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—Mrs. LIZZIE COURTNEY, 108 8th Ave., West, Oskaloosa, Iowa.

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## The Gods of Mars

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

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### CHAPTER XIV.

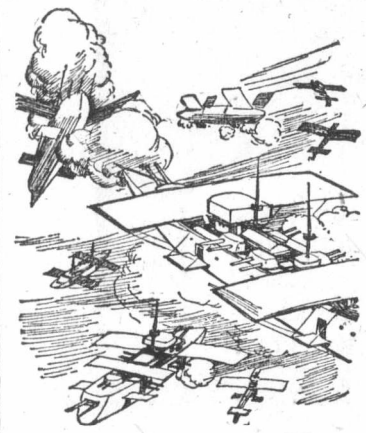
#### The Air Battle.

Sudden was our onslaught that they had no time to prepare for it. It was as unexpected as lightning from a clear sky.

Every phase of my plan worked splendidly. Our huge ships moved their way entirely through the line of their battle craft; then the V opened up and a broad lane appeared, through which the transports leaped toward the temples of the therns, which could now be seen glistening in the sunlight.

By the time the therns had rallied from the attack 100,000 green warriors were already pouring through their courts and gardens, while 150,000 others leaned from low swinging transports to direct their almost uncanny marksmanship upon the thern soldiery that manned the ramparts or attempted to defend the temples.

Now the two great fleets closed in a titanic struggle far above the fiendish din of battle in the gorgeous gardens of the therns. Slowly the two lines of



Now the Two Great Fleets Closed in a Titanic Struggle.

Helium's battalions joined their ends, and then commenced the circling within the line of the enemy which is so marked a characteristic of Barsomian naval warfare.

Round and round in each other's tracks moved the ships under Kantos Kan until at length they formed nearly a perfect circle. By this time they were moving at high speed, so that they presented a difficult target for the enemy.

Broadside after broadside they delivered as each vessel came in line with the ships of the therns. The latter attempted to rush in and break up the formation, but it was like stopping a buzzsaw with a bare hand.

From my position on the deck beside Kantos Kan I saw ship after ship of the enemy take the awful, sickening dive which proclaims its total destruction. Slowly we maneuvered our circle of death until we hung above the gardens, where our green warriors were engaged.

The order was passed down for them to embark. Then they rose slowly to a position within the center of the circle.

In the meantime the therns' fire had practically ceased. They had had enough of us and were only too glad to let us go on our way in peace.

But our escape was not to be accomplished with such ease, for scarcely had we got under way once more in the direction of the entrance to Omean than we saw, far to the north, a great black line topping the horizon. It could be nothing other than a fleet of war.

Whose or whether bound we could not even conjecture. When they had come close enough to make us out at all Kantos Kan's operator received a radio-aerogram, which he immediately handed to my companion. He read the thing and handed it to me:

Kantos Kan—Surrender in the name of the Jeddak of Helium, for you cannot escape.

ZAT ARRAS.

The therns must have caught and translated the message almost as soon as did we, for they immediately renewed hostilities when they realized that we were soon to be set upon by other enemies.

Before Zat Arras had approached near enough to fire a shot we were again hotly engaged with the thern fleet, and as soon as he drew near he, too, commenced to pour a terrific fusillade of heavy shot into us. Ship after ship reeled and staggered into uselessness beneath the pitiless fire that we

were undergoing.

The thing could not last much longer. I ordered the transports to descend again into the gardens of the therns.

"Wreak your vengeance to the utmost," was my message to the green allies, "for by night there will be none left to avenge your wrongs."

Presently I saw the ten battleships that had been ordered to hold the shaft of Omean. They were returning at full speed, firing their stern batteries almost continuously.

There could be but one explanation. They were being pursued by another hostile fleet. Well, the situation could be no worse. The expedition already was doomed.

No man that had embarked upon it would return across that dreary ice cap. How I wished that I might face Zat Arras with my long sword for just an instant before I died! It was he who had caused our failure.

As I watched the oncoming ten I saw their pursuers race swiftly into sight. It was another great fleet. For a moment I could not believe my eyes, but finally I was forced to admit that the most fatal calamity had overtaken the expedition, for the fleet I saw was none other than the fleet of the Black Pirates that should have been so safely bottled up in Omean.

What a series of misfortunes and disasters! What awful fate hovered over me that I should have been so terribly thwarted at every angle of my search for my lost love! Could it be possible that the curse of Issus was upon me; that there was, indeed, some malign divinity in that hideous carcass?

I would not believe it, and, throwing back my shoulders, I ran to the deck below to join my men in repelling boarders from one of the thern craft that had grappled us broadside. In the wild lust of hand to hand combat my old hopefulness returned, and as there after them went down beneath my blade I could almost feel that we should win success in the end even from apparent failure.

My presence among the men so greatly inspired them that they fell upon the luckless whites with such ferocity that within a few moments we had turned the tables upon them, and a second later as we swarmed their own decks I had the satisfaction of seeing their commander take the long leap from the bows of his vessel in token of surrender and defeat.

Then I joined Kantos Kan. He had been watching what had taken place on the deck below, and it seemed to have given him a new thought. Immediately he passed an order to one of his officers, and presently the colors of the Prince of Helium broke from every point of the flagship.

A great cheer arose from the men of our own ship, a cheer that was taken up by every other vessel of our expedition as they in turn broke my colors from their upper works.

Then Kantos Kan sprang his coup. A signal legible to every sailor of all the fleets engaged in that fierce struggle was strung aloft upon the flagship. "Men of Helium for the Prince of Helium against all his enemies," it read.

Presently my colors broke from one of Zat Arras' ships; then from another and another. On some we could see fierce battles raging between the Zodangan soldiery and the Heliumetic crews, but eventually the colors of the Prince of Helium floated above every ship that had followed Zat Arras upon our trail. Only his flagship flew them not.

Zat Arras had brought 5,000 ships. The sky was black with the three enormous fleets. It was Helium against the field now, and the fight had settled to countless individual duels. There could be little or no maneuvering of fleets in that crowded, fire split sky.

Zat Arras' flagship was close to my own. I could see the thin features of the man from where I stood.

His Zodangan crew was pouring broadside after broadside into us, and we were returning their fire with equal ferocity. Closer and closer came the two vessels until but a few yards intervened. Grapplers and boarders lined the contiguous rails of each. We were preparing for the death struggle with our hated enemy.

There was but a yard between the two mighty ships as the first grappling irons were hurled. I rushed to the deck to be with my men as they boarded. Just as the vessels came together with a slight shock I forced my way through the lines and was the first to spring to the deck of Zat Arras' ship.

After me poured a yelling, cheering, cursing throng of Helium's best fighting men. Nothing could withstand them in the fever of battle lust which enthralled them.

Down went the Zodangans before that surging tide of war, and as my men cleared the lower decks I sprang to the forward deck where stood Zat Arras.

"You are my prisoner, Zat Arras!" I cried. "Yield and you shall have quarter."

For a moment I could not tell whether he contemplated acceding to my demand or facing me with drawn sword.

For an instant he stood hesitating, and then, throwing down his arms, he turned and rushed to the opposite side of the deck. Before I could overtake him he had sprung to the rail and hurried



"You are my prisoner, Zat Arras!" cried.

himself headforemost into the awful depths below.

Thus went Zat Arras, jed of Zodanga, to his end.

On and on went that strange battle. The therns and blacks had not combined against us. Wherever thern ship met ship of the Black Pirates was a battle royal, and in this I thought I saw our salvation. Wherever messages could be passed between us that could not be intercepted by our enemies I passed the word that all our vessels were to withdraw from the fight as rapidly as possible, taking a position to the west and south of the combatants. I also sent an air scout to the fighting green men in the gardens below to re-embark and to the transports to join us.

My commanders were further instructed that when engaged with an enemy to draw him as rapidly as possible toward a ship of his hereditary foemen and by careful maneuvering to force the two to engage, thus leaving himself free to withdraw.

This stratagem worked to perfection, and just before the sun went down I had the satisfaction of seeing all that was left of my once mighty fleet gathered nearly twenty miles southwest of the still terrific battle between the blacks and whites.

Our plan now was to attempt to make a combined assault upon Issus at dawn of the following day.

Tars Tarkas, with his green warriors, and Hor Vastus, with the red men, guided by Xodar, were to land within the gardens of Issus or the surrounding plains, while Carthoris, Kantos Kan and I were to lead our smaller force from the sea of Omean through the pits beneath the temple, which Carthoris knew so well.

I now learned for the first time the cause of my ten ships' retreat from the mouth of the shaft. It seemed that when they had come upon the shaft the navy of the Black Pirates were already issuing from its mouth.

Fully twenty vessels had emerged, and, though they gave battle immediately in an effort to stem the tide that rolled from the black pit, the odds against them were too great, and they were forced to flee.

With great caution we approached the shaft under cover of darkness. At a distance of several miles I caused the fleet to be halted, and from there Carthoris went ahead alone upon a one man flier to reconnoiter.

In perhaps half an hour he returned to report that there was no sign of a patrol boat or of the enemy in any form, and so we moved swiftly and noiselessly forward once more toward Omean.

At the mouth of the shaft leading to Omean we stopped again for a moment for all the vessels to reach their previously appointed stations; then with the flagship I dropped quickly into the black depths, while one by one the other vessels followed me in quick succession.

We had decided to stake all on the chance that we would be able to reach the temple of Issus by the subterranean way, and so we left no guard of vessels at the shaft's mouth. Nor would it have profited us any to have done so, for we did not have sufficient force all told to have withstood the vast navy of the Black Pirates had they returned to engage us.

(Continued in our next issue.)

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