

Chapter 5

We were sitting before a little fire inside a safe grotto one night shortly after we had quit the cliff-dwellings of the Band-lu, when So-al raised a question which it had never occurred to me to propound to Ajor. She asked her why she had left her own people and how she had come so far south as the country of the Alus, where I had found her.

At first Ajor hesitated to explain; but at last she consented, and for the first time I heard the complete story of her origin and experiences. For my benefit she entered into greater detail of explanation than would have been necessary had I been a native Caspakian.

"I am a cos-ata-lo," commenced Ajor, and then she turned toward me. "A cos-ata-lo, my Tom, is a woman" (lo) "who did not come from an egg and thus on up from the beginning." (Cor sva jo.) "I was a babe at my mother's breast. Only among the Galus are such, and then but infrequently. The Wieroo get most of us; but my mother hid me until I had attained such size that the Wieroo could not readily distinguish me from one who had come up from the beginning. I knew both my mother and my father, as only such as I may. My father is high chief among the Galus. His name is Jor, and both he and my mother came up from the beginning; but one of them, probably my mother, had completed the seven cycles" (approximately seven hundred years), "with the result that their offspring might be cos-ata-lo, or born as are all the children of your race, my Tom, as you tell me is the fact. I was therefore apart from my fellows in that my children would probably be as I, of a higher state of evolution, and so I was sought by the men of my people; but none of them appealed to me. I cared for none. The most persistent was Du-seen, a huge warrior of whom my father stood in considerable fear, since it was quite possible that Du-seen could wrest from him his chieftainship of the Galus. He has a large following of the newer Galus, those most recently come up from the Kro-lu, and as this class is usually much more powerful numerically than the older Galus, and as Du-seen's ambition knows no bounds, we have for a long time been expecting him to find some excuse for a break with Jor the High Chief, my father.

"A further complication lay in the fact that Duseen wanted me, while I would have none of him, and then came evidence to my father's ears that he was in league with the Wieroo; a hunter, returning late at night, came trembling to my father, saying that he had seen Du-seen talking with a Wieroo in a lonely spot far from the village, and that plainly he had heard the words: 'If you will help me, I will help you--I will deliver into your hands all cos-ata-lo among the Galus, now and

hereafter; but for that service you must slay Jor the High Chief and bring terror and confusion to his followers.'

"Now, when my father heard this, he was angry; but he was also afraid--afraid for me, who am cosata-lo. He called me to him and told me what he had heard, pointing out two ways in which we might frustrate Du-seen. The first was that I go to Du-seen as his mate, after which he would be loath to give me into the hands of the Wieroo or to further abide by the wicked compact he had made--a compact which would doom his own offspring, who would doubtless be as am I, their mother. The alternative was flight until Du-seen should have been overcome and punished. I chose the latter and fled toward the south. Beyond the confines of the Galu country is little danger from the Wieroo, who seek ordinarily only Galus of the highest orders. There are two excellent reasons for this: One is that from the beginning of time jealousy had existed between the Wieroo and the Galus as to which would eventually dominate the world. It seems generally conceded that that race which first reaches a point of evolution which permits them to produce young of their own species and of both sexes must dominate all other creatures. The Wieroo first began to produce their own kind--after which evolution from Galu to Wieroo ceased gradually until now it is unknown; but the Wieroo produce only males--which is why they steal our female young, and by stealing cos-ata-lo they increase their own chances of eventually reproducing both sexes and at the same time lessen ours. Already the Galus produce both male and female; but so carefully do the Wieroo watch us that few of the males ever grow to manhood, while even fewer are the females that are not stolen away. It is indeed a strange condition, for while our greatest enemies hate and fear us, they dare not exterminate us, knowing that they too would become extinct but for us.

"Ah, but could we once get a start, I am sure that when all were true cos-ata-lo there would have been evolved at last the true dominant race before which all the world would be forced to bow."

Ajor always spoke of the world as though nothing existed beyond Caspak. She could not seem to grasp the truth of my origin or the fact that there were countless other peoples outside her stern barrier-cliffs. She apparently felt that I came from an entirely different world. Where it was and how I came to Caspak from it were matters quite beyond her with which she refused to trouble her pretty head.

"Well," she continued, "and so I ran away to hide, intending to pass the cliffs to the south of Galu and find a retreat in the Kro-lu country. It would be dangerous, but there seemed no other way.

"The third night I took refuge in a large cave in the cliffs at the edge of my own country; upon the following day I would cross over into the Kro-lu country, where I felt that I should be reasonably safe from the Wieroo, though menaced by countless other dangers. However, to a cos-ata-lo any fate is preferable to that of falling into the clutches of the frightful Wieroo, from whose land none returns.

"I had been sleeping peacefully for several hours when I was awakened by a slight noise within the cavern. The moon was shining brightly, illumining the entrance, against which I saw silhouetted the dread figure of a Wieroo. There was no escape. The cave was shallow, the entrance narrow. I lay very still, hoping against hope, that the creature had but paused here to rest and might soon depart without discovering me; yet all the while I knew that he came seeking me.

"I waited, scarce breathing, watching the thing creep stealthily toward me, its great eyes luminous in the darkness of the cave's interior, and at last I knew that those eyes were directed upon me, for the Wieroo can see in the darkness better than even the lion or the tiger. But a few feet separated us when I sprang to my feet and dashed madly toward my menacer in a vain effort to dodge past him and reach the outside world. It was madness of course, for even had I succeeded temporarily, the Wieroo would have but followed and swooped down upon me from above. As it was, he reached forth and seized me, and though I struggled, he overpowered me. In the duel his long, white robe was nearly torn from him, and he became very angry, so that he trembled and beat his wings together in his rage.

"He asked me my name; but I would not answer him, and that angered him still more. At last he dragged me to the entrance of the cave, lifted me in his arms, spread his great wings and leaping into the air, flapped dismally through the night. I saw the moonlit landscape sliding away beneath me, and then we were out above the sea and on our way to Oo-oh, the country of the Wieroo.

"The dim outlines of Oo-oh were unfolding below us when there came from above a loud whirring of giant wings. The Wieroo and I glanced up simultaneously, to see a pair of huge jo-ooos" (flying reptiles--pterodactyls) "swooping down upon us. The Wieroo wheeled and dropped almost to sea-level, and then raced southward in an effort to outdistance our pursuers. The great creatures, notwithstanding their enormous weight, are swift on their wings; but the Wieroo are swifter. Even with my added weight, the creature that bore me maintained his lead, though he could not increase it. Faster than the fastest wind we raced through the night, southward along the coast. Sometimes we rose to great heights, where the air was chill and the world below but a blur of dim outlines; but always the jo-ooos stuck behind us.

"I knew that we had covered a great distance, for the rush of the wind by my face attested the speed of our progress, but I had no idea where we were when at last I realized that the Wieroo was weakening. One of the jo-oos gained on us and succeeded in heading us, so that my captor had to turn in toward the coast. Further and further they forced him to the left; lower and lower he sank. More labored was his breathing, and weaker the stroke of his once powerful wings. We were not ten feet above the ground when they overtook us, and at the edge of a forest. One of them seized the Wieroo by his right wing, and in an effort to free himself, he loosed his grasp upon me, dropping me to earth. Like a frightened ecca I leaped to my feet and raced for the sheltering sanctuary of the forest, where I knew neither could follow or seize me. Then I turned and looked back to see two great reptiles tear my abductor asunder and devour him on the spot.

"I was saved; yet I felt that I was lost. How far I was from the country of the Galus I could not guess; nor did it seem probable that I ever could make my way in safety to my native land.

"Day was breaking; soon the carnivora would stalk forth for their first kill; I was armed only with my knife. About me was a strange landscape--the flowers, the trees, the grasses, even, were different from those of my northern world, and presently there appeared before me a creature fully as hideous as the Wieroo--a hairy manthing that barely walked erect. I shuddered, and then I fled. Through the hideous dangers that my forebears had endured in the earlier stages of their human evolution I fled; and always pursuing was the hairy monster that had discovered me. Later he was joined by others of his kind. They were the speechless men, the Alus, from whom you rescued me, my Tom. From then on, you know the story of my adventures, and from the first, I would endure them all again because they led me to you!"

It was very nice of her to say that, and I appreciated it. I felt that she was a mighty nice little girl whose friendship anyone might be glad to have; but I wished that when she touched me, those peculiar thrills would not run through me. It was most discomfiting, because it reminded me of love; and I knew that I never could love this half-baked little barbarian. I was very much interested in her account of the Wieroo, which up to this time I had considered a purely mythological creature; but Ajour shuddered so at even the veriest mention of the name that I was loath to press the subject upon her, and so the Wieroo still remained a mystery to me.

While the Wieroo interested me greatly, I had little time to think about them, as our waking hours were filled with the necessities of existence--the constant battle for survival which is the chief occupation of Caspakians. To-mar and So-al were now about fitted for their advent into Kro-lu society and must therefore leave us,

as we could not accompany them without incurring great danger ourselves and running the chance of endangering them; but each swore to be always our friend and assured us that should we need their aid at any time we had but to ask it; nor could I doubt their sincerity, since we had been so instrumental in bringing them safely upon their journey toward the Kro-lu village.

This was our last day together. In the afternoon we should separate, To-mar and So-al going directly to the Kro-lu village, while Ajor and I made a detour to avoid a conflict with the archers. The former both showed evidence of nervous apprehension as the time approached for them to make their entry into the village of their new people, and yet both were very proud and happy. They told us that they would be well received as additions to a tribe always are welcomed, and the more so as the distance from the beginning increased, the higher tribes or races being far weaker numerically than the lower. The southern end of the island fairly swarms with the Ho-lu, or apes; next above these are the Alus, who are slightly fewer in number than the Ho-lu; and again there are fewer Bolu than Alus, and fewer Sto-lu than Bo-lu. Thus it goes until the Kro-lu are fewer in number than any of the others; and here the law reverses, for the Galus outnumber the Kro-lu. As Ajor explained it to me, the reason for this is that as evolution practically ceases with the Galus, there is no less among them on this score, for even the cos-ata-lo are still considered Galus and remain with them. And Galus come up both from the west and east coasts. There are, too, fewer carnivorous reptiles at the north end of the island, and not so many of the great and ferocious members of the cat family as take their hideous toll of life among the races further south.

By now I was obtaining some idea of the Caspakian scheme of evolution, which partly accounted for the lack of young among the races I had so far seen. Coming up from the beginning, the Caspakian passes, during a single existence, through the various stages of evolution, or at least many of them, through which the human race has passed during the countless ages since life first stirred upon a new world; but the question which continued to puzzle me was: What creates life at the beginning, cor sva jo?

I had noticed that as we traveled northward from the Alus' country the land had gradually risen until we were now several hundred feet above the level of the inland sea. Ajor told me that the Galus country was still higher and considerably colder, which accounted for the scarcity of reptiles. The change in form and kinds of the lower animals was even more marked than the evolutionary stages of man. The diminutive ecca, or small horse, became a rough-coated and sturdy little pony in the Kro-lu country. I saw a greater number of small lions and tigers, though many of the huge ones still persisted, while the woolly mammoth

was more in evidence, as were several varieties of the Labyrinthadonta. These creatures, from which God save me, I should have expected to find further south; but for some unaccountable reason they gain their greatest bulk in the Kro-lu and Galu countries, though fortunately they are rare. I rather imagine that they are a very early life which is rapidly nearing extinction in Caspak, though wherever they are found, they constitute a menace to all forms of life.

It was mid-afternoon when To-mar and So-al bade us good-bye. We were not far from Kro-lu village; in fact, we had approached it much closer than we had intended, and now Ajour and I were to make a detour toward the sea while our companions went directly in search of the Kro-lu chief.

Ajour and I had gone perhaps a mile or two and were just about to emerge from a dense wood when I saw that ahead of us which caused me to draw back into concealment, at the same time pushing Ajour behind me. What I saw was a party of Band-lu warriors--large, fierce-appearing men. From the direction of their march I saw that they were returning to their caves, and that if we remained where we were, they would pass without discovering us.

Presently Ajour nudged me. "They have a prisoner," she whispered. "He is a Kro-lu."

And then I saw him, the first fully developed Kro-lu I had seen. He was a fine-looking savage, tall and straight with a regal carriage. To-mar was a handsome fellow; but this Kro-lu showed plainly in his every physical attribute a higher plane of evolution. While To-mar was just entering the Kro-lu sphere, this man, it seemed to me, must be close indeed to the next stage of his development, which would see him an envied Galu.

"They will kill him?" I whispered to Ajour.

"The dance of death," she replied, and I shuddered, so recently had I escaped the same fate. It seemed cruel that one who must have passed safely up through all the frightful stages of human evolution within Caspak, should die at the very foot of his goal. I raised my rifle to my shoulder and took careful aim at one of the Band-lu. If I hit him, I would hit two, for another was directly behind the first.

Ajour touched my arm. "What would you do?" she asked. "They are all our enemies."

"I am going to save him from the dance of death," I replied, "enemy or no enemy," and I squeezed the trigger. At the report, the two Band-lu lunged forward upon their faces. I handed my rifle to Ajour, and drawing my pistol, stepped out in full view of the startled party. The Band-lu did not run away as had some of the

lower orders of Caspakians at the sound of the rifle. Instead, the moment they saw me, they let out a series of demoniac war-cries, and raising their spears above their heads, charged me.

The Kro-lu stood silent and statuesque, watching the proceedings. He made no attempt to escape, though his feet were not bound and none of the warriors remained to guard him. There were ten of the Band-lu coming for me. I dropped three of them with my pistol as rapidly as a man might count by three, and then my rifle spoke close to my left shoulder, and another of them stumbled and rolled over and over upon the ground. Plucky little Ajour! She had never fired a shot before in all her life, though I had taught her to sight and aim and how to squeeze the trigger instead of pulling it. She had practiced these new accomplishments often, but little had I thought they would make a marksman of her so quickly.

With six of their fellows put out of the fight so easily, the remaining six sought cover behind some low bushes and commenced a council of war. I wished that they would go away, as I had no ammunition to waste, and I was fearful that should they institute another charge, some of them would reach us, for they were already quite close. Suddenly one of them rose and launched his spear. It was the most marvelous exhibition of speed I have ever witnessed. It seemed to me that he had scarce gained an upright position when the weapon was half-way upon its journey, speeding like an arrow toward Ajour. And then it was, with that little life in danger, that I made the best shot I have ever made in my life! I took no conscious aim; it was as though my subconscious mind, impelled by a stronger power even than that of self-preservation, directed my hand. Ajour was in danger! Simultaneously with the thought my pistol flew to position, a streak of incandescent powder marked the path of the bullet from its muzzle; and the spear, its point shattered, was deflected from its path. With a howl of dismay the six Band-lu rose from their shelter and raced away toward the south.

I turned toward Ajour. She was very white and wide-eyed, for the clutching fingers of death had all but seized her; but a little smile came to her lips and an expression of great pride to her eyes. "My Tom!" she said, and took my hand in hers. That was all--"My Tom!" and a pressure of the hand. Her Tom! Something stirred within my bosom. Was it exaltation or was it consternation? Impossible! I turned away almost brusquely.

"Come!" I said, and strode off toward the Kro-lu prisoner.

The Kro-lu stood watching us with stolid indifference. I presume that he expected to be killed; but if he did, he showed no outward sign of fear. His eyes, indicating his greatest interest, were fixed upon my pistol or the rifle which Ajour still carried.

I cut his bonds with my knife. As I did so, an expression of surprise tinged and animated the haughty reserve of his countenance. He eyed me quizzically.

"What are you going to do with me?" he asked.

"You are free," I replied. "Go home, if you wish."

"Why don't you kill me?" he inquired. "I am defenseless."

"Why should I kill you? I have risked my life and that of this young lady to save your life. Why, therefore should I now take it?" Of course, I didn't say "young lady" as there is no Caspakian equivalent for that term; but I have to allow myself considerable latitude in the translation of Caspakian conversations. To speak always of a beautiful young girl as a "she" may be literal; but it seems far from gallant.

The Kro-lu concentrated his steady, level gaze upon me for at least a full minute. Then he spoke again.

"Who are you, man of strange skins?" he asked. "Your she is Galu; but you are neither Galu nor Kro-lu nor Band-lu, nor any other sort of man which I have seen before. Tell me from whence comes so mighty a warrior and so generous a foe."

"It is a long story," I replied, "but suffice it to say that I am not of Caspak. I am a stranger here, and--let this sink in--I am not a foe. I have no wish to be an enemy of any man in Caspak, with the possible exception of the Galu warrior Du-seen."

"Du-seen!" he exclaimed. "You are an enemy of Du-seen? And why?"

"Because he would harm Ajor," I replied. "You know him?"

"He cannot know him," said Ajor. "Du-seen rose from the Kro-lu long ago, taking a new name, as all do when they enter a new sphere. He cannot know him, as there is no intercourse between the Kro-lu and the Galu."

The warrior smiled. "Du-seen rose not so long ago," he said, "that I do not recall him well, and recently he has taken it upon himself to abrogate the ancient laws of Caspak; he had had intercourse with the Kro-lu. Du-seen would be chief of the Galus, and he has come to the Kro-lu for help."

Ajor was aghast. The thing was incredible. Never had Kro-lu and Galu had friendly relations; by the savage laws of Caspak they were deadly enemies, for only so can the several races maintain their individuality.

"Will the Kro-lu join him?" asked Ajor. "Will they invade the country of Jor my father?"

"The younger Kro-lu favor the plan," replied the warrior, "since they believe they will thus become Galus immediately. They hope to span the long years of change through which they must pass in the ordinary course of events and at a single stride become Galus. We of the older Kro-lu tell them that though they occupy the land of the Galu and wear the skins and ornaments of the golden people, still they will not be Galus till the time arrives that they are ripe to rise. We also tell them that even then they will never become a true Galu race, since there will still be those among them who can never rise. It is all right to raid the Galu country occasionally for plunder, as our people do; but to attempt to conquer it and hold it is madness. For my part, I have been content to wait until the call came to me. I feel that it cannot now be long."

"What is your name?" asked Ajor.

"Chal-az," replied the man.

"You are chief of the Kro-lu?" Ajor continued.

"No, it is Al-tan who is chief of the Kro-lu of the east," answered Chal-az.

"And he is against this plan to invade my father's country?"

"Unfortunately he is rather in favor of it," replied the man, "since he has about come to the conclusion that he is batu. He has been chief ever since, before I came up from the Band-lu, and I can see no change in him in all those years. In fact, he still appears to be more Band-lu than Kro-lu. However, he is a good chief and a mighty warrior, and if Du-seen persuades him to his cause, the Galus may find themselves under a Kro-lu chieftain before long--Du-seen as well as the others, for Al-tan would never consent to occupy a subordinate position, and once he plants a victorious foot in Galu, he will not withdraw it without a struggle."

I asked them what batu meant, as I had not before heard the word. Literally translated, it is equivalent to through, finished, done-for, as applied to an individual's evolutionary progress in Caspak, and with this information was developed the interesting fact that not every individual is capable of rising through every stage to that of Galu. Some never progress beyond the Alu stage; others stop as Bo-lu, as Sto-lu, as Bandlu or as Kro-lu. The Ho-lu of the first generation may rise to become Alus; the Alus of the second generation may become Bo-lu, while it requires three generations of Bo-lu to become Band-lu, and so on until Kro-lu's parent on one side must be of the sixth generation.

It was not entirely plain to me even with this explanation, since I couldn't understand how there could be different generations of peoples who apparently had no offspring. Yet I was commencing to get a slight glimmer of the strange laws which govern propagation and evolution in this weird land. Already I knew that the warm pools which always lie close to every tribal abiding-place were closely linked with the Caspakian scheme of evolution, and that the daily immersion of the females in the greenish slimy water was in response to some natural law, since neither pleasure nor cleanliness could be derived from what seemed almost a religious rite. Yet I was still at sea; nor, seemingly, could Ajor enlighten me, since she was compelled to use words which I could not understand and which it was impossible for her to explain the meanings of.

As we stood talking, we were suddenly startled by a commotion in the bushes and among the boles of the trees surrounding us, and simultaneously a hundred Kro-lu warriors appeared in a rough circle about us. They greeted Chal-az with a volley of questions as they approached slowly from all sides, their heavy bows fitted with long, sharp arrows. Upon Ajor and me they looked with covetousness in the one instance and suspicion in the other; but after they had heard Chal-az's story, their attitude was more friendly. A huge savage did all the talking. He was a mountain of a man, yet perfectly proportioned.

"This is Al-tan the chief," said Chal-az by way of introduction. Then he told something of my story, and Al-tan asked me many questions of the land from which I came. The warriors crowded around close to hear my replies, and there were many expressions of incredulity as I spoke of what was to them another world, of the yacht which had brought me over vast waters, and of the plane that had borne me Jo-oo-like over the summit of the barrier-cliffs. It was the mention of the hydroaeroplane which precipitated the first outspoken skepticism, and then Ajor came to my defense.

"I saw it with my own eyes!" she exclaimed. "I saw him flying through the air in battle with a Jo-oo. The Alus were chasing me, and they saw and ran away."

"Whose is this she?" demanded Al-tan suddenly, his eyes fixed fiercely upon Ajor.

For a moment there was silence. Ajor looked up at me, a hurt and questioning expression on her face. "Whose she is this?" repeated Al-tan.

"She is mine," I replied, though what force it was that impelled me to say it I could not have told; but an instant later I was glad that I had spoken the words, for the reward of Ajor's proud and happy face was reward indeed.

Al-tan eyed her for several minutes and then turned to me. "Can you keep her?" he asked, just the tinge of a sneer upon his face.

I laid my palm upon the grip of my pistol and answered that I could. He saw the move, glanced at the butt of the automatic where it protruded from its holster, and smiled. Then he turned and raising his great bow, fitted an arrow and drew the shaft far back. His warriors, supercilious smiles upon their faces, stood silently watching him. His bow was the longest and the heaviest among them all. A mighty man indeed must he be to bend it; yet Al-tan drew the shaft back until the stone point touched his left forefinger, and he did it with consummate ease. Then he raised the shaft to the level of his right eye, held it there for an instant and released it. When the arrow stopped, half its length protruded from the opposite side of a six-inch tree fifty feet away. Al-tan and his warriors turned toward me with expressions of immense satisfaction upon their faces, and then, apparently for Ajor's benefit, the chieftain swaggered to and fro a couple of times, swinging his great arms and his bulky shoulders for all the world like a drunken prize-fighter at a beach dancehall.

I saw that some reply was necessary, and so in a single motion, I drew my gun, dropped it on the still quivering arrow and pulled the trigger. At the sound of the report, the Kro-lu leaped back and raised their weapons; but as I was smiling, they took heart and lowered them again, following my eyes to the tree; the shaft of their chief was gone, and through the bole was a little round hole marking the path of my bullet. It was a good shot if I do say it myself, "as shouldn't" but necessity must have guided that bullet; I simply had to make a good shot, that I might immediately establish my position among those savage and warlike Caspakians of the sixth sphere. That it had its effect was immediately noticeable, but I am none too sure that it helped my cause with Al-tan. Whereas he might have condescended to tolerate me as a harmless and interesting curiosity, he now, by the change in his expression, appeared to consider me in a new and unfavorable light. Nor can I wonder, knowing this type as I did, for had I not made him ridiculous in the eyes of his warriors, beating him at his own game? What king, savage or civilized, could condone such impudence? Seeing his black scowls, I deemed it expedient, especially on Ajor's account, to terminate the interview and continue upon our way; but when I would have done so, Al-tan detained us with a gesture, and his warriors pressed around us.

"What is the meaning of this?" I demanded, and before Al-tan could reply, Chal-az raised his voice in our behalf.

"Is this the gratitude of a Kro-lu chieftain, Al-tan," he asked, "to one who has served you by saving one of your warriors from the enemy--saving him from the death dance of the Band-lu?"

Al-tan was silent for a moment, and then his brow cleared, and the faint imitation of a pleasant expression struggled for existence as he said: "The stranger will not

be harmed. I wished only to detain him that he may be feasted tonight in the village of Al-tan the Kro-lu. In the morning he may go his way. Al-tan will not hinder him."

I was not entirely reassured; but I wanted to see the interior of the Kro-lu village, and anyway I knew that if Al-tan intended treachery I would be no more in his power in the morning than I now was--in fact, during the night I might find opportunity to escape with Ajor, while at the instant neither of us could hope to escape unscathed from the encircling warriors. Therefore, in order to disarm him of any thought that I might entertain suspicion as to his sincerity, I promptly and courteously accepted his invitation. His satisfaction was evident, and as we set off toward his village, he walked beside me, asking many questions as to the country from which I came, its peoples and their customs. He seemed much mystified by the fact that we could walk abroad by day or night without fear of being devoured by wild beasts or savage reptiles, and when I told him of the great armies which we maintained, his simple mind could not grasp the fact that they existed solely for the slaughtering of human beings.

"I am glad," he said, "that I do not dwell in your country among such savage peoples. Here, in Caspak, men fight with men when they meet--men of different races--but their weapons are first for the slaying of beasts in the chase and in defense. We do not fashion weapons solely for the killing of man as do your peoples. Your country must indeed be a savage country, from which you are fortunate to have escaped to the peace and security of Caspak."

Here was a new and refreshing viewpoint; nor could I take exception to it after what I had told Altan of the great war which had been raging in Europe for over two years before I left home.

On the march to the Kro-lu village we were continually stalked by innumerable beasts of prey, and three times we were attacked by frightful creatures; but Altan took it all as a matter of course, rushing forward with raised spear or sending a heavy shaft into the body of the attacker and then returning to our conversation as though no interruption had occurred. Twice were members of his band mauled, and one was killed by a huge and bellicose rhinoceros; but the instant the action was over, it was as though it never had occurred. The dead man was stripped of his belongings and left where he had died; the carnivora would take care of his burial. The trophies that these Kro-lu left to the meat-eaters would have turned an English big-game hunter green with envy. They did, it is true, cut all the edible parts from the rhino and carry them home; but already they were pretty well weighted down with the spoils of the chase, and only the fact that they are particularly fond of rhino-meat caused them to do so.

They left the hide on the pieces they selected, as they use it for sandals, shield-covers, the hilts of their knives and various other purposes where tough hide is desirable. I was much interested in their shields, especially after I saw one used in defense against the attack of a saber-tooth tiger. The huge creature had charged us without warning from a clump of dense bushes where it was lying up after eating. It was met with an avalanche of spears, some of which passed entirely through its body, with such force were they hurled. The charge was from a very short distance, requiring the use of the spear rather than the bow and arrow; but after the launching of the spears, the men not directly in the path of the charge sent bolt after bolt into the great carcass with almost incredible rapidity. The beast, screaming with pain and rage, bore down upon Chal-az while I stood helpless with my rifle for fear of hitting one of the warriors who were closing in upon it. But Chal-az was ready. Throwing aside his bow, he crouched behind his large oval shield, in the center of which was a hole about six inches in diameter. The shield was held by tight loops to his left arm, while in his right hand he grasped his heavy knife. Bristling with spears and arrows, the great cat hurled itself upon the shield, and down went Chal-az upon his back with the shield entirely covering him. The tiger clawed and bit at the heavy rhinoceros hide with which the shield was faced, while Chal-az, through the round hole in the shield's center, plunged his blade repeatedly into the vitals of the savage animal. Doubtless the battle would have gone to Chal-az even though I had not interfered; but the moment that I saw a clean opening, with no Kro-lu beyond, I raised my rifle and killed the beast.

When Chal-az arose, he glanced at the sky and remarked that it looked like rain. The others already had resumed the march toward the village. The incident was closed. For some unaccountable reason the whole thing reminded me of a friend who once shot a cat in his backyard. For three weeks he talked of nothing else.

It was almost dark when we reached the village--a large palisaded enclosure of several hundred leaf-thatched huts set in groups of from two to seven. The huts were hexagonal in form, and where grouped were joined so that they resembled the cells of a bee-hive. One hut meant a warrior and his mate, and each additional hut in a group indicated an additional female. The palisade which surrounded the village was of logs set close together and woven into a solid wall with tough creepers which were planted at their base and trained to weave in and out to bind the logs together. The logs slanted outward at an angle of about thirty degrees, in which position they were held by shorter logs embedded in the ground at right angles to them and with their upper ends supporting the longer pieces a trifle above their centers of equilibrium. Along the top of the palisade sharpened stakes had been driven at all sorts of angles.

The only opening into the inclosure was through a small aperture three feet wide and three feet high, which was closed from the inside by logs about six feet long laid horizontally, one upon another, between the inside face of the palisade and two other braced logs which paralleled the face of the wall upon the inside.

As we entered the village, we were greeted by a not unfriendly crowd of curious warriors and women, to whom Chal-az generously explained the service we had rendered him, whereupon they showered us with the most well-meant attentions, for Chal-az, it seemed, was a most popular member of the tribe. Necklaces of lion and tiger-teeth, bits of dried meat, finely tanned hides and earthen pots, beautifully decorated, they thrust upon us until we were loaded down, and all the while Al-tan glared balefully upon us, seemingly jealous of the attentions heaped upon us because we had served Chal-az.

At last we reached a hut that they set apart for us, and there we cooked our meat and some vegetables the women brought us, and had milk from cows--the first I had had in Caspak--and cheese from the milk of wild goats, with honey and thin bread made from wheat flour of their own grinding, and grapes and the fermented juice of grapes. It was quite the most wonderful meal I had eaten since I quit the Toreador and Bowen J. Tyler's colored chef, who could make pork-chops taste like chicken, and chicken taste like heaven.