

# CHAPTER VI - Thuvia, Maid of Mars

**CHAPTER VI - Thuvia, Maid of Mars** begins as Carthoris and Thuvia reach the gates of Lothar, a city hidden for centuries and shrouded in silence. No cries rise from the battlements, no sentries guard its walls, and yet the city remains untouched by war. Just moments before, it had been defended by a phantom army—archers who materialized to repel an advancing force and then vanished without a trace. Thuvia, again demonstrating her unspoken power over banths, secures safe passage for herself and Carthoris. The beasts, known for their savagery, submit to her as if she were one of their own, echoing the bond she once formed in the presence of John Carter.

The mysterious city they now approach seems carved from both stone and illusion. Grand structures rise in the distance, gleaming under Barsoom's light, but not a single sound escapes its gates. Inside, there are signs of opulence: polished corridors, golden ornamentation, and lush chambers that seem too pristine for a place untouched by life. A lone figure appears—Jav, their guide—offering no answers to their immediate questions, only promising an audience with Tario, the city's ruler. As they follow him, Carthoris remains wary, noting that even the ground beneath them feels strange, as though memory and reality have blended into one.

Throughout their journey into the heart of Lothar, Carthoris is unsettled by the city's eerie duality. It is filled with elegance yet echoes like a tomb. When they finally reach Tario's throne room, what awaits them is not a court of dignitaries, but a solitary figure who commands without soldiers or council. Tario welcomes them without suspicion or fear, despite their sudden appearance in a city long believed to be forgotten. His demeanor is calm, but his presence exudes an unnatural control, one not reliant on physical force.

As Carthoris speaks, he senses that Tario is less interested in diplomacy than he is in study—studying them. He seems fascinated by Thuvia, not for her beauty alone, but for her presence, her reality. Carthoris, protective and alert, observes how quickly Tario's interest veers from neutral conversation to a subtle fascination with Thuvia. Meanwhile, Jav offers vague commentary on the city's strength, suggesting that Lothar's defenses are born not of steel or numbers, but of thought. They need no armies, for they conjure warriors from will and focus, illusions so potent that they harm as real blades might—if the enemy believes them.

Doubt gnaws at Carthoris. If these illusions only work through belief, then resistance should be simple. But Jav insists otherwise—death can be as real as the mind allows it to be, and Lothar's enemies have perished on empty plains, impaled by weapons that never touched them. Carthoris finds it hard to accept, yet the very walls surrounding him, their vibrancy and warmth, might be nothing more than dreams shaped by centuries of practice. Lothar is a city of mental mastery, not machinery. Its citizens, reduced in number, have elevated thought into survival.

Thuvia's silent strength holds firm even under Tario's scrutinizing gaze. Though unnerved, she refuses to appear weak. She continues to hold Komal—the banth—at bay without words, asserting a dominance even Tario seems to find both intriguing and threatening. The chapter ends with a stillness as tense as the moment before a storm, with Carthoris silently wondering if their arrival in Lothar is salvation—or the beginning of a deeper trap.

The brilliance of this chapter lies in its delicate fusion of mystery, psychological tension, and subtle revelations. It invites readers to question what is real in a world where thought can kill and illusions defend a city better than swords ever could. Thuvia's bond with creatures and Carthoris's grounded sense of honor contrast powerfully with Lothar's intangible defenses, setting up a larger conflict between belief and substance that will shape the trials to come.