Chapter VII - Thuvia - Maid of Mars

Chapter VII brings Carthoris and Thuvia into the strange world of Lothar, where nothing can be trusted at face value. Their arrival is met not with hospitality, but with confusion as Jav confronts them, backed by bowmen who vanish like mist. Carthoris prepares for battle, but his enemy dissolves before he can strike—a disorienting moment that leaves both him and Thuvia wary. Jav, instead of explaining plainly, presents riddles cloaked in logic, slowly revealing that the bowmen were mere illusions—phantoms summoned through thought, as real or as false as the mind dares to believe. To Jav, these figures are more than tricks; they are Lothar’s defense, tradition, and legacy. For Carthoris, it’s an assault on reason. A soldier cannot fight shadows and win.

Tario, the ruler of Lothar, is introduced as a man shaped by thought rather than action. He rejects the physical world, claiming true strength lies in the mind’s ability to shape experience. This philosophy dominates Lothar’s culture. The people no longer build or fight; they dream, project, and believe until belief becomes indistinguishable from fact. Carthoris, forged in the physical struggles of Helium, finds this logic dangerous. His skepticism grows, especially when he learns that food, too, is imagined here—sustenance without substance. Jav insists that belief alone satisfies hunger. Though unconvinced, Carthoris eats. Strangely, it nourishes him. Yet the unease remains. Is this nourishment—or surrender to a world that no longer values reality?

The more Carthoris observes, the clearer it becomes that Lothar is not just a city, but a concept. Its people have given up progress for permanence, trading truth for illusion. Thuvia, by contrast, remains a beacon of clarity in this murky environment. Her presence alone challenges Tario’s worldview. She is real, defiant, and unmoved by the phantom comforts Lothar provides. Jav warns Carthoris that Tario's interest in Thuvia goes beyond politics. Tario believes she might be his creation, born from desire rather

than lineage. This thought enrages Carthoris. His loyalty is not based on illusion, but on memory and shared struggle. Tario, in denying her autonomy, becomes an enemy not just of reason, but of respect.

Jav, half mentor and half manipulator, presents Lothar's ideals as noble. He speaks of peace—how illusions prevent war and suffering. Yet beneath his calm logic lies a subtle cruelty. Real threats are fed to Komal, the beast revered as divine. Komal, according to Jav, maintains Lothar's harmony by devouring non-believers—those who refuse to accept illusion as truth. Carthoris sees this not as peace, but as selective tyranny. In Lothar, safety is a reward for surrender. And survival depends not on strength or wisdom, but on belief in a shared hallucination.

Despite Jav's cryptic counsel, Carthoris is unmoved in his resolve. He understands now that Thuvia is in danger—not only from Tario's infatuation, but from a city that cannot distinguish love from imagination. When Tario speaks of Thuvia, it's not as a person, but as a dream made flesh. That belief, in a world like Lothar, gives him power. Carthoris refuses to allow it. Whether illusion or not, the love he feels is real. And it drives him to act. He prepares to challenge whatever force Lothar brings forth—phantom or otherwise.

Thuvia, though silent for much of this chapter, holds firm against the growing absurdity. She remains composed, neither seduced by comfort nor shaken by fantasy. Her resolve gives Carthoris strength. They do not need to question what is real. Their shared past, their struggles, their choices—they are the proof. Lothar may command illusions, but it cannot recreate the authenticity between them. That truth becomes their defense against a world built to obscure it.

This chapter casts a philosophical shadow over the adventure, raising questions about the role of belief in shaping reality. Is it safer to live in a comforting lie than in a harsh truth? Lothar answers "yes," but Carthoris and Thuvia say "no." Through them, Burroughs contrasts passive imagination with active courage. In a city ruled by thought, it is action that reclaims meaning. And even among phantoms, real love and real loyalty remain invincible.