

## Chapter 12 - The Giant Stranger

And while the warriors and the priests of A-lur searched the temple and the palace and the city for the vanished ape-man there entered the head of Kor-ul-ja down the precipitous trail from the mountains, a naked stranger bearing an Enfield upon his back. Silently he moved downward toward the bottom of the gorge and there where the ancient trail unfolded more levelly before him he swung along with easy strides, though always with the utmost alertness against possible dangers. A gentle breeze came down from the mountains behind him so that only his ears and his eyes were of value in detecting the presence of danger ahead. Generally the trail followed along the banks of the winding brooklet at the bottom of the gorge, but in some places where the waters tumbled over a precipitous ledge the trail made a detour along the side of the gorge, and again it wound in and out among rocky outcroppings, and presently where it rounded sharply the projecting shoulder of a cliff the stranger came suddenly face to face with one who was ascending the gorge.

Separated by a hundred paces the two halted simultaneously. Before him the stranger saw a tall white warrior, naked but for a loin cloth, cross belts, and a girdle. The man was armed with a heavy, knotted club and a short knife, the latter hanging in its sheath at his left hip from the end of one of his cross belts, the opposite belt supporting a leathern pouch at his right side. It was Ta-den hunting alone in the gorge of his friend, the chief of Kor-ul-ja. He contemplated the stranger with surprise but no wonder, since he recognized in him a member of the race with which his experience of Tarzan the Terrible had made him familiar and also, thanks to his friendship for the ape-man, he looked upon the newcomer without hostility.

The latter was the first to make outward sign of his intentions, raising his palm toward Ta-den in that gesture which has been a symbol of peace from pole to pole since man ceased to walk upon his knuckles. Simultaneously he advanced a few paces and halted.

Ta-den, assuming that one so like Tarzan the Terrible must be a fellow-tribesman of his lost friend, was more than glad to accept this overture of peace, the sign of which he returned in kind as he ascended the trail to where the other stood. "Who are you?" he asked, but the newcomer only shook his head to indicate that he did not understand.

By signs he tried to carry to the Ho-don the fact that he was following a trail that had led him over a period of many days from some place beyond the mountains

and Ta-den was convinced that the newcomer sought Tarzan-jad-guru. He wished, however, that he might discover whether as friend or foe.

The stranger perceived the Ho-don's prehensile thumbs and great toes and his long tail with an astonishment which he sought to conceal, but greater than all was the sense of relief that the first inhabitant of this strange country whom he had met had proven friendly, so greatly would he have been handicapped by the necessity for forcing his way through a hostile land.

Ta-den, who had been hunting for some of the smaller mammals, the meat of which is especially relished by the Ho-don, forgot his intended sport in the greater interest of his new discovery. He would take the stranger to Om-at and possibly together the two would find some way of discovering the true intentions of the newcomer. And so again through signs he apprised the other that he would accompany him and together they descended toward the cliffs of Om-at's people.

As they approached these they came upon the women and children working under guard of the old men and the youths--gathering the wild fruits and herbs which constitute a part of their diet, as well as tending the small acres of growing crops which they cultivate. The fields lay in small level patches that had been cleared of trees and brush. Their farm implements consisted of metal-shod poles which bore a closer resemblance to spears than to tools of peaceful agriculture. Supplementing these were others with flattened blades that were neither hoes nor spades, but instead possessed the appearance of an unhappy attempt to combine the two implements in one.

At first sight of these people the stranger halted and unslung his bow for these creatures were black as night, their bodies entirely covered with hair. But Ta-den, interpreting the doubt in the other's mind, reassured him with a gesture and a smile. The Waz-don, however, gathered around excitedly jabbering questions in a language which the stranger discovered his guide understood though it was entirely unintelligible to the former. They made no attempt to molest him and he was now sure that he had fallen among a peaceful and friendly people.

It was but a short distance now to the caves and when they reached these Ta-den led the way aloft upon the wooden pegs, assured that this creature whom he had discovered would have no more difficulty in following him than had Tarzan the Terrible. Nor was he mistaken for the other mounted with ease until presently the two stood within the recess before the cave of Om-at, the chief.

The latter was not there and it was mid-afternoon before he returned, but in the meantime many warriors came to look upon the visitor and in each instance the latter was more thoroughly impressed with the friendly and peaceable spirit of his

hosts, little guessing that he was being entertained by a ferocious and warlike tribe who never before the coming of Ta-den and Tarzan had suffered a stranger among them.

At last Om-at returned and the guest sensed intuitively that he was in the presence of a great man among these people, possibly a chief or king, for not only did the attitude of the other black warriors indicate this but it was written also in the mien and bearing of the splendid creature who stood looking at him while Ta-den explained the circumstances of their meeting. "And I believe, Om-at," concluded the Ho-don, "that he seeks Tarzan the Terrible."

At the sound of that name, the first intelligible word that had fallen upon the ears of the stranger since he had come among them, his face lightened. "Tarzan!" he cried, "Tarzan of the Apes!" and by signs he tried to tell them that it was he whom he sought.

They understood, and also they guessed from the expression of his face that he sought Tarzan from motives of affection rather than the reverse, but of this Om-at wished to make sure. He pointed to the stranger's knife, and repeating Tarzan's name, seized Ta-den and pretended to stab him, immediately turning questioningly toward the stranger.

The latter shook his head vehemently and then first placing a hand above his heart he raised his palm in the symbol of peace.

"He is a friend of Tarzan-jad-guru," exclaimed Ta-den.

"Either a friend or a great liar," replied Om-at.

"Tarzan," continued the stranger, "you know him? He lives? O God, if I could only speak your language." And again reverting to sign language he sought to ascertain where Tarzan was. He would pronounce the name and point in different directions, in the cave, down into the gorge, back toward the mountains, or out upon the valley below, and each time he would raise his brows questioningly and voice the universal "eh?" of interrogation which they could not fail to understand. But always Om-at shook his head and spread his palms in a gesture which indicated that while he understood the question he was ignorant as to the whereabouts of the ape-man, and then the black chief attempted as best he might to explain to the stranger what he knew of the whereabouts of Tarzan.

He called the newcomer Jar-don, which in the language of Pal-ul-don means "stranger," and he pointed to the sun and said as. This he repeated several times and then he held up one hand with the fingers outspread and touching them one by one, including the thumb, repeated the word adenen until the stranger

understood that he meant five. Again he pointed to the sun and describing an arc with his forefinger starting at the eastern horizon and terminating at the western, he repeated again the words as adenen. It was plain to the stranger that the words meant that the sun had crossed the heavens five times. In other words, five days had passed. Om-at then pointed to the cave where they stood, pronouncing Tarzan's name and imitating a walking man with the first and second fingers of his right hand upon the floor of the recess, sought to show that Tarzan had walked out of the cave and climbed upward on the pegs five days before, but this was as far as the sign language would permit him to go.

This far the stranger followed him and, indicating that he understood he pointed to himself and then indicating the pegs leading above announced that he would follow Tarzan.

"Let us go with him," said Om-at, "for as yet we have not punished the Kor-ul-lul for killing our friend and ally."

"Persuade him to wait until morning," said Ta-den, "that you may take with you many warriors and make a great raid upon the Kor-ul-lul, and this time, Om-at, do not kill your prisoners. Take as many as you can alive and from some of them we may learn the fate of Tarzan-jad-guru."

"Great is the wisdom of the Ho-don," replied Om-at. "It shall be as you say, and having made prisoners of all the Kor-ul-lul we shall make them tell us what we wish to know. And then we shall march them to the rim of Kor-ul-gryf and push them over the edge of the cliff."

Ta-den smiled. He knew that they would not take prisoner all the Kor-ul-lul warriors--that they would be fortunate if they took one and it was also possible that they might even be driven back in defeat, but he knew too that Om-at would not hesitate to carry out his threat if he had the opportunity, so implacable was the hatred of these neighbors for each other.

It was not difficult to explain Om-at's plan to the stranger or to win his consent since he was aware, when the great black had made it plain that they would be accompanied by many warriors, that their venture would probably lead them into a hostile country and every safeguard that he could employ he was glad to avail himself of, since the furtherance of his quest was the paramount issue.

He slept that night upon a pile of furs in one of the compartments of Om-at's ancestral cave, and early the next day following the morning meal they sallied forth, a hundred savage warriors swarming up the face of the sheer cliff and out upon the summit of the ridge, the main body preceded by two warriors whose duties coincided with those of the point of modern military maneuvers,

safeguarding the column against the danger of too sudden contact with the enemy.

Across the ridge they went and down into the Kor-ul-lul and there almost immediately they came upon a lone and unarmed Waz-don who was making his way fearfully up the gorge toward the village of his tribe. Him they took prisoner which, strangely, only added to his terror since from the moment that he had seen them and realized that escape was impossible, he had expected to be slain immediately.

"Take him back to Kor-ul-ja," said Om-at, to one of his warriors, "and hold him there unharmed until I return."

And so the puzzled Kor-ul-lul was led away while the savage company moved stealthily from tree to tree in its closer advance upon the village. Fortune smiled upon Om-at in that it gave him quickly what he sought--a battle royal, for they had not yet come in sight of the caves of the Kor-ul-lul when they encountered a considerable band of warriors headed down the gorge upon some expedition.

Like shadows the Kor-ul-ja melted into the concealment of the foliage upon either side of the trail. Ignorant of impending danger, safe in the knowledge that they trod their own domain where each rock and stone was as familiar as the features of their mates, the Kor-ul-lul walked innocently into the ambush. Suddenly the quiet of that seeming peace was shattered by a savage cry and a hurled club felled a Kor-ul-lul.

The cry was a signal for a savage chorus from a hundred Kor-ul-ja throats with which were soon mingled the war cries of their enemies. The air was filled with flying clubs and then as the two forces mingled, the battle resolved itself into a number of individual encounters as each warrior singled out a foe and closed upon him. Knives gleamed and flashed in the mottling sunlight that filtered through the foliage of the trees above. Sleek black coats were streaked with crimson stains.

In the thick of the fight the smooth brown skin of the stranger mingled with the black bodies of friend and foe. Only his keen eyes and his quick wit had shown him how to differentiate between Kor-ul-lul and Kor-ul-ja since with the single exception of apparel they were identical, but at the first rush of the enemy he had noticed that their loin cloths were not of the leopard-matted hides such as were worn by his allies.

Om-at, after dispatching his first antagonist, glanced at Jar-don. "He fights with the ferocity of jato," mused the chief. "Powerful indeed must be the tribe from

which he and Tarzan-jad-guru come," and then his whole attention was occupied by a new assailant.

The fighters surged to and fro through the forest until those who survived were spent with exhaustion. All but the stranger who seemed not to know the sense of fatigue. He fought on when each new antagonist would have gladly quit, and when there were no more Kor-ul-lul who were not engaged, he leaped upon those who stood pantingly facing the exhausted Kor-ul-ja.

And always he carried upon his back the peculiar thing which Om-at had thought was some manner of strange weapon but the purpose of which he could not now account for in view of the fact that Jar-don never used it, and that for the most part it seemed but a nuisance and needless encumbrance since it banged and smashed against its owner as he leaped, catlike, hither and thither in the course of his victorious duels. The bow and arrows he had tossed aside at the beginning of the fight but the Enfield he would not discard, for where he went he meant that it should go until its mission had been fulfilled.

Presently the Kor-ul-ja, seemingly shamed by the example of Jar-don closed once more with the enemy, but the latter, moved no doubt to terror by the presence of the stranger, a tireless demon who appeared invulnerable to their attacks, lost heart and sought to flee. And then it was that at Om-at's command his warriors surrounded a half-dozen of the most exhausted and made them prisoners.

It was a tired, bloody, and elated company that returned victorious to the Kor-ul-ja. Twenty of their number were carried back and six of these were dead men. It was the most glorious and successful raid that the Kor-ul-ja had made upon the Kor-ul-lul in the memory of man, and it marked Om-at as the greatest of chiefs, but that fierce warrior knew that advantage had lain upon his side largely because of the presence of his strange ally. Nor did he hesitate to give credit where credit belonged, with the result that Jar-don and his exploits were upon the tongue of every member of the tribe of Kor-ul-ja and great was the fame of the race that could produce two such as he and Tarzan-jad-guru.

And in the gorge of Kor-ul-lul beyond the ridge the survivors spoke in bated breath of this second demon that had joined forces with their ancient enemy.

Returned to his cave Om-at caused the Kor-ul-lul prisoners to be brought into his presence singly, and each he questioned as to the fate of Tarzan. Without exception they told him the same story--that Tarzan had been taken prisoner by them five days before but that he had slain the warrior left to guard him and escaped, carrying the head of the unfortunate sentry to the opposite side of Kor-ul-lul where he had left it suspended by its hair from the branch of a tree. But

what had become of him after, they did not know; not one of them, until the last prisoner was examined, he whom they had taken first--the unarmed Kor-ul-lul making his way from the direction of the Valley of Jad-ben-Otho toward the caves of his people.

This one, when he discovered the purpose of their questioning, bartered with them for the lives and liberty of himself and his fellows. "I can tell you much of this terrible man of whom you ask, Kor-ul-ja," he said. "I saw him yesterday and I know where he is, and if you will promise to let me and my fellows return in safety to the caves of our ancestors I will tell you all, and truthfully, that which I know."

"You will tell us anyway," replied Om-at, "or we shall kill you."

"You will kill me anyway," retorted the prisoner, "unless you make me this promise; so if I am to be killed the thing I know shall go with me."

"He is right, Om-at," said Ta-den, "promise him that they shall have their liberty."

"Very well," said Om-at. "Speak Kor-ul-lul, and when you have told me all, you and your fellows may return unharmed to your tribe."

"It was thus," commenced the prisoner. "Three days since I was hunting with a party of my fellows near the mouth of Kor-ul-lul not far from where you captured me this morning, when we were surprised and set upon by a large number of Ho-don who took us prisoners and carried us to A-lur where a few were chosen to be slaves and the rest were cast into a chamber beneath the temple where are held for sacrifice the victims that are offered by the Ho-don to Jad-ben-Otho upon the sacrificial altars of the temple at A-lur.

"It seemed then that indeed was my fate sealed and that lucky were those who had been selected for slaves among the Ho-don, for they at least might hope to escape--those in the chamber with me must be without hope.

"But yesterday a strange thing happened. There came to the temple, accompanied by all the priests and by the king and many of his warriors, one whom all did great reverence, and when he came to the barred gateway leading to the chamber in which we wretched ones awaited our fate, I saw to my surprise that it was none other than that terrible man who had so recently been a prisoner in the village of Kor-ul-lul--he whom you call Tarzan-jad-guru but whom they addressed as Dor-ul-Otho. And he looked upon us and questioned the high priest and when he was told of the purpose for which we were imprisoned there he grew angry and cried that it was not the will of Jad-ben-Otho that his people be thus sacrificed, and he commanded the high priest to liberate us, and this was done.

"The Ho-don prisoners were permitted to return to their homes and we were led beyond the City of A-lur and set upon our way toward Kor-ul-lul. There were three of us, but many are the dangers that lie between A-lur and Kor-ul-lul and we were only three and unarmed. Therefore none of us reached the village of our people and only one of us lives. I have spoken."

"That is all you know concerning Tarzan-jad-guru?" asked Om-at.

"That is all I know," replied the prisoner, "other than that he whom they call Lu-don, the high priest at A-lur, was very angry, and that one of the two priests who guided us out of the city said to the other that the stranger was not Dor-ul-Otho at all; that Lu-don had said so and that he had also said that he would expose him and that he should be punished with death for his presumption. That is all they said within my hearing.

"And now, chief of Kor-ul-ja, let us depart."

Om-at nodded. "Go your way," he said, "and Ab-on, send warriors to guard them until they are safely within the Kor-ul-lul.

"Jar-don," he said beckoning to the stranger, "come with me," and rising he led the way toward the summit of the cliff, and when they stood upon the ridge Om-at pointed down into the valley toward the City of A-lur gleaming in the light of the western sun.

"There is Tarzan-jad-guru," he said, and Jar-don understood.