

CHAPTER XIV - GORE AND DREAMS

It was a two-masted felucca with lateen sails! The craft was long and low. In it were more than fifty men, twenty or thirty of whom were at oars with which the craft was being propelled from the lee of the land. I was dumbfounded.

Could it be that the savage, painted natives I had seen on shore had so perfected the art of navigation that they were masters of such advanced building and rigging as this craft proclaimed? It seemed impossible! And as I looked I saw another of the same type swing into view and follow its sister through the narrow strait out into the ocean.

Nor were these all. One after another, following closely upon one another's heels, came fifty of the trim, graceful vessels. They were cutting in between Hooja's fleet and our little dugout.

When they came a bit closer my eyes fairly popped from my head at what I saw, for in the eye of the leading felucca stood a man with a sea-glass leveled upon us. Who could they be? Was there a civilization within Pellucidar of such wondrous advancement as this? Were there far-distant lands of which none of my people had ever heard, where a race had so greatly outstripped all other races of this inner world?

The man with the glass had lowered it and was shouting to us. I could not make out his words, but presently I saw that he was pointing aloft. When I looked I saw a pennant fluttering from the peak of the forward lateen yard--a red, white, and blue pennant, with a single great white star in a field of blue.

Then I knew. My eyes went even wider than they had before. It was the navy! It was the navy of the empire of Pellucidar which I had instructed Perry to build in my absence. It was MY navy!

I dropped my paddle and stood up and shouted and waved my hand. Juag and Dian looked at me as if I had gone suddenly mad. When I could stop shouting I told them, and they shared my joy and shouted with me.

But still Hooja was coming nearer, nor could the leading felucca overhaul him before he would be along-side or at least within bow-shot.

Hooja must have been as much mystified as we were as to the identity of the strange fleet; but when he saw me waving to them he evidently guessed that they were friendly to us, so he urged his men to redouble their efforts to reach us before the felucca cut him off.

He shouted word back to others of his fleet--word that was passed back until it had reached them all--directing them to run alongside the strangers and board them, for with his two hundred craft and his eight or ten thousand warriors he evidently felt equal to overcoming the fifty vessels of the enemy, which did not seem to carry over three thousand men all told.

His own personal energies he bent to reaching Dian and me first, leaving the rest of the work to his other boats. I thought that there could be little doubt that he would be successful in so far as we were concerned, and I feared for the revenge that he might take upon us should the battle go against his force, as I was sure it would; for I knew that Perry and his Mezops must have brought with them all the arms and ammunition that had been contained in the prospector. But I was not prepared for what happened next.

As Hooja's canoe reached a point some twenty yards from us a great puff of smoke broke from the bow of the leading felucca, followed almost simultaneously by a terrific explosion, and a solid shot screamed close over the heads of the men in Hooja's craft, raising a great splash where it clove the water just beyond them.

Perry had perfected gunpowder and built cannon! It was marvelous! Dian and Juag, as much surprised as Hooja, turned wondering eyes toward me. Again the cannon spoke. I suppose that by comparison with the great guns of modern naval vessels of the outer world it was a pitifully small and inadequate thing; but here in Pellucidar, where it was the first of its kind, it was about as awe-inspiring as anything you might imagine.

With the report an iron cannonball about five inches in diameter struck Hooja's dugout just above the water-line, tore a great splintering hole in its side, turned it over, and dumped its occupants into the sea.

The four dugouts that had been abreast of Hooja had turned to intercept the leading felucca. Even now, in the face of what must have been a withering catastrophe to them, they kept bravely on toward the strange and terrible craft.

In them were fully two hundred men, while but fifty lined the gunwale of the felucca to repel them. The commander of the felucca, who proved to be Ja, let them come quite close and then turned loose upon them a volley of shots from small-arms.

The cave men and Sagoths in the dugouts seemed to wither before that blast of death like dry grass before a prairie fire. Those who were not hit dropped their bows and javelins and, seizing upon paddles, attempted to escape. But the felucca pursued them relentlessly, her crew firing at will.

At last I heard Ja shouting to the survivors in the dugouts--they were all quite close to us now--offering them their lives if they would surrender. Perry was standing close behind Ja, and I knew that this merciful action was prompted, perhaps commanded, by the old man; for no Pellucidarian would have thought of showing leniency to a defeated foe.

As there was no alternative save death, the survivors surrendered and a moment later were taken aboard the Amoz, the name that I could now see printed in large letters upon the felucca's bow, and which no one in that whole world could read except Perry and I.

When the prisoners were aboard, Ja brought the felucca alongside our dugout. Many were the willing hands that reached down to lift us to her decks. The bronze faces of the Mezops were broad with smiles, and Perry was fairly beside himself with joy.

Dian went aboard first and then Juag, as I wished to help Raja and Raneé aboard myself, well knowing that it would fare ill with any Mezop who touched them. We got them aboard at last, and a great commotion they caused among the crew, who had never seen a wild beast thus handled by man before.

Perry and Dian and I were so full of questions that we fairly burst, but we had to contain ourselves for a while, since the battle with the rest of Hooja's fleet had scarce commenced. From the small forward decks of the feluccas Perry's crude cannon were belching smoke, flame, thunder, and death. The air trembled to the roar of them. Hooja's horde, intrepid, savage fighters that they were, were closing in to grapple in a last death-struggle with the Mezops who manned our vessels.

The handling of our fleet by the red island warriors of Ja's clan was far from perfect. I could see that Perry had lost no time after the completion of the boats in setting out upon this cruise. What little the captains and crews had learned of handling feluccas they must have learned principally since they embarked upon this voyage, and while experience is an excellent teacher and had done much for them, they still had a great deal to learn. In maneuvering for position they were continually fouling one another, and on two occasions shots from our batteries came near to striking our own ships.

No sooner, however, was I aboard the flagship than I attempted to rectify this trouble to some extent. By passing commands by word of mouth from one ship to another I managed to get the fifty feluccas into some sort of line, with the flagship in the lead. In this formation we commenced slowly to circle the position of the enemy. The dugouts came for us right along in an attempt to board us, but by keeping on the move in one direction and circling, we managed to avoid getting

in each other's way, and were enabled to fire our cannon and our small arms with less danger to our own comrades.

When I had a moment to look about me, I took in the felucca on which I was. I am free to confess that I marveled at the excellent construction and stanch yet speedy lines of the little craft. That Perry had chosen this type of vessel seemed rather remarkable, for though I had warned him against turreted battle-ships, armor, and like useless show, I had fully expected that when I beheld his navy I should find considerable attempt at grim and terrible magnificence, for it was always Perry's idea to overawe these ignorant cave men when we had to contend with them in battle. But I had soon learned that while one might easily astonish them with some new engine of war, it was an utter impossibility to frighten them into surrender.

I learned later that Ja had gone carefully over the plans of various craft with Perry. The old man had explained in detail all that the text told him of them. The two had measured out dimensions upon the ground, that Ja might see the sizes of different boats. Perry had built models, and Ja had had him read carefully and explain all that they could find relative to the handling of sailing vessels. The result of this was that Ja was the one who had chosen the felucca. It was well that Perry had had so excellent a balance wheel, for he had been wild to build a huge frigate of the Nelsonian era--he told me so himself.

One thing that had inclined Ja particularly to the felucca was the fact that it included oars in its equipment. He realized the limitations of his people in the matter of sails, and while they had never used oars, the implement was so similar to a paddle that he was sure they quickly could master the art--and they did. As soon as one hull was completed Ja kept it on the water constantly, first with one crew and then with another, until two thousand red warriors had learned to row. Then they stepped their masts and a crew was told off for the first ship.

While the others were building they learned to handle theirs. As each succeeding boat was launched its crew took it out and practiced with it under the tutorage of those who had graduated from the first ship, and so on until a full complement of men had been trained for every boat.

Well, to get back to the battle: The Hoojans kept on coming at us, and as fast as they came we mowed them down. It was little else than slaughter. Time and time again I cried to them to surrender, promising them their lives if they would do so. At last there were but ten boatloads left. These turned in flight. They thought they could paddle away from us--it was pitiful! I passed the word from boat to boat to cease firing--not to kill another Hoojan unless they fired on us. Then we set out after them. There was a nice little breeze blowing and we bowled

along after our quarry as gracefully and as lightly as swans upon a park lagoon. As we approached them I could see not only wonder but admiration in their eyes. I hailed the nearest dugout.

"Throw down your arms and come aboard us," I cried, "and you shall not be harmed. We will feed you and return you to the mainland. Then you shall go free upon your promise never to bear arms against the Emperor of Pellucidar again!"

I think it was the promise of food that interested them most. They could scarce believe that we would not kill them. But when I exhibited the prisoners we already had taken, and showed them that they were alive and unharmed, a great Sagoth in one of the boats asked me what guarantee I could give that I would keep my word.

"None other than my word," I replied. "That I do not break."

The Pellucidarians themselves are rather punctilious about this same matter, so the Sagoth could understand that I might possibly be speaking the truth. But he could not understand why we should not kill them unless we meant to enslave them, which I had as much as denied already when I had promised to set them free. Ja couldn't exactly see the wisdom of my plan, either. He thought that we ought to follow up the ten remaining dugouts and sink them all; but I insisted that we must free as many as possible of our enemies upon the mainland.

"You see," I explained, "these men will return at once to Hooja's Island, to the Mahar cities from which they come, or to the countries from which they were stolen by the Mahars. They are men of two races and of many countries. They will spread the story of our victory far and wide, and while they are with us, we will let them see and hear many other wonderful things which they may carry back to their friends and their chiefs. It's the finest chance for free publicity, Perry," I added to the old man, "that you or I have seen in many a day."

Perry agreed with me. As a matter of fact, he would have agreed to anything that would have restrained us from killing the poor devils who fell into our hands. He was a great fellow to invent gunpowder and firearms and cannon; but when it came to using these things to kill people, he was as tender-hearted as a chicken.

The Sagoth who had spoken was talking to other Sagoths in his boat. Evidently they were holding a council over the question of the wisdom of surrendering.

"What will become of you if you don't surrender to us?" I asked. "If we do not open up our batteries on you again and kill you all, you will simply drift about the sea helplessly until you die of thirst and starvation. You cannot return to the

islands, for you have seen as well as we that the natives there are very numerous and warlike. They would kill you the moment you landed."

The upshot of it was that the boat of which the Sagoth speaker was in charge surrendered. The Sagoths threw down their weapons, and we took them aboard the ship next in line behind the Amoz. First Ja had to impress upon the captain and crew of the ship that the prisoners were not to be abused or killed. After that the remaining dugouts paddled up and surrendered. We distributed them among the entire fleet lest there be too many upon any one vessel. Thus ended the first real naval engagement that the Pellucidarian seas had ever witnessed--though Perry still insists that the action in which the Sari took part was a battle of the first magnitude.

The battle over and the prisoners disposed of and fed--and do not imagine that Dian, Juag, and I, as well as the two hounds were not fed also--I turned my attention to the fleet. We had the feluccas close in about the flag-ship, and with all the ceremony of a medieval potentate on parade I received the commanders of the forty-nine feluccas that accompanied the flag-ship--Dian and I together--the empress and the emperor of Pellucidar.

It was a great occasion. The savage, bronze warriors entered into the spirit of it, for as I learned later dear old Perry had left no opportunity neglected for impressing upon them that David was emperor of Pellucidar, and that all that they were accomplishing and all that he was accomplishing was due to the power, and redounded to the glory of David. The old man must have rubbed it in pretty strong, for those fierce warriors nearly came to blows in their efforts to be among the first of those to kneel before me and kiss my hand. When it came to kissing Dian's I think they enjoyed it more; I know I should have.

A happy thought occurred to me as I stood upon the little deck of the Amoz with the first of Perry's primitive cannon behind me. When Ja kneeled at my feet, and first to do me homage, I drew from its scabbard at his side the sword of hammered iron that Perry had taught him to fashion. Striking him lightly on the shoulder I created him king of Anoroc. Each captain of the forty-nine other feluccas I made a duke. I left it to Perry to enlighten them as to the value of the honors I had bestowed upon them.

During these ceremonies Raja and Ranee had stood beside Dian and me. Their bellies had been well filled, but still they had difficulty in permitting so much edible humanity to pass unchallenged. It was a good education for them though, and never after did they find it difficult to associate with the human race without arousing their appetites.

After the ceremonies were over we had a chance to talk with Perry and Ja. The former told me that Ghak, king of Sari, had sent my letter and map to him by a runner, and that he and Ja had at once decided to set out on the completion of the fleet to ascertain the correctness of my theory that the Lural Az, in which the Anoroc Islands lay, was in reality the same ocean as that which lapped the shores of Thuria under the name of Sojar Az, or Great Sea.

Their destination had been the island retreat of Hooja, and they had sent word to Ghak of their plans that we might work in harmony with them. The tempest that had blown us off the coast of the continent had blown them far to the south also. Shortly before discovering us they had come into a great group of islands, from between the largest two of which they were sailing when they saw Hooja's fleet pursuing our dugout.

I asked Perry if he had any idea as to where we were, or in what direction lay Hooja's island or the continent. He replied by producing his map, on which he had carefully marked the newly discovered islands--there described as the Unfriendly Isles--which showed Hooja's island northwest of us about two points West.

He then explained that with compass, chronometer, log and reel, they had kept a fairly accurate record of their course from the time they had set out. Four of the feluccas were equipped with these instruments, and all of the captains had been instructed in their use.

I was very greatly surprised at the ease with which these savages had mastered the rather intricate detail of this unusual work, but Perry assured me that they were a wonderfully intelligent race, and had been quick to grasp all that he had tried to teach them.

Another thing that surprised me was the fact that so much had been accomplished in so short a time, for I could not believe that I had been gone from Anoroc for a sufficient period to permit of building a fleet of fifty feluccas and mining iron ore for the cannon and balls, to say nothing of manufacturing these guns and the crude muzzle-loading rifles with which every Mezop was armed, as well as the gunpowder and ammunition they had in such ample quantities.

"Time!" exclaimed Perry. "Well, how long were you gone from Anoroc before we picked you up in the Sojar Az?"

That was a puzzler, and I had to admit it. I didn't know how much time had elapsed and neither did Perry, for time is nonexistent in Pellucidar.

"Then, you see, David," he continued, "I had almost unbelievable resources at my disposal. The Mezops inhabiting the Anoroc Islands, which stretch far out to sea beyond the three principal isles with which you are familiar, number well into the millions, and by far the greater part of them are friendly to Ja. Men, women, and children turned to and worked the moment Ja explained the nature of our enterprise.

"And not only were they anxious to do all in their power to hasten the day when the Mahars should be overthrown, but--and this counted for most of all--they are simply ravenous for greater knowledge and for better ways of doing things.

"The contents of the prospector set their imaginations to working overtime, so that they craved to own, themselves, the knowledge which had made it possible for other men to create and build the things which you brought back from the outer world.

"And then," continued the old man, "the element of time, or, rather, lack of time, operated to my advantage. There being no nights, there was no laying off from work--they labored incessantly stopping only to eat and, on rare occasions, to sleep. Once we had discovered iron ore we had enough mined in an incredibly short time to build a thousand cannon. I had only to show them once how a thing should be done, and they would fall to work by thousands to do it.

"Why, no sooner had we fashioned the first muzzle-loader and they had seen it work successfully, than fully three thousand Mezops fell to work to make rifles. Of course there was much confusion and lost motion at first, but eventually Ja got them in hand, detailing squads of them under competent chiefs to certain work.

"We now have a hundred expert gun-makers. On a little isolated isle we have a great powder-factory. Near the iron-mine, which is on the mainland, is a smelter, and on the eastern shore of Anoroc, a well equipped ship-yard. All these industries are guarded by forts in which several cannon are mounted and where warriors are always on guard.

"You would be surprised now, David, at the aspect of Anoroc. I am surprised myself; it seems always to me as I compare it with the day that I first set foot upon it from the deck of the Sari that only a miracle could have worked the change that has taken place."

"It is a miracle," I said; "it is nothing short of a miracle to transplant all the wondrous possibilities of the twentieth century back to the Stone Age. It is a miracle to think that only five hundred miles of earth separate two epochs that are really ages and ages apart."

"It is stupendous, Perry! But still more stupendous is the power that you and I wield in this great world. These people look upon us as little less than supermen. We must show them that we are all of that.

"We must give them the best that we have, Perry."

"Yes," he agreed; "we must. I have been thinking a great deal lately that some kind of shrapnel shell or explosive bomb would be a most splendid innovation in their warfare. Then there are breech-loading rifles and those with magazines that I must hasten to study out and learn to reproduce as soon as we get settled down again; and--"

"Hold on, Perry!" I cried. "I didn't mean these sorts of things at all. I said that we must give them the best we have. What we have given them so far has been the worst. We have given them war and the munitions of war. In a single day we have made their wars infinitely more terrible and bloody than in all their past ages they have been able to make them with their crude, primitive weapons.

"In a period that could scarcely have exceeded two outer earthly hours, our fleet practically annihilated the largest armada of native canoes that the Pellucidarians ever before had gathered together. We butchered some eight thousand warriors with the twentieth-century gifts we brought. Why, they wouldn't have killed that many warriors in the entire duration of a dozen of their wars with their own weapons! No, Perry; we've got to give them something better than scientific methods of killing one another."

The old man looked at me in amazement. There was reproach in his eyes, too.

"Why, David!" he said sorrowfully. "I thought that you would be pleased with what I had done. We planned these things together, and I am sure that it was you who suggested practically all of it. I have done only what I thought you wished done and I have done it the best that I know how."

I laid my hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Bless your heart, Perry!" I cried. "You've accomplished miracles. You have done precisely what I should have done, only you've done it better. I'm not finding fault; but I don't wish to lose sight myself, or let you lose sight, of the greater work which must grow out of this preliminary and necessary carnage. First we must place the empire upon a secure footing, and we can do so only by putting the fear of us in the hearts of our enemies; but after that--"

"Ah, Perry! That is the day I look forward to! When you and I can build sewing-machines instead of battle-ships, harvesters of crops instead of harvesters of

men, plow-shares and telephones, schools and colleges, printing-presses and paper! When our merchant marine shall ply the great Pellucidarian seas, and cargoes of silks and typewriters and books shall forge their ways where only hideous saurians have held sway since time began!"

"Amen!" said Perry.

And Dian, who was standing at my side, pressed my hand.