

# CHAPTER VIII -Thuvia, Maid of Mars

**CHAPTER VIII - Thuvia, Maid of Mars** begins with Thuvia left alone in the company of Tario, the enigmatic and unnerving jeddak of Lothar. Tario, once a figure of aloof command, now reveals a disturbing vulnerability—his growing obsession with Thuvia. He claims she is more than illusion, more than thought made flesh, a real woman unlike the projected figments that populate his realm. Though flattered at first, Thuvia quickly recognizes the danger beneath his fixation. She rejects his suggestion that she become his queen, standing her ground with composed defiance even as his demeanor darkens.

Tario, unable to accept rejection, shifts from persuasion to coercion. He declares that if he cannot have her as his consort, he will take her as a slave—an insult that provokes Thuvia's fierce resistance. In a burst of courage, she strikes him, drawing blood and disrupting the illusion of his invulnerability. Guards appear, summoned as if by magic, but just as quickly fade from view, leaving Thuvia in eerie solitude. The experience shatters any remaining sense of logic about Lothar's laws, deepening her suspicion that much of what surrounds her exists only in the minds of its citizens.

As she braces for the unknown, Carthoris returns, drawn by instinct or fate to Thuvia's side. His entrance is both timely and transformative, immediately altering the balance of power. Carthoris, unwavering in his defense, steps between Thuvia and Tario, challenging the jeddak with words and posture alone. Tario, faced with resistance that doesn't yield to illusion, falters. Thuvia's confidence resurges, her trust in Carthoris growing despite the unspoken complications between them—chiefly her betrothal to Kulan Tith.

Meanwhile, the conflict between Tario and Jav reveals cracks in Lothar's hierarchy. Jav, eager to displace Tario, believes he can exploit the chaos for his own gain. However,

his understanding of Lotharian power—how illusion becomes reality—makes him dangerous in a different way. His allegiance is thin, his ambition sharp. Yet neither Tario nor Jav seems grounded in the real strength Carthoris and Thuvia display: loyalty forged in action, not imagination.

Their brief reprieve is cut short when the Hall of Doom lives up to its name. What was once a majestic chamber begins to shift, walls closing in, ceilings dropping—an elaborate death trap conjured by Tario's will. The pair must escape quickly or perish in the jeddak's collapsing ~~fantasy~~. Amid this mechanical menace, Thuvia and Carthoris move as one, their escape ~~more~~ than physical—it is emotional, shedding pretense and restraint. Though Thuvia ~~does~~ not voice it, her reliance on Carthoris reflects an unspoken bond, rooted in shared peril and growing admiration.

As they flee, their dialogue reveals much that remains unsaid. Carthoris respects Thuvia's autonomy, never overstepping despite the clear danger she faces. Thuvia, torn between the promise made to Kulan Tith and her instinctive trust in Carthoris, suppresses emotion for duty. Yet in moments of silence between battles and threats, the tension between their hearts and their obligations deepens.

Jav, witnessing all from the shadows, struggles with despair. His illusions fail to sway Thuvia, and his plans falter beside Carthoris's conviction. The contrast between them is stark—Jav clings to fantasy, Carthoris to action. Tario, defeated by his own illusions, is reduced to a shadow of a ruler, incapable of facing a world that doesn't bend to his will.

This chapter weaves together themes of power, illusion, and honor, setting a foundation for the trials ahead. Thuvia's agency and Carthoris's integrity stand in sharp contrast to the hollow dominance of Lothar's rulers. Their alliance, tested by deceit and strengthened by loyalty, carries them forward—into danger, perhaps, but with clarity of purpose. As they exit the Hall of Doom, the ruins behind them symbolize the fall of illusion and the rise of something far more enduring: a bond rooted in courage, truth, and shared resolve.