

Rex and Zendah
in



REX AND ZENDAH WERE soon aware that they were near the last gate, that of the Ram, for it began to get so hot that they quickly turned around to look.

It was the first time during their adventures that they were really startled, and even a little afraid, just for a moment. Where one would expect to find the gate, there was a wall of leaping flames, dashing with a roar higher and higher above their heads until they seemed to touch the sky.

They stood and watched, and as they did so, they began to see all the wood-fire colors of green and blue, lilac and red, where, at first, they had seen only yellow. Each colour seemed to be singing a note of music, so it was fascinating to watch and pleasant to listen to.

“The last gate!” said Rex after a few minutes, “and it seems to be the most difficult to pass. See! Among the flames there hangs a horn; but how ever can we manage to get it so as to sound the alarm?”

“Well,” replied Zendah, “**courage** is the password of this land so we had better see if we can get near it.”

Hand in hand, step by step, they crept nearer and nearer. Strangely enough it did not get hotter the nearer they came to the gate, and at last they stood quite close to the flames. Rex, greatly daring, put up his hand and found he could take the horn without getting burned.

He sounded the horn, which was answered by another on the other side of the gate.

The flames divided themselves into two pillars

curved and twisted at the top like horns. A chain of scarlet fire joined them together, from which hung a curtain of rose-colored flames. The pillars were of a golden color and very brilliant.

Again the inner horn sounded and then came the challenge.

“Who dares to come to this gate?”

The children replied as instructed by their scroll: “Rex and Zendah through Courage dare to enter the Land of the Ram.”

“Enter the fire,” commanded the voice.

This instruction did seem difficult and they stood and looked at each other for a minute or two, but neither of them said anything in case the other was afraid.

They came closer to the gate and found the curtain of flames divided in the centre, which allowed them to enter without harm, although the flames seemed to be roaring on each hand as they passed. They arrived suddenly at the other side and found themselves in a land of brilliant sunshine.

The air was so sparkling, that they wanted to jump and sing with excitement.

No one was there to meet them, as at some of the other gates, and wild country lay ahead—rough stones and forest land, uncultivated but beautiful, and with no roads.

At their feet they found two hatchets, which evidently they were expected to take, for they had labels, on which were carved the words, “Use me, I help to smooth rough places.”

“There does not seem to be any path,” said Rex, picking up one of the hatchets and giving the other to Zendah. “I wonder which way we had better try

to go?"

"Let us follow the Sun," she replied, "That will surely lead us somewhere."

Off they went, over the rough land, clambering amid rocky slopes, through woods, where they had to cut a path in the thickets with their axes. It was great fun though rather rough travelling.

At last, after some little time, they came to pleasant fields and signs of habitation, and were met at the edge of the wild woods by a big white ram. Bells hung from the ram's gilded horns.

Flocks of sheep filled the fields but the ram, somehow, made Rex and Zendah understand that they were to follow him—he was certainly a very wise one!

On they went, tramping after the ram. The Sun was very hot, and the breeze strong, but it made them feel vigorous and able to walk miles without becoming tired.

At last they came to a road and houses, and from the largest of these sounded forth the noise of machinery and much hammering. They stopped to look, for all the doors and windows of the building from which came the hammering noise, were wide open. Inside many men were working with tools, machinery and furnaces, handling in some cases red hot iron.

"What are they making?" they ventured to ask of a man who was coming out of the building.

"Everything you can imagine that is made of iron," he replied. "All the tools that are used on the land for plowing and reaping, and at present, I am sorry to say, swords and guns, and all things that men need when they go to war, and these we shall have to make until men stop fighting. Then the energy of the ram will be used for only really useful tools."

For a few minutes they watched the busy hive of men and the sparks that flew up every now and then. At last turning away they again followed the ram.

Up the road came dashing a group of horsemen who glittered in the Sun as they approached. When they drew their panting horses to a halt, Rex and Zendah saw they were knights in real armor. The leader saluted them with his sword. "The King desires your presence at once," he said, "and has

sent us to fetch you. Mount quickly and ride with us."

A horse was brought for each of the children, and they were delighted to find that they were the same horses they had ridden in the Land of the Archer. The leading knight too, they had met before in the Land of the Lion, so they felt quite at home.

Rex was invited to ride at the head of the troop of knights, because he was the special visitor, this being his own land. Very fast they rode, the wind rushing through their hair with the speed at which they travelled, on and on, past clearings in the forest where rough huts were springing up, past towns that seemed only just built; until at last they arrived at the City of Mars.

Situated on a hill was the palace, built entirely of red polished marble, looking very splendid and shining like fire in the rays of the Sun.

They did not stop for a moment, but swiftly ascended the steps until they drew up at the palace porch, where more knights met them. These knights wore over their armor white tunics, embroidered in red and gold with the emblem of the cross and the lamb. Some of them, but not many, had red tunics and white crosses.

Each knight was attended by a small boy, with red hair, who walked in front carrying the knight's sword and helmet, which was always splendid, and made of worked steel.

Rex and Zendah were escorted along passages and up a long flight of dark green, bloodstone steps, until at the top they were met by an old man in a monk's robe.

"You have something very important to do," he said. "In this, your last visit, we have been given orders to make you Knights of the Sun, if you will take the pledges. The fire you passed through at the gate was the first test.

"Will you, Rex and Zendah, promise to speak the truth, be fearless, fight for the weak, and be loyal to our King?"

Each replied: "I will."

He then placed on their shoulders a long white cloak with a red cross on the back and requested them to follow him into the hall and not speak until he bade them.

It was a very lofty hall, so high that one could not see the ceiling. The walls were pale rose color, and the pillars were a magnificent scarlet, like a poppy.

Knights in their shining armor stood at attention along the walls, and banners of all countries and lands hung everywhere, some new and some worn and tattered.

The throne was not in the usual place, but in the centre of the hall, and facing it at the far end stood an altar. The window in the wall behind this was curiously shaped like a sword, stretching from floor to roof. The cross handle of this sword formed the diameter of a narrow circular window, with twelve small divisions, each of a different colored glass.

Slowly they followed the old man to the throne, where they found King Mars dressed in wonderful red and gold robes, and wearing a crown of polished steel.

He bowed to them and said, "I am commissioned by our Lord the Sun, to make you his knights; it is a great honor. You have promised to obey the knights' law, and so when the right moment arrives you will follow me to the cushions in front of the altar.

"You notice the fire is not lighted; once every year the Sun relights the Sacred Fire to show that the Earth awakens to its year of work with his help. It is at this time that we admit anyone who is qualified to become a Knight of the Sun."

In front of the altar on the right hand, stood a herald with a trumpet. On each side were seated six drummers. The drummers rolled out a tattoo, and as they did so Mars left his throne, and walked up and took his place in front of the altar. Rex and Zendah followed and knelt down on the cushions placed for them. The trumpeter sounded one clear note, and at this moment a great beam of sunlight flashed through the sword-shaped window, strik-



Rex and Zendah are knighted as "true Knights of the Sun" by King Mars, while they are bathed in a beneficent beam of light cast by the approving Sun Lord.

ing across the altar on its way, and shining on Mars and on the children who knelt at his feet.

The scented wood caught fire and clouds of smoke rose into the air. In the clouds they saw the face of the Sun Lord smiling at them, and then it vanished.

While the sunbeam still shone upon them Mars drew his sword, and striking each child lightly on the shoulder, cried:

"Rise true Knights of the sun, take each the Sword of Light, like that which was bestowed upon King Arthur, and, with courage and cheerfulness, fight the Dragon of Selfishness in the world, never despairing, however difficult the task."

The children rose to their feet, and the attendant pages girded them with scarlet belts, and gave

them shining swords whose handles had their names set in brilliant diamonds.

Every knight in the hall drew his sword and saluted them. It was a wonderful sight to see them all flashing in the air.

Then they took their places as knights by the side of Mars, and watched men and women come to beg him to sign their papers, that they might, during the coming year, go forth into strange lands and explore or fight for the oppressed.

To each he said as he fixed his red seal to the paper: "Go forth, brother, with courage, and overcome all difficulties."

The beam of sunlight gradually faded away and Mars turned to the children and told them it was time for them to go.

Saluting with their new swords, they turned and went out of the palace, back to their horses which were waiting for them at the entrance.

The knights rode with them to this entrance, and after saluting their brother knights with their swords, the children soon found themselves outside the gates.

"Our adventures are over, Zendah," sighed Rex, "now we have to go home."

"And you would not find that so easy without me," cried a voice, and turning around they saw Hermes.

"Now we must go quickly. When we get home I shall help you to remember all you have seen and heard. You are wondering how to use your talismans? Well, as each comes, think of your password and you will find that you will be able to use your talisman all that month. How much use you can make of it depends on practice. See, too, here are the rest of the keys to open the Book of Wisdom; these you will be able to use also as you grow older."

He took hold of their hands, and back they flew to Earth, so swiftly that before they could count two, they were standing in their own room.

"Now," said Hermes, "you must get out of your bodies very slowly and then you will remember when you wake up in the morning. "He touched

them with his hand—the next thing they remembered they were sitting in bed with the Sun shining in at the window and mother saying: "Well, you are a long time waking up this morning."

They jumped up at once. "Oh mother, we have had such a lovely time, we have been to the star lands with Hermes. And oh—do you remember seeing us in the Land of the Crab?"

Mother smiled, "So you do remember too. I hope you always will, for not all children are taken by Hermes to the lands of the Zodiac."

EPILOGUE

The adventures are ended. But you can all find the entrance gates to the lands of the Zodiac if you search for them. However, you will find some of these lands much easier to visit than others. Of course this does depend upon which fairy smiled into your cradle when you were born and gave you for your very own the talisman and password of your sign.

If King Neptune smiled upon you, or the Lady Moon, you will have adventures to tell even more exciting than those of Rex and Zendah when you awaken in the morning. And then you must write your adventures for other children to read.

Best of all, if you can persuade Hermes, the messenger of the gods, to touch you with his magic wand and give you his shoes of swiftness, these will bring to you, as your most cherished possession, a passport to all the Lands of the Stars. □

—Esme Swainson

