

**The Outlaw of Torn**

**By**

**Edgar Rice Burroughs**

To My Friend

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## CHAPTER I

Here is a story that has lain dormant for seven hundred years. At first it was suppressed by one of the Plantagenet kings of England. Later it was forgotten. I happened to dig it up by accident. The accident being the relationship of my wife's cousin to a certain Father Superior in a very ancient monastery in Europe.

He let me pry about among a quantity of mildewed and musty manuscripts and I came across this. It is very interesting--partially since it is a bit of hitherto unrecorded history, but principally from the fact that it records the story of a most remarkable revenge and the adventurous life of its innocent victim--Richard, the lost prince of England.

In the retelling of it, I have left out most of the history. What interested me was the unique character about whom the tale revolves--the visored horseman who--but let us wait until we get to him.

It all happened in the thirteenth century, and while it was happening, it shook England from north to south and from east to west; and reached across the channel and shook France. It started, directly, in the London palace of Henry III, and was the result of a quarrel between the King and his powerful brother-in-law, Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester.

Never mind the quarrel, that's history, and you can read all about it at your leisure. But on this June day in the year of our Lord 1243, Henry so forgot himself as to very unjustly accuse De Montfort of treason in the presence of a number of the King's gentlemen.

De Montfort paled. He was a tall, handsome man, and when he drew himself to his full height and turned those gray eyes on the victim of his wrath, as he did that day, he was very imposing. A power in England, second only to the King himself, and with the heart of a lion in him, he answered the King as no other man in all England would have dared answer him.

"My Lord King," he cried, "that you be my Lord King alone prevents Simon de Montfort from demanding satisfaction for such a gross insult. That you take advantage of your kingship to say what you would never dare say were you not king, brands me not a traitor, though it does brand you a coward."

Tense silence fell upon the little company of lords and courtiers as these awful words fell from the lips of a subject, addressed to his king. They were

horrified, for De Montfort's bold challenge was to them but little short of sacrilege.

Henry, flushing in mortification and anger, rose to advance upon De Montfort, but suddenly recollecting the power which he represented, he thought better of whatever action he contemplated and, with a haughty sneer, turned to his courtiers.

"Come, my gentlemen," he said, "methought that we were to have a turn with the foils this morning. Already it waxeth late. Come, De Fulm! Come, Leybourn!" and the King left the apartment followed by his gentlemen, all of whom had drawn away from the Earl of Leicester when it became apparent that the royal displeasure was strong against him. As the arras fell behind the departing King, De Montfort shrugged his broad shoulders, and turning, left the apartment by another door.

When the King, with his gentlemen, entered the armory he was still smarting from the humiliation of De Montfort's reproaches, and as he laid aside his surcoat and plumed hat to take the foils with De Fulm, his eyes alighted on the master of fence, Sir Jules de Vac, who was advancing with the King's foil and helmet. Henry felt in no mood for fencing with De Fulm, who, like the other sycophants that surrounded him, always allowed the King easily to best him in every encounter.

De Vac he knew to be too jealous of his fame as a swordsman to permit himself to be overcome by aught but superior skill, and this day Henry felt that he could best the devil himself.

The armory was a great room on the main floor of the palace, off the guard room. It was built in a small wing of the building so that it had light from three sides. In charge of it was the lean, grizzled, leather-skinned Sir Jules de Vac, and it was he whom Henry commanded to face him in mimic combat with the foils, for the King wished to go with hammer and tongs at someone to vent his suppressed rage.

So he let De Vac assume to his mind's eye the person of the hated De Montfort, and it followed that De Vac was nearly surprised into an early and mortifying defeat by the King's sudden and clever attack.

Henry III had always been accounted a good swordsman, but that day he quite outdid himself and, in his imagination, was about to run the pseudo De Montfort through the heart, to the wild acclaim of his audience. For this fell purpose he had backed the astounded De Vac twice around the hall when, with a clever feint, and backward step, the master of fence drew the

King into the position he wanted him, and with the suddenness of lightning, a little twist of his foil sent Henry's weapon clanging across the floor of the armory.

For an instant, the King stood as tense and white as though the hand of death had reached out and touched his heart with its icy fingers. The episode meant more to him than being bested in play by the best swordsman in England--for that surely was no disgrace--to Henry it seemed prophetic of the outcome of a future struggle when he should stand face to face with the real De Montfort; and then, seeing in De Vac only the creature of his imagination with which he had vested the likeness of his powerful brother-in-law, Henry did what he should like to have done to the real Leicester. Drawing off his gauntlet he advanced close to De Vac.

"Dog!" he hissed, and struck the master of fence a stinging blow across the face, and spat upon him. Then he turned on his heel and strode from the armory.

De Vac had grown old in the service of the kings of England, but he hated all things English and all Englishmen. The dead King John, though hated by all others, he had loved, but with the dead King's bones De Vac's loyalty to the house he served had been buried in the Cathedral of Worcester.

During the years he had served as master of fence at the English Court, the sons of royalty had learned to thrust and parry and cut as only De Vac could teach the art, and he had been as conscientious in the discharge of his duties as he had been in his unswerving hatred and contempt for his pupils.

And now the English King had put upon him such an insult as might only be wiped out by blood.

As the blow fell, the wiry Frenchman clicked his heels together, and throwing down his foil, he stood erect and rigid as a marble statue before his master. White and livid was his tense drawn face, but he spoke no word.

He might have struck the King, but then there would have been left to him no alternative save death by his own hand; for a king may not fight with a lesser mortal, and he who strikes a king may not live--the king's honor must be satisfied.

Had a French king struck him, De Vac would have struck back, and gloried in the fate which permitted him to die for the honor of France; but an English King--pooh! a dog; and who would die for a dog? No, De Vac would

find other means of satisfying his wounded pride. He would revel in revenge against this man for whom he felt no loyalty. If possible, he would harm the whole of England if he could, but he would bide his time. He could afford to wait for his opportunity if, by waiting, he could encompass a more terrible revenge.

De Vac had been born in Paris, the son of a French officer reputed the best swordsman in France. The son had followed closely in the footsteps of his father until, on the latter's death, he could easily claim the title of his sire. How he had left France and entered the service of John of England is not of this story. All the bearing that the life of Jules de Vac has upon the history of England hinges upon but two of his many attributes--his wonderful swordsmanship and his fearful hatred for his adopted country.