

Rex and Zendah in



THE CHILDREN were very glad when they stood before the next gate, for even outside it looked warm and welcoming. It reminded them of mother's fire when she had a great wood log burning in the winter, for first blue and then green flames seemed to dart across it.

There were moving figures on this gate as there were on the first, but they could not see them well, because of the flickering lights that flitted across its surface.

The only thing they could see clearly, was a scroll with some silvery letters near the top of the gate. Looking at this carefully, after a time they saw these to be: *Aim at the Star and hit the Moon.*

"What do you think that means?" asked Rex.

"It has something to do with shooting," replied Zendah, "and we must find something to shoot with." So they looked round and soon found a very, very small bow hanging on one side of the gate, and a small quiver of arrows on the other.

"We cannot both use it at once," explained Rex. "I think I am the better shot." So he took the bow and aimed with an arrow at the gate. But it missed and hit the left pillar. Aiming again he hit the right-hand one.

"I thought you were the better shot," laughed Zendah. "Try aiming higher."

Rex aimed at a place over the top of the gate, and found he hit a small shield, just below the

scroll which he had not noticed. Immediately the whole gate lighted up, and in the centre could be seen a great fiery arrow.

On each side was a figure, half man and half horse; the one dressed in beautiful armor, and the other in rough skins, like a savage.

A voice demanded the Password, and they replied,

"Freedom."

"Enter freely, Rex and Zendah, into the Land of the Archer," rang the answer. As in the other lands the gates opened immediately. A young man dressed in a short blue tunic, with bare legs and sandals, like the ancient Greeks, ran up to them. He held with a leash, two elegant greyhounds. Raising his right hand in salute, he welcomed them, and bade them follow him.

It was a beautiful country with rolling plains of grass surrounded with little ranges of hills. Here and there were graceful temples with gleaming pillars of different colored stone, like those that are still to be seen in Greece and Rome.

Putting a silver whistle to his lips, their guide blew a clear note and immediately up rushed four beautiful horses.

"Can you ride?" he asked.

"Oh yes," cried the children, for they had often ridden bareback round the fields at home.

Rex mounted on a black horse, while Zendah had a white one and their guide stood upright, with one foot on a brown horse and one on a gray, the



reins in his hands guiding all four horses. Off they went, with a merry shout, and the horses flew as the wind along the roads and over the downs.

There were no saddles and they clung to the horses' manes, for they went so quickly it took all their attention to save themselves from falling.

Everywhere they saw crowds of horses, of all colour and sizes, chasing and racing over the downs, some with riders, some with men's heads and bodies down to their waists. There were many dogs also enjoying the fun.

They drew up suddenly in front of a courtyard paved with squares of black and white stone.

Dismounting, the young man tied the reins of the horses to a ring on one of the gate posts. They followed him up the centre of the courtyard to a curious building made of a shining white metal, with nine sides, and nine windows in each of the sides. There did not seem to be a way in, unless one could fly through a window!

Around each window was a stone border carved with queer leaves and signs, and on the top of each, something that looked like a bird rising out of flames.

Their guide made a curious low sound, and suddenly the whole front opened, and they found themselves looking into a stable made entirely of a purple stone, polished like glass.

"Look, Rex, look!" cried Zendah, "it is Pegasus, the flying horse!"

Indeed it was, for coming toward them was the most beautiful white horse they had ever seen. His coat shone like silk and just behind his shoulders were two great silvery wings, which he kept folded along his back, except when he was flying. Zendah reached up and gently stroked his nose.

"Can he take us for a ride?" she asked.

"I do not believe you could manage him yet," said their guide, shaking his head, "and if you could not, as he can fly everywhere, even to all the other stars that you can hardly see, he might take you to some star from which you would find it very difficult to get back.

"When you have learned all the passwords, then perhaps you will be able to call him and ride along the Milky Way. You will be given a tin whistle by our King; you will not find it easy to blow the right



The Land of the Archer

note to call Pegasus, but when you can, he will come and you will be able to have your ride."

After leaving the stable, they went down to a plain of most beautiful short grass and moss, a real velvet lawn. All around were raised banks covered with turf, standing one above the other like steps.

Children, men, and women were sitting on these slopes, watching others in the central space, taking part in all sorts of races and games.

"How jolly and good-tempered they all seem," said Rex after they had watched one of the races, "they don't seem to mind a bit if they win or lose."

Just then they caught sight of two boys who did seem to mind! They had just run a race and had come to the winning post about the same time and they were standing disputing as to which of them had won the wreath of fig leaves that was the prize.

The young man came up to them and said, "If you cannot agree about it, we will go to the King." Calling for two more horses for these boys, they all mounted and off they went again over the green

plains, until they came to a castle which had nine towers with curious sharp pointed spires. Men with long robes and white wigs met them and went before them, from the entrance to the main hall.

Here they saw, sitting on his throne, the jolliest king they had ever met, with a rosy face and twinkling blue eyes.

“He surely must be some relation to Old King Cole,” thought the children, for he looked as if he were always just on the point of laughing, even when he was serious!

It was impossible to feel sad when you looked at him; you had to feel happy.

The pages in attendance showed Rex and Zendah to some cushions on the steps near the throne, and after bowing to the king, who gave them one of his jolly smiles, they sat down.

Two more pages brought forward the disputing boys, and King Jupiter, for that was his name, looked serious a few minutes while he listened to their story.

“How foolish you are,” he said. “It does not matter the least who arrived at the winning post first, so long as you both ran your best. You know the motto over the entrance to this land: ‘Every-one can aim at the Star, but not until you have had much practice can you expect to hit it.’”

So he divided the wreath between the two and they were quite satisfied. King Jupiter rose from his throne and clapped his hands.

“Bring in the banquet, and let my merry musicians play their best music, so that we may show Rex and Zendah how the subjects of King Jupiter can be merry and happy.”

It does not matter the least who arrived at the winning post first, so long as you both ran your best. You know the motto over the entrance to this land: “Everyone can aim at the Star, but not until you have had much practice can you expect to hit it.”



In a few minutes tables appeared, and great dishes of fruit and cakes and sweets were set before them. There was an abundance of everything; everyone tried to make the children feel at home and showed them with presents of figs and apricots

to take away with them. They did not know which to do first—thank everyone, eat their fruit, or listen to the music, which was very beautiful. Just then an old man, who was sitting at one end of the table, rose and held up his hand. Everyone stood up, and he said, “Let sing our usual song of thanks to the angels, for helping us to grow all these beautiful fruits.” A glorious hymn of praise was sung by

all, after which the children were taken back before the throne of King Jupiter.

There Zendah received the promised whistle, and Rex received a nine-pointed star made of a carbuncle, and, much to their disappointment, they were told it was time for them to go.

Never before had they been anywhere where everyone was so generous, nor any place they were so sorry to leave.

At last their guide brought their horses to the palace door, and they mounted. This time he let them guide their own horses back to the gate. Hundreds of the people rode with them to see them off. As they stood outside and the gates gradually closed, they heard voices crying, “Goodbye, goodbye, come again soon, we shall be so glad to see you.”

“I do love this Land of the Archer,” said Zendah.

“Of course you do,” retorted Rex. “It’s your own sign!” (Continued) □

—Esme Swainson