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# THE DAY THE GODS FELL

By IVAR JORGENSEN

*When John Gutzon Borglum carved, in rock-ribbed majesty, the faces of Washington, Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt high on the side of Mount Rushmore, he left not only an imperishable monument to the past, but what could easily become an awesome puzzle to generations yet unborn.*

*At least, so Ivar Jorgensen suggests in this compassionate study of mankind's return to the stone age as a result of one World War too many. In a society where clubs and spears have replaced the hydrogen bomb, there are sure to be wise old men like Kropor . . . just as there must be bewildered youngsters who can't separate the truth from superstition. The question is: where does superstition leave off and wisdom begin?*

IT was Dorn's day of manhood, the most important day of his life, and he was up very early standing in front of the village looking up at The Faces.

The Faces had always meant a great deal to him. But now they seemed to have greater significance than ever before, proving, as they did, that the Sodakans were

a chosen tribe, a privileged warrior clan. They alone lived in a place hallowed by The Gods; the one place in all the great land where The Gods had carved their own images into the rock of a great mountain.

A lump arose in Dorn's throat at the thought of his being a Sodakan. There were many large and

fierce tribes in the land. The Nodakans, the Misotans; the Nebraskans and the Misourans to the south. And further west the proud Wyomans, Idoans, and Montanans.

And — said Kropor, the learned priest of the Sodakans — there were many other tribes in the land. Kropor had things called Books, handed down to him from his priestly forebears, and in these Books were strange markings which — it was said — gave knowledge to those who could interpret the markings. And Kropor was one of these.

Kropor said the land stretched far in all directions and that there was a sacred number — 48 — this being the number of the tribes in the land.

Dorn had sat often at the feet of Kropor, even since early childhood, and had listened to his many stories. But of all Kropor's stories, Dorn liked best those dealing with The Gods.

*Many many generations ago, only Gods lived in this land. They were young and virile Gods. They came across wide waters to this land because of a dispute with other Gods and they made this the Chosen Land.*

*They had powers which we can understand but dimly. They built great dwellings that reached high into the sky. They were not bound to the land, but rode over it in great shining craft. They took the lightning out of the sky and used its*

*power to drive these craft through the air and also across the land at great speeds along ribbons of smooth stone which only The Gods could have caused to be.*

*And as a sign of their Godhood, they carved The Faces into the vast side of a mountain, here in the land of the Sodakans. This makes the Sodakans a tribe chosen of The Gods, as The Faces are the one true symbol left of their —*

"I envy you, Dorn."

Dorn turned quickly to find his friend Zoodor standing by his side in the dawn. Dorn smiled and said nothing.

Zoodor sighed. He was still a year from manhood and looked forward also to the time he would come of age; when he could fight the surrounding tribes; when he could take to himself a mate, as Dorn would this day take Gora.

"Gora is very beautiful," Zoodor said.

Dorn turned his head to look toward the far side of the village; toward the houses in which the young females were kept and closely guarded. He had often seen Gora walking with the others inside the fences, and on the day of the selection she had been brought before him along with several others and he had picked her out. He had seen the joy and promise in Gora's face and now he looked forward to the hour, not far hence, when she would be given to him.

Zoodor was also thinking of Gora and — being on the most intimate terms with Dorn — he said, "What do you think it will be like?"

"I don't know."

"They say it is wonderful when you take your woman into the hills for the first time."

"Perhaps. But there are more important things about reaching manhood than taking a woman."

"What could be more important than that?"

"The glory of being a Sodakan, for one thing. We are the chosen ones of The Gods, Zoodor. Only in our land did they leave their images; only on our mountain did they carve The Faces. All the tribes have women. All the tribesmen, when they come of age, take a female into the hills." Dorn stood now — tall and proud — looking up the Sacred Mountain. "But only the Sodakans have The Faces."

Zoodor looked curiously at his friend. "You always were a serious one, Dorn. You never talked much about women with the others. Always The Faces and The Gods and the glory of being a Sodakan. Kropor says you are the greatest among us — that some day — because you have wisdom — you will be our Chief. . . .

"It is whispered among the youths that Kropor's final lesson to you will not be the ordinary one but what to do with the woman in

the hills, how she must be treated gently and not hurt or killed."

"I have heard nothing about my final lesson. What will I be told other than that?"

Zoodor shrugged. "No one knows. But tell me, Dorn, do you really believe what Kropor tells us about the past?"

*Our Gods were not the only Gods in existence. But ours were the greatest and the most powerful. They had magic such as to make the other Gods look puny. Our Gods wanted only to live in peace, but the other Gods — with weak magic — were jealous of ours.*

"Why shouldn't I believe it? Don't you?"

*In order to defend themselves from the jealous ones, our Gods built great weapons which they could carry across the sky and drop upon the cities of the others.*

"Do you believe about the cities? How could there have been places where for miles around the sky was filled with dwellings that reached clear up to the sky? How could there have been boxes that would freeze rock-hard even in the warm season? How could they talk to each other further than a man can shout and be heard? Do you believe all that?"

"Of course I believe," Dorn said sternly. "And so do you. We know The Gods could do anything. Nothing was beyond the power of their magic."

Zoodor continued puzzled: "Then why did they leave? And if their magic was all-powerful, why did they let the other Gods drop weapons on their cities and turn them into great stone piles?"

"That was all explained by Kropor. There were certain traitors who gave the magic of our Gods into the hands of their enemies. Too late, our Gods discovered this and there was a great war. The skies were darkened by the war craft and all our land and all the other lands rocked from the thunder and lightning of the war. Our Gods defeated the enemy, but after the war was over our Gods were sad and no longer cared to live in this land. So instead of re-building the great cities with their magic, they built instead craft greater than any that had been built before and went up to live among the stars."

Zoodor of course had heard all this many times before. These things were the tenets of religion. All people believed them and Zoodor would not voice a doubt except to his closest friend. He said, "I guess it is all true because only The Gods could have carved The Faces."

"Of course it is all true. And only we Sodakans have The Faces of The Gods in solid stone on our mountainside."

Zoodor's mind wandered from these weighty topics. "Tonight," he said, "you will take Gora into

the hills." His eyes were veiled and he spoke dreamily. "You will remove her clothing and . . . ."

But Dorn, not wishing to discuss such things, was striding off into the village.

Dorn hardly touched his morning meal. His mind was too full of thoughts relative to the new life he was entering. Suppose in a few days the Nodakans sent an army to attack the Sodakans and take their food and women? He would fight against them for the first time. He would stand valiantly in the front line and wield his club along with the other men of the tribe. In his first battle he wanted fiercely to acquit himself well. He would smash a dozen skulls, possibly, and bring home an enemy hand, hacked off with the sharp edge of a rock. And later he would be allowed to enter battle with a better weapon — one of the sharp sticks you could drive right through an enemy's body.

Dorn thrilled at the thought — the holy thought of protecting his land from an invader.

But now the time had come to give over dreaming — the time to sit at the feet of Kropor and hear from him the final words of instruction which all youths were given on the day of manhood.

He found the fragile, gray-headed priest seated in his dwelling. Dorn entered and dropped down cross-legged at his feet. Many times he had sat at Kropor's

feet, and this would be the last. It made Dorn a little sad because he loved Kropor and was grateful for all the wisdom he had received from him.

Kropor sat looking down at Dorn for a long time, and finally Dorn said, "I have come for the last instructions."

"Yes," the aged man replied, "but this last ritual is so unnecessary — so futile. Men know instinctively what to do with women. And men are not beasts. They cherish the mates they take to themselves."

"Then you do not intend to tell me —"

Kropor leaned forward and placed his hand upon Dorn's young shoulders. "No, my son. I am going to tell you something far different. Long I have taught you, and long I have waited for this day. I have watched closely through the years, hunting for a youth of mind and ability — one to lead his people out of their ignorance and superstition."

"I don't understand."

"Only with a strong leader can our people start up the long hill out of this darkness into which they have fallen."

Dorn looked more bewildered than before, and Kropor went on: "My son — a great deal of what I have taught you — and the others — is untrue."

"Untrue?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you teach it to us?"

"Because, Dorn, a long time ago our people suffered a great shock. Those who survived were left broken and bleeding on the ground. All they had was taken from them. Death rained down from the sky and no man had a home or anything to eat. All he had left was the fear that drove him into the hills to crouch behind rocks and in holes and the forests."

"That was the War of the Gods. You told us of it."

"Yes, Dorn, but I hid the truth. I changed it around as all the teachers before me have done. In the generations which followed that great war, man lost his knowledge and even a great deal of his ability to comprehend. He would not have believed the truth, so it was distorted into a fairy tale because even children can understand fairy tales."

A vague uneasiness stirred in Dorn's heart. He had the feeling this was sacrilege somehow. But he could only listen to Kropor. And, strangely, he wanted to listen.

"And, after generations of untruth had passed, the truth became dangerous. People did not want to hear it. They only wanted to hear their fairy tales repeated, because all men must have a sense of security, and the greatest sense of security comes from doing what your ancestors did and their

ancestors before them. To believe as they believed and to live and die as they did."

"Why shouldn't we live and die as did the great Sodakans before us? That is our way of life."

"But it is a bad way, Dorn. It brings no progress. In order to rise and have better things we must think our own thoughts. We must so live and strive as to be better men than our ancestors were."

Dorn could not quite follow all this, and he was still uneasy. But his curiosity was greatening. "And now you are going to tell me of this truth?"

"Yes, Dorn. The time has come when our people must be led out of ignorance and you must be their leader."

"Then what is the truth?"

"*That there were no Gods.*"

Dorn's senses reeled. It was almost as though Kropor had raised his arms and cursed the ancient and honorable Sodakans who had fought and died to save this land from the surrounding enemy tribes. Even worse than that. *He had said there were no Gods!*

Dorn started to get to his feet, but Kropor pushed him down and went on: "My son. Man is always prone to attribute that which he cannot understand to the Gods. And because we would be unable to carve The Faces upon the mountainside, we tell ourselves The Gods did it."

"The Gods *did* carve The Faces.

You have often said so yourself."

"But only through fear did I tell such lies; through fear of the people's wrath. The Books say differently, and the Books are right. Those we know as Gods, Dorn, were men like you and me. At one time they too were ignorant like ourselves, but they thought as men of tomorrow, not men of yesterday, and so they found knowledge. They learned all the seemingly magical things man can do. He can harness the elements to work for him. Our forefathers did this. They learned gradually — one little thing — then another little thing — and they would not be blinded by superstition. They built ships to sail on the sea and under the sea. They built the craft that sailed through the air. They learned to talk to each other over wires at a great distance, and finally how to talk over great distances without wires. And even to send pictures of each other, so those far away could see and hear them even though they were in some other place."

Dorn's heart was beating like thunder in his ears. "But The Faces! I could not make them. You could not make them."

"No. Because we are without the knowledge, the artistic ability, the great machinery which these early men made to do their will."

"Then there was no great war and The Gods did not sail away to

live far out among the stars?"

"There was a great war, Dorn, because these men, while having godlike knowledge, did not have godlike wisdom. They turned their great learning, through greed and fear, into paths of destruction. They created weapons so powerful no nation could stand against them."

"True, but they were Gods —"

"No, Dorn! No. They were men. And when the great war was over these men had all but destroyed each other. Only a few miserable humans escaped — not to fly up to the stars, but to run shrieking into the forests and the rocks. Man was through, but mankind survived to begin again; to send their children out of the holes and from behind the rocks to look again at the wide world. The children lived in fear and needed something to give them comfort. They needed an explanation of things they could not understand. Hence, they made up the story of The Gods."

"Only men," Dorn muttered dully.

"Only men — like you and me. And if mankind is again to rule the earth and the seas and the skies, they must have a leader with the courage to tell them the truth. You must be one of those leaders, Dorn."

"Today," Dorn replied, "was to be the happiest of my life. The day I would become a man and

take my woman up into the hills. The day I would become a warrior and fight the battles of the So-dakans."

"It will be a greater day, my son. You must teach our people that war is futile. Continuous fighting beats men down. Only through love and through a joining with all the tribes in peace can we again be great."

Dorn had spent many hours wandering through the hills remembering Kropor's words. Not until sundown had he returned to the village. This was indeed a strange day of manhood, because Gora was still in the place of women and there had been no mating.

But there had been other great excitement. Even now, in the darkness, Dorn could hear the death-cries of the false priest Kropor. He could see the firelight dance and hear the yells of the men who were stoning the priest to death.

Scarce an hour had passed after Dorn told them of Kropor's lies before they dragged the old man out and began the killing.

Dorn did not like the sound of Kropor's cries. He had known the old priest too well, and it was like listening to the agony of a friend.

But this of course was wrong. No friend, Kropor, but a liar and a blasphemer.

*(Continued on page 162)*

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## **THE DAY THE GODS FELL**

*(Continued from page 71)*

Dorn turned to look up at the mighty Faces, dim now on the mountainside under a pale moon. And as he looked, his courage and his happiness came back. He was a

Sodakan! Soon he would mate and fight his tribe's enemies.

"Of course they were Gods," he whispered. "Only The Gods could carve such giant images in the granite."

Now he smiled and looked up among the stars.

Where The Gods had gone.