Chapter VI - Thuvia - Maid of Mars

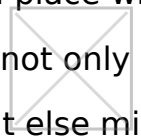
Chapter VI begins with Carthoris and Thuvia advancing across a battlefield that defies all natural expectations. The dead are gone—no bodies, no trace—leaving only a haunted silence where violence once reigned. Carthoris, grounded in action and reason, cannot reconcile what he sees with what he knows. Thuvia shares his confusion, though her instincts sense something more than just mystery. They press forward toward the looming city of Lothar, driven by the belief that shelter might lie within. The desert behind them is far from safe, and ahead, the city walls hold a strange promise of answers. Despite their doubts, they move closer, step by step into a realm where nothing behaves as it should.

At the city’s edge, danger arrives not in the form of men, but of banths—ferocious beasts feared across Barsoom. Yet, to Carthoris’s astonishment, Thuvia meets them not with a weapon, but with calm. Her voice, her presence, tames them. It isn’t control through force, but something more intuitive. The creatures yield, not because they are broken, but because they choose to. Thuvia herself seems unaware of the source of her power. Carthoris remembers other moments like this, where her influence calmed chaos. But knowing the memory doesn't bring understanding. All they can do is accept what works, even when logic fails. The banths move aside, allowing passage as if honoring royalty, and the pair enters the silent city.

The quiet that meets them is not reassuring. It’s the kind that presses against the skin, thick and watchful. Buildings rise around them—grand, ancient, and eerily pristine. No signs of life echo through the streets. Then, like mist forming from thought, an army appears before their eyes. Carthoris braces for combat, but before he can act, the soldiers vanish. Not one drop of blood is shed. There is no battle, only disbelief. Thuvia’s eyes widen in astonishment. The city is not dead—it is something else entirely. Their guide, a man of Lothar, steps forth and calmly explains: everything seen

is created by will alone.

These warriors, he says, are no more real than dreams, but in Lothar, dreams have weight. The Lotharians mastered mental projection long ago, using it to defend themselves against the green hordes who roam outside their walls. It is not merely illusion—it is warfare of the mind. Carthoris, though trained in tactics and steel, realizes he is in a place where conviction can substitute for matter. Thuvia listens carefully, seeing not only power but danger in such skill. If a city can be defended by imagination, what else might be controlled that way? Truth, perhaps. Or love. The thought unsettles her.



They are led deeper into Lothar, where illusions greet them at every turn. A bustling city appears to bloom around them—citizens, markets, and vibrant activity. But Carthoris begins to notice the repetitions. Movements loop, faces flicker, voices echo with no origin. This city, grand as it looks, may not be alive at all. It may only remember being alive. The palace, when they reach it, is no different. Towers shimmer, light casts no shadow, and guards materialize as needed. It is both magnificent and hollow, like a song sung without breath.

Thuvia steps cautiously through this world built by thought, her grip on reality tested with each illusion. Carthoris remains close, his instincts warning him that even though nothing is solid, danger is real. The illusions are not mere distractions—they are tools of control. Those who wield them, like Tario, shape perception itself. When they finally prepare to meet the Jeddak, Carthoris feels the stakes rise. This is no longer just a place of safety—it is a crucible. Whatever they find in the halls of Tario will determine whether they can trust Lothar at all.

The chapter closes with unease pressing down. Lothar is a city where truth is optional and reality bends to desire. For Thuvia and Carthoris, grounded in loyalty and strength, it feels like walking through a dream someone else controls. And yet, within this strange city lies a deeper question—can reality be rewritten if enough minds believe in it? In Lothar, belief builds walls, creates armies, and masks loneliness. But Carthoris knows that belief without truth becomes illusion. And illusions, no matter how strong,

must be faced with something real.

