

## Chapter 22 - A Journey on a Gryf

Tarzan and Jane skirted the shore of Jad-bal-lul and crossed the river at the head of the lake. They moved in leisurely fashion with an eye to comfort and safety, for the ape-man, now that he had found his mate, was determined to court no chance that might again separate them, or delay or prevent their escape from Pal-ul-don. How they were to recross the morass was a matter of little concern to him as yet--it would be time enough to consider that matter when it became of more immediate moment. Their hours were filled with the happiness and content of reunion after long separation; they had much to talk of, for each had passed through many trials and vicissitudes and strange adventures, and no important hour might go unaccounted for since last they met.

It was Tarzan's intention to choose a way above A-lur and the scattered Ho-don villages below it, passing about midway between them and the mountains, thus avoiding, in so far as possible, both the Ho-don and Waz-don, for in this area lay the neutral territory that was uninhabited by either. Thus he would travel northwest until opposite the Kor-ul-ja where he planned to stop to pay his respects to Om-at and give the gund word of Pan-at-lee, and a plan Tarzan had for insuring her safe return to her people. It was upon the third day of their journey and they had almost reached the river that passes through A-lur when Jane suddenly clutched Tarzan's arm and pointed ahead toward the edge of a forest that they were approaching. Beneath the shadows of the trees loomed a great bulk that the ape-man instantly recognized.

"What is it?" whispered Jane.

"A gryf," replied the ape-man, "and we have met him in the worst place that we could possibly have found. There is not a large tree within a quarter of a mile, other than those among which he stands. Come, we shall have to go back, Jane; I cannot risk it with you along. The best we can do is to pray that he does not discover us."

"And if he does?"

"Then I shall have to risk it."

"Risk what?"

"The chance that I can subdue him as I subdued one of his fellows," replied Tarzan. "I told you--you recall?"

"Yes, but I did not picture so huge a creature. Why, John, he is as big as a battleship."

The ape-man laughed. "Not quite, though I'll admit he looks quite as formidable as one when he charges."

They were moving away slowly so as not to attract the attention of the beast.

"I believe we're going to make it," whispered the woman, her voice tense with suppressed excitement. A low rumble rolled like distant thunder from the wood. Tarzan shook his head.

"The big show is about to commence in the main tent," he quoted, grinning. He caught the woman suddenly to his breast and kissed her. "One can never tell, Jane," he said. "We'll do our best--that is all we can do. Give me your spear, and--don't run. The only hope we have lies in that little brain more than in us. If I can control it--well, let us see."

The beast had emerged from the forest and was looking about through his weak eyes, evidently in search of them. Tarzan raised his voice in the weird notes of the Tor-o-don's cry, "Whee-oo! Whee-oo! Whee-oo!" For a moment the great beast stood motionless, his attention riveted by the call. The ape-man advanced straight toward him, Jane Clayton at his elbow. "Whee-oo!" he cried again peremptorily. A low rumble rolled from the gryf's cavernous chest in answer to the call, and the beast moved slowly toward them.

"Fine!" exclaimed Tarzan. "The odds are in our favor now. You can keep your nerve?--but I do not need to ask."

"I know no fear when I am with Tarzan of the Apes," she replied softly, and he felt the pressure of her soft fingers on his arm.

And thus the two approached the giant monster of a forgotten epoch until they stood close in the shadow of a mighty shoulder. "Whee-oo!" shouted Tarzan and struck the hideous snout with the shaft of the spear. The vicious side snap that did not reach its mark--that evidently was not intended to reach its mark--was the hoped-for answer.

"Come," said Tarzan, and taking Jane by the hand he led her around behind the monster and up the broad tail to the great, horned back. "Now will we ride in the state that our forebears knew, before which the pomp of modern kings pales into cheap and tawdry insignificance. How would you like to canter through Hyde Park on a mount like this?"

"I am afraid the Bobbies would be shocked by our riding habits, John," she cried, laughingly.

Tarzan guided the gryf in the direction that they wished to go. Steep embankments and rivers proved no slightest obstacle to the ponderous creature.

"A prehistoric tank, this," Jane assured him, and laughing and talking they continued on their way. Once they came unexpectedly upon a dozen Ho-don warriors as the gryf emerged suddenly into a small clearing. The fellows were lying about in the shade of a single tree that grew alone. When they saw the beast they leaped to their feet in consternation and at their shouts the gryf issued his hideous, challenging bellow and charged them. The warriors fled in all directions while Tarzan belabored the beast across the snout with his spear in an effort to control him, and at last he succeeded, just as the gryf was almost upon one poor devil that it seemed to have singled out for its special prey. With an angry grunt the gryf stopped and the man, with a single backward glance that showed a face white with terror, disappeared in the jungle he had been seeking to reach.

The ape-man was elated. He had doubted that he could control the beast should it take it into its head to charge a victim and had intended abandoning it before they reached the Kor-ul-ja. Now he altered his plans--they would ride to the very village of Om-at upon the gryf, and the Kor-ul-ja would have food for conversation for many generations to come. Nor was it the theatric instinct of the ape-man alone that gave favor to this plan. The element of Jane's safety entered into the matter for he knew that she would be safe from man and beast alike so long as she rode upon the back of Pal-ul-don's most formidable creature.

As they proceeded slowly in the direction of the Kor-ul-ja, for the natural gait of the gryf is far from rapid, a handful of terrified warriors came panting into A-lur, spreading a weird story of the Dor-ul-Otho, only none dared call him the Dor-ul-Otho aloud. Instead they spoke of him as Tarzan-jad-guru and they told of meeting him mounted upon a mighty gryf beside the beautiful stranger woman whom Ko-tan would have made queen of Pal-ul-don. This story was brought to Lu-don who caused the warriors to be hailed to his presence, when he questioned them closely until finally he was convinced that they spoke the truth and when they had told him the direction in which the two were traveling, Lu-don guessed that they were on their way to Ja-lur to join Ja-don, a contingency that he felt must be prevented at any cost. As was his wont in the stress of emergency, he called Pan-sat into consultation and for long the two sat in close conference. When they arose a plan had been developed. Pan-sat went immediately to his own quarters where he removed the headdress and trappings of a priest to don in their stead the harness and weapons of a warrior. Then he returned to Lu-don.

"Good!" cried the latter, when he saw him. "Not even your fellow-priests or the slaves that wait upon you daily would know you now. Lose no time, Pan-sat, for all depends upon the speed with which you strike and--remember! Kill the man if you can; but in any event bring the woman to me here, alive. You understand?"

"Yes, master," replied the priest, and so it was that a lone warrior set out from A-lur and made his way northwest in the direction of Ja-lur.

The gorge next above Kor-ul-ja is uninhabited and here the wily Ja-don had chosen to mobilize his army for its descent upon A-lur. Two considerations influenced him--one being the fact that could he keep his plans a secret from the enemy he would have the advantage of delivering a surprise attack upon the forces of Lu-don from a direction that they would not expect attack, and in the meantime he would be able to keep his men from the gossip of the cities where strange tales were already circulating relative to the coming of Jad-ben-Otho in person to aid the high priest in his war against Ja-don. It took stout hearts and loyal ones to ignore the implied threats of divine vengeance that these tales suggested. Already there had been desertions and the cause of Ja-don seemed tottering to destruction.

Such was the state of affairs when a sentry posted on the knoll in the mouth of the gorge sent word that he had observed in the valley below what appeared at a distance to be nothing less than two people mounted upon the back of a gryf. He said that he had caught glimpses of them, as they passed open spaces, and they seemed to be traveling up the river in the direction of the Kor-ul-ja.

At first Ja-don was inclined to doubt the veracity of his informant; but, like all good generals, he could not permit even palpably false information to go uninvestigated and so he determined to visit the knoll himself and learn precisely what it was that the sentry had observed through the distorting spectacles of fear. He had scarce taken his place beside the man ere the fellow touched his arm and pointed. "They are closer now," he whispered, "you can see them plainly." And sure enough, not a quarter of a mile away Ja-don saw that which in his long experience in Pal-ul-don he had never before seen--two humans riding upon the broad back of a gryf.

At first he could scarce credit even this testimony of his own eyes, but soon he realized that the creatures below could be naught else than they appeared, and then he recognized the man and rose to his feet with a loud cry.

"It is he!" he shouted to those about him. "It is the Dor-ul-Otho himself."

The gryf and his riders heard the shout though not the words. The former bellowed terrifically and started in the direction of the knoll, and Ja-don, followed

by a few of his more intrepid warriors, ran to meet him. Tarzan, loath to enter an unnecessary quarrel, tried to turn the animal, but as the beast was far from tractable it always took a few minutes to force the will of its master upon it; and so the two parties were quite close before the ape-man succeeded in stopping the mad charge of his furious mount.

Ja-don and his warriors, however, had come to the realization that this bellowing creature was bearing down upon them with evil intent and they had assumed the better part of valor and taken to trees, accordingly. It was beneath these trees that Tarzan finally stopped the gryf. Ja-don called down to him.

"We are friends," he cried. "I am Ja-don, Chief of Ja-lur. I and my warriors lay our foreheads upon the feet of Dor-ul-Otho and pray that he will aid us in our righteous fight with Lu-don, the high priest."

"You have not defeated him yet?" asked Tarzan. "Why I thought you would be king of Pal-ul-don long before this."

"No," replied Ja-don. "The people fear the high priest and now that he has in the temple one whom he claims to be Jad-ben-Otho many of my warriors are afraid. If they but knew that the Dor-ul-Otho had returned and that he had blessed the cause of Ja-don I am sure that victory would be ours."

Tarzan thought for a long minute and then he spoke. "Ja-don," he said, "was one of the few who believed in me and who wished to accord me fair treatment. I have a debt to pay to Ja-don and an account to settle with Lu-don, not alone on my own behalf, but principally upon that of my mate. I will go with you Ja-don to mete to Lu-don the punishment he deserves. Tell me, chief, how may the Dor-ul-Otho best serve his father's people?"

"By coming with me to Ja-lur and the villages between," replied Ja-don quickly, "that the people may see that it is indeed the Dor-ul-Otho and that he smiles upon the cause of Ja-don."

"You think that they will believe in me more now than before?" asked the ape-man.

"Who will dare doubt that he who rides upon the great gryf is less than a god?" returned the old chief.

"And if I go with you to the battle at A-lur," asked Tarzan, "can you assure the safety of my mate while I am gone from her?"

"She shall remain in Ja-lur with the Princess O-lo-a and my own women," replied Ja-don. "There she will be safe for there I shall leave trusted warriors to protect

them. Say that you will come, O Dor-ul-Otho, and my cup of happiness will be full, for even now Ta-den, my son, marches toward A-lur with a force from the northwest and if we can attack, with the Dor-ul-Otho at our head, from the northeast our arms should be victorious."

"It shall be as you wish, Ja-don," replied the ape-man; "but first you must have meat fetched for my gryf."

"There are many carcasses in the camp above," replied Ja-don, "for my men have little else to do than hunt."

"Good," exclaimed Tarzan. "Have them brought at once."

And when the meat was brought and laid at a distance the ape-man slipped from the back of his fierce charger and fed him with his own hand. "See that there is always plenty of flesh for him," he said to Ja-don, for he guessed that his mastery might be short-lived should the vicious beast become over-hungry.

It was morning before they could leave for Ja-lur, but Tarzan found the gryf lying where he had left him the night before beside the carcasses of two antelope and a lion; but now there was nothing but the gryf.

"The paleontologists say that he was herbivorous," said Tarzan as he and Jane approached the beast.

The journey to Ja-lur was made through the scattered villages where Ja-don hoped to arouse a keener enthusiasm for his cause. A party of warriors preceded Tarzan that the people might properly be prepared, not only for the sight of the gryf but to receive the Dor-ul-Otho as became his high station. The results were all that Ja-don could have hoped and in no village through which they passed was there one who doubted the deity of the ape-man.

As they approached Ja-lur a strange warrior joined them, one whom none of Ja-don's following knew. He said he came from one of the villages to the south and that he had been treated unfairly by one of Lu-don's chiefs. For this reason he had deserted the cause of the high priest and come north in the hope of finding a home in Ja-lur. As every addition to his forces was welcome to the old chief he permitted the stranger to accompany them, and so he came into Ja-lur with them.

There arose now the question as to what was to be done with the gryf while they remained in the city. It was with difficulty that Tarzan had prevented the savage beast from attacking all who came near it when they had first entered the camp of Ja-don in the uninhabited gorge next to the Kor-ul-ja, but during the march to

Ja-lur the creature had seemed to become accustomed to the presence of the Hodon. The latter, however, gave him no cause for annoyance since they kept as far from him as possible and when he passed through the streets of the city he was viewed from the safety of lofty windows and roofs. However tractable he appeared to have become there would have been no enthusiastic seconding of a suggestion to turn him loose within the city. It was finally suggested that he be turned into a walled enclosure within the palace grounds and this was done, Tarzan driving him in after Jane had dismounted. More meat was thrown to him and he was left to his own devices, the awe-struck inhabitants of the palace not even venturing to climb upon the walls to look at him.

Ja-don led Tarzan and Jane to the quarters of the Princess O-lo-a who, the moment that she beheld the ape-man, threw herself to the ground and touched her forehead to his feet. Pan-at-lee was there with her and she too seemed happy to see Tarzan-jad-guru again. When they found that Jane was his mate they looked with almost equal awe upon her, since even the most skeptical of the warriors of Ja-don were now convinced that they were entertaining a god and a goddess within the city of Ja-lur, and that with the assistance of the power of these two, the cause of Ja-don would soon be victorious and the old Lion-man set upon the throne of Pal-ul-don.

From O-lo-a Tarzan learned that Ta-den had returned and that they were to be united in marriage with the weird rites of their religion and in accordance with the custom of their people as soon as Ta-den came home from the battle that was to be fought at A-lur.

The recruits were now gathering at the city and it was decided that the next day Ja-don and Tarzan would return to the main body in the hidden camp and immediately under cover of night the attack should be made in force upon Ludon's forces at A-lur. Word of this was sent to Ta-den where he awaited with his warriors upon the north side of Jad-ben-lul, only a few miles from A-lur.

In the carrying out of these plans it was necessary to leave Jane behind in Ja-don's palace at Ja-lur, but O-lo-a and her women were with her and there were many warriors to guard them, so Tarzan bid his mate good-bye with no feelings of apprehension as to her safety, and again seated upon the gryf made his way out of the city with Ja-don and his warriors.

At the mouth of the gorge the ape-man abandoned his huge mount since it had served its purpose and could be of no further value to him in their attack upon A-lur, which was to be made just before dawn the following day when, as he could not have been seen by the enemy, the effect of his entry to the city upon the gryf would have been totally lost. A couple of sharp blows with the spear sent the big

animal rumbling and growling in the direction of the Kor-ul-gryf nor was the ape-man sorry to see it depart since he had never known at what instant its short temper and insatiable appetite for flesh might turn it upon some of his companions.

Immediately upon their arrival at the gorge the march on A-lur was commenced.