed were of the same ancestry. It was soft and redolent of rare oils and perfumed unguents, that body, and her long hair was blue-black in the lamplight and her eyes were like glimmering black opals, filled with swirling witch-fires.

Where Darya was slim and vibrant, Zoraida was voluptuous and full-bodied, with magnificent deep breasts and rounded thighs and haunches. But a dancer's silken and tireless strength was apparent in every sinew, and she moved as gracefully as a tigress.

Her enormous and slightly tilted eyes were fringed with kohl, which also darkened her long lashes. Her full-lipped mouth, in whose ripe curves slept passion and pride, willfulness and jealousy, was as scarlet as a wound. Her long, thick silken mane was held out of her eyes by a triple row of beads; emeralds, polished but uncut, flashed in gold settings from the lobes of her ears; gauds and beads and bangles clashed about her throat and spilled in glittering webs across her heaving breasts, which were naked beneath an open vest of yellow felt sewn with glinting sequins.

A wide sash of colored silks cinched in her narrow waist; transparent pantaloons of smoky gauze clad her lithe and lissom legs; gold and silver bracelets clinked upon her wrists. And in her round navel there twinkled a star-sapphire as big as a man's eye.

Such was Zoraida of El-Cazar . . . .

The woman was in a tigerish fury; word had sped to her, it would seem obvious, that during his long voyage "south" Kairadine Redbeard had become infatuated with a savage girl of the tribes, and had fetched her back to the island fortress as his prize. Nor could the spiteful curiosity of the jealous dancer forbear to look upon her rival for the affections of the corsair monarch. Now her flashing eyes widened in mock astonishment.

"By the Veiled Prophet of Khorassan!" she swore in a deep, husky voice whose timbre did interesting things to a man's mind, "from the gossip of the seamen, I had thought to find an exquisite houri from Paradise encamped in the bed of Redbeard-which once was all of the kingdom Zoraida held, or aspired to!-but, now instead, I see a skinny girl-child with paps scarce bigger than a boy's . . . a freckled hoyden who stinks of seawater and rancid sweat . . . a gawky savage, more accustomed to squatting in a filthy cave and gnawing on week-old bones, than to the palaces of princes and the luxuries of El-Cazar! I wonder me if mayhap Redbeard has taken leave of his wits, to become besotted with a trembling infant

such as you, as ignorant of the arts of pleasing a man in bed as she is ignorant of paint, powder and perfume!"

With these words, the dancing-girl threw back her head and voiced a burst of mocking laughter. Darya of Thandar could not understand the words, but the sarcasm and the mockery in them and the laughter which followed were unmistakable. The cavegirl crimsoned-hating herself for it-and bit her lip to stem the flood of bitter words which sprang to her lips.

Zoraida eyed her up and down, maliciously, knowing full well how to tease and insult another woman with a glance. Especially a woman who is not looking her best-and Darya had gone through weeks of captivity, jungle treks, and a long voyage. Despite the attempts of the slave girls to tame her salt-stiff, unruly mane of golden hair, it fell in knotty tangles, its gleam dulled by the salt-spray. Weals and scratches but half-healed scored her bare arms and thighs. Also, she had lost weight during the voyage, as the rancid food and meat and overripe fruit and sour biscuits which served the seamen as provender were as distasteful to her as they were unfamiliar.

The girl flushed and eyed Zoraida mutinously, a dangerous glint in her blue eyes. Zoraida sensed something in that glowering, level stare and in the lift of the small, stubborn chin, and laughed again . . . but fell back a step and let the henna-colored fingers of her right hand toy meaningfully with the hilt of the small gemmed dagger she wore at one lush hip.

"By the Blood of Ali, but the wench is half-wildcat!" she exclaimed in mock surprise. "Redbeard, that lustful rogue, must in sooth have left his wits behind when he fell for the unripe charms of this skinny savage-she'll claw his hide to ribbons when he mounts her, and cut out his eyes with one slash!"

Then-with startling suddenness-the raillery died in Zoraida's manner, and was replaced by cold venom. Thrusting her face forward like a serpent about to strike, she spat vicious words whose meaning her victim could sense intuitively, but not comprehend.

"Think you to replace Zoraida in Redbeard's bed, you scrawny slut? I'll see you bedded down with Shaitan in the redhot pits of Hell before that happens-"

And she spat full in Darya's face!

Astounded, the cavegirl wiped the spittle away-then launched herself at the dancer's throat. She leaped like a panther, taking the other woman by surprise, bearing her backwards onto the floor and kneeling upon her chest while locking small, capable hands about her throat, throttling.

Zoraida goggled up at her adversary, eyes wide with amazement. Then those eyes filled with splendid fury and with a convulsive heave of her trained body she threw the cavegirl from her, sprang to her feet; ripped her bright blade from its scabbard with a wicked rasp and brandished the naked steel beneath Darya's nose.

"I have no claws like you, jungle wildcat, but this is Zoraida's fang-and it shall mark that pretty face in such a way that never will Redbeard or any other man look upon you without flinching away . . ."

The glittering blade hovered near.

Then Zoraida screeched, for the firm white sharp and even teeth of Darya of Thandar had sunk into the wrist of that hand like the fangs of a striking adder.

Over and over the two women rolled upon the floor, cursing, panting, biting, clawing, kicking. Darya seized a handful of the necklaces that hung about the dancer's throat and ripped them away, beads scattering, pearls rolling into the far corners of the room. Zoraida gasped with outrage, and reached for Darya's blond mane with one hand while with the other she strove to sink her dagger in the cavegirl's slim throat

"Hold, woman!"

That resounding voice froze Zoraida in mid-motion.

In the next instant the long blade of a curved sword flashed between the two girls; both young women looked up to see none other than Kairadine Redbeard in the doorway, supported by the strong black arms of Achmed. His face was pale as death but his eyes were as dangerous as the gaze of a deadly serpent.

"Beloved . . . you are wounded! They did not tell me." moaned Zoraida, scrambling from Darya to fall upon her knees before her lord. She sought to cover his slippered feet with kisses, but he reared back and kicked her full in the mouth, rocking her back upon her heels. Blood dribbled from a cut on her lip.

"B-But-" gasped the dancer.

"The jungle wench is under my protection, woman-touch her again at your peril," snarled Kairadine.

"What is a skinny savage child to you, beloved, who have reached the heights of ecstasy in the arms of your own Zoraida?" whimpered the dancer, wiping the blood from her lips and smearing her cosmetics as she did so.

Redbeard sneered, looking her over-the disarranged hair, torn garments, scratched breasts. Blood and lip-rouge made a crimson mask on her lower face, and tears had made her kohl run in black trickles down her cheek.

"She looks less like a madwoman or a clown than does Zoraida," laughed Redbeard. "Need I repeat it once again? By the Black Stone of Kaaba, the woman is mine!"

"You call me clown and madwoman," wept Zoraida, bursting into passionate tears, "whom once you hailed as Flame of Araby and Moon of Delight, when that Zoraida danced the dance of the scarlet veils . . ."

"Those days are past," growled Redbeard. Suddenly, vigor drained from him and he sagged in the strong arms of Achmed, eyes going dull and curved scimitar dropping from listless fingers to ring like a stricken bell upon the stone flags.

"Leave us now, O Zoraida, for our master is very weak and wearies swiftly!" rumbled Achmed, bearing the Barbary Prince to his bed.

The dancer staggered to her feet, eyed Achmed resentfully, not failing to notice the flicker of gloating amusement in the eyes of the Moor as he watched the discomfiture of his only rival for the comradeship of Kairadine. She tugged uselessly at her torn raiment, tried to arrange her hair; then her back stiffened with furious pride, and she went from the room with gliding steps.

She paused once in the portal to cast a look back at where Darya crouched by the table.

And if looks could kill, the malignancy in the eyes of Zoraida the Flame of Araby would have struck Darya dead on the spot.

Later, having repaired the damages to her appearance with cosmetics and a change of raiment, Zoraida slunk from her apartments in the palace of Kairadine Redbeard. Veiled in dark robes, her gorgeous face concealed behind the yashmak, the veil which the women of Islam wear upon their faces, she descended into the streets of El-Cazar and sought out a tall house of whitewashed stone which stood beside a cobbled square.

Gliding into the shadow of an arched doorway, she fumbled with a cord. A bell tinkled somewhere within the imposing structure. Moments later, a figure appeared, peering through the eye-slit in the door; whispered words were exchanged, and the door opened a crack to permit the dancer to enter.

And from the shadows of a portico across the square, Achmed the Moor, who had followed Zoraida hither, tugged thoughtfully at the golden hoops which glittered in his lobes.

"Now, what would Zoraida be doing in the house of Yussuf ben Ali at this hour?" mused Achmed to himself. "What business can the favorite of Kairadine Redbeard have to transact with the chiefest rival to his throne?"

To that question no answer was possible, as yet . . .

## Chapter 9 FUMIO IS PURCHASED

When Kairadine Redbeard had recovered sufficiently from the terrible wound inflicted upon him by the monstrous yith, and realized that his first mate had captured the wrong man along with Darya-not Jorn, but another-he was quick to burst into rage and even quicker to forgive.

After all, Achmed the Moor had only seen Jorn the Hunter once, and then fleetingly and from a distance. It was not his fault that he had mistaken the renegade Fumio for Darya's young protector. One Cro-Magnon savage, let it be admitted, looked very much like any other Cro-Magnon savage, at least to the Barbary Pirates.

Thwarted in the cruel vengeance he had planned to wreak upon young Jorn, the Redbeard did not at once know exactly what to do with Fumio. He had nothing against the fellow, never having laid eyes upon him before; on the other hand, another mouth to feed was another mouth to feed. What, then, to do with an unwanted captive?

Kairadine resolved the small dilemma with ruthless ease, as was typical of a man of his temperament.

He sold Fumio into slavery.

The slave market of El-Cazar was situated near the waterfront in a huge barnlike wooden building whose walls were lined with slave pens, while the podium or slave block stood in the open center of the floor. This way, potential buyers could stroll about the pens, looking over the livestock, so to speak, while deciding on which to make their bid.

The slave-trader was a very fat Algerian named Abdoul, with tremendous mustachios which were his pride and joy. They were waxed and curled and scented with perfume, and he was forever fondling and preening himself on them. Since the rest of Abdoul was grossly fat-his face all triple chins and ballooning cheeks, dripping with greasy sweatperhaps he needed something to be proud of.

At any rate, Fumio went for a pretty good price, being tall and powerfully built. Indeed, his musculature was superb, and he would have been a magnificently handsome man were it not for his broken nose, and the slight sneering curl to his thin lips, and the gleam of cunning and cowardice which glistened in his eyes.

His purchaser was one Yussef ben Ali, foremost of the corsair captains, and chiefest rival to the throne of Kairadine himself. This made Achmed the Moor rub the bridge of his nose thoughtfully, and tug at the golden hoops which bobbed in his pierced earlobes.

It might be sheer coincidence, of course, but . . . well, Achmed was the seventh son of a seventh son, and by the traditional superstitions of Islam, such are reckoned to possess the rare gift of second sight.



And those who can, however seldom and then but dimly, glimpse into the future rarely believe in coincidence.

When Fumio was hauled before his new master, the Cro-Magnon knelt hastily, trembling in every limb and gasping like a beached fish. Yussef ben Ali prodded him to his feet with a disdainful toe and gave his new possession a careful looking-over. He did not particularly approve of what he saw, but he had paid good money for Fumio and resolved to get the most for his cash.

"A simple savage," he observed contemptuously, "and a sniveling coward, to boot! By the Mountain of Kaf, Zoraida, of what use is such a lout to such as I?"

The veiled woman at his side smiled thinly.

"The savage was captured at the same time, and in the company of, Darya of Thandar," she purred silkenly. "The wildman will know as much of the woman as can be known; doubtless, she is his jungle sweetheart. Through him we shall gain valuable knowledge of the woman, which both you and I, O Yussef, can use to our mutual advantage . . . ."

"I hope so," grumbled Yussef, wrinkling his nose. "Thirty gold dinars I paid for this animal, and I would hate to see the money wasted!"

He touched a gong beside his divan. A slave woman appeared, her slender beauty veiled, but not at all concealed, behind filmy yashmak and gauze trousers. Yussef murmured a command and the girl bowed again and vanished behind a drapery.

While Yussef was looking Fumio over, Fumio was fearfully eyeing his new master. This Yussef ben Ali was a tall, broad-shouldered man, lean and straight as a swordblade, with a hawklike face and cruel thin lips framed in black mustachios. He went otherwise clean-shaven, and, instead of the turban affected by Kairadine, wore a tall tarboosh of red felt. Lounging at ease on his divan, his lean body draped in light silken robes, he looked as swift and restless, as dangerous and unpredictable, as a panther.

And he was.

Within a few moments, the slave girl reappeared with another slave, this one a blond Cro-Magnon slave from the mainland. He and Fumio stared dully at each other.

"What is the slave's name?" demanded Yussef of the girl.

"Grond, my master," she replied.

"Well, then, Grond, ask of your fellow here his name and station, and such other questions as I shall

direct you to ask, since you speak the language of the savages and I, of course, do not," drawled Yussef.

And Grond proceeded to do so.

They soon set Fumio to work at the most dirty or backbreaking of menial tasks, deeming the Cro-Magnon too low on the scale of intelligence to be fitted to more complicated duties. This is a failing I have many times noted of men who deem themselves civilized, that they underestimate the intelligence and the capacity to learn of people less "civilized" than themselves.

At any rate, Fumio found himself mopping the stairs and scrubbing pots clean in the kitchens and carrying out the slops. He had been queried by Grond for over an hour, under direction of Yussef ben Ali, and they had dredged out of him everything he knew about Darya of Thandar and her people. Since he was a member of the same tribe, this was very much, indeed. Some of it was useless to the purposes of Yussef and Zoraida, but other items of information were of high potential value.

For example, it very much interested the two schemers to learn that a hundred or more stalwart Thandarian warriors were hot on the trail of their stolen princess. As Yussef wanted nothing more than to disgrace and replace Kairadine Redbeard through the exposure of some miscalculation of disastrous import, and to replace him on the throne of El-Cazar (to which, as a cousin of the present island monarch, he had a tenuous but genuine claim by blood), his agile mind busied itself in figuring the angles: how could an invasion of Cro-Magnon fighting men serve to his own advantage? How could they be led or brought here without harm to Yussef and his friends? Would Kairadine and his friends be able to repulse him, and at what price?

Both Yussef ben Ali and the dancing-girl, Zoraida, were disappointed to learn that, contrary to what they had naturally assumed, Fumio and Darya were not sweethearts. Yussef's first idea-suggested to him by Zoraida, actually-had been to insinuate Fumio into the palace of Kairadine somehow, so that the savage could defend the honor of his jungle lovely by murdering the corsair king. This, sadly, would not prove feasible.

But the wily brain of Yussef ben Ali was already spinning the webs of other plots.

"Never fear, O Flame of Araby," he promised Zoraida. "We shall find a use for this tool with the broken nose yet, to the discomfiture of the man whom both you and I hate-"

"I do not hate Kairadine Redbeard, I love him!" flared the dancing-girl with passionate conviction. Her superb breasts heaved and her eyes flashed like black diamonds.

"Well, then; well, even so," soothed Yussef, calming her.

"It is the wench I mean to be rid of," she hissed. "With her dead or stolen, Kairadine will mourn briefly, then return to my arms again, where he was once happy as the Saints in Paradise, and will again be, I

vow!"

"Yes, yes; to be sure . . . ."

"Nor would I conspire like this with you, his enemy, were there another way! But I am forbidden to come near unto either him or his hussy, on pain of the bastinado! Hence, I must rely upon your despicable wiles to reft the girl from his arms-although what good that will do to you and to your cause and ambitions, I really cannot understand."

Yussef shrugged.

"Anything that will hurt Kairadine Redbeard will give me pleasure," he said suavely. "And to return him to your arms will afford me the protection of your friendship, for now there is a bond between us, which I, for one, will never break."

His words sounded convincing, and honesty shone in his bland and guileless eyes, but Zoraida eyed him doubtfully. If she were not fully certain that her hero and lover could defend himself against the wiles and traps of Yussef, she would never have conspired with Kairadine's rival.

Privately, she did not trust the rival captain any further than she had to. And, probably, she was right.

"Now you must leave here, O Zoraida," urged the corsair captain. "I believe that my house is being watched-perhaps by that dog of a Moor that serves your master as his first mate-and it's no longer safe for you to come and go here as you please."

"How, then, shall we communicate henceforward?" demanded Zoraida.

Yussef smiled. "Fear not! Nor trouble your lovely little head about that, for Yussef ben Ali has other friends behind the walls of the palace of Kairadine than your exquisite self! Now go, and quickly-and take care not to be seen!"

As the dancer veiled herself and slipped from the room, Yussef fingered his mustache, thinking back over the passionate avowals of love which Zoraida had just made for the man she was betraying. The irony of the situation appealed to his wry sense of humor.

"By Allah," he chuckled, "I thank the saints that no woman loves me as much as Zoraida loves Kairadine!"

## **Chapter 10 A MYSTERIOUS FRIEND**

Darya of Thandar found life in the harem of Kairadine Redbeard at once boring, luxurious, confining,

tedious and lonely. Her suite in the harem wing was sumptuously decorated, a soft and silken nest, and after the hardships and exertions she had endured in recent weeks, the Cro-Magnon girl would not have been human did she not luxuriate in such pleasures as a comfortable bed, delicious, if unfamiliar, foods and hot, soapy baths.

She was lonely because she was kept apart from the other women by Kairadine Redbeard's direct orders. Burly eunuchs stood beyond her door day and night, permitting no one to enter and refusing to let her leave. The guards had been posted immediately after the scene when Zoraida had burst in upon her and the two had fought together, Zoraida armed with a knife. Kairadine wished no recurrence of that event; hence the eunuchs.

The Princess of Thandar could have enjoyed the luxury of her captivity much more had it not been for the suspense which she endured. True, she was secure from the lusts of the Barbary Prince while the lacerated muscles of his shoulder healed, but-for how long would her present safety continue? The pirate prince was in the full glory of his prime, with the sheer animal vigor of a healthy athlete; ere long, he would be healed enough to claim the object of his desires. It was difficult to estimate just how long that would be ....

Darya spent the listless days and empty nights dreaming of escape. It seemed hopeless to think of getting past the two giant blacks who guarded her door, and the long windows were screened by latticework riveted to the window frames. She might have been able to break through the carved wood lattices with a knife or tool, but none was in her possession. The Barbary Pirates, being more or less true Moslems, did not employ eating utensils, preferring thin wooden rods like those thrust through shish kebab. Those and their bare hands were all the implements they required to down their meals. True, meat was carved with knives, but the meats served to Darya were already carved, and she was never permitted to see a knife.

Escape seemed hopeless.

But Darya had gambled her life on even more hopeless odds before. And won.

Isolated as she was behind the silken barriers of the women's quarters, it still was not unknown to Darya that the pirate kingdom of El-Cazar was in a seething turmoil. Only the strong leadership and heavy hand of Kairadine Redbeard had restrained the reckless and explosive tempers of his corsair chieftains; while he healed in bed, surrounded by a flurry of Arab physicians, plots were brewing, aye, and counterplots, too.

Rumor claimed that Kairadine had been crippled by the yith's bite-that his swordarm was useless. And the Pirate Prince maintained his grip on the precarious throne of El-Cazar only so long as he was strong and vigorous enough to maintain his grip on the hilt of a sword. For it was law in El-Cazar that he could be challenged to a duel at any time by one of chieftainly rank who questioned his abilities to lead his men wisely and to fight at their forefront.

That these rumors had been surreptitiously begun by the wily Yussef ben Ali was suspected by Achmed the Moor, whose suspicions had been aroused by the furtive meetings between Zoraida, the cast-off former love of Kairadine, and his foremost rival. Nothing could be proved, of course, but Achmed resolved to wait, and watch, and listen ....

Darya had begun to learn the language spoken in El-Cazar, or enough of it, at any rate, to piece together the morsels of information that came her way, for slave girls will chatter carelessly, especially when in the company of one believed ignorant of the local language.

The cavegirl soon came to understand that the leadership of the corsairs was divided between five chieftains, each the captain of a galley, who were leagued into the Council of Captains. In matters pertaining to the kingdom, each had a single vote and a simple majority ruled. Hitherto, Kairadine had commanded the loyalty of all but one of these captains, Yussef ben Ali.

Commanding four votes against his one, the wishes of the Redbeard had always carried the day. Until now, that is: for rumors whispered that one of Kairadine's erstwhile supporters, a huge, fat-bellied Algerian called Zodeen, wavered in his loyalties. Whether he had been bribed by wealth from the bulging coffers of Yussef ben Ali, or whether Yussef had something heartily desired by fat Zodeen was a matter of open speculation.

It was known, however, that Zodeen's fancies lay in the direction of prepubescent girls.

It was also known that Yussef had recently come voyaging home from a slave-raiding expedition to the mainland with two exquisite young blonde savage girls.

And even the slaves in the harem, ignorant of reading and writing and arithmetic, could put one and one together, and come up with two ....

The cavegirl adapted swiftly to her new environment, for all that nearly everything about it was strange and unfamiliar to her. She had been reared in her jungle homeland, dwelling in log huts, hunting and fishing for food; here men dwelt in tall stone houses, in a city, no less, governed by laws, not dim traditions and customs, wearing elaborate clothing, not scraps of hide, fighting with keen swords whose employment was an art, almost a science. It was all bewilderingly new to Darya.

But her people, the Cro-Magnons, were as intelligent as are modern men, and as capable of learning new ways. When they had entered into Zanthodon the Underground World during the onset of the Ice Age millennia ago, crawling into fissures in the slopes of the huge volcanic mountain which marked the main entrance to the subterranean cavernworld, they had been men of the Stone Age, crude, violent, simple, ignorant and superstitious.

The continuous struggle for existence here in Zanthodon had called into play whatever imagination and ingenuity they possessed. Single-handedly, they had progressed from out of the Stone Age into the

Bronze Age, teaching themselves by experiment and by trial and error how to extract metal ores from the hills of their jungle land and how to smelt them into ingots of pure metal; further experiment had taught them how to strengthen those metals by the admixture of such ores as copper and tin.

And once you have started on the road of learning there is no turning back. So Darya, daughter of the Bronze Age, must now pit her native cunning and ingenuity against the decadent wits of the Barbary Pirates-to survive.

She soon learned that she had a friend-an unknown and unnamed and very mysterious friend-somewhere in the palace of Kairadine Redbeard.

Another mind than hers was aware of her predicament, of the difficulties she faced in trying to escape from the palace. In order to get through the wooden lattices which covered the tall windows of her apartment, she would require a knife. No other implement would do. The interstices between the wooden slats which comprised the lattice were too narrow for her to be able to insert anything else strong enough to do the trick-a broken chair leg, for instance. No, the cavegirl could only get through the window by cutting through the tough wood with a sharp steel blade.

It was not healthy for the cavegirl to be forever locked up in the dimness of her shuttered room, and she complained of this to those who attended upon her needs. Doubtless those servitors reported her complaints to their superiors, and also the fact that she had become pale and listless and merely toyed with her food these days, rather than tackling her meals with anything like her former gusto.

For soon-under heavy guard, of course-she was permitted a daily stroll in a walled garden adjoining her rooms. Fountains splashed and small ornamental streams meandered over gravel beds, and strange flowers bloomed in a riot of rich colors, filling the humid salt-stung air with their sweetness.

These daily strolls were a boon to the cavegirl-to smell the open air and see again the golden skies of Zanthodon, to feel the wind in her hair and to experience at least the illusion of freedom! It was heady and exhilarating to the Cro-Magnon girl, and she reveled in it.

During one such walk through the gardens, after she had been a prisoner in the island fortress of El-Cazar for somewhat more than two weeks, a curious incident occurred. One of the slave women who customarily shared these garden strolls with Darya, who was protected by her eunuch guards, suddenly and without any warning uttered a piercing scream, clutched at her side, and fell thrashing upon the greensward, long lithe legs kicking as she gasped and squirmed in agony.

All eyes were instantly fastened upon the convulsions which wracked the slave girl. No one was watching Darya.

In that same instant, something wrapped in soft white cloth flew over the garden wall to fall between the small sandaled feet of Darya of Thandar.

Without hesitation, the cavegirl stooped and snatched it from the ground and thrust it into a place of concealment beneath the silken sash which wound about her slender waist.

The stricken slave was helped to her feet, gasping some tale of a sudden pain which had knifed through her-and as she happened to utter this phrase, her dazed eyes, wandering about, chanced to touch upon the gaze of Darya, whereupon-

She winked!

The girl, whose momentary pains had now passed, was assisted back into the building. And the walk was ended for this day, as the eunuchs returned Darya to her apartment and locked her within.

With pounding heart the breathless cavegirl suffered an agony of suspense until she had withdrawn the small, slim bundle from its place of concealment in her sash and unwrapped it from its white cloth.

It was a ten-inch dagger, with a blade of cold steel as sharp as any razor!

Thus Darya learned that she had not only a friend within the palace, but, now, a means of leaving!

Part Three

CONQUERORS OF EL-CAZAR

## Chapter 11 THE MISSION OF GROND

For weeks the fleet of dugout canoes explored the misty reaches of the underground ocean. There were many rocky isles-some of them mere gaunt crags of naked rock lifting from the foam, others large enough to support vegetation, and a few of sufficient size to house a small village. All must be scouted, if not actually searched.

The trouble was, Tharn of Thandar did not really know what he was looking for. A settlement of some kind, obviously-but how easy was it to find, and what did it look like? If he had been Kairadine Redbeard, called Barbarossa, with many implacable enemies ranged against him, Tharn would have carefully concealed his settlement from chance discovery.

For this reason, the Cro-Magnons must search each island that was large enough to support a village of some nature. Which took time ....

The one thing that made Tharn of Thandar realize that it was only a matter of time before his fleet discovered the whereabouts of El-Cazar, was the ship on which the Barbary Pirates had carried off

Darya and Fumio. Nothing that size can easily be hidden, and while huts may be concealed in thick jungle, or behind hills or mountains, there isn't much you can do to hide a galley the hugeness of the Red Witch.

Before embarking on the voyage, the tribe of Thandar had brought along supplies of food and drinkable water. As these ran low, the hunters brought down sea fowl with their arrows or speared primitive fish with their javelins. The women and children and older people fished, for the seas hereabouts were teeming with the finned and scaly denizens of the deep.

Water, however, became a problem. They were forced ashore to refill their waxed leather water-hides from fresh streams on many of the larger islands. But water was not such a problem as it might have been, for it rained frequently in these parts of Zanthodon and the rain water was easily collected.

About the time the Professor and I were hightailing it out of the Scarlet City of Zar with a furious goddess at our heels, they found El-Cazar.

There could be no mistaking it-those soaring walls and sturdy ramparts were clearly the work of human hands, and if further evidence was required, there lay the Red Witch herself, riding at anchor against a long stone quay built out into the shallows.

But there were other ships as well as Kairadine's galley, five lean warcraft in all. And the fortress city which rose upon its cliff-walled height was densely populous, as the many roofs and towers which could be glimpsed above the ramparts demonstrated.

Tharn had not guessed that his adversaries would be so strong and numerous. And, never having seen or heard of a real city before, he could not have imagined one like El-Cazar. He stood in the bow of his dugout, arms folded upon his mighty breast, staring up at the soaring wall.

And he would not have been human had he not felt a bit intimidated by the stronghold of the Barbary Pirates.

"How will you enter the place of the Men-Who-Ride-Upon-The-Water, O my Omad?" asked one warrior, half-fearfully.

"I do not know," he grunted. "But enter it I will, for enter it I must."

"They will be very many to our few, my Omad," warned one of the veteran warriors in Tharn's personal retinue.

The jungle monarch grunted noncommittally, but made no reply. What the fellow had said was perfectly correct, and Tharn was leader enough to know that what was needed here was not brawn, but brain. No strength that he could summon could burst through those mountainous walls of solid rock, and how



could men armed with arrows, daggers, clubs and spears defeat the howling hordes of El-Cazar, with their strange weapons of edged metal?

"We must think and plan," Tharn growled half to himself. "I must take counsel with my chieftains. Let us withdraw to that rocky isle that lies not far off; behind it we can shelter from the eyes of our foes-if indeed they can see us through these accursed mists. There we shall discuss the ways of entering the stone huts of our foe."

Privately, he wondered to himself if this was at all possible.

As with every other problem, time alone would tell.

The majordomo of the household of Yussef ben Ali was a suave, sly and obsequious fellow named 'Dullah. He was mystified, was this 'Dullah, when his master bade him fetch one of the slaves of the house, the young Cro-Magnon, Grond, who had earlier interpreted for Yussef ben Ali the words of Fumio.

Grond was, or had been, a warrior of the Gorthak tribe which inhabited portions of the northern shoreline of the subterranean continent. He had been taken in a slave raid not many months before. While he was surly and took orders poorly, he did not have the cowed, beaten, half-starved look of many of his fellow slaves. He could easily pass for a free warrior.

Entering the chambers of Yussef ben Ali, he bowed slightly and stood with stern, impassive mien and incurious eyes, awaiting whatever orders should come. Yussef ben Ali looked him over with narrowed, thoughtful eyes; beside him stood the dancing-girl, Zoraida, who also examined Grond. She admired the deep arch of his chest, his broad, muscular shoulders, and the strong thighs of the Cro-Magnon slave.

"Your name is Grond?" inquired Yussef ben Ali in a lazy, drawling voice.

"Yes, Master," replied Grond.

"Listen to me carefully, Grond. Moored on the other side of the Isle of Nine Peaks is a tribe of people similar to your kind. They have come hither in a fleet of dugout canoes to invade and conquer El-Cazar."

Grond blinked at this astounding news, but said nothing. Yussef ben Ali paused to drink in a mouthful of perfumed smoke from his nargileh. For a moment there was no sound in the silk-hung chamber but the gurgling of the waterpipe.

"This fact I have discovered for I have posted a watchman in the top of the tallest spire of my house, with a spyglass. He it was who observed, during the past 'sleep,' the cautious approach of the savages."

"And fortunate for you, O Yussef, that it was not the watchmen of Kairadine Redbeard who espied the

fleet of canoes," murmured Zoraida. The corsair gave her a languid glance.

"Fortune had nothing to do with it, O Moon of Delight! Only I knew from the lips of the other slave that the tribe from which Kairadine carried off the girl would be hunting her. Kairadine, doubtless, has no suspicion of the fact."

Then he returned his attention to Grond, who stood with stolid indifference as if none of this concerned him, although inwardly his heart was racing with excitement. To escape from El-Cazar was the dream that sustained him in his captivity—that, and the love of a girl of his own tribe, one Jaira, who also served in the house of Yussef ben Ali.

"To continue, Grond: I intend to dispatch you as my ambassador to the savages, as you and they share the same speech. You will dress yourself in these garments," added Yussef, pointing to a carven chest atop which were laid out an abbreviated loincloth of supple fur and high-laced buskins of tanned leather.

With a surly nod, Grond stripped off his present garments and donned those which his master had indicated. Zoraida's eyes were dazzled as she observed the magnificent nakedness of the yellow-haired slave. She had a zest for men, had Zoraida, and she had long been banned from the bed of Kairadine Redbeard.

When Grond was attired like a Cro-Magnon warrior of the tribes, Yussef ben Ali unlocked his slave-collar with a tiny key and replaced it with a thong necklace of the claws of a saber-toothed tiger.

The slave collar was a slim band of silver locked about the base of a slave's throat. Inscribed upon the band, in the hooked cursives of the Arabic tongue, were the slave's name and number, the number of his quarters, and the emblem of the house of Yussef ben Ali which owned him.

The removal of the hated collar was an enormous relief to Grond. He tried not to let his expression reveal the tumult of emotions which surged within his breast, but Yussef ben Ali was cleverer than he.

"Do not think to escape from your master, Grond!" the corsair captain warned. "In the first place, there is nowhere for you to go, and a single man alone could not cross the breadth of the sea between El-Cazar and the mainland without perishing. In the second place, you will bear with you on this mission no supplies of food or water, and you will not be armed."

Grond nodded to indicate that he comprehended. Yussef ben Ali smiled lazily his small, catlike smile.

"If you accomplish your mission and return, I shall give you the girl Jaira, whom my majordomo has given me to understand you desire as she desires you. Also, you will be given lighter and less unpleasant duties, and your new position will be one in which you will enjoy considerably more freedom of movement and a certain measure of authority. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master," grunted Grond.

"Then understand this as well," snapped Yussef ben Ali. "If you do not return, for whatever reason-whether you decide to risk destruction by attempting to sail to the mainland and rejoin your tribe, or whether the savages put you to death as a spy-understand that I shall see to it that the girl Jaira will die, and very slowly. Also, very painfully. She will be taken and used by every male slave, servant and seaman in my house . . . over and over again, until she dies of it. Let this remind you to hasten to return to the house of your master . . . ."

Grond flushed, then paled, and gritted his teeth to hold back the roar of bestial challenge which rose unbidden deep in his chest. He would gladly have throttled the mocking villain who sprawled lazily before him, even if to do so meant that he himself would die in the next second.

But there was Jaira to think of ....

"Yes, Master."

No one paid any attention as Grond, wrapped in a red cloak to conceal his native garb, paddled a crude dugout canoe across the harbor of El-Cazar in the general direction of the rocky island. Many were the feuds and intrigues and romances which brewed in the cookpot of the pirates' stronghold, and wise is the man who minds his own business and steers clear of the doings of others.

Grond beached his craft and dragged it high up on the pebble-strewn shore so that the waves would not suck it back to sea, leaving him stranded.

Then he began to climb across the tall hills of naked stone which hid the tribe from the eyes of El-Cazar. Yussef ben Ali had carefully coached him in exactly what he was supposed to say to the leader of the expedition, and as he climbed the slave mentally rehearsed the message thus drilled into him.

He wondered how long it would take to find the encampment of the strangers. Actually, it did not take long at all, for they found him, instead.

He was clambering through a narrow way between two steep walls when suddenly there stepped into view blond, stalwart, half-naked men attired in abbreviated fur garments very like his own. His hair was as yellow as theirs was, and his eyes as blue.

The main difference was that they were armed with long, bronze-barbed spears, while he went barehanded.

In fact, these spears were leveled directly at his naked chest ... .

## Chapter 12 THE CUNNING OF YUSSEF

While these events occurred, time was passing with excruciating slowness for the corsair prince. The raw animal vitality of Kairadine Redbeard, the unquenchable vigor of his lusty physique, was such that his wounds were healing rapidly. But so impatient was the restless pirate, that it grated upon his nerves.

During every "wake" he exercised his wounded right arm, gingerly practising with the cutlass and, later, with a somewhat heavier weapon, his customary scimitar. But the healing process seemed to take forever, and the restoration of his strength occupied an interminable period of time.

Not only was Kairadine impatient to enjoy the charms of the young slave girl he had captured on his last voyage to the mainland, but he was all too aware of the dangerous opportunity which his incapacitation afforded to his rivals and his enemies. His grip on the throne of El-Cazar was too tenuous, too precarious, for so much time to pass without his foes seizing their chances to plot and connive against him.

In particular, he worried about the wily and catlike Yussef ben Ali, who was conspicuous in his absence. Where was the other corsair chieftain, and what schemes was he up to?

During the enforced leisure of the pirate monarch, it was the loyal and tireless Achmed the Moor who served as the eyes and ears of Kairadine. But the first mate of the Red Witch had disappointingly little of substance to report to his weakened master. The apparent defection of the dancing-girl Zoraida he had not dared mention-uncertain as to whether or not his master yet retained some traces of his former affection for the sleek and supple Mooress. And concerning the schemes of Yussef ben Ali, even Achmed was unable to ascertain any information. The rival corsair chieftain seemed to be lying low ....

Achmed would have assumed it natural for Yussef ben Ali to seize the advantage of Kairadine Redbeard's enforced confinement, to plot with the other members of the Council of Captains. But this did not seem to be happening at all, which the Moor found puzzling in the extreme. The only one of the captains who openly consorted with Yussef was the huge, fat-bellied Algerian, Zodeen, who had become a crony of Yussef's. The other captains were conspicuous in their absence.

Kairadine's staunchest supporter in the council, a towering dark-skinned Barbary Pirate named Moustapha, was momentarily to depart from El-Cazar for a voyage into the northern isles, to raid and plunder the fisher-folk who dwelt in tiny villages along the rock-strewn shores. It did not occur to the simple, faithful Moor that with Moustapha absent, the balance of power in the council would be exactly even: Zodeen siding with Yussef and Kairadine with the one remaining captain on his side, a lean, vulpine corsair chieftain called Ayyub. And if Yussef could win over or bribe or somehow beguile Ayyub into his camp, the balance of power would tilt in the favor of Yussef.

This did not occur to Achmed, as I have noted, but it did indeed occur to the restless and fiery Kairadine, chafing in his leisure and all too aware of simmering plots and counterplots. Kairadine was often

closeted with the saturnine Ayyub, who swore that Yussef had not even attempted to speak to him since the return of the Red Witch to anchor in the harbor of El-Cazar. This baffled the uneasy pirate king, who thus found himself in the peculiar position of almost wishing his enemy were actively plotting against him.

Within another wake and sleep, Moustapha was scheduled to depart for the northern isles. And Kairadine had a foreboding that then things would start to happen.

Far beneath the cellars of the house of Yussef ben Ali was a stone-walled chamber like a burial crypt. The walls of black basalt sweated with glistening moisture. The ceiling was obscured by layers of soot from the greasy smoke of flickering oil lamps. The chamber was furnished only by a rough table of wooden planks and three capacious chairs of Moorish design. That, and a dull and age-stained wall-hanging of green cloth, were all the furnishings the crypt contained.

One of these chairs was occupied by Yussef ben Ali, who lounged moodily, one long booted leg draped over the chair arm, staring with brooding eyes into a wine goblet of chased gold.

The second chair groaned under the ponderous weight of Zodeen the Algerian. He was gobbling fruit and cheese from a silver dish, washing the meal down with gulps of red wine. In contrast to the moodiness of Yussef ben Ali, the fat Algerian seemed unconcerned.

A bell tinkled somewhere far off, its chime muffled by the rock walls of the chamber. At the sound, Yussef started and gave voice to an exclamation.

A moment later, the green drapery was drawn aside by the slender hand of the Moorish dancing-girl, Zoraida. She wore a long robe of dark red cloth beneath which her slim legs gleamed in their pantaloons of diaphanous gauze. Bracelets of solid gold clanked upon her supple wrists. Her bewitching features were veiled.

The drawing aside of the drapery revealed an aspect of the room hitherto undescribed—a door of stout wood bound with strips of green brass.

Behind Zoraida's slim figure loomed a tall gaunt man whose khalifeh or headdress was drawn in loose folds to conceal his long-jawed visage. But had Achmed the Moor been invisibly present, he would at once have recognized the newcomer as none other than Ayyub, the fifth member of the Council of Captains.

Nodding at Zodeen, who broke off from his guzzling just long enough to grunt a surly greeting, the tall pirate chieftain bowed slightly to Yussef and seated himself in the empty chair. Yussef turned intent eyes upon Zoraida, who stood with folded arms before the portal, as if guarding the secret door.

"None perceived your coming hence, I trust, O Zoraida," he demanded, "nor the approach of Ayyub the

Captain?"

"None, my lord," replied the Mooress. "The secret tunnel you had dug beneath your house and the cellars of old Rustum's pleasure-house remains a secret to all . . . ."

"Aye," grinned the saturnine Ayyub. "All of El-Cazar saw me stride into the bordello of Rustum, and whatever eyes may scrutinize my movements have doubtless satisfied themselves that even now Ayyub lies in the warm arms of his favorite Negress, Fatima! None will suspect this meeting, O my friend, any more than they have those which preceded it."

"It is well," smiled Yussef. "O Zoraida, did all go as I planned?"

"It did, Master. The savage girl found and hid the knife which I caused to be thrown at her feet while my friend Ayesha pretended to fall in a fit. Even now I doubt me not, the savage is cutting her way through the window screen to seek her freedom . . . ."

Satisfied, Yussef nodded without speaking.

Ayyub poured himself a goblet of wine and sipped it meditatively. "What of your slave and his mission to the savages in the boats?" he inquired.

"Grond reached the island unobserved," said Yussef. "He has yet to return and report on the success of his embassy. What of the captain, Moustapha?"

Ayyub grinned. "When the world next wakes, he will be gone from El-Cazar! I have this from the lips of his first mate, Abu . . . ."

"And when he returns to El-Cazar," purred Yussef silkenly, "it will be to find that he has a new monarch . . . ."

"Aye," grunted Zodeen, rubbing his paunch. "Yussef ben Ali, cousin to Kairadine, will reign as eighth successor to the throne of the mighty Khair ud-Din Barbarossa!"

Yussef smiled.

The pirates of El-Cazar, having more recently come to the Underground World than the Neanderthal or Cro-Magnon tribes, retained a memory of day and night denied their contemporaries. Thus, even though the eternal afternoon of Zanthodon does not darken into night or brighten into day, they are accustomed to sleep and wake at measured intervals.

That "night," then, while the palace of Kairadine slept, Darya of Thandar remained awake. The slim

blade which Zoraida's confederate had tossed at her feet was the key the cavegirl needed to secure her freedom from the harem of Kairadine. Its keen and razory steel had cut through the carven screen which effectively barred the window of Darya's suite. During the remainder of the last wake, the Cro-Magnon girl had carefully propped the portion of the screen which she had cut through, holding it into place with threads unraveled from her garments.

Once she was certain that the palace slept, the girl arose from her couch and crossed to the window. From beneath a heap of cushions she extracted the garments she had stolen from a servant's wash-basket; unlike the rich finery in which Kairadine had draped her, the garments she had chosen were plain and worn. She had deliberately selected these with the thought of making herself inconspicuous in the street, if she were indeed fortunate enough to escape from the palace.

Swiftly changing her clothes, the Cro-Magnon girl detached the portion of the screen which she had cut free and slid through the opening, pulling the screen into place behind her in order to baffle pursuit.

A thick tangle of vines grew outside her window, clinging tenaciously to the wall. Clambering down this, Darya vanished into the thick shrubbery of the little walled garden. It was simplicity itself for the lithe cavegirl to scale the wall.

With beating heart, she slid to the ground beyond the wall. And found herself in the street beyond the palace-and free.

## **Chapter 13 COUNCIL OF THE CAPTAINS**

Kairadine Redbeard was in a vile and vicious temper. No sooner had he arisen from his rest than servants informed him that Yussef ben Ali and Zodeen the Algerian had arrived at the palace to demand that their prince convene a Council of the Captains. This was a confrontation which the Redbeard had been avoiding all during his convalescence, hungrily awaiting the return of his full strength and the restoration of his swordarm to its normal fighting vigor. And was it now to be forced upon him-?

"Send the dogs away to whine before another kennel!" the Prince of El-Cazar growled irritably. "Know they not that it requires a clear majority of the captains to convene the council against the wishes of their prince? And two captains together make no majority, for we be five in all, by Allah!"

His servant bowed humbly, touching his brow in the salaam. "Alas, O master, the lords would seem to have anticipated thine argument," he whispered. "They argue that within the hour the lord Moustapha hath departed from El-Cazar on a voyage to the north, leaving the captains in residence numbering but four-and that, according to the Articles of Brotherhood, in the absence of one member, half of the captains may force their prince to yield to a council summons-"

With a roar of wrath, the Redbeard kicked his servant full in the chest, driving him from the sleeping chamber.

"By the Fiery Beard of Shaitan, Yussef goes too far!" swore Kairadine, kicking back the bedclothes as his frightened servant scuttled from the room. Rapping a brass gong to summon his valet, the Prince of Pirates knuckled the sleep from his eyes and loudly demanded that his best finery be laid out.

Munching ripe fruit and drinking unmixed wine, he moodily permitted his valet to adorn his body in an open-throated blouse of scarlet silk with voluminous sleeves caught at the wrist by silver buttons, tight trousers of bottle-green velvet, and black boots with up-curved toes, worked all over with arabesques of silver thread. A sash of mustard-yellow cloth wound about his lean Waist completed the costume.

Almost as an afterthought, Kairadine Redbeard belted on his swordbelt-selecting, neither scimitar nor cutlass, but a slender French epee.

While attiring himself, Kairadine had issued orders that messengers were to be dispatched to the houses of the only captain remaining in the fortress isle, the lean and crafty Ayyub whom he still counted among his friends. Then Kairadine stomped off to the Chamber of the Council, trying to ignore the forebodings of disaster and doom which gnawed upon his heart.

He had a grim feeling that he would somehow rue this day. And in his heart he vowed that Yussef ben Ali would have great and good cause to rue it, too . . . .

The Chamber of the Council was circular and high-roofed, with a long table of fine old wood, black with age, about which sat five high-backed chairs of the same ancient wood, upholstered in the Frankish fashion with red velvet.

When Kairadine stalked in, the others were already assembled in their places. Fat Zodeen, his bulk swatched in a loose Moorish robe like a kaftan of yellow satin, was gnawing on a greasy haunch of meat, his bushy beard dripping hot gravy. Yussef, slim as a panther in close-fitting black velvet which clothed him from throat to wrist and heel, lounged lazily, fingering a giant ruby that smoldered in his left earlobe like a pulsing coal. A little apart from these two cronies sat Ayyub, solemn and saturnine, soberly attired in turban, cummerbund, and long-sleeved robes of dark wool.

They greeted him coolly, even warily, as he stalked in and flung himself into his great chair at the head of the long table. He glowered wrathfully on one and all, seeking to intimidate them with his very evident fury. If Yussef ben Ali was at all taken aback to see his chief-hitherto reputedly an invalid, virtually bedridden-in such high temper and lordly vigor, his suave features concealed it well.

Slamming the table with his balled right fist-making the wine cups jump-Kairadine demanded the reason why they had forced this council upon him. Yussef thoughtfully observed that gesture . . . was it not the right shoulder which had been so frightfully maimed by the fanged jaws of the monstrous yith? Surely, it was: had, then, the unpredictable Kairadine Redbeard already recovered his full use of that arm?



Belching loudly, wiping his greasy lips on a scarlet kerchief, Zodeen the Algerian began the attack, having been carefully coached in his speech by the wily Yussef.

"In the name of the Brotherhood of El-Cazar," he rumbled in his bull-chested voice, "I, Zodeen Ahmmad Zelim Khan declare the Prince and Captain Kairadine Barbarossa, Seventh of That Name, incompetent to command the fortunes of El-Cazar!"

Kairadine crushed down the hot flame that arose within him, and his eyes narrowed even as his lips whitened.

"On what grounds doth the Captain Zodeen lodge this complaint?" he inquired with dangerous softness. Zodeen shifted his massive bulk uncomfortably in his chair, shooting a surreptitious glance in Yussef's direction. He cleared his throat with a cough.

"That he hath become besotted with a savage girl seized upon the mainland, thus throwing all of the Brotherhood into immediate peril," announced the fat corsair pompously.

Kairadine smiled thinly. "Such eloquence from one hitherto largely given to coarse oaths implies careful coaching from another," he observed, with a venomous look at Yussef ben Ali, who smiled calmly but said nothing.

The Algerian flushed to the roots of his beard, then blustered: "Answer the charge or yield to a successor-"

"That successor being none other than the honorable Captain, Yussef ben Ali, I suppose?" inquired Kairadine mockingly.

Zodeen doggedly shook his head. "Answer the charge!"

"Very well. As to my dealings with my own women, that lieth between my soul and the eyes of heaven," snarled Kairadine. "But in no wise have my actions in this regard incurred peril to the Brotherhood, and he who says so is a doglivered liar-"

At that very moment, Achmed the Moor burst into the Chamber, hurling aside the Nubians who guarded its portal with drawn scimitars.

"To arms, my captains!" he blurted. "The streets are infested by a howling horde of blond savages, demanding the return of the wench, Darya!"

Kairadine swore, paled, and rose to his feet to confront Yussef ben Ali.

"This is your doing, you snake-tongued dog!" he hissed, half-drawing his sword from its scabbard. Yussef rose lithely erect and their eyes locked in a long moment of silence.

Zodeen demanded of Achmed how in the name of Shaitan the savages had breached the defensive wall of the fortress isle. The Moor shook his head gloomily.

"There was a long-unused sea-door which gave forth on an abandoned quay at the foot of the Street of Wineshops," he made melancholy reply. "Somehow, the savages found it unbarred, the hinges recently oiled . . . ."

"Treason!" hissed Kairadine Redbeard. Yussef smiled blandly, spreading his hands with an eloquent shrug.

"The charges leveled by our brother Zodeen would seem, however, to have been proven," he said silkenly. "By capturing this girl, our prince has brought down upon us the vengeance of her tribe!"

"How could you not have anticipated this danger, O Kairadine, my prince?" inquired Ayyub in heavy tones. The Redbeard looked baffled.

"I had no knowledge that her tribe was pursuing us-" he faltered. Yussef pounced.

"-Thereby demonstrating your unfitness to lead the Brotherhood," snapped the man in black velvet.

"I have heard enough," said Ayyub in somber tones. "The charge brought against Kairadine Seventh is proven. I cast my vote that he be dethroned and the princely title bestowed upon his cousin-"

"Not while I live!" yelled the Redbeard. And in the next instant, he flung himself across the table upon Yussef, strong hands seizing the other's throat. The chair in which Yussef had been sitting went over backwards with a crash and the two men, snarling and spitting like cats, writhed on the floor in a tangle of kicking limbs.

Beyond the wall, Darya found the street all but deserted at this hour. Nevertheless, drawing the cloth of her headdress across her face to conceal her visage from any prying eyes, the cavegirl crept into the shadows of a striped awning. Hidden in the shadows, she peered around her fearfully . . . the worst thing was, she had no idea in which direction to go or where she might best seek a safe haven.

Darya knew that the moment her escape was noticed and the alarm given, the chase would be yapping at her heels. Kairadine Redbeard was not the sort of man to yield supinely to fate-not when his desires were so strongly engaged. No, the Prince of the Barbary Pirates would pursue her to the farthest corners of Zanthodon; but, for the moment, she was safe, as it would be some considerable time before her absence was discovered. During that respite, she must find a place to hide or a means to escape from the pirate isle entirely ....

A narrow opening yawned in the walls beyond the palace, the black mouth of an alley from which panted the fetid stench of rotting garbage and excrement. Wrinkling her nostrils fastidiously against the effluvium, which struck her with the impact of a blow, the girl gathered up her courage and slunk into the blackness of that narrow way. Freedom, she knew, lay in the harbor, for there was no escape from the island of El-Cazar except by sea, and where many boats lie tied at anchor, one mayhap will not be missed ....

She had not gone far before strong hands seized her and a wadded cloth choked off the cry which rose to her lips involuntarily. Peering back over her shoulder she was astonished to find herself staring into the grinning visage of none other than Fumio-!

"You were right, mistress," said the renegade with a gloating leer. "She came this way, after all . . . ."

A door, hitherto unnoticed, opened in the wall. Through the darkness, Darya could just make out a supple figure swathed in heavy robes. With a pang of dreadful anticipation, the cavegirl strove to make out the features halfconcealed by the shadows of a hooded robe.

Then Zoraida laughed.

## **Chapter 14 BLOOD ON COLD STEEL**

Grond sweated, hunched low in the dugout canoe. It had been touch and go there a while, attempting to prove himself a friend to the host of Thandar, although a stranger from another tribe, that of Gorthak. The young Cro-Magnon slave had been of two minds about his mission: while his primary obligation was to perform his task satisfactorily, in order to return to his beloved Jaira, all of the clean, healthy manhood in him rose in revolt at the realization that he was tricking into a trap these stalwart warriors, who were of his own kind.

Risking all upon his estimate of the character of another, Grond finally drew Tharn of Thandar aside and revealed all to him. The jungle monarch nodded grimly, having suspected something of the sort, and clapped the younger man on one brawny shoulder.

"Tharn understands the dilemma of Grond the Gorthakian," he growled. "Nor does he think the less of Grond for his part in this plot. But what is the plan of this Yusef? Once he has managed to give my warriors secret access to the city of the Men-Who-Ride-Upon-Water, how does he expect to prevent our conquering these foes?"

"Grond's master," said that worthy, his lips twisting wryly upon the hated word, "did not confide in him to that extent. All that Grond knows is that he is to admit you into El-Cazar, with all your strength, through the sea door that Yusef pointed out. It will be unlocked and unbarred, and Yusef will see to it that no guards or patrols are near. This is to be done at a certain time; but once the men of Thandar are

within the fortress city, they may rampage at will and inflict the utmost damage upon the Barbary Pirates."

Tharn considered, frowning. "The one object of Tharn's desire is the safe rescue of his beloved daughter, whom you claim is held captive in the great house of this Redbeard, upon the height at the center of the isle. Therefore, we shall cut our way through the streets in a direct path toward the house of Redbeard, and not let ourselves be tempted into another path. Can Grond tell aught more that may be of use to us?"

The slave had nothing more to tell. Tharn nodded, seemingly satisfied-although Grond himself could not imagine why, for so many problems remained unsolved and so many questions were left unanswered, that the invasion of El-Cazar seemed to his way of thinking utter madness.

Yet here he found himself crouched in a miserable dugout, salt spray dampening his yellow hair, a stone axe clenched in one fist while, with the other, he clutched a tall shield of stout wicker framework over which was tightly stretched and pegged the armored hide of a diplodocus.

The Thandarians beached on the rocky shores of El-Cazar and stormed the length of the old quay which was deserted and long since abandoned. The heavy door in the clifflike wall was ajar, even as had been promised. Lithe, wary scouts entered, finding the immediate vicinity empty of fighting men: it was a huddle of dreary hovels, slouching against each other, many empty, some in use, but at this early hour the residents slept a sound sleep.

Through the narrow alleys which stretched between the slums crept the warriors of Thandar, intent upon the palace which crowned the hilly height of the isle. However Yussef ben Ali had managed it, the streets where through they roamed were devoid of citizens, they were not discovered. Ere long, however, the swinging doors of a wineshop opened to disgorge a Barbary buccaneer, so drunk upon the forbidden juice of the grape that it was all he could do to stand on his two feet. As his bleary eyes focused upon the astounding rank of blond, half-naked phantoms, the corsair of a sudden became cold sober from the shock.

"Hoy-!" he croaked uncertainly, one swarthy hand questing for the hilt of his nicked and dented cutlass.

It was the last sound he ever uttered, for in the next split second a Thandarian arrow transfixing his throat and he fell in the gutter, vomiting hot blood. With one last kick, one last thrashing of long legs, he perished on the spot.

Tharn gestured, and two spearmen dragged the dead pirate into an alley and pulled across his corpse a tottering mound of garbage, effectively concealing the dead carcass.

"Oh!" grunted Tharn, and the warriors advanced, on silent feet like hunting cats, bronze-bladed spears at the ready, arrows nocked on drawn bows, clubs and war axes gripped in strong, eager fists.

So perfectly had Yussef ben Ali timed the Thandarian host's invasion of El-Cazar, that the horde of yellow-haired Cro-Magnons actually reached the midpoint of the island city before sentinels noticed them and sounded the alarm. By that time it was almost too late to stop them, so deeply had they penetrated the pirate city. Yowling corsairs exploded from inn, wineshop and bordello, wild-eyed, cutlasses a-wave, although half-dressed and in no condition for a pitched battle after a night of drunken debauchery.

The blond savages were half-naked, armed only with the most primitive of weapons, whereas their foes bore edged weapons of well-forged steel, in whose use they were well practiced. Nevertheless, the animal vigor of the Thandarians, the deadliness of their intent, the splendid health of their magnificent bodies, drove them through the mob of excited corsairs whom they smashed aside and trampled underfoot. In no time they were pelting up the street toward the towers of Kairadine's palace which loomed above their heads.

Time and time again they encountered crude and hasty barricades which the buccaneers flung athwart their path.

These they leaped over or tore apart, slaying the corsairs by the dozens. It was not so much that the Barbary Pirates were poor fighters or lacking in the will to oppose the invaders, it was a simple and practical matter of arms.

The corsairs were poor bowmen. The Thandarians had hunted all their lives with bow and arrow, and to nock and loose a feathered shaft was instinctive to them. Time and again, as the corsairs massed to cut the invaders apart with sharp steel, a withering rain of barbed and aerial death cut them down before they could get close enough to the savages to employ the superiority of their weapons against them.

Tharn stooped, plucking a steel cutlass from the lax fingers of a dying pirate. He hefted the unfamiliar weapon cautiously, his expression thoughtful: the glittering blade was sharper than that of a knife of flint or copper or bronze, would resist nicks better and would obviously hold an edge far longer. Moreover, the long curved blade was cunningly weighted in such a manner that even he could see it was a superbly designed weapon with which to slash and cut.

He passed orders down the line that his warriors were to retrieve from their fallen foe all such weapons, one to each man. Rapidly, the Cro-Magnons began gathering a harvest of gory steel.

Thandar had been entering upon the Bronze Age; but now the tribe had entered upon a more advanced era ....

They dragged Kairadine Redbeard from the gasping, halfthrottled body of Yussef, and restrained him until his wild frenzy calmed and he was able to listen to reason.

"My prince, the city is under attack," cried Achmed. "None but you can lead us against the savages-"

At that very moment one of Kairadine's servants burst into the room and fell upon his knees before the panting, wildeyed, disheveled figure of his lord.

"O reis, the savage girl has fled from the palace, escaping through a window!" the man wailed, thumping his forehead against the floor.

Kairadine stared at him, a turmoil of emotions seething within his breast. He recognized the black slave as one of the eunuchs set to guard Darya's place of confinement.

"Fled?" he repeated in wondering tones, as one dazed. "How 'fled,' you groveling pig? Was she not guarded and watched day and night-were not her windows stoutly screened?"

The black man beat his head against the floor. "Even so, my prince! But from somewhere the woman obtained a sharp knife and cut asunder the wooden screens, finding a path to freedom-

Ayyub plucked at his sleeve. "Redbeard-let the wench go! None but you can lead us against the savages-

Spitting like a wildcat, Kairadine tore his arm free of the other's grasp.

"Let me be, you whining cur! You have chosen yonder half-dead dog as your leader-follow him!"

"Master!" wailed Achmed.

But Kairadine was beyond hearing or caring by this point. The blows to his esteem had come too swiftly to be endured. All that he could think of was the slim, vibrant, golden loveliness of the cavegirl, Darya. To think of such delectable girlflesh so long desired, and the consummation of that desire so achingly long deferred, now escaping from his reach goaded him into a red madness.

Hurling the pleading Moor from him, Kairadine strode from the chamber and was gone, leaving the others to stare blankly at each other. Achmed soon gathered himself together and fled in pursuit of his master, while Ayyub and fatbellied Zodeen assisted Yussef ben Ali to stagger to his feet, helped him to a chair and poured wine into a goblet, which the other man thirstily gulped down.

"You have a plan to rid us of the savages?" demanded Ayyub sharply. "Then use it, and quickly, O Yussef-for the savages are in the streets even now, and we are at war!"

"I have a plan," gasped Yussef, massaging his bruised neck.

"Best use it, then," grunted Zodeen, turning from the casement from which he had been peering down at the melee below. "The barbarians are assaulting the main gate of the palace, and soon we will all be

fighting for our lives."

"What is your plan?" demanded Ayyub of Yussef.

"The girl whom the savages seek has fled the palace, and my agents have seized her. Any moment now, Zoraida will appear to call out to the savages that the girl is theirs if they will make an orderly retreat."

Zodeen stared at him dumbfounded. "But-but," he spluttered, "Erlik fry me for a flounder, don't you know Zoraida hates the wench's guts, for replacing her in the affections of Kairadine? Broil me for a haddock, by Ahriman, where is the dancing-girl?"

"She should be . . . ah . . . about now," faltered Yussef as the main gate of the palace came crashing down before the lusty blows of the Cro-Magnon savages. He limped across to the window and stared out, and blanched.

A long silence ensued, broken only by the sounds of distant fighting, which rapidly drew nearer.

"Nergal stew me for a squid!" groaned Zodeen to himself, staring at the other.

As for the saturnine Ayyub, he was also staring at the pale and twitching features of Yussef ben Ali, sourly wondering if the prince he had helped elect was any better than the lovebesotted arrogant he had helped depose ....

## **Chapter 15 ZORAIDA'S VENGEANCE**

Once the great portal to the palace had been broken through, Tharn and his howling horde went through the stumbling confused mob of Barbary Pirates like a heated blade through soft cheese. Utterly contemptuous of danger were the Cro-Magnon warriors, afire with vengeance, and hot with the lust to kill, now that they were within very reach of their goal.

The corsairs, on the other hand, had been roughly awakened from sound sleep, and were still struggling to gain clear heads and sharp wits. Befuddled with drinking the night through, they were also astounded beyond words, for never before in the generations they had dwelt here in El-Cazar had the fortress island been invaded by any foe.

They were used to raiding others, were the Barbary corsairs, weakly defended Cro-Magnon villages, ringed about with relatively flimsy palisades. Snug and secure behind their mighty and seemingly impregnable ramparts, it had never occurred to them that they might themselves someday be invaded. The knowledge was cold and queasy-making, and it unmanned them.

Another factor in the quick crumbling of their defense was the inexplicable absence at their fore of any

of their leaders. Where was the redoubtable Zodeen of Algiers, the crafty and fortunate Yussef ben Ali, the unconquerable Ayyub? And where, above all, was their dauntless prince and leader, the mighty Kairadine Redbeard? Nowhere were they to be seen.

"By the Sword of Allah," groaned one wizened veteran to his grim-faced comrade as he manned a barricade of broken furniture flung hastily across a palace corridor, "have all the captains fled, scenting disaster and defeat?"

The two exchanged an eloquent glance of agreement and furtively slunk from their posts. Where the great captains flee, were not the lesser corsairs wise to slink away?

In this manner, the defenders of the palace melted away before the seemingly tireless horde of yelling naked savages. There were many hidey-holes in a structure as ancient and as intricate as this one, and many of the rogues knew closets where they could conceal themselves for days, if necessary.

In less time than might have seemed possible, Tharn of Thandar found himself master of the deserted palace of the Prince of El-Cazar-deserted of all but the slain, that is, and the victorious Cro-Magnons.

While his men went hastily through the palace, freeing scores of slaves, all of whom were Cro-Magnons like themselves, although from little-known or unfamiliar tribes, Tharn's chieftains sought out the leaders of the town, with Grond's aid. These men had been at council meeting in the very hour of the invasion, it would seem, and all had been trapped by the sudden inrush of yellow-haired warriors. Their valor was such that they fought heroically and slew many, before they themselves fell to the superior strength of numbers. The heads were severed from their bodies with those new steel weapons which Tharn had commanded his warriors to retrieve from beside the fallen foe. Those heads were brought before Tharn and Grond where they held a command post in the great hall, for Grond to identify.

"That is Zodeen the Algerian," murmured Grond. "And that is the head of Ayyub."

Tharn nodded; the names meant absolutely nothing to him, but as a leader born and bred, he well knew the value of slaying the leaders of the foe, in order to dishearten their followers.

"And that one?" he asked, pointing.

"Yussef ben Ali, my former master," said Grond with a faint, bitter smile.

Now, for the first time, he felt truly free.

The jungle monarch looked at him sympathetically. Never having been a slave, he could not quite understand what it meant to Grond to be free ....

Darya struggled vainly in the iron grip of Fumio, there in that narrow, stinking alley beyond the palace



of Kairadine Redbeard. To have come this close to drinking the sweet wine of freedom, only to have the cup dashed from your lips was bitter indeed. Fumio laughed sneeringly, vastly enjoying the sight of the helpless girl as she writhed panting in his arms. To his way of thinking, Darya of Thandar was the sole cause of all of his many misfortunes, and he gloated over her unhappiness.

So it is with cowards and weaklings, that they perennially blame others for their own guilty failures.

Zoraida looked the cavegirl over, eyes glowing with a nameless lust. This was the scrawny slut who had stolen her place in the bed of Kairadine-she was the cause whereby Zoraida had been forbidden the pleasure of his embraces! Well, soon enough would the cause of her fall be removed forever-and with no one the wiser.

As for Fumio, lent to her by Yussef ben Ali for this purpose, once the slave had outlived his usefulness to her and to his master, he could easily be removed with a dagger through the ribs . . . .

"Bring her inside," she commanded. Fumio dragged Darya into the door, which Zoraida shut behind them and barred with a hefty slab of solid wood.

As soon as it was possible for him to do so, Grond the Gorthakian parted company with the now-victorious tribesmen of Thandar and hurried to the house of Yussef ben Ali. One fear and one fear alone possessed the heart of the Cro-Magnon warrior, and that was that in this lawless city, swarming with stalwart invaders, his beloved Jaira might be in peril.

The door of Yussef's house was bolted against the savages, but Grond obtained entry by a little known side door. 'Dullah the majordomo admitted him, inquiring fearfully of the safety of their lord and master, and whether or not the Cro-Magnons were headed this way.

"They are," said Grond with a grin. "And, as for your lord and master, his headless corpse lies slain in the palace of the Redbeard, which is now teeming with the warriors of Thandar."

"O, woe! Woe!" wailed the quivering 'Dullah, his eyes virtually starting from their sockets. The majordomo clasped both hands together as if in supplication. "Whatever shall we do?" he moaned.

Grond chuckled with grim mirth: it was a pleasure to his heart to see 'Dullah in such a state of terror, for often had he suffered beneath the heavy hand of the majordomo, who had a penchant for the lash and an appetite for enjoying the pain inflicted on others.

"Flee for your life," Grond said succinctly.

'Dullah needed no further encouragement. Seizing up a priceless carpet stuffed with objects that clinked and clanked metallically together, he shrugged into his burnoose and fled out of the house of Yussef ben Ali, slippers slapping the greasy cobbles. From the appearance of the bulging carpet, it would seem that

the prudent 'Dullah, anticipating the fall of the house of Yussef ben Ali, had fortified himself against unemployment by selecting a few precious mementoes from the furnishings of the mansion.

"A pleasure to see you back," growled Grond in what was obviously the Cro-Magnon equivalent of "good riddance." He spat in the dust which bore the marks of 'Dullah's slippers.

Then he went to work. Slaves and servants had largely fled from the doomed house already, he observed with mounting tension, slipping away one by one furtively, seizing the opportunity to escape proffered them by the Thandarians' invasion. But where was Jaira? Had she escaped with the others, or was she hiding somewhere in the house? Was she perhaps imprisoned on orders of Yussef ben Ali, as insurance against the prompt return of Grond?

Swiftly and efficiently, the blond warrior searched the upper levels, finding a cowering maidservant in a closet and trembling eunuch concealed behind an arras, but no one else.

Neither did the two recall having seen or heard aught of the Cro-Magnon girl, Jaira.

At length, having searched the house from top to bottom, Grond descended into the cellars and searched the gloomy vaults beneath the house. Here were stored the provisions of the household in barrels, boxes, bottles and bales. Here also he found no one and no sign of his missing sweetheart. Neither did the cells reserved for recalcitrant or disobedient slaves and servants yield any assistance to him in his quest. But he lingered long enough to find the dungeon-master's keyring and open the rusty locks, setting free the miserable wretches therein immured. These he curtly informed of the tide of recent events, advising them to flee for their lives before the warriors of Thandar came to loot and plunder. They took to their heels on the instant.

Privately, Grond felt certain that Tharn's men were not at all interested in looting and plundering, but he couldn't be entirely sure.

Despondent, yielding momentarily to despair, Grond sagged against the wall of the dungeon. Where was Jaira . . . ? Had she fled into the tumultuous streets? If so, she could be anywhere by this time, hidden in any one of a thousand places, for the fortress city of El-Cazar was old and riddled with forgotten vaults and tunnels, attics and other hideyholes.

Resolutely, he straightened his broad shoulders and tightened his jaw. And resolved to search on ....

While a leering Fumio held the wrists of the captive princess behind her back, Zoraida ripped the front of Darya's garment. The thin cloth split asunder, and the pale golden body of the Cro-Magnon girl was bared to view by the light of candles which flickered in a gold stand upon the long table.

Fumio stared with lust written in his ruined face as the Moorish woman tore open the front of the garment, exposing to view the naked breasts of the captive girl. With an ugly, gloating chuckle, Zoraida

ran her bejeweled hands over the panting breasts of the Cro-Magnon girl who writhed helplessly in Fumio's powerful grip.

Zoraida fondled the half-naked girl lasciviously, pinching the pink nipples which crowned the bare breasts. Darya sank her white teeth into her nether lip to silence the whimper of pain and outrage that rose within her throat.

Fumio grinned nastily, licking dry lips.

"So this is the beauty that lured the fickle Redbeard from Zoraida's bed!" the Mooress snarled, fondling the cavegirl intimately. "Well . . . Zoraida will see to it that never again does a man find you desirable, slut! You, there, string her up."

Fumio bound Darya's wrists together with a stout thong and tied the thong to an iron hook in one of the wooden beams which braced the ceiling of Yussef's hidden chamber-for it was to the place of the secret council of conspirators that Zoraida had led her henchmen and her captive.

Her arms stretched above her head, Darya kicked and struggled vainly as Zoraida stripped the torn garments from her, leaving her lovely body stark naked. But naught availed to free her from her bonds.

Zoraida drew from the sleeve of her robes a coiled whip and fingered it caressingly, looking the bare body of the young girl up and down with cold, cruel, calculating gaze. Catching the expression on Fumio's ruined visage and the hunger in his eyes as he stared at the writhing loveliness so temptingly displayed, Zoraida laughed throatily.

"When Zoraida has taken her pleasure in her own way," smiled the Mooress, hefting the whip meaningfully, "then the slave Fumio may take his own pleasure from what is left!"

"Yes, mistress," said Fumio obsequiously, licking his lips.

"The breasts first, I think," murmured Zoraida thoughtfully, raising the whip. Its long, snaky length of supple, well-oiled leather hissed as it slithered across the floor.

Slim, strong muscles stirred silkenly in the bare arm of Zoraida as she lifted the handle of the whip-And, in the next instant the stony walls of the hidden chamber echoed to the hideous sound of a young woman's voice, screaming in unendurable agony ....

Part Four

THE HUNTERS AND THE HUNTED

## Chapter 16 SOTHAR ON THE MARCH

Across the vast and grassy plains of the north the tribe of Sothar moved by slow and easy stages. They were returning to the place whereat they had sundered paths with their brother tribe, the Thandarian nation.

The two Cro-Magnon tribes had joined forces after the battle in the cavern city, which had led to the defeat of the Gorpaks and the eradication of their frightful and monstrous masters, the hideous Sluagghs. As their own homeland had been destroyed in a volcanic convulsion, there was nowhere for the warriors of Sothar to travel but wherever they wished. And, for a time, they had marched together with the tribe of Tharn.

When the pterodactyl had carried off Yualla, the daughter of their High Chief, Garth, the two tribes parted ways. The Thandarians continued on in their search for Darya, while the Sotharians marched across the plains in the direction of the Scarlet City of Zar, seeking the daughter of their Chief.

Now all was changed. While Yualla was still lost, no more did her people search for her whereabouts. For the dagger of the Zarian assassin, Raphad, had struck down the mighty Garth in the very moment of his triumph, when he brought to a standstill an attack of the Dragonmen of Zar, led by their proud and impetuous goddess-queen, the Divine Zarys.

Raphad's blade had not been driven into the heart of Garth, as had first been feared. But the wound was very close to that organ, and for a time the life of the mighty Cro-Magnon hung in the balance.

Garth was a huge man, a virile warrior in the full noon of his prime. His strength and vigor, his animal vitality, were as impressive as his recuperative powers soon proved to be.

When it was decided that he could safely be moved, the tribe assembled for the march back across the plains to rejoin the men of Thandar. And the quest for the lost Yualla was given over, for the life of Garth was deemed of greater importance.

The primitive Cro-Magnons, mighty hunters, great warriors, share every breath with a thousand perils. Their life is a continuous struggle for sheer survival against impossible odds, for in the savage wilderness of the Underground World, with its gigantic predators and hostile tribes, life is the cheapest of commodities. Wives, brothers, lovers-not one among their number but has lost those near and dear to him: to the swamps, the jungles, sudden storms, war, raids, or the titanic reptiles that roam and rule the length and breadth of Zanthodon.

Thus the life of one girl, even the daughter of their king, loved and admired by all, seemed comparatively trivial. And the recovery to health of Garth became their preeminent concern.

We traversed the great plain at a slow pace, with frequent rest stops. My friend Professor Potter was of

the opinion, after a time, that it would be safe to move the Chief; a litter was constructed for that purpose. But to move a man so seriously injured as was Garth was extremely risky, and must be done with great care.

Riskier still would it have been to remain where they were. The flat and treeless expanse of the plains afforded them no form of shelter against wind, rain or storm-no defense against the predators which roamed the grasslands-and their proximity to the Scarlet City was itself ominous. For it would not be long before the legions of this lone surviving colony of ancient Minoan Crete would be upon our track, eager for vengeance against those that had loosed their monstrous god, Zorgazon, and humiliated their divine empress, the Immortal Zarys. Safety for the tribe of Sothar lay only in the security of their alliance with the men of Thandar.

It took us many wakes and sleeps to cross the immensity of the plains, and along the way we had many worries that gnawed upon our hearts. One of Garth's scouts, a lean and grizzled veteran called Mordan, was the first to articulate at least one of these.

"How can we know, Eric Carstairs, that when we have again reached the place where our paths parted from that of the Thandarians, we shall still find them there? Perchance, by now, they will have wandered leagues away . . . ?"

I shrugged.

"You may be right, Mordan; but there is nothing else to do. At least, when we have reached the shores of the Sogar-Jad once again, there will be trees from which to construct huts and a stout palisade, and caves wherein to take refuge from storm or attack."

The old scout looked a trifle dubious.

"Perchance. Yet, as I recall, no trees grew along those shores . . ." he mused.

Later, as we camped amidst the plain, I reiterated Mordan's query to the band of my warriors. They soberly agreed that Mordan had a good point, but dismissed it as a minor problem.

"After all, my chieftain," said Varak the Sotharian with a merry grin, "so huge a force of warriors will leave the marks of their passage visible upon the earth."

"And so shrewd a scout as Mordan should be able to trace the path followed by so many men," chuckled Thon of Numitor. This last, a cheerful and winning young fellow, was one of the Cro-Magnons from foreign tribes who had fled with us from Zar. He and my giant friend, Gundar the Goradian, had fought beside me in the Great Games of Zar. Both had asked to join my band of warriors, and I was glad to have their comradeship. I guess we veteran gladiators tend to stick together ....

A rousing halloo interrupted our discourse. We turned to see my old friend, Professor Percival P. Potter, Ph.D., come strutting up to us with a brace of zomaks under one scrawny arm. We grinned, and even the somber and stolid Gundar voiced a chuckle, which was understandable.

You have to understand that, even under the best of circumstances, the Professor does not exactly strike one as an impressive figure. With his absurd little spike of white goatee, bony arms and legs mercilessly exposed due to his skimpy costume (a sort of abbreviated apron of fur which covered his lap and not much else), and the indestructible pince-nez perched, generally askew, on the bridge of his nose, he is a comical sight. In this case, however, he had added a new note to his ensemble: he wore a dainty silver coronet wherein flashed a strange, gem-like crystal.

This was worn atop his battered, old-fashioned sun helmet, by the way.

"With the new jewelry, Doc, you look like the Queen of the May," I quipped. He was too pleased with himself to take umbrage at our mirth.

"Inferior minds will always take refuge in making fun of an advanced intelligence, my boy," he said jubilantly. Then, brandishing his clutch of feathered reptile-birds, he crowed: "Behold!"

Gundar took them from him and examined the dead zomaks curiously.

"There is no blood upon them, nor any wound that Gundar can see," observed the blond giant in his deep, slow voice.

"Gundar is right. What did you do, smother them to death?" inquired Varak impishly. The Professor doffed his glittering circlet.

"I summoned them to me with the power of thought alone, and knocked them in the head," he said mysteriously.

Hurok the mighty Neanderthal, squatting on his heels at my back, grunted dubiously. I shrugged; we all were well aware by now of the strange powers of the circlet, a device of Zarian craftsmanship, which augmented and focused telepathic impulses from the human mind, enabling the wearer to control the lesser intelligence of beasts to an astonishing degree.

It was by means of such devices that the Dragonmen tamed and controlled the huge thodars they used for riding beasts.

Ever since Garth had employed the weird powers of the circlet to turn aside the attack of the thodars, the Professor had been experimenting with the nature of the implement. Now, it would seem, he had learned to use it for hunting purposes.

"Remarkable," commented Warza, another of my warriors. "No longer need we strive to bring the zomaks down with the bow alone. Now we can lure them into the cookpot with witchery!"

"Yes, and Parthon wonders if the thing also works upon the uld," joked that worthy. But the Professor, whose sense of humor remains hopelessly rudimentary, and therefore seldom knows when he is being kidded, took the question seriously.

"Actually, friend Parthon I have not yet had the opportunity to test the efficacy of the telepathic crystal upon the indigenous species of eohippus you refer to as uld, but I have no doubt . . . ."

Then he broke off, looking bewildered. For we were laughing merrily.

"Oh, I see," he said frostily. "Another jest at my expense. Well, the primitive intellect finds humor in curious situations, I must say! Ker-hrumpp!"

Just about then, the word came down to reassemble for another leg of the trek, so we had no further chance to have fun at the elderly scientist's expense.

And in this way we crossed the plains.

## **Chapter 17 THE MYSTERIOUS CHAMBER**

Through the wild wrath that stormed within the heart of Kairadine Redbeard there burned a scarlet thread of unslaked desire. Filled with fury as he doubtlessly was by the plot of Yussef to dethrone him and by the betrayal of trust on the part of the fickle Ayyub, it was his passion for the slim body of Darya of Thandar which occupied his mind.

What mattered it to the Pirate Prince that he had been hurled from his principedom, and that unknown enemies were even at that moment storming through the crooked streets of El-Cazar? Let the faithless brigands snarl and snap like dogs over the kingdom that was falling to ruin about their heads-Kairadine would possess the body of the blonde cavegirl even if the world crumbled into ruin in the next instant!

As he entered that suite in the harem of his palace in which the Cro-Magnon princess had been installed, it took but moments for the keen eye of the Redbeard to discern the mode and manner of her escape. Lifting out of its place and hurling into a corner the portion of the wooden screen which Darya had cut loose with her knife, Kairadine peered through the opening into the gardens. He had not realized that the wall which stood between this corner of the palace gardens and the street beyond was quite this conveniently close to Daryas window: the girl was lithe and agile, and for her to climb over the wall would have been but the act of a few moments. Doubtless she had stripped off the finery in which he had commanded that she be draped, donning simpler, more unobtrusive raiment . . . and, within the next moment, he discovered the heap of jewelry and clothing which the cavegirl had indeed tossed aside.

Beyond, from the streets outside the window, there sounded the roar of battle, the clang of swords, the grunt and scuffle of struggling men, and the deep chanting war cries of the unknown savages. But Kairadine cared not a whit for this: his mind was fiercely bent upon repossessing the slim girl who had so narrowly escaped the consummation of his lust-and it was bent upon this to the exclusion of all other concerns.

Vaulting over the windowsill, and ignoring the pang that lanced through the but newly knit muscles of his injured shoulder, Kairadine crossed the gardens and scaled the wall, dropping like a great cat to the cobbled street.

The battle surged some blocks away, where giant blond warriors in fur clouts were assaulting the hasty barricade of broken furniture which the beleaguered corsairs had flung together to block the street against their advance. Darya would not have gone in that direction, surely ....

The black mouth of an alley caught Kairadine's eye. Swallowed in that blackness, the girl could easily have eluded detection and pursuit, and could perhaps have hidden until such time as she could join her tribal brethren without risking her life in attempting to slip past the buccaneers' line.

Kairadine strode into the black mouth of the alley, boots ringing upon the cobbles, his rapier naked in one brown fist, alert and wary for the slightest sign that his captive had fled in this direction.

But he found nothing until something crunched beneath his heel. Peering down, he saw the glittering blade of a slim poniard. Stooping, he plucked it from the cobbles, turning it over in his fingers and examining it closely. The blade was of excellent steel, the hilt elegantly worked. This was no cheap blade to be carelessly lost in an alley, or tossed aside, but a fine piece of craftsmanship ....

With a blade of this keenness, one could easily cut through a wooden window-screen ....

Kairadine searched the dark walls of the alley and spied a stout wooden door. There was no telling where it led, and there was no particular reason for Kairadine to suspect that Darya had been carried through that door by Fumio or any other . . . but the cavegirl would not voluntarily have dropped her dagger, since it was probably the only means of self-defense she possessed.

Kairadine Redbeard had the instincts of a hunter, and that keen intuitive sense impelled him to his next act.

He slammed the door with his booted foot, just above the strong lock. Wood splintered; the doorframe shuddered, but the lock held.

Then Redbeard kicked the door a second time and a third. The metal of the lock shattered beneath his vigorous assault, and Kairadine battered it in until it hung askew on torn hinges.



Stone steps led down into unrelieved darkness, but a wallbracket held a tar-soaked torch. It was a matter of moments for the pirate prince to strike the torch afire with flint and steel.

Holding his sword at the ready in one hand, lifting with the other the blazing torch so that it illuminated the steps, Kairadine Redbeard descended the stair. The torchlight glittered crimsonly on the naked steel of his polished blade.

At the bottom of the stair-which was well below the level of the streets-the pirate prince found a narrow and winding subterranean passage, into which he flung himself with reckless speed, scenting the joy of the hunt.

While lust dominated the heart of the Barbary Pirate, it did not dim the cunning of his intelligence. Mentally orienting himself, he soon realized that the secret passage extended in the direction of the mansion of his arch-rival, Yussef ben Ali, which stood near to his own palace. And the vengeful Redbeard swore bitterly to himself, for he detected the fine hand of Yussef in the apparent abduction of the woman he desired.

"I should have throttled the dog when we fought," he snarled to himself. "But that pleasure I shall reserve for another time!"

His cloak swinging from broad shoulders, the Barbary Pirate explored the secret passage to its end ....

He found at length the concealed entrance through which Fumio and Zoraida had conducted Darya. If his estimate of the distance was at all accurate, he reasoned to himself, the passageway led directly beneath the basements of the house of Yussef ben Ali-proof that the rival captain was deeply implicated in the stealing away of Kairadine's prize captive.

This door was locked, too, but repeated blows of the pirate's booted feet shattered it until the lock burst asunder. Kairadine snatched the wall-hanging aside and strode recklessly into the gloomy, vaultlike chamber.

Walls of naked rock sweated with an oily moisture. A wooden stair in one corner led to a trap in the roof, whereby entrance could be gained into the cellars of the house of Yussef ben AIL

Rapidly, the gaze of Kairadine Redbeard explored the hidden room, noting the long table, the empty wine goblets and the three chairs. By the light of his flickering torch, he explored the dark room-and discovered a mystery!

Sprawled in a sodden heap in one corner of the room lay the body of a dead man.

Prodding the corpse with the toe of his boot, Kairadine turned it over on its back so as to be able to

discern its features by the light of his torch.

It was Fumio....

With narrowed eyes, Kairadine Redbeard studied the face of the dead slave, his mind churning furiously. He recognized the face of the blond Cro-Magnon from its flattened nose, recalling that the savage had been captured by Achmed and his seamen in the company of Darya of Thandar.

Later, this same savage had been sold at public slave auction, Kairadine vaguely recollected. He knew this because at the time of their capture it had seemed likely to the Redbeard that the savage was a friend, brother or, perchance, a suitor of the jungle girl.

Fumio, then, had assisted Darya in hiding, if not actually in her escape? Kairadine mused: on the surface of things, it was a logical assumption . . . but the pieces of the puzzle did not fit together.

If Darya had an accomplice in making her escape, why did she throw aside the dagger which he had found in the alley?

And who had murdered Fumio?

Not Darya, obviously, for the caveman was dead from a sword thrust, and the cavegirl could have hardly have escaped from the palace armed with a sword and a dagger.

And-where was Darya?

He glanced over at the wooden stair. As secure as was this secret chamber, why should the girl have climbed it, ascending into the very house of one of the Captains of the Brotherhood?

Spitting a curse, Kairadine prowled restlessly about, seeking another clue to this mystery, and giving no further thought to the murdered man.

So perished Fumio, once a chieftain of Thandar high in the esteem of his peers, cut down to die like a dog in this stark and miserable underground chamber. . .

Suddenly, Kairadine stiffened. A low, sobbing groan reached him. It seemed to have come from the far corner of the stone-walled chamber, where the shadows lay thick as dust.

He strode fearlessly across the room, to discover yet a second body, lying in a spreading pool of gore.

And his heart froze within him as he saw it was the body of a woman-

## Chapter 18 JAIRA'S FLIGHT

Jaira of Gorthak had not been this frightened since the day, not very long ago, when a host of howling Barbary Pirates had swept down upon the little village of her people, slaughtering many and enslaving, among others, her sweetheart Grond and herself. When she had entered into a life of captivity in the island fortress of El-Cazar, the beautiful cavegirl had wondered if ever she would see her native village of Gorthak again . . . and now, as she fled through the streets of El-Cazar, she wondered if ever she would see her beloved Grond once more.

When the people of El-Cazar awoke to find their seemingly impregnable fortress city invaded by a horde of stalwart blond savages, it had quickly dawned upon the slaves in the house of Yussef ben Ali that the moment of their deliverance was at hand. Their master, the great captain, was absent from his mansion; gone, too, was his retinue of guardsmen. Only 'Dullah the majordomo stood between them and the freedom for which they had so long hungered.

One man cannot adequately guard a house with as many doors as had the house of Yussef ben Ali. Thus the slaves found it easy to slip forth from this portal or that, seeking to join with the unknown force of Cro-Magnons storming the streets of the city.

This Jaira of Gorthak was very young, very beautiful, slim as a willow and with a dancer's grace in her long, slender legs. Her hair was a thick, heavy mass of raw gold, seemingly too heavy to be supported comfortably by her slim neck and fragile shoulders. She had small, pointed, immature breasts and shy, fawnlike eyes. She was timid, was Jaira the Gorthakian, and far less bold and daring than are many of the women of the Cro-Magnon nations I have come to know. When she furtively stole forth into the streets by a little-used side door, she sought to find her lover, Grond, rather than to join in the fighting.

Grond, she knew, was rumored to have been dispatched by their master, Yussef ben Ali, on a mission to admit these very fighting men into the bastions of the fortress city. Therefore, it seemed likely to the timid Jaira that, if Grond was to be found, he was unquestionably to be found among the blond warriors.

The turmoil of the streets, the whirling battle, the surging to and fro of shouting, struggling men, frightened the young girl. As a band of wild-eyed corsairs came clumping down the way, glittering scimitars naked in their hands, she shrank fearfully into a doorway.

The buccaneers had eyes only for their stalwart blond adversaries, however, and not for escaping slave girls, so they passed her by with scarcely a glance. Panting with relief, her heart pounding wildly, the girl slumped against the closed portal, bewildered, wondering how, in all this chaos of rioting men, she would ever find her lover . . . .

Then it occurred to Jaira that, if Grond had been dispatched by Yussef ben Ali on a secret mission to confer with the leaders of the Thandarian host, he must logically be in the forefront of the battle, where those leaders were most likely to be found.

As far as she could tell, the main thrust of the Bronze Age host was in -the direction of the palace citadel of Kfiradine Redbeard, which crowned the summit of the height upon which the city sprawled, and which was not very distant from the house of Yussef ben Ali.

Furtively, the blonde girl stole in that direction, keeping hidden as well as she could and trying to avoid the knots of struggling, cursing men. She crept through an alley, finding herself near the wall which enclosed the gardens adjacent to the palace of Kairadine Redbeard. The invaders had already stormed the gates of the palace and seemed to be sacking it thoroughly, and the shy cavegirl did not dare expose herself to the brawling tumult which raged within the halls and suites of the palace . . . but she could safely hide in the gardens, if she could find a way to enter them.

It was not for the fawnlike slavegirl to do as Darya had done much earlier, and boldly climb over the wall. So she crept along one side of it, casting fearful glances to every side, hoping to find an entrance. Before long she did indeed find one, a narrow opening whose door was a grille of wrought iron teased into graceful arabesques. It was through this little entrance that the merchants who provided the kitchens of Kairadine Redbeard made their entry in order to deliver viands for the monarch's table, although Jaira guessed it not.

She unlatched the gate and slid through into the gardens-hastily latching the gate behind her, against the possibility of another band of intruders.

Her heart beating as wildly against the cage of her ribs as ever a captive bird fluttered against its own cage, the girl glanced around, seeking a place in which to conceal herself until the proper moment arrived for her to seek out the leaders of the Thandarian host. She spied a little structure resembling a gazebo, which stood amidst a small grove of prehistoric cycads, girdled about with shoulder-high flowering bushes unknown to her. Therein could she hide herself, therefore the Cro-Magnon girl hastened to direct her steps in that direction.

As she shouldered her way through the dark-leaved foliage-very suddenly and without the slightest warning-a powerful swarthy arm locked about her throat and a hard, callused palm was clapped over her mouth, blocking out the shriek of pure terror which rose instinctively to her lips.

Tharn of Thandar stood upon the dais of the great hall of the palace of Kairadine Redbeard, harkening to the reports brought to him by scouts and messengers.

"My Omad," reported one of these, a wiry long-legged lad called Doran, "the chieftains bade me inform you that the last pocket of resistance within the palace has been crushed."

Tharn nodded somberly. The entire structure had been ransacked, without any sign of the whereabouts of Darya of Thandar, although many slaves and servants eagerly agreed that she had been imprisoned here by Kairadine Redbeard not long since.

Another scout, this one a leathery-faced veteran, whose bright hair was dimmed by streaks of iron gray, came forward.

"My Omad," said the older man, "all of the leaders have been accounted for, save for one Moustapha, who departed into the 'north' before our attack, Kairadine Redbeard himself-for such seems to be the name of him that carried off your daughter, the gomad Darya, and another warrior called Achmed the Moor, who was a powerful chieftain under the Redbeard. These last two are known to have escaped the slaughter and to be alive, for the palace slaves have viewed the corpses of the dead corsairs and are unanimous that this Kairadine and Achmed are not among their number."

Again, Tharn nodded.

"Set free the slaves, those of them that are of our own kind, and tell them that they are free to join with us or to strive to return to their own homelands, as they wish."

The second messenger touched his brow by way of salute, and left. Tharn turned to two of his chieftains, who with him had led the assault on the palace.

"How go things in the city proper?" he inquired.

The first chieftain shrugged. "There is still much fighting in several quarters and certain areas are blockaded and are strongly defended. The buccaneers seem to have recovered from their confusion-for our coming, it seems, took them very much by surprise and completely unprepared-and are giving vigorous resistance."

"I agree with Brogar, my Omad," interjected the second of the chieftains. "And would point out, if I may, that were the corsairs to find themselves a strong and determined leader, our position here could become untenable. Defeated though they were, they are very many and we are few."

Tharn smiled grimly.

"All of their captains are slain, save for Kairadine and this Moustapha who is far away, so I doubt me that any leader will come forward to assume the command. As well, the slaves and captives I have freed will greatly augment our number, and will fight with extreme courage and vigor so as to avenge themselves upon their former masters."

"The Omad knows best," responded the other.

"Let us hope so," said Tharn humorlessly. "Sometimes, I wonder. However, rifle the palace armory to arm the former slaves, and bid the warriors of Thandar seize up the edged weapons of metal with which the buccaneers so valiantly defended themselves. These weapons are called 'swords,' and hold a sharper

edge than do our knives and spears of bronze. It is the wish of your Omad that every warrior arm himself with these weapons, and learn to care for them."

"It shall be done," said the second chieftain. His name, by the way, was Rhak.

"Where has Grond gotten to?" inquired Tharn the jungle monarch.

Brogar smiled. "He has gone off to the house of Yussef ben Ali, Kairadine's rival, to find the woman he would make his mate."

"I wish him well, for he is a good and brave man."

"Has the Omad any further instructions?" inquired Rhak.

"The Omad has. We have searched the palace for the gomad, to no avail. Release our captives, but disarm them. Then bid all of our warriors, and those of the former slaves who wish to join with us, to quit the premises."

"It shall be done," said Rhak, and turned to follow the orders of his king. Tharn then regarded Brogar solemnly.

"My Omad?"

"Organize search parties. It is my intention to explore every portion of this island city until the gomad Darya has been found . . . alive or dead. See that this is done."

Brogar saluted and left the hall.

Tharn stood alone in the vast room, arms folded upon his massive chest, broodingly staring at nothing, with a frown of determination creasing his lofty brows.

## **Chapter 19 DARYA'S RESCUE**

As has already been told, Grond the Gorthakian parted company with the warriors of Thandar just as soon as he could conveniently do so. Once the palace was securely taken and could be firmly held, the former slave of Yussef ben Ali had departed for the now-deserted mansion of his former master, so as to ascertain the safety and the whereabouts of his sweetheart, the girl Jaira.

He searched the house rapidly, from top to bottom, without finding her. By this point, the house of Yussef ben Ali was completely deserted, save for 'Dullah, who fled as Grond made his entry, and certain others, including captives immured in the cells beneath the mansion for purposes of punishment.

These he set free, suggesting that they take up arms against their former masters, joining their strength to that of the victorious fighting men of Thandar.

The Gorthakian had completely searched the deserted mansion, before he chanced to recall the hidden chamber beneath the house, wherein it had been the wont of Yussef ben Ali to hold his secret meetings with his fellow conspirators, Ayyub and Zodeen. It seemed to Grond highly unlikely that the timid Jaira would have sought refuge in the secret chamber below the house, for as far as he knew the Cro-Magnon girl was ignorant of its very existence. Nevertheless, Grond was a thorough man and was unwilling to overlook any possibility, however remote it might seem.

When the former slave had been escorted thither, on the occasion of his commission by Yussef ben Ali to serve as emissary to the host of Thandar, he had paid careful attention to the route which led to the secret room. This was by way of being a trait of Grond's, to vigilantly accumulate every bit of information about his captors he possibly could do; for it seemed to the young warrior that one could never tell when any specific item of knowledge might come in handy.

And Grond was one slave who had never bowed his will to his masters. Ever had he kept alive in his heart the desire for freedom, and the determination to escape someday from the island fortress.

The Cro-Magnon warrior raised the trapdoor which led into the hidden room with particular care, not knowing who or what might have taken refuge in the gloomy chamber. His sandals made no sound as he descended the wooden stair, his scimitar naked and ready in his hand.

The secret room was cloaked in shadows. Only the fitful glimmer of a gold candelabrum lit the gloom with the wan luminance of its seven waxen tapers. But there was light enough to enable Grond to discover a grim tableau ....

Her wrists tightly bound by leathern thongs, a naked young woman of his own race dangled. The thongs which bound her wrists with savage tightness were looped over an iron hook deep-sunk in one of the tarry beams which supported the ceiling.

Facing the girl, but in such a position that he could not observe its features, a robed and hooded figure stood, brandishing a whip of braided leather.

Even as Grond took in the scene, the hooded figure lifted one dark-skinned arm. In the next moment the nude girl would suffer the terrible blow of that cruel length of oiled and supple leather.

For Grond, to observe was to act. He could not observe the features of the naked girl, but she was of an age with his darling Jaira, and of much the same appearance. He leaped to the conclusion that he had, indeed, found Jaira, and just in time to rescue her from a sadistic whipping.

The Cro-Magnon warrior hurled himself across the room like a great jungle cat. Candlelight flashed upon the oiled steel of his scimitar as he swung it down upon the wrist that held the whip.

A shriek of intolerable agony rang through the stonewalled chamber.

Zoraida stared unbelievably as her right hand, neatly severed at the wrist, fell to the pave with an obscene thud. Crimson gore spurted from the stump of her wrist. Pale and wrung with torment, the Moorish dancing-girl sank to her knees, clutching at the stump of her wrist. Hot red blood squirted from between her fingers, staining the robes wherein her voluptuous figure was swathed. She fell back against the wall, whimpering like a hurt animal, crawling into the darkest corner as if to nurse her pain in solitude.

Fumio, who stood at the end of the table, had gone unobserved by Grond as the young warrior flung himself across the room to strike down Zoraida. For all his faults, Fumio was a brave and mighty fighting man. He was unarmed, was Fumio, and did not even bear Darya's dagger, as it had fallen from her hand when he leaped upon her in the dark alley and he had not bothered to retrieve it.

But now his eye fell upon one of the wine goblets from which Yussef and Ayyub and Zodeen had drank during their meeting earlier. The cup was capacious and long-stemmed, with a rounded base, and it was wrought of heavy red gold.

Surely, it was heavy enough to crush in a man's skull ....

Snatching it up, Fumio lunged across the room at Grond, who had his back turned to his assailant and was lifting his dripping blade to cut loose the wrists of the blonde girl.

Darya, staring over Grand's shoulder at the sudden flicker of movement from the shadows, cried out a warning.

Like a cat, Grond whirled, sword lowered and outthrust.

Fumio was a larger man, and could not move as swiftly.

He ran full upon the point of Grond's sword, which sank into his heart.

He lurched drunkenly upon unsteady legs, like a man who has drunk too deeply of strong wine.

He grinned weakly and tried to say something. But red blood gushed from his mouth, stilling whatever words he had meant to speak.

Then he fell down upon the floor, groaned once, and died.



Wiping his wet blade on the hem of Fumio's cloak, Grond cut the naked girl down and helped her to a chair. By coincidence, it was the same chair in which Yussef ben Ali had earlier sat. He removed the thongs from her wrists and chafed the bruised flesh until the circulation returned into Darya's hands.

"You are not the woman I thought," said Grond somberly. "I was searching for Jaira, my beloved . . . ."

"I know her not," replied Darya. "But I am thankful that you came this way in time to spare me from the lash."

"The woman is Zoraida, whose former lover was Kairadine the Redbeard," muttered Grond thoughtfully. "And the man I slew was one Fumio, a slave in the house of Yussef ben Ali whom once I interrogated at the behest of my then master. But you I have never seen before . . . ."

"I am Darya, the daughter of-"

Excitement flashed in the clear blue eyes of the warrior.

"Darya, the daughter of Tharn the Mighty? Darya, the long-lost gomad-of Thandar?"

"None other," sighed the girl. "But how do you know my name, when I have never seen you before?"

Grond smiled. "You may not know it, Princess, but since your capture by the Redbeard, it seems that half the world has come looking for you!"

Darya looked bewildered. Grond laughed, and gave her a cup of wine. The drink was tepid by this time, but Darya drank it down gratefully.

"I am Grond, formerly a warrior of the tribe of Gorthak upon the mainland, more recently a slave in the house of Yussef ben Ali. It was Yussef who dispatched me on a mission to your father, Tharn-

"My father!" the girl gasped, hope leaping up within her heart. "You have met my father? Where? Is he near-?"

"Near?" laughed Grond. He is here-even now he stands upon the throne of Kairadine Redbeard, who has fled into hiding. The Omad your father has invaded and conquered the island of the Barbary Pirates, and Yussef and all of the other Captains of the Brotherhood are slain. You are safe at last, Princess Darya, and among friends."

The blonde girl paled and slumped back in the tall chair, weak with relief.

"I can hardly believe it," she murmured. "My father, here in El-Cazar . . . ."

"And master of it, by this time," said Grond. "Come: I will take you to him."

It was none other than Achmed the Moor who had seized Jaira and stifled her cries with his rough hand.

The burly Moor had taken refuge in the palace gardens, as by now the streets in the immediate vicinity were overrun by the blond invaders of El-Cazar. He had hoped to hide until all was quieter, then make his way to the harbor and board the Red Witch, which stood at anchor there. With a few seamen under his command, the Moor felt confident he could put to sea and venture north, there perchance to find the squadron of Moustapha. With these ships at their command, and Moustapha's horde of lusty rogues, they might well return to El-Cazar and turn the tide of battle. With the fortune of Allah smiling upon them, all might yet be put to rights in the private kingdom, and the yellow-haired savages slaughtered to the last man.

He did not know the slave girl Jaira, but from the sigh engraved upon the slender silver collar which she wore he knew her to belong to the house of Yussef ben Ali. What she was doing here in the palace gardens he could not guess, but all who were of the following of the traitorous Yussef ben Ali were the enemies of Kairadine Redbeard, and the enemies of Kairadine Redbeard were the enemies of Achmed the Moor.

He bore the struggling girl into the gazebo and hastily tied her arms and legs with strips of stout cloth torn from the hem of his robe. Her mouth he stuffed with a ball of torn cloth, bound into place with another strip, so that she could not cry out and give the alarm. Then he crouched near the entrance to the flimsy structure, peering about grimly.

All of the world seemed topsy-turvy to the Moor: his lord and master was overthrown by his own captains, and El-Cazar was itself overthrown by savages. Achmed was bewildered by the swift transition, and his strong hands itched for employment.

Achmed would from time to time glance resentfully over to where Jaira lay, her eyes wide with fear. At such a time as this, fleeing for his life, it was an inconvenience to have to be burdened with taking captives. Even now, he grimly guessed, the leaders of the savages would have ascertained from slaves of their own race who were the leaders of El-Cazar-among whom as first mate of the flagship of the corsair fleet and lieutenant of Kairadine Redbeard himself, Achmed the Moor was surely to be numbered.

The savages would be anxious to seek out and dispatch every last one of the leaders of the pirate kingdom. Therefore, they would be searching for him. With his height and bulk, it would be difficult enough for Achmed to escape especially if he must lug along a captive Cro-Magnon girl.

But carry her with him he must, for he did not dare to leave her behind as she could probably guess his identity and would inform her fellow savages of his whereabouts.

Then it was that the cunning eyes of Achmed narrowed and a glint of cruelty came to them. His powerful hand crept to the hilt of the long dagger he bore thrust into the sash about his waist.

Why must he drag her along to encumber him? There was no reason. Neither need he leave her behind to raise the alarm and to send the hunters after him.

Would it not be safer to slit the throat of the girl and leave her gory corpse behind in the gazebo to puzzle and confuse the barbarians?

## Chapter 20 DEATH AND MARRIAGE

Kairadine stifled the hasty exclamation that rose unbidden to his lips as he perceived the body of a woman sprawled in a pool of gore in the dimness of the farther corner of the room. Traversing the secret chamber in a rapid stride, he knelt and, with trembling hands, turned the body over so that he might peer into the features of the corpse.

He dreaded to recognize the body of Darya, whom to this moment he desired with a hunger transcending thought and all reason. But the body was that of Zoraida!

"Beard of the Prophet!" groaned the Prince of the Barbary Pirates hoarsely, "but what has transpired in this accursed place?"

Swiftly he examined the body of the dancing-woman who had been his mistress. Her right hand had been severed neatly at the wrist, and the blow had been a clean one, performed with a heavy, sharp-bladed instrument, perhaps a scimitar. The Moorish had lost very much blood, but the flame of life, although it flickered wan and low within her tawny flesh, yet burned, however feebly.

Moistening her eyes and lips with a few drops of wine, he succeeded in bringing the half-dead girl back to consciousness. Her eyelids fluttered. Her glazed eyes wandered about the dim stone-walled chamber uncomprehendingly, indifferently, finally coming to rest upon his own features. A wan smile creased her colorless lips.

"What happened here?" demanded the Redbeard harshly. "And where is the savage girl, Darya?"

". . . Darya? . . ." murmured Zoraida in the ghost of a whisper. A half-remembered resentment flared briefly in her dull gaze. "Was that not the name of the scrawny slut whom my Kairadine came to prefer to his beloved Zoraida?"

"What if it is?" he said hotly. "What have you done with her, you traitress?"

A pale flame gleamed in the eyes of the dying Moorish Woman.

"Once you loved Zoraida, and called her your 'Flame of Araby,'" the dancer whispered. "And now you name her whom you adored with a deathless passion 'traitress' ....."

In his fury, the corsair almost shook her slender shoulders.

"Speak, curse you!" he grated. "Where have you hidden the savage girl?"

"In a place where you can never reach her," breathed Zoraida faintly. "In a place where you can never find her . . . search for her, my beloved, as you will ... ."

The lips of Kairadine writhed back from his white teeth in a wolfish grin. Hellfires blazed in the depths of his dark eyes. His mouth opened to curse Zoraida, but then he perceived that it was no use. For Death had come into that stony chamber on silent and invisible feet, to steal her shade away to his amazing kingdom, and she was beyond all of his curses now.

With a muffled groan Kairadine Redbeard let the corpse fall back into its pool of blood and squatted there on his heels, hugging his knees for a long moment or two, brooding on nothingness. Betrayed by his captains, his very kingdom invaded by remorseless enemies, and the girl he desired lustfully stolen from him by a faithless whore whose lips Death had locked upon the secret of her hiding place, it seemed to the Prince of the Barbary Pirates that he had lost everything in life which had possessed meaning or value for him-even revenge!

"By the Scarlet Fiends of Kaf," he groaned from the bottom of his heart, "but I swear that I shall find her if I must ransack the entirety of this world from end to end!"

Then he sprang lithely to his feet and strode from the chamber, and vanished into the secret passage. And silence fell upon that gaunt room of stark horror and grisly murder.

During the several wakes and sleeps that we consumed in crossing the northern plains-moving by slow and easy stages, with many frequent pauses to rest, lest we strain the fragile health of Garth-many curious and interesting things transpired.

When my comrades and I had fled from the captivity of the Scarlet City of Zar, and joined forces once again with the tribesmen of Sothar, we bore with us very many of those who had been the former slaves and captives of the Minoans. Most of these were Cro-Magnon men and women stolen from other tribes than those of Sothar or of Thandar-such as the two good and true friends I had made in the Pits of Zar, while we were awaiting our death in the Great Games of the monster god, Zorgazon.

I refer, of course, to youthful Thon of Numitor, that cheerful good-humored and likable young warrior, and to the grim and stalwart Gundar of Gorad, that mighty and hulking strongman, whose massive chest and burly shoulders and iron arms were those of some heroic gladiator of the Dawn.

Both were from tribes alien to the men of Sothar, and unfamiliar to them. Ordinarily, I have perceived that the Cro-Magnon nations view with intense suspicion and downright hostility any stranger, be he as blond and blue-eyed as are they. In the unremitting struggle for survival against ravaging monsters and impassable jungles that is everyday life here in Zanthodon, one learns to cleave to one's own kin and to regard all other men as, at very least, potential foes.

But the strangers who had fled with me from the captivity of Zar had stood and fought side by side with the warriors of Sothar against the mounted troops of the Scarlet City, earning at least the reluctant admiration of the Sotharians. Now, during our lengthy trek across the plains, I observed that they were beginning to win a deeper kind of acceptance from their hosts, by their uncomplaining sharing of the burdens and tasks of the march and the hunt, if by naught else.

At first the newcomers were left strictly alone by the men and women of Sothar, permitted grudgingly to share in the provisions but left very much alone, ever viewed with truculence and suspicion. Things, however, began to change soon enough.

I had, from the start, quietly encouraged their acceptance by welcoming several of the strangers among my own company of warriors. As a full-fledged tribal chieftain, I had the authority to admit into my own retinue of followers whomever I wished. And thus Thon of Numitor and Gundar of Gorad and one or two others who had seized my fancy became warriors in my group.

My example was followed not long after by others of the chieftains for I was by way of being something of a national hero to the men of Sothar, if I may immodestly admit to the fact. This was because of my role in freeing the Sotharians from their grim captivity in the cavern city of the Gorpaks and their ghastly masters, the vampiric Sluagghs. Warriors by the score had clamored to join my retinue, and in the beginning I had enlisted in equal numbers those of my friends among the Thandarians and the Sotharians. Now several of the newcomers joined my ranks at my invitation.

Where Eric Carstairs, chieftain of Thandar and of Sothar led, the other chieftains were not long in following, I am proud to say. Thus, days before we reached the seacoast of the Sogar-Jad, the new men were all but fully assimilated among the tribal warriors.

More than a few of purest Zarian blood had fled with us from the Scarlet City, as well. These men and women were of a different racial stock than were the blond Cro-Magnons, being small and slight of build, with olive skins and dark hair and eyes.

Picture, if you will, the Cro-Magnons as essentially Nordic or Aryan in appearance, and the Zarians as Mediterraneans, and you will have a clearer view of the racial differences. While the Zarians were not of such height and strength as the Cro-Magnons, their lighter, slenderer bodies were well-knit and trim, lending them the grace and tireless agility of dancers or acrobats. At my subtle suggestion, Garth's chieftains employed these men as scouts and huntsmen-roles for which agility and stealthiness are valuable traits to possess. And in these occupations they proved singularly adept.

They also proved much more skillful craftsmen than the larger, clumsier Sotharians. They were better at making arrows and javelins and at the fashioning of leathern buskins and fur garments, as their small and nimble fingers could better ply the bone needles and other tools. So, in time, even these foreigners became also more or less assimilated among the blond, blue-eyed warriors.

The one awkward and uncomfortable note of discordance in all of this was the girl, Ialys.

The slim and beautiful, dark-eyed Zarian lady had been one of the handmaidens of the Divine Empress. She had befriended me, and the ever-jealous and suspicious Zarys had both of us condemned to death in the arena, believing that we had conspired together-which, by the way, was not in the least true. But try to explain something to a jealous woman-!

When we made our hasty and precipitous flight from Zar, there was no alternative available to me but to bring Ialys along, for the Empress would surely have had her sacrificed to propitiate the monster god Zorgazon had she remained behind. Ever after, on our trek across the plains, Ialys had cleaved closely by my side, somewhat to my discomfort, I assure you, for I came in for quite a bit of friendly kidding from my comrades about the beautiful black-haired girl who accompanied me everywhere.

At times I found her nearness a matter of considerable embarrassment. It was not that I feared the Zarian girl had fallen in love with me or anything, for she continued to refer to me deferentially, in the courtly manner of Zar, as "Lord Eric." It was just that . . . well, damn it all, there are times a man wants to be alone with his thoughts, or off hunting and carousing with his friends, and having Ialys tag along reminded me of my boyhood friends-those unfortunately saddled with little sisters to take care of, right in the middle of baseball season!

This problem-well, it really wasn't that much of a problem, more of a minor annoyance-this annoyance quite soon resolved itself to everyone's satisfaction, and much to my surprise.

Rather often, while I was at the head of my troop, I noticed that it was Varak of Sothar who attended to the needs of little Ialys. Varak is one of the warriors who had joined my company very early on: a warm-hearted, good-natured, cheerful and uncomplaining fellow, as likable and loyal as Thon or any of the others.

It became Varak whom Ialys tagged along after, when I was busy; Varak who chivalrously assisted her to cross boggy places or rocks or defiles: Varak with whom she shared her meals, and very much low-toned conversation.

Then I noticed Varak disappearing at intervals into the woods, returning with succulent fruit and occasionally, gorgeous blossoms, which he rather unobtrusively gave to Ialys. I noticed this, I repeat, rather off-handedly, being busy with the responsibilities of chieftainship. But notice it I did, thinking very little about it. Until one day.

The two came up to me during a rest stop, and I noticed that they were holding hands. I caught myself staring and recomposed my features.

"Yes, Varak?" I inquired.

"Er, ah," said the usually articulate and even voluble young warrior.

"Um?" I grunted encouragingly.

He blushed scarlet to the tips of his ears and muttered something in a low mumble.

"What was that?"

Clearing his throat with an effort, Varak put a severe expression on and said straightforwardly: "I wish Ialys to be my mate!"

"Your . . . what?" I repeated.

"My mate."

"Oh. Well . . . Ialys, is this agreeable to you?"

She lowered her lids shyly, and a rosy flush colored her cheeks.

"It is my wish, Lord Eric, that Varak become my mate," she whispered demurely.

"Well, then," I said heartily, "congratulations to you both!" (Inwardly, I was wishing that I knew something about the marriage customs of the Cro-Magnons, a subject on which I had never yet had reason to desire knowledge of . . . )

"We can do it right now, if that's all right with you," added Varak.

"Oh, can you?" I murmured, somewhat dazedly. "Well, it's all right with me, of course . . ."

A few minutes later, with the whole of my company assembled for witnesses, Varak took Ialys's hand and claimed her as his mate, while she in turn repeated the same claim. My warriors raised a lusty cheer, and clapped the two of them approvingly on the shoulders.

All the while Varak stood awkwardly, with a foolish grin on his face, looking very much like a simpleton.

I bent down and gave Ialys a fatherly kiss on the cheek, murmuring my best wishes.

She raised to me starry eyes brimming with tears of happiness.

The two of them looked very much married.

That "night," rolled up in my sleeping-skins, I dreamed of Darya, wondering if I were ever to claim her for my mate before the tribe, I would look as foolish as Varak.

I had a feeling that I certainly would.

Part Five

BLADES OF THE BROTHERHOOD

## **Chapter 21 THE VENGEANCE OF ZAR.**

It will be recalled, by those who have perused the previous volumes of these memoirs, that while Hurok and the other warriors of my retinue were seeking an entry into the Scarlet City of Zar, where they presumed me to be held captive, my young friend, Jorn the Hunter, fell from the cliffs during an avalanche.

Hurok and Varak and the others believed him to have perished on the rocks below, for who could have guessed that the boy had been lucky enough to have fallen into a mountain lake, which broke his fall?

Indeed, Jorn yet lived, as did Yualla, the daughter of Garth of the Sotharians, who had been carried off by a pterodactyl and whom Jorn at length encountered, leading miserable, whimpering little Murg at the end of a leash, who had attempted to ravish her as she slept.

The boy and girl decided to scale the cliffs, hoping to join the forces with Hurok and the others. Murg perforce must accompany them.

The tide of events has carried us far from the story of Jorn and Yualla and their adventures. Let us rejoin them now, and take up again the thread of their tale . . . .

The Divine Zarys returned to Zar in a magnificent temper.

Just as the world had turned upside down for our friend Achmed the Moor, even more unprecedented had been the changes wrought upon the Empress of this last, surviving colony of Minoan Crete.

For the beautiful queen was very accustomed to having her own way in everything. And then into her



island city came Eric Carstairs and the Professor, and things began to go haywire. First, I declined to share her loyal bed-not because I am a celibate, I hasten to assure you, but because I was deeply and forever in love with my adorable Princess, Darya of Thandar, to whom, by the way, the Divine Zarys bore a remarkable resemblance. For this refusal she had me imprisoned.

Then she discovered me conspiring-it seemed to her, although she was mistaken in this assumption-with the lovely, dark-eyed Zarian girl, Ialys, her own handmaiden. For this she had me sent to the arena, to face Zorgazon the Great God in the sanguinary and gladiatorial Games of Zar.

Then my old pal, Professor Potter, blew her palace citadel sky high by detonating his gunpowder factory-her wily vizier, Xask, having somehow talked the old boy into reinventing firearms. The explosion (which was a doozy, by the way) drove Zorgazon crazy. He broke through the walls of the arena and trampled half of the Scarlet City into wreckage on his way back to the wild.

Zorgazon turned out to be a titanic tyrannosaurus rex, the most fearsome and mighty of the monstrous reptiles of the dim Jurassic. He was built on the order of King Kong, and weighed about as much as a railroad train laden with anvils . . . and when something drove Zorgazon crazy, he went crazy like you can hardly imagine. He plowed through the solid stone tiers which lined the wall of the arena like an Italian baker punching through a thin sheet of pizza dough ....

But here I seem to be telling of my own adventures, when I had promised to pick up the thread of Jorn and Yualla's. Sorry!

After her defeat by Garth and his Sotharians beyond the pass, Zarys returned to Zar in a fury. One thought and one thought alone possessed the proud and cruel heart of that imperious young woman, and that was to be revenged upon the Professor and me, and upon the Sotharians. So she wasted no time in ordering out the Marines. What mattered it to her that her city was in ruins, her palace a smoldering heap of ash, and the Great God Zorgazon fled from the city of his worshippers into the unknown - Zarys would have her revenge upon Eric Carstairs, and upon all those who were his friends and allies!

Toward this end, the Empress summoned her legions of warriors mounted upon their domesticated saurian steeds, and launched a second pursuit of the fugitives. This time with thrice the number of troops, a host surely sufficient to break the horde of Sotharian tribesmen . . . .

Jorn the Hunter and Yualla of Sothar took many wakes to cross the mighty range of mountains which served, like some titanic wall, to shield the Scarlet City of the Minoans from the remainder of the Underground World. Cautiously, carefully, the Cro-Magnon boy and girl descended the precipitous slopes of the farther side of the range, and took their first astonished look at the impressive vista of the island city that was the last surviving colony of ancient Crete.

With them perforce went their whining, miserable little captive, poor Murg. He feared the heights, did Murg, and the giddy depths below his insecure footing, but he had little if any say in the matter, as

Yualla held one end of the tether which was looped about his scrawny throat.

The two cave children had never before seen or even imagined anything like the great metropolis of Zar, and found the view breathtaking. Jorn and Yualla were accustomed to settlements which consisted of little more than a score of huts and a rude palisade; Zar, however, was built upon a scale which seemed titanic to them, and they stared with awed bewilderment upon its streets and squares, its hundreds of houses, its very forest of towers and spires. They had never imagined that the hands of men could construct anything so huge and so complex.

Now for the first time, the two began to entertain doubts about their quest and its chances of success. How, in all that stone wilderness of walls and ramparts, could they ever hope to find Eric Carstairs? How could they possibly fight such an enormous host of foes?

Finding a snug cave on the far slope of the mountains, the two decided to plan and reconnoiter before descending into the great valley of Zar. And thus it was that the caveboy and the cavegirl became eyewitnesses to the swift succession of events which I have already alluded to—the Games in the arena, the explosion which demolished the imperial palace citadel and set fire to much of the city, and the escape of the monster god, Zorgazon. From their coign of vantage, they also observed our flight from the city and Zarys's pursuit at the head of her mounted legions.

As swiftly as they could with safety descend the crumbling slopes to the floor of the valley, the boy and girl hastened to rejoin their friends. Surely, thought Jorn to himself, in all of this confusion, it should be possible for the two to elude discovery and pursue Eric Carstairs and his companions, among whom the young hunter had seen and recognized Professor Potter, Hurok of Kor, and several others.

Skirting the entrance to the island city, the two Cro-Magnon youngsters hurried through the pass which cleft the wall of mountains, and emerged upon the grassy plains beyond just in time to observe, from a considerable distance, the battle between the tribe of Sothar and the vengeful Minoans, which surprisingly resulted in a victory for the savage warriors of Yualla's tribe and yet another defeat for the Divine Zarys.

They watched as Garth, employing the telepathic crystal, seized control of the huge thodars upon which Zarys and her warriors were mounted, forcing them into flight. And thereby, all unknowingly, the mighty Omad of Sothar brought about the capture of his daughter. For, fleeing back into the relative safety of their valley realm, the Zarian warriors discovered and took captive Jorn the Hunter and the girl Yualla.

It was Xask, the clever and cunning vizier of Zar, who found the boy and girl hidden among the thick grasses, and directed his warriors to disarm and bind them. Xask did not recognize Jorn, and had never met Yualla, but realized that the two must be members of the barbarian horde which had just defeated the forces of the Empress, and had somehow become separated from their people.

Thus it was that when Zarys returned to her half-demolished capital in a fine fury, Xask had at least a morsel of good news wherewith to temper her rage.

The fact of the matter was, quite simply, that Xask felt insecure in the affections of his Empress. For it had been more or less his fault that Professor Potter had found free and easy access to the gunpowder factory which he had touched off. And Xask very much enjoyed his recent return to the favor of the Empress, and did not wish to incur her wrath a second time.

"Of what use are these two savage children to my purposes?" demanded Zarys hotly. "It is Eric Carstairs and Eric Carstairs alone whom I desire to hold within my power, to extract from him the full measure of vengeance-"

"Your servant fully understands, Goddess," replied Xask soothingly, "but permit your servant to suggest, however humbly, that the two savages may very well be close to the heart of Eric Carstairs or to the leaders of the savage host. By holding them prisoners and hostages, we may yet be able to enforce our will upon Eric Carstairs . . ."

The Empress considered it thoughtfully, a slight frown creasing her flawless brow. She was impatient to reorganize her legions and again hasten in pursuit of the escaping savages, and even the slightest delay rankled within her breast. Finally, seeing some logic in Xask's argument, she shrugged.

"Very well, bring them along," she murmured. "They will afford us only the slightest encumbrance, and may, as you suggest, come in useful for the purposes of bargaining. It may well be that Eric Carstairs will willingly surrender himself into our hands for judgment, rather than see these children suffer indignity or torment . . . but, surely, we have no use for their cringing little companion?"

Xask thought otherwise, although he was hard put to think of a good reason for sparing Murg. The clever vizier had many times found his way to a desired goal by spying out and playing upon the weaknesses in others, and the weaknesses in the heart of Murg were clearly visible to him. It seemed wise to Xask to spare even Murg, for in this life men such as Xask never quite know when even the miserable Murgs of this world may come in handy. Therefore, he urged Murg upon his Empress. Impatient to be gone, she carelessly agreed.

"After all," she murmured, "even if this cringing cur or the two savages are of no importance to Eric Carstairs and prove to be an inconvenience, well, we can always cut their throats and leave them for the scavengers of the plain."

And with these callous words, the Divine Empress hurried about her preparations for departure, leaving Xask well satisfied.

Despite the urgency of her desire to be gone from Zar and to hasten in pursuit of the fugitives, it was impossible for the Immortal Zarys to leave her city until many wakes and sleeps had passed.

The destruction caused by the explosion of the gunpowder factory, and by the escape of Zorgazon, had left her capital in smoldering ruins for the larger part, her people scattered and demoralized. In this Byzantine tangle of plot and counter-plot, intrigue and anti-intrigue, which was the Zarian court, even the divine descendent of Minos could have been dislodged from her throne had not Zarys, however grudgingly, taken the time to set things aright again.

This took weeks, actually. But in time, and now triple in strength, the legions of Zar, mounted upon their ponderous thodars, went thundering down the stone causeway and through the pass, to re-enter the great plains of the north, in pursuit of the host of Sothar and the former slaves and captives.

At the forefront of the legions rode Zarys herself, and also Xask, as her second-in-command, to which post the Empress had appointed her wily vizier upon the demise of my old rival, General Cromus, who had lost his life when Garth had seized telepathic control of the thodars.

And in the rear of these troops, their wrists securely tethered and under close and vigilant guard, rode young Jorn the Hunter and the girl Yualla.

And, of course, the unhappy Murg. Not that anyone ever paid much attention to Murg . . . .

## **Chapter 22 SEARCH'S ENDING**

When Grond brought Darya of Thandar before her mighty father, there in the palace of Kairadine Redbeard, there ensued a reunion which was touching. With a gruff cry of joy, Tharn of Thandar caught up his daughter and crushed her to his powerful breast. For long moments, the Omad of Thandar and his long-lost daughter had eyes only for each other.

"Is all well with you?" demanded Tharn searchingly. "Have any of these men harmed or abused you? If so, point them out and they will harm no other woman, ever again!"

"All is well with me, father," murmured Darya, nestling within the circle of his arms. "Only Kairadine Redbeard-as the leader of these people is known-would have harmed me, but found no opportunity to do so."

"Him alone we have not found, as yet," growled the jungle monarch. "Although we have searched the palace and the town. Thus far the scoundrel has eluded us."

"And what of Eric Carstairs?" inquired Darya. "For I see him not among your chieftains . . . ."

Tharn scratched the roots of his beard and looked uncomfortable, for of course he was aware of the affections that had grown between his daughter and the stranger from the upper world.

"Eric Carstairs parted company from us some time ago," Tharn admitted gruffly. "After we came out of the cavern city of the Gorpaks and the Sluaggh, and you were stolen away by that villain Fumio and the other men. He and some of the warriors in his company went their own ways in pursuit of you, and have not been seen since."

Darya sighed. "I hope that he yet lives, and is unharmed," she murmured.

Tharn tightened his brawny embrace about her slim shoulders, protectively.

"Eric Carstairs has survived many perils before this," the jungle monarch pointed out. "We surely have not heard the last of our brave friend . . . ."

Darya said nothing, but the expression of sorrow in her splendid eyes spoke volumes.

With his long-lost daughter at last safe, Tharn next busied himself about preparations for departure, for the island fortress of El-Cazar depressed him with its frowning ramparts and narrow, stony ways, and with all his heart the Cro-Magnon king yearned for the open plains and lofty mountains of the mainland, and for his distant home.

All search of Kairadine Redbeard had proved fruitless, for beyond question the Pirate Prince had sought refuge in some secret hiding place only known to himself. Although Tharn was hungry to visit a grim punishment upon the Barbary corsair for the theft and persecution of Darya, he resolved at length to give over the search and return with his host to the mainland of Zanthodon. Among the other reasons which urged this course of action upon him there was the imminent return to El-Cazar of the pirate squadron commanded by Moustapha, the last surviving member of the Council of Captains, who had departed from the island fortress of the corsairs just before the invasion by the Thandarians, as the reader will remember.

For Tharn wisely foresaw that it would be distinctly dangerous for him to linger here and then find himself and his warriors besieged by Moustapha's squadron of ships, with no means to defend themselves, outnumbered and relatively helpless. With this decision all of the leaders of the tribe concurred, and that heartily, being wearied of this strange town and its winding streets and towering houses.

All, that is, but Grond. For still the whereabouts of his jungle sweetheart, Jaira, had not been discovered. Disconsolately, the young warrior prowled the labyrinthine ways of El-Cazar, searching for the lost girl.

It did not occur to Grond in his distraction that one other was also missing. But Achmed the Moor, who had been Kairadine's first lieutenant, also had not been found, although at the time his absence from the rosters of the captured and the slain seemed to the mind of Grond a thing of no particular significance.

Grond had accepted the offer of Tharn to join with the host of the Thandarians-an offer made to all of

the former slaves and captives of the Barbary Pirates-and he well knew that he must depart from El-Cazar when the tribe quitted its shores, as to remain behind was to return to captivity as soon as Moustapha returned to restore the authority of the Brotherhood. But how could he leave, with Jaira's fate unknown?

That he eventually decided he must do so is not to impugn either the loyalty or the love of Grond, but to make a comment upon the peculiar, but very understandable, fatalism shared by the Cro-Magnon peoples of Zanthodon.

From the very cradle, as it were, these innocent children of nature are engaged in an unremitting struggle for survival in a savage world inimical to their existence. Surrounded on every hand by perils beyond number, they fight from the womb to the grave against hostile nature, cruel jungles, hideous monsters and savage foes, and in that struggle more than a few of them succumb earlier than the rest. Not a warrior but has seen parent, brother, uncle, sister or comrade slain before his or her time, and thus the warriors of Zanthodon have developed, almost as an unconscious instinct of self-protection, a curious indifference to death which is difficult for "civilized" persons such as you or I to comprehend.

Grond was among the nearly two hundred Cro-Magnons who had been slaves or captives of the Barbary Pirates, and who elected to join with the tribe of Thandar rather than to search the mainland for their own half-forgotten homes. At one stroke, then, the fighting force of the Thandarians was nearly tripled. Even so, Tharn took every precaution to render the subjugated Berbers helpless of pursuit and revenge.

Those of the corsair ships which remained anchored in the harbor of El-Cazar he ordered burned and sunk. In time, of course, the survivors of the Thandarian invasion would rebuild their fleet, but Tharn guessed that when that time came around he and his people would be deep within the jungles of the mainland and far beyond the reach of the Brotherhood.

Tharn did not take into consideration the imminent return to El-Cazar of Moustapha and his corsair squadron. This was partly because no one could guess or predict just how long it would be before the missing captain would terminate his venture into the nothern isles and turn about to sail home to the island fortress of the buccaneers.

The time to leave El-Cazar came at length, and the Cro-Magnons made ready to depart from the isle with their new recruits. And among these, as I have explained, was Grond, although his heart ached at the thought ....

It seemed to Achmed the Moor that he had crouched here in cowardly concealment for days, seeking to elude capture by the yellow-haired savages who had so swiftly overrun the pirate kingdom. Ever since he had found a hiding place in the little gazebo-like structure which adorned the gardens of the palace of Kairadine Redbeard, the burly Moor had sweated in a fever of impatience to find a more secure place of refuge, and in an agony of apprehension lest he be discovered by the primitives.

Bound and gagged, the girl Jaira helplessly lay by his side. Achmed could not have explained to you exactly why he had spared the life of the slave-girl, any more than he was able to explain it to himself. But it surely was not from any tenderness or feelings of compassion, for such did not exist in the hardened and calloused heart of the Moorish corsair. Perhaps he let Jaira live as a possible hostage to his own freedom and security-a potential bargaining point in the event that his hiding place was discovered; and then again, perhaps not.

But for what seemed an interminable length of time, the burly Moor had squatted behind the little wooden structure, peering fearfully about as the savages came and went on mysterious errands and unknown missions, dreading at any moment that the halloo would be raised and he would have to fight for his life.

That this did not, in fact, occur is probably to be explained by the simple answer that few of the warriors or chieftains of Thandar had much notion of Achmed's very existence. With the captains of the corsair kingdom slain or missing, their junior officers seemed of no consequence, whether they were alive and fled or captive, or themselves slain.

It would greatly have disgruntled the Moor had he known that his very existence was of no consequence to the conquerors, of course. We have, all of us, an understandably inflated notion of our own importance in the great Scheme of Things-an opinion most likely not shared by very many of those around us.

For an equally interminable period of time, Jaira had suffered her captivity in a terror of impending death at the hands of her grim captor. The shy, frightened girl was somewhat more delicate and very much less brave than were her savage sisters, but after many hours of being a bound and helpless captive at the cruel mercies of the Moor, it eventually dawned on Jaira that perhaps after all, she was not going to be murdered in the next instant. And with this realization her fears calmed somewhat; recovering from the paralysis of her panic, the girl began to puzzle a way out of her horrible dilemma.

Achmed had bound her hastily and clumsily, and as time passed Jaira noticed that certain of her bonds had slipped from their original position and that her limbs were less cramped and confined than they had been. This inspired the blonde girl to attempt to free her wrists: twisting and turning, striving with every small strength at her command-and virtually ignored by the huge Moor, who crouched fearfully sweating, peering in every direction as the savage warriors came and went-she eventually managed to slip one slim hand free. From that point it was not difficult for her to unobtrusively writhe loose of her bonds.

When at length she had succeeded in freeing herself, the girl fearfully glanced at her captor, expecting momentary discovery. But Achmed had his broad back turned upon his captive, and was paying not the slightest attention to her. With her heart in her mouth, the girl began stealthily to creep from the gazebo.

Although it seemed to take an agonizing eternity, she managed to reach the relative safety of the bushes

which grew close about the little ornamental structure. Then she rose furtively to her feet, hopeful of gaining the security of the nearest group of trees-but at that which met her eyes in the very next instant, she stood transfixed; all thoughts of stealth fleeing from her mind, Jaira uttered a shrill and piercing cry of astonishment which jerked Achmed, cursing vilely, to his feet, one huge hand seizing up his scimitar.

Grond was halfway down the garden path, on his way to accomplish a final errand for Tharn of Thandar, when a well-remembered voice raised in a sharp cry of alarm arrested his steps.

The Cro-Magnon whirled about to see a sight at once delightful and dreadful-

For there, not far away, stood his beloved staring at him with incredulous delight.

At her back, rising into view, was a gigantic black figure armed with a glittering scimitar .... 

## Chapter 23 JAIRA STRIKES BACK

Kairadine well knew that his life was forfeit were his whereabouts to be discovered. If the leader of the blond barbarians was, indeed, the father of Darya, the girl he had stolen away and would have ravished, then her father-like all fathers-would be satisfied with nothing less than his blood.

Although wary and cautious in the extreme, the Redbeard was not fearful of discovery. No one knew as thoroughly as did he the thousand hiding places open to a fugitive in the immense and ancient warren of El-Cazar.

So, drawing the hood of his cloak over his face in order to conceal his features, and affecting a limp which should serve to disguise his swaggering, arrogant stride, the former Prince of the Barbary Pirates slunk furtively down the alley and into a main thoroughfare.

The savage conquerors were everywhere, but as none of them save only for the girl Darya could possibly have recognized him, Kairadine put a bold face on it, and mingled with the crowd which wandered to and fro. No trade was being conducted in the grand bazaar on this day, for those merchants who would otherwise have been boastfully declaiming the virtues of their wares hid behind bolted doors and closed shutters, fearful lest the conquerors should come seeking loot and plunder.

It is natural for men to judge others by themselves, thought Kairadine wryly to himself as he slunk through the square. Since the Barbary Pirates lived on loot and plunder, they expected no less from others-least of all, from their savage conquerors. The truth of the matter was, of course, that the "simple" Cro-Magnons had no conceivable use for gold or silver or gems, and were uninterested in accumulating such bright but essentially worthless trash.

What they were interested in, were the excellent steel swords and daggers used by the corsairs. Thus,



when Kairadine crept past a swordsmith's booth, he noticed the savages emerging therefrom, their bare and brawny arms laden with glittering weapons. He did not, of course, know that Tharn of Thandar, instantly recognizing the superiority of the Berber weaponry, had commanded his men to arms themselves with such.

Keeping out of sight as much as was possible, and choosing the shadows rather the bright and revealing light of day, the Pirate Prince traversed the broad plaza of the bazaar without incident, and vanished into the narrow doorway of a disreputable dive.

A few dispirited Berbers huddled on the long benches or sprawled in the booths to the rear, heavily gone in drink and obviously trying to forget the ignominy of their defeat at the hands of oafish primitives armed with stone axes and crude bronze spears. None of these so much as glanced up as Kairadine, muffled to the eyes, limped past them and sank into a curtained booth near the kitchens.

Hastily drawing the curtains, Kairadine sank back with a sigh of relief into the welcome gloom. Then, rousing himself, he searched with nimble fingers beneath the edge of the table, finding a cleverly concealed switch. At his touch, a panel creaked open in the rear wall, through which he glided. A moment later, the panel closed again, and the booth was empty of any occupant.

Down a narrow wooden stair Kairadine descended, gaining at length a small apartment sumptuously hung with woven stuffs and furnished with luxurious furniture of rare woods and even a rarer craftsmanship. Pouring himself a goblet of wine from a stoppered bottle on a tabouret, the corsair captain kicked off his boots and sank into the soft embrace of velvet cushions with a sigh of relief.

None in El-Cazar knew of this hiding place which Kairadine had long ago prepared for himself in the eventuality of revolt or treason. Under the name of his lieutenant, Achmed, he owned the tavern and workmen at his direction had prepared the secret panel, the hidden stair and the unknown hiding place-before mysteriously vanishing from the sight of men, with slit gullets.

Here he had squirreled away his chiefest treasures-objects of gold and silver worth a satrap's ransom, and bags and sacks and chests stuffed with gems of inestimable worth, together with rare and exotic curiosities such as few of the pirates had ever seen.

Here too he kept several changes of clothing and a supply of weapons, together with stores of food and drink sufficient to last him for many days before hunger or thirst drove him forth into the light of day.

Here he could hide, biding his time, planning his escape from the clutches of his enemies . . . .

And his vengeance!

Without a moment's thought or hesitation, Grond launched himself upon the burly black giant who menaced his sweetheart, Jaira. He flung himself across the intervening space which separated himself

from the girl he had sought like a charging leopard, and such was the swiftness of his action that Achmed the Moor was quite taken by surprise.

The Moor growled a savage curse to his African gods as he spun about, lifting his heavy scimitar to meet this unexpected adversary. Ducking under the blade, Grond clamped one iron hand about the massive throat of the burly Moor, digging his thumb into the corsair's windpipe. His other hand locked about the wrist of the Moor's swordarm.

While Jaira stood frozen, one hand to her parted lips, eyes wide with fear, heart pounding against her ribs, the two men struggled breast to breast and thigh to thigh, grunting like beasts, faces black and distorted with effort.

Slowly but surely, the superior weight and strength of the great Moor began to tell, as his younger, lighter adversary weakened and his grip relaxed.

The moment his throat was free of the grim pressure, Achmed stole a precious moment from the conflict in order to suck air into his starved and laboring lungs. But Grond did not pause: balling his hard fist, he sank it into the pit of the Moor's stomach with all the steely strength packed into his powerful arm, shoulder and back.

The Moor's paunch collapsed like a pricked balloon; breath whistled from his open mouth and his eyes popped comically. Grond spun about, clamped his other hand about the pirate's arm-and heaved!

Achmed whirled head over heels at this primitive jujitsu and landed with a paralyzing thump on his back, while his sword went spinning across the garden to splash into a pool, startling the lazing fish.

In the next instant, Grond again flung himself upon his foe, and now, locked in each other's iron grip, they rolled over and over, grunting and panting, crashing through the underbrush, the flowerbeds, the pebble-strewn walks. Weakened by the sledgehammer blow in the pit of his stomach, partially stunned by his fall, Achmed found himself temporarily helpless in the savage grip of the Cro-Magnon warrior.

Within moments, however, the giant Moor had recovered himself and, once again, his greater weight and strength began to tell in the balance of the struggle.

Suddenly, he felled the blond youth with a lucky blow to the jaw, and, standing with spread legs straddling the halfconscious Grond, his swarthy features convulsed in a grin of cruel delight, he tore a long poniard from his sash and raised it high-to plunge it into the heart of his helpless foe.

In the next second, the silence of the gardens was broken by a dull, resounding thud.

His evil grin relaxed into a stupid expression of bewilderment.

The brandished blade fell from suddenly nerveless fingers, to clank against the tiles which lined the edge of the flowerbed.

For a moment, Achmed swayed on his feet like a tree torn from the earth in a gale.

Then, knees buckling, he fell sideways and crashed to earth to move no more.

When Grond awoke from his daze, he found his head cradled upon the soft thighs of a weeping, fearful Jaira. For a long moment the bewildered caveboy did not comprehend what had occurred. When he did, he grinned and almost laughed aloud.

Jaira, as I have remarked previously, was more shy and timid than most of her sisters of the Cro-Magnon tribes, who for the most part can hunt and fight almost as well as can their men. But even a shy creature like Jaira responds with alacrity when her lover is threatened ....

Climbing stiffly to his feet on bruised and aching limbs, Grond hobbled over to examine the sprawled figure of the fallen Moor. The fresh blood which pooled behind his turbaned head was sufficient to satisfy the curiosity of Grond, who did not even need to see the fist-sized dent in the back of Achmed's broken skull.

Again, the young Cro-Magnon grinned, hugging the happy girl to him and kissing her with pride.

For Jaira-timid little Jaira!-had brained Achmed with a heavy flowerpot.

## **Chapter 24 THE TRIBE DEPARTS**

It was not very long after these events that Tharn began to ready his warriors for their departure from the fortress isle.

The last of the corsair galleys had burnt to the waterline. Floating, half-submerged, flame-blackened hulks, they would encumber the harbor of El-Cazar and make perilous that formerly safe haven for years to come.

This, of course, made it virtually impossible for the Barbary Pirates to rearm and sail in pursuit of their conquerors . . . at least, for a considerable length of time, until they could build new ships from whatever stores of timber might lie in the warehouses of El-Cazar.

Armed with their bright new weapons of edged steel, the Cro-Magnons regained their dugout canoes and paddled across the waters of the bay to the island on whose far side there still lay hidden the women and children, the older people and the wounded of the nation of Thandar.

Once all were reunited, and the freed slaves of El-Cazar were distributed amongst the boats, the flotilla set out to sea again, bound for the mainland of Zanthodon. Across the steamy seas of the waters of the Sogar-Jad they sailed, brawny arms plying crude oars. In the forefront of the lead vessel, Tharn stood, his magnificent form leading the way like some majestic figurehead.

One powerful arm was wrapped protectively about the slim shoulders of his beloved daughter; having at last and in the fullness of time found and rescued the gomad Darya from the midst of a thousand perils, the jungle monarch had vowed deep within his heart never to let her stray far from his sight again.

In another dugout canoe, Jaira sat close to her sweetheart Grond, as he plied his oar with lusty arms. She was very happy, was the Cro-Magnon girl: whatever the future might hold for the two of them, at least they would face it boldly-and together.

In each of the dugout canoes of the Thandarians, vigilant bowmen sat with their arrows hocked and at the ready, keen eyes warily searching the misty surface of the Sogar-Jad for any sign of the fearsome yith. Fortunately, it seemed that the ghosts of their ancestors favored the men and women of Thandar on that day, for none of the dreaded plesiosaurs made their appearance.

Many rocky islands broke the dim expanse of the steamy sea, and vision was difficult, making navigation something of a problem. But the Cro-Magnons, in lieu of the compass, possessed an innate instinct for direction, and knew that they were sailing in the proper direction.

Before very much longer, a line of jagged rocks; about whose black bases swirled foaming white water, signaled their approach to the northernmost shores of the subterranean continent. And before it was time to rest and share a meal and sleep, the last of the Cro-Magnons had disembarked.

Tharn had considered that much time might have been saved had they continued to sail on down the coast of the continent, but had at length dismissed the notion.

In the first place, he felt that he had very little to fear from the vengeance of the Barbary Pirates, for he had rendered them incapable of pursuit and it would take them many wakes and sleeps to rebuild their fleet, by which time he and those that followed him would long since have returned to their distant homeland far to the south.

In the second place, he thought it distinctly unwise to venture so near to the island of Ganadol, where there yet lurked those of the Drugars, or Neanderthals, who had survived the stampede of the great woolly mammoths on the plain of the trantors. Their wounds licked to health by now, and their cruel lust for revenge surely whetted, the Drugars would have found sufficient time to rebuild their own fleet of dugout canoes, and might well attempt to assault the Thandarian flotilla, had it ventured into those waters.

But his third reason was the best of all: Tharn was heartily sick of boats and islands, and hungered for

the solidity of the good earth beneath the heels of his sandals, and for the comfortable gloom of the jungle aisles about him once again.

Pausing to rest and eat, they began the trek "south." It would be a long road home to Thandar, down the rocky coast and across the Peaks of Peril, then "south" through plains and jungles and mountains. But at the journey's end lay . . . home.

Moustapha had not sailed very far into the islands and archipelagoes of the northern seas before a sudden storm drove the flagship of his squadron upon hidden reefs, gouging a hole in the hull of his galley just beneath the waterline.

Cursing sulphurously, the corsair ordered his ship about, and bade his first mate to set a course directly for El-Cazar. Hasty patchwork had crudely repaired the pierced hull, and the pumps would keep the vessel from foundering, but Moustapha knew that only in El-Cazar could his crippled ship receive the skillful craftsmanship she required.

And so he limped back to his home port, in a villainous temper, having raided not a single village or captured so much as a single Cro-Magnon slave.

When he arrived in the vicinity of the pirate isle, he was amazed and alarmed to see the pall of dense black smoke which hung over the city. Sailing nearer, he saw that the source of the pall of smoke was in the burning ships which had foundered, blocking the harbor.

Consternation seized the corsair-what in the name of the Beard of the Prophet had chanced to occur on El-Cazar during his brief absence? Had some unknown enemy launched an invasion of the pirate kingdom? Had riot and insurrection broken out among the quarrelsome Captains of the Brotherhood? Had the Cro-Magnon slaves, long docile and believed fully cowed into submission, revolted against their masters?

Anchoring his crippled galley near an offshore island-by a quirk of whimsical Fate, the very same island on which Tharn had concealed his wounded and the women and children-Moustapha launched a longboat with a full complement of well-armed seamen, led by his own first mate. He instructed them to ascertain what had happened in El-Cazar, and to return to the galley with word. Before he knew exactly what he was sailing into, it behooved the corsair chieftain to remain wary and to practice caution. It would never do to risk his flagship from mere curiosity.

Before very long, the boat returned with the astounding news that El-Cazar had been taken unawares by a great host of savages in dugout canoes, who had stormed the town and had succeeded in seizing the palace citadel of Kliradine Redbeard, and that they had taken, as well, the heads of Moustapha's fellow captains.

All save the head of Kairadine Redbeard himself, of course, whose whereabouts remained unknown.

Now Moustapha would not have been human had it not occurred to him that, in the absence of the other captains and of the Prince of El-Cazar himself, the leadership of the pirate kingdom was easily within his grasp. Although Moustapha had always been a staunch supporter of the Redbeard, and would never have taken any part in a rebellion against his prince, the domain of the Barbary Pirates was now leaderless, and the throne of El-Cazar was, so to speak, up for grabs.

Moustapha of El-Cazar was no more and no less ambitious than any other man. And, although no single drop of the blood of Khair ud-Din the mighty Barbarossa of the Mediterranean was mingled in the veins of Moustapha, he cunningly knew that every line, no matter how ancient or illustrious, must end at last and that every dynasty must terminate eventually, giving way to a new sequence of monarchs.

So . . . El-Cazar was his!

Wasting no time, Moustapha ordered his squadron to anchor beyond the mouth of the harbor, which they could not enter due to the smoldering hulks which blocked the entrance. Then he and a full company of his mariners, armed to the teeth, descended upon the town and began putting things to rights.

Demoralized by the sudden conquest, shaken by the loss of their captains, the men and women of El-Cazar were easily brought to heel. Under Moustapha's stern directives, they began to clear the streets of rubble, to extinguish those fires which still smoldered in some of the wrecked houses, and to cart away the dead for rapid burial against the menace of the pestilence.

Moustapha also commanded that a full accounting be made for every man and woman in El-Cazar, so as to ascertain who lived and who had perished in battle against the savages. While this was being accomplished, he moved his personal belongings into the now empty residence of Kairadine Redbeard, and had himself proclaimed de facto Prince of El-Cazar by the leaders of the Brotherhood.

He then ordered that every able-bodied man not otherwise employed be set to work attempting to clear the harbor. Some of the hulks were still only half-submerged, and by dint of much toil could be hauled out of the way, their unburnt timber and cordage and canvas salvaged and stored away toward the construction of future galleys.

When he received the accounting of the dead and missing, the totals were indeed disheartening. All of the captains, and most of their veteran officers, were dead. Quite a large number of the ordinary seamen had fallen in battle against the savage horde which had invaded the pirate isle, and many others had suffered injuries serious enough to incapacitate them for many weeks to come.

Moreover, almost to a man, the Cro-Magnon slaves and captives had fled the island-apparently in company with the blond invaders. All of which left the fighting strength and work force of El-Cazar very seriously depleted, indeed. And this would prolong the time required to put the pirate city to rights again ....

Moustapha growled an oath, then shrugged philosophically. There was no point in weeping over spilled blood, and the dead could not return to life to assist the living. So, in the meanwhile, he directed that repairs go forward on his crippled flag-ship, the Lion of Islam and on two of the smaller galleys which had escaped the serious demolition at the hands of the Cro-Magnon conquerors.

For Moustapha fully intended to follow the savages to the mainland and extract a bloody vengeance from them.

Also, he needed slaves . . . .

So, just as soon as enough ships could be made seaworthy again, he determined to descend upon the subterranean continent of Zanthodon and put the warriors of Thandar to the sword, carrying off their women and children to replenish the harems and bordellos of El-Cazar.

But where, during all of these events, was Kairadine Redbeard? This unanswered question plagued Moustapha sorely, for the former Prince of the Barbary Pirates was not to be found either among the rosters of the slain or the listings of the living.

Moustapha knew his prince from of old to be a cunning and a cautious man. Perhaps he had taken refuge in some secret hiding place known only to himself . . . .

But if so, why did he persist in remaining in hiding?

There was no answer to that ominous question, and it made Moustapha distinctly uneasy.

## **Chapter 25 MURG HAS A SECRET**

The mighty thodars of Zar traversed the great plains of the north with ponderous but unwearied stride. The Divine Empress had mustered an imposing host from the decimated legions of the Scarlet City, for she meant to fall upon the blond barbarians and wreak a fearful slaughter in vengeance for the destruction of the Scarlet City of Zar.

Only grudgingly did she permit her men and beasts brief respite from the march. They barely had time to relieve nature and munch a hasty meal before the trumpets summoned them back into the saddles again. As for the huge saurians they rode, the poor reptiles scarcely had time to gulp down a few mouthfuls of meadowgrass before mentally commanded to continue the journey.

Zarys knew, or shrewdly guessed, that the savages were not very far ahead of her pursuing legions. She could not, of course, have known that Garth of Sothar had taken a dreadful wound and was near death, which greatly slowed the flight of the Cro-Magnons across the plain to the edge of the sea, where they hoped to rejoin their brethren, the warriors of Thandar. But she sensed the savage horde was not very far

ahead, and for this urgent reason the Empress begrudged every moment "wasted" on food or rest, as it delayed interminably the sweet hour of her sanguinary revenge.

At the forefront of the legions, mounted upon one of the monstrous reptiles which the Zarians employed in lieu of horses, rode Xask, resplendent in his glittering gold-washed armor as commander of the host.

The wiley vizier vastly enjoyed the power and prerogatives of his new office. Every advance in the favor of the Divine Zarys added to his authority and prestige; every new honor which he could wrest from his adversaries or rivals enhanced his own importance to the Empress, and put him one step nearer to the ultimate goal upon which he had decided long ago to direct his every energy.

To tell the truth, Xask was not exactly dissatisfied with this expedition, although privately he disapproved of revenge as essentially childish and nonproductive. But on an adventure such as this, who could foretell what accidents might befall?

Even an Empress might succumb to a stray arrow or a mishap.

Which would, of course, leave the Throne of Zar empty and untenanted . . . and not very far out of the reach of one as clever and cunning as, say, Xask ....

It would seem that the Machiavellian little vizier and Moustapha of El-Cazar had more in common than either of them could have guessed.

None of this would have come as any particular surprise to the Divine Zarys, could she have read the plots and counterplots that seethed through the busy brain of her vizier, behind the bland, obsequious mask of his features-although she would not have believed him capable of aiming at the throne itself, in all likelihood, since he was not even remotely descended from the sacred line of the immortal Minos.

But Zarys was herself a shrewd and capable judge of men, and knew their ambitiousness. Indeed, she played the ambitions of one courtier against those of another, to achieve excellent service and to maintain something of a balance of power between the rivals, each jealous of the other's post or birth or position of favor.

Zarys had once before banished Xask from the Scarlet City, exiling him to a harsh life in the hostile wilderness beyond the mountains which encircled Zar, for a slip which had disclosed somewhat of his schemes against her throne. She had accepted him back into her service because he had promised her the secret of the thunder-weapon (as the folk of Zanthodon call my .45 automatic), which he believed he could extract from either Professor Potter or myself, and could then duplicate to arm her legions, rendering them invincible.

That this plan had fallen through-"blown up" would be the more apt phrase!-was not really the fault of Xask, who had been very close to achieving success. Still, he had betrayed her once, and now, for a



second time, he had let her down.

The Empress resolved to keep a close eye on Xask. It was for this very reason that she had appointed him to the command of her legions, a post left vacant by the demise of Cromus. That meant he would remain at her side where she could keep an eye on him.

The only other alternative would have been to leave Xask behind in Zar, while she left her kingdom to pursue the fleeing savages.

And Zarys of Zar was certainly not fool enough to take that risk!

In the rear of the Zarian force, Jorn the Hunter and Yualla of Sothar rode in the saddle of one of the thodars.

The saddle was capacious enough to accommodate both of the young Cro-Magnons, whose wrists were bound with stout thongs of leather. Yualla was seated in front of Jorn, whose hands were fastened around the girl, resting in her lap. Despite the dismal fact of their captivity, the caveboy and the cavegirl were very conscious of each other's body. Jorn's hands were upon the firm warm thighs of the scantily clad Cro-Magnon princess, and she was leaning back in the circle of his arms, very aware of his bare and muscular chest.

For a time, neither of them spoke. Then they began to converse in whispers, and the subject on which they conversed was, of course, their possible chances for escape. At the moment, these seemed few and frail, but one could never tell what lay in the womb of time.

Yualla wore only a soft, tanned hide which shielded her loins and extended up her slim body to cover one breast, leaving the other bare, while a strap of fur continued over her shoulder and was fastened to the rear portion of her brief garment. Her slender waist was cinched in by a girdle of leather.

"If only we had a sharp instrument, we could perhaps sever our bonds," murmured Jorn in her ear. She nodded.

"I have such an instrument," she confided to the boy in low tones. "A bronze knife, given to me by my father, Garth."

Hope leaped up in Jorn's heart.

"Where do you keep it?" he inquired.

"Beneath my garment," she replied, "scabbarded below my right breast. I cannot reach it with my wrists tethered to the saddlehorn . . . ."

"My wrists are tethered to the saddlehorn, too," said Jorn glumly. "Otherwise, perhaps I could reach it."

"Your bonds are within reach of my fingers," the girl whispered. "Perhaps I can untie them-"

"You can try, anyway."

And try she did. It was difficult work, and she strove not to look down to her lap to see what she was doing, lest she catch the attention of the Dragonmen who rode to either side of them, directing the beast on which they were mounted with beams of telepathic thought.

It was slow and agonizing work, fumbling with the tightly knotted leathern thongs, but at length it seemed to Yualla that she had found the key to loosening the bonds of the boy. In time, one strap fell away, then another was loosened sufficiently for the young hunter to work one hand free of the rest. He kept his hand pressed against the warm thigh of the girl so as not to attract attention, while assisting her to free his other hand.

"At the next rest stop," he said, once his hands were free, "we can make a break for freedom!"

"No," said the girl decidedly. "It would not work-we cannot run fast enough to elude the Dragonmen of Zar, neither could we find any place to hide amid these flat and featureless plains."

"Then what shall we do?" demanded Jorn restively. Yualla urged him to be patient.

"When the Dragonmen have reached the host of Sothar," she said, "and are attacking, in the confusion of the battle surely we can slip away to rejoin my people."

"I hope that you are right," he said grimly.

"I hope I am, too," the girl sighed.

They rode on in silence, as he cut her bonds with the bronze knife he had slipped from beneath her garment.

As for poor, miserable Murg, he rode behind the two young people, sharing his saddle with a Dragonman called Ophar. The two did not at all get on well together, for Ophar did not care to share the saddle of his thodar with a savage, and resented having been ordered to do so, and seized upon every opportunity to take his resentment out on the hapless Murg.

It seemed to Murg's way of thinking, and probably there was quite a bit of truth behind his opinion, that recently life had not played exactly fair with Murg. He had gone from one calamity to the next, from the horrible slavery of the Gorpaks in their ghastly cavern city to the cruel hands of the Neanderthal bully,

One-Eye; from the dangerous adventurings with Hurok and my band of warriors, to being tethered by Yualla (whom, he had conveniently forgotten, he had tried to ravish while she slept); and from that condition to his present unhappy bondage by the Dragonmen of Zar, whom he feared mightily.

In short, Murg heartily wished that he had never left home. Of course, home to Murg was the tribal village of Sothar, which had been riven apart by earthquakes and then buried beneath seething rivers of liquid fire (which was how Murg named molten lava to himself), so to have remained back in Sothar would have been distinctly uncomfortable, at best, and doubtless seriously injurious to his health. But people like Murg can only feel sorry for themselves.

At any rate, Murg was thoroughly weary of a life which seemed to consist of one dangerous captivity after another. He wished only to be back with his tribe, surrounded (and, of course, protected) by the stalwart warriors of Sothar.

Alas, that wish seemed extremely unlikely of ever finding fulfillment: once the Dragonmen caught up with the warriors of Sothar, there would quickly ensue a frightful battle, and Murg didn't like battles any more than he liked being someone's slave.

But Murg had not survived to his present age in the hostile wilderness of Zanthodon without having long since learned to keep his eyes and ears open, and to remain alert to every slightest advantage that might come his way. Thus, while the Dragonmen remained oblivious to the fact, the keen eyes of Murg were not long in discerning that the hands of Jorn and Yualla were somehow freed. True, the boy and the girl had cunningly wrapped their thongs about their hands to simulate bondage, but it became obvious to Murg that the two had managed to free themselves, and were undoubtedly waiting for some sort of a diversion before making their break.

Murg saw everything in the light of what possible advantage it might afford the well-being of Murg. So he long and thoughtfully pondered this present discovery, without finding the advantage. Mounted on another thodar, the Cro-Magnon youngsters could hardly free Murg, even if they wished. Separated as they were, he could not threaten them with disclosure of their secret unless they took him along, because there was no chance for them to converse privately. Of what use to Murg, then, was this knowledge?

Then Murg thought of Xask.

The cunning tricksters of this life seem to recognize their brethren at a glance, and therefore Murg had long been aware that Xask was not unlike himself. At the first rest stop, therefore, Murg dared address the surly Dragonman whose saddle he was forced to share.

"If the lord pleases," whined Murg in servile tones, cringing in anticipation of a blow, "I have important information for the lord Xask --- "

"The Lord Commander Xask is not to be conversed with by the likes of you," snarled the Dragonman,

cuffing Murg aside.

"That," declared Murg with unexpected and atypical daring, "is a matter which only the Lord Commander Xask may properly decide. And if the Lord Ophar refuses to permit this lowly one to pass along the important information of which I speak, then the wrath of the Lord Commander may perchance fall upon the Lord Ophar's head . . . ."

Ophar was about to knock Murg to the ground for this impertinence, but stayed his hand. The whining cur might well speak the truth, and Ophar had great and good reason to fear the disapproval of Xask, who was a ruthless and unforgiving man.

"If the Lord Xask is unimpressed by the information whereof this scrawny savage boasts, then at least he will not fail to approve of the alert vigilance of Ophar, who did not scruple to bring to his attention anything that might be of interest to the Lord Xask. At any rate, how can I suffer for so doing?"

Thus reasoned the clever Ophar to himself. Then, aloud, to Murg, he said:

"Oh, very well, come along-but the information you claim to possess had better be of interest to the Lord Commander, or your miserable hide will bear the brunt of his-and my-disapproval!"

Murg nodded obsequiously, and trotted along at the heels of Ophar.

In his weaselly little heart, Murg hoped desperately that his news would indeed be of interest ....

But only time would tell.

Part Six

BATTLE BENEATH THE WORLD

## **Chapter 26 TRACKED BY THE UNKNOWN**

By slow and easy stages the tribe of Sothar traversed the great northern plain, reaching at last the rocky coastline of the sea of Sogar-Jad.

It was at this place, I was informed, that the twin tribes had split in twain, with the tribe of Thandar continuing their search for their lost princess, Darya, while Garth and his tribe struck off across the plains, following the few and faint traces which denoted the direction in which Yualla had been borne.

Arriving at this rocky shore, we found no slightest trace of the Thandarians. After this length of time, there was, of course, no way we could guess of the direction in which they had traveled, or the

destination which they sought. Our only clue was that we knew Tharn of Thandar was searching for the stronghold of the Barbary Pirates, the fortress isle of El-Cazar. But we had no idea where, in all this expanse of misty sea, strewn with small rocky islets and archipelagoes, El-Cazar might lie.

Garth, the Omad or High Chief of the Sotharians, had regained much of his vigor during the long, slow trek from the "east," and his mighty frame had largely repaired itself, the injury inflicted upon him by the assassin Raphad being by now very nearly half-healed.

I believe I have noted before the remarkable healing powers of the Cro-Magnons of Zanthodon. Perhaps their extraordinary recuperative powers result from the simple, natural life they lead, close to the manner in which our common and remote ancestors lived; this perhaps accounts for their abilities to recover so swiftly from serious injuries; again, it may be due to some substance in the soil of Zanthodon, in some element in the food they eat, or some mysterious quality in the very air of the Underground World, which enables them to experience such miracles of swift healing.

I do not know. But Garth, now much recovered, wisely advised that we could spend our lives searching these unknown northern shores in quest of our Thandarian friends, while we might better strike south along the coastline, hunting for Thandar itself, in which land we had been promised welcome and refuge.

Besides, to linger in these parts might well be dangerous as well as fruitless. For, surely, the Divine Zarys would not delay very long in launching her pursuit of the tribe-which was, as you have already read, the very case.

So, after a time, we turned "south" and followed the coastline down the curve of the subterranean continent. Somewhere "south" of the jungles which proliferated below the Peaks of Peril and the plain of the trantors, we knew, lay Thandar. We thought that we could probably find it . . . and that every league we put between ourselves and the pursuing enemy would add to our already slender margin of safety.

Thus it was, unfortunately, that Varak and his bride, Ialys, had hardly any time at all for a honeymoon-if, indeed, the Cro-Magnons of Zanthodon or the Minoans of the Scarlet City of Zar know the custom. At any rate, while they sought-and were given-as much privacy as they wished, they did not exactly have a chance to enjoy that blissful idyll that is what honeymoons are all about.

The warriors of my retinue rather missed the companionship of the cheerful, good-humored youth, whose jests and gibes and pranks had enlivened much of the trek for us this far. But all of us, even solemn old Hurok, understood instinctively that the young couple desired nothing so much right now as their own company. Only Professor Potter griped.

"What a priceless opportunity, my boy, to witness the nuptial ceremonies of our remote ancestors, doubtless preserved for countless ages here in the Underground World! Frazier forever, how will the anthropologists of the Upper World ever forgive me, if I do not--"

"Doc," I said severely, "you are not going to spy on them so long as I can lift a fist to slug you."

He buffed and swelled like a bantam cock, then wilted, as if deflated by the merciless gleam in my eye.

"Oh, very well!" snapped the old boy pettishly. "But the loss to science be upon your own pointed head, Eric, and not upon my own!" With that he stalked off in a high fury, to sulk alone. I suppressed a rueful grin.

Hurok looked puzzled.

"What does he say, the old one?" he inquired in his slow, deep voice.

I tried to explain—not only the young couple's need of privacy, but the Doc's scientific curiosity. Neither attitude made much sense to the simple Neanderthal, but eventually he shrugged and ignored it.

"Hurok shall never understand the ways of the panjani," he sighed, turning away.

As a panjani born and bred myself, I could have admitted that many of the ways of my own kind were pretty mystifying even to me, but he was gone by then.

We marched "south," along the coast.

Before very long, it became obvious to the more alert and keen-sighted of our host that a large body of men had but recently marched along this same path. It was the scouts and rangers of Sothar who apprised me of this, pointing to the marks of many sandaled feet scarcely visible in the scant patches of bare earth along our way.

Once these things were called to my attention, it was easy to see them and I was puzzled that I had not noticed them before. One of the scouts, a grizzled veteran named Quaron, perhaps explained it best.

"The chieftain did not see the marks-of-many-feet because he was not looking for them," he remarked.

I quirked an eyebrow.

"And was the scout Quaron looking for them?" I inquired tartly.

The older man smiled briefly.

"It is the duty of a scout to be constantly looking for everything," he said succinctly.

Surely, the footprints could only have been made by the warriors of Thandar! That was the easiest and most obvious explanation, and the one which came most quickly to mind. Which implied that, were we to stretch our stride a bit, we might, ere long, catch up with our friends. Which we endeavored to do, upon the urgings of Garth.

I was as eager as any of the others to press forward with all speed, for it occurred instantly to me that if the horde of Thandar was already on the route "south" to their homeland, the only explanation for this could be that my beloved Darya had been found by her people, and thus was not very far ahead of me.

We pressed on.

Again, before very long, it became obvious to us that we were being followed. Scouts set their ears against the ground, and reported a faint drumming in the earth, which could only be the result of the feet of many marching men or beasts.

"Who could it be?" murmured Garth thoughtfully to himself, from his stretcher of tanned hides fastened over parallel poles. "What foe have we in these parts?"

"We are too far 'north' to have attracted the attention of the Drugars of Kor," I pointed out, "and not far enough 'south' for any lingering and surviving remnants of the Gorpaks of the cavern city to be on our trail . . . ."

"It can only be the Dragonmen of Zar," was the announcement uttered by Hurok in his deep tones. We looked at him nonplussed.

"Surely, there has not yet been enough time for Zarys to mount a counterattack," I protested. Then I cut my protest off at the expression of bafflement in his small, deep-set eyes, remembering that the men of Zanthodon have only the most rudimentary notion of the very existence of time. Here beneath the eternal noon of their undarkening skies, time remains as yet unguessed by even the wisest of the tribesmen.

"Let us continue on our way," said Garth heavily. "Whoever our unknown pursuers are, they will be upon us soon enough."

And that was one prophecy soon proven true.

## **Chapter 27 KAIRADINE REAPPEARS**

On the fortress island of the Barbary Pirates, the work of clearing away the wreckage, burying the dead, repairing the few ships which were left more or less whole and of removing or sinking those which the savage hordes had burnt was progressing with every speed possible.

Moustapha, the new-and self-styled-Prince of El-Cazar, felt, and that rightly, that his prestige and authority over his fellow corsairs rested, to a considerable degree, with the swiftness and thoroughness with which he pursued and punished the Cro-Magnon savages for their temerity in invading and conquering the island of the Barbary Pirates.

There had been, and was, considerable grumbling and dissatisfaction over his prompt assumption of the princely title among the corsairs. It was not so much that Moustapha was not esteemed as one of the captains, or that he was disliked, for he had always been both popular and respected by his brother buccaneers. It was, simply, that he was not of the race of the great Khair ud-Din of Algiers, the original Barbarossa, and that from the distant time of their flight into the Underground World of Zanthodon, a son of the line of the mighty Barbarossa had always ruled El-Cazar.

In this, if in little else, the Barbary Pirates tended to be strictly traditional. However, as no rival rose to challenge Moustapha with a clearer claim to the throne, his assumption of the regal authority aroused mere grumbling, and no organized opposition.

As soon as his repairs were completed on his flagship and the other vessels of his squadron were refurbished, and those of the less damaged ships in the harbor had been made seaworthy, the new Prince of El-Cazar moved with alacrity to enlist a strong force of fighting men and made preparations for the voyage to the shores of the subterranean continent.

The unexpected intervened, however-as might have been expected.

Moustapha was alone in the great hall of the princely citadel, studying the lists of men and weaponry and provisions, when a mocking laugh sounded from behind his back.

Snarling an oath, Moustapha whipped about, ready to lash out at any servitor who might have dared to enter his solitude unannounced and uninvited-

Only to pale to the lips with astonishment as he saw and recognized the man who had laughed.

For, lounging gracefully against a stone pillar, stood none other than Kairadine Redbeard.

Moustapha's consternation must have been written clearly upon his swarthy features, for at sight of his face, Kairadine laughed again. And, in truth, the consternation of the other was more than understandable: the Redbeard had vanished from the knowledge of the buccaneers weeks before, at the time of the Thandarian invasion, and had not been seen or heard from since. He was dead or had disappeared, all men believed, and most accounted him among the very many corpses burned or hacked out of all recognition. Yet here he stood-alive and hale and hearty!

For a long moment, Moustapha stared wide-eyed at this amazing apparition, licking dry lips with a dry tongue.



"M-my prince!" he stammered foolishly.

Kairadine grinned sardonically.

"Your prince, is it? By the Fiends of Kaf, but I had heard that you yourself, my faithful and loyal Moustapha, had assumed that title, along with my citadel and my very crown!"

Moustapha stammered something inarticulate but apologetic. Suddenly, the playfully mocking manner of the Redbeard changed, as he showed ever his mercurial nature.

"Get off of my throne," he snapped icily, one dark, strong hand gliding to curl its fingers about the hilt of his sword.

Moustapha stumbled to his feet, parchment sheets sprawling over the dais. Eyes wary, he backed away as the other mounted the stone steps and seated himself in the place thus made vacant.

"That is better, you rogue," said Kairadine. "Your place is at the foot of those steps, not on the throne atop them."

"Yes, O reis," whispered Moustapha. "I thought . . . we all thought--?"

"Kairadine Redbeard knows full well what you thought, you shallow-pated fools," grinned the Prince of El-Cazar. Negligently, with the point of his blade, the Redbeard punctured one of the parchments, removed it and glanced over it casually.

"I see that you had planned to launch an expedition against the mainland, to attack and wreak vengeance upon the savage host," he drawled lazily.

"Yes, O reis," murmured Moustapha.

"The plan is an excellent one, for only by so doing will the mariners of the Brotherhood regain their self-esteem and their faith in their leader," said Kairadine. "Your plan will go forward with, of course, the slight alteration of the name of the leader."

"Naturally, O reis."

"As the accursed savages burned my Red Witch to the waterline, I will assume the command of your Lion of Islam as my flagship," purred Kairadine. "I trust that the Captain Moustapha has no objection to this?"

"None, O reis!"

"I thought not! Very good, then . . . you may remove your gear and possessions from my palace, and return to your own house. When all arise from slumber, there will be a council of the senior seamen in this hall, not only to formally reinstate your prince and to revoke your own unlawful assumption of my power, but to select the leaders of the ships which I shall lead against the savages-a question?"

Moustapha spoke hesitantly.

"O my prince . . . the command of the ships of my squadron has already been vested in tried and trustworthy captains."

"Yes, captains of your own choosing, loyal to you, at least," snapped the Redbeard. "I no longer trust you, Moustapha; and I cannot, therefore, place any reliance in men loyal to you and, perchance, somewhat less than loyal to myself."

"It shall be as you command," murmured Moustapha tonelessly.

"So it shall," smiled Kairadine. "Now you have our leave to withdraw."

Moustapha bowed with a wooden face, and left quickly. He felt fortunate to have escaped that confrontation with a whole skin.

The men of El-Cazar welcomed the mysterious reappearance of their prince wholeheartedly. They had never been informed of the decision of the Council of the Captains which had deposed the Redbeard, as the abrupt invasion of the host of Thandar had come so swiftly upon the heels of this act that the news of it had never been circulated. And, as well, since all of the participants in that Council, saving only Kairadine Redbeard alone, were now slain, there remained no one to inform them that it had ever taken place.

The selection of captains pro tem for the few ships which remained seaworthy out of the fleet of the corsairs went forward swiftly, following a simple formula: anyone that Moustapha had chosen to command a vessel was automatically disqualified and was replaced with a man known to be true to Kairadine Redbeard.

There were no exceptions to this, and, considering the vicious temper of the Prince of Pirates, hardly any muttering about it.

The squadron departed from El-Cazar on the day appointed, and rapidly negotiated the foggy and hazardous waters. The many shallow reefs and rocky islets which rendered these seas dangerous were well known to the Barbary Pirates, and in less time than it would take me to describe they had reached the shores of the northern extremity of the underground continent. Here Kairadine decided that they

should voyage south, following close to shore, until the host of savages or their tracks could be glimpsed by his keen-eyed watchmen stationed high in the rigging.

Erelong, the host was discovered trudging through the plains.

Anchoring offshore, the pirates clambered into longboats and cast off. Beaching their hulls, they organized in ranks and advanced on the trail of the blond savages.

The blades of the Brotherhood were out and ready, keen and thirsty to drink the blood of the Cro-Magnon primitives who had dared incur the wrath of the sons of Islam.

## **Chapter 28 THE BATTLE IS JOINED**

The Divine Zarys was consumed by impatience. She sat in the embossed leather saddle, her strong, bare thighs claspng the sides of her giant reptile, a slim, three-pronged trident of the silvery-reddish metal the Professor believed to be the fabled orichalcum of Lost Atlantis tightly gripped in the fingers of one hand, while with the other she held the reins.

Every hour that went by only served to stoke the fires of impatience which blazed within her heart. She drove her legions on mercilessly, begrudging every moment wasted on rest and food. The savages could not be very much farther ahead, and her scouts were closely following the trail they left on the beaten earth, the crushed grasses.

Here they had paused, near the sea; then they had turned to journey south along the coast of the Sogar-Jad. Here they had camped, where the ashes of a fire were still warm.

She lifted her head and stared before her, where the craggy heights of gaunt mountains lifted against the mistily luminous skies of the Underground World. These were the Peaks of Peril, although Zarys could not have known that name, for never yet had her legions come this distance from the Scarlet City. With a hunter's instinct, however, she realized that whatever passes might wind between these mountains, they would be narrow and difficult to negotiate. Here, then, the horde of yellow-haired barbarians would perforce move forward but slowly; with their backs against the wall of cliffs, they would be unable to avoid her attack, and the tactical advantage thus afforded her troops would be decisive.

Or so, at least, she believed.

The Empress of Zar had given much thought to exactly how best to conduct the assault upon the savages. Never again could she risk having her own thodars turned against her by the power of the gem-studded circlet which, presumably, the savages still held. When she came within view of the Cro-Magnon army, then, she had decided to order her soldiers to dismount and to turn their giant steeds loose to graze upon the long meadow grasses which clothed the plains. Confident that her people could summon to them the wandering thodars with their circlets, she saw no danger in turning the beasts loose,

and, after all, there was simply no way to tether reptiles so enormous and so strong, especially here amidst the empty plains where no trees grew.

The air of Zanthodon is humid and misty, and the luminosity of the sky is less intense than is the light of the sun in the Upper World. These factors combined to make it difficult to perceive objects clearly at any great distance, hence her scouts and out-riders ranged far ahead of the mounted legions; in order to detect the army of savages before they approached them.

Now one of these scouts came up to where she rode beside Xask at the head of the formation. He reined his ponderous steed to a halt and saluted crisply.

"What is the word, Gorus?" she demanded.

"Sacred One, the army of savages is directly ahead of us, near the barrier of the mountains," the scout reported.

Zarys smiled. "That is, indeed, good news!" she exulted. "In your opinion, should we dismount at this point and press on afoot?"

Gorus nodded, but there was a strange reluctance visible in his manner.

"There is something else?" she inquired.

"It is difficult to perceive clearly, Divinity, but-

"But what? Speak up, man!"

"There are the sounds of fighting ahead, the clamor of a battle . . . the dust raised by the battling of many warriors makes it impossible to discern the identity of the combatants, but surely the blond savages are one of the adversaries."

Zarys frowned in puzzlement: who else besides herself could possibly be in pursuit of the barbarian horde? What other foe could they have in these remote and unsettled parts of Zanthodon?

Well, there was only one way to find out!

She directed her commander, Xask, to give the signal, and watched as her legions dismounted and assembled into battle formation.

Then they began their march.

Whoever the unknown host might be, they were approaching us with all possible speed, coming (it seemed) from the direction of the seashore, for we were not very far inland from the margins of the Sogar-Jad.

By this time we were massed before the narrow mouth of one of the passes which led through the Peaks of Peril, and if we must stand and fight, at least our backs would be protected by that sheer and clifflike wall of stone.

Garth voiced the command from his litter, and the chieftains of the host hastily assembled their warriors into fighting order. The taller and huskier of the warriors formed the first rank, their long shields locked together like a palisade. I believe that I have mentioned elsewhere in these memoirs that the Cro-Magnon warriors carry strong but light wicker shields over whose kite-shaped frame are stretched the tough, tanned hides of dinosaurs. These shields are approximately the shape and the height of the kite-shields used by the Norman knights when they invaded England, and the pattern or design of such shields goes back to the old Vikings who were the ancestors of the Normans. The Cro-Magnon warriors of Zanthodon locked these shields together much in the same manner as did the Vikings-I believe the old Icelandic sagas call this formation a "shield-berg."

At any rate, it presents a formidable defense, and behind this barrier of tall shields our warriors grimly waited for the attack of our unknown enemies, long bronze-bladed spears bristling and swords and stone axes held at the ready.

The foe was not long in making their appearance . . . and their appearance was astonishing.

I don't quite remember what it was I had expected to see as I stood there at the forefront of my company of warriors, but I guess it must have been the Dragon-riders of Zar, for what other enemy could we have expected, here at the northern extremity of the world?

Instead, they proved to be tall, long-legged, swarthy-skinned men with beards and turbans, clad in curly-toed boots, loose trousers, sashes bristling with daggers. They looked for all the world like buccaneers stepped from the pages of Rafael Sabatini's *The Sea Hawk*-and in a very real sense of the word, they were: for they were, of course, the Barbary Pirates.

"Who is the enemy, Eric Carstairs?" inquired Garth of Sothar from his litter behind my position. In terse words I told him.

"But why are these men attacking us? Never have we encountered them before, nor done aught that would earn us their enmity . . . ."

I was baffled by that one myself, and had no answer to give him. But the why and wherefore of the matter were of trivial importance, for they came howling against us, their bright scimitars flashing, shrilling their old Moslem battle cries, and the fight was begun ....

Kairadine felt satisfied as he watched his corsairs charge the shield-wall of the savages. The answer to Garth's question and the cause of the attack were easily explained-the Redbeard had made a very simple mistake, one of identification. Pursuing a horde of naked blond Cro-Magnon savages, he had found one, and believed it to be the one for which he had been searching. That we were not the host of Thandar, his foes, who had invaded and sacked the fortress isle of EICazar, but the host of Sothar, come hither from the Scarlet City of Zar, was something he could not have guessed.

I guess one host of yellow-haired Cro-Magnons looks about the same as another host of yellow-haired Cro-Magnons, to the eyes of a Barbary Pirate.

The fighting began and soon became hot and furious. The long spears of the Sotharians held the buccaneers at bay for a time, but as the spears broke or were flung at the foe, the men of El-Cazar were able to close with their adversaries, and the battle degenerated into a hand-for-hand melee. The Cro-Magnons were taller and stronger than the corsairs, but they had never before faced men armed with steel swords, and the buccaneers had been practiced in the arts of swordplay since boyhood. The difference soon began to tell as the shield-wall broke, and bands of yowling, wild-eyed pirates penetrated our lines in a dozen places.

We held our ground and fought grimly, since there was nothing else to do: with the sheer cliffs behind us, there was nowhere to retreat to.

So we stood and fought.

Until there came what can only be described as a timely intervention ....

## **Chapter 29 A TIMELY INTERVENTION**

We stared in baffled incomprehension as, suddenly, some strange impulse struck the Barbary Pirates. All along the front of their line, as they stood and fought our warriors, a ripple seemed to travel: heads turned, swordhands faltered; they seemed distracted-but by what, or from whence, none of us could say.

"Look, Black Hair!" boomed Hurok the Korian from where he stood at my right hand. I followed the direction in which he pointed with an extended arm, and saw that, inexplicably, the rear ranks of the corsairs were melting away as if by magic. Men turned their attention from their assault of our lines, distracted by something we could not see in all that haze of whirling dust.

"Can you see what it is they turn to greet?" I asked him urgently. "For you are taller than am I, and can see over their heads."

"But the eyes of Hurok are dimmer than are the eyes of his friend," he rumbled hesitantly, peering.

We fought on; but to every hand the line of the Barbary Pirates was crumbling, as men fell back as if to engage adversaries attacking from the rear-but what adversaries could they be, we puzzled, for surely the tribesmen of Thandar were somewhere ahead of us beyond the Peaks of Peril, through whose passes we had sent ahead our noncombatants, the women, the children, the aged and injured.

Erelong, however, the nature of the forces which were assaulting the buccaneers from behind became apparent. They were a huge body of men, small and slight of build, with sleek black hair and olive-hued skin, arrayed in glittering metal armor and brandishing gleaming tridents and other oddly shaped hand weapons.

The Dragonmen of Zar! Indeed, it was none other than they-which meant our host was engaged, or would soon be engaged, by twice the enemy forces now pitted against us.

In the meanwhile, however, the surprise attack from the pirates' rear worked to our advantage, for we pressed forward, breaking our lines, and in less time than it takes to describe, the corsairs of El-Cazar found themselves ground, as it were, between two millstones. Their forces crumbled and began to flee in all directions, as the frightened buccaneers threw down their weapons and fled in haste, severely outnumbered. This was done, incidentally, despite the rage and thundered orders of their tall, hawk-faced leader, whom I surmised (correctly, as it turned out later) to be none other than the notorious Kairadine Redbeard, whom I had long hungered to meet at sword's point.

Spotting the man, I pressed forward at the head of my retinue, with huge, hulking Hurok on my right and the blond giant, Gundar, guarding my left. We cut a red path straight toward where Kairadine stood, attempting to stem the disintegration of his host.

As the legions of the Scarlet City hurled themselves against the rear-most ranks of the corsairs, Jorn the Hunter gave Yualla a nudge, which was the signal agreed upon between them earlier.

Without a word, the boy whirled, his hands suddenly free: he turned upon the Zarian warrior guarding him and kicked the surprised fellow in the pit of his stomach. As the Zarian fell to his knees, gagging and clutching at his middle, the young Cro-Magnon snatched up his leaf-bladed shortsword and long-hafted trident.

In the same moments, the lithe young girl had dispatched her own guard with her dagger and had divested him of his weapons. The pair raced for safety behind some rocks, glided from that vantage point into a stand of thick bushes, seeking to circle about the battle and to rejoin the tribe of Sothar from the rear.

In the confusion of the battle, their escape had gone unnoticed by all but, of course, the wily Murg, who had been watching for just such a bold and daring break for freedom on their part. The moment that Jorn and Yualla turned to engage their guards, Murg gave the signal to the Zarian who accompanied him, and a bugle note soared above the tumult of battle.

As the Divine Zarys led her legions against the rear ranks of the Barbary Pirates, Xask unobtrusively fell back to a more prudent position, well out of the way of the glittering scimitars and thrusting tridents. Moments later, when the bugle signaled the attempted escape of the two young Cro-Magnon captives, Xask ordered his personal guards to their pursuit. Along the way, Murg and his guard fell into step with them.

At this point, I must confess that I have no way of knowing-or even guessing-what plans went coiling through the subtle brain of the wily vizier. Perhaps he was seizing upon the pursuit of the escaping captives as a pretext for quitting the scene of battle in order to better preserve his own hide, and Xask had very little liking for battles and a perhaps over-exaggerated fondness for his hide.

Or, possibly, he intended to recapture Jorn and Yualla and hold them as hostages for the Professor for he probably still banked on gaining the secret of the thunder-weapon, which had almost been in his grasp.

I do not know-and thus you see demonstrated one of the weaknesses of the true and veritable history over the natural advantages of writing purely fictional narratives. For I never had the opportunity to query Xask on this point, and am merely reconstructing his actions from information given me by eye-witnesses.

Intent on punishing the blond savages whom she believed-correctly, of course-to be the identical host which had earlier defeated her upon the plains of the north, Zarys led her legions forward, assaulting the rear of the confused and amazed buccaneers with the impetuous daring and contempt of danger which marked her mercurial character. Taken off guard, the corsairs went down before her disciplined and armored legions by the dozen and the score. In no time, the Divine Empress had cloven into the very heart of the force of strange, swarthy men which had attacked the Sotharians.

As she did so, she came within close proximity to Kairadine Redbeard, who stared at her open-mouthed. She did not know the man, save only that he was an adversary, but he-and very strangely!-seemed instantly to recognize her.

By this time, being attacked from two sides simultaneously, the buccaneer host was beginning to crumble, as the pirates, losing heart, took to their heels. On sight of Zarys, Kairadine instantly abandoned his attempts to hold his men in check: whirling about, he leaped upon Zarys and bore the astounded young woman prone to the ground, while his personal retinue of well-armed mariners dispatched her own guards.

Zarys was stung into an incredulous fury. Never in all of her young life had the Empress of Zar been so rudely attacked by a mere man. But there was little that she could do about it, although she struggled in the prison of his brawny arms like the proverbial wildcat, snarling imprecations and spitting curses. All the while, enjoying the pressure of her supple, warm body against his own, the Redbeard grinned down exultantly at his furious but beautiful captive ....



The fact of the matter was, of course, that Kairadine had made another mistake in identity. First, he had attacked the host of Sothar, believing them to be the host of Thandar; now, he had mistaken the Divine Zarys for none other than Darya!

I have elsewhere in these memoirs remarked on the astonishing resemblance which Zarys held to my beloved Darya; indeed, at my first sight of the Empress, I, too, mistook her for Darya, so I cannot exactly blame the Prince of the Barbary Pirates for this error. Expecting to find the woman he so lustily desired among the Cro-Magnon host, he had encountered a young woman who so closely resembled her that it was difficult to tell them apart. It made little difference to Kairadine that she was curiously arrayed in glittering metal armor, with a crystal-studded coronet or circlet about her brows: Darya was-Darya.

When, exhausted, she had ceased struggling, he quickly bound and gagged the girl. Then, turning abruptly to the bewildered Moustapha, who had watched without comprehending these inexplicable actions, he curtly directed his lieutenant to take what arms he could to hold the men in battle, and, without waiting to hear a word in reply, turned and began cutting his way through the howling Zarians toward the beach where his longboats were hidden.

In the whirling and dusty confusion of the three-way battle, he soon vanished from the knowledge of men.

He and his helpless captive, the Empress of Zar.

## **Chapter 30 BATTLE'S END, JOURNEY'S BEGINNING**

By now, the battle had degenerated into a vast, confused, bewildered mob in which only the men of Sothar kept their heads.

The buccaneers had lost many lives in striving to defend themselves from the front and rear simultaneously. Also, they had lost heart and many of them had fled the battle, leaving Moustapha's host decimated and in considerable disarray.

As for the legions of Zar, as soon as their fiery Empress had pressed forward into the very midst of the battle, and then vanished from their sight so suddenly and mysteriously, they turned to Xask as second-in-command. He, of course, had prudently left the scene of battle: disheartened and leaderless, they threw down their weapons, surrendering in droves.

Which left the host of Sothar victorious. We quickly rounded up as many of our former adversaries as we could and disarmed them, taking their weapons for our own.

Nowhere among the many captives did we find Zarys, Xask or Kairadine. The arch-villains,

unaccountably, had disappeared. Anyway, the battle was won ....

Garth's warriors were resting, drinking water from a little stream that meandered across the trampled meadow toward the sea, when suddenly a vast host of warriors appeared at the mouth of the pass through the Peaks of Peril.

And, at its head, stood Tharn of Thandar.

Grinning hugely, the jungle monarch came striding up to where I stood dumbfounded; he clapped me on the shoulder (a numbing blow which would have felled a lesser man than I, and, in fact, made me stagger), then bent to where Garth had half struggled to his feet from his litter, to greet his brother Omad and inquire after his health.

Then he turned to give a friendly salute to Hurok the Neanderthal and Varak and several of the chieftains who stood nearby, and to stare curiously at Gundar and Thon of Numitor and others of our new friends whom he had not yet met.

The mystery of the sudden appearance of the Thandarians was easily explained. When we had been attacked by the Barbary Pirates, we had taken our stand up against the mouth of the pass, through which we sent our women and children, the aged and the injured.

The tribe of Thandar had not been so very far ahead of us, after all, as it turned out. For ere the battle was half over, the forefront of our noncombatants had been spotted by the rearguard scouts of Thandar, and quickly Tharn had turned his host about and retraced their path through the mountains to come to our aid—just as quickly as he heard that the buccaneers of El-Cazar had attacked us, mistaking us for the Thandarians.

That he had arrived too late upon the scene to have taken an active part in the battle was a source of disappointment to Tharn, but as his assistance had not been needed, it was an inconsequential detail.

"There is someone here who has long been waiting to greet you, Eric Carstairs," said Tharn of Thandar with a quiet smile.

"There is?" I said inanely. "Who?"

"You shall soon see," he chuckled, and turned on his heel to disappear among the ranks of his warriors—reappearing a few moments later with a slim, tanned golden-haired girl clinging to his mighty arm.

"It is . . . good to see you again, Eric Carstairs," said Darya of Thandar tremulously.

"It is . . . good to see you again," I said in none too steady a voice. "My princess," I added.

She flushed crimson, but continued to smile at me through the sudden rush of tears which blurred her magnificent blue eyes.

"Bless you, my children," chuckled Tharn-or the Cro-Magnon equivalent of the sentiment, anyway.

Having disarmed our captives, we simply turned them loose to wander away dispiritedly. There was nothing else to do with them, after all. There was no reason to bring them along with us on the long road south to Thandar, and, without their weapons or their leaders, there was little or nothing which they could do to harm us. So we let them go.

Garth disapproved of this plan, which was my own strongly urged suggestion. And Tharn was none too happy with it, either.

Staring after the last of the Barbary Pirates as they went trudging off to the beaches, Garth sighed and shrugged, saying, "I have a foreboding that this was charitable but unwise, Eric Carstairs. And a feeling that we have not seen the end of the corsairs of El-Cazar."

"I share your feelings, my brother," rumbled Tharn, frowning after the last of the buccaneers as they dwindled in the distance.

"You may both be right," I had to admit.

"What shall we do, if they rearm and pursue us again?" asked Garth.

For a long moment I stood silent, considering.

Then-

"We shall fight them," I said simply.

My arm tightened protectively about the slim shoulders of my beloved Darya.

"After all, we now have something worth fighting for," I added.

THE END

But the Adventures of Eric Carstairs in Zanthodon. the Underground World, will continue in Eric of Zanthodon the fifth volume in this new series.