

CHAPTER II - Thuvia, Maid of Mars

CHAPTER II – Thuvia, Maid of Mars sets the stage high above the Martian ground, as a slender flier comes to rest atop the opulent palace of Helium’s nobility. The rooftop landing bustles with ritual, from the crisp salutes of warriors to the jeweled hands of noblewomen who aid their guest with respectful care. Vas Kor, arriving with calculated composure, steps from the craft to face the formal welcome of Kar Komak, the Jed of greater Helium, and is soon enveloped in the ceremonial routines that separate outsider from honored visitor. Every detail—the dignified greeting, the layers of protocol, the careful scrutiny exchanged in brief glances—reflects the deep traditions and political sensitivities that govern Barsoom’s great houses.

In this atmosphere thick with custom and suspicion, Vas Kor seeks an audience with the Jed. He appeals to the ancient laws of hospitality, professing a mission of peace rather than subterfuge, though his words carry a hint of urgency. The conversation unfolds with measured caution; Kar Komak listens in silence, neither quick to trust nor overtly hostile, his manner that of a ruler weighing each word for hidden meaning. Vas Kor, aware of the stakes, frames his presence as one born not from self-interest, but from a desire to avert war and serve the house of Helium. He implores the Jed to believe in his intentions, invoking the hope for peace as a sacred charge.

After a prolonged exchange that touches on matters both open and unspoken, Kar Komak signals for his guest to be shown to quarters deep within the palace’s winding corridors. With the audience concluded, the Jed quietly summons his majordomo and gives careful instructions to ensure Vas Kor’s movements will be closely monitored. The palace, a marvel of Martian engineering, towers with its many guest chambers, each a testament to the planet’s ancient customs and the grandeur of its ruling class. Vas Kor, alone in his assigned room, ponders the uncertain outcome of his mission—caught between the peril of being revealed as a Dusarian noble and the

possible advantage that might come from the Jed's curiosity or need.

Taking advantage of the privacy, Vas Kor sheds his outer garments, revealing beneath them the unmistakable harness of a lesser Heliumite noble—an emblem that grants both privilege and potential danger depending on the observer's loyalty. He bathes and prepares himself with the regal trappings of a house guest, careful to display only what is expected. The network of annunciators in the room makes it effortless to summon a servant, reflecting the luxury and discipline that permeate Helium's upper echelons.



Summary

Soon, at Vas Kor's request, he is brought once again before Kar Komak. The Jed's summoning is swift and direct, a sign of both authority and intrigue. The interplay between guest and host is a delicate one: the Jed seeks to uncover the real motives behind Vas Kor's visit, while Vas Kor aims to navigate these suspicions with both candor and strategic ambiguity. The encounter hints at the complex dance of Martian politics, where alliances shift with circumstance and every gesture carries meaning beyond the surface.

This chapter highlights the grandeur and strict formality of Helium's society, drawing readers deeper into the ceremonial life and subtle tensions of Barsoom's aristocracy. Through Vas Kor's perspective, the text captures both the awe inspired by the palace's achievements and the ever-present risk of political misstep. In this world, identity is as much a mask as a truth, and survival depends on reading the currents of power as skillfully as navigating the skies. The chapter leaves Vas Kor and the Jed poised at the brink of a decision—one that may determine not only the fate of their own houses, but the delicate balance of peace on Mars itself.