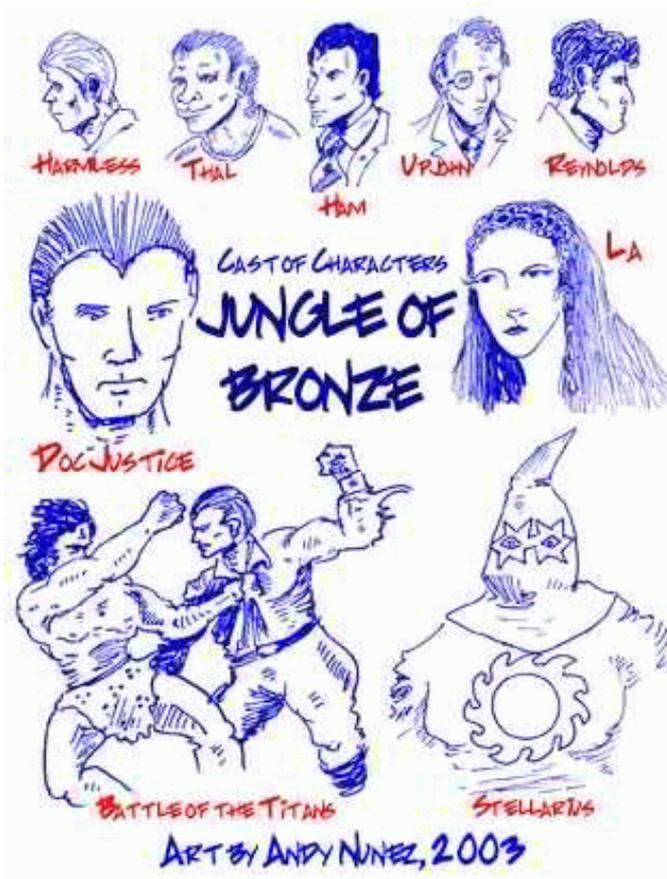


Jungle of Bronze

ANDY NUNEZ

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CHAPTER ONE BAGGED IN BALTIMORE

The whole business began in Baltimore, Maryland, a pretty big city by most standards, and seemed innocent enough. A lady and her lawyer sat down to go over the sale of some property, an event that was occurring on a daily basis around the globe, and still occurs, because nobody has figured out how to get along without lawyers.

The lady in question was a knockout blonde named Mrs. Clayton. She was downtown at a real

estate office not far from the Enoch Pratt Free Library—and maybe a rifle shot from Edgar Allen Poe's grave. In a room set aside for closing deals, she was sitting at a table with the real estate agent and her lawyer. The real estate agent had a nice office with well-polished furniture and some decent prints of duck hunters and sailboats. Baltimore is close to the Chesapeake Bay, and a lot of those two things go on there. He was dressed in a respectable, if not flashy suit. Mrs. Clayton had her hair combed straight down until it fell with a little bob at her shoulders and was dressed in a fashionable pink dress with matching hat and shoes.

Her lawyer, though, put them both to shame. His clothing was enough to turn heads at a wooden Indian factory. He was a slender fellow, though his shoulders were fairly broad. His hair was shiny black and combed back away from his noble brow. He was wearing a black cutaway coat with a fine pinstripe, a fawn vest and razor-pressed gray pants. His narrow feet were encased in Italian leather shoes and spats. Against his chair was a black cane upon which rested an equally black derby. His shirt was a rich champagne color and a pearl stickpin that matched his cufflinks set off his Ascot. Supple leather gloves lay in his lap as his long, manicured fingers went over the paperwork.

He glanced at Mrs. Clayton with glittering obsidian eyes, and his mobile mouth turned into a friendly smile as he noted her general boredom.

"You are sure you want to go through with this?" he asked in a voice so silky that unaware people could be entranced.

"Yes, Mr. Rivers," she said, quietly, but firmly. "I have only been holding on to it because of sentimental value. When my father passed away, nobody lived there, so its really been going to seed these years."

"But, this is your childhood home," Rivers pointed out. "Will you never wish to return?"

"I alternate my time between London and East Africa," she told him. "I have large estates in both locations that need constant attention. No, I will have no use for the Baltimore house. Are the papers in order?"

"Yes," he revealed. "Sign where the 'X' is, and the deal is closed."

The real estate agent, who began sweating profusely when the lawyer had urged consideration suddenly smiled, already banking his commission on the sale. It was a large house in a good neighborhood near Johns Hopkins University. The former owner was the deceased Prof. Archimedes Q. Porter, who had had a lot of alphabet sets behind his name.

While Mrs. Clayton used the lawyer's gold fountain pen to sign her name, trouble started. No sooner had she lifted her pen from the document than the door burst open and three men armed with pistols broke into the room. Beyond them, in the outer office, stood a fourth man holding a pistol on the secretary.

"Nobody's got to get hurt," one of the men said. "We just want the dame."

"Holy Smoke!" another gunman ripped. "You see who's with her, Eighty-Six?"

"Shut your biscuit hole!" the addressed thug snapped. "So what? We got the drop on him. Lady, you come quietly and your friends here don't need to find out if their insurance is paid up."

"This is an outrage!" Mrs. Clayton complained. "I would expect this in Chicago..."

"Have it your way." The gunman called Eighty-Six pointed his pistol at the lawyer. He was a huge man with shoulders so broad he barely fit the doorframe. The .38 in his fist looked like a child's cap pistol by comparison. "This bird's nothing but trouble anyway."

"Very well," Mrs. Clayton relented. "I'll go." She got up, carrying her purse, and walked toward the men who surrounded her while keeping their guns on the lawyer and agent.

Eighty-six fished something out of his pocket. "Here's something to keep you from tailing us," he grinned, and tossed a metal sphere into the room. He quickly closed the door.

"Down!" cried the lawyer. He barely had time to upend the table so that it was between him and sphere. Then he threw himself flat. The real estate agent tumbled out of his chair and was sitting on the floor with his legs over the seat when the sphere went off. There wasn't much force to the explosion, but the room was lit up as if a miniature sun had been born in that instant.

Rivers saw the glare against the wall and put his hands over his eyes. After a few seconds, he glanced and saw it had died down. He got up and brushed himself off. He looked at the agent to see that the man was rubbing his eyes and bawling.

"I'm blind!" the guy was screaming. "The light! It was like a giant flashbulb."

"Just quiet down!" Rivers clipped. "It's all over. Sit still and I'll get help."

He grabbed his cane and looked out the window. He was just in time to see the four thugs bundle Mrs. Clayton into a touring car and take off. There was a shoeshine boy on the street.

"Get the tag of that car!" Rivers hollered. "I'll give you a dollar!"

The boy grinned and ran far enough to make sure of the tag and came back to his shine box. Rivers went into the reception room and found the secretary huddled under her desk.

"Your boss needs a doctor," he said, pointing into the meeting room. He could see that the bomb had burned a hole in the carpet and left a half-moon shaped black smudge on the tabletop. "Get him some wet cloths for his eyes, and call the police." After that, Rivers ran into the street. The shoeshine boy was working on a customer. He looked up and grinned the same way he had earlier.

"Got my dollar, mister?" he asked, not missing a stroke of his cloth.

Rivers fished in his pocket and pulled out a Peace Dollar. Before the boy could grab it, he snatched it high. "Got my number?"

The boy did. The two exchanged goods and Rivers went to the nearest public phone and rang the operator.

"This is an emergency. Connect me to the Chief of Police." He waited while that took place before speaking again.

A man's voice came on the line. "Sergeant Duffy."

"This is Brigadier General Hamilton Harley Rivers. Is the Chief available? Thanks. Hello, Chief, glad you remember me. I need an all points bulletin for a gray roadster with the following number." He rattled off the numerals. "There has been a kidnaping. A blonde woman named Jane Clayton. She has rooms at the Tremont. I'll give you the details later. Do you know a good autogyro for hire? Great, I'll call you when I get there. Thanks."

Rivers hung up the phone and hailed a cab. He gave the hack jockey the address supplied by the Chief and the buggy took off. Twenty minutes later, the taxi pulled up at a small hanger out in the Essex neighborhood. Two crop dusters and an autogyro sat beside a field of hard packed clay. Rivers got out, gave the driver a decent tip and ducked inside a small office to one side of the hangar doors. The fellow sitting inside behind a battered desk was dressed in the latest Hollywood aviator gear: leather jacket, boots, the works. Rivers looked into the man's hard blue eyes and knew, though, that the glitz was for the rubes.

Rivers' nod was his introduction. "I want to hire you and your autogyro. You were recommended by the Baltimore Chief of Police."

"Sure, and why not?" the man said with a thick brogue. "He's after being my cousin, after all. 'Camel' Callahan, at your service."

Rivers took the proffered hand. "I need to call your cousin, then, plus one more, a long distance call."

"Well, now, it can't hurt," Callahan agreed. "Since me cousin said I was the best, then you have to know I'm not cheap, so we'll just add the wee charge to your bill."

Rivers yanked out his wallet and produced a hundred dollar bill. "I hope this will suffice."

"Sure, will you be wanting a steak dinner to go with that?" Callahan snickered, grabbing the note and stashing it in his breast pocket. "Make your calls while I get my egg beater ready to go. There's the phone." He grabbed his helmet and went out whistling.

Rivers grabbed the earpiece and gave its cradle a couple of clicks. He soon got hold of the Chief. "I've got your car," he said. "It's out of my jurisdiction, heading toward New York. Gassed up in Dundalk and headed right up the pike. I've called the State boys to be on the lookout, but, well, they're only so good."

"By Jove, good work," Rivers cheered. "I'm going after them."

He hung up and made another connection, coincidentally to a New York number. His demeanor changed when the person on the other end answered. "No, I haven't robbed any widows or orphans," he gritted. "I'm in a hurry. Somebody kidnapped my client, Jane Clayton. One of them was named Eighty-Six. They used some sort of flash bomb. Why don't you use that little nub above your eyes and call the Baltimore Police Department and see if they'll send you a sample of the residue. I'm following their car, and it's headed your way. No, they are not driving an ambulance!" He slammed

down the earpiece and trotted out to the field. He was just in time to see Callahan moving the wheel chocks away. Callahan waved him inside and started the motor.

"By the way, this could be dangerous," Rivers said as he strapped in.

"You think I'm some dumb Pollack from Highlandtown?" Callahan called over the whine of the starter. "You come from me cousin, so I know you're not after sightseeing the harbor. Wait a minute!" His blue eyes narrowed behind his goggles. "I know you. You're—" The end of his statement was lost as the whirlybird roared to life.

* * *

Jane Porter Clayton inwardly fumed at being abducted, but kept her demeanor calm. She wasn't sure how much the men knew about her, so if they thought she was a shrinking violet, so much the better. She realized the contents of her purse carried nothing deadlier than a nail file, so she would play along for the time being. She sat in the back squeezed against one door while the massive Eighty-six covered her. Her reminded her of some gorillas of her acquaintance in Africa, all this brute needed was more hair.

One of the fellows up front, a guy with a long horse face and buckteeth, half-turned while another drove. Since there were three up front, they were squeezed also. "Hey, Eighty-Six!" he brayed. "This sure beats tossing drunks out of bars, don't it?"

"Any day of the week, pal," Eighty-Six replied.

Apparently, the crook had obtained his sobriquet performing those duties, Eighty-Six-ing people for the management. "This is a cinch. No muscle, just wave a heater. OK, sister, we're going for a ride."

"Where?" Mrs. Clayton asked. "And I'm not your sister."

"That's swell by me, lady," Eight-Six smirked. "We're going to a little place out in the woods. The boss wants a word with you."

"Who? And what about?"

The first question was ignored. "How the hell should I know? He said to put the bag on you and I did."

Mrs. Clayton wasn't acquainted with the area anymore, but a glance showed she was heading roughly in the direction of Pennsylvania.

"What about that bloke back at the land office?" snorted the horse-faced crook. "He's bad juju."

"I ain't worried about him," Eighty-Six growled.

"Yeah, but you know who he works for!"

"I tell you I ain't worried!" Eighty-Six repeated. "If he snoops around the Bright Ones'll take care of him and his boss, too. Now, shut up and turn around before I turn those tombstone teeth of yours into swinging doors."

The rest of the trip was spent in silence. Jane Clayton took note as best she could of her surroundings. When the large car pulled off on to a side road, she felt confident she could find her way back to the turnpike. They traveled the road about ten miles until they came to a two-story farmhouse. A big elm tree grew up beside the house and there were some dilapidated sheds out back housing

rusted farm equipment. The windows of the house were boarded up and the place looked on the edge of foreclosure.

Eighty-Six escorted Jane from the car as he and his men took her inside the house. They took Jane upstairs and put her in a room with a musty-smelling couch, a table and chairs. Outside the window she could see the thick branches of the elm.

Eighty-six turned to the horse-faced man. "You watch her," he said. "We'll spell you later. If she gives you grief," his smile was ugly, "let her know who's in charge. The boss didn't say she had to be pretty as long as she can talk." He pointed at Jane. "You try any funny stuff and we tie you to a chair. That might just be the start of how nasty we can be, so play nice, sister."

Jane sat down on the couch and saw that mice had chewed on it. "I'm not your sister." She said to Eighty-Six's back as he left. Her guard just laughed. She took off her high-heeled shoes and lay back on the couch. She need time to think.

* * *

Rivers and Callahan were in the air following the turnpike and would have missed the side road if not for the plume of dust that had not yet settled. The turnpike was not terribly busy at midday, so it was logical to assume that the kidnappers might have left the highway and that this smudge was theirs. They curved around to follow the side road and came upon the farmhouse. Rivers recognized the touring car. The thugs and Mrs. Clayton were

just going inside. He made hand signals to Callahan to find a spot to land where they wouldn't be noticed. There was a nearby field behind a stand of trees. Callahan put the autogyro down there, switching it off.

"Stay here," Rivers cautioned. "This could get ugly."

"Not on your life!" Callahan protested. "It can't be any worse than some of the brouhaha's I got into dog fighting with the Flying Circus. Let's go."

They scouted the house and found the best approach was from a side that had some close sheds for concealment and an overgrown hedge. This was the side opposite the elm tree. They scampered and crawled through the brush and were in position behind the hedge when hell started breaking loose inside.

* * *

Jane picked up her purse and retrieved her nail file. She started working on her nails even though they already seemed perfect. The horse-faced guard watched her with interest, making no secret that he found her luscious form appealing. Jane decided to throw him a few sweet glances, which made him grin, even though he still had a firm grip on his pistol.

"Say," she said, "why don't you be a dear and open that window a crack. It's kind of stuffy in here." She jerked her head in the direction of the window that overlooked the elm tree. The branches were so close they seemed to be clawing at the side

of the house.

"Sure thing, doll," the crook agreed. He got up and unlocked the windowsill. He tried to pull up the sash but it resisted. He put the pistol down on the ledge and used both hands. The sash flew up and he staggered back a bit. That was what Jane had been waiting for.

She grabbed up one of her shoes, holding it by the toe. When the crook saw her, he tried to grab for his pistol, but Jane was faster. She put the heel of her shoe squarely in his eye. Before he could do anything more than grab his eye and squall, she took her nail file and jammed it into the man's eardrum until it snapped off from the force. Without waiting to see what happened next, she snatched off her hose and crawled out the window.

* * *

Rivers and Callahan heard the man scream. Rivers then opened up his coat and pulled out a gun from a concealed holster. Callahan gaped. This was no ordinary gun, but an oversized machine pistol of some sort. Rivers snapped a banana shaped clip into the pistol and made ready to rush the house. They could easily hear the crook's voices and people running up the steps.

"The dame's gone!" One voice said. "She socked Larry in the eye with her shoe and stabbed him in the ear. I think he's a goner."

"Great!" Rivers recognized this voice as belonging to Eighty-Six. "She can't be far. Go out and find her!"

Rivers watched the back door and soon the remaining three crooks burst out, pistols ready. He

fired his pistol at the first man. It made a deep, bull-fiddle roar that sent them scattering. His target, however, went but a few steps, then decided to lie down as if he had fallen asleep standing up. The other two rushed to the car, got in and took off. Rivers fired the gun a few more times, but the bullets just seemed to splatter against the windshield. He made sure that the car was out of range, then got up and rushed the house, Callahan close behind. Upstairs, they found Larry dead, Mrs. Clayton's purse and stockings, plus the open window. Rivers looked out, seeing only the Elm tree. There was no way anybody could have climbed down the side of the house. Callahan came up beside him.

"Bejaisus," he swore. "Sure, and she must have grown wings. Only one person could have shinnied down that tree, and he lives in Africa."

"Well," Rivers pointed out, "he does have a wife."

They went downstairs and found the fellow Rivers had shot still on the ground. He had no mark on him, as if he was just snoozing in the yard. Callahan was puzzled.

"That cannon of yours should have blown a hole the size of Dublin in this blackguard," he stated. "He's clean as a whistle and sleeping like a baby."

"Anesthetic bullet," Rivers revealed. "Let's get him to the gyro and get going."

They found the car ditched a few miles up the turnpike, and tracks where they had met another vehicle. Not knowing its identity, they flew back to the hangar. Rivers asked to use the phone again, to

which Callahan readily agreed. He propped up the still sleeping crook and trussed him while Rivers got his connection.

"James Justice, Jr., please," he said into the mouthpiece.

CHAPTER TWO THE DOC IS IN

Most of the world's population that read newspapers or listened to the radio had heard of James Justice, Jr., better known as Doc Justice. Raised from childhood to be the ultimate protector of civilization, he was Solomon, Galahad, Lincoln, and Edison all rolled into one. He had amazing knowledge and seemingly unlimited wealth that he used to right wrongs and stop criminals no matter how powerful they were. Using five trusted aides, including Rivers, there were few parts of the earth that Doc Justice had not visited to dispense his own brand of justice.

Doc Justice arrived at the same Essex landing field used by "Camel" Callahan. He flew an autogyro that put Callahan's to shame. It was a bigger job, tricked out with fancy sighting equipment and able to carry twice the capacity of Callahan's bus. With him, Doc Justice brought Lt. Col. Anson Anders. When the two alighted from the autogyro, Callahan, for all his war experience, had to stare.

Doc Justice usually caused a stir wherever he went. He stood well over six feet tall, but his powerful frame was so symmetrical that he didn't look that tall until he stood next to somebody

shorter. His skin was a deep bronze where his clothes didn't cover it, and his hair was only a shade or two lighter, combed back so closely that it looked more like a skullcap than real hair. His eyes were the most arresting things, though. They were like pools of golden flakes, and they swirled around like bits of gold in the bottom of a gold pan that the 49'ers might have used.

Lt. Col. Anders was better known as "Thal ", a playful, though accurate take on "Anders" and "Neanderthal" and it was easy to see why. Anson Anders stood only a bit above five feet, and was nearly as wide. His bullet head didn't look like it had the capacity for more than a walnut-sized brain, but he was recognized as one of the world's foremost chemists. Besides his size, his arms were also unusual. They hung down almost to his knees and were covered with thick red hair. His eyes were small and sunk into pits of gristle above a nose that looked like a hastily applied dab of putty.

Rivers had taken the liberty of arranging a cab as soon as he learned that Doc was coming to Baltimore personally. When Thal saw him, his face split with a wide crooked grin.

"Hiya, Ham!" He called in a squeaky voice that would have better fitted an eight year old. "We came to bail you out, shyster."

Rivers was called "Ham" after an unfortunate incident in the Great War when he had been falsely accused of improperly requisitioning some pork from the French commissary—and because "Hamilton" was such a pretentious mouthful. He and Thal were the two aides of Doc who were usually avail-

able. The other three were Major Harmony J. Obert, an electrical wizard, Col. John Reynolds, an engineering expert, and William Harris Upjohn, one of the leading lights in archaeology and geology.

Doc Justice fished out an equipment case from the storage area of his autogyro. He stowed it in the cab's trunk, put Thal up front with the cabbie, and had the captured thug placed with Ham in the rear seat of the taxi.

"I'll catch up to you," he said to them in tones that would make nine out of ten women swoon, the tenth being dead. "I'm going to get Callahan to show me the farmhouse. Maybe I can turn up Mrs. Clayton."

"Sure, and its an honor to fly you over there," Callahan said with a grin.

Instead, Doc waved him to his own autogyro and Callahan found himself the passenger, shouting directions. He marveled at Doc's craft, which was only half as loud as his own, and was fitted with numerous devices that Callahan had only read about in *Popular Mechanics* or *Astounding*. The Man of Bronze flew them to the site and they landed close to the house. Callahan showed Doc where Mrs. Clayton had escaped. The dead thug was still lying on the floor, now the object of flies. Doc paid him little heed other than to check his pulse. He was more interested in the window.

From a hidden vest, he produced a small vial of powder and sprinkled it on the windowsill. He then examined the results with a lens. His expression never changed, and Callahan watched with admiration as the Bronze Man moved with precision

through a series of examinations, finally looking at the tree branch. For a brief second, his expression changed, then Callahan heard it. The noise was faint at first, but grew. It seemed to have no source, and was a trilling sound. Had any of Doc's aides been present, they would have instantly recognized it as the sound Doc made when confronted with something unusual.

Callahan thought Doc's next move was equally unusual. He stripped off his jacket, shoes and socks, and then climbed out the window and onto the tree branch.

"Bring my clothes downstairs, please," he asked Callahan.

Callahan watched Doc climb down the tree in a manner he would have thought reserved for the homely chemist Thal, then rushed down the steps and found Doc examining the ground under the tree with his lens. He pointed to the dirt.

"She climbed out the window, down the tree and ran toward the woods, using the buildings as cover," he said, and Callahan could see a faint footprint where Doc pointed. "I want you to take my ship and follow me until I signal you. Stay high so you won't disturb anything with the rotors. You don't mind flying my bus, do you?"

"Faith, and I'd take on Adolf and Benny the Moose, too for the chance," Callahan breathed. "I'll do as you say. This woman must be a regular Amazon."

"She was underestimated by her captors," Doc explained. "They won't do that again. I must find her before they try another kidnapping."

Without another word, he ran along toward the woods in a half-bent fashion. When he got to the first trees, he leaped and caught the lowest bough of a tree and disappeared into the branches. Callahan decided to do some running himself and got back to the autogyro. He got off the ground and just did manage to see Doc amid the greenery. Doc was jumping from limb to limb like a bronze squirrel. Callahan got dizzy just thinking about the chances of death that would come with one slip. Doc moved unerringly, and was soon at the main road. He stopped, looked about, then waved to Callahan, who landed and picked him up. Doc got in and dressed.

"Let's get over to Police Headquarters," he said.

"You lost her," Callahan stated.

"In a sense. She got a ride into town."

"Somebody picked her up?"

"Right," Doc said. "If you saw a beautiful blonde woman standing barefoot by the side of the road with her thumb out, what would you do?"

Callahan laughed and stayed in a good mood until they got to his cousin's offices. There, Doc paid him for his help and gave him cab fare back to his airstrip. When he walked in the building, he was recognized immediately and taken to the Chief's office. There, he found the Chief, his two aides, and the thug, who was now handcuffed to a chair. The Chief was looking out the window when Doc came in. The window had an excellent view of the Shot Tower.

"Doc!" Ham called. "Did you find Mrs. Clayton?"

"Not yet," Doc admitted. "She's a resourceful

woman. I don't think she's in any immediate danger. What about the prisoner?"

"He's not saying a word," said the Chief. "I'm booking him on kidnapping, assault, and attempted murder. That real estate agent's blindness is going to be temporary, but he will never have full vision again."

"I analyzed the soot from the bomb," Thal piped in. "Looks like it was made from sodium, magnesium, phosphorus, and some other chemicals that make a lot of light. It was like letting off a flare inside that room."

"Odd weapon for a kidnapper," Doc remarked. "What about it?"

He stared at the prisoner, who squirmed under Doc's gaze.

"I don't know nothing!" The man protested.

Doc continued to look at the prisoner. The thug looked away at first, but he began to look back into Doc's gold-flecked eyes as Doc continued to speak to him in soothing tones.

"We know you aren't the head person," Doc told him. "That was your friend Eighty-Six. Now, there are a couple of ways to approach this. I can give you to the Chief, and he can let you rot in a cell until you confess, I can give you to my associate Mr. Anders, who would probably put a lot of stress on your bones and muscles, or you can confess now." Thal cracked his large knuckles for effect and grinned, making his homely face look ghastly.

"Eighty-six didn't say much of nothing about what was going on," the crook said, growing calmer. "He just said we had to follow the Clayton dame and

nab her. We staked out the building after she went in, saw there weren't many people, and jumped in. Eighty-six used some kind of bomb the boss gave him and that was that."

Doc's gaze continued to bore into the man, and the rest in the room could see that he was slowly bringing the thug under some sort of hypnotic influence.

"Why did your boss want Mrs. Clayton?" Doc demanded.

"He said she knew where some treasure was located, and that he was going to get it and rub out anybody who knew its location," the man said, his head swaying a little.

"Who is your boss?" Doc asked.

"Stellarius of the Bright Ones!" the man snapped. "They can't be stopped. You can't do nothing against them, not even you."

"Why?" Doc wanted to know.

Before the man could answer, Ham rapped, "It's getting awfully hot in here!"

He was right. The room's temperature was rising. The Chief looked around.

"Look at the window!" He hollered.

They stared. The window had turned into a wavering golden sheet, emanating heat with growing intensity.

"Down!" Doc yelled.

They dove and the window suddenly blew in, splattering hot, molten glass inward. A bright cylinder of energy thick as a man's arm shot through the smoldering hole, striking the handcuffed thug and causing his clothes to burst into

flame. His screams were horrible. The chair caught fire and the air was full of the stink of roasting flesh. In no more than five seconds, the beam winked out. Doc crawled to the window and took a quick peep. The Chief grabbed up his phone and called for the fire hose. Thal and Ham used their coats to try to put out the burning crook.

Two cops dragged a brass nozzled fire hose into the room and let it go. Thal and Ham jumped back to avoid being drenched.

"That beam came from the Shot Tower!" Doc informed them.

"I'll send a squad," the Chief offered and yelled to the two impromptu firemen to do just that. They packed up the hose and rushed to obey. Doc and his men examined the thug. His steaming body looked like it had taken a ride in the fiery furnace without benefit of heavenly aid. His upper torso was charred so badly that there was little left of his head except a grinning skull.

Doc ordered Thal to get his portable chemical lab and the two made a series of tests. While they worked, the squad returned empty handed.

"The place was empty," the squad leader admitted. "We found some queer marks where something heavy had been dragged around, but whoever they were, they packed up fast and lit out of there. We're making inquiries."

"These killers have some big medicine," Thal observed. "That beam looked like the hottest flashlight I ever saw. It would take thousands of degrees of heat to char a body like that in such a short time."

"Mrs. Clayton isn't safe," Doc noted. "Come on, brothers, we have got to get to her hotel."

It was a short drive from Police Headquarters on Baltimore St. to the Tremont Arms. Doc and his men took a cab while the Chief called for backup. No sooner did they exit the cab than gunfire blossomed from above. Bullets whined and nicked concrete from the pavement. Thal made a deep coughing sound and went over like a giant had slapped him. He managed to get behind a mail drop. Seeing Thal in trouble enraged Ham. He yanked out his oversized automatic and found another clip to jam into it. He took general aim and let fly with it.

The effect was terrific. A string of explosions struck the façade of the old hotel, knocking off chips of brick and shattering windows. The gunfire ceased, giving Ham a chance to check Thal out. Thal was on his knees, looking like he had been too many times on a roller coaster. There was a .38 size hole in his shirt that revealed a shiny glimmer.

"Gotta figure out how to put more padding on these bulletproof shirts," he gritted. "That one almost cracked a rib by the feel of it."

"The vest is only for show on you anyhow," Ham retorted. "Your ugly hairy hide would have turned just about any bullet."

"Inside!" came Doc's voice.

They charged the building, which was still wreathed in smoke from the barrage of explosive bullets that Ham had discharged from his super firer. Ham replaced them with mercy shells as he ran. Thal winced, got to his feet and made good time despite his pain. People were cowering behind

chairs in the lobby and they cheered as they recognized Doc. Doc peeped over the front desk to find the clerk hiding there.

"Which room is Mrs. Clayton in?" Doc demanded.

"5-C," the clerk stammered.

Super firer in one bronze fist, Doc vaulted the steps three at a time while his aides scrambled to keep up. Sirens could be heard approaching. As Doc rounded the stairwell to the fifth floor, he was greeted by a hail of gunfire. Doc ducked as the bullets bit plaster and lathing, covering him with dust. He dipped into his equipment vest and found a glass globe not much bigger than a shooter. He shouted something in an unknown language and flung the globe up the landing. It hit with a pop.

Doc then held his breath. He turned to see that his aides had done the same. He had warned them in Mayan, a language that all his aides were fluent in, so that they could communicate without anybody being able to translate. After about three minutes, he exhaled and continued up. This time he met no resistance. At the fifth floor landing, he found three men lying on the floor, revolvers and shotguns beside them. Doc could see that the door to Room 5-C was open.

"Mrs. Clayton!" Doc rapped. "It's James Justice, Jr."

His men came up behind him when he saw not Mrs. Clayton, but a huge, broad shouldered man. The man rolled a billiard ball sized object down the hall carpeting and then ducked back in and slammed the door.

"Back!" Doc ordered.

Few people can think and act with the speed of Doc Justice. He was trained from birth to make instant judgments, to calculate complex operations in split seconds. He realized what was coming at him from Ham's description. He swiftly grabbed the end of the runner and yanked upward. The carpet tacks gave way with a ripping sound and he flung the carpet up in a curling roll. It stopped the ball's approach and started it rolling back. It had not gone far when it detonated. The brilliant explosion was partially blocked by the carpet, long enough for Doc and his aides to get down below the landing. The hallway above them turned bright as the ball erupted in lightning white flame.

The light was so bright that once it had died away, the shadow of the landing rail remained etched against the far wall. The carpet was afire and Thal and Ham had to strip the unconscious gangsters of their coats to beat out the flames. Doc raced ahead and smashed open the door to 5-C with one well-placed heel. Crouching low, he dove inside.

The room was empty of human habitation.

Doc saw an open window with a fire escape outside. He rushed to it, peered at the street below. He could see the large man, whom he decided was Eighty-Six from Ham's report, and two others jam into a black coupe and take off. While he was relieved to see that Mrs. Clayton wasn't with them, he wondered where she was. He stared at the fire escape until something caught his eye. He plucked it out of a joint in the fire escape where it had

caught. It was a piece of pink cloth, identical to what Ham described as Mrs. Clayton's garment color. He looked up. The fire escape was empty, too, all the way to the roof.

Thal and Ham, once the fire was out, burst into the room and were brought up short by a familiar sound. The melodious trilling filled the room. Doc stuck his head back inside and faced them.

"Brothers," he said. "I am beginning to wonder if Mrs. Clayton really needs saving or not."

CHAPTER THREE THE BRIGHT ONES

A search of the room found it devoid of Mrs. Clayton's belongings.

"We'll ask for a report if she shows up at any train stations, ports, or airfields," Doc decided. "In the meantime, we'll get back home and see if we can turn up anything on these mysterious Bright Ones."

Doc turned the unconscious thugs over to the Chief, who promised his full cooperation to share any information he gathered. He and his men went back to their New York headquarters in the autogyro. Once at their skyscraper home, Doc called the rest of his aides together and they sifted through the ashes of their recent encounter with the mysterious gang called the Bright Ones. Besides Thal and Ham were Doc's three other aides. First was Colonel John Reynolds, known as Reynolds. He was such a sourpuss that people were always trying to cheer him up. His favorite pastime was knocking

holes in doors with his quart-sized fists. The next was Major Harmony J. Obert, who got his nickname of "Harmless" because his actions delay advancing Huns during the war were anything expect harmless. He was a small sickly fellow that looked like he had been raised in a basement with mushrooms. Undertakers constantly followed him around, rubbing their hands at the prospect of business. In reality, he was tough as nails and could whip his weight in wildcats. He was an electrical genius and responsible for many innovations in dynamo construction. The fifth was William Harris Upjohn, or Johnny for short. This tall skinny fellow always looked like he bought his clothes and then went on a crash diet the way they hung on him. He was an expert on geology and archaeology, and never used little words when he could find a huge one to take its place.

"We don't have much to go on," Doc said to his aides and they pored over newspapers, maps, and made telephone calls. "The Bright Ones seem to have a penchant for things that make a lot of light as well as heat. The beam that cut down that crook was more concentrated than sunlight magnified. Their flash bombs seem to be made of common enough materials, though in refined combinations."

"Doc," Harmless spoke, "I've been on the line with General Electric. They say that they've been working on a theory of light amplification using electromagnetic waves."

"See if you can get more details," Doc ordered. "I am familiar with the theory, but it's the ability to focus the amplified light that has been the sticking

point."

A phone rang by Thal . He picked it up. He listened for a few minutes and a wide grin split his anthropoid face before he returned the receiver to its cradle.

"Well, we got a line on the Clayton dame," he said. "She showed up at the airfield in Lakehurst. She leaves in about six hours on the Graf Zeppelin."

"Good riddance, I say," Ham snorted. "If she's on that, she's fairly safe."

"The Bright Ones wanted her, though," Doc reminded him. "Question is, why?"

"Holy Cow!" Reynolds boomed. "Listen to the radio, Doc!"

He cranked up the dial on the large floor model. Harmless had modified it so that there was little static. "...received this news flash," came the announcer's harried but cultured voice. "We have received a phone call here at the station by someone claiming to be Stellarius of the Bright Ones. He predicts that at midnight tonight, dawn will rise in Chattanooga."

"Six hours from now," Ham said, glancing at his watch. "Coincidence? It might be a diversion to grab Mrs. Clayton." The phone at his elbow sounded and he snatched at it eagerly. "Really! By Jove, good work. There'll be something at the office for you." He put down the phone and rubbed his hands. "That was a fellow from the Pittsburgh airfield. He said a fellow matching Eighty-Six's description chartered a plane for himself and four others. It was heading south."

"That means Mrs. Clayton is probably safe,"

Doc reasoned. "However, Johnny, you will get a ticket on board the Graf and keep an eye on her."

"I acquiesce indubitably," Johnny agreed.

"Good idea, Doc," Thal said. "She's too much woman for the shyster to handle anyway."

"Indeed, one look at you, and she probably would think she was in darkest Africa captured by a gorilla with the intent of ravishment," Ham retorted.

"Phooey, you ambulance chaser," Thal carped. "The idea of gorillas ravishing humans is about as real as, as..."

"Elmo of the apes," Ham finished for him.

"Yeah, him."

"No more time to argue, brothers," Doc broke in. "Thal and Ham will go with me to Chattanooga and see if we can spot that plane. Reynolds, you call Pittsburgh back and get the plane's identification. Harmless, you stay on the electromagnetic angle."

Doc, Thal and Ham replenished their stocks of bullets for their guns. Then, Doc hit a secret switch on a column revealing a lozenge-shaped car with straps. They climbed into the tight compartment and Doc pushed a button, sending the car down its tube in a rush of compressed air. The pneumatic tube shot them down the skyscraper and out to the waterfront, where they emerged, somewhat shaken, inside a large warehouse. Outside, faded letters proclaimed it to belong to the Hidalgo Trading Company.

The Hidalgo Trading Company was Doc Justice.

Doc flipped a light switch by the tube entrance. A huge room was revealed. It looked like a rich

man's dream garage. Several planes sat wing-tip to wing-tip, from speed jobs that were almost all engine to tri-motor transports. Doc's autogyro nestled among them. Several wheeled vehicles were parked as well: Sleek roadsters, touring cars, and panel trucks. Finally, snug against an interior dock were a speedboat, a cabin yacht and a full size submarine. Hanging above them all, almost lost in the ceiling beyond the hanging incandescent lights was a glittering bronze dirigible. Doc chose one of the tri-motor planes and got it going. Thal threw switches at a panel inside Doc's giant storage hangar. A massive door slid back, revealing a long stretch of dock.

Props turned over easily as the three engines purred to life. Doc had built the mooring docks to an exact width so that he could take off right out of the Trading Company. He also had them reinforced to bear the weight of the aircraft. His latest invention was something he was going to turn over to the army eventually. Doc had been in touch with Robert Goddard and their gab-fests gave him the inspiration for two fat bottle-shaped tubes under the fuselage. After Ham and Thal were securely aboard and all pre-flight checks made, Doc powered up the plane. Halfway down the dock, he flipped a switch on his control panel. The dock was obviously not long enough for him to take off with a plane this heavy. There was a low roar, barely audible above the engines. The two bottles under the fuselage suddenly came to flaming life. They spat pale fire and suddenly the big tri-motor seemed to leap forward. It plunged off the dock, dipped a bit, and

then sailed gracefully over the harbor and into the night sky.

"Howlin' Calamities!" Thal grinned, even though he was sweating a little. "Those jet assist bottles really worked."

"They did the trick," Doc agreed, checking the radio beacons as he turned the plane south. "Air-craft carriers use steam catapults to propel planes off their decks. This does the same thing. The chambers mix oxygen with specially refined fuel in a sort of controlled explosion. I think we could get more lift if we could super-cool the oxygen until it became liquefied."

"You could probably use lower grade fuel, too," Thal guessed.

"I understand the Germans are working on the possibility."

The tri-motor job winged south and slightly west. They passed back over Baltimore, and in about four hours they were circling over Chattanooga. For those not from that state, Chattanooga is an old and interesting city. Nestled in the hills, it is like being in the bottom of a bowl, with steep mountain sides all around, most prominently Look-out Mountain, site of the Battle in the Clouds during the Civil War, and currently home to the region's wealthy, including heirs to the Coca Cola formula.

Along the way, Doc had received radio traffic from Reynolds. He got 86's plane's ID, and passed it along to ground authorities when he got in radio range. He also got word that Johnny had successfully boarded the Graf Zeppelin and was expected to

leave on time. Doc heard from the authorities in Chattanooga just before landing. A plane bearing the same ID had landed a short while ago just over the line in Georgia. He put the plane down at the local airport in time to see a black sedan roar up. It came to within a hundred feet of the tri-motor as it taxied to a stop.

Doc secured the plane, motioning for his men to grab their super firers and exit on the side opposite the car, in case of trouble. Using the plane's wheels for cover, they saw a single occupant exit the car. He was a tall fellow, conservatively dressed, tanned and sporting a noticeable bulge at his left armpit. The fact that he walked up to the plane like the ground was covered with snakes showed he had a lot of respect. Doc revealed himself and approached. The man stopped, because he hadn't realized that Doc had even gotten out of the plane. He didn't move and waited for Doc to get within arm's length of him before putting out his hand.

"It's an honor to meet you, Mr. Justice," the man said. "My name is Wayne Colt. I'm with the government."

"Yeah, but which one?" Thal quipped as Doc shook hands. Doc gave him a look that was almost a smile.

"You are Wayne Colt that went to Africa a few years back," Doc stated. "You did some classified things there and came back with a Russian bride, Zora Drinov."

"Nothing gets by you," Colt breathed. "I'm beginning to wonder whether you need my help or

not. Anyway, we tried to nab the guys in that plane you called about, but when we got to the field, they were gone. Attendants claimed they unloaded some big boxes into a truck and took off this way. Since its dark, nobody remembers seeing any unusual trucks going in or out of the city. What's the angle?"

"They are tied to Stellarius in some way," Doc explained. He rapidly recounted past events.

"Well, we don't know anything more," Colt admitted. "We've only got a few agents to spare plus the local boys. All the important parts of the city are covered. The local militia hasn't drilled since the Great War, so we're leaving them be. Alvin York is on his way and he's worth more than a tank squadron."

"You've done your best," Doc said. "Now, we wait and see. I'd like to have a couple of State troopers here with us. The tower here should be as good a place as any to watch for Stellarius' next move."

Doc and his men unloaded some equipment and went to the cramped control tower of Chattanooga's airport. Wayne Colt accompanied them after making a few calls on his car radio. While Doc was setting up, two patrol cars from the Tennessee State Police arrived and their occupants alighted and stayed close to their vehicles. Colt squared everything with the airport officials, but was cloistered when the phone rang for him. In the meantime, Doc got out a pair of binoculars that looked like they had two condensed milk cans fitted over their lenses. Colt came back into the room, astonished by Doc's apparatus.

"What's he got?" he asked Thal .

"Special binoculars that amplify light," Thal explained. "They pick up the tiniest light sources and allow Doc to see like it was twilight."

"Is there anything he doesn't have?"

"Yeah, he don't have a line on Stellarius or a wife. The last part don't bother him that much."

"You'd think women would be crawling all over him." Colt scratched his head.

"They would, if he'd let them. Doc figures that if he got interested in any dame, his enemies would kidnap her and use her against him."

"True," Colt admitted. "I guess he needs a woman just as—as savage as he is. Reminds me of something that happened in Africa." Somebody shouted for him to grab the phone once more. He rushed out, then came back and grabbed his hat. "Bad luck. Our watchers on Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain aren't reporting in. I'm going to drive over there. I've got Alvin York down at police headquarters if you need anything. Plus, the troopers will be downstairs." With that, he left.

"Stellarius has struck," Ham opined. "Why the hills?"

Doc said nothing, but the melodious trilling sound began to curl about the room. Time passed, until it was just a few minutes before midnight. Doc called in to police headquarters, where Alvin York told him that what militia he could deem battleworthy was deployed at all streets with the police guarding important buildings. He had not, he said, heard from Wayne Colt. Doc put down the phone and scanned the hilltops. He could see nothing.

Below, Thal noticed one of the state troopers reach into his car and grab his radio. He talked a few minutes and then raced into the tower.

"Mr. Justice!" He bawled. "We got reports that smoke is rising from Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain."

Doc threw the binoculars to his eyes. Sure enough, in the faint starlight, he could see a rising curtain of white smoke in a semicircle around the city. He put them down and ordered Thal to report this to York. As Thal did so, the droning of an aircraft could suddenly be heard. Doc looked up, but the smoky haze was starting to congeal above the city, blotting out the stars and any approaching craft.

"Let's go, brothers," he commanded, stowing his special binoculars and grabbing his case. Thal and Ham followed. Once outside, Doc came up to the troopers.

"Warm up your cars, boys," he suggested.

They started to comply when a voice boomed out above them.

"I am Stellarius of the Bright Ones!" it roared above Chattanooga like thunder. "The world will know no peace, no safety, unless all bow to me! Even the great Doc Justice cannot save you! Your puny armies are nothing. Behold the power of Stellarius, who can turn night into day!"

A ghostly needle of light shot out from Lookout Mountain, and suddenly the smoky air above Chattanooga bloomed with light. It looked like a star had exploded. Something dazzlingly bright shone like a miniature sun. The smoke glowed as if the North-

ern Lights had gone south.

"Don't look at the light!" Doc commanded. He grabbed a set of goggles from his case and put them on, then snatched them off and turned to his men. "We've got to get up there. Troopers, we need one car. You two escort us up Lookout Mountain and call Alvin York to tell him what's going on."

They saluted and obeyed. Both cars were running. Doc drove the second car himself. He handed goggles to his men. "Put them on when we get up the mountain," he said. "They are specially tinted like welder's goggles. Still, don't look directly at anything bright. Get your pistols ready."

Lights flashing, the troopers led them non-stop through the streets of Chattanooga and up the inclined roads of Lookout Mountain. They passed stylish mansions amid lush trees until they got to the flattened top. As they gained the summit, the beam winked out, then it winked on again, hot and searing. It struck the first patrol car on its grille, exploding the radiator in a plume of steam. The beam then crawled along the car's side igniting paint until it hit the gas tank. The car was lifted up and over as the fuel exploded, flipping it into the trees with a yellow ball of flame.

The beam sought Doc's car, but he braked and began to reverse. As it traveled toward him, suddenly, it weakened, stuttered, and went out. Doc parked behind some trees and he got out, his men behind him.

"Spread out," he advised. "Their weapon seems to have malfunctioned. We will have to rush them before they fix it." Doc pulled out his own auto-

matic.

They crept forward in a semicircle, guns ready. Doc was in the middle, Thal on the left, Ham on the right, sword cane in one hand, pistol in the other. They didn't have long to wait. Out of the gloom rushed four men in silvery robes that looked like they were made out of silk. They had bright suns on their chests and loose silver hoods concealed their faces. Thal was their evident target and they fell on him with fists and snatched-up tree branches.

The first one that got within arm's reach found his swing blocked by a red-furred forearm. The next thing he got was a fist in his face that sent him down squalling. His three buddies rushed in and started rapping Thal on his head and back. He kicked one in the shins and ducked between the other two. They managed to hit each other before trying to catch Thal again. The homely chemist shot one with a Mercy bullet. The others regrouped and started in again.

Ham found another bunch attacking him. He managed to shoot the first and stab the second with his sword cane. Its tip had a tarry preparation similar to the Mercy bullets. The other three attackers circled him with their clubs while waiting for an opening. Ham slowly backed toward Doc. Thal did the same until they formed a small knot against their foes.

"Reminds me of the Silver gang," Thal snarled between breaths. He had several lumps on his forehead.

"Not as deadly," Ham decided, opening his collar. "They would have had guns."

Men seemed to be pouring everywhere. The trio shot several and knocked out several more. The odds seemed thin. Doc Justice downed at least six before a small group of thugs came forward carrying what looked like flamethrowers. The foremost shoved out his nozzle and a black-tinged jet of fire spurted forth, falling just short of Doc and his men. The rest of the silver shirts jumped in and grabbed Doc and crew, dragging them toward the flames. Thal could feel the heat singing his hair.

A shot cracked through the night, dropping the first villain. His flame gun twisted, setting fire to several of his companions. In rapid succession several more went down from bullets. The rest fled into the night. Doc, freed, could see men in militia uniforms rushing past. He heard engines and shots over the other side of the mountain. Appearing out of the gloom behind them was a tall, angular figure in a red flannel shirt and blue jeans. He was holding a still smoking Springfield rifle.

Thal whistled. "I know you!" he clamored in his squeaky voice.

The newcomer smiled. "Sergeant Alvin York, at your service," he drawled.

"Thank you, sir," Doc Justice said, shaking hands with the ex-soldier.

"It's an honor," York said. "Hope I've been some help. These boys needed a little practice anyway."

"It's appreciated," Doc assured him.

There was no time to swap war stories among the four veterans of the World War. Sgt. York went with Doc and his men to see what they could learn. Doc found the spot where the light beam had

originated from, examining the ground with a flashlight.

"Something big was dragged to here," He said. "Looks like it was hooked up to a generator on a truck by the snaky marks here and the tire treads there. My guess is that when the machine broke down, they tried to finish us with their thugs while they loaded up for a getaway. Any sign of Colt?"

"No," York admitted. "We found numerous smoke bombs and the like planted all around the hills. Our lookouts were found either knocked out or stabbed. Colt's car was uncovered just down the slope a bit, but he's vanished, just like this bunch."

The militia came back and reported that the Bright Ones had escaped in two trucks. They were calling in the state police, but the trucks had a good head start. Stellarius had made his point and made good his escape.

"Now what do we do, Doc?" Ham wondered, brushing dirt from his coat.

"We'd better talk to Mrs. Colt," Doc answered.

CHAPTER FOUR A PLAGUE OF KIDNAPPERS

Palm Springs was pleasant on the day that Doc and his men landed at the airport, but then it was pleasant most of the time. Doc learned that Mrs. Colt was visiting friends in the area and was staying at a local hotel. On the way, Thal and Ham discussed events of the previous night.

"So, the smoke set up a curtain that worked like a movie screen," Thal said as he sat beside Doc.

Ham was in the back seat of the rented car, renewing the anesthetic gum to his sword tip.

"Yes," Doc agreed. "Stellarius set off some sort of giant star shell and the smoke reflected the light. Not quite like a mirror, but enough to dazzle the entire city. He may have also intended to use his beam weapon to cause further chaos."

"Harmless said the thing amplifies light," Thal stated.

"Right, just like a stereophonic amplifier increases sound quality. Scientists have been working on transmitting light and heat recently. When we solved the mystery of 'White Eyes', we saw the impracticality of the transmission of microwave energy for much of anything but cooking in a self-contained oven. According to the scientists at General Electric, light can be stimulated and amplified so that in theory it could concentrate intense heat in a small area, perhaps as small as a pencil. They think that jewels like rubies or diamonds could work. Imagine a cutting torch that could saw through battleship plate armor as easily as you carve balsa wood."

"Howlin' Calamities," Thal muttered. "As if we ain't got enough problems. What's this got to do with the Clayton dame, anyway?"

"She and Wayne Colt have something in common," was Doc's only reply.

They finally located Mrs. Colt at a nearby tennis court playing mixed doubles. Her partner just happened to be actor James Cagney. They were up against a vivacious blonde and her noticeably older partner. Doc waited until the set was finished

and the quartet retired to a nearby table for refreshments. Cagney noticed the trio first and stood up with a grin on his mobile features.

"Say, Ham Rivers!" he greeted. "Haven't seen you since the Thelma Todd murder."

"Officially, it's a suicide," Rivers admonished, taking Cagney's hand.

"Sure, and we know the truth, though don't we?" Cagney winked. "And isn't this the fair-haired boy that got the truth out? The Bronze Man himself."

"A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Cagney," Doc Justice said. "You have an excellent way of playing villains." From anybody else, such a phrase would have seemed obsequious, but Doc was as gifted an actor as any breathing. "We are actually here to speak to Mrs. Colt on a matter not only of delicacy but of urgency."

The fair Zora Colt's face became troubled. "Does this concern my husband? Has something happened?"

"Please, Mrs. Colt, I don't want to alarm your friends," Doc said. "Perhaps we could speak privately."

"Whatever you have to say, you can say it in front of Mr. and Mrs. Burroughs," she said. "This is Florence and Ed. Ed is a writer so nothing you say will startle him. He'll probably put you in his next Elmo story."

"Oh, that Ed Burroughs," Ham broke in. "Say, Thal, he could definitely make a few pages out of your antics. You and that Chimpanzee Cheetah could be long lost cousins."

"Actually, the chimp is from the movies," Ed Burroughs corrected. "I use a monkey in the novels. Still, I don't think I could do justice to some of the episodes your gang is involved in. I think I'll stick to my Martians, jungles and dinosaurs."

"We'll have to tell you about The Land of Terror, the Devil on the Moon, and the Fantastic Island sometime," Thal offered. "That is, after I use this shyster here as a vine and show you how to swing through the trees."

"Not now," Doc rapped. "I am afraid Wayne Colt has disappeared. He was working with us to foil the plans of Stellarius of the Bright Ones. This Stellar-ius also tried to kidnap Mrs. Jane Clayton. We still don't know what he is ultimately up to, but there are a lot of threads that lead to Africa. Before we head there, I'd like to know what you and Mrs. Clayton would have in common, Mrs. Colt."

"That's a good question," Mrs. Colt said in her accented English. "Wayne and I owe our lives to Mrs. Clayton's husband. Perhaps this involves him. However, he is a very elusive individual."

"Did you ever meet Mrs. Clayton?" Doc asked.

"No, her husband gave us escort to the coast and we managed to fly out courtesy of the American government. Wayne and I were married shortly after. Our life has not been easy. He has been working on a case for some months and I have had little communication with him."

"What then, would tie the two of you together so that Stellarius would want to kidnap your husband and Mrs. Clayton?" Ham wondered.

"That's probably not apparent," spoke up Ed

Burroughs. He appeared very fit to be in his early 60's. "Mrs. Clayton and Wayne Colt both visited the same place, though at different times. Since I edit the material supplied by her husband, I can tell you that, during the last 30 years, both of them have entered the fabled lost city of Opar."

All of them started as the melodious trilling sound seemed to exude from the air around them. Doc's eyes seemed vacant for a moment, then he put his corded bronze hands on the table.

"It has been a real pleasure," he said with a rare smile. He produced a card and handed it to Ed Burroughs. "I'd like for you to search your files and call my associate Major Obert at this number. "Mrs. Colt, we will do all we can to find your husband. Goodbye."

The three piled into their rented car.

"Say, Doc, you must have gotten an idea," Thal stated. "What's our next move?"

"We're going back to New York, get Harmless and Reynolds, and head to Kenya," Doc mentioned distractedly.

"So you got something?" Thal asked.

"Yes," Doc replied.

"You gonna tell us?" Thal pressed.

"No."

Before Thal could start the car, the air was shattered by a scream and a gunshot. The trio yanked out their superfirers and dived out of the car. Doc instinctively ran back toward the tennis courts. They could see three men with guns holding Ed Burroughs, Florence, and James Cagney at bay. Ed was nursing his hand. One of the three gunmen

had an arm around Zora Colt. Ham recognized the massive Eighty-Six the same time the thugs saw them coming.

Doc fell to one knee, braced himself and fired a single shot from his machine pistol. The weapon coughed its bull-fiddle hum and the head of the man holding Zora Colt snapped back. He fell down boneless. Eighty-Six and the other gunman sent a flock of lead toward Doc and his men. They hit the dirt, giving Eighty-Six a chance to slap something on his fallen lackey before retreating to a waiting sedan. The other gunman got behind the wheel as Doc and assistants sent a stream of mercy bullets at them. The fusillade either missed or splattered harmlessly against the car as it screamed off.

Eighty-Six rolled down a window long enough to stick out the ugly snout of a Tommy gun and rake Doc's rented car. Two tires shredded under the barrage, and then the speeding car turned a corner and was gone. Doc and his helpers got to their feet and went over to the shaken tennis players. When they reached the fallen crook, Doc stared at the object that Eighty-Six had attached to the man. It looked like a glob of gray paste that was starting to smolder. With lightning reflexes, he shoved his aides back.

The smoking gray glob suddenly burst into a white-hot tongue of flame so intense that nobody could look at it directly. The unconscious man awakened suddenly, eyes bulging and a horrible shriek issued from his lips. His body flopped in pain, then he was still except for some twitching. His mouth hung open, smoke and blood sending tendrils

across his chin. The fire went out and Doc bent to examine the man. There was nothing left of the gray blob, but it had eaten a hole six inches in diameter and deep enough to burn through the man's ribs, lungs, and heart. Doc turned away from the ghastly wound.

"The same stuff Eighty-Six used at the real estate office," Ham rapped.

"The chemicals were probably sealed and ignited on contact with air," Thal observed. "It's a nasty way to keep somebody quiet."

Doc turned to the objects of the kidnapers.

"What happened?" Doc asked.

"Them guys, they came outta nowhere," Cagney spoke up, falling into his mobster cadence. "They pulled their rods and wanted Zora. Ed punched one guy, so they fired into the air to show they meant business, then grabbed Zora. You know the rest."

"Getting too old for this stuff," Ed said. "I feel like I broke my hand."

Doc examined it. "It needs some ice now and some hot soaks later to keep it from getting stiff. You didn't break it, though. Call the police and get some protection. Mention my name. I helped the Chief out a few times. We've got to go."

* * *

Reynolds and Harmless were packed and waiting for them at the Hidalgo Trading Company. They were idly smoking while sitting on crates and bundles of equipment and supplies. As soon as the

plane touched down, they stubbed out their smokes. Reynolds began handing the cargo up to Thal while Harmless began refueling. Reynolds and Thal swung the heavy crates like they were lunch pails. The whole operation took less than twenty minutes.

Reynolds checked the ship over, then climbed into the pilot's seat and got the plane turned around. Harmless pulled out a notebook and went over things with Doc while Ham and Thal napped in the rear section. None of them had slept in over 24 hours. If Doc felt any fatigue, he failed to show it.

"I got what I could from that Burroughs guy," Harmless said as the plane took off. "Apparently this lost city of Opar is full of crazy monkey men and its claim to fame is a pile of gold and jewels."

"Opar was an outpost of Atlantis," Doc informed him. "Most people that start out looking for it don't come back. We need to figure out why Stellarius wants to go there. What about the beam device?"

"It's theoretically possible, but no working model has been made yet. Problem seems to be two fold. One is the power source. You'd need to pack a lot of electricity to make this thing work. Even if you put it on a truck, you could only use so much."

"So it could break down or short out, like what happened at the Shot Tower and in Chattanooga," Doc mused.

"Exactly. You'd need a battleship to carry enough power."

"Or a zeppelin."

"Sure, Doc," Harmless agreed. "The other problem is focusing the light. Magnification by glass

doesn't give you any range. You need something hard and dense to focus the light through."

Harmless stopped as Doc's trilling filled the ship's cabin. It echoed like the song of an exotic bird, and then stopped. "So," he said, "Do we have a location for this Opar?"

"Burroughs didn't say, but he gave us somebody to look up."

"Let me guess, John Clayton?"

"Good guess, Doc. He called him Lord Grey-stoke. Said he had a big spread in Kenya and that all the locals knew him. What do we need some Limey duke for?"

"He's an earl."

"Ok, he can be Count Basie for all I care. What are you going to do?"

"Get some sleep right now. Monitor the radio."

CHAPTER FIVE UNWELCOME GUESTS

Elmo of the Apes was relaxing high in a tree some twenty miles from his estate when Usha the wind brought to his ears the sound of running feet. He was not far from a well-traveled jungle path known to the neighboring Waziri tribe. Elmo's nose identified the scent of the man's perspiration, but not an odor of fear. The runner was on a mission, and Elmo's curiosity was piqued. He slipped from the broad limb and began to swing down through the terrace of branches toward the ground. The little monkey on his shoulder nearly fell off, but managed to bury his fingers in the Ape Man's black

hair.

"Waugh," he chattered. "Are we in danger?"

"No, Nkima," Elmo said in the language of the Great Apes. "A runner is coming. I am surprised you did not smell him. Do not tell me the vigilant Nkima was asleep?"

"Perhaps I was seeing if you could smell him at all," Nkima averred. "I smell him just fine. He is a Gomangani."

Elmo smiled ever so slightly. "I knew that some time ago. Now, great nose of the jungle, which Gomangani is it?"

"It is Muviro." Nkima drew himself up huffily.

"Wrong. It is Usula. Let us see what he wants."

Elmo crouched on a limb over the trail as the magnificent warrior approached, then leaped down, using one arm to decelerate as he did so. Usula was startled, but his surprise soon turned to joy.

"Oh, Bwana, bwana!" Usula greeted. "For a day have I searched the trails hoping to find you. Five white men have come to the ranch searching for you."

"Are they on safari?" Elmo asked.

"No, bwana. They have no bearers and landed a very big plane where you and memsahib Jane ride your horses. More than this they would not say."

"There is a stream nearby. Drink your fill and we shall return."

Usula drank and regained his strength before they started to return. Having given his brain over to its ape side, he had wandered far from his plantation, farther than he realized. Elmo could easily have outpaced the Waziri warrior, but saw no

reason to abandon the man. The jungle was still a dangerous place. Elmo did move ahead as it grew late and managed to kill a small boar for their dinner, supplementing it with some fruit. Night found them secure in a tree beyond the reach of prowling lions. The next morning they set out at daybreak, reaching Elmo's estate by noon.

Lord Greystoke noted the sleek lines of the massive bronze aircraft with admiration. He had flown before, but it had been some years, and his last voyage aloft had been on the giant dirigible O-220. After his return from the Inner World of Pellucidar, Elmo had formed a small transport company with Jason Gridley and some of the German officers. The company did well, but was forced to move its headquarters along with its massive asset after the Nazi party came to power. Currently, the ship carried passengers to the Americas, occasionally crossing paths with the Graf Zeppelin.

He found his visitors sitting on the wide veranda, being served tea by their maid, Flora Hawkes. Careful to avoid being seen, he slipped into a back window, changed into more convention European bush clothing, and strolled out the door as Flora was clearing away their refreshment. She and four of the men looked startled as he appeared, but the fifth, a sun-bronzed giant with dark bronze hair, showed no evidence of surprise. He did, however, stand up.

"Lord Greystoke," he greeted.

"I am just John Clayton here," Elmo corrected. "My seat at Parliament collects dust, I fear, save for when my son is there to help pass some critical bill.

The workings of governments hold no interest for me. This is as close to civilization as I prefer to be."

"I am James Justice, Jr.," the bronze man said by way of introduction. "These are my associates. We have come here on a mission of some urgency."

"Please be seated then," Elmo offered. "I am sure that it is not so urgent that you must stand to relate it."

Justice sat down, and Elmo followed, accepting a cup of coffee from Flora, one of his civilized weaknesses. The bronze man continued: "It has to do with your wife, I am afraid." Justice quickly related his recent adventures in a few paragraphs. "I am certain that this Stellarius intends to go to Opar for the purpose of gaining either the gold or the jewels for his nefarious schemes. I have my man, Professor Upjohn, keeping an eye on your wife."

"I thank you for your efforts so far, but now my wife's safety is my concern, and mine only," Elmo stated. "I will be on hand when the Graf Zeppelin docks at Nairobi. That will free up your man to help you round up this villain."

"My thanks, Mr. Clayton," Justice said. "Before you depart, I ask only one thing. Stellarius has kidnapped Wayne Colt, who knows the way to Opar. If Stellarius bypasses Nairobi and heads there, we need to know its location."

Greystoke shook his head. "That is impossible. You may deal with Stellarius anywhere else you like, but you will not be given the location of Opar. Should he go there, I will take care of the matter personally."

"Hold on!" squalled a squat man who was covered with thick, rusty hair. "You don't seem to know who we are. This here is Doc Justice."

"You have over 150 million people in your country," Elmo observed. "It would be impossible to know them all. Now, if you will excuse me, I must get ready to depart for Nairobi."

"Allow us to fly you there," Doc offered. "Our plane is one of the latest models."

Before Greystoke could answer, the blaring horn and rumble of a car engine sounded above the animal sounds of the plantation. A gauzy plume of dust marked the approach of what appeared to be a military coupe of the last decade. Elmo immediately recognized it as belonging to the local colonial office. Besides the native driver, the apeman recognized Montgomery Jeffords, one of the wardens. The car came to a halt near the house and Jeffords alighted, brushing grit from the khaki outfit that hung on his angular frame.

He saluted smartly. "Lord Greystoke," he greeted. "I have some troubling news. Due to your interest in the case, I was asked by the Nairobi constabulary to inform you that Esteban Miranda has escaped the mental hospital that you had built to house him and others like him."

"He was locked in his room, and constantly under guard," Greystoke grimaced. "How could he have done this?"

"Well, sir, he had help. The room was broken into from the outside."

"How long ago was this and why did the guards miss something so noisy?" Elmo was becoming

annoyed, and the red streak across his forehead began to darken.

"Something about an explosion out front, a blinding flash that rendered them unable to do much more than rub their eyes," Jeffords reeled out in a choppy fashion. "When they got round to taking a head count, they saw the room blown in, and what looked like the bloke didn't go willingly."

"A blinding flash," Doc Justice repeated. "Any heat, anybody in a strange costume?"

"Here now, what business is it of yours?" Jeffords demanded.

"This is Doc Justice," Thal grinned, jabbing a thumb at Doc. "Maybe you've heard of him."

"Stone the bleeding crows, yes," Jeffords allowed. "You're just the man they need for this business. I am sure they'll give you the details at Nairobi. Well, I've got to be getting back." He saluted again and departed.

"Mr. Justice," Elmo said. I believe that I will take you up on that offer of a plane ride. Apparently, you have some sort of reputation. If you promise not to get in my way, I may let you try to live up to it."

If the bronze man was insulted by Greystoke's tone, he gave no indication. Thal's protest was cut off by having his instep trod upon by Ham Brook's tailor-made safari boots. The party boarded Doc's sleek aircraft and prepared to take off. He offered Elmo the co-pilot's seat and the apeman readily assented. They strapped in and prepared to take off.

"You enjoy flying?" Doc asked as he started the engines and turned the craft around.

"My airborne adventures seldom have happy endings," Elmo replied. "However, I am always interested in the latest craft."

"Once we are airborne, you are free to take the controls," Doc offered.

"I accept. What sort of dirigible is this Stellarius using?"

"Probably a Helium lift craft. It has to be a thousand feet or so long to hold the generating equipment that he uses to power his beam weapon. I believe that he seeks the wealth of Opar to finance his mad schemes as well as find a way to make his weapon more efficient and less power-hungry."

"The O-220 was a prototype," Elmo said, handling the controls with enthusiasm. "I had a second, more powerful ship constructed that would have been able to circumnavigate the globe without refueling, but it was lost in the Antarctic some weeks ago. Captain Hines received radio messages from his brother, who was commanding the ship. They were in a storm. You see, most all the metal on board the ship was Harbenite, a lightweight metal stronger than steel. It would have revolutionized the aircraft industry if the discoverer, Eric Von Harben, had made its location known. However, he did not, and scientific tests on the material were not exhaustive, especially in relation to conductivity. According to Hines' brother, Wolff, the ship was wracked by lightning which traveled through the Harbenite frame and shorted out the ship's electrical system. Without sustained power to the vacuum pumps, the ship would have lost buoyancy and plunged into the ocean. No trace was ever found."

Doc said nothing, but Elmo noted a strange melodious sound filtering through the cabin. It seemed to come from all directions at once and was vaguely unsettling.

"By the way," Elmo mentioned, "do you always travel with livestock?"

Thal and Ham looked at each other with dagger eyes. "You didn't!" they both squalled at the same time. Then they both grinned like the proverbial canary eating cats.

"I had Reynolds throw on an extra case for me," Thal said innocently.

Ham glared and fiddled with his sword cane. "I had Harmless do the same," he sniffed.

They both unstrapped their safety belts and headed to the rear cargo compartment. There, they each went to some large crates with air holes whose lids were clamped shut. Throwing off the clamps, they reached in and helped out the crates' inhabitants. Thal held in his arms a strange looking pig. Unlike run of the mill porkers from American swineries, this pig had a lean body, long legs almost like a dog's, and ears that might be used as toy boat sails. The pig was clean as a whistle and had a collar.

Ham had fished a rather large anthropoid from his crate. Not a chimpanzee, but smaller than a gorilla, this simian used Ham as a ladder to descend to the airplane's deck and sidle up to its master. This sizeable creature looked like nothing more than a hammered down copy of Thal Anders without clothes.

Ham began to swing his sword cane menac-

ingly.

"At least we'll have fresh bacon in the jungle," he snarled.

"You touch one hair on Habeas Corpus and I'll sock you so hard that it'll be a burial at sea all the way from here," Thal growled, balling his fists. "It's that no-account refugee from an organ grinder that's the dead weight here."

"Who, Chemistry?" Ham chortled, looking appalled. "Why, if nothing else, he is proof to the world that you should not breed."

"Shut your cake holes!" Reynolds bellowed. "It's bad enough you had to bring those two pets along, but don't argue over the dang things. Holy Cow!"

They said little else until arriving at Nairobi. A police escort awaited them and they were rushed to the site of Elmo's sanitarium. They found that the damage to the wall had been repaired, but there were plenty of eyewitnesses, some of them permanently blind, some who would never speak again on this side.

They all told a similar tale. About two weeks ago, several men in strange robes drove by in a large truck, tossing out bombs that exploded with sun-like intensity. The guards and passersby were blinded. Concurrently, another group set off a series of explosive charges that blew the wall out of Miranda's cell. Save for repairing the wall, the room had otherwise been untouched. Doc examined the content's of the Spanish actor's cell minutely, subjecting some objects to chemical analysis.

The results were as expected. Doc explained to

Lord Greystoke that traces found in the room were consistent with the chemicals used by Stellarius of the Bright Ones. Miranda possessed several books. One was a large atlas. Another was Jason Gridley's account of his voyage to Pellucidar, the land at the Earth's Core. Finally, there was a scrapbook full of newspaper and magazine clippings about Lord Greystoke. Doc Justice leafed through these with interest.

"Your friend seems to have kept up with your exploits," he mused.

"Esteban Miranda was no friend of mine," Elmo gritted, his scar becoming livid again. "He came to Africa, impersonated me and attempted to steal gold and diamonds from Opar. He even went so far as to try to supplant me in the eyes of my wife. He went mad during his hardships in the jungle and came to believe he was I. He lives only because he was too sick for me to throttle when I returned from a journey to find him trying to seduce my wife."

"So you had him locked away," Doc observed. "When we find him, I can take him and cure him of his behavior. Did you visit him?"

"Never, for his own sake."

"Did anyone?" Doc asked.

"There is a log book downstairs, I believe." Elmo led them back to the lobby. Doc Justice looked around the facility with interest. Though in Africa, it was as well equipped as any continental hospital. Elmo asked for the logbook and he and Doc Justice hunched over it. While the man of bronze remained taciturn, Elmo exclaimed as his finger ran down the listings.

"Wolff Hines!" he snarled. "I brought him into the company after promoting his brother to captaincy. Captain Zuppner, former commander of the O-220, retired to improve the prototype design into the improved ship, XLZ-221. Why would the brother of one of my loyal officers visit this lunatic?"

"That," Doc Justice murmured, "remains to be seen."

Elmo slammed the book shut in anger. "They must be going to Opar. Wayne Colt kidnapped, Jane nearly kidnapped, and Esteban Miranda freed. This Stellarius is making sure he grabs somebody who will talk. Very well, gentlemen, we shall meet my wife and your associate at the landing field. Then, we shall spend the night here and tomorrow, the voyage to Opar will begin. I will have your plane refueled and provisioned at my expense."

"That is splendid," Doc said.

The ride back to the airfield was uneventful. Once there, they soon saw the familiar cigar shape of the Graf Zeppelin. This queen of dirigible transport had traveled over much of the world, without one mishap. It landed at a mooring mast as a large ground crew guided it down with ropes until the massive airship was secure. Elmo and Doc's crew formed a solid wedge into the crowd and were in the forefront when the passenger compartment was opened. Officials came pouring out, frenzied looks on their faces. They shouted for authorities. Then, ruffled and dazed looking came William Harris Upjohn of Doc Justice's men.

"What happened, Johnny?" Doc demanded.

"What of my wife?" Elmo broke in.

"Doc, you won't believe it," Johnny said, forgetting his characteristic big words, which he seldom used when talking to Doc anyway. "We were over Ethiopia when we were overtaken by another Zeppelin. This craft was huge, painted bright silver with a sunburst on its side. Everything was streamlined into the hull except its engines."

"The XLZ-221!" Elmo exclaimed. "It was not destroyed!"

"Whoever was at the helm was a master pilot, given the tricky air currents over Ethiopia. It rose above us and several men were let down in rope harnesses like mountain climbers. They all wore silver jumpsuits and goggled hoods. They carried air guns of some sort, so as not to set off the hydrogen gas that lifted the Graf. I had some of your gas grenades, Doc, in my pocket, but I was afraid to use them in case I set off a spark. They only wanted one thing, and left after getting it."

"Jane!" Elmo exploded.

"We'll get her back," Doc assured him. "Whatever their game, they needed her, probably as a hostage to keep you off their backs. I suggest we get some sleep now, since it is growing late, and take up the trail in the morning. I have no doubt now that they will be traveling to Opar."

Elmo had no choice but to agree. They found a suitable hotel, intending to be gone at first light. Doc Justice only brought one large crate from his plane to the hotel. In it were various testing items that he challenged himself in a two-hour ritual that he never wavered from. He did hundreds of calisthenics, using isometrics to pit one set of muscles

against another. He then attempted to blindly determine a random set of odors, listened for sounds too faint for the human ear, and did complex equations in his head. While they were occupied, Elmo found Johnny's coat, noting the bulge in his pocket. He extracted several small glass balls the size of marbles. He bid Doc and his men good night and went to his room. There he made a phone call to Captain Hines, requesting that he remove the O-220 from its duties, refit it with her rapid fire cannons, and sail it to the coordinates he then gave him.

Instead of going to bed, Elmo went downstairs, outside the building and noted which rooms belonged to Doc Justice and his men. Due to the heat, the windows of all were open. With uncanny accuracy, Elmo tossed one of the glass balls through each window; hearing faint tinkles as they broke. After waiting a few minutes, he climbed up the balconies of each room to make sure its occupants were rendered unconscious. Smiling grimly, he climbed down and hailed a cab.

CHAPTER VI TRICKED!

Thal Anders was dreaming about a beautiful blonde when a hard banging threatened to rattle the screws from his door. He got up groggily, noting that his head was hurting slightly. He didn't remember having any booze. He opened the door to find Doc Justice standing there, fully dressed. Doc, normally stoic, looked unhappy.

"What?" Thal managed. He could hear his roommate Ham Rivers still snoring.

"We've been tricked," Doc clipped. "Greystoke gassed us, probably with Johnny's gas grenades. He has stolen our aircraft. Apparently, he decided that he did not need our help."

"Hey, for all we know, he could be Stellarius," Thal offered. "He was the one who had the airship built. He won't tell us where this Opar place is. It could be him."

"I doubt that," Doc said. "You obviously don't realize who we are dealing with."

"He's an arrogant Limey toff, that's all I know."

"He is John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, known around here as Elmo of the Apes."

"No—er—joke, Doc," Thal grinned. "Let me wake up the shyster, here, and we'll get moving."

The rest were awakened and got dressed, though still groggy from the gas. They all met in the lobby, where Doc was getting some equipment out of his case. They crowded around the man of bronze.

"So, Doc," Ham asked. "How did you know that fellow was the real Elmo?"

"I met his son during the war," Doc mentioned as he set up a large radio transceiver. "Also, I was approached by Jason Gridley about his radio set as well as having my father sponsor his expedition to the Inner World. My father could not afford to undertake the mission, which I now regret. Not only had I all this information, but also our host had recently been swinging half naked through the jungle before changing his clothes. There was still

minute evidence of wood splinters in his hands where he had been traveling through the trees, even though he had washed them. Also, I could smell that a monkey had been perched on his shoulder."

"Nothing gets by you," Ham admitted.

"I didn't anticipate his uncooperative attitude, but I guess he is used to acting on his own. There was a note left with the desk apologizing for borrowing our ship, along with a check for an amount that is double what the craft cost. He also thanked us for our help and advised us to return to New York."

"You gonna take that guff?" Thal squeaked.

"By no means. I am going to get a fix on our aircraft's position from the hidden transmitter that I installed and we are going to hire a plane to pursue Lord Greystoke. I found out that he made a phone call to his dirigible company. He is drawing together his own methods of combat, and they will be much bloodier than we employ."

Doc used his complex apparatus to get a general fix on his transport's direction, and then he and his crew were taxied out to the airport. He made several inquiries into renting a suitable plane. It cost almost enough to buy the airplane they intended to charter, so Doc bought it outright and he and his crew took off. It was a rickety British job, but Doc handled it like it was new from the factory. Using the transceiver to pinpoint their plane, the group was able to soar deep into the Kenyan hinterland. Hours later, they found themselves approaching a range of mountains, with a series of knife-cut

canyons folded out of them.

"There's the ship!" Thal squalled, pointing out the window.

In a flat plain at the foot of the mountains was their plane, sitting innocently in the waving grasses. They began to circle toward it when two things were noticed almost simultaneously. Ham picked out the ruins first, vine covered, but recognizable as a massive city, some domes glitteringly gold-sheathed. Doc, however, saw the bank of clouds that overspread them, and then he saw the dazzling silver shape that sank from their cottony underbelly.

"Stellarius!" he rapped, diving hard.

Doc was unequalled behind the yoke of any aircraft, but even his skill could not avoid a weapon that moved at the speed of light. There was a flashing eruption from the dirigible's nose, and a mercury vapor bright beam shot forth, striking the right wing of Doc's newly acquired bus and causing the engine to explode, tearing the wing raggedly in half. The plane began to spin violently.

"Out!" Doc commanded.

They all had their parachutes on, but it was no simple matter diving out of a tumbling plane. Thal scooped Habeas Corpus under his arm and Chemistry got a piggyback ride on Ham before they exited. The vicious beam stabbed out again, shearing the tail from the fuselage. Doc was the last out, and the rocking damage this second strike caused sent him back into the plane. The plane was falling in an arc toward the mountains. Doc struggled to his feet. The beam hit a third time, cutting the plane in two

only inches from the toes of his boots. Doc propelled himself forward, feeling the heat from the scorched aluminum and wood frame. He waited until the last minute and opened his parachute, so that the gunner above might not have his chute for a target any longer than necessary.

Doc went down one sheer side of a mountain opposite the dirigible, then pulled the ripcord. The cliff side hid him from the airship. A glance told Doc the others had made it to the ground while the dirigible pursued the aircraft's wreckage and probably could not turn to fire at them without describing a large arc. Doc dropped straight down, staying as close to the cliff as possible. He was descending into the valley with the ruined city. He knew at once it had to be Opar, the last colony of Atlantis. He had arrived at his destination, but would he live to leave it?

As it was, he barely managed to hit the ground and shuck his parachute before the blunt nose of the dirigible poked over the sheer cliffs surrounding Opar. It seemed almost invisible against the growing blanket of clouds rolling in from the west. Doc found a jumble of rocks to hide in as he heard the chatter of a machine gun from above. Bullets made the shapeless mass of the parachute jump. The giant airship then turned gracefully and disappeared behind the peak once more.

Doc stared at the darkening sky for several minutes, listening as the XLZ-221's motors died away. He then laid out a zigzagging route to the base of the massive stone wall of Opar. He was cut off from his men, but he knew that they were

resourceful and would catch up to him as soon as possible. Doc made sure that his pistol was securely holstered and took off running between his predetermined waypoints. There was no gunfire, but the surroundings were dimming from the thickening clouds that were turning a deep purple.

Doc knew that a storm was brewing. He looked up and estimated that the smooth walls of Opar were nearly fifty feet high, though some parts were broken down a bit. He found a worn trail leading to a crack that was some twenty inches in width. As he was preparing to slip into this chink in the formidable defenses of Opar, a glint of silver caught his eye. Under a flat rock was a small bundle. He took it out to reveal one of the silver robes of the Bright Ones. It covered a set of safari clothes, along with a pistol. Doc's nature got the best of him and his unnatural trilling soon surrounded him. This nearly proved to be his undoing as a tanned arm shot from the crack and grabbed him around the throat!

Doc grabbed his assailant's arm and gave the unknown a judo throw. He followed it up with a leap on his grounded attacker too late to realize that it was Elmo of the Apes. He was no longer dressed as the master of a plantation, now wearing only a leopard skin loincloth and primitive weapons. Doc tried to pin the Lord of the Jungle down, but Elmo was too strong and threw Justice from him like he was no more than a child. They stood there eyeing one another, both ready to spring.

"I told you to stay away from Opar," Elmo snarled. "This place is not to be plundered by man

and destroyed by civilization. A thousand deaths await inside these walls."

"I am not your enemy," Doc stated. "We have a common goal, the defeat of the Bright Ones."

"No, my goal is the rescue of Jane and the death of her captors," Elmo stated. "I cannot be responsible for your death. Even now, we are no doubt watched."

As if to verify his words, a strange wailing sound issued from inside the walls. Doc Justice drew his pistol.

"You can't fight what you can't see," Elmo remarked. "Get out now. I know a secret way to get in, one that the Oparians fear to enter."

"I will go with you," Doc offered.

"I am through talking. Go now, or I will tie you up and put you in a safe place until I am done."

"No."

Elmo flung himself on Doc Justice without warning. Doc was fast, and many criminals called him bronzed lightning, but Elmo was faster. He threw Doc heavily to the ground, intending to stun him, but Doc got his feat curled to his chest and struck out, knocking Elmo back. Doc was trying to gain space, to continue to reason with the apeman, but Elmo was determined. He leaped again in a cross-body block, and this time Doc was able to slip beneath the attack, lashing out with a bronze fist and sent the apeman to the ground.

"This is senseless," Doc Justice rasped. "We should be -"

His words were cut off as a jagged spear of lightning split the purple dome of sky and struck

between them, almost as if some unknown power had chosen to intervene. Electricity arced up through their bodies, flinging them prostrate into unconsciousness as thunder rumbled through the canyons like massed artillery.

* * *

La, High Priestess of the Flaming God, ruler of the city of Opar, was enjoying her bath. Her tub was of finely polished marble smoothed over the millennia by countless other high priestesses who luxuriated within its confines. The tub was fitted and edged with pure gold, bright and gleaming as the day it had been mined and fashioned by the artisans of long sunken Atlantis. The beautiful La stretched her entire bronzed length in the tub, feeling the ache of the day drain away as the warm water with its added salts and oils invigorated her skin. The only parts of her that were above the water were her soft oval face with its luminous gray eyes and the rosy tips of her breasts and toes. Attendants fussed about, cleaning her garments and preparing refreshment for their mistress. La was drifting into a sleepy languor when suddenly there burst into her chambers one of the ruling council of priests, a hideous gnarled man named Clooth. Her courtiers closed ranks to shoo off the invader, but he brushed them aside with apelike strength, ascending the tiled steps to the royal bath. La pushed herself up on her elbows until she was exposed above her sternum. One hand found her dagger.

"How dare you enter the chamber of the High

Priestess unbidden?" She demanded. "You court death, Clooth!"

Clooth bowed, his twisted, apish form folding like a worn thing of scabrous flesh and matted hair. "Your pardon, La," he said, dripping sarcasm. "If you do not think that the presence of Elmo of the Apes is worthy of your notice, I shall withdraw."

"Elmo!" La gasped. "Has he been harmed?"

"We found him within the courtyard, staggering like a man drunk. His loincloth and weapons seemed scorched by fire," the priest explained. "He would say nothing save your name, over and over."

La waved for her attendants, and they swiftly gathered to offer robes as their mistress rose gracefully from her bath. Clooth was moved by her beauty, dazzled by the glints of bronze the guttering torchlight spun in her hair, and the perfect symmetry of her fair form as water slithered from it in glistening rivulets.

"Lower your eyes or they shall be put out," La commanded over her shoulder, and was satisfied to see the priest avert his gaze. "Have Elmo seated in the throne room. Give him food and drink. I shall attend him presently. Go!"

The priest backed out bowing, and La's attendants began the complicated task of her dressing. Her modesty was first covered by supple leopard skin over which was laid a stomacher and breastplates of gold worked with diamonds. Next came her headdress of odd sized ovals of gold. Then came jewels to be set in dazzling orbits in her hair, and finally bands of gold, intricately worked with engravings and fine stones upon her lithe arms and

legs. Her natural beauty was enough to send any man mad, whether a twisted male of Opar or a normal, upright man from any civilized country, but once adorned with the many accoutrements of her station, some thousands of years old and handed down from mother to daughter, she was on a plane beyond that of the mere mortal. Unlike the bestial males, she was tall and proud, her face so beautiful that no starlet in Hollywood could dream to match it for all the makeup artists in California. Her skin was of the most delicate bronze, soft and clear, belying the sturdy form beneath whose strength had driven the sacrificial dagger through many an unfortunate. The many gold and jeweled ornaments enhanced rather than concealed her luscious curves, and now her slim feet were shod in sandals of soft leather. Her demeanor was cold and regal, the beauty and majesty of glaciers, but within, the furnaces of passion were stoked to burning red, for La of Opar was very much a woman, and her heart beat heavily and longingly at the thought of Elmo of the Apes.

Her decorum melted away the closer she got to the throne room. There, prostrate before her dais lay the man she recognized all too well. Here was her Elmo, the only man she had ever loved, and the only man she vowed ever to love. It took every fiber of her being not to crush her body to his, to feel the tautness of his physique beneath her slender fingers and to press her lips in hot passion upon him. Instead, she stepped around him warily, as if he could explode at any second. His head lolled, and his eyes met hers. At first, they seemed

distant, then, some spark ignited them and his lips parted.

"La," he whispered dryly.

"Elmo," she half-moaned, and her misery was evident to all in the room. Circling them was a gaggle of priests and priestesses, eyes wary. No small number of them were hostile, since they resented the affection that La bestowed upon this stranger, instead of giving her love to one of their own. She spoke the language of the mangani, the First Men. "What has happened to you?"

"No, La," he said in the language she had learned from Zora Drinov and Wayne Colt. "Those around us will understand. I have come to protect you again from men who would rob you of the treasure of Opar. I was struck down by lightning. There was another with me. I do not know what became of him."

"Elmo," she said again, stronger now. "I am not afraid of any strangers as long as you are here."

"It is well, La," the tanned giant said. "My head hurts. I will need to rest and eat before they come."

"My own quarters will be your lodging," La offered. "I shall feed you myself, lest one of these jealous men poison you. I promise not to say anything of the love that I have in my heart for you either." At this, she smiled sadly.

"I have poorly paid back that love," he said. "Now, let us go."

He slowly rose to his feet, and La had to help him stand. She put his arm about her shoulder and together they managed to shuffle toward her quarters as vile and lunatic eyes followed them

CHAPTER VII THE CAMP OF THE BRIGHT ONES

Doc Justice awoke slowly. His head throbbed abominably. He lay still, drinking in his surroundings while pretending to be unconscious. He was no longer on the desolate plain before the walls of Opar. Instead, he was in a draw, and he could smell campfires and cooking food. The bugs crawling on his body told him that he had been stripped of his clothing. A glance told him they had left him with nothing but a pair of bathing trunks. His hands were tied behind him. He managed to remain in this position until the hulking Eighty-Six, now dressed in ill-fitting khaki safari togs came over and began to kick him in the ribs with his mosquito boots.

"Wake up, bronze devil," he snarled. "Time you got what was coming to you."

To avoid further torture, Doc sat up. Even bound, he was impressive enough for Eighty-Six to step back. The ex-bouncer reached for his sidearm.

"None of that, Justice," he said. "Get up, slow-like, or I might be tempted to perforate you now, instead of later."

Doc got to his feet quickly, though the headache continued to nag him. He could now see that the camp was some 500 yards beyond the zeppelin. Night was falling, and the dazzling cigar shape took on a reddish tint in the setting sun. Doc noted at least 20 men about the camp, and more than enough tents. Guards were posted at intervals, all armed with modern rifles, a few with Steyr-Solothurn submachine guns.

Eighty-six took Doc close to the airship. There, beside one tent was an iron cage, big enough to transport a lion. Doc peeked in and saw a hunched form in a straitjacket. The man's hair was in his gray eyes, but he appeared unconscious. Eighty-six called to the tent, and Jane Clayton was brought out, tied like Doc. She saw the caged man and stifled a scream.

"John!" She exclaimed.

"Mrs. Clayton, I am James Justice, Jr." Doc said. "We haven't been introduced yet."

"This is not a good time for socializing," she said, wheeling on the massive Eighty-six. "What have you done to my husband?"

"Easy, sister," Eighty-Six chuckled. "We ain't done nothing to him. Besides, that ain't him anyway. That's the loony we broke out of the booby hatch in Nairobi. Now, he'll tell you he's your husband, but we knows he ain't."

"Miranda," she breathed. "You have kidnapped a madman. Why?"

"He knew where the treasure was," Doc pointed out. "Doesn't look like he's been much help."

"He ain't worth the lead it would take to snuff him," Eighty-Six growled. "Soon as he gives us the dope on the hidden entrance to the treasure, that's what we'll do."

"Colt wouldn't talk?" Doc fished. "Where is he?"

"Shut your noise flap, Justice," Eighty-Six ordered. "Don't worry about Colt. Worry about those five rejects of yours that are wandering around out there. When we get hold of them, they're history. Now, come on. The boss wants to

see you at the zep."

As they passed the cage, the prisoner within moaned and tried to raise his head. He spied Jane and recognition flared.

"Jane," he called. "It is I, John."

"I wish you were," Jane replied sadly, then turned away to follow Doc Justice as Eighty-Six compelled them onward. "You fooled me twice, but not again."

The caged man protested even louder at this, which caused Eighty-Six to call for some men who used poles to prod the prisoner until he was snarling like a wild animal. From a tent came a man in one of the dazzling suits of the Bright Ones. He snapped his fingers and a ball of light crackled out, blinding the prisoner. The Bright One used the time to jab a large hypodermic needle into the prisoner's thigh and deliver a potent injection before the man could twist away. Within moments, the captive slumped to the floor of the cage. Doc looked on the prisoner with sympathy, and before caged man fell unconscious, he saw the man's lips move. Doc, being an expert lip reader, translated the man's last words. If their content caused him any consternation, he gave no indication.

They were marched into the shadow of the massive dirigible. The gondola was built into its hull much as was its sister ship, the O-220. Eighty-Six led his two prisoners up the ramp into the crew compartments. There, they found themselves in a large common room. There were a few tables and chairs along the walls, and Doc noticed a pile of clothes in one chair.

"The boss is changing," Eighty-Six informed them, waving his pistol toward a door by the pile of clothes. "When he comes out, the party will start." He laughed one of his deep guffaws at this witticism.

Doc Justice was in no mood to wait for the arch-villain Stellarius to appear. He stepped close to the chair and saw that the pile of clothes looked like a typical business suit and shirt. There was a wallet among the effects.

"Would you mind opening that wallet up?" he whispered to Jane Clayton.

She quickly snatched up the leather billfold and glanced inside. Her face convulsed in shock as Eighty-Six stepped over to slap the wallet from her hand.

"No funny stuff, sister," he barked.

"That was Wayne Colt's wallet!" she exclaimed to Doc Justice. "Could he be -"

Doc moved like bronzed lightning. He stood on one foot and lashed out with the other in an arc that ended when it connected with Eighty-Six's jaw. The big thug howled and went backward over the chair, spilling its contents. His gun went spinning across the room. The exclamation brought immediate response. A figure in a robe even more resplendent than any previously seen emerged from the door. He was toting an oversized pistol that bore a resemblance to Doc's mercy gun. Not waiting to see what happened, the robed figure started banging away with the pistol. Projectiles shot out leaving fiery trails, as if they were rocket powered.

Doc dived low, snatching up the fallen chair and

tossing it at the figure while the strange bullets sizzled overhead. Jane hit the floor, going for the pistol. She came up with it and fired back, pegging the silver-garbed villain in the midsection. He squalled and fell backward into the room, but he struggled back up so fast that Doc figured he was wearing some sort of body armor. Outside, he could hear shouts.

"They won't hurt you," he told Jane. "You are their insurance policy against your husband. I have got to get help."

"Hurry up, then," she returned calmly, sending another shot at the robed figure. It shattered the doorpost, causing the villain to duck and get behind the door. "I'll keep them busy. Find my husband."

"I will." Doc straightened for an instant and strained with every fiber of his massive form. Trained from birth to be the benchmark of perfection in the human body, his muscles stood out like copper cables and piano wire. The rope binding his arms parted like rotten straw and then he was gone, a bronze flash in the darkness.

He could hear men running, guns being cocked. Even though stripped to his skivvies, Doc Justice was more dangerous than ten men. He had special caps fitted on his teeth, and he dislodged one of these to reveal a small capsule, barely the size of a grape seed. Silently, he slithered to the cage bearing the man Jane Clayton called Miranda. Doc whispered to the prisoner, who stirred more than it would have seemed possible after the sedative he was given. He then took the tiny capsule, and using the fake cap, crushed it against one of the cage bars.

An oily liquid splashed over the bar, causing an acrid smell.

Not waiting to see the results, Doc plunged on, his sense of direction taking him away from the camp and into the hills that hid Opar. His bronze skin seemed immune to the bugs, and his constitution seemed immune to the fact that he had not eaten in a day. Once clear of the camp, he ran in a steady pace that would have left any marathon racer in the dust. He made the foothills, then began the treacherous ascent to the cliffs that overhung Opar, cliffs full of rocks that cut into his feet, tough as they were. He did not stop to acknowledge pain or fatigue until he was on the other side and was descending onto the blasted plain before the ruins of Opar.

If the city looked awesome in daylight with its shining minarets, it was repellent and forbidding by night. The clouds melted away to reveal a full moon, giving the white towers a silvery edge that gave way to Stygian shadows. Doc stole out on the plain warily, making his way to the long shape of his aircraft, sitting unmolested on the plain of Opar. Along the way, he saw footprints in the dust by the bright moonlight. They indicated great hurry, and had paused at his ship, but did not tarry. He climbed aboard. A clumsy attempt had been made to smash the controls, but they were repairable, and he could probably salvage the parts from the wreck of the British plane that Stellarius had shot from the sky. If not, he had a number of spare parts stowed away that would suffice.

More important to him were the equipment

cases. Sealed with heavy combination locks, they were too massive for one man to carry, save Doc, Reynolds or Thal . Doc found them still aboard. He opened one to find a change of clothes, emergency rations and medical supplies. He ate hurriedly, applying salve and bandages to his cut feet. He dressed and donned a spare equipment vest. Arming himself with a mercy pistol, Doc went forth, eyes encased in special goggles that he designed which allowed him to see in the infrared spectrum.

He first went to the narrow crack in the wall of Opar that led within. Taking a small tin of powder from his vest, he sprinkled it on the spot where he and Elmo had been struck by lightning. Then, he took out a special black light projector and waved it over the site. It caused the powder to fluoresce, highlighting the irregularities in the dust. Doc smiled grimly as he saw that booted feet had come upon them and had dragged away two bodies. However, he saw that one set of bare feet went away from the scene into the cleft in the wall.

Doc followed into the passageway, finding it worn but clear. It led into an avenue that passed through an open temple. Then, he saw beyond a courtyard and a massive building that had to house the rulers of Opar. Doc looked up, seeing flickering torchlight within. As he did, he heard a woman's scream from within.

* * *

La closed the door swiftly behind Elmo. Here was one more opportunity to make her case, per-

haps her last. Though time had dulled none of her beauty, she knew that one day the savage life they both led would spell doom for one of them. For an instant she wished she had driven the sacrificial knife deep into Jane's breast and watched her final moments while the priestesses held up their golden cups for the fountains of blood. Sadly, she realized that to do so might have turned Elmo against her forever. This way, at least, he was still her friend.

Elmo seemed a little hesitant to her. Before, he was always confident, ready for action. Though he talked of saving her and her city from the invaders, she found him a little off-balance, but she considered the fact that he had been struck by lightning. She had seen its effects on trees and marveled that anybody could survive being hit. She approached him slowly, and she saw that his gaze never left her.

"You have suffered much," she said in the language of the great apes.

"Stick to English," he said in a low voice. "Can you be certain that we are not being overheard?"

"The windows are open," she stated. "Perhaps you are right. Who are these evil men?"

"Men from many parts of the world," he said, putting aside all weapons save his hunting knife. He stood at the window for a moment, watching the clouds part and the full moon shine through. Then he turned again to La, and she saw his expression soften. "They carry the guns that you have seen before, and they are not superstitious natives this time. If your men fight, they will be killed."

"How can we win, then?" she asked.

"The men must withdraw to the mountains near

the city of gorillas," he said. "The women should hide as best they can. They would not be harmed. The invaders want your treasure, but they do not know the way to the treasure vault. When they are deep below the city, I will trap them and they will all die."

"When will they come?" La asked. She was troubled by the prospect of outsiders pillaging her city, no matter how confident Elmo seemed of the outcome.

"Tomorrow morning, I think," Elmo said. "You should call your head priest, and give him these orders."

"Yes," she agreed. La went to a table jumbled with golden objects. Among them was an elaborately decorated brass disk set between posts of gold. She found a brass hammer and struck the disk. It gave forth a deep gong sound. She went to her door and waited for a hesitant knock. Clooth stood there, cudgel in his hand.

"Is all well?" the gnarled Oparian demanded, eyeing Elmo suspiciously.

"Elmo has told me that powerful invaders are coming," she related in the tongue of the mangani. "Elmo has a plan to destroy them, but he believes that their weapons are so powerful that if you fought, many would die. I see no need for senseless slaughter, so I order you to hide the priestesses and take your men to the mountain passes near the city of Bolgani. This must be done tonight for the invaders will be here in the morning."

"Elmo is but one man, and we are many," Clooth pointed out. "We are not afraid to die."

"Elmo has outwitted you all before," she reminded him. "I am sure he can defeat this foe. Now, do as I command. I have spoken."

"I obey," Clooth bowed, but his expression was ugly as she shut the door in his face.

"They still hate me," Elmo observed as La turned back to him.

"They are jealous that La bestows her love upon you and not one of them," she said. "Your shadow always falls between their desire and mine, while your wife's shadow falls between my desire and you."

"No man knows the future, La," he said. The hesitancy crept back in his voice. He seemed so vulnerable to her, as if he had lost his way. He had never before shown weakness and she was not sure she liked seeing it now.

"You have been hurt," she said, to drive away her own doubts. "You have so troubled me that in obeying your wishes I have sent away my own handmaidens. These robes of office are too confining for that which must come. Will you help me?"

He seemed taken aback at first, then smiled slowly. "You have obeyed my wishes, it would be poor sport for me not to return the favor."

The words struck her, but she struggled not to show the blow. Vulnerability, hesitancy, and now softness from Elmo were more than she could cope with. She found that she could not stop the flow of events. Some part of her screamed for it to be true, that something had happened to change his feelings, but another part was afraid, and these two parts could not be reconciled.

She first removed the elaborate headdress, its lengths of gold disks falling over her hands as she removed it and placed it upon a stand designed to hold it. Next came the gold and diamond stomacher with its outthrust icon of a repellent bird and sheath for her sacrificial dagger. She nearly jumped when she felt Elmo's strong hands undo the clasps of her golden breastplates. She cupped the accoutrement, one convex surface in each hand, placing them beside the stomacher. She hesitated at the side ties of her one-piece leopard skin garment, but forced herself to unknot them. She had to know. The soft hide fell to the floor in a semicircle about her sandaled feet, and she turned to Elmo.

"La," he whispered.

"I ask you one more time, Elmo of the Apes," she said, hesitancy now coming to her voice. She plunged on, her upbringing as the latest of a long line of high priestesses keeping her strong. "Can you truly say that there is no love in your heart for La?"

"La," he whispered again. "I have no words left."

He grasped her naked body and crushed it to his own, running his hands across her body as his lips covered her face and breasts with hot kisses. She moaned, but it was not in ecstasy. He paid no heed, taking her outcry for encouragement. La was in misery. Tears flowed down her cheeks, their salty taste filling her mouth. She fell back against her dressing table as he pressed her closely, lips against her neck and hands upon her and he suddenly buried his lips in hers. She clasped the back of his neck with her left hand, but her right sought

the sacrificial dagger from its sheath.

She tore it free and struck. He saw the glint in the corner of his eye and managed to twist at the last second, causing the sharp blade to skitter across his ribcage, opening a shallow wound that bled profusely. His face became livid with anger and he drew back.

"You are not Elmo!" she sobbed. "I should have known it from the first, but it had been years since last I had seen him. I tried to believe that you were not quite yourself because of your injury, but no matter how hurt Elmo could be, even to the loss of his memory, he still would not have defiled me so eagerly, not while his mate lives. I hate Elmo's loyalty for his mate, but I admire him. That is why I love him — and that is why you are not him though you look so much like him that I almost accepted you."

"La, I can be him," the man said. "I am him in all save being raised by apes. I am more, because I have no mate. Your followers would never know the difference. We can rule here together. I am the man you have loved for years. Look at me and tell me you do not desire me, as you have challenged me."

"I do not, because no matter how much you look like him, sound like him, even move like him, you are not him," she snarled, misery becoming rage. "Now I see your plan. You have sent the men away, and these invaders are with you. You want the gold of Opar."

"I want more than that," the imposter growled as blood forked down his leg to pool at his feet. "I want Opar as my own, with you by my side. Decide

now, or the invaders will destroy Opar."

"Never," she spat. "La will fight you to the death. Kree-gah!"

She struck at him again, but he was ready, catching her dagger hand and squeezing until the pain forced her to drop it. Now unarmed, she was helpless as he dragged the woman to her bed and threw her down. He tore a silk hanging and wrapped his bleeding side as she shrank from him, searching for another weapon. He was upon her again and she had time for one scream of rage before his full weight drove the wind from her lungs.

CHAPTER VIII THE BATTLE BEGINS

Doc Justice's cautious approach abruptly changed when he heard the woman's scream. His trained mind sent his body into immediate action. He ran to the building's wall, tore off his boots and socks, then climbed up the wall, finding precarious holds in the close fitting stones of the wall with his powerful fingers and toes. The speed of his action made it seem as if he were walking straight up the sheer wall, but he was straining at every instance, especially with his torn feet. Doc made it to the window he identified as being the right one and cautiously peeped over the sill.

He didn't like what he saw. A muscular man who looked like Elmo and was bleeding from a nasty cut was shoving around a woman who was dressed in nothing but some gold bangles. Doc

didn't hesitate. He got a grip on the stone sill and swung his entire body up and over the sill into the room. The two occupants were too focused on their struggle to notice. Not stopping to think, Doc bounced off his feet and launched himself at the man in the room. His body slammed the fellow sideways, away from the woman he had thrown himself on. Doc landed across the woman who was on a fancy ancient-looking bed, while his foe hit the floor hard.

Doc knew that he couldn't give his enemy a minute to recover. He reached over the bed and grabbed his opponent's head and neck. Violently, Doc rolled off the bed so hard that he twisted the other man completely around and he struck the stone floor face first. This galvanized his antagonist, who yanked himself away and drew his knife. Doc got to his feet and prepared for the other's attack. In the room's flickering torchlight, the man looked uncannily like Elmo.

The false Elmo stabbed out with his knife, ripping Doc's shirt across the front. The man was very fast, and Doc could only duck and weave while the other continued to lash out with the big hunting knife. Three more times the other connected, shredding Doc's shirt and opening a long but superficial slash along one arm. Doc's chain-mesh reinforced vest turned aside any slices along his vitals. Finally, Doc saw an opening and knocked the knife from the other's hand with a savage karate chop.

Disarmed, the man dove for his case of arrows. He dug into it and came out with a black sphere instead of an arrow. Doc realized what his foe had

and leaped for the bed once more, clearing it entirely as the false Elmo threw it to the spot Doc had just occupied. Doc reached up with one arm and dragged the woman down with him. She fell in a tangled heap in his arms and he grabbed her so tight she was unable to free herself as the room exploded with light.

Doc closed his eyes in time and opened them as soon as he thought it safe, leaving the woman beside the bed and preparing for another attack by his antagonist. However, the room was empty. A trail of blood led to the door. Doc threw it open to find a darkened corridor. His sensitive ears heard the faint rattle of something moving. He threw himself backwards and shut the door as another of the Bright One's spheres exploded in the hall. By the time he could reopen the door, he knew his prey would be long gone. He would have to pursue them later.

He turned back to the woman now on the floor. Doc Justice had seen a lot of women in his life, and more than his share of knockouts. Truth be told, a fair amount of these knockouts and plenty more in lesser categories would tend to act all loosey-goosey around him, since he was not only handsome, but one of the richest, most eligible bachelors in the world. He had a good reason for being unattached. He had almost as many enemies as he did women who wanted to tie the knot with him, and if it became known that any woman was special to him, then his enemies would probably try to kidnap her to use against the Bronze Man.

This woman was different. She reminded him

of Monja, the beautiful princess from the hidden city in Hidalgo, where much like Elmo, Doc had a secret source of wealth. He'd been around Monja a couple of times and he had to admit she gave him a warm spot, but he'd never seen a woman like this one. She was still lying there on the stone floor in her birthday suit, and it gave him pause. Behind her, though, on the floor was a bloody dagger, and it brought him back to reality just as his toes were starting to curl.

"You are hurt," she said in bad English, though her voice was pure music as she murdered the language.

"It's just a scratch," he replied. "I think you got it worse."

She rose up then, and he could see some purple marks on her wrists where the fake Elmo had thrown her around. She got lightly to her feet and swayed over to him. He found it hard not to stare at her, and tried to keep his façade impassive. He also started doing some mental exercises like extracting cube roots out of six digit numbers.

She put her slender hands on his arm and examined his cut.

"La of Opar owes you her honor and her life," she said. "Come to my table and I will dress your wound."

Doc had bandages and antiseptic ointments in his vest, but he somehow forgot all about them as this ravishing naked woman led him over to a primitive, but highly decorated table full of jewelry and adornments. She found a bit of silk and wet it from a gold pitcher on the table. She wiped away

the blood from his cut then tore off a dry piece to wrap it with. Doc was sweating by the time she was done, whether from her proximity or her alluring scent, it was hard to tell.

"My name is Justice," he introduced himself. "You really ought to get dressed."

She looked up at him and seemed unhappy. "We are going somewhere? Or, are you upset by me?"

"Yes and yes—I mean, no," Doc stuttered, suddenly unsure of himself. "We have to find that false Elmo before he can bring trouble back."

"I should have known it was not really him, but, well, sometimes we want something so bad, we make nothing into something. He has tricked me into sending the men away."

"He was an actor and he is insane," Doc revealed. "His name is Esteban Miranda. You should not feel bad. He has fooled a lot of people over the years. What of your females?"

"They are here, hiding."

Doc smiled, a rare thing, but then, this was an unusual situation, even for him. "You must summon them. I have an idea. Of course, you must get dressed."

"If you insist."

* * *

Thal Anders was not having fun. First, he was jumping out of an airplane over strange and rocky territory. Second, he was carrying a long-legged pig with ears so big if Thal let go, the pig might make it to the ground without breaking any bones. Third, he

had to take the first two items into consideration as he tried to keep close to the rest of his friends. The giant airship that destroyed their plane was making a leisurely arc as it sent another blast into the tumbling aircraft's hull. The plane smashed into the side of a cliff and burst into flame. Thal and partners fiddled with their chutes so that they were falling into a narrow valley full of big boulders that would provide plenty of cover if they didn't crack up on any of them first.

His own consolation was that Ham Rivers was having problems also. His pet ape Chemistry was wrapped around the dapper lawyer's neck and nearly throttling him. Thal grinned at this, but could think of no retort as the ground approached. Expert parachutists, the amazing five made solid landings without injury. They shucked their chutes and dove for the boulders, drawing forth their automatic pistols. The huge dirigible no longer found them interesting and turned away west, dipping over the jagged mountains to be lost in the gloom of an approaching thunderhead. Thal got up, threw his hat down and stomped on it.

"Dang it!" he roared. "Doc went down in another valley."

"He'll be fine," Ham assured him. "For now, we have to get to that city and help the inhabitants before that flying monster comes back to take over the place. I am confident Doc will do the same thing."

"Let's go, then," boomed Reynolds. "We ain't getting nothing done flapping our gums."

The group thought nothing of accomplishing

this task, armed only with their pistols and having brought no food. They looked at the terrain and picked a gentle slope off to their left that would give them a good vantage point, having lost sight of Opar now that they were on the ground. Big Reynolds in the lead and the shorter legged Thal in the rear, the group set off, the pets making their way along as best they could.

Topping the rise, they saw below them a steep decline to a narrow path. To their left was a stone city in ruins, but one building glittered as if made from diamonds. To their right were the more familiar ruins of Opar; golden towers now dull against the darkening sky.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" lanky Johnny erupted. "Two lost cities. This is one of the greatest archaeological finds in history."

"Must be," chuckled the pale Harmless. "You forgot to use big words."

"We'll turn right," Reynolds decided. "The other city can wait another day."

"What a choice," Thal commented. "Taking gold over diamonds."

The storm broke as they descended the almost perpendicular cliffs to the pathway. Wind howled, sending out stinging raindrops that soaked the party. Lightning dazzled and crashed with deafening thunder following. The storm lashed at them, causing them to slip and stumble, but their skills allowed them to get to the path without incident. They trudged along, damp and shivering, until they found a clump of thick brush and skimpy trees that afforded them some protection. As suddenly as it

began, the storm ended, clouds scudding away to reveal a full moon.

"We'll all have jungle rot if we don't dry out," Ham stated. "Trenchfoot and pneumonia are two things we don't need. I think we should rest anyway."

The group assented to this and made a rude camp in the trees. They erected a lean to and gathered some relatively dry deadwood for a fire. Johnny found some edible tubers so they could fill their rapidly emptying stomachs while Ham lit the fire. It took a while, but it was soon burning brightly and the party stripped to their shorts and hung their clothes and boots around the blaze to dry.

Having no choice, the group napped while one member stood guard. Thal was on duty when he heard the sound of grunts and the slap of bare feet. Normally, the group would have been eaten alive by the various insects of the jungle, but they carried an insect repellent of Doc's invention, so that even nearly naked, they were not troubled. Thal quickly sent Habeas Corpus to nudge the party to alertness. The homely chemist also used his skill at ventriloquism to make it seem that Habeas was whispering to each of them to wake up. This startled most of them so bad that they were instantly ready for action.

"That blasted shoat of yours should be on the breakfast menu," Ham gritted as he crawled next to Thal .

"Tell it to the Marines, shyster," Thal replied, grinning. "We've got company."

Peering through the brush, the amazing five

saw the large blob of a group of men trudging up the very path they camped beside. The moonlight glittered off metal, but Thal could see that most of them carried no more than rude bludgeons. Their appearance, however, astounded him. To a man they were the ugliest crowd he had ever seen. All of them, while heavy and muscular looking, were stooped and gnarled, almost appearing as half-shaved gorillas rather than *Homo sapiens*. Their tangled black masses of hair and beards merged into the matted hair of their chests. Oddly, they were covered in ornaments of beaten gold, some worked with many precious gems.

"A repellent congregation of seeming antediluvian anthropoids," Johnny whispered. "Are their armaments a manifestation of truculence or trepidation?"

"No time to take chances," Reynolds opined. "Stay low and maybe they'll pass by."

"Aw, its only twenty or thirty to one," Thal complained.

They remained silent, but when the intruders got within thirty feet or so, the foremost lifted their splayed nostrils like hunting hounds, and spoke to each other in a language that sounded a great deal like that of apes or chimpanzees. Chemistry, however, looked at Ham with an expression that led the legal eagle to think that his pet ape had a glimmer of insight into the strangers' conversation. Thal saw to his chagrin that the misshapen men bared their fangs in snarls and began to form a rough circle around the party's concealment, readying their weapons.

"They're on to us!" Thal whispered.

"OK, get up slowly, keep your hands up, but have stick your pistols behind your backs in the waistbands of your shorts, just in case," Johnny suggested, not stopping to figure out big words. "Don't show your teeth."

Slowly, the five rose from the brush after hiding their machine pistols. They all raised their hands, palms out, and tried not to grimace or stare too hard at any of their opponents. Thal in the van of their group, and the hulking males seemed to find him of interest. After some deliberation, a small party of them approached the apish chemist. Their leader, who was more richly decorated than the others, spoke in their guttural language, gesticulating and making a show of his gold-banded bludgeon.

"Can you get their lingo, Johnny?" Thal asked quietly.

"Nothing that has ever graced my auditory orifices," Johnny admitted. "It's rather more congruent with the eliciting of genus anthropoidia than homo."

"What?"

"He means they sound like apes," Harmless translated.

"These guys must be some sort of missing link," Thal guessed. "I can't figure out if this first one wants to talk to me or bash my brains out."

"He'd have too much trouble finding them," Ham japed.

The hairy men began to close in as their leader gained no satisfaction. Before they attacked, Chemistry ambled in front of Thal. Though only half his

height, Chemistry was nearly an identical likeness of the stripped down Thal. The simian began to return the leader's barks with some of his own, punctuated by some gestures both at Thal and the leader's club.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny exclaimed. "Chemistry can communicate with these fellows."

Chemistry reached behind Thal's back and withdrew his super-firer. He shook it and then pointed to the leader's bludgeon again, making a laughing sound. Thal snatched the gun away from Chemistry before he could discharge it.

"Wait," Ham said. "Chemistry is trying to let them know you are the big cheese and that your gun is worse than his club. Fire an explosive round at something."

"Only 'cause it's the ape's idea and not yours," Thal said.

He checked the clip for the right round and squeezed off a shot at a small tree. The explosive pellet tore the tree in half, sending splinters flying. The men of Opar shrank back. Thal smiled and twirled the pistol by its guard on his forefinger. The leader of the Oparians sank to his knees and bowed down. The rest, cowed, followed.

"Pretty slick, Chemistry," Thal grinned.

"Only because you look like a red-haired version of them," Ham pointed out. "All you need is the beard. They probably think you are a long lost cousin. They'll probably want to marry you off to the chief's sister. If the women look anything like these plug-uglies, that'd be a real hoot."

"In that case, they'd be more up your alley,

homely and smell. We've got to get through to these rejects from the Lost World. We need them to help us find Doc and Elmo," Thal commented.

The word Elmo elicited a series of grunts and growls among the Oparians. The leader got to his feet and pointed back down the path. "Elmo," was the only recognizable thing he said.

"That's the magic word," Reynolds boomed. "Let's get dressed and go. Lead on MacDuff!"

"The correct line is 'Lay on, MacDuff'," Johnny noted.

"Who gives a hoot in Hades? Come on!"

CHAPTER IX WAR IN OPAR

Elmo of the Apes was mad. The bolt of lightning had knocked him unconscious. When he awoke, he was in a cage, confined by a filthy strait jacket. Worse, he picked up the odor of Esteban Miranda on it. The jacket was too confining for Elmo to rip loose, so he waited for his chance. Seeing Jane was both a welcome and shocking surprise. The Bright Ones tormented him, though, then set off some flash paper or something similar in his face while they tried to drug him.

Elmo began to swoon, but he saw Justice's face swimming before him as he collapsed. His mind knew that the American was his best hope, a man whose abilities surprised even the Lord of the Jungle. His throat began to constrict, but he managed to mouth the words: "I stole your airplane."

Blackness took him, but his constitution was

too powerful for whatever narcotic they gave him. The sound of gunshots brought him back to consciousness, and he could smell fear as well as hear men running and shouting. Suddenly, Justice was near his cage again, smearing something on one of the bars. Elmo thought it smelled like acid. He waited a second, and then threw his weight against the bar. It gave, and he tried again until the bar was sticking out at a 45-degree angle. Wriggling furiously, the ape man managed to squeeze his confined body through the gap.

Elmo backed up to the bent iron bar and rubbed the cords of his straight jacket against its tip, hoping that the chemical Doc Justice had crushed against it retained some potency. A stinging sensation along the edge of his left hand told him that his assumption was correct. Oblivious to this new pain, he strained against the canvas garment until he heard satisfying popping and ripping sounds. His hands came free and he wriggled out of the jacket before any of Doc Justice's amazing acid concentrate could sear his flesh further. A quick glance showed a red streak two inches long across his hand. With a savage yank, Elmo grabbed the bar and wrenched it until its weld broke.

Careful not to smear any acid still on the bar's tip, Elmo gripped it by the other end and crept toward the dark, humped silhouette of the zeppelin. His jungle-trained nose detected Jane there. Within 50 yards of the gondola, he heard her scream. Where once he was cautious, Elmo was now a beast in motion, the soporific effects of the drug fully dampened by the possibility that his mate was in

mortal danger. He saw a man close beside him who was raising a rifle, shoving its barrel toward the apeman. Elmo did not break his stride, but lashed out with the bar, smashing the man's jaw and hurling him senseless to the ground, rifle clattering away unfired.

Two men in silvery robes had grabbed Jane from either side, and she was furiously clubbing one with the grip of her pistol while kicking the other, first in the shins, then aiming higher. Elmo snarled, the veneer of civilization swept away and charged as one of the tribe of Kerchak.

"Kree-gah!" He challenged.

The two men let go of Jane and reached for pistols at their sides. Elmo hurled his bar like a steel javelin, catching the leftmost full in the chest. Crimson spread in an odd shape around the bar and the man crumpled like a thing of paper. Jane's heel connected solidly with the other assailant, and she caught him across the bridge of his hooded nose with the heavy pistol butt, sending him to oblivion.

"Run, Jane!" Elmo called, yanking a pistol from one man's holster. The other carried Elmo's own knife in a sheath on his waist. The Lord of the Jungle recovered his weapon and tossed the pistol to Jane as they ran away from the camp. Shots pursued them, but the darkness made it hard to home in on the two as they ran in a low, zigzag fashion. This was not Elmo's beloved jungle, but a maze of rock. Once a good distance from the camp, he scooped up Jane and was able to make better time, sprinting down the draws and canyons that ringed Opar until he was again on the desolate plain

before the crumbling city.

Only then did he pause, both to listen and sniff the air. Satisfied, he put Jane on her feet. She put her arms around him and dragged his lips to hers. How long they stayed in that embrace, one cannot say, but let it suffice that their reunion was a happy one and each was loath to release the other.

"Where did you come from?" she asked as they rested for a moment under an overhang of rock.

"I was in the cage," Elmo answered her. "I was having a disagreement with Justice when we were struck by lightning. When I awoke, I was in that cage, trussed up in Miranda's straitjacket. This time, he tricked you into believing I was him. Justice figured out who I was, put something on the cage to weaken the bar and I got out in time to rescue you."

"Rescue me?" she smiled. "I was doing fine. I even shot Stellarius, mind you."

The apeman returned the smile. "Did you kill him?"

"He was wearing armor of some sort. What do we do now? Where is Justice? He helped me escape."

"He went to the plane for weapons. We should catch up to him."

Elmo and Jane moved quickly then, crossing the dark plain of Opar. Elmo's uncanny sense of direction led him back to Justice's plane. He found that the American had left a case of food unlocked. He ate along with Jane, knowing there would be no time to hunt for the fresh meat he craved. Once satisfied, he bent to the ground, easily making out

Justice's booted footprints.

"He has gone to Opar," Elmo said grimly. "We must find him before La captures and tortures him."

"Must we?" Jane wondered. "We have both had our problems with that—woman."

"We owe him our lives," Elmo reminded her. "La will not harm a friend of mine."

"She still loves you, then," Jane looked grim herself.

"La refuses to change her heart," Elmo admitted and said no more.

Jane's beautiful features softened a bit, knowing that Elmo could have easily had La for his mate, and still chose her. "Let us go then. The torment of La must be horrible."

* * *

Doc Justice's torment was anything but what Jane was thinking of. He forced himself to turn away as the curvy high priestess donned a close-fitting leather garment and a less ostentatious headpiece. She found a plain belt to attach her dagger, and then was ready. When she moved around Doc to face him, there was a coy smile on her face.

"You must be from the same land as Wayne Colt," she said. "Women embarrass you."

"I have been taught from birth to respect them and not to demean them," he said, more stiffly than he planned.

"Not looking upon my form demeans me," she told him. "Do you find me malformed that you

refuse to look upon the High Priestess of the Flaming God?"

"No, not at all," he sputtered. "You are more beautiful than almost any other woman I have ever seen."

"You do like women, yes?"

"Madam!" Doc Justice blushed for the first time in many years.

"At least you are human," she said, giving her luxurious mane a toss. "I will tease you no further. We have work to do. I hope your plan is better than the false Elmo's."

"We shall see," he said. "I will need a large mirror."

"There is one in my preparation chamber. It was polished from a slab of silver. It would take two of my priests to move it."

"Show me," Doc requested.

She took him to a side chamber where extra garments hung in racks along one wall. Opposite the racks was the tall silver mirror on a brass stand. The silver looked to be a quarter inch thick backed by brass. It was at least five feet tall and was so highly polished he was hard put to find any distortion. Setting himself, he grasped each side of the stand and raised the mirror with little more effort than you or I would lift a bag of feed.

"Lead me to your audience chamber," he told her, not even breathing hard.

She looked at him with awe. No man except Elmo had ever displayed such strength. She took him to her throne room, empty now and gloomy as the flaming cressets by her chair were burning low.

He sat the mirror so that it covered the main doorway. He looked about, studying the various pillars and hangings in the room. The chamber seemed little different than it probably had been when Atlantis was above water and hundreds of merchant galleys attended her. He noted that there were two rear entrances, bordered by a row of columns that ended about ten feet on either side of the throne. The throne sat on a dais of some half a dozen marble steps set in a semi-circle. The floor was of polished stone and double doors of heavy native wood, whose brass valves and fittings were overlaid with gold, served the main entrance.

"Excellent," Doc said. "Now, you must find your priestesses and hand maidens."

"Would they not be in danger?" La asked.

"We are all in danger," he replied. "The men who are coming here are armed with terrible weapons and are led by at least one madman. My impression of them is that they will stop at nothing to get what they want. All your people are in danger of death or dishonor if they succeed and your city will be pillaged of all its wealth."

"I have to confess that, while you are a great man, I wish Elmo were here," La said glumly. "Since he spurned me, I have led a sad life, mere existence, little caring whether I lived or died, but with him at my side, I am very happy."

"You may get your wish," Doc stated. "However, his mate will be at his side."

"Death comes in many forms in Opar," La shrugged. "If it comes to her, then I shall be happy. If it comes to me, I shall no longer be sad."

"Would you slay her?" Doc asked, tensing at her bloodthirsty fatalism.

"Elmo would hate me if I did. However, if she would die, then how could he then choose any but La?"

"I don't doubt that he would," Doc said honestly. For all her savagery, she was a woman to be possessed, but never dominated. He was not immune, no matter what his training. For an instant, he was almost jealous of Elmo, but only for an instant. He put his superb mind back on its mission and reminded himself that he could have no personal attachments. However, he had to remind himself more times than usual.

La located the females who attended the temple. They had hidden themselves in an old storage building. The rest of Opar's inhabitants had fled to the countryside after the departure of the fighting males of the city. La brought them back to the throne room where they stood in awe at the bronze giant.

"Have them bring fruit and trinkets of gold, then line up on either side of the door," Doc commanded. "Let them be friendly to the invaders, but when I shout, they should find cover and shield their eyes."

"Elmo would fight," La said dubiously.

"I will fight in my own way," Doc assured her. "For now, we must use a tender trap."

"Blood does run in your veins," she said with renewed interest. "It shall be as you say."

She ordered her handmaidens to prepare platters of fruits and her priestesses gathered

necklaces and bracelets of pure gold, though not as fancy as they wore themselves. No sooner was this done that Doc's trained ears heard the mutter of the dirigible's engines. The attack was coming by air as well as land. He stepped to the main door and looked out into the moonlit night. A vast, black shape blotted out the stars, the moon giving it a ghostly silver tinge.

Doc ducked back in when he heard the crunch of boots. Flashlight beams played among the outer courtyard. The temple was the only building with light, something Doc wished he could have taken credit for. It made La's seat of power even more of a target. Doc placed himself behind the long silver mirror, testing its swivel mount as he waited. He dug a small periscope from his vest and used it to spy around the mirror's side.

The massive doors boomed open as twenty men in the silver garments of the Bright Ones rushed in, rifles and submachine guns pointed in all directions. They hesitated, though, when they saw the double row of females, one set smiling and holding out beaten gold platters laden with ripe fruit, the row behind them offering finely crafted chains and hoops of solid gold.

The effect was immediate. Hardened these men might be, but the sight of beautiful women bearing irresistible gifts was too much. Bad-tempered after their battle in Chattanooga and a long trip across the Atlantic to camp on the edge of the jungle, these men were eager to take advantage of the bounty set before them. They snatched at fruit, gold, and female.

Four more silver-robed individuals strode in, three carrying the strange rocket guns Stellarius had used previously in his shootout at the dirigible. The largest of the four began to berate and beat the suddenly dissolute Bright Ones, but to little avail.

"You dopes!" the figure yelled, and Doc recognized Eighty-Six's voice beneath the hood. "This is chicken feed compared to the real treasure. Lay off the dames and be ready."

"Shut your hole," One of the underlings snarled. "We been cooped up in that gasbag for too long! The Boss got rid of those monkey men, so who's left to fight? We got the guns, we got the gold, and we got the frails. Lay off yourself!"

"You son of a bitch," Eighty-Six snapped and sent the man sprawling with a well-placed right. The girl beside him shrank away in terror.

"Peace," clipped another of the four, in a German accent. "Let us go to the queen and then the rest will be nothing."

The four advanced to the dais, where a dressed-down La of Opar stared down at them from her barbaric throne.

"Who are you and what do you want in Opar?" she demanded icily, eyes flashing. "You are in the Realm of the Flaming God uninvited. Depart, lest the Flaming God strike you down!"

"You're breaking my heart," Eighty-Six chortled. "What are you tricked up to be, the understudy for Claudette Colbert in Cleopatra?"

"I do not understand your words, but the tone is clear," she said in limping English. "You are no friend of Opar. Go, or death will take you all."

"Fat chance," Eighty-Six continued. "Here's somebody you know to give you the straight goods."

He yanked the hood off the unarmed man to reveal the features of Wayne Colt beneath. Colt looked drawn and dull.

"You must surrender to Stellarius of the Bright Ones," he said quietly, not looking La in the eye. "If you do not open the treasure vaults to this army, you will all be killed."

La lost some of her imperiousness. "I remember you," she breathed. "I cannot believe you would betray La, after she and Jad-Bal-Ja saved you from death. "

"You have no choice," Colt stated. "Surrender or be destroyed."

Nobody except Doc Justice noticed the broad ape that ambled in from one of the colonnaded rear entrances. There were so many monkeys and chimpanzees wandering around that he was just one more. Doc recognized him, though. It was Chemistry. The squat, long-armed ape hid behind La's throne and motioned toward the way he had come. Doc saw Thal stripped to the waist in the shadows, with more people behind him. He glanced over his shoulder at the other entrance and saw another gang of figures there.

Doc Justice stood up then, getting close to La and leaning one arm on her throne.

"It is you who had better surrender," Doc ordered. "You have come here to plunder the riches of Opar, which rightfully belongs to its people. Thieves you come and thieves you had better either

surrender or run."

"That tears it, Justice," Eighty-six thundered, ripping off his confining robes. He produced a worn pair of brass knuckles from his safari outfit and advanced to the dais, unmindful of anything else. "I am going to turn them teeth of yours into swinging doors."

"La, tell your women to find cover," Doc hissed as he set himself for the former bouncer's attack.

She called something in her native tongue that caused her maidens to flee and duck behind benches and other furniture. As they did, a horde of Oparian warriors poured from the colonnaded entrances, led by Doc's men. That set his super-firer on full auto and sent a stream of mercy bullets into the churning silver mass of the Bright Ones. They responded with hasty, unaimed shots that had little effect. After their first ragged volley, the invaders were set upon by the Oparians who used their cudgels to deadly effect. One of the two still-hooded leaders leaped forward to grasp La, perhaps with the idea of taking her hostage.

He learned the error of his way when she ducked beneath his lunge and struck him full in the chest with her dagger. The man clutched at the growing red stain on his silver robe, stood up, and then fell limply to one side. La calmly wiped the blood from her dagger on the man's hem.

"No one shall lay profane hands upon the High Priestess of the Flaming God," she challenged, readying herself in case one of the other two advanced. The remaining hooded villain turned to flee. His men were already falling back to the door as

their number steadily decreased under the onslaught of the Oparians led by Doc's men.

Doc Justice braced himself as Eighty-Six charged toward him. He was as tall as the burly thug, but Eighty-Six was broader and heavier. His massive, brass-edged fist swept down, and had it landed would have felled an ox. Doc Justice, however, was no ox, and got under the swing. He grasped the descending arm and using Eighty-Six's momentum hurled him over his shoulder where the crook fell sprawling along the dais.

Eighty-Six lay stunned only for a second, then scrambled to his feet and rammed Doc in the stomach with his head, flailing his arms in the hopes of connecting with some vital spot. Doc's body was hard as steel, giving Eighty-Six little satisfaction. Doc reached down with one hand and grasped the villain's neck juncture, exerting massive pressure on a nerve center. Eighty-Six went limp as a rag doll and tumbled near the body of his erstwhile compatriot. Doc had manipulated the nerves in Eighty-Six's neck to render him unconscious. He looked around in time to see La raise her dagger to strike at Wayne Colt. He threw one bronze arm under her swing and stopped the dagger's arc just inches shy of Colt's heart.

"He's not an enemy!" Doc rapped. "He's been drugged with something to make him repeat whatever they wanted him to say. I'll give him something to snap him out of it later. Right now, sit him down somewhere where he can't get hurt."

La looked at Colt with savage amusement. "Again, you owe your life to the High Priestess of

the Flaming God," she said, taking his hand and leading him behind the throne where she not-too-gently sat him down. Colt complied without murmur.

Doc snatched the hood from the dead Bright One. Underneath was a blonde, blue-eyed man with a beard. Beneath the robe appeared to be a uniform of some sort.

La looked at the Man of Bronze with an almost innocent smile as she noticed him examining the dead man. "I have had much practice," she said.

Doc looked for the final leader, whom he guessed was Stellarius. He saw the man hot-footing it for the entranceway. However, a tanned giant in loincloth blocked his path. Stellarius' response was to shuck his robe and throw it full into the newcomer's face.

Doc was amused to see that Stellarius appeared to be a mirror image of the newcomer. Elmo and Miranda faced each other in the doorway. Doc's ears picked up the hum of the zeppelin's engines getting startlingly loud. He waded through the battle as bullets rattled everywhere.

"Elmo!" he yelled. "Shut the door!"

Elmo backed off from his confrontation with Miranda to grasp one of the giant brass-valved doors. Doc lunged right and grabbed the other. Almost in one motion, they swung the two wooden panels shut. It was not a moment too soon as something thudded into the entranceway. Doc could see smoke drifting through cracks in the doorframe. The dirigible's crew had unleashed their light amplifier. The door was holding, but for how long?

Elmo returned to his foe. Miranda yelled savagely and the two clinched. Doc noted that the Oparians, led by his men, were mopping up the remaining Bright Ones. Very few of them were alive, and fewer still did not have broken limbs. Doc rallied his men, then tried to keep the Oparians from killing those Bright Ones who wished to surrender. Doc opined that the Nairobi jail and hospital would be very active if he could keep the Oparians from sacrificing their foes.

Elmo, meanwhile, got the upper hand on the wounded Miranda. He grasped the actor by the waist and flipped him up as if he were a child, grasping him by throat and loincloth to hurl him across the room, where the Spaniard landed in a pile of wooden chairs and furs. The madman did not rise. Doc saw that the inside of the door panels were turning black and smoke was getting thick in the room. He motioned for everyone to drop down. William Harris Upjohn rushed up to Doc.

"Doc, you must see this panel behind the throne," Upjohn gasped, using little words again. "Engraved in gold here is a lot of the Oparian language. I made a preliminary study of their ideograms while we waited to ambush the Bright Ones after marching from a remote part of the country. I think I can translate it. This panel, in particular is fascinating, because it explains the peculiar evolutionary process that keeps all Oparian males ugly and all females beautiful." He indicated a gold panel filled with hieroglyphics almost directly behind the throne.

The door's clasps grew cherry red, then sagged

to run in brass rivulets across the stones. The two great panels blew inward and the thick beam of dazzling light crept inward, setting rugs aflame. Doc saw the body of Eighty-Six too late. Mercifully unconscious, the thug did not stir as the shaft of light cut through his body as easily as a surgeon slices with a scalpel. Doc ran to the mirror by the throne as the beam licked up the dais, checked his angle, then pushed the mirror sideways before the beam struck the throne.

The effect was immediate. The high polish of the mirror reflected the ray as it would any other light. The beam's white-hot shaft bent double back to its source, penetrating the dirigible's nose above the ray projector and driving straight into its innards. Heat distorted the mirrored surface until the silver ran like mercury and Doc threw himself sideways behind the throne to knock Wayne Colt over. The beam ate through the mirror and obliterated the panel of hieroglyphics, causing Opar's secret to fall in golden droplets to the floor.

The reflected beam had done its damage, however, as smoke then flame erupted from the dirigible's sides. Doc figured that he had hit a fuel cell. The giant zeppelin struggled to rise, drifting away from Opar and towards the mountains of the City of Diamonds. For many minutes it limped along, only the flames keeping its course visible, until it dipped from view in the jagged mountains. A thunderous explosion shook Opar and a huge ball of flame shot skyward.

"The end of Stellarius and the Bright Ones," Doc Justice announced. Oparians grabbed for ewers

of water to douse the flaming doors. Smoke rolled across the ceiling and out the entranceway without any further damage being done to the throne room. Wayne Colt staggered to his feet and looked around in dismay.

"Where am I?" he asked dazedly.

"In Opar," La told him. "You were trying to get me to surrender my kingdom."

"Why would I do a stupid thing like that?" he demanded.

"What do you remember?" Doc asked him.

"I was in Chattanooga, trying to track down what was going on around Lookout Mountain when I was jumped by a bunch of guys in silver robes and hoods. I was taken aboard an airship, run by," he glanced down at the blonde corpse "that guy. He ran the ship, but a tall, hooded guy seemed to run everything."

"That pretty much fits what we know," Doc said. "The dead man is no doubt Wolff Hines, a German national and master airship pilot. I think with a little digging, we can discover he was a plant, spying on the construction of the new airship XLZ-221. Erich von Harben, as I understand it, was a genius, and he was probably behind the construction of this light amplification device as well. The Nazis probably intended to steal both, and would have succeeded if not for Hines' greed."

Doc examined the fallen Miranda to discover that he was alive, but would need hospital care, as would a dozen of his former comrades. He then treated the wounded Oparians. Elmo watched his ministrations with interest.

"You care for friend and foe equally," the apeman said.

"No man deserves death, if it can be avoided," Doc commented.

"You have never killed?" Elmo asked.

"I didn't say that. I killed several early in my career, including those who caused the death of my father. Having killed, though, I found no joy in it, and once I discovered that I could turn off the evil tendencies in a man's brain, I saw absolutely no need for it. You will give me Miranda, will you not?"

"If you can do as you say, he is yours." Elmo looked pensive for moment. "What about robbing a man of his free will in this matter. Is he not better off dead?"

"He can do anything he likes once I have operated on him," Doc said, "except commit a crime. I need to figure how to get these wounded out of here."

"I can help with that," Elmo replied. "The 0-220 is on its way here. They can transport the wounded wherever you like."

"Excellent," Doc agreed. "We may have different methods, but I see we do share a strong sense of justice."

"I owe the safety of Opar to you," came a silky voice. Justice and Elmo turned to see La of Opar. "There shall be a feast in your honor," she said.

"Without sacrifices," Elmo remarked.

La narrowed her eyes, her smile was contained. "As you wish—you have the High Priestess of the Flaming God in your debt."

"La is Elmo's friend," the apeman noted.

"Is there nothing more?" La crept smoothly to his side, touched his streaked chest with a slim forefinger. Justice arched a brow and withdrew as the woman parted her lips.

Elmo could feel the woman's heart thudding. Her breath shallow. She was incredibly beautiful. Then came a voice:

"John!" It was Jane Clayton. She emerged from the darkness beyond the throne room's entrance.

Doc watched Elmo's face and the ape-man's wife ran toward him. The look in Greystoke's eyes was awesome to behold. Jane's face spread with happiness and, suddenly, the Man of Bronze felt a sharp twang of jealousy, though mixed with regret and loneliness. He turned away as the Claytons embraced. La turned away also, a slight moisture glistening on her cheeks. He approached the high priestess and placed one corded hand on her shoulder.

Only for a heartbeat did the woman allow that gesture. She shook him off. "Such things are not for La," she declared.

"You are wrong, La," Doc whispered. "You are beautiful and self-reliant. Men would kill each other in droves to be at your side."

"I could not love them," she said bitterly. "They are not Elmo and La loves him and him alone. You cannot not understand what it is to desire someone so completely and not be able to—" Her chin rose imperiously, her lips firmed. She dared James Justice to speak.

"Perhaps I do," he said. The two faced each other until Upjohn approached. La disappeared into

the crowd before the archeologist began speaking.

"Doc this is the obfuscation of 10,000 years of history!" he complained. "Heretofore undiscovered proof of Atlantis' existence, and more, a record of a society's descent from the pinnacles of achievement to the depths of barbarity. Antediluvian aberrations! All rendered non sequitur by a megalomaniac's auro-philic perfidy. I'll be superamalgamated!"

Doc turned back to La, but she was rallying her priests, giving them orders to set her throne room to rights. Then, his attention was grabbed by Thal and Ham, surrounded by a bevy of Oparian handmaidens. Most of them seemed attracted to the hulking Thal, since he was closest to their own males in outward appearance.

"This is no fair!" Ham railed. "They are attracted only by your anthropoid attributes, while it is plain that I am the *ne plus ultra* of sartorial splendor! What a miscarriage of justice!"

"Yeah," agreed Thal, hugging one beauty and then the other, "ain't it a damn shame."

THE END