



Land of Terror

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CHAPTER 1

When Jason Gridley got in touch with me recently by radio and told me it was The Year of Our Lord Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-nine on the outer crust, I could scarcely believe him, for it seems scarcely any time at all since Abner Perry and I bored our way through the Earth's crust to the inner world in the great iron mole that Perry had invented for the purpose of prospecting for minerals just beneath the surface of the Earth. It rather floored me to realize that we have been down here in Pellucidar for thirty-six years.

You see, in a world where there are no stars and no moon, and a stationary sun hangs constantly at zenith, there is no way to compute time; and so there is no such thing as time. I have come to believe that this is really true, because neither Perry nor I show any physical evidence of the passage of time. I was twenty when the iron mole broke through the crust of Pellucidar, and I don't look nor feel a great deal older now.

When I reminded Perry that he was one hundred and one years old, he nearly threw a fit. He said it was perfectly ridiculous and that Jason Gridley must have been hoaxing me; then he brightened up and called my attention to the fact that I was fifty-six. Fifty-six! Well, perhaps I should have been had I remained in Connecticut; but I'm still in my twenties down here.

When I look back at all that has happened to us at the Earth's core, I realize that a great deal more time has elapsed than has been apparent to us. We have seen so much. We have done so much. We have lived! We couldn't have crowded half of it into a lifetime on the outer crust. We have lived in the Stone Age, Perry and I—two men of the Twentieth Century—and we have brought some of the blessings of the Twentieth Century to these men of the Old Stone Age. They used to kill each other with stone hatchets and stone-shod spears before we came, and only a few tribes had even bows and arrows; but we have taught them how to make gunpowder and rifles and cannon, and they are commencing to realize the advantages of civilization.

I shall never forget, though, Perry's first experiments with gunpowder. When he got it perfected he was so proud you couldn't hold him. "Look at it!" he cried, as he exhibited a quantity of it for my inspection. "Feel of it. Smell of it. Taste it. This is the proudest day of my life, David. This is the first step toward civilization, and a long one."

Well, it certainly did seem to have all the physical attributes of gunpowder; but it must have lacked some of its spirit, for it wouldn't burn. Outside of that it was pretty good gunpowder. Perry was crushed;

but he kept on experimenting, and after a while he produced an article that would kill anybody.

And then there was the beginning of the battle fleet. Perry and I built the first ship on the shores of a nameless sea. It was a flat-bottom contraption that bore a startling resemblance to an enormous coffin.

Perry is a scientist. He had never built a ship and knew nothing about ship design; but he contended that because he was a scientist, and therefore a highly intelligent man, he was fitted to tackle the problem from a scientific bases. We built it on rollers, and when it was finished we started it down the beach toward the water. It sailed out

magnificently for a couple of hundred feet and then turned over. Once again Perry was crushed; but he kept doggedly at it, and eventually we achieved a navy of sailing ships that permitted us to dominate the seas of our little corner of this great, mysterious inner world, and spread civilization and sudden death to an extent that amazed the natives.

When I left Sari on this expedition I am about to tell you of, Perry was trying to perfect poison gas. He claimed that it would do even more to bring civilization to the Old Stone Age.

CHAPTER 2

The natives of Pellucidar are endowed with a homing instinct that verges on the miraculous, and believe me they need it, for no man could find his way anywhere here if he were transported beyond sight of a familiar landmark unless he possessed this instinct; and this is quite understandable when you visualize a world with a stationary sun hanging always at zenith, a world where there are neither moon nor stars to guide the traveler—a world where because of these things there is no north, nor south, nor east, nor west. It was this homing instinct of my companions that led me into the adventures I am about to narrate. When we set out from Sari to search for von Horst, we followed vague clues that led us hither and yon from one country to another until finally we reached Lo-har and found our man; but returning to Sari it was not necessary to retrace our devious way. Instead, we moved in as nearly a direct line as possible, detouring only where natural obstacles seemed insurmountable.

It was a new world to all of us and, as usual, I found it extremely thrilling to view for the first time these virgin scenes that, perhaps, no human eye had ever looked upon before. This was adventure at its most glorious pinnacle. My whole being was stirred by the spirit of the pioneer and the explorer.

But how unlike my first experiences in Pellucidar, when Perry and I wandered aimlessly and alone in this savage world of colossal beasts, of hideous reptiles and of savage men. Now I was accompanied by a band of my own Sarians armed with rifles fabricated under Perry's direction in the arsenal that he had built in the land of Sari near the shore of the Lural Az. Even the mighty ryth, the monstrous cave bear that once roamed the prehistoric outer crust, held no terrors for us; while the largest of the dinosaurs proved no match against our bullets.

We made long marches after leaving Lo-har, sleeping quite a number of times, which is the only way by which time may be even approximately measured, without encountering a single human being. The land across which we traveled was a paradise peopled only by wild beasts. Great herds of antelope, red deer, and the mighty Bos roamed fertile plains or lay in the cool shade of the park-like forests. We saw the mighty mammoth and huge Mai, the mastodon; and, naturally, where there was so much flesh, there were the flesh-eaters—the tarag, the mighty sabre-tooth tiger; the great cave lions, and various types of carnivorous dinosaurs. It was an ideal hunters' paradise; but there were only beasts there to hunt other beasts. Man had not yet come to bring discord to this living idyll.

These beasts were absolutely unafraid of us; but they were inordinately curious, and occasionally we were surrounded by such great numbers of them as to threaten our safety. These, of course, were all herbivorous animals. The flesh-eaters avoided us when their bellies were full; but they were always dangerous at all times.

After we crossed this great plain we entered a forest beyond which we could see mountains in the far distance. We slept twice in the forest, and then came into a valley down which ran a wide river which flowed out of the foothills of the mountains we had seen.

The great river flowed sluggishly past us down toward some unknown sea; and as it was necessary to cross it I set my men at work building rafts.

These Pellucidarian rivers, especially the large ones with a sluggish current, are extremely dangerous to cross because they are peopled more often than not by hideous, carnivorous reptiles, such as have been long extinct upon the outer crust. Many of these are large enough to have easily wrecked our raft; and so we kept a close watch upon the surface of the water as we poled our crude craft toward the opposite shore.

It was because our attention was thus focused that we did not notice the approach of several canoes loaded with warriors, coming downstream toward us from the foothills, until one of my men discovered them and gave the alarm when they were only a matter of a couple of hundred yards from us.

I hoped that they would prove friendly, as I had no desire to kill them, for, primitively armed as they were, they would be helpless in the face of our rifles; and so I gave the sign of peace, hoping to see it acknowledged in kind upon their part; but they made no response. Closer and closer they came, until I could see them quite plainly. They were heavy-built, stocky warriors with bushy beards, a rather uncommon sight in Pellucidar where most of the pure-blood white tribes are beardless.

When they were about a hundred feet from us, their canoes all abreast, a number of warriors rose in the bow of each boat and opened fire upon us.

I say, "opened fire," from force of habit. As a matter of fact what they did was to project dart-like missiles at us from heavy sling-shots. Some of my men went down, and immediately I gave the order to fire.

I could see by their manner how astonished the bearded warriors were at the sound and effect of the rifles; but I will say for them that they were mighty courageous, for though the sound and the smoke must have been terrifying they never hesitated, but came on toward us even more rapidly. Then they did something that I had never seen done before nor since in the inner world. They lighted torches, made of what I afterward learned to be a resinous reed, and hurled them among us.

These torches gave off volumes of acrid black smoke that blinded and choked us. By the effects that the smoke had upon me, I know what it must have had upon my men; but I can only speak for myself, because, blinded and choking, I was helpless. I could not see the enemy, and so I could not fire at them in self-defense. I wanted to jump into the river and escape the smoke; but I knew that if I did that I should be immediately devoured by the ferocious creatures lurking beneath the surface.

I felt myself losing consciousness, and then hands seized me, and I knew that I was being dragged somewhere just as consciousness left me.

When I regained consciousness, I found myself lying bound in the bottom of a canoe among the hairy legs of the warriors who had captured me. Above me, and rather close on either hand, I could see rocky cliffs; so I knew that we were paddling through a narrow gorge. I tried to sit up; but one of the warriors kicked me in the face with a sandaled foot and pushed me down again.

They were discussing the battle in loud, gruff voices, shouting back and forth the length of the boat as first one and then another sought to make himself heard and express his individual theory as to the strange weapon that shot fire and smoke with a thunderous noise and dealt death at a great distance. I could easily understand them, as they spoke the language that is common to all human beings in Pellucidar, insofar as I know, for I have never heard another. Why all races and tribes, no matter how far separated, speak this one language, I do not know. It has always been a mystery to both Perry and myself.

Perry suggests that it may be a basic, primitive language that people living in the same environment with identical problems and surroundings would naturally develop to express their thoughts.

Perhaps he is right—I do not know; but it is as good an explanation as any.

They kept on arguing about our weapons, and getting nowhere, until finally the warrior who had kicked me in the face said, "The prisoner, has got his senses back. He can tell us how sticks can be made to give forth smoke and flame and kill warriors a long way off."

"We can make him give us the secret," said another, "and then we can kill all the warriors of Gef and Julok and take all their men for ourselves."

I was a little puzzled by that remark, for it seemed to me that if they killed all the warriors there would be no men left; and then, as I looked more closely at my bearded, hairy captors, the strange, the astounding truth suddenly dawned upon me. These warriors were not men; they were women.

"Who wants any more men?" said another. "I don't. Those that I have give me enough trouble—gossiping, nagging, never doing their work

properly. After a hard day hunting or fighting, I get all worn out beating them after I get home."

"The trouble with you, Rhump," said a third, "you're too easy with your men. You let them run all over you."

Rhump was the lady who had kicked me in the face. She may have been a soft-hearted creature; but she didn't impress me as such from my brief acquaintance with her. She had legs like a pro-football guard, and ears like a cannoneer. I couldn't imagine her letting anyone get away with anything because of a soft heart.

"Well," she replied, "all I can say, Fooge, is that if I had such a mean-spirited set of weaklings as your men are, I might not have as much trouble; but I like a little spirit in my men."

"Don't say anything about my men," shouted Fooge, as she aimed a blow at Rhump's head with a paddle.

Rhump dodged, and sat up in the boat reaching for her sling-shot, when a stentorian voice from the stern of the canoe shouted, "Sit down, and shut up."

I looked in the direction of the voice to see a perfectly enormous brute of a creature with a bushy black beard and close-set eyes. One look at her explained why the disturbance ceased immediately and Rhump and Fooge settled back on their thwarts. She was Gluck, the chief; and I can well imagine that she might have gained her position by her prowess. Gluck fixed her bloodshot eyes upon me. "What is your name?" she bellowed.

"David," I replied.

"Where are you from?"

"From the land of Sari."

"How do you make sticks kill with smoke and a loud noise?" she demanded.

From what I had heard of their previous conversation, I knew that the question would eventually be forthcoming; and I had my answer ready for I knew that they could never understand a true explanation of rifles and gunpowder. "It is done by magic known only to the men of Sari," I replied.

"Hand him your paddle, Rhump," ordered Gluck.

As I took the paddle, I thought that she was going to make me help propel the canoe; but that was not in her mind at all.

"Now," she said, "use your magic to make smoke and a loud noise come from that stick; but see that you do not kill anybody."

"It is the wrong kind of a stick," I said. "I can do nothing with it;" and handed it back to Rhump.

"What kind of a stick is it, then?" she demanded.

"It is a very strong reed that grows only in Sari," I replied.

"I think you are lying to me. After we get to Oog, you had better find some of those sticks, if you know what's good for you."

As they paddled up through the narrow gorge, they got to discussing me. I may say that they were quite unreserved in their comments. The consensus of opinion seemed to be that I was too feminine to measure up to their ideal of what a man should be.

"Look at his arms and legs," said Fooge. "He's muscled like a woman."

"No sex appeal at all," commented Rhump.

"Well, we can put him to work with the other slaves," said Gluck. "He might even help with the fighting if the village is raided."

Fooge nodded. "That's about all he'll be good for."

Presently we came out of the gorge into a large valley where I could see open plains and forests, and on the right bank of the river a village. This was the village of Oog, our destination, the village of which Gluck was the chief.

CHAPTER 3

Oog was a primitive village. The walls of the huts were built of a bamboo-like reed set upright in the ground and interwoven with a long, tough grass. The roofs were covered with many layers of large leaves. In the center of the village was Gluck's hut, which was larger than the others which surrounded it in a rude circle. There was no palisade and no means of defense. Like their village, these people were utterly primitive, their culture being of an extremely low order. They fabricated a few earthenware vessels, which bore no sort of decoration, and wove a few very crude baskets. Their finest craftsmanship went into the building of their canoes, but even these were very crude affairs. Their slingshots were of the simplest kind. They had a few stone axes and knives, which were considered treasures; and as I never saw any being fabricated while I was among these people, I am of the opinion that they were taken from prisoners who hailed from countries outside the valley. Their smoke-sticks were evidently their own invention, for I have never seen them elsewhere; yet I wonder how much better I could have done with the means at their command.

Perry and I used often to discuss the helplessness of twentieth-century man when thrown upon his own resources. We touch a button and we have light, and think nothing of it; but how many of us could build a generator to produce that light? We ride on trains as a matter of course; but how many of us could build a steam engine? How many of us could make paper, or ink, or the thousand-and-one little commonplace things we use every day? Could you refine ore, even if you could recognize it when you found it? Could you even make a stone knife with no more tools at your command than those possessed by the men of the Old Stone Age, which consisted of nothing but their hands and other stones? If you think the first steam engine was a marvel of ingenuity, how much more ingenuity must it have taken to conceive and make the first stone knife.

Do not look down with condescension upon the men of the Old Stone Age, for their culture, by comparison with what had gone before, was greater than yours. Consider, for example, what marvelous inventive genius must have been his who first conceived the idea and then successfully created fire by artificial means. That nameless creature of a forgotten age was greater than Edison.

As our canoe approached the river bank opposite the village, I was unbound; and when we touched I was yanked roughly ashore. The other canoes followed us and were pulled up out of the water. A number of warriors had come down to greet us, and behind them huddled the men

and the children, all a little fearful it seemed of the blustering women warriors.

I aroused only a mild curiosity. The women who had not seen me before looked upon me rather contemptuously.

"Whose is he?" asked one. "He's not much of a prize for a whole day's expedition."

"He's mine," said Gluck. "I know he can fight, because I've seen him; and he ought to be able to work as well as a woman; he's husky enough."

"You can have him," said the other. "I wouldn't give him room in my hut."

Gluck turned toward the men. "Glula," she called, "come and get this. Its name is David. It will work in the field. See that it has food, and see that it works."

A hairless, effeminate little man came forward. "Yes, Gluck," he said in a thin voice, "I will see that he works."

I followed Glula toward the village; and as we passed among the other men and children, three of the former and three children followed along with us, all eying me rather contemptuously.

"These are Rumla, Foola and Geela," said Glula; "and these are Gluck's children."

"You don't look much like a man," said Rumla; "but then neither do any of the other men that we capture outside of the valley. It must be a strange world out there, where the men look like women and the women look like men; but it must be very wonderful to be bigger and stronger than your women."

"Yes," said Geela. "If I were bigger and stronger than Gluck, I'd beat her with a stick every time I saw her."

"So would I," said Glula. "I'd like to kill the big beast."

"You don't seem very fond of Gluck," I said.

"Did you ever see a man who was fond of a woman?" demanded Foola.

"We hate the brutes."

"Why don't you do something about it, then?" I asked.

"What can we do?" he demanded. "What can we poor men do against them? If we even talk back to them, they beat us."

They took me to Gluck's hut, and Glula pointed out a spot just inside the door. "You can make your bed there," he said. It seemed that the choice locations were at the far end of the hut away from the door, and the reason for this, I learned later, was that the men were all afraid to sleep near the door for fear raiders would come and steal them. They knew what their trials and burdens were in Oog; but they didn't know but what they might be worse off in either Gef or Julok, the other two villages of the valley, which, with the village of Oog, were always warring upon one another, raiding for men and slaves.

The beds in the hut were merely heaps of grass; and Glula went with me and helped me gather some for my own bed. Then he took me just

outside the village and showed me Gluck's garden patch. Another man was working in it. He was an upstanding looking chap, evidently a prisoner from outside the valley. He was hoeing with a sharpened stick. Glula handed me a similar crude tool, and set me to work beside the other slave. Then he returned to the village.

After he was gone, my companion turned to me, "My name is Zor," he said.

"And mine is David," I replied. "I am from Sari."

"Sari." I have heard of it. It lies beside the Loral Az. I am from Zoram."

"I have heard much of Zoram," I said. "It lies in the Mountains of the Thipdars."

"From whom have you heard of Zoram?" he asked.

"From Jana, the Red Flower of Zoram," I replied, "and from Thoar, her brother."

"Thoar is my good friend," said Zor. "Jana went away to another world with her man."

"You have slept here many times?" I asked.

"Many times," he replied.

"And there is no escape?"

"They watch us very closely. There are always sentries around the village, for they never know when they may expect a raid, and these sentries watch us also."

"Sentries or no sentries," I said, "I don't intend staying here the rest of my natural life. Some time an opportunity must come when we might escape."

The other shrugged. "Perhaps," he said; "but I doubt it. However, if it ever does, I am with you."

"Good. We'll both be on the lookout for it. We should keep together as much as possible; sleep at the same time, so that we may be awake at the same time. To what woman do you belong?"

"To Rhump. She's a she-jalok, if there ever was one; and you?"

"I belong to Gluck."

"She's worse. Keep out of the hut as much as you can, when she's in it. Do your sleeping while she's away hunting or raiding. She seems to think that slaves don't need any sleep. If she ever finds you asleep, she'll kick and beat you to within an inch of your life."

"Sweet character," I commented.

"They are all pretty much alike," replied Zor. "They have none of the natural sensibilities of women and only the characteristics of the lowest and most brutal types of men."

"How about their men?" I asked.

"Oh, they're a decent lot; but scared of their lives. Before you've been here long, you'll realize that they have a right to be."

We had been working while we talked, for the eyes of the sentries were almost constantly upon us. These sentries were posted around the