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By CHARLES STODDARD

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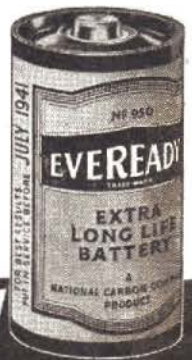
"PANDEMONIUM BROKE as the bewildered, enraged animals tried to kick the car to pieces! We covered inside as their thudding hooves smashed lights, hood and windshield! It looked as if we were as good as dead!



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THRILLING ADVENTURES

Vol. XXXVII, No. 2

J. S. WILLIAMS, Editor

May, 1941



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By CHARLES STODDARD

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THE GLOBE TROTTER A Department

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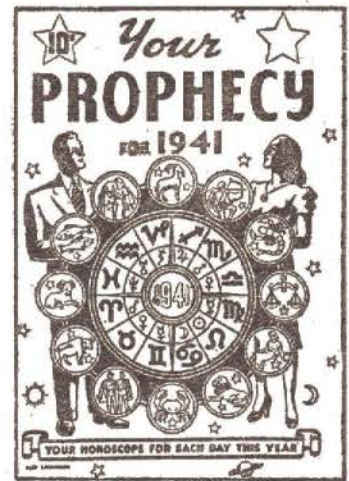
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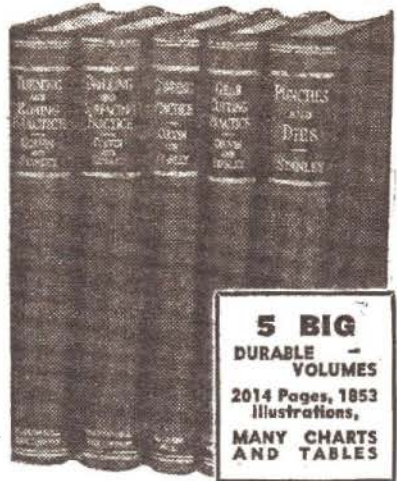
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The GLOBE TROTTER



SALAMAT JALANI!

That's the greeting that was usually exchanged between the turbaned Malay and the white linen-clad American and English tourists that stepped off the gangplanks in the Straits Settlements a couple of years ago. *Salamat Jalan* means "peaceful journeying," and those were the days when a journey on the Peninsula and Oriental Steamship Company's boats, on the Dollar Line steamers, or others of the famous Far Eastern liners, was indeed peaceful journeying.

Now, however, with the activity of the little brown men of Nippon moving southward from the ravaged and scorched battlefields of China into ill-fated France's rich Indo-Chinese possessions, and toward the lush bounty of the Malay peninsula, the Netherlands East Indies and Australia, the prospect of peaceful journeying is a gloomy one. This extensive source of raw materials for the world, at peace and at war, must be defended by the powers that now develop its resources. Thought of this brings us to a name that is growing increasingly important, both in British Empire defense, and American Pacific naval activity.

The name is Singapore!

Beyond Mandalay

Just what is Singapore? To a good many people it is the name of an exotic city somewhere beyond the Road to Mandalay. A name that conjures up visions of adventure and intrigue. But as a real city with vibrant, throbbing life, and living, breathing people, it is not so well known.

While Singapore's importance in the Anglo-American naval picture may be of recent development, the town itself has a history of nearly a thousand years behind it. Early Chinese historians tell of trading journeys before the memory of European travelers, and it is quite likely that both Marco Polo and Ibn Batuta spent some time in this great Malay port at the time of their exploit in the field of Globe Trotting in the 12th and 13th centuries.

The early community on the island that is now the core of the great Far Eastern defense organism, was a collection of thatched huts, reminiscent of the Sea Dyak houses of today. This truly frontier city was subjected to an assault by the power-

ful Majapahit in the middle of the 14th century, and with the classic rebirth that seems to be such an important part of East Indian tradition, a newer and more prosperous Singapore grew on the ashes of the old.

Meet Singapore's Raffles!

The Globe-Trotting visitor that comes to the city, as I did, on board one of the huge Imperial Airways flying boats, is likely to become interested in the importance of the name Raffles in the guide-books of the city. Without too much trouble, and only a smattering of one of the Malay dialects, it is possible to secure directions to the Raffles college, the Raffles museum, and a dozen or so other things bearing the familiar name.

Immediately, in visiting the college, we expect to see Ronald Colman on the job teaching safe-cracking or some other equally entertaining bit of subversive craftsmanship. In the museum we might expect to find some neat skeleton keys and a gaudy jimmy or two. But no—the Raffles isn't the Amateur Cracksmen. The Raffles of Singapore was Sir Stamford Raffles. When the city passed by treaty to the East India Company in 1819, Sir Raffles persuaded the sultan and temenggong of Johore to cede it to him. At that time Singapore was a collection of fishing huts.

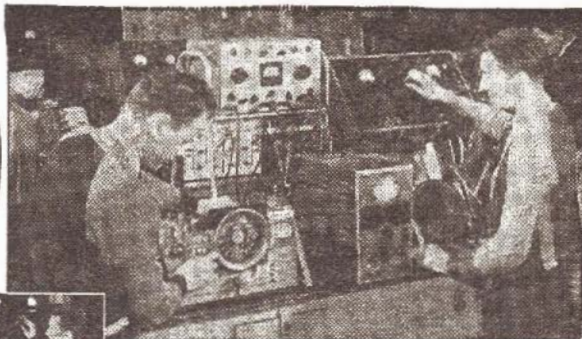
Naval Base

Quite a difference between the Singapore of one hundred and twenty years ago and the formidable naval base of today. Naturally the British Government isn't permitting any facts and figures on the facilities at Singapore to get into foreign hands, but considering the fact that nearly all of the equipment here is less than fifteen years old, there is no question about it's being up to date.

In 1922 the British Admiralty initiated its plans for the construction of an important naval base here. But the preliminary work on this during the next six years was limited to dredging and staking. In 1928 the real work on the port took shape, and the dockyard now includes berths for deep-water ships under repair, a dry-dock and floating dock with necessary shops, an independent power station, storage sheds,

(Continued on page 12)

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THE GLOBE TROTTER

(Continued from page 10)

and all facilities for storing oil and refueling the largest ships of the line.

Singapore!

The name itself is enough to stir the cockles of the romantic heart. And standing, as it does, at the dividing line between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, a bulwark between Asia and Australia, it may well be a high-water mark of destiny. More power to the Sentinel of the South Pacific!

So much for this month's little jaunt to one of the out-of-the-way corners of the world. Now let us look at the mail bag.

First on hand we have a bang-up letter from Charles Stoddard in which he takes us behind the scenes with Thunder Jim Wade. We're sure you're going to like Thunder Jim, as soon as you come to know him better. Stoddard's analysis of the story behind the story should be a big help in this direction.

Let her go, Stoddard:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Let me introduce Thunder Jim Wade. He's a fictional character, but he certainly isn't an imaginary one. Actually, Wade is a composite; he's based on a dozen different famous adventurers, and to that extent, at least, he's drawn from life. People like Wade exist today, and have existed in the past—Lawrence of Arabia, for one, and Davy Crockett, for another. In writing about Thunder Jim, I've tried to show, fairly realistically, how a legend may be started.

Take a parallel. Some scholars believe that, around 500 A. D., a general named Artorius lived in Britain, when the Roman empire was crashing down in ruin. The legions of Caesar left Britain, which immediately was invaded by the barbarian tribes. Artorius, with his army of knights, fought those invaders—and today we have the legend of King Arthur and the Round Table.

And there are other tales—Beowulf, Roland, Charlemagne, our own John Henry and Paul Bunyan—herocs whose exploits have grown marvelously with the passing of years. Five hundred years from now there may be a legend about a flying man—named Byrd!—whose fabulous exploits may rival those of Beowulf. Probably such a legend will grow about the name of Richard Coeur-de-Leon, whose history, in some ways, parallels that of his predecessor, King Arthur.

So—Thunder Jim Wade, a man who might exist today. Such men have existed, and not necessarily in the remote past. Eddie Rickenbacker, Simon Bolivar, the incredible Haitian Henry Christophe, who defied Napoleon and held out against the combined might of France and Spain, Clive of India, de Francia of Paraguay, who carved out an empire there, Jeb Stuart and Light Horse Harry Lee, Marion the Swamp Fox—the exploits of these sound far more fantastic than fiction! And, as I say, Thunder Jim is based on the characters of various flesh-and-blood adventurers.

I've tried, too, to combine modern adventure with authentic historical lore. In this yarn I deal with the ancient Cretan empire, which we know chiefly through the tale of Theseus and the Minotaur. Such men as Schlieman and Sir Arthur Evans explored and excavated in Crete, discovering ruins of an amazing lost civilization that existed from 3000 to 1400 B. C. There was a well-developed culture; they weren't savages, by any means. They even had plumbing—five thousand years ago! They knew the use of movable type, and scientists are still speculating about the mystery that shrouds these strange ruins.

I've stayed close to known historical facts, developing them, wherever necessary, along natural lines. So I hope readers will like Thunder Jim Wade, for, if they do, I shall write up more of his exploits and those of his two side-kicks, Red Argyll and Dirk Marat. There's plenty to tell—those boys have been aound!

Bonne soire!

Charles Stoddard

Thanks a lot Charlie. We'll be looking forward to more yarns from Thunder Jim's stirring odyssey.



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EXCITING COMICS

AT ALL STANDS

Last month, Margaret De Lap asked us to clear up a little matter of curiosity regarding one of Freddie Painton's stories that appeared in THRILLING ADVENTURES in a recent issue. We did.

And here's another fellow that would like some clarification from our authors. Always glad to help, Henry:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I am studying natural history in high school here, and have been particularly interested in some of Harold F. Cruickshank's animal stories. I particularly like the way he uses the old Indian names for the animals in the Canadian wilds. Cruick's story about the bear in DEATH HAUNTS THE ICEFIELD left me with a lot of unanswered questions. Maybe you'll ask him to give us a little more dope about polar bears. How about it?

Henry L. Fordney.

Hibbing, Minn.

Harold F. Cruickshank has always been one of our particular pals, and he came through like a trooper when we asked for some information on his character Yanu in "Death Haunts the Icefield." Here it is, Henry. Hope it fills the bill.

Dear Globe Trotter:

I had scarcely finished the final draft of DEATH HAUNTS THE ICEFIELD when I met a very close friend of mine who had a "great" story for me. He said while driving along a highway one night he had picked up a chap going his way. The hitch-hiker was a forecapper who had a great story to tell of his hunting adventures in the very far north. Outstanding was his tale of hunting and killing polar bears with the ease with which I used to hunt and kill snowshoe rabbits. His technique was quite unique and quite on a par with the hair-raising we used to read as kids—where gallant explorers, on meeting a polar bear on the icefields, closed into battle. They just whipped out a hunting knife and as the brain entold the hunter in his massive "arms," the hunter just skillfully slid the knife into his heart.

The method of this hitch-hiker was somewhat similar. He waited for the polar bear to rear and charge, then he whipped inside and let him have it.

Personally, I've never tangled with a polar bear, and I'm not going north to do so, just for the purpose of settling a question of how or how not they should be attacked. I shall be content to take the word of the great naturalists of all time, whose works, along with my own observations of animal life, I have studied for years.

Although the big bears do rear to their hind-quarters, or to their full height; although they most certainly do smash victims with their massive fore-paws, the attacks, generally, are made from all fours. But more often than not, the big fellers, like many other wild creatures, fear man and his high-powered rifle and are therefore very shy.

I have always admired the polar bear perhaps more than any other species. He is so graceful in his movements, so sure-footed, and so majestic. I could spend hours watching him weave that serpentine neck of his, or walk the edge of a shelf rock, turning his half-ton body with the ease and skill of a fox.

It is a fact that there is no more devoted mother in all the wilds than Mrs. Polar Bear, and it is because of this fact that I made a she-bear my central character in DEATH HAUNTS THE ICEFIELD—a yarn written with every regard for authenticity of the lives and habits of these big white fellers.

Naturally, for fiction purposes, these habits must be dramatized, but I intend, in all my animal-wilderness yarns, to base all such yarns on accurate color and atmosphere and authentic habits of my wild life characters.

Yanu, the central character of my story, is a character who appealed to me more strongly than any I have drawn in countless published animal

(Continued on page 106)

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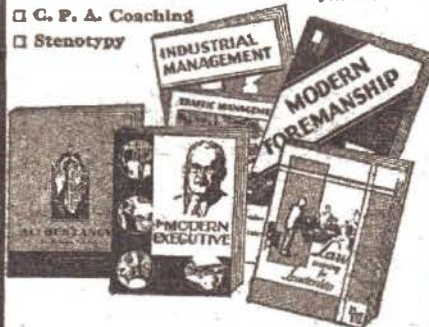
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Thunder Jim Wade hurled the bull mask and charged at his opponent (Chap. XV)



THUNDER JIM WADE

A Full-Length Complete Action Novel

By CHARLES STODDARD

Author of "Pride of the Northwest," "Loot of Ages," etc.

CHAPTER I

The Statue

SINGAPORE, being the fingertip of Asia, reaching down toward the equator just north of Sumatra, is a melting-pot in more ways than one. It is cosmopolitan—and it is tropically hot. From all over the Orient men of all types find their

way to Singapore and, in that dazzling, quivering heat, they find their veneer of civilization melting away. Anything can happen between Bombay and Borneo, from Yogi magic to murder under the great docks in the brawling waterfront district.

Duke Solent, however, was not at the docks. He was relaxed on the cushions of a closed sedan—unusual in that

The Thunderbug Speeds to Answer the

climate—as it hurtled along under the shadow of lofty tamarinds that bordered the dusty reddish road. Sweat gleamed on his dark face under the cork helmet, though he was wearing only the lightest of white linen.

He turned to the man beside him—a gaunt, bald fellow, with the predatory face of a vulture.

“You have the chloroform ready, Quester?”

“I’ve got it.”

Again there was heavy silence, broken only by the hum of the car’s motor and the distant cries of coolies working in the flooded rice fields through which the road now wound. Ragged youngsters were driving buffaloes, whose enormous horns were silhouetted against the blazing blue vault of the sky. To the left, herons were circling above a clump of palms.

Solent’s manicured, fleshy hand brushed lightly across his forehead, as though to eradicate the cross-shaped scar that was branded there. Save for that, he would have been handsome.

Solent was an Eurasian, with slightly slanted eyes in a strong, bronzed face. And as is so often the case, he had the vices of two races.

Two other men, big-shouldered and silent, were in the front seat. Solent nodded toward them.

“They know what to do?”

“They know.”

“We must be sure to get the statue,” Solent reminded.

“Don’t worry about Galbraith’s refusing to talk,” Quester growled, and for a second his mouth twisted unpleasantly. Solent looked at him with contempt.

“Professor Galbraith will give us the information we want,” he said, “but torture is quite unnecessary. We’ll use scopalamine—truth-serum.”

Quester patted his concealed underarm holster.

“Suit yourself. But I—”

“You depend on guns,” Solent said sardonically. “At times they are necessary. Later on”—he scowled—“we’ll need them. But not yet.”

“I don’t believe in buried treasure,” grumbled Quester.

SOLENT’S slanted eyes hooded. “Your beliefs are quite unimportant, Quester. Galbraith is a well-known archeologist. Last month, when he was in Indo-China on an expedition, he caught fever and, in his delirium, talked about a lost city and a treasure. That was reported to me.” The Eurasian smiled. “I have many—friends. There are certain reasons why I’m convinced as to the truth of Galbraith’s words. This, I know definitely: Years ago, Professor Galbraith found a lost city somewhere in Africa. I checked up, and learned that he did go to Africa then—but never revealed his findings. He spoke of an immense treasure, and a promise he’d made never to tell anyone about it, unless the need arose. Well—the need has arisen.” Solent touched the scar on his forehead. “There is a fortune in what we plan to get, much more than the treasure alone. Though we’ll need it, as I’ve explained.”

“The statue?”

“Galbraith brought it back with him from Africa. He’s never let it out of his sight, even when he travels. Took it with him to Indo-China. And now that he’s returning to Singapore, it will be in his car. My man wired to confirm that.”

He was silent, peering ahead. A cloud of reddish dust hung in the distance, shrouding the road.

“I think—” He picked up his field-glasses. “Yes.” He leaned toward the driver. “Turn the car—*mao!*” he snapped.

The sedan slowed, maneuvered, and slowly retraced its path. “Let them

Challenge of Modern Plundering Pirates!

overtake us," ordered Solent. "Then—"

"The set-up's screwy," Quester muttered. "The treasure ought to be enough. You said there'd be gold—gems—"

"Those will be the means to the end," Solent told him. "The real treasure is something else again. It's more

travel-stained and piled high with equipment. A native boy was driving, with reckless disdain for human life, and a linen-clad, dwarfish old man sat beside him.

"Galbraith," Quester said under his breath.

"Yes. Wait till we get to a deserted spot."



THUNDER JIM WADE

valuable than gold." He hesitated. "To some people."

"Okay. You're the boss. The plane's ready, the boys are ready, and we've everything from machine-guns to grenades. All we need is the dope from Galbraith."

"You'll get it," Solent said, watching the other car overtake and pass them.

It was a rickety touring model,

Solent's car trailed the other back toward Singapore. Presently they passed across the bridge, where yellow flood waters were bringing down clumps of floating moss, and small sandalwood and tamarind trunks. A cormorant flew past, clacking its beak loudly.

"Now!" the Eurasian said.

Instantly the sedan leaped forward, overtaking the open car. There was a

lurching skid, the scream of metal on metal, and Galbraith's car slid into the ditch that bordered the road, coming to a precarious stop, tilted hood-down. Muddy water splashed up, and a cloud of midges rose.

It was, just as Solent had calculated it to be, an ideal spot for an abduction. The perfume of hibiscus and the purple flame-trees was strong, and the thickets effectually screened the road. In the sudden silence the chirp of crickets was nerve-rasping.

Solent waited in the sedan, one hand on his automatic. But he did not need to use it. Galbraith's native chauffeur was disposed of by smashing a gun-barrel against his head. The scientist, curiously enough, made no move, but his bright little eyes were alert. He had realized at once what was happening.

"This stuff isn't valuable," he said to Quester, who was menacing him with a revolver. "Except to my museum."

"Shut up and get out," Quester commanded.

"Get the statue," Solent called.

The scientist caught his breath. About to step out of the car, he whirled suddenly and snatched at the dashboard compartment. But a wad of chloroform-soaked gauze was pressed over his face, and, after a few frantic struggles, he subsided.

"Is it in the compartment?" Solent called.

"No." Quester held up a small, paper-wrapped bundle he had found in the front seat. "This it?"

Solent took the package and moved aside to allow the limp body of Galbraith to be shoved into the sedan's back. Hurriedly he tore open the wrappings.

"Good! This is it. Come along now, —*mao!*"

Quester and the two others obeyed. Within fifteen seconds the sedan was racing along the road to Singapore, the scientist lying motionless under a heavy auto robe.

By the time they had reached their destination, the swift tropic night had fallen. Under the electric street lights a mob surged through the avenues. Autos blasting their horns, forced their way through rickshas and malabars. This was the fashionable foreign district, center of the shops and cafés.

Further on Singapore went native. It didn't seem too unlike the Arabian Nights. The smell of food and sesame was everywhere. A soap peddler, with his two jars suspended from the pole across his shoulder, called his wares; a *congai* shouted shrilly the merits of the earth-nuts he was selling. Chinese in silk tunics, beggars, coolies, an Indo-Chinese in his *lineo cai-ao* . . .

Fifteen minutes later the occupants of the sedan were in a room four stories above the teeming street. The incessant noise was bedlam. Those who own radios in Singapore are proud of the fact, and advertise it. And in this noisy ramshackle hotel, catering to what was known as "the trade," a cry would pass unnoticed.

Solent laid out hypodermic needle, and his other equipment while he waited for Galbraith to revive. The scientist lay on a dirty couch in one corner, breathing harshly. Quester was fingering the package.

The Eurasian took it from him and, with a peremptory nod, ordered the two others from the room. Alone with Quester, he found a hammer and chisel and unwrapped the bundle. The figurine that emerged was gilt-plated, and represented a bull having the head and torso of a man. The features were clearly recognizable as those of Professor Galbraith.

SOLENT fingered the statuette carefully. At last, with a grunt, he brought down the hammer upon it. Nothing happened.

Quester watched. The Eurasian tried hammer, chisel, and acid on the image, without perceptibly affecting it. He gave it up at last.

"Doesn't matter," he said. "Galbraith's waking up."

He turned to the scientist, who was grimacing and rubbing his head.

"Sorry I had to use such tactics," he said, "but it was necessary."

Galbraith glared at him. "You won't realize much on the things I found in Indo-China."

"Oh—those!" Solent made a gesture of disclaimer. "We didn't touch those."

Galbraith's gaze went to the little statuette. He moistened suddenly gray lips.

"I think you know what I want," Solent murmured. "Some information about—"

"You're crazy!" the scientist snapped. "That figurine's worth not more than a few dollars."

"Then you shouldn't mind telling us where you got it."

Galbraith frowned. His eyes went to the hypodermic on the table, and the vial beside it. He could read the label.

He stood up, swaying slightly, and went to the figurine. There he hesitated, as one quick glance shot toward the window.

"It's a four-story jump," Quester growled. "Don't try it." Nevertheless, he moved toward the window.

Galbraith picked up the image. "Very well. The information will do you no good, but—"

Solent cursed and sprang forward, but he was too late. The scientist's fingers had moved with surprising speed. He had slipped something over the statuette and flung it straight at the window.

With a crashing of glass the image went out of sight. The roar of sound blasted in from the street below.

"Guard him!" Solent snapped, and raced for the door.

In a moment he was darting down the stairway. He plunged into the stream of humanity that thronged the avenue, fighting his way to where the image might have fallen. But, as he

had expected, he was too late. Someone had picked up the—the thing.

Solent's eyes were deadly as he went back up the stairs. Without a word he filled the hypodermic needle and approached Galbraith who, under the menace of Quester's gun, did not move. But there was a glint of triumph in his eyes.

Then there was nothing to do but wait, while Galbraith lay motionless on the couch.

In a whisper, Quester asked: "Will he talk?"

"Yes. He'll tell the truth, too. Wait a bit. He's coming 'round."

The scientist moaned and shivered. His eyes opened, blank and blind.

Over the broken window the shade rattled in a sudden gust of oven-hot air. Midges danced around the electric bulb. The roar of sound from below seemed to come from another world.

THE Eurasian's voice came, softly commanding. And presently, in response, Galbraith began to talk.

"... pretending to be unconscious. While you were testing the image, I managed to get out a pencil and write a note. Then, when I had the opportunity, I fastened it to the Minotaur with one of my arm-bands and threw it out the window."

"What did the note say?"

"I asked Kearney for help. I wrote that if the finder would take it to Kearney's shop he'd receive a reward."

"Kearney?" Quester looked at Solent, who shrugged.

"There's a man named Kearney who runs an antique and curio shop uptown. Is that the one, Galbraith?"

"Yes."

"Will he get in touch with the police?"

"He will send a radio message to Thunder Jim Wade."

The reaction to these words was totally unexpected. Quester's head swung around toward Solent. The vulture-faced man seemed suddenly

strung on wires, tensely alert, and waiting for his cue.

Solent did not move at all. His face went completely blank. Then, slowly, he took out an enameled jade cigarette case and lit one of the small white cylinders.

"So Kearney's one of Wade's agents," the Eurasian said, his voice toneless. He touched the scar on his forehead. "Well, then we must change our plans . . . Galbraith!" He turned back to the drugged scientist. "Tell me. . ."

It was nearly half an hour later when Solent straightened, sweat beading his bronze forehead. But he was smiling. Quester watched him in silent inquiry.

"We leave for Africa at dawn," Solent said. "In the meantime, try and get hold of Kearney and the statuette."

"What if—"

"We're flying at dawn, and taking Galbraith with us. Can't afford to wait. The police might come into the picture. If we fail to—to accomplish what we wish by morning, there's a man named Varden in Singapore who'll finish the job."

"I can stay—" Quester started, but the Eurasian smiled and shook his head slowly.

"You're coming with me. You know too much about this business. Varden can keep in touch with us by radio, and if he gets the statue, he'll let us know. Meanwhile, there's no time to waste."

"How can we go without the statue? You know what Galbraith said."

"We'll get the statue." There was a half-smile on the Eurasian's face. "Even if Varden fails and it falls into Wade's hands, he'll follow to rescue the professor. Thunder Jim Wade! We shall discover whether or not his reputation is justified."

At dawn a big cabin monoplane took off from the flying field, heading for Cairo.

Quester had failed, and the job of

recovering the statuette was now in Varden's hands.

But it was several days before the Singapore police were summoned by a riot call some blocks from Kearney's little shop. In the commotion, no one noticed four armed men who entered the antique shop and reappeared presently bearing a mummy case, which they had conveniently discovered, and which now contained Kearney's unconscious body.

The sarcophagus was placed in a waiting automobile, and Varden gave swift commands. He had his orders from Quester.

"Lucky we managed it before Wade got here," one of the men commented.

"There's somebody watching at the airport," Varden smiled. "When Thunder Jim does blow in, he'll get a plenty hot reception."

He leaned back on the cushions, feeling quite pleased. Why not? He had been well paid—and there would be more dough presently. All that remained now was a minor matter of murder, torture, and sabotage.

CHAPTER II

Man Missing



"THUNDER JIM" WADE arrived in Singapore the next afternoon. He'd had a long trip by air from his hideout in the South Pacific—the mysterious place where he vanished when he was not working on

"cases," as he defined them.

He called himself a trouble-shooter. But he had a habit of seeking trouble, and smashing it with a cold, ruthless fury that had given him both name and reputation. His past was shrouded in mystery. Years before he had flashed on the scene like a comet—a comet whose mission was to destroy such men as Duke Solent.

Many had wondered whence Wade had come. But not even "Dirk" Marat and "Red" Argyle, Jim's aides, knew that. Red was a burly giant with gnarled hands like knotted oak roots, and incredibly deft fingers. And Dirk was a small, innocent-looking chap with blond hair and black eyebrows, and one great passion. That was for cold steel. He could handle guns, but preferred to work with knives.

They helped Wade in his work—which was to smash crime and evil. Together they had wrecked opium rings, slave trades, pearl thievery, and a hundred other unscrupulous activities. Fighting always for the underdog, Wade had stationed agents in various parts of the world, each with a special powerful radio for getting in contact with him at his Pacific island hideout. Kearney was one such agent—and it was his message that had brought the *Thunderbug* to Singapore.

The *Thunderbug* was an impossible engineering marvel. That was agreed upon except by the few experts who had been allowed to inspect the craft. They had emerged shaking their heads, more than ever convinced that Wade was a scientific wizard.

For the *Thunderbug* could fly in the air, move underwater as a submarine, and speed across the ground as a fast tank. Only those who had inspected the fantastic craft could have explained how it was done, and they never did. It was a super-convertible, and a marvel of scientific engineering.

Just now Wade was whistling happily as he sprang out of the ricksha and tossed a coin to the native boy. He didn't seem to mind the uncomfortable heat, though Dirk was sweating and pulling at his collar.

"I WANT a drink," the little man growled.

"Kearney'll feed you some n'g-ka-po," Wade said, rather absently.

He was thinking how little this

street resembled the popular tourist's version of Singapore. It might have been any Eastern city, and the hotel before whose glass doors he stood might have been lifted from the Riviera. No, Singapore was not merely a collection of dives, dens and huts. Comfort could be had here—if one paid for it.

He didn't go into the hotel. He turned to a small antique shop nearby, and stood for an instant staring at the collection of bric-a-brac in the windows.

"The door's locked," Dirk said. "That's funny."

"Yeah."

Wade hesitated, took a key-ring from his pocket, and selected the right one. Sometimes it had been necessary for him to enter Kearney's shop after it had been closed, and so he owned a duplicate key. But now it was only afternoon, and the store was shut. Why?

Together the two men quickly entered, and went back through the maze of display cases to a curtain at the back. They went through this warily, and paused.

"Fight," Dirk said tonelessly.

"Yeah."

There was blood on the floor, and a table had been overturned. The wreckage of a chair lay in a corner. Wade hastily went to an alcove and pressed a concealed spring there. A panel set in the floor slid aside, revealing steps that went down into darkness.

"Wait here," Wade commanded, and raced down the stairs. He came back after a few moments, frowning.

Dirk looked at him with silent inquiry.

"Nothing. Somebody attacked Kearney, of course. But they didn't find the radio room down there. They took Kearney away with them."

His dark eyes lightened suddenly. Wade took a hasty stride forward, peering at the wall. There were

streaks of blood on it. Dirk followed the direction of his gaze.

"Eh?"

"Kearney's left us a message. In Chinese—see?"

Translated, the message read:

Lao Chen. Guard *Thunderbug*

"Right." Wade nodded. "I've heard of Lao Chen. He runs a dive down at the waterfront. Somebody's trying to stop us, Dirk. And I suppose they'll take a crack at the *Thunderbug*. Grab a taxi back to the airport. Tell Red, and see that nothing happens."

"Like fun!" Dirk muttered. "I'm coming along with you."

"No. If I don't show up by morning, you'll know where to look. Lao Chen's."

"Why not get the police?"

But Wade shook his head. "The way I figure it, our friends wanted Kearney alive, or they'd have killed him here. They want information from him."

"Maybe they want that statue."

"Could be. I know Kearney. He's probably hidden it, and he'll be tortured if he won't talk. But if we get in the police and they raid Lao Chen's—well, they won't find Kearney. You know that!"

Unwillingly Dirk nodded. "Okay. Luck."

They went out, Wade locking the door after him. He gave Dirk a casual wave and found a cab. There was no time to waste on rickshas. The auto shot off as Wade relaxed on the cushions.

He looked entirely different now, somehow. Lean, hard, dangerous. He looked like the man who had smashed a Turkestan opium ring, and blasted out a reputation for himself at the point of flaming guns. Rolling through the bumpy streets of Singapore, he let his mind wander.

First, Professor Galbraith had sent a message for help. That little statuette probably was vitally important.

And—where was it? Only Kearney knew.

The car threaded its way toward the ill-lit, bad-smelling waterfront district of Singapore, and Wade's sense of imminent danger grew stronger. The sudden tropic night fell.

THE city wakened from its day-time drowsiness into roaring, lusty night. Men of all nations moved through the streets, seeking liquor, women, excitement, or trouble. Here the smooth face of a Lascar sailor gleamed under a lamp; there a bearded, turbaned Sikh strode with his regal, arrogant stride. Singapore, melting-pot and sink-hole of nations, resting like a blood-stained jewel beside an azure sea. City of contrasts, where men died by violence on beaches of enchanting loveliness, where every vice could be pandered to, and where there was no middle ground between squalid poverty and fantastic wealth.

The purple night darkened over Singapore. . . .

Lao Chen's tavern took up only a part of the lower floor of a huge, silent warehouse near the waterfront. Yellow light flamed from the windows. A man came staggering out through the swinging doors and collapsed in the gutter. Nice joint, Thunder Jim thought. Quite a dive. He could vaguely sense the distinctive, sickly odor of opium, but that was nothing unusual in Singapore.

He paid the cab driver and got out. Alone on the dimly lit street, he felt for the snub-nosed little automatic in its shoulder holster under his white coat, and nodded briefly. He'd probably need that gun before the night was over.

He pushed open the swinging doors and descended a few steps into a large room that held curtained booths along the walls, a large bar, and tables. In the corner a juke-box was jangling unmusically. A few native waiters, in

grimy aprons, were moving about, and there were girls here and there. But they, obviously, were not customers.

Wade felt eyes on him. Well, he would have to take a chance that no one would recognize him. If his luck held—

With the painstakingly steady walk of a drunken man, he crossed the floor to a booth and lowered himself to the bench. A waiter was at his side instantly.

"Sair? Your order?"

"Rye."

"Yes, sair."

The man vanished. A native girl in a green taffeta gown rustled forward and hesitated by the table. Wade gestured invitingly.

"You buy me a drink, perhaps?" she asked.

"Sure," Wade said, and waited until full glasses of rotgut were brought.

He didn't touch his. He waited, eyeing the girl. Her liquid dark eyes were inquiring.

"A friend sent me here," Wade said. "He said I could get"—he hesitated meaningly—"anything I wanted."

The girl's dark eyes were suddenly veiled. "Yes?"

"A smoke?"

The girl pocketed the folded bill Wade passed her under the table.

"You will excuse me?"

escape from this labyrinth would not be easy. Suppose he had been a government man? A body would be found floating by the docks the next morning.

Had he been recognized? He wasn't sure. Glancing around the low-ceilinged room in which he stood, Wade sniffed the sickly-sweet odor of opium. Curtained bunks lined the walls, on which men lay in varying stages of stupor. A few dim lights glowed faintly. Opium smokers prefer shadows.

Wade turned to the skinny, mustached Chinese beside him. Lao Chen himself had offered to guide his guest. The butter-colored face was impassive.

"This way."

Wade let himself be drawn to a bunk. He lay down, loosening his collar, and accepted the long pipe Lao Chen handed him.

His eyes searched the room. No one was paying any attention, apparently. Good!

"Draw the curtain," he muttered, and the Chinese started to obey.

They were in a shadowy corner. So swiftly did Lao Chen move that Wade was almost caught by surprise. But not quite.

Steel flashed as the Chinese's hand dived into his sleeve. The wicked, short-handled knife shot down at the white man's throat. But it did not find its mark.

For Wade jerked aside, feeling a sting of pain in his shoulder as the sharp point ripped through cloth and skin. His arms swept around Lao Chen's body, dragging the killer off balance and into the bunk. Instantly Wade rolled over, slamming the Chinese against the wall so hard that he momentarily went limp. Then Thunder Jim had twitched the curtain back into place, retrieved the knife, and turned to his captive.

Lao Chen was wriggling frantically, his eyes popping. Wade's hands tightened until the man relaxed, al-

CHAPTER III

At Lao Chen's



IT WAS surprisingly easy. A little too much so. Lao Chen must be very confident, Wade thought, not to have investigated more thoroughly.

But, after being taken along a long corridor to a stairway that led up into the depths of the warehouse, Wade realized that

most unconscious. There was a moment of silence.

Had anyone heard the sound of the scuffle? No noise came from beyond the grimy curtain. Wade waited a moment, and then whipped off the Chinese's sash, ripping it in two to bind his prisoner's hands and feet.

That done, he waited, one arm across Lao Chen's throat, ready to tighten.

"Don't yell," he said gently. "Just whisper." He put the point of the knife against the scrawny yellow neck. "You're going to talk—understand?"

The steel drew blood.

Lao Chen gasped. "Yes," he whispered, "I understand. I'll talk!"

Thunder Jim's eyes were icy black, but he was smiling.

"You're blamed right you'll talk. Where's Kearney?"

"On the next floor down."

"Why did you try to kill me?"

"I—I recognized you."

"Spill it. All of it."

The Chinese moistened his lips. "I don't know much. They paid me to let them use one of my rooms."

"Nothing unusual, eh? Always ready to turn a dishonest penny. Spill it—go on."

"A man came to me and wanted to rent a room in the warehouse. He—"

SLOWLY Wade pieced out the story. The man's name had been Varden. He was known to the Singapore police as a killer who could be hired for any job and, apparently, someone had paid him to kidnap Kearney.

"Why?"

Lao Chen had made it his business to find out, scenting a possible profit. Kearney had in his possession a certain statue that Varden's employer wanted. Kearney had been kidnaped, and was now in a room above Lao Chen's tavern, stubbornly refusing to reveal the hiding-place of the statue, even under torture.

The Chinese, surreptitiously listening, had discovered that Varden had sent men to wait for the *Thunderbug* and sabotage it when it arrived. Knowing Wade's reputation, he had put two and two together when Thunder Jim had arrived. He had recognized Wade.

Well, Jim Wade thought quickly, Dirk and Red were guarding the *Thunderbug*. Meanwhile, Kearney was a captive here. Varden himself Wade was inclined to discount. The man was merely a tool in the hands of some higher-up, paid to do a certain job. That was all.

"Where's Varden now?" he demanded.

"Not here. At the airport, I think."

Wade froze as the soft *pad-pad* of slippered feet came from beyond the curtain. But they passed by without pausing. The gleam of hope in Lao Chen's eyes faded.

"But Kearney's here, eh?" Wade pressed, "How do I get to him?"

The Chinese explained, somewhat too willingly. He mentioned that there was only one guard. Wade didn't believe that, but he said nothing.

He had no intention of walking into a trap, as Lao Chen no doubt intended him to do.

He shifted his position and brought up a hard fist in a short arc. The Chinese didn't even grunt. He simply relaxed completely, knocked out. It was the safest way. Had Wade simply gagged the man, Lao Chen might have rolled off the bunk and attracted attention and aid. As it was, he turned the Chinese to face the wall, and left the opium pipe where it could have fallen from a relaxing hand. Then, having arranged the embroidered red-and-yellow smock to cover the bound wrists and ankles, Wade slipped out of the bunk.

He didn't look around. A boy was rolling opium gum on a needle for a drowsy Chinese, but he seemed innocuous enough. Simulating the walk

of a drugged man, Wade moved toward the door, opened it, and went out into the passage.

He did not look at the man stationed outside. He walked on, lurching a little, but with every sense on the alert.

Lao Chen had said that the prisoner's room was on the next floor down. He found the staircase and descended the rickety steps. A few wan lamps scarcely dispelled the darkness. Movement seemed to lurk



Wade's ship hurtled down toward the imposing figure of the Minotaur (Chap. VII)

in every shadow. But the feel of the automatic was comforting in its shoulder holster.

Wade paused at an open door. A musty smell of rats and dead air came out. He stepped into the unused storeroom and waited, but there was no sound of pursuit to be heard. Good!

From his pocket came a flat, compact kit—make-up. He didn't use

much of it, and when he emerged from the room he seemed unaltered, save for a vague trace of grease-paint on his skin.

But this was invisible unless one looked closely, as was the nose-putty that transformed that feature ever so slightly.

STILL, the trick had a good chance of working, Wade thought.

He found the right door, at the end of the passage, and paused outside, listening. If Varden were inside, in spite of Lao Chen's insistence that the hired killer was at the airport, his trick was foredoomed to failure. But he would have to take the chance. Not for a moment did he believe that there was only one guard within.

First he loosened his shoulder holster and took it off. He laid it behind a pile of rubble in the corner, near a window that overlooked the water. Then he went back to the door and knocked, stepped aside instantly.

There was the sound of a chair being scraped back. A lock clicked, and a man hesitated on the threshold as the door swung open. He did not see Wade immediately. When he did, the gun in his hand jutted menacingly.

Wade had his fingers to his lips. He nodded significantly to the open door.

The other's brows drew together uncomprehendingly.

"Thun—" he said.

Wade's grimace stopped him.

"Shut up! Varden sent me."

The other man didn't look stupid, and for a moment Wade was afraid he might be Varden himself. But seemingly he was not. He drew the door closed, still holding the gun aimed unwaveringly.

"You're Thunder Jim Wade," the man said softly.

"Listen," Wade said. "I don't know what this is all about, but Varden told me to come up here, and not let the little guy see me. He said I looked

like Thunder Jim, and that he'd pay me plenty for a job he wanted done."

Cold eyes were fixed on him, searching his face.

"He took me into a joint and had me made up," Wade went on. "Said I was a ringer for Wade, and that you'd know what to do."

"Yeah?" There was suspicion in the low voice. "Step out here in the light."

They moved dangerously close to the pile of rubble in the corner. The gunman peered closely at Wade. He put out an exploratory hand and touched Wade's cheek.

"Careful. It'll come off."

"Grease-paint. Yeah." Swiftly the gunman searched Wade. "You're clean, too."

He hesitated, obviously wondering if Thunder Jim would be crazy enough to walk into a den of enemies, completely unarmed. He couldn't conceive of such a thing—and that turned the balance. Yet suspicion still lingered.

"I get the picture. Okay, I'll get the boys out. You go in when we tell you, and get the guy to talk. He's tied up in a chair."

WADE watched his opponent back away without lowering the gun. The man looked like a sailor, burned almost black, with an undershot jaw and a scar that knifed from cheek to lip.

He thrust open the door and called, "Come on out. Something's up."

"Righto, Dinky," a voice answered, and feet thudded on planks. "What about our friend here?"

"Leave him," Dinky said. "He can't get away."

Five men crowded out into the passage—ordinary specimens of dock-rats, they seemed.

There were startled looks among them as they saw Wade.

"What the—"

"Shut the door," the man they had called Dinky commanded. "That's it.

Now listen—this guy isn't Wade. He's a ringer, made up to look like Thunder Jim. The boss sent him around to get Kearney to talk. But he won't do it if he thinks this fella's a ringer. We'll have to play up." He turned to Wade. "So we'll let off a few shots. Nobody'll pay any attention around here. You dive into that room and lock the door behind you. We'll hammer on the outside and make a lot of noise, but we won't bust in till you get the guy to talk. He'll talk to you if he thinks you're Thunder Jim. And we'll help make him think so."

Wade nodded.

"We'll be outside," Dinky said. His eyelids lowered significantly. "Okay," he said, and fired a shot into the floor.

JIM WADE instantly opened the door, sprang in, and slammed the panel behind him, locking it. His eyes were blinded by a blaze of lamp-light. The little room in which he stood was empty save for a table and a few chairs, and the single window was covered with iron bars. No wonder Dinky had been willing to let him enter! For there was no possible way of escape save by the door, guarded now by armed men.

Or—the thought came chillingly to Wade—did Dinky feel certain that he was Thunder Jim Wade? Had this merely been a shrewd method of imprisoning him, too? Well, that could wait.

For tied to one of the chairs was a little man, short and thin, with a tangled mop of gray hair. It was Kearney.

"Thunder Jim!" he whispered.

Wade grinned. "Yeah. How—" he began.

He paused, noting Kearney's bare feet. The little man had been tortured.

"I didn't talk, Jim. They wanted to know where I'd hidden that statue—"

CHAPTER IV

The Thunderbug



WADE was untying the prisoner's bonds. The men outside were trying to hammer the door down, but not trying too hard. They could shoot out the lock whenever they chose.

So there was a little time, at least until Varden returned.

Kearney stretched his arms, wincing with the pain of returning circulation. Wade hesitated a moment, wondering what to do next. He moved to the window, but the bars were set solidly in their sockets. Wait a bit! One of them was loose.

He tested it, as Kearney silently watched. Slowly, imperceptibly, Wade exerted his strength. Muscles bulged under his thin linen coat. The rusted bar gave, tearing free with a shrill screech that went unheard amid the clamor at the door.

Then, suddenly, the clamor stopped. Wade heard a deep, authoritative voice raised in question. His heart jumped.

Varden had returned!

That meant there was only a minimum of time left before the deception was discovered. He glanced at Kearney.

"Can you swim?" he demanded.

"Like a fish."

"Okay. That window opens over the water. You can squeeze between the bars."

"But"—Kearney hesitated—"what about you?"

"I'll be right behind you."

Without another word Kearney wriggled between the bars. He hung for a moment, his face peering in, then it dropped from view. A distant splash came up.

Wade went after him as a shot blasted from the hall. He would have preferred to stay and fight it out

with Varden and his men, but that would have been suicidally foolish. He was unarmed—and they were merely tools.

He went out the window, and a shot burned a red-hot furrow along his back. Then he was falling, with the lights of Singapore like innumerable shooting stars in the distance, and the water was leaping up.

HE DIVED deep, till his lungs ached for air. But the surface was silvered with moonlight, and Wade forced himself to swim underwater to the concealing shadow of a wharf. Clinging to the barnacled curve of a pier, he gasped air into his lungs and shook back his hair plastered across his eyes.

"Kearney?" he called softly.

"Right here," the answer came back from the darkness.

"*Bueno!* There's a ladder over here. Come along. . . ."

Half an hour later Wade was at the airport, with a small bundle under his arm. He had left Kearney at the antique shop, with police guards, and the statuette had been taken from its hiding-place inside a Ming vase and given to him. He had phoned the airport.

Dirk came to meet him. "Sorry, Jim. There was a bit of a scrap."

"So you said on the phone." Wade nodded. "Glad neither of you were hurt."

"The sons couldn't aim worth a hoot. But they lobbed a grenade at the *Thunderbug*."

"You told me. What's the damage?"

"Nothing serious. It wasn't a direct hit. Red's working on the motors now. It should be okay in a few hours."

"So?" Wade's brow furrowed thoughtfully. "We'll take off at dawn, if we can. We're heading for Africa."

Dirk's eyes widened, but he said nothing. . . .

Early the next morning the *Thunderbug* rose from the tarmac, cir-

led, and fled southwest. Wade was at the stick, guiding the plane over the smooth blue expanse of water, while Dirk and Red alternately checked equipment and squabbled bitterly.

"We heading for Cairo?" the giant asked at last.

Wade shook his head. "Nope. By the way, our friends at Lao Chen's got away, didn't they?"

"Yeah. The police raided the joint, but no soap."

"Doesn't matter. We're after bigger game."

Red picked up the little statuette Wade had got from Kearney. It represented a bull with the head and torso of a man rising from its shoulders. Originally it had been gilded, but the paint had been knocked off by rough handling. The statue seemed to weigh very little, as if it were hollow.

"So that's the Minotaur," Red said, pondering over it. "It's had plenty rough handling. Doesn't look very valuable."

"It is, though," Wade said. "I think I know why."

The big man waited, but Thunder Jim had apparently said all he was going to. At last Red asked:

"Got any objections to telling us what this is all about?"

Thunder Jim lit a cigarette with one hand. The small white cylinder seemed to leap into view out of empty air, as did the flaming match. Few professional magicians could have matched Wade's tricks, which he had learned long ago.

At last he nodded. "Okay. I'd better give you guys the dope on all this. Galbraith's been kidnaped. You know that. I suppose I'd better tell you where I met the professor—it's got a lot to do with what's happening now."

He was silent for a moment, choosing his words carefully.

"You never knew where I was born, where I came from," he said then.

"Well, when I was five years old, my father and I were wrecked on an island off Africa. Dad was a scientist—a blamed good one. He kept us alive till we were rescued."

Wade's strong face relaxed as his mind went back.

"A little Cockney flier picked us up. Saw our signals. That was during the World War, and he was fighting and flying in Africa. He flew us—well, there was a storm, and we were driven off our course. The rescue didn't quite jell.

"The plane crashed in a valley that was shut off from the outer world. Dad was killed. The pilot, Tim Miggs, was hurt, but I got off without a scratch. Kid's luck. There were people in the valley, and they took care of us."

"Natives?" Red put in.

Wade's smile was somewhat odd. "I suppose. Yeah, you might call 'em that. Only they'd come to Africa thousands of years ago, and had never left that valley. They were Cretans."

"Cretans!" Red's jaw dropped. "But—"

"I know. But Crete existed before Greece. Thousands of years ago. It was plenty civilized then, and it sent out explorers. Some of them reached this valley in Africa, and settled there. Then Crete fell, and the African pioneers stayed where they were, hidden from their enemies." Wade's voice held an odd awe. "Imagine it—cultivating there in that wilderness the science and secrets of their parent race! For the Cretans had their sciences.

"Well, I was too young to wonder much. I was brought up there. Miggs sort of adopted me, too. There was no way out of the valley—a pass had once existed, but not for centuries. So I grew up in a lost civilization, learning—a good deal. The priests showed me a lot. How to use hypnosis, for example. And Miggs did his part by teaching me sleight of hand tricks. I've an idea he used to be a

pickpocket in Limehouse, though he never taught me anything crooked. A good guy, Miggs. The crash crippled him, and he died after four years in the valley.

"So I grow up there, and one day Professor Galbraith found his way in. An avalanche had opened a pass in the mountains, and he simply walked through. Pure luck! He took me back to civilization when he left, saw to it that I had a modern education. A bond almost of father and son has always been between us, though now our paths lie far apart as do our interests. But after we left the valley, the Cretans closed up the pass. They'd learned enough from Galbraith about the outer world to want to stay where they were. And the professor and I always kept the secret."

THERE was silence for a moment, before Dirk asked a question.

"What has the Minotaur to do with it all?"

"The Cretans worship the Minotaur—the Man-Bull. Galbraith used that word in the message to tell me where to hunt for him." Wade crushed out his cigarette.

"So," Dirk said, and pulled in his lips. "Well, if Galbraith didn't talk, how'd anybody find out about the place?"

Wade shrugged. "There's another question. No, the professor wouldn't talk, unless they gave him a dose of scopolamine—as they probably did. And there was only one thing he ever took out of the valley."

"What?"

"This little statuette the priests made for him—a bull with Galbraith's head. It was pretty much of a compliment, and I know he kept it."

Wade glanced at the instrument panel and changed the course.

"Anyway," he continued, "Varden's boss kidnaped Galbraith, found out what they wanted to know, and took him in a plane to the hidden valley.

They may think there's treasure there. I don't know about that. But I do know we've got to save the professor. His captors are ruthless, judging by the sample I got!" There was a hard brilliance to the jet eyes. "I lived among those people for years. They're a good, gentle tribe for the most part. They don't go in for war. A few grenades or a machine-gun would let hell loose in that valley. I don't intend to let that happen. The Cretans deserve to be let alone."

"Well," Dirk asked practically, "what next?"

"We'll refuel at Cairo and then head inland, beyond Ethiopia." Then Wade remarked abruptly: "I don't like the sound of that engine. The *Thunderbug* needed more work done on it. But we couldn't wait."

"Sounds all right to me," Red said. "Cairo, eh? Nice town. For a short stop-over."

Wade didn't answer. He sent the *Thunderbug* racing on, a black bullet in flight. But Dirk glanced at the redhead sharply.

"Think there'll be trouble there?"

"Maybe," Red said noncommittally. "Maybe somebody's got orders to stop us. Can't tell." He looked speculatively at one gnarled, gigantic hand and slowly closed it. "I'd like to get a crack at those boys myself."

"Sweets to the sweet," Dirk remarked. "Cracks from the cracked."

"That'll be all from you," Red returned, and took down another gun to clean.

But nothing untoward happened at Cairo. Nothing at all occurred, indeed, until the *Thunderbug* was far inland, racing over tropical jungle not far from its destination. Then the motor began to give trouble.

WADE said nothing, but his eyes worriedly searched the unbroken forest beneath. It was impossible to land. He eased the engine as much as possible until, half an hour later, a small lake appeared below. Luckily,

the *Thunderbug* was equipped with retractable pontoons for just such an emergency as this. Wade circled down slowly, squinting against the glare of the setting sun. He dared not fly further with darkness coming on. Repairs could be made while the amphibian rested on the surface of the lake. The delay need not be a long one.

Spray flew up in white fountains. Startled herons took off in squawking anger. A few crocodiles slid sluggishly from the banks. The *Thunderbug* coasted to a stop and rocked slowly, silence falling again over the jungle as Wade cut the motor.

Thick bush fringed the lake. In the distance there was a commotion as a giant rhino snorted and grunted as it drank. But there was no danger there, nor any from the crocodiles, provided Wade and the others stayed out of the water.

"We'll stay here tonight," Thunder Jim decided. "But we'd better make repairs now, while the night's not too bad. Don't fall off the pontoons."

Grumbling, Red got out tools. He paused, startled, as a new sound whispered through the jungle stillness.

A plane's motor was humming, growing louder.

Wade, half out of the cabin, froze, staring up. The cruciform shape of an amphibian came out of the north and circled overhead, losing altitude steadily.

There was no doubt about its intentions, even before a burst of machine-gun fire chattered out.

Wade dived back into the cabin, his eyes flashing.

"Varden, maybe," he called. "Must have trailed us. He fired too soon, though. We'll have time—"

He was at the controls, while the others worked busily rendering the *Thunderbug* airtight.

"Dive?" Red asked.

"Yeah. Only thing to do. We can't get off the lake without repairing the motor, but it'll do for a dive. Quick!"

CHAPTER V

Jungle Terror

FROM outside, it would have seemed that a magic metamorphosis was overtaking the *Thunderbug*. The wings grew shorter as they were cranked in. Smooth, sleek black plates slid out here and there, until the craft was a cigar-shaped torpedo. Thunder Jim Wade had spent years designing and building the *Thunderbug* and, as was admitted, it was a marvel of scientific engineering. Capable of being altered as it was to travel swiftly by land, sea, or air—just now it was a submarine.

Last of all the pontoons were pumped in, and plates slid out over them as the *Thunderbug* plummeted into the depths. Machine-gun fire was drumming against the hull as it sank. Wade, busy with the controls, scowled. This would give him only a breathing-space. Inappropriate simile! The air in the miniature submarine wouldn't last forever, but to have remained on the surface would have been sheer suicide.

Now, however, the enemy had the upper hand. When the *Thunderbug* did emerge, the enemy amphibian's guns would be waiting for it. No doubt the other craft would land on the lake and wait for developments.

The *Thunderbug* grounded, with a lurch, in sticky mud.

"Think there are any hippos here?" Red asked, his face gleaming with sweat in the electric light.

"Doubt it," Wade grunted, and cut the engine. "Lake's too small."

He sat still, considering. What next? Remain here until the air was gone? There was no room to maneuver in the small lake, and the water was too murky to aim a torpedo. But they couldn't stay here forever!

Red and Dirk were silent, looking to their leader for orders. Wade flipped a cigarette out of the air and examined it. He made it vanish.

"Can't afford to smoke in here. . . . Well, let's see. We've got to get rid of our friends. There can't be many of 'em. It'll be dark soon. When it is"—Wade glanced at his wrist-watch—"I'll go up through a torpedo-tube."

"Crocs," Dirk said quietly.

Wade grinned. "Nuts! You're just aching for the chance to go yourself."

"Why not?"

"The *Thunderbug* will need both of you to raise her. That engine's bad—*muy malo*. I'll try and get rid of our friends and, if I do, swell."

"How'll we know?" Red asked.

"You won't. Come up in an hour—maybe two. If you're shot at, better abandon ship and swim for it. I'll see what I can do in an hour."

There was a little silence. No one spoke as Wade shed his coat and crawled into the torpedo tube. He went head-first.

"I'll count up to ten," he called back. "Then I'll hold my breath while you flood the tube. Ready?"

"Luck, *amigo*," Red said, and slammed the lock. Dirk hadn't spoken but his eyes were bleak.

Water gushed into the tube. The numbing shock of it was icy. Wade waited until the tumult had died, and then he was out of the *Thunderbug*, swimming up through murky water that blinded him.

THERE would be a full moon, he knew, and that was dangerous. The silver African light would betray him to any watchers. Moreover, there were crocs in the lake. He had a knife stuck in his belt, and an automatic in a water-tight pouch, but he couldn't help wondering if they would help.

His head broke water. He gasped for breath and ducked under again instantly.

He came up twenty feet away, but only for a second. In the tropical moonlight he caught a glimpse of the jungle, and a cabin plane floating, moored to the shore where a clump of trees grew alone, near the place where the rhino had drunk.

Firelight was glowing on the bank. Men must be there, armed.

Wade struck out for the opposite bank, coming up for breath as seldom as he dared.

Halfway across the lake, he saw a v-shaped ripple heading toward him. It was a croc.

Wade went cold. If he fought the saurian, the commotion would attract the enemy's attention. His only possible hope was to outdistance the monster to the opposite shore.

A slim chance!

Until that moment Wade had not actually exerted himself. Silence had been more important than speed. But now his magnificent, wiry body came into action. Every muscle seemed perfectly coordinated; not a motion was wasted. His churning feet made little commotion, but his strong arms shot him across the surface of the water. Each stroke counted. His years in the wilderness had prepared him for such perils as these.

Through flashing droplets of foam he could see the crocodile sliding silently toward him, most of the lizard-like, huge body beneath the surface. And there was another one now. Then another, all three converging on their prey. Wade wondered whether he was heading toward the jaws of a fourth. That reedy, dark bank ahead would make a perfect hiding place for a croc.

He was conscious of nothing but the smooth, flowing rhythm of his muscles, surging almost intoxicatingly to carry him across the lake. Closer the bank drew. He did not wish to use the knife unless he had to. But—well, he must wait and see.

The pursuing saurians were near now. Yet he was in shallow water.

Wade's hand touched bottom. He flung himself up the shelving underwater slope, and rose to his feet. From the corner of his eye he saw the crocs racing toward him, not ten feet away. Simultaneously a dark bulk slid off the bank and partly into the water, blocking his path. Its jaws clamped shut—crocs always sleep with their mouths open. But they open again immediately if it is necessary, with more dangerous intent.

There was only one thing to do, and Wade did it. He jumped high, coming down hard on the saurian's back. One of the other crocs slid past the spot where he had been a moment before. Wade felt the hard, rubbery, corrugated hide under his soles, but he did not wait to be flung off balance.

His second leap carried him into the reeds, which rustled and crackled as he plunged into them, hurtling forward to avoid the deadly backlash of the crocodile's tail. He heard the swish of its swing, and heard reeds break. Splashing sounds came from behind him as he fled up the slope, hoping he would not blunder into more of the monsters.

HIS luck held. He found a tree, hurriedly climbed it, and reconnoitered. Clinging closely to the trunk to avoid detection—though there was little danger of that—he peered across the lake. Its moonlit surface lay flat and unbroken. There was no disturbance around the enemy's campfire.

The night was not still. In the jungle only the midday is silent. With sundown the great carnivores stretch and stir in their lairs, preparing to go forth to hunt. In the wooded *dongas*, Wade knew, would be wildebeestes, zebras, and *kongoni*. There might be buffalos, and even elephants. But mostly the jungle night held prowling lions, leopards and cheetahs—the big cats that were so dangerous.

Wade descended the tree, and carefully began to skirt the lake, keeping his weapons handy. Crickets called shrilly from the shadow. Frogs were booming and croaking along the marshy banks.

A shadow stirred in the bush. Wade froze as he glimpsed two green eyes. Vaguely he could make out a silhouette, but could not tell what the animal was. A large leopard or a small lioness, perhaps. He waited.

There was a difference. A leopard charges like a streak of lightning and is hard to stop, even when filled with lead. But men have emerged, living, from hand-to-hand scraps with leopards. A lion, on the other hand, does not hug the ground when he charges, and has not a leopard's speed and suppleness. But when a lion does reach a man and gets him down, it's his finish.

Wade never knew what beast it was that watched him. It slunk back into the gloom and was gone. The wind brought the acrid taint of blood to Jim Wade's nostrils, and he realized that the carnivore had made its kill and was feeding. He gave the bushes a wide berth as he went on, but no further sound or motion was visible.

Wade glanced at his watch. Not much time left. If the *Thunderbug*

rose to the surface before he had accomplished his aim, it might prove fatal to Argyle and Marat.

Cautiously he slipped closer to the enemy's camp. There were five men—maybe more. Quester, whom he had already discovered was one of Galbraith's chief kidnapers, apparently wasn't there, though Wade could not be sure. The men were working at some task that kept them busily occupied—all but one on guard.

They were preparing—Wade's eyes confirmed his guess—depth bombs. Bombs that would wreck the *Thunderbug* if they were dropped into the lake.

Less time than he had thought! The men were well armed, and there was even a submachine-gun among them. The plane's guns might be turned against attack, too. Perhaps, though, guerrilla tactics might help.

If he could dispose of the enemy, one by one. . . . Impossible! They stayed too close together, though at a safe distance from the fire, for they were, literally, playing with dynamite.

Wade seemed like a statue as he crouched motionless. No, not a statue, for every inch of him was vibrantly alive. He was like some sleek, alert

[Turn Page]

From
the Private
Diary of
Gloria N---



1 Broke a date with Jim for tonight. The way my head aches, I don't feel like seeing anybody! Guess I need a laxative, but I dread the thought of taking one.



2 Aunt Helen told me to try Ex-Lax. I hate the taste of laxatives—but Ex-Lax was a pleasant surprise. It tasted just like fine chocolate.



3 Slept wonderfully all night. Ex-Lax worked fine this morning. No upsets or anything. Headache's all gone, too. Sure hope Jim calls me tonight.

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet *gentle*! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢



carnivore of the jungle night, wary and dangerous. His black eyes looked almost luminous.

He had his automatic, of course. But the enemies were on the alert. At his first shot they would rake the underbrush with submachine-gun fire. Then, too, Wade had never yet shot a man from ambush, not even the most murderous scoundrel. But to save his men—

Wade's bronzed, strange face was hard. His wet hair clung to his face, and he brushed it back with silent impatience. Perhaps there was another way. He was sure, now, that Quester was not among these men. Five killers—but their leader was not present. Wade regretted that as his fingertips slid along the cold metal of his gun.

Though soaked to the skin, he was not worrying about fever, even in the jungle.

Long years of adventuring had made him hard as nails. But of course his body was not armor against a bullet. Armor. . . . The thought stuck. It reminded him of something. What?

Abruptly he remembered. The rhino he had seen drinking at the lake a little while ago, its tough hide strong enough to turn steel. An ugly-tempered fellow, with its powerful, saber-curved horns. The rhino has bad eyes, but a good nose. And, knowing the creature's habits, Wade had an idea this particular one might not be far away.

If he could find it, there might be a way!

Carefully he scanned the encampment. The plane was moored to a tree at the water's edge. It was a big crate, which would help, and it was bobbing and dipping with the gentle movement of the water. *Bueno!* The rhino could not fail to see such an obvious and bulky shape. And the man odor would infuriate him to a killing frenzy.

All he had to do, Wade thought,

was to lead the rhino here by the nose. Yeah, just that!

And first—find the rhino.

CHAPTER VI

Juggernaut



LIKE a shadow Thunder Jim slipped through the jungle, finding the path the great beast had made, and tracking it by its spoor, with every sense alert for danger. The manifold jungle odors were a hot, sweet excitement in his nostrils. From the muted symphony around him he automatically picked out individual sounds—the grunt of a leopard, the sleepy chatter of a gibbon.

This country, Wade thought, was alive with game. Consequently the carnivores were not trouble-hunters. They were well fed, at least until they became old and toothless and turned into rogues. However, rhinos are never noted for sweet dispositions.

This one had not gone far, after filling its belly with water. Wade heard a hiss of steam escaping through a locomotive stack. There were no trains around, he knew. And that meant—rhino.

It had scented the man. It came forward from deep shadow into the jungle path and stood motionless in the moonlight. Then it lowered its head, let out another explosive snort, and trotted forward a few steps before it stopped again.

Behind it, Wade saw, was another, only slightly smaller. But both seemed momentarily larger than haystacks. The chief danger of a rhino's charge is the paralytic effect it has on the target. A mountain seems to be rushing at the victim—a mountain with the face of a dinosaur. At a short distance it looks fantastically gigantic. Many a hunter has been frozen with something more than fear

at the sight, and has died as a result. It is the impulse that stops a man from jumping from the path of an automobile hurtling down at him.

Would they charge? Wade knew that, if they did, they might turn off if their pretended target stood firm. That sometimes happened. He waited.

Up went the first rhino's tail, down went his head, and he charged!

Dangerous to use the gun! That would warn the enemy! Wade knew his knife would be useless, but his hand closed on its hilt nevertheless. He waited no longer. He turned and ran at top speed down the trail toward the lake.

The low, earth-shaking thudding of hoofs paced him. He risked a glance, and saw that both beasts were on his trail. He could not outrun that express-train charge, but if he could keep ahead until he reached the shore, that would be enough.

He ran easily, head up, legs pumping, as though he did not realize that a misstep would mean death. His eyes searched the trail ahead, showing him where to place each foot. The skin of his back was crawling.

The wind stirred by his running blew coldly on his wet skin. It was like racing in a nightmare, unable to turn aside, unable to escape from a pursuing Juggernaut. Two Juggernauts! That ominous *thud-thud* was louder.

Then, through the bush, he glimpsed the fire.

He lunged forward, his chest aching, his muscles flame-hot, and burst out into the clearing. Simultaneously he lunged aside. He saw the fire, startled men rising around it, and beyond, the dipping, lifting hulk of the plane.

SO CLOSE had the leading rhino crept up that Wade felt the wind of its passing as he flung himself aside into the bushes. The thorns tore at his skin and clothes. But he drove farther in, regardless of pain, just as a bullet clipped leaves from his hid-

ing place and went singing off into the night.

The rhino snorted again. Wade heard one of the men yell, and there was the sound of a shot plunking home. The beast went "*Phsss!*" and went for these new enemies, enraged by his wound, crazed by the man smell, confused by the huge, bobbing target of the plane that he mistook for an enemy.

The fire could not stop him. He went around it, for luckily it was not in his direct path. Luckily for Wade, that is. The second rhino just stood there until a bullet hit it. Then it bent its knees and folded up, killed by the lucky shot.

The men were shouting and firing in confusion. There was a rending crash as the rhino hit the plane. Spray rose in moonlit fountains. Wade yanked the automatic out of its holster and lunged forward out of the bush.

A bullet greeted him, slicing cloth from his shirt sleeve. The gun barked and jolted against his palm. He saw one of the figures jerk upright and begin to collapse, but there was no time to watch that. The remaining men had seen Wade.

The rhino was wreaking its fury on the plane, and splintering crashes mingled with the splashing of the heavy bulk in the shallow water. Wade ignored the beast. The danger was not there. Coldly, icily, he stood with the automatic jolting in his hand, straddle-legged and grim, his eyes deadly as black ice. The whip-lash crack of his shots split the night.

To his enemies, he must have seemed a ghost risen from the lake. The legendary Thunder Jim!

But Wade knew that he was up against four guns, and not even his unerring marksmanship would help enough. So, with chill deliberation, remembering Red Argyle and Dirk Marat imprisoned in the *Thunderbug*, waiting to be blasted to doom by depth-charges, he took steady aim.

His bullet found its mark—the dynamite.

The roaring boom of the explosion ripped out like heavy thunder. Wade was flung back into the bushes, his eyes blinded by the glare, deafened and shock-paralyzed. He lay motionless while the gusting echoes went *whoo-whoo-whoo* and faded into silence. Faintly he heard the rhino charging away in fright.

But there were no more shots.

Wade got up, blinking to clear his vision. A curious stillness had fallen over the jungle. The wreckage of the plane was half-submerged in the lake. The clearing was a shambles, embers scattered far into the bush by the explosion. There were no survivors.

Wade's eyes still held a blazing, ruthless fury—a fire that had meant death to many. Slowly it died. But there was no sign of compassion in the hard, bronzed face, just as there was no trace of triumph.

He glanced around, made certain that there was no immediate danger, and walked to the shore.

Something was rising above the surface of the lake. It was the *Thunderbug*. A hatch on the rounded upper hull opened, and Red Argyle cautiously poked out his head.

"Oaky," Wade called. "There's no danger."

"That you, Jim?" Argyle did not ask what had happened.

"Yeah. Bring the *Thunderbug* ashore here. We've got some repairs to do before we take off."

As the black bulk slid forward, Wade absently reloaded his gun. His eyes were no longer black ice. . . .

THE next morning the repaired *Thunderbug* rose smoothly from the surface of the lake, once more adapted to air travel. Wade was at the controls, shaking his head worriedly as he listened to the engine's beat. The craft had taken hard usage up in the Turkestan country, and really needed a complete going-over.

But there had been no time for that, of course. If it would hold out until they reached the hidden valley—swell! But would it? Thunder Jim Wade was not sure.

Still, there was not far to go now. Yet the air currents over the mountain barrier were treacherous. And a crack-up in that desolate, lifeless region would be fatal. Blizzards on the equator! But that was nothing new in Africa, land of weird contrasts and incredible survivals. It was the country where the unexpected always happened.

Wade hoped there would be no fog. Flying blind, in a low ceiling, would not be pleasant. He was tense with the momentary expectation that the motors would stutter and quit.

No landmarks were visible. They were flying over a great plain. Zebras, giraffes that ran at sight of the *Thunderbug's* shadow, elephants and buffalo were plentiful. There were smaller animals, too—hyenas, jackals, wart hogs, and a great many leopards. Then, as the ground rose, *kudu* were visible on the mountain slopes, their spiral horns clearly visible through the glasses.

Once they passed above a group of natives who stood staring up in wonder at the *indagi*—the "great bird." And once they swept over an island in the center of a huge lake. Wade nodded down.

"I've been there. The natives are Omolos. It's a funny place. The blacks think they're the only people in the world."

Red stared. "How come?"

"They can't see the shoreline—it's a big lake. And they haven't any boats. They make rafts out of reeds, but those get water-logged almost immediately."

The *Thunderbug* roared on. The ground mounted steadily. They were leaving the great plains. Sometimes a solemn-looking secretary bird or a bustard was seen, but there was not much game now.

Uninhabited, bleak and hot was the country they now passed. It was utterly barren, like sand-dunes frozen motionless at the moment of some vast cataclysm. Mostly the terrain was volcanic lava covered with sand. It was a baking oven, and heat currents blasted up from below incessantly. Wade nodded toward a window.

"That's one reason why the Valley of the Minotaur remains undiscovered," he said. "Even in the Sahara you find oases, but here—well, most of the lakes are alkali. People don't come here, as a rule. There's nothing to bring them."

Dirk smoothed back his blond hair. "How did Galbraith get in?"

"Sheer luck—and nerve. A long time ago—centuries—there was a fresh river that ran across this hell. Galbraith discovered its route by ancient inscriptions he dug up, and followed the dry water-course. He found enough good water to keep him going, though mostly he had to dig for it. But he *did* get through, and brought me back with him." Wade glanced down. "I wonder if I could find any traces of our camps. Guess not, though. The *simoons* wipe out everything."

Red shifted uneasily. "Want me to take the stick?"

Wade nodded. "Thanks." He relinquished the controls to Argyle, and lit a cigarette, expelling the smoke in twin streams from his nostrils. "*Bueno*. We'll spell each other. We can't afford to be tired, any of us, when—"

He didn't finish. There was no need to. All three men knew that peril waited for them in the Valley of the Minotaur.

PRESENTLY Wade began to sketch on a pad he took from a compartment. Dirk peered over his shoulder.

"Eh?"

"Here's the set-up. Something you

both should know. The valley's pretty big. Or, rather, the two valleys. There's a large one where the Cretans have their walled city—Minos—and a smaller one at the top." He drew an oval, and a small circle crowning it. "The valleys are connected by a pass, through which a river flows. The Argo River, it's called. It comes down from the mountains into the little valley, where the priests have their headquarters, runs through the Labyrinth—that's their temple—and through the pass into the big valley, where it skirts the wall of Minos. Catch?"

Red, glancing aside at the map, asked:

"What's this Labyrinth?"

"I'll have to teach you to read some time," Dirk observed blandly. "You'd be surprised what you can find in books. Ever hear of Theseus?"

"Yeah—three little Theseus," Red responded, and bellowed with laughter. "Haw!"

Dirk moaned. "You and your lousy puns. Even if it were good. . . . Shut up and listen. Back in ancient Crete the Minoans worshiped a monster-god called the Minotaur, half bull and half human. Victims were turned into a maze, the Labyrinth, and the Minotaur got 'em. They couldn't find their way out, of course."

"Bull," Red said, laughing immoderately.

"For the love of—" Dirk growled.

He lifted one hand, presumably to scratch the back of his neck. Suddenly it flashed down, with a short, deadly throwing knife in it. More than once Dirk had found his backholster effective, giving him the advantage over an armed enemy. To tell Dirk Marat to put up his hands was leading with your chin. A swift, blinding motion, a lightning-fast throw—and bullets didn't always have the advantage over Dirk's sharp steel.

But now he just sat idly toying with the knife, and went on talking.

"One more crack out of you and the

joint will be covered with blood," he promised. "Theseus, as I was saying, killed the Minotaur. He took a spool of thread with him into the Labyrinth, unrolling it as he went, and simply back-tracked."

Wade was staring at his crude map.

"There was no Theseus in the valley," he said. "I never was in the Labyrinth, but the priests said there was a Minotaur in it. Criminals condemned to death were sent in—and never came out. But a young priest once told me he'd seen the Minotaur. He believed in it."

"What was it like?" Red forgot to joke.

Wade shrugged. "Dunno. He wouldn't say. But he was scared pantsless. . . . Well, I suppose we ought to make some plans."

Inwardly he was not so sure. It was difficult to foretell anything yet.

"The best thing to do is get in touch with a guy named Cardoth. He's the high priest. We'll find him at the Labyrinth."

"In the small valley?"

"Right."

"Is there room to land there?"

"Room enough." Wade fell silent, thinking.

CHAPTER VII

Over the Mountains



MOUNTAINS loomed ahead. They were beyond the last outposts now. This was the lost land, forsaken and desolate as the surface of another planet. Presently Wade took the

controls again.

Higher the mountains rose, snow-capped and thrusting up like menacing spears. The wind was chill now, and the plane hard to handle in the whirlpool currents. The icy mountains, bordering the oven-hot surrounding wilderness, made the air

rough. From occasional rifts and valleys rose thermals that sent the *Thunderbug* sliding and rocking sickeningly. Wade lifted the plane's nose higher.

Up—and up! Toward the highest ramparts of that great wall, to the towering peaks that seemed to touch the sky.

"We'll need oxygen masks," Red muttered.

"Not quite." Wade smiled. "There's a pass—for planes, anyway, if my memory's right. I've never been this way by air."

All around them now lay the tumbled, cataclysmic vastness of the icy ranges. Sometimes the bellowing roar of an avalanche thundered up from below. Plumes of snow blew constantly from the mountain peaks, like the famous mile-long plume of Everest. The scene beneath was a black-and-white dry-brush sketch, redeemed only by the violet shadows on the snow. The sky was a pale, cloudless blue.

Wade felt a surge of excitement mounting within him. He was a part of the plane now. It was an extension of him, like an extra arm. He vibrated to every life-beat of the engines, and the *Thunderbug* thrilled responsively to his deft, delicate touch as he fought the winds.

Red and Dirk were silent, marveling and appreciating Thunder Jim's mastery over the great plane. He nursed it along, remembering the danger that still lurked in the motors, not yet completely repaired.

Mountains—mountains that stretched to the ends of the world, far beyond the horizon! Towering peaks that lifted far above the laboring engines of the plane. And then—a wall, a vast, frowning, overhanging rampart that rose directly ahead, broken only by a single cleft, narrow as a knife blade. Wade headed for it.

He could not rise above the barrier, not with the motors straining as they were. In more rarefied air they might

quit completely. And that would mean catastrophe, swift and sudden.

He headed for the cleft. Red and Dirk leaned back, seeming to relax completely. Long ago they had learned to do this, in order to minimize the nervous strain of imminent danger. Relax. . . .

The gorge seemed to grow wider as they approached. It was no longer a knife-cut in the ice-wall. It was wide enough to let a plane fly through—just wide enough.

But not easily—no! The pass was a natural channel for raving, pouring winds. Snow clouds billowed and whirled in gusty currents. And the gorge turned and twisted like a snake. It was no easy road—impossible for men afoot, terribly difficult for a plane.

"The valley's beyond," Wade said softly. "It's a hot place."

THAT, of course, explained the winds. Cold air rushed down the pass to replace the constantly rising heated air from the valley beyond. The jagged walls sent the winds rippling dangerously in all directions. Like shooting rapids, Wade thought grimly. He nosed up slightly, leveled off, and roared at top speed into the cleft.

Peril at this speed, but even more if he went slowly, with a corresponding lack of control. Now the mighty power of the *Thunderbug* throbbed at his finger-tips, power that could mean success or crack-up, depending only on

Wade's lightning-quick reactions. If he were an instant too slow in handling the controls, gauging his distances, it would be fatal.

They were in the shadow of the cleft. There was no sound but the humming roar of the motors. The wingtips seemed to be brushing the gorge's walls. The *Thunderbug* zoomed up, tilting sideward in the grip of the wind, and snow blasted against the glass. Wade's fingers did not tighten on the stick. They rested there delicately, ready to grip. And they gripped now as the plane was hurled down toward the floor of the pass far below.

The prop bit deep into the air, hurtling the *Thunderbug* forward. There was no danger of a wing buckling. Wade knew his craft too well to fear that. But there was the danger of the motors going dead.

The plane righted, fled on, while Thunder Jim fought the stick. There was the merest hint of a smile at the corners of his mouth. His eyes, in that brown, expressionless face, were blazing with excitement.

The booming roar of the engine resounded through the gorge.

"Avalanche ahead!" Dirk said suddenly.

Wade had already seen it. The repercussions and echoes had loosened a key rock somewhere. Ice was falling like flashing diamonds from an overhang not far ahead. The black streak of a boulder arced down. If one of those hit the plane— [Turn Page]



TOPS 'EM ALL!

BIGGER DRINK • BETTER FLAVOR

Pepsi-Cola is made only by Pepsi-Cola Company, Long Island City, N. Y. Bottled locally by authorized bottlers.

The smile on Wade's face was distinct now. He was gambling with death, as he had done so often before. For there was no other way. He could not stop or turn back. He must race on at top speed, trying to beat the avalanche.

The whole side of the gorge swayed out. A glacier seemed to be exploding in colossal fragments. As the plane roared on, Wade saw from the corner of his eye a great wall of churning, thundering ruin bellowing out toward him. The wind lifted the *Thunderbug*, while the stick twisted like a mad thing in Wade's hands.

The iron fingers tightened, holding the plane steady. Ice rattled and clashed on the wings. Then, incredibly, the danger was over. There was clear air ahead. The booming echoes of the avalanche were left behind.

Out of the gorge the *Thunderbug* swept. A current of hot air—a thermal—drove it up. Briefly Wade fought the controls; then the plane steadied.

It flashed into a valley, bordered on all sides by the towering ramparts. In the exact center, Wade saw with a heart-stopping twinge of memory, was the walled city, white and splendid as a jewel. Minos!

DOWN the length of the oval valley a river ran—Argo River, skirting the city's western wall. Tilled fields were visible, and tiny huts and farms, as well as a few roads.

To the south, the river plunged into the cliffs and was lost, as Wade knew, in a cavern. Northward it emerged from a narrow pass beyond which lay the smaller valley of the priests. He turned the *Thunderbug* in that direction.

Strange homecoming. The boy Jim Wade had grown up in that valley. It had been his home for many years until Professor Galbraith had made his way in from the outer world. And the place seemed to have changed not at all. Poignantly he remembered the days he had spent, swimming in Argo

River, watching from the wall of Minos . . . It was like going back into the past.

"By the way," he said, "you guys don't know the Cretan tongue, but some of the people here speak Greek."

Dirk Marat nodded. "I know the lingo pretty well."

"I know a little of it," Red said.

"Modern Greek," Wade told them. "This is archaic. But you'll get along. Cardoth, the high priest, speaks English. He picked it up easily, when Miggs and I were here."

Miggs. Tim Miggs, the Cockney pilot, who had crashed with Wade in the lost valley. Vividly Jim Wade remembered the strutting, arrogant



little man, with his withered brown walnut of a face and his beady, sparrowlike eyes. Tim Miggs, whose grave was on the shore of Argo River. Thunder Jim's smile was sad.

The *Thunderbug* raced north, up the valley. There were no signs of danger. Through a pass they went, following the river, and into a smaller valley.

Before them rose—the Minotaur!

It was a statue so gigantic that, for a brief moment, nothing else seemed to exist. White and alien it towered against the background of dull black crags, impressive as Memnon on the Nile, archaic as the Colossus of Rhodes, strong with primeval menace as the Sphinx. But this was older than all. It was the Man-Bull—the Minotaur, beast-god of the ancient Cretan nation. Once its power had ruled the Mediterranean. Centuries ago, before the conquering Greeks

stormed upon the mysterious Minoan nation, the Sign of the Man-Bull had meant terror and mystery to all the earth.

Bull-headed, the anthropomorphic god towered. It had the body of a man, monstrously thewed, decorated with ornaments of bright metal. Atop the broad shoulders rose the head of black stone.

It was forty feet high, and it had the horned, blunt-muzzle head of a bull. The sheer, vigorous power of the image was overwhelming. It was impossible to tear eyes away from the colossus. Though Wade had seen it before, he felt again that touch of superstitious awe he had known years ago.

Between the knees of the seated figure was a gate—a double bronze door. The pedestal on which the Minotaur sat was apparently hollow.

Wade pointed. "That's the entrance to the Labyrinth. It's underground."

He swept the plane around in a long, swooping curve. Argo River burst from a cavern at the valley's head, and raced down to go through the pass into the larger valley beyond. Below no farms were visible. This was a park, and in its center stood the Minotaur.

AROUND the towering statue were a number of temples, flat-roofed, white as pale marble. Wade let the *Thunderbug* drive down, his eyes alert for sign of danger. But he saw nothing. A few tiny figures stood motionless, staring up. Priests, evidently. That was all. There was no sign of any more of Quester's men. Had they failed to reach the lost valley? Had they crashed in the mountain barrier?

Wade put the plane down on a smooth stretch of grass. He cut the motors, and silence fell. Then, from the far distance, came a faint booming thunder—the roar of the glaciers that were perpetually crashing down among the surrounding peaks.

It died. Thunder Jim stepped out of the plane, followed by his two companions. Wade, save for his pistol, was unarmed, but both Red and Dirk carried rifles. One of the priests was coming forward.

Hastily Jim turned back to the *Thunderbug*. His hands worked swiftly, and metal shutters slid over the ports. He closed the door once more; his fingers seemed to drift lightly over its surface. But now no one but Wade, Red, or Dirk could get into the super-plane. Certain precautionary guards had been built into the *Thunderbug*.

The priest, a gaunt, thin-faced figure in short kilt and blue tunic, was staring. His eyes opened wider when Wade addressed him in the Minoan tongue. "Greetings, in the name of the Minotaur!"

"Greetings." The man's gaze wandered to the plane, then back to Jim. "Who are you?"

Wade told him. The priest nodded. "Now I remember. But you were much younger when you left the valley. Much!"

"There's little time. I bring a warning of danger. Have any other planes—bird-machines—landed here?"

"No. We could not believe, at first, when we saw—"

Wade interrupted. "Then we got here first. But I must see Cardoth, quickly. He's still alive?"

"Yes. He's in the temple. I'll take you to him."

The priest stared again at the plane, turned, and signaled to the other natives who waited nearby. They scattered.

"My name is Yaton," he said. "Come with me."

Wade nodded, and obeyed, Red and Dirk behind him. Planes, of course, were not unknown to the Minoans. Jim Wade's first entrance to the valley had been made in a plane—a rickety old Spad. But there was quite a difference between a Spad and the *Thunderbug*.

CHAPTER VIII

Hidden Valley

SOMEHOW, the place looked different, Wade thought. He had seen it years before with the immature eyes of a youngster, naïve and unsophisticated. It was significant that now, as he stared around, he was analyzing the possible defenses of the temple group. The pass into the larger valley might be defended against a strong force, but much would depend on weapons. Spears and arrows were of little use against machine-gun bullets. And of no use at all against aerial bombs!

He followed Yaton into one of the great flat-roofed temples. Red and Dirk followed, their eyes wide with curiosity. So this was the mysterious land from which their leader had sprung! It was like stepping back thousands of years into the past, and one could almost imagine that beyond the mountains red-sailed galleys plied from the Tin Isles to the Mediterranean. Only the three adventurers made an incongruous note in the cool, dim quiet of the temple's interior.

They passed into a dark corridor after the shadowy, silent figure of their guide. Everywhere was a queer, indefinable odor of antiquity. It was utterly silent now.

Yaton reached out, as though to guide himself by touching the wall. So Wade thought, at first. Too late he realized his mistake. Beneath his feet the floor tilted—tilted and dropped away!

Twisting like a cat in mid-air, he fell, hearing surprised gasps from Red and Dirk. A flame of intensely bright light blinded him. He landed on his feet, but his knees buckled, and he went down, legs bending like springs. Before he could recover, vague figures were leaping forward.

The light was painfully bright. For brief moments Wade could see nothing. He heard grunting curses from his companions, and the sound of harsh breathing and blows. He stood up, motionless, as wiry arms wrapped themselves about his body. His vision cleared.

Red and Dirk were still battling, though hopelessly outnumbered. Battling not only against priests, blue-garbed and kilted, but against men who were not the stocky, broad-shouldered Minoans. White men! Killers, armed with guns, which they were not using. Apparently they wanted their prisoners alive. But there were at least twenty enemies in all.

Several men stood against the walls, weapons aimed. But they did not fire. They waited.

Red and Dirk had already been disarmed, but that did not seem to bother them. The red-haired giant's gnarled fists crashed home with audible *thunks!* A priest's face dissolved in a crimson blur, and he staggered back, screaming and spitting out bits of teeth. Each sledge-hammer punch Red Argyle landed had disastrous effect.

Dirk fought differently. The little man was tricky, an expert at ju-jitsu and street-fighting. His bland face wore an expression of sleepy happiness as he kicked, gouged, bit, and punched. He had the morals of a wolverine and the fury of a wildcat.

Then Thunder Jim went into action. His captors had been momentarily disarmed by his seeming helplessness as he stood there without making any effort to defend himself. One had a gun jammed into Wade's middle. And Thunder Jim's arms were held, bent forward slightly, by two others.

THERE was unusual power in Wade's muscles. When he moved, his captors were caught by surprise. He simply jerked his arms free, brought one down and the other up. The first slammed into the gun,

knocking it aside. Wade's right fist crashed against an unshaven jaw, and there was a crunching click as teeth were jammed suddenly together. The gunman was *hors de combat*.

Simultaneously Wade sprang back, evading the hands that reached for him. His automatic had been taken from its holster, and his companions' rifles were also gone. The glaring brightness was not so much of a handicap now. His eyes were accustomed to it.

So this was a trap! The enemy *had* reached here first, after all, and they had made their preparations. But why were the Minoan priests helping them?

That was a problem Wade could not solve just then. He was too busy using his fists.

Two bright searchlights had been set up at opposite ends of the room, and from the darkness behind them came the sound of a shot. Red Argyle let out a yelp and stood for a moment staring at his left arm, dripping with blood.

"THAT'S it!" a sharp voice said. "Don't kill 'em! Aim at their arms and legs."

"Hold it!" Wade commanded. "Red—Dirk—lay off!"

Argyle turned an expression of angry disbelief to his leader.

"What?"

Ignoring him, Wade called, "We surrender!" He raised his arms.

From behind the searchlight, someone laughed.

"Good! Tie 'em up, boys. But be careful."

Wade let himself be bound, and Red and Dirk followed his example, though with muttered objurgations. But they knew in their hearts that this was the best way. If they had continued to fight, they would have been shot at ruthlessly from the darkness, until they were crippled and helpless.

Now, though prisoners, they were

still able to fight should the chance come.

Wade hoped he had not been wrong. His first mistake had been in allowing himself to be lulled into a false sense of security, and so into this trap. Somehow, he could not believe that the Minoans had allied themselves with Galbraith's kidnapers. Yet everything pointed to that.

"Leave their legs free," the voice commanded, then the speaker came forward. A man with squinting eyes, lantern jaw, and bald head. He looked like a vulture, and needed a shave.

"Thunder Jim Wade and his pals, eh?" He grinned, eyeing his captives. "My name's Quester. Glad to know you."

Wade didn't answer, and Quester went on:

"So Varden's men didn't get you in Singapore. They radioed us about that. But what happened to the boys we had tailing you?"

Wade's eyes were icy cold. "They're dead," he said, and something like a gust of icy wind seemed to sweep through the underground room.

Quester's tongue came out and licked his lips. He was not grinning any longer.

"You'll be dead yourself, pretty soon," he said at last. "All three of you."

He made a quick gesture, and Wade saw that Yaton, the treacherous Minoan guide, had appeared.

"The cell is ready," the Cretan said.

He spoke English, and Wade realized that this must be the result of his own visit with Miggs to the valley years before.

Perhaps many of the natives had studied the new tongue.

AT a command from Quester, Wade and his companions were hustled through a short corridor and stopped before a metal door, which Yaton unlocked. The door was made of bronze bars, set solidly in a metal frame.

Beyond it was a small, bare cell, lighted by a single lamp.

The prisoners were thrust in; the door was shut and locked. The others went away, leaving only Quester, Yaton, and one of the armed killers, a squat, hairy fellow with evil, piggish eyes.

Quester's face was twisted with malice. "If I had my way, I wouldn't keep you alive," he said, staring through the bars. "So you're Thunder Jim Wade, eh?"

"Not really," Wade said, with infuriating calm. "I'm Santa Claus, and these guys with me are Donner and Blitzen. Two of my reindeer." His eyes were no longer icily inhuman.

"Smart fella," Quester growled. "Yeah!"

"What about Blitzen, here?" Wade said. He nodded toward Red. "Want him to bleed to death?"

Argyle's arm was still dripping blood.

"The rope will make a good tourniquet."

"Go away, Baldy," Dirk put in. "You bother us. We want to play charades."

Quester took out his gun. "You'll sing different if I put a slug through your arm."

Dirk met the vicious eyes with bland indifference. "Nuts."

Yaton murmured something. "... he does not want..." Wade could not hear the rest. Quester's face turned a mottled red.

"They'll still be alive if I put bullets in their legs!" he burst out.

He lifted his gun. Simultaneously a hand shot out of the shadows and closed on Quester's wrist. The bald man gasped in startled surprise, his discolored teeth showing in a snarl. Then he glanced at his assailant—and went parchment-pale.

"You must learn not to disobey me, Quester," a low, purring voice murmured.

The hand—fleshy and well manicured—took the gun. So swiftly that

eye could scarcely follow the motion, it swept out. Quester grunted explosively.

He reached up and touched bleeding scratches on his cheek.

"You had better put iodine on that," the voice said, and, more sharply, "Now!"

Quester said nothing. His mouth was working as he turned and vanished in the depths of the corridor.

Yaton had not spoken. But there was fear in his eyes. The owner of the voice moved into view before the door, and Thunder Jim Wade nodded slowly.

"Solent," he said. "Duke Solent."

He had never seen Solent before, but tales of the man were whispered from Bombay to Rio. Duke Solent, the Eurasian, hybrid of two races, with the worst vices of each combining in his strong, well-built body. Ruthless, cunning, dangerous as the *ringhals* cobra or the black mamba, he had left a trail of death in his wake across the world.

He worked swiftly, and had always gone unpunished—except once. A Russian *mujik* was the only man who had left his mark on Solent. No one ever knew the truth of that story, but Duke Solent had come out of Siberia with a flaming, crinkled scar on his forehead. He had been branded with a cross.

MANY women had found him attractive. He was tall, strongly built, with an easy flowing grace. Only his slightly slanted eyes in the dark face told of his half-Asian ancestry.

Wade had always known that some day his trail must cross that of Solent.

And now—he felt a thrill of exultation at the thought—that day had come. True, he was the Eurasian's prisoner, but—

"Quester is impetuous," Solent said softly. "I wanted you alive and unharmed. I have heard of the *Thunderbug*, and the precautions you take."

Wade lifted an eyebrow. "So you couldn't get into it, eh?"

The other lifted his hand in a queer gesture, brushing at his lips.

"My men could not," he admitted. "When they had acid sprayed on them from concealed automatic vents, they were discouraged."

"I'm the only one who can get into the *Thunderbug*, once it's locked," Wade informed his captor. "I'd advise you not to try to burn your way through the hull with an acetylene torch. There's high explosive in the *Thunderbug*, and it's apt to go off."

For a long moment Solent stared. "I believe you," he said at last. "You'd rather see the *Thunderbug* destroyed than have it get out of your hands. But you can open it, eh?"

"I can—"

"And you will. Or your men will be tortured."

Wade exchanged significant glances with Red and Dirk. Such threats had been made before.

"Got any objections to having a chat, first?" Wade asked. "There's a lot I'd like to know."

Solent shrugged his muscular shoulders. The scar on his forehead gleamed crimson.

"I shall tell you only what I wish, of course. But go ahead."

"Is Professor Galbraith safe?"

"Yes."

"What are you after here?"

"Talk will get us nowhere," Solent said suddenly. His hand brushed his lips again. "No, we waste time. You will show me how to operate the *Thunderbug*. You have ten minutes to make your decision. Otherwise, the torture begins."

Without another word he turned and strode away, followed by Yaton. The single guard they had left leaned idly against the wall. Silence fell over the prison vault.

"Well," Red grunted, "what next?"

Wade smiled. "Next? We're getting out of here, of course!"

CHAPTER IX

Test for the Thunderbug

JIM WADE glanced around. The cell was empty, save for the single dim light of the ancient lamp.

"Over here," he said softly, and led the way into a corner of the prison where

they were temporarily hidden from the guard outside. "Now—what about a knife, Dirk?"

Marat's round face twisted in a smile, its seraphic effect somewhat marred by a black eye.

"I have one. You'll have to get it for me."

"Where?"

"Behind my teeth—feel? It snaps in place like a dentist's band."

He knelt as Wade deftly retrieved the tiny sliver of steel. One of Dirk's chief interests was thinking up ingenious ways of concealing knife blades so that they would not be found by searchers. The sliver was sharp, and soon the three were free of their bonds.

"Keep the ropes in place," Wade warned. "We're not out of this fix yet."

With his arms still apparently bound he went to where the lamp stood on the floor, and stumbled, knocking it over. The guard outside stirred, peering into the Stygian blackness of the cell.

"What you think you're doin'?" he snapped.

Thunder Jim was moving swiftly. The ropes were gone from his body now. He snatched up the lamp, drifted like a shadow to the door, and emptied the contents outside the bars, on the stone floor. That done, he slipped aside into the blackness, and Red Argyle took his place.

The guard was coming forward, his gun ready. The torchlight just revealed Red within the cell.

"Back up," the guard snapped. Argyle obeyed.

The guard was taking no chances. He walked forward warily, his pistol snouted forward, his eyes intent on the interior of the vault. Consequently he did not see the little pool of oil. He stepped into it, but his hob-nailed boots did not slip.

Simultaneously Wade lit the packet of matches he had fished out of his pocket, and tossed it between the bars.

Instantly the oil-pool blazed up. To the guard, it seemed as though fire had leaped up from his very feet. Attack he had expected, but not this.

And Argyle's huge hand shot between the bars, clamped on the guard's gun-hand, and dragged the man forward. His companions worked in swift unison. Wade's fist cracked sharply against the gunman's jaw. He caught the fellow as he slumped down. Dirk had already yanked the pistol from the guard's hand.

It was over. The three had worked like a well-oiled machine, with swift precision and accuracy—as always.

"We could use the pistol on the lock," Wade said, "but that'd be too noisy."

"Got that pen-knife of yours?" Red asked.

He took the steel sliver from Dirk and bent over the door. His gnarled, hairy fingers looked clumsy, but within a few seconds the lock clicked, and the barrier stood open. The three hurdled the pool of oil. Briefly they paused to smother the fire licking at the unconscious guard's clothing.

LEAVING an enemy to be burned to death was something they could not do, even at this critical moment. But it did not take long, and then they were hurrying back along the corridor. Wade had taken the torch from its socket, and led the way.

"Know the way out?" Dirk asked.

"Maybe. We've got to get to the *Thunderbug*."

"There'll be guards."

"Some. Let's have that gun, Dirk."
"What about Galbraith?"

Wade grunted. "Figure it out. Why did Solent want the *Thunderbug*? Because he didn't have another plane. His own must have cracked up when he landed here. Okay. But why the rush? Because he wants to use the *Thunderbug* for something. I know the Minoans. Not many of them are fools or scoundrels. Solent might have got a few to help him, but the rest—no. Certainly not Cardoth, the king-priest."

Red was tying up his wounded arm as they went on. "Well?" he asked.

"My idea is that most of the Minoans are against Solent, and they're with Cardoth, in the city—Minos. So Solent wants to get the *Thunderbug* and drop a few bombs on Minos. I don't get all the angles yet, but I believe that's the best solution."

Wade halted in mid-stride, staring around. He held the torch higher.

"Anyway, this is the place. Where we fell through the trap-door. How's your arm, Red? Can you stand some weight?"

The giant grunted. "Climb on." He braced himself.

Carefully Wade mounted, until he stood astride Red's shoulders.

"Can't reach. Dirk?"

Marat made the third stone in the human tower. He could just touch the ceiling.

"Right. No lock on it. I—I'll see."

Abruptly the panel slid down, upsetting all three. They were up again instantly, alert for any sound that might betoken danger. They heard nothing.

Once more Red braced himself. This time Dirk's fingers slipped over the edge of the aperture, and slowly, gradually, he pulled himself up.

"All oke," he whispered down. "Let's have your hand, now."

It was more difficult to get Red up through the trap, but they managed it at last, with the aid of improvised ropes made from their belts and

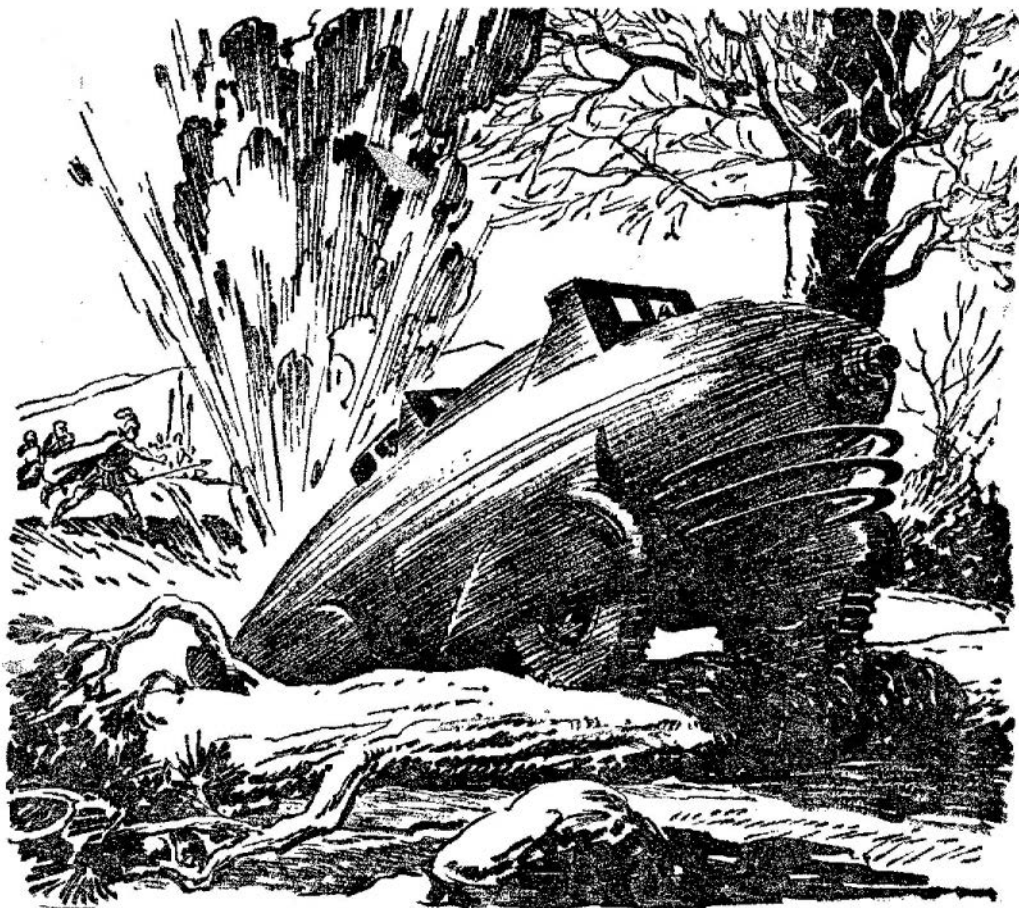
twisted shirts. Finally the three stood panting in the upper corridor that was dim, silent, and empty.

Wade had the gun. He led the way. They met no one.

Then they were outside the temple, in the bright sunlight. The *Thunderbug* stood not far away. It seemed unharmed. There were a few men near it, two of them priests.

voice was shouting something. Had their escape been discovered? Had Solent returned to the cell and found it empty? In that case, Jim Wade could not wait for an opportunity to disguise himself and his companions as priests. "Red," he whispered, "head for the plane. I'll cover you."

Without hesitation Argyle launched himself forward. He knew Wade's



Wade sent the Thunderbug racing forward (Chap. IX)

"What about Galbraith?" Dirk whispered. "We going to leave him here?"

"Got to," Wade said shortly.

It was the only way, he knew. Just now it was imperative that they make their escape, and return later with aid. Besides, Galbraith might not be here. He might be in the walled city of Minos.

Wade felt a sudden electric tingle go right up his spine. Far away, a

uncannily accurate marksmanship.

Dirk was gone, too, slipping like a shadow from bush to bush. Wade followed, his eyes keenly alert for any sign of movement.

The four men visible near the plane noticed Red's sprinting figure. One of them yelled and jerked up a gun. Wade seemed to fire without aim. The gun was unfamiliar to him, but he did not miss. The killer yelled even louder, and jerked up an arm from

which red drops splattered in the bright sunlight.

Wade willed himself to icy calm. His glance raked the scene. The shadow of the gigantic Minotaur lay beyond the plane. Was someone moving there? Yes!

Again the pistol snarled. From far away, a voice rose in agony. Red was almost at the *Thunderbug*. Then he was at its side, bending low, his deft fingers searching. The magic in those gnarled hands opened the secret lock in split seconds. But meanwhile Wade guarded him, not daring to waste bullets, for he had no extra ammunition. Six slugs, and he had used two . . . three now.

Red was in the plane. The door was shut. A staccato clatter of machine-gun fire ripped out, and the priests flung themselves flat on their faces. But they had no need to fear. That was just a warning. Angyle had aimed high.

"Dirk!" Wade called sharply, and saw a small figure dart rabbitlike toward the *Thunderbug*.

He followed, racing at top speed. Behind him he heard shouts and shots. Over his shoulder he saw men pouring out of the temple he had just left, and risked a snap-shot that halted them momentarily.

Then Dirk was scrambling into the plane, Wade on his heels. Lead plunked against the armored hull. A bullet sang through the door as it closed, and splashed on the inner wall. Wade jammed the barrier shut, locked it, and breathed again.

"Anybody hurt?"

"Those sons can't shoot worth a hoot," Red told him, and Dirk merely smiled.

"Okay." Wade bent over the controls, touching the starter. Only a coughing grunt was the response. He went suddenly tense.

Neither Dirk nor Red said anything, though they realized that something was wrong. Quietly they took their places, one on each side of the cabin.

The shutters were still in place, and the small enclosure was lit by electric light. Nothing outside, of course, was visible.

Wade's deft fingers moved swiftly. That attempt to enter the *Thunderbug*—it hadn't helped any. The engine trouble had developed to dangerous proportions. Dangerous to men in the air, for a forced landing here might be disastrous.

"We're moving by land," Wade said.

INSTANTLY the cabin sprang into hurried activity. The retractable wings were drawn in, tractor wheels pumped out, and, in a matter of minutes, the *Thunderbug* was not a plane any more. It was a tank, of definitely unusual construction, but looking strong.

Wade chanced a glimpse of the outside. As he half suspected, the enemy, under Quester's guidance were arriving with dynamite. Ahead, in the *Thunderbug's* path, a tree had been hastily felled, and rocks piled about it to form a barricade. No doubt boulders had been put against the treads, too.

Jim would have preferred to warm the motor awhile longer, but he dared not delay. With a signal to the others, he flipped open the front shutters. The *Thunderbug* quivered, shook, but did not move.

From outside, came Quester's voice.

"Touch off that fuse! Quick!"

Wade threw on more power. The *Thunderbug* backed up, the floor tilting dangerously, and then moved forward. It crawled toward the tree that blocked its path. The straining, damaged motors sang more shrilly.

Slowly, gradually, the *Thunderbug* clambered like a beetle over the barricade. It came down with a thump, just as a grenade landed nearby. Wade threw on additional speed, and the tank, once more on level ground, began to move faster. The pick-up was good, he thought, but those

motors might quit at any moment. Faster, now. . . .

The grenade exploded, too far away to do any harm. From the distance came shots and cries. Wade sent the *Thunderbug* racing forward, at thirty miles an hour, heading for the pass.

The mountainous ramparts at either side drew closer. On the right was the Argo River, flowing with smooth, oily speed. The Minotaur's shadow fell on them briefly as they rounded an outcrop of rock; then they were in the pass. The confusion of noise grew fainter behind them.

The *Thunderbug* picked up speed, but its motor sometimes stuttered disconsolately. Wade frowned. If it died—

They had to reach shelter first. And the only safe shelter was the walled city, Minos.

The sun was dipping toward the western rampart of ice-bound cliffs, and the shadows of trees and bushes were lengthening. Jim Wade glanced around. Dirk was busy adjusting a new bandage on Red's arm, to replace the temporary, makeshift one. Both of the men were ragged and blood-smeared, but Wade knew there was plenty of life in them yet. There would have to be! If his suspicions were right, a hard fight lay ahead.

So Duke Solent was behind this! The Eurasian was a dangerous man. He was cunning as well as unscrupulous, and no doubt he had laid his plans well. But what was behind all this mystery? What was the unknown treasure of the valley? And how did the little statue of the Minotaur, which Galbraith owned, affect the situation? The material of which it was made was not even marble. The thought of its being pitchblende or any precious metal was ridiculous. Nor was it *old*. The priests had made it for Galbraith when the Professor visited Minos.

Wade shook his head doubtfully, guiding the *Thunderbug* through the pass and into the larger valley. A

gradually rising slope lay ahead, tree-forested and bushy. Higher up were farms. But, when Wade passed them, he saw that the oddly constructed buildings seemed deserted. No smoke rose from the roofs, and cattle lowed sadly in the meadows.

CHAPTER X

Escape to Minos



NOW there was no danger of pursuit. But there was always the ever-present peril of engine trouble. The motor was worse now. Once it went out entirely, and Wade had to tinker

with it for fifteen minutes before it sputtered unhappily to life again.

Red and Dirk watched in silence. The little man had found another throwing knife among the equipment, and was sharpening its blade. Red was smoking a particularly vile brand of black cigar, which Dirk contended was imported from Gehenna.

The ground kept on rising. The river lay on the right, hidden now behind palisades of low cliffs, from which ravines cut up at sharp angles to the plateau-plain. Ahead Wade could see the tall rampart of the city's wall, and the gate that opened northward. He went on, following a road into which he had guided the *Thunderbug*.

Cough, the engines went. *Sput-t—sputt-t-t—chk!* The tank needed an overhauling badly, Wade realized. He wished he had left it in Singapore until the job had been completed. But there would have been no time, had he done so. As it was, time was dangerously short. Duke Solent already had acquired power of some sort in the valley. But how?

Those questions could be answered later, Wade thought. Meanwhile, the most important thing was to get the *Thunderbug* into Minos, where it

would not fall into Solent's hands and be destroyed. Granted, of course, that the city held friends.

Land of mystery and ancient glamor! And now overrun with killers, the worst types of the outer world's civilization. To Wade, who had lived so long in the lost valley, such intrusion seemed almost sacrilege. The incongruity of modern guns, hand grenades, dock rats and hired killers in Minos was, somehow, subtly degrading. Like a black blotch of fungus on a marble statue of pure beauty.

Wade's mind went back to a long-ago day when brigands had attacked an isolated Chinese Buddhist temple, a marvel of jade and bronze and ebony. He had felt the same way then. And he had had no compunction in machine-gunning the brigands, at that time, for their weapons had been superior to his own. And once, in the silent fastnesses of Tibet, battling in the air against roaring planes, he had glanced down and seen the bleak, ascetic bulk of a lamasery against the snowy peak. It had stood there for centuries, untouched by greed and hatred and evil.

And now Minos—cheapened, somehow, desecrated by Solent and his murderous crew.

The great wall loomed ahead. To left and to right it stretched, tall and grimly undecorated, save for sentries who paced the walls, tiny silhouettes against the dying light. The road led directly to the tall bronze gates, three times higher than a man, decorated with carving of the Minotaur. Wade sent the light tank heading directly toward it.

"They've spotted us," he said, over his shoulder. "We may have to back up in a hurry. Keep extra clips handy."

Dirk, busy with a rifle, nodded. Red, handicapped by his wounded arm, was awkwardly adjusting a small machine-gun.

The great gates swung open. Wade felt himself getting tense. The next

few moments would be important indeed.

THE swift twilight of the tropics was falling. The sun dipped behind the western peaks. A shadow fell on Minos.

Beyond the open gates were the towers and buildings of a city. The road led into a cleared space, a square in which many Cretans were thronged. Wade stopped the *Thunderbug* just short of the gateway, peering through the bullet-proof glass window.

Minoan women, in their striped full skirts and neat bodices, strapped tightly about their middles. Men, in scanty, tight skirts and broad-shouldered tunics, carrying shields and short-swords, javelins, bows, and spears. The Cretans of Minos, watching the gateway.

Out of the throng a man strode, white-bearded and tall. He came forward fearlessly, his arm lifted in salute. Wade sighed in gusty relief.

"Okay, boys," he said. "That's Cardoth, the king-priest. We'll be safe in Minos. For awhile, anyhow."

He sent the *Thunderbug* lurching forward. The bronze gates crashed closed behind them.

They were in Minos—lost to the world for untold centuries! The heart of a secret, forgotten civilization!

Minos—the mystery of mysteries!

There was a queer, warm feeling in Thunder Jim's chest as he stepped out of the *Thunderbug* and advanced to meet Cardoth. Many years before, a child stunned by the Spad's crash, he had been carried over these same stones. And often he had walked upon them as he had grown older, sometimes with Miggs, the little Cockney, at his side. It was like opening again a dearly loved book not read since boyhood.

The dim, ghostly twilight made the scene unreal. The walls towered up endlessly, gray as the somber skies. With the coming of night, a chill wind blew down from the surround-

ing mountains. Torches were aflame here and there in the square. A curious silence hung over all. The mob was not demonstrative. They did not shout—they scarcely seemed to whisper.

Wade gave a strange, archaic salute, and Cardoth acknowledged it. The king-priest was very old, yet his lean body was not bent by age. Bright, keen eyes flashed from under tufted white brows. The oldster's nose was a scimitar-beak. Unlike the broad-shouldered, squat Minoans he was tall, wiry and lean.

"You have come back, my son," he said simply. "I am glad." He put out his hand. "Let us greet each other in the way of your people."

Wade wrung the hard hand. This was homecoming—to the only real home he had ever known. Abruptly he felt an aching longing that he knew could never be fulfilled. A home. But he was Thunder Jim Wade! Always he must pay the price his strange background exacted. Always must he remain homeless, a wanderer in far places, and an avenger.

Yet his youth lay buried here in Minos, with the bones of his father, and with little Miggs, the Cockney pilot. He could never forget that.

"It is good to see you, Cardoth," he said. "But let us talk in English, if you remember? My friends do not speak Minoan, and only a few words or more of Greek."

The king-priest bent his white head. "So. Come to my palace, with your friends."

HE SALUTED Red and Dirk and, as they stared, extended his hand. They shook it, surprised at the old man's strength.

"My machine—" Wade said.

Cardoth looked at the *Thunderbug*. "The outside world holds strong magic, as we have lately found to our cost. But it will be safe here. The gates are barred, and there are sentries. I will post guards, though."

He called a command, and soldiers pushed forward, armed with short swords and javelins. Silently they formed a cordon around the tank.

Cardoth beckoned. He led the way between the silent throng that opened before them and closed again in their wake. A chariot, drawn by two black horses, waited. Riding in it through the flame-lit streets of Minos, Wade could almost believe that he had stepped back into his fantastic youth. The towers and domes of the city rose up all about him. And ever the people watched, silently, with an air of waiting.

The palace was surprisingly simple. In a plain, quiet room high up in a tower, undecorated save for a frieze about the walls, Wade and his companions faced Cardoth at last, relaxing on soft cushions. From a window came the sound of a rushing torrent—Argo River, far below. The palace was by the west wall of Minos, where the stream ran.

"You will wish to refresh yourselves," Cardoth had just said.

"Time for that later," Wade said promptly. "Just now, we'd better talk, eh?"

"As you wish. But you can eat and drink as you speak."

Girls in the odd Minoan costume came hurrying in response to Cardoth's summons. Speedily they returned with wine and food.

Wade watched Red light one of his twisted black cigars. He caught the king-priest's glance, and smiled.

"You remember Miggs? He was always unhappy because there was no tobacco here. This is what he meant by cigars, Cardoth."

"So?" The oldster was interested. "I should like to try it."

"Try a cigarette," Wade said hastily. He knew the strength of Red's cigars.

Cardoth took one of the small white cylinders, and was soon puffing away interestedly, delighted with the new sensation.

"So this is what little Miggs wanted," he murmured. "Well, it is pleasant. . . . But we have other things to talk about. You come in good time, son. Strange that both of you—you and Professor Galbraith, who was here so many years ago and took you away with him—should arrive a day or two apart."

Wade grunted. So Galbraith was here! Good!

"Just what happened?" he asked.

Cardoth was smoking with unhurried calm. "We are besieged in Minos. But I had better begin at the start. For a long time a priest named Yaton—"

"Yaton?" Wade repeated sharply.

"You know him? So . . . He chafed under my rule. He gathered malcontents about him. But they could do nothing. The bulk of the people were satisfied. Yaton is cruel, and if he had his way, there would be many more sacrifices to the Minotaur than there are now. At present only convicted criminals enter the Labyrinth to die. Well—well, I have my spies."

HE EXAMINED the cigarette with interest.

"A man named—what is it?—Solent, came into the valley in a plane. Like the one that brought you and Miggs and your father, only more modern, I suppose. He had Professor Galbraith with him as a prisoner. We did not know that at first. Later, too late, we learned the truth. Solent wished to acquire a treasure he believes the valley holds. Yaton wished to rule. Inevitably, the two found each other, and helped each other. Yaton said he would give Solent the secret provided Solent helped him become king-priest of Minos. Thus the two are allies, now, against me."

Wade's face was expressionless.

"And?"

"They hold the sacred valley of the Minotaur. I fled here to Minos. I could see Solent and his men were evil, and only evil could come of deal-

ing with them. They wish to conquer us, kill me, and enslave and rule the people. Yaton will become king-priest, and he will not be a good one. The Minotaur will have far too many sacrifices."

"I get it," Wade said. "They're going to march on Minos."

"Yes. All the people have fled into the city. We are not well armed against the weapons of the outside world. But we have courage. Yaton and Solent will not conquer us easily."

"So," Jim Wade said thoughtfully, "Yaton and Solent have Galbraith a captive in the sacred valley."

CHAPTER XI

Besieged City



GOING over to the window, Thunder Jim stared down at the long sweep of tower that merged into the city wall, and then the cliff that dropped sharply away to the moonlit surface of Argo River far below. The water's rushing murmur came up to him softly. What treasure, unknown to him, could possibly exist here?

"Solent has modern weapons, of course," he said, turning abruptly, his tall figure outlined against the blackness behind the window. "That means guns, dynamite, and so forth. What about his plane?"

"It was damaged," Cardoth said, with the trace of a sly smile behind his beard. "As I said, I have my—spies!"

Wade nodded appreciatively. The king-priest was no fool. He would make a good ally. And the Minoans, hard, trained fighters, would not be useless. But the thought of seeing them fall in dozens before machine-gun fire was sickening to Wade.

He looked at Red and Dirk.

"Solent can't attack by air," he said, then turned back to the king-priest.

"He—how many men are against us, Cardoth?"

"Not many. Six hundred altogether, perhaps. We are many more."

"But you have no guns. That's why Solent wanted the *Thunderbug*, of course. To attack by air. He doesn't really need the tank. Dynamite can breach holes in these walls easily enough. We haven't much of a chance."

"The *Thunderbug*?" Dirk said quietly.

"Those engines are badly strained. It'll take days to repair the machine. We can't depend on that."

"We have weapons, too."

"Some. Yes. But not enough to de-

arrows. How much time have we, do you think?"

The king-priest shrugged. "I do not know that. Days—or perhaps only hours." He rose as a gong clanged sharply from the distance. "Wait. This may be a messenger."

Presently a stocky, broad-shouldered priest was ushered into the room. Sweat still made channels in his grimy cheeks. He bowed low before Cardoth, sending a glance of swift inquiry at the three Americans.

"There is news, Highness."

"Then say it," Cardoth commanded. "These men are to be trusted."

Wade felt again that queer warning thrill of danger. He sensed



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fend a city. Solent isn't a fool. He has his own men, and he's trained the priests by now to use guns."

"We can do that, too," Dirk said emphatically.

Wade scowled. "Yeah—yeah. But I wish we could use the *Thunderbug*. Drop a few bombs on those boys, and they'd hightail it *pronto*."

Red gnawed his cigar. "We got some ammunition, but not such a lot. Even if we could train the Minoan soldiers to use gats, it'd take awhile. And badly trained soldiers are *muy malo*."

"Our men have courage," Cardoth said.

Wade smiled at him pacificly. "Of course. But in a fight they'd probably forget the guns and depend on their own weapons—spears and

menace in the air, a breathless expectancy that tingled through his body.

Red and Dirk felt it, too. Their eyes were bright.

"This is Rezzar, one of my spies," the king-priest said. "He has just returned from the Minotaur valley, where he pretended to be a priest of Yaton."

REZZAR nodded. "Aye. They attack at noon tomorrow, in full force. The slant-eyed man—"

"Solent?" Wade asked.

"Yes, Solent. He was waiting for something, but decided not to wait."

"He was waiting for the *Thunderbug*, in case it got past that trap they set for us back in the jungle," Wade explained. "We got away, so the

longer he delays now, the longer we have to prepare for him."

"More than six hundred men will march on Minos," Rezzar said. "I—I had difficulty in escaping." He glanced at a bloody scratch on his bare, bronzed arm. "They will come with strange new weapons, and the powder that explodes."

"Grenades — dynamite — machine-guns," Red growled. "This'll be slaughter!"

"Do you know of Professor Galbraith?" Wade asked suddenly, and the spy priest nodded.

"He is Yaton's prisoner."

"Do you know what they intend to do with him?"

Rezzar shrugged. "They will kill him, I suppose." He turned to Cardoth. "If you have no orders for me, I shall go to join the soldiers who will be defending Minos tomorrow."

The king-priest smiled. "You are a brave man, Rezzar. Yes, go. Our gods guard you!"

Then, for a time, there was silence in the room. Wade went to the window again and stared down, pondering. So the attack would be at noon tomorrow? So little time left in which to prepare! He turned.

"We have a night and half a day to train the soldiers. Spread the guns around as much as possible. Train as many as you can, so there'll be reserves. And get to work on the *Thunderbug*. There's a chance—a long one—that we can get it working by noon tomorrow. Before the attack. So hop to it!"

Dirk nodded silently. Red's shaggy brows came together.

"What about you?"

"I'm going back to the sacred valley," Wade told him. "Cardoth, can I be disguised as a priest?"

"You are tall—too tall," the ruler said hesitantly. "But we can try."

"You're going back?" Red broke in. "Why the—"

"Sabotage," Wade explained. "Fifth Column work. I want to try and crip-

ple the attack at the source, if I can. And save Galbraith, too."

The giant scowled. "Well, why can't Dirk and I go along. You might need us."

"Because I might fail—be captured or killed. Then everything would depend on you guys. On your guns, and on the *Thunderbug*, if you can repair it in time."

"Fat chance," Dirk muttered. But Red eyed his big capable hands and nodded.

"*Bueno.*"

Wade stretched his muscular body.

"Cardoth—"

THE king-priest signaled for an attendant. He gave swift orders, and followed the American as he was conducted out.

"I had better go with your friends, my son, and confirm what they do," he offered.

"Yeah. Thanks."

Wade was removing his clothing as he walked. He waved at Red and Dirk, saluted the king-priest, and went on. Soon he found himself in a huge, cool bath, lit by torches. A deep basin was sunk in the stone floor. Servants were busy, bringing clothing, *strigils*, and other necessities.

Twenty minutes later Wade was transformed. He was still too tall for an average Minoan, but there were some tall men among the natives. He wore the customary short skirt and blue bodice of a priest, covered by a loose cloak. On his head was a plumed hood.

He stood looking at his reflection in a steel mirror. From beyond the window came the sound of noisy preparations as Minos made ready for the invaders' attack. Wade grunted and went to find the *Thunderbug*, from which he took some weapons that might come in handy.

He needed no guide to the sacred valley. Soon he was outside the city wall, its torch-lit glow fading behind him, hurrying northward on a fast

horse whose hoofs drummed through the moonlit night.

The river was a silver stream on his left. Down the long slope he rode, and, at last, the narrow pass that led to the Labyrinth opened before him.

Wade dismounted, sending the horse away with a slap on its rump. He slipped into the shadows, peering ahead with wary eyes. There might be—would be—guards in the pass.

SILENTLY as a wind-blown leaf, Thunder Jim advanced.

Civilization seemed to drop from him like a useless cloak. He was back in the jungle now, where life and death were primeval and everyday occurrences. Where wariness and skill meant life, and weakness was a prelude to destruction.

Not physical weakness alone—no! A single false step, a betraying sound, a miscalculation in the dimensionless moonlight, any of these might bring death swift and inevitable. But Wade was a curious blend of ancient instinct and keen intelligence. He was not merely wise with the wisdom of the wilderness savage. He was an animal, a stalking carnivore; a puma with the alert mind of a man.

Like a shadow he moved, making no sound. His eyes were strange now, the pupils expanding until they seemed large and almost luminous—jet stones in the hard, bronzed face. The wisdom of two races—of a forgotten, archaic civilization, and of a modern, scientific world—mingled with the primitive, deadly instinct of the jungle. To have seen Wade now as he moved like a stalking beast through the gloom would have been to know why many feared him.

The careless, daredevil adventurer was gone. In his place was a Nemesis, relentless and inexorable. In his mind, Wade had condemned the killers who had brought blood and death into the lost valley, and the cold fury within him glittered in his jet eyes. He went on.

There was a guard posted—one of the renegade Minoan priests, stocky and sinewy, his gaze wary as he lounged in a dark crevasse that cut the eastern wall of the pass, hidden from view. Wade did not see him, but sensed his presence unmistakably. The innumerable night-sounds, the whisper of winds, the murmur of the river, the hum of nocturnal insects, formed a monotone which altered, very slightly, as Wade approached the guard.

An almost undetectable hush surrounded him. His presence had driven away the wary insects and small bush animals. His breathing was not quite inaudible, and Wade's nostrils, long trained for such work, could detect the man's odor, as distinctive as the strong musk-smell of a lion. Each of Wade's senses was keenly alert, attuned to the slightest disturbance.

He waited, considering. There was no reason to risk an alarm unnecessarily. Discovery at this point would be dangerous. He grinned in the darkness. Dangerous was an understatement. It would be fatal.

To overcome and tie the guard would be a delay, and unnecessary. Better to slip past unnoticed. If that could be done!

Wade retreated. Taking advantage of the cover, he crossed the narrow pass to the west, until he reached Argo River. It did not flow too swiftly for his purposes. The valley was fairly level, and the stream had neither rapids nor falls. It clung to the steep side of the gorge, and by keeping to the slow water of the shallows, Wade felt sure he could swim upstream. Whether he could do so without being detected by the enemy's guards was another matter.

Crouching under a bush, he stripped and made his garments into a small, compact bundle, which he gripped in one hand. That done, he slipped into the water. Its snowy chill was a shock. There were flecks of ice visible floating downstream, and Wade knew

speed was essential, to avoid freezing. But silence was even more important.

Holding his clothes and gun over his head, he crossed the river and reached the shallows, where plants grew thickly on the shore. He paused long enough to procure camouflage—some leaves that served to disguise his bundle, and a vine that he ripped up and wound about his head like a turban. This might not help much, but every precaution was valuable at this stage of the game.

Again he dropped into the water and began to make his way upstream. Above him the steep, dark rampart of rock rose against the purple sky. Sometimes pebbles and earth would be dislodged and fall splashing into the stream. The moon had risen above the eastern summit of the gorge, and its light slanted down on the river. But that was something that could not be helped.

Far away came the muted rumble of avalanches. The sky was blazing with jeweled brilliance. The strange, fantastic beauty of the African night was exotically unreal. Wade thought he might be on another world, a planet where man had never existed. For the thousandth time the lure of the far, lonely places beyond civilization's outposts struck through him. Wade could never live long in a city, he knew. The blood of explorers and adventurers flowed too strongly in his veins.

Little clicks sounded as ice-shards touched rocks. But this was along the edge. In the center the river flowed like a broad, smooth ribbon, back into the larger valley and past the wall of Minos. There were no crocodiles here, Wade knew. It was far too cold. Nor, for the same reason, would there be hippopotami. But there were certainly guards and, worst of all, there was the deadly, biting chill of the water.

It crept through Wade's flesh and into his bones until he clenched his teeth to keep them from rattling to-

gether. His breath came unsteadily. Still he fought his way on.

Abruptly he froze. A guard! A Minoan, standing motionless on the bank. Had he seen the swimmer? Wade let himself drift down. Under the water his hand found a rock, and he anchored himself to it with numb fingers. To the priest it must seem as though two floating bits of vine had caught on a boulder. He waited, while the iron cold gnawed into him, numbing his naked body.

There must be no alarm! Over and over he repeated the phrase in his mind. He must wait, for hours, if necessary, until the way was clear once more. His hand slipped from the rock, and he regained his grip with difficulty. His fingers were without feeling.

CHAPTER XII

The Minotaur's Lair



CAREFULLY the guard looked up and downstream, turned, and walked away. Wade waited a few minutes, for safety's sake, then resumed his struggle. But it was more difficult now. His reactions were slowed by the terrible chill.

The walls of the pass grew wider. He was entering the sacred valley. In the distance he could see the towering image of the Minotaur, ghostly in the moonlight, and the white temples shining about it. Sleep shrouded the place. The men of Solent and Yaton were resting, in preparation for tomorrow's attack.

A glint of silvery-gray caught Wade's eye. Far upstream, by a grove, he could make out the wreckage of a plane—Solent's, obviously. Solent would need the *Thunderbug* to leave the valley, once he accomplished his ends. But a plane was not vital. With dynamite, the pass to the outer world

could be blasted open, and the trek make afoot. Wade himself and Professor Galbraith had once done that, in the distant past.

Briefly Jim Wade wondered how Red and Dirk were getting along back in Minos. He doubted if the *Thunderbug* could be repaired in time to repel the attack. That made his present mission even more important.

It was time to leave the river. Under the cover of bushes, Wade scrambled out, shuddering with cold. He took time to rub his body vigorously with a mat of stiff grass he tore up, gasping as circulation was restored, and the ache left his arms and legs. That done, he dressed again in the priestly masquerade, and considered.

What was to be done first? Solent seemed to be the worst danger. With the Eurasian dead, the attack might collapse. Or would it? Yaton, determined to seize power in the valley, would not give up his plans so easily. There was an army of six hundred men here, most of them familiar, by now, with the weapons of civilization. Quester would take Solent's place, if necessary.

There were three leaders—Quester, Solent, and Yaton. They must be killed or rendered harmless.

And Professor Galbraith. He was a prisoner here somewhere, condemned to death. He must be rescued. Wade wondered if the pass to the larger valley could be closed with dynamite. No, it was too wide. And the enemy could blast it open again easily enough.

Solent remained the real danger. The Eurasian was diabolically clever. If he had a weakness, Wade did not know it.

Wade slipped toward the temples, watching for a guard. What he wanted now was information. As he advanced, he stooped to lift from the ground a smooth, round stone, a little larger than a walnut. He had a gun, but the sound of its explosion would ring like a thunderclap in the silent

valley. A thrown knife might kill, but would not knock a man out. Wade weighed the stone in his palm, judging its potentialities as a missile.

A Minoan priest—apparently all the guards were priests, selected because of their specialized training—walked past as Wade froze into immobility. He wasn't quite close enough. But he was approaching.

THUNDER JIM'S arm went back, and he hurled the stone with unerring accuracy. There was a soft thump, and the priest slumped without a sound. Briefly there was deadly silence. Had any other watchers seen him fall? Wade's muscles were tense, ready for instant action. But the stillness only dragged on endlessly.

A few moments later, Wade had the unconscious guard in the concealment of bushes, and was bending over him, deft fingers busy. Soon the man sighed and opened his eyes. They went wide as he saw his captor. As his mouth opened Wade's hand clamped over it, while his other hand found the priest's throat.

The man tried to struggle, discovered that he was bound with strips torn from his own garments, and relaxed, glaring balefully.

"Do you wish to die?" Wade said.

The priest gasped for air. The strong fingers about his throat relaxed slightly.

"If you speak above a whisper—"

"By the goddess Rhea! You—" The priest's face went purplish-bronze under Wade's deadly grip. "Nay!" he choked out. "Nay! I will speak!"

"So. You are wise. Where is the white man, Galbraith, held prisoner?"

The prisoner's eyes were somewhat too frank in their honest stare as they met Wade's.

"In Rhea's temple."

"And now the truth!"

"Nay, do not slay me! He is in the Temple of Cnossos! That is the truth. I swear it by the Minotaur!"

Wade was satisfied. He asked a few more questions, grunted, and struck. The priest went limp as a hard fist cracked against his jaw. It was the only way, short of killing the man, to insure his silence. He would revive, but not immediately. Wade gagged him, tested the bonds, and melted into the bushes like a wraith.

The Temple of Cnossos. It lay beyond the image of the Minotaur, a small stone building that usually housed priests. But now—

The time for concealment was past. Wade had to trust his disguise. He stood up, and his tall, well-knit body seemed to alter strangely. Years spent studying gymnastics, something all priests and warriors in Minos had to know, had given him incredible control over his muscles. His body seemed to shorten, his shoulders to broaden. His head was hunched down so that he appeared neckless. The concealing cloak helped, too. He kept his legs slightly bent, like his arms, to help maintain the illusion.

Then he walked toward the Temple of Cnossos.

Soldiers slept under temporary shelters on the grassy ground of the sacred park. There did not seem many, but Wade knew the temples housed others. A few guards were strolling about, alert for danger. Yet they sensed none in this figure that walked among them like any Minoan priest, with no attempt at concealment. They did not see the gun Wade gripped under his cloak.

HIS nerves were like chilled metal now, with the deceptive calm of unexploded dynamite. He walked, without a word, past the guard stationed at the entrance of the temple. His captive, the priest who lay now bound and unconscious under a bush, had told him in what room Galbraith was a prisoner, and Wade made for it without delay.

He moved along a dimly-lit hall, passed the cell's door, and continued

for a few yards until he found what he wanted—a window that overlooked the park. It had no bars in it, and would provide an easy means of egress, even burdened by Galbraith.

He went back to the cell and tested the door. A metal bar locked it, but Wade slid this back without a sound. He pushed open the portal noiselessly.

Silence. The room into which he stared was completely empty, save for a couch against the wall on which a man's figure lay. Moonlight slanted in through a barred window. A lamp was bright in one of the corners.

Wade hesitated on the threshold. A trap? No—this was Professor Galbraith, lying bound hand and foot on the couch. About the prisoner's throat, Wade saw, was a noose that ran up into the gloom overhead. He stepped forward.

Instantly the door slammed shut behind him. Simultaneously Galbraith's thin, dwarfish body rose into the air, hoisted by the rope about his neck. Before Wade could move, the scientist was hanging against the wall, his feet dangling above the couch, and he rose higher as Wade watched.

So it was a trap! Galbraith was gasping for breath, his wrinkled face mottled and congested. As Wade crossed the room with two swift leaps the captive was hoisted up until he hung with his feet a man's height above the floor. The rope about his neck ran through a small aperture in the wall, thence into an adjoining chamber, Wade guessed, where men were pulling it taut. Cursing, he sprang to the couch and ripped a knife from under his cloak.

The moment he touched the rope he realized his mistake. It was of twisted wire. So taut was it that Wade could get no slack, and the blade could not cut through its metal. He seized Galbraith's legs and tried to hoist the agonized figure higher to relieve the strain, but that did no

good. There was not an inch of space between the scientist's neck and the wall through which the rope ran.

Hopeless! The strangling man was already unconscious. Wade hesitated, and suddenly a voice—Solent's purring tones—sounded in the room.

"There is not much time, Wade. Drop all your weapons out the window, quickly, or Galbraith will die."

That, at least, was evident. Thunder Jim wasted not a moment. He was at the window instantly, and his gun and knife made soft thuds on the turf outside as he tossed them through the bars.

"Make no resistance, or—" Solent's voice began, but he did not finish.

Galbraith was still dangling helplessly from the wall. The door burst open, and six priests sprang in, weapons ready. Wade raised his arms.

THERE was nothing else to be done. He could not see his old friend killed while he watched. But not until the priests had bound him securely did the wire rope slacken, and Galbraith's figure fall back on the couch. A priest went to him and loosened the noose.

"He will live," he said shortly. "As for this man, bring him out. He will go into the Labyrinth—to meet the Minotaur!"

Ten minutes later Wade stood on a little dais of marble, before the towering image of the Minotaur. The harsh clamor of a trumpet still echoed against the valley's bleak walls. In answer to its summons, men were pouring from the temples, gathering around in a swarming mob, Minoan priests and soldiers, and Solent's killers as well. The moon made the scene bright enough so that the torches seemed wan and useless.

Wade's legs had been shackled together with a short length of chain, permitting him to walk only with four-inch steps. His wrists were similarly manacled behind him, and a taut chain ran down from them to

join his leg irons. He had been carefully searched, and wore only the tight Minoan skirt and blue tunic. His dark face was quite impassive. His mind was relaxed, alert and waiting. At present he could do nothing. But when and if opportunity arose, he would be ready.

The surging throng pressed around closely. In the forefront, Wade saw, were Quester and Solent. Both were smiling triumphantly.

Again the trumpet cried. Yaton, the renegade priest lifted his arms high. There was silence as his voice rang out.

"This is our greatest enemy! Some of you know him. Most of you have heard of him! As a boy he lived in Minos, and now he has come back to help our enemies. But the Minotaur is stronger than he! The Minotaur aids us! Under his protection, we shall destroy Minos and rule. But first this man, our foe, will go into the Labyrinth!"

A muted whisper murmured up from the serried, moonlit ranks. Plumes dipped; moonlight rippled along bronze helmets.

"The Labyrinth!"

"The god will slay him! No man comes alive from the Minotaur's lair!"

CHAPTER XIII

The Labyrinth



YATON'S words were good psychology, Wade thought absently. The Minoans would be encouraged by his death. Religious fervor would be added to the lust of conquest. And, too, the natives of the lost valley were superstitious. They worshiped their god, and feared him. The Man-Bull was a part of their life—an intrinsic, worshiped part—from birth to death.

It was worth remembering. Psy-

chology was a science with which Wade was familiar.

He scarcely listened as Yaton continued his harangue. At last soldiers thrust him toward the gigantic statue.

No escape. No man had ever come alive from the Labyrinth. They had met the monster, and had perished. And never before had a captive been sent in chains to meet the Minotaur. Such a handicap had been considered unnecessary. But Yaton was taking no chances with this prisoner!

The bronze gates between the statue's knees swung slowly open. Darkness yawned beyond. Wade turned on the threshold. He looked at Yaton; his gaze swung to Quester; and ended with Solent.

"I intend to kill you three," he said, quite gently. "Personally, if I can. But you will die, nevertheless."

Yaton's harsh laugh held little mirth. Quester cursed under his breath. His hand swung down toward the gun at his belt. But Solent's grip restrained him.

The Eurasian smiled. Wade smiled back, but his eyes did not.

"I'll put a bullet through that scar on your forehead," he said, and with that grim promise turned back to the threshold.

He stepped through into gloom. The bronze gates clanged shut behind him. He was in darkness, utter and complete. Before he could stir, there was movement under his feet. The floor tilted and dropped away.

He plunged down like a stone. In the few moments of his fall, his mind worked like lightning. Was this the simple explanation of the Labyrinth? A well down which victims were dropped? Would his body crash into a mound of crumbling skeletons far below?

Something crashed against Wade's skull, and the world exploded in a blinding fountain of sparks.

He awoke slowly, his body aching. What had happened? He had fallen, but at least he was alive. Metal fet-

ters clanked noisily against the rock on which he lay. How severely was he hurt?

The chains clinked as he investigated. His arm ached a bit more than the rest of him, and a cut on his head was dry with coagulated blood. That meant he had been unconscious for a long time. He looked at his wrist-watch, luckily unharmed by the fall. Past noon, he guessed. That meant—

The renegade army had already marched on Minos!

Wade forced the thought away. He realized that there was light here, a vague, wan radiance that filtered dimly around a bend of the corridor in which he lay. It was a broad passage, at least twenty feet wide, with walls of unscalable smooth rock. The roof, he judged, was about three men's height above him. He could not escape by the way he had unwillingly entered the Labyrinth.

WHAT next? The fetters, of course. They were of bronze, tough and unbreakable without tools, but they were not welded on. They were locked. They might have held anyone but Houdini or Thunder Jim Wade.

Silently he blessed his arduous years of training. His bones were not flexible, but long practice had given him incredible control over his joints and muscles. And, too, the little Cockney pickpocket, Miggs, had taught him much.

Wade's hands were manacled behind his back. First of all, he rolled onto his back and doubled up his legs, knees under his chin. Without much difficulty he slipped his manacled hands over his feet, so that they were no longer chained awkwardly behind his back. A chain still bound them to his ankle-fetters, but by keeping his knees bent he could get slack.

The bronze could not be cut or broken easily, especially without lever or chisel. But the cuffs might be slipped off, over Wade's hands.

Until his hands were free, anyway, he could do little. But at least he *could* escape from his fetters. That wouldn't get him out of the Labyrinth, of course, yet it would decrease his handicaps.

Skin tore from his knuckles as he worked the cuffs free. Even for his trained, limber agility it was difficult. But it could be done.

It was done! Wade's hands were free now! Without hesitation he began to work on his leg irons. They could not be slipped off like the wrist cuffs. The locks must be picked.

Miggs could have done the job no sooner. Within five minutes Wade was free, and stood up, stretching his lean body. His stiff joints cracked audibly. He stared around.

No sound—nothing. What was the next step? A weapon?

He had one. The chains. They would make a formidable mace, and Wade carried them dangling from one hand as he moved noiselessly toward the source of the dim light. His sandals made no sound on the stone.

He rounded a bend of the corridor. A lamp glowed high up on the wall, on a shelf placed out of reach of any prisoner. The corridor branched here into three forks, with lamps placed at intervals along all of them. The Labyrinth—the maze from which no one ever escaped, and in which all the passages led toward the center—the lair of the Minotaur.

Faintly, from far away, came a whisper of sound. It grew louder, echoing through the tunnels till it roared out ominously.

It was the deep-throated, ominous bellow of a bull.

As it died another noise came, a muffled thunder Wade did not recognize. It was like the beating of an incredibly huge drum.

His fingers tightened on the bronze chains. He froze into a statue, still listening.

And now he heard water—rushing, tumultuous.

It seemed to come from the left-hand corridor. On impulse, Wade hurried into and along it. The lamps recurred at frequent intervals. He had not walked more than a few minutes before the tunnel branched; the muffled roar of a torrent sounded from the right-hand fork this time. It seemed close.

IT WAS close. The passage ended at an underground river that tumbled along swiftly to vanish into a gaping hole in the rock wall. The road stopped here, Wade realized, and with a shrug turned to retrace his steps.

He had passed the first fork when he heard the bull's bellow again. It was much louder this time. Louder, too, was the hollow thunder of a drum.

Far down the tunnel, a monstrous figure raced into view. It was a man with the horned, malformed head of a bull.

A priest! So this was part of the Labyrinth's secret—a priest with a bull's mask! The man paused at sight of Wade, and lifted a trumpet to his lips. From it came a roaring, piercing bellow.

For answer there was a thundering rattle of drums. In the priest's wake sounded a clashing of hoofs. Around a bend of the corridor came pouring—bulls!

They filled the passage completely, a raging, horned flood that bore down relentlessly upon the priest, who seemed unconscious of his danger. He raised the trumpet to his lips and blew again. The drumming was a clashing roar now.

So this was the secret! A herd of fierce bulls, trained to kill at the priest's command! In the bare passages of the Labyrinth few men could escape the beasts' charge.

The priest was armed, nevertheless, Wade saw. He carried a javelin, and there was a knife at his side. The blind, weird mask of the bull glared

balefully at its victim. Again the trumpet simulated a bellow.

The herd thundered on. But they did not harm the priest. They split to right and left about him, as a stream splits on a rock, and bore down on Wade, a welter of tossing horns and clashing hoofs. The thunder of their passage roared back deafeningly from the walls.

There was no possible hiding-place, no niche in the rock where Wade might take shelter. He thought of the underground river. If he could get back to that and hurl himself into it—

Then, with flashing suddenness, a plan came into his mind. It was desperate enough to seem almost completely hopeless, but not quite. And if it succeeded, triumph might be snatched out of disaster.

It meant killing the priest, first of all!

The bulls came on. There must be a hundred of them, at least, Wade judged. They crammed the passage to the walls, squeezed so closely together that no man could have lived or kept his footing among them.

But upon them!

It would be like trying to cross a river on ice-floes! But there was no time to consider danger now, or the possibility of failure. There was just sufficient time to race forward toward that avalanche of horned death, gather every ounce of strength for a straining, desperate leap.

High in the air Wade flung himself, while the first wave of the herd crashed beneath him. He came down precariously on a swaying, shaggy back, felt himself falling, and leaped again before he could be shaken off his insecure footing. Horns swung viciously, menacing him from all sides. But the bulls had lost sight of Wade momentarily, and the impetus of their savage charge carried them on.

Once, in Wyoming, in the United States, Jim Wade had known an old-

time stage-coach driver who had been famous for his handling of bullock-drawn wagons. Old Cyram Haggart, cracking his whip, would spring up and race along the backs of the bulls, springing lightly from one to another.

It could be done. And now, in the narrow tunnel, the beasts were jammed so closely together that Wade could not have fallen between them had he tried.

His years of acrobatic training carried him safely through the menace of the sharp, swinging horns. The real danger lay in pausing, even for a moment. He flung himself forward atop the surging mass of the bulls.

CHAPTER XIV

Out of the Jaws of Death



ON THE bulls came, pouring into the left-hand fork of the passage. Wade hurled himself forward in desperate leaps, the bronze chains gathered into a ball about his fist. And suddenly, incredibly, the last of the herd fled past him—under him—and he sprang down to the floor of the corridor, hazy with the dust-clouds raised by innumerable sharp hoofs.

Only the priest faced him. The weird figure was running forward, javelin raised. The bull-mask lay discarded on the stones. Its purpose served, it was only an encumbrance now. The swarthy, ferocious face that had been beneath it was twisted into a snarl of hatred.

Caught off balance, Wade hurled the balled, heavy mass of bronze chain he held in one hand. Simultaneously the javelin flashed at him, ripping flesh from his shoulder as he fell.

Instantly he was on his feet, waiting for the priest to attack with drawn knife. But the man did not come. He was lying motionless, his face a bloody, crimson mask where

the bronze missile had crashed through flesh and bone.

He was dead. The thin temporal bone had been broken, and the Minotaur's priest lay silent and still in his Labyrinth. From the distance the pounding of hoofs beat a requiem.

Wade's eyes were cold. He took the priest's knife, found the trumpet, and placed it to his lips. He blew a shattering, peremptory bellow.

That done, he placed the bull-mask upon his own head. It was merely a light framework, not uncomfortable, and he could see through eye-slits cut in the hairy throat.

Would the bulls obey him? The mask and the horn seemed the vital things—the horn to lead the herd to attack, the mask to safeguard its owner.

Wade went down the right-hand fork of the Labyrinth until he was near the river. It must mingle its waters with the Argo, but probably it flowed underground for some distance before the juncture. Yet the larger stream was not far from the Labyrinth. On that realization Wade based his hopes—on that, and the supposition that the bulls were trained to blind obedience.

He saw them come plunging into the main tunnel, and blew his trumpet again. The herd turned and came at him. He waited until they were uncomfortably close, then dropped the horn from his lips and raced before them.

The brink of the river loomed at his feet. Without hesitation Wade leaped out over the rushing water. The icy shock of its cold numbed him. He came up gasping for air, saw the black gap in the wall rushing toward him, and realized that the bulls were following.

Trained to blind obedience—yes! The herd did not hesitate. The great beasts came pouring along the tunnel, over the brink, into the stream.

Blackness swallowed Wade. He clung desperately to the trumpet. He

might need that. Would the bull-mask stay in place? As he wondered, it was torn away, and he saved it only by a blind clutch in the dark.

Gripping the mask with one hand and the trumpet in the other, he went spinning and tumbling through the Stygian gloom, the roar of the torrent a deafening thunder in his ears, the snorting and bellowing of the bulls all about him.

ABRUPTLY sunlight flamed above. The stream spewed Wade out into a broad, swift-flowing river under a precipitous cliff. The Argo!

He was borne downstream. The huge statue of the Minotaur was visible in the distance, then gone as he drifted along into the pass that led to the larger valley. The surface of the water was alive with tossing heads and churning hoofs. The snorting of the bulls mingled with their bellows.

Wade chanced a glance at his watch. Far past noon. The attacking army had arrived at Minos, and perhaps were already in the city. Unless the defenders, guided by Red and Dirk, had held them off for awhile.

Cliffs rose to the left, broken by ravines that led up to the plateau on which Minos stood. Presently Wade glimpsed the long wall of the city ahead, rising like a precipice above the river. Instantly he sounded the trumpet, donned the bull-mask, and struck out for the east shore.

The bulls followed, splashing and churning. They were trained from calfhood to obey that sound, and to follow the priest who wore the Minotaur mask. Now they swam toward the figure of Wade who stood on the bank, the trumpet at his lips.

Gunfire crackled in a staccato outburst from far away. Wade glanced up. No sign of the *Thunderbug*. It was still disabled, then.

He had landed at the foot of a broad gulch that ran up at a steep angle to the plain above. Now he

turned and raced along it. The bulls were landing, stretched out in a long curve across the river. There were still nearly a hundred.

But they were the strongest of their species, chosen for power and ferocity and trained to kill with raging fury. All the better! Wade's eyes were cold as he fled up the gulley, the Minotaur's herd thundering at his heels.

The crash of dynamite boomed out from above, and then the roar of toppling masonry. The wall of Minos had fallen!

Wade felt a shock of apprehension. Was he too late? If the hordes of Yaton burst into the city before he arrived with his terrible army, he would fail. With an effort that brought twinges of pain to his tired legs, he spurred himself over the last few yards of the ravine. He came out on the plateau, the great plain that spread before Minos wall.

Parallel to the gulley, on his right, the rampart stretched from the river eastward across the valley. Atop it were the soldiers of king-priest Carboth, armed, Wade saw, with guns as well as with their own weapons. Red Argyle's flaming head shone burnished beyond the gate. He held a sub-machine-gun that stuttered out death. Dirk Marat as not visible to Wade.

But the wall had fallen. A great gap had been breached in it, and dust clouds were still rising like a pallid pall. Drawn back out of spear range were Yaton's soldiers.

There were at least six hundred, Wade saw. Few of them were mounted. Horses had almost died out of the lost valley in the centuries since they had been brought in from the outer world. But the three leaders—Yaton and Quester and Duke Solent—rode steeds, as did a few others.

The army, Wade thought, had drawn back out of range, while the wall was being dynamited. Mostly the attackers were composed of Minoan priests and soldiers. There were only a score of Solent's imported

killers. But of guns, grenades, rifles, and pistols there was no lack. The natives carried them, as did their allies.

BEYOND the fallen pile of rubble and masonry that marked the breach in the wall the defenders were gathering, many of them, but armed chiefly with spears and swords and bows, useless against modern guns. The *Thunderbug's* arsenal was not large. When the invaders poured in through the gap, blasting a path with grenades and machine-gun fire, nothing could stop them. They would be in Minos—and the city would be lost!

But for a brief moment the attackers waited, ready for the charge. In that second Wade raised the trumpet to the gaping mouth of his mask, and the roaring bellow of a bull boomed out over the plain!

Every eye turned toward him. And what the Minoans saw was fantastic enough. On the edge of the plateau stood a man in the garb of a priest, with the hairy, horned head of a bull. It was the Man-Bull—the Minotaur!

And out of the gulley, pouring past Wade, spawned as though from the depths of the earth like the soldiers Cadmus made by sowing the dragon's teeth, came horned and terrible beings—the bulls that served the Minotaur! Excited and enraged by their swim, dripping with river water, eyes blazing, the herd thundered past Wade. Dust rose in great clouds from their clashing hoofs. Their horns tossed and gleamed in the hot sunlight.

Bulls, chosen for their strength, trained to kill ferociously at the command of their master—the bulls of the Labyrinth thundered down on the attacking army!

They had been searching for their prey, puzzled by its vanishing when Wade had escaped them. Now the roaring blast of the trumpet sounded in their ears, the familiar figure of the Minotaur had led them to this place—and before them were men! Men, to

them, meant victims. Victims to be trampled and gored and slain.

Like an avalanche the hundred bulls swept across the plain!

They had not far to go. Erratic gunfire broke out from Solent's men. But the Minoans, priests and soldiers alike, reacted in an entirely different



way. Yaton's scheme had rebounded to his own ruin. The superstitious natives remembered their high priest's words:

"The Minotaur aids us. . . ."

Was this the Minotaur's aid? No, rather his vengeance! The god of the lost valley had taken sides with Car-doth, king-priest of Mines!

A concerted attack might have turned the bulls or stopped their charge. Even Solent and his men, alone, might have done it with their guns. But the ranks of Minoans broke in frantic, terrified confusion. They were faced with the avenging figure of their god, and the concrete weapon of his vengeance. They forgot the new, deadly weapons that had been given them. They forgot their own swords and spears. Mad with fear, they broke ranks and were lost!

THE scene exploded into a blind blur of action. Dust rose up in a gray, whirling pillar, a cloud that hung over the milling army. The three leaders, yelling commands, were caught in the maelstrom, their voices lost in the confusion of shouts and screams, the shrilling of horses, the bellowing of the bulls and the clashing pound of their hoofs.

Into the edge of the army the herd drove like a wedge. The bulls

knowing nothing but to kill, went mad with blood-lust. They gored savagely, charging like thunderbolts through the mass of surging, leaderless men.

From the wall came gunfire, vicious and deadly. Red Argyle had marshaled his men into a competent fighting force. The defenders were picking off targets with painstaking care, concentrating, Wade saw, upon Solent's men.

The renegade Minoans were already broken. They were scattering across the plain, fleeing in a panic of superstitious fear. But many of the bulls were down now, killed by well placed bullets.

Yaton yelled futile commands. Abruptly Wade saw the priest's horse rear, terrified by the smell of blood or by the confusion. Yaton was flung off, a shrill scream breaking from his lips as he went down.

He did not touch the ground. A huge black monster of a bull was under him. Yaton's scream rose still higher as the sharp horns pierced through his body. Then he slipped off the ground, and the bull's head lowered as it snorted and gored savagely at its victim.

The priest's army was scattered, fleeing across the plain, pursued by the raging bulls. Only Solent's men remained. Wade, crouching in concealment at the gulley's head, saw a gaunt, bald-headed figure break from the group and race toward him. It was Quester.

"Trying to get away," Wade thought. "He hasn't seen me."

But he slipped back into the ravine, crouching behind a rock, though it offered little concealment. Still, there was no other place to hide.

He took the bull-mask from his head, drew the knife he had won from the priest in the Labyrinth, and waited. Distantly the crackle of gunfire grew fainter. But now there came the sound of thudding feet, louder and louder.

CHAPTER XV

Vengeance of the Minotaur

QUESTER burst into view, face shining with sweat, blood smearing his bald head. His clothing was in rags. He held an automatic in one hand, and swung it up instantly as he caught sight of Wade. His lips twisted in a screaming oath.

Thunder Jim flung the mask. It made a good missile, light, but bulky. For a second it distracted Quester—enough to make his bullet go wide of its mark. Then Wade, gripping his knife, had launched himself over the boulder and was diving at his opponent.

Again the gun blazed, the flash of its explosion blinding Wade. He felt a sickening agony tear along his side.

"Rib broken," he thought, and his clenched fist felt a thudding shock.

For a second the tableau held, breathless and immobile. Wade realized that his knife was sunk to the hilt in Quester's chest. Instinctively he ducked aside the gun as the dying man's trigger finger sought to contract. But there was no shot.

Quester's mouth gaped open, as though he sought for breath.

"Thunder Jim!" he said, in a soft, oddly surprised voice.

And he fell, wrenching the knife hilt from Wade's hand.

Simultaneously a shot cracked out. It struck Wade somewhere. He knew that, but he could not have told where. His whole body felt nervelessly numb. All he could see was the automatic that had fallen from Quester's relaxing fingers. He dived for it, lead burning across his back as he did so.

The cool steel was ice against his palm. The familiar feel of the butt nestling in his hand was like finding a friend. As Wade turned, the gun

coming up, he saw Duke Solent silhouetted against the sky at the head of the ravine.

The Eurasian stood motionless as a statue, rifle at hip. It barked. But Wade's gun had spoken first.

Thunder Jim's eyes seemed again to become pools of black ice. His face was hard and relentless as Lucifer's. He waited, while Duke Solent lifted his hand in a half completed gesture toward the branded cross that had been on his forehead—but which was there no longer! Wade's bullet had erased it forever.

Solent came down as a tree falls, crashing on his face, to roll over and over down the gully. He lay still at last, staring up blindly.

The satanic, remorseless fury ceased to glow in Wade's eyes. He turned and walked away, up the ravine. He seemed to have forgotten that Duke Solent ever existed.

Once again Thunder Jim Wade had kept a promise.

He stared out at Minos. Men were pouring out of the gap in the wall, spreading over the plain. The bulls were almost all gone now, and the few of the enemy who still remained were going down swiftly under arrows and bullets. Red Argyle and Dirk Marat were visible, and Wade hurried toward them.

"Find me a horse!" he shouted, and by the time he reached his companions a swift gray stallion waited beside them.

Red grinned through a thick coating of dirt and blood. Dirk had somehow managed to remain immaculate, save for a sleeve drenched with crimson.

"Going somewhere?" Red asked. "A mighty fine time to go riding."

"Galbraith's still a prisoner," Galbraith told him. "I've got to—"

Galbraith said, "I've got to—"

DIRK gripped his arm, holding him.

"Wait a bit! Cardoth's already sent a troop up to the sacred valley to

clean up things there. They'll find the professor."

Wade hesitated, watching a band of horsemen racing northward across the plain.

"Yeah—"

"You may not believe it, but you're wounded," Dirk said. "You couldn't get to the valley before the soldiers, so what's the use? Just relax." He vaulted to the saddle. "I'll go along with 'em and make sure things are okay. Where is the old goat?"

"In the Temple of Cnossos," Wade said, and gasped with pain as he turned.

"See? Busted rib, probably. *Adios!*" Dirk spurred the horse away after the others.

Red started to yell in the little Greek he remembered.

"Come over here, you shavetails! Lend a hand! How the devil can I do any bandaging with a lame wing?"

"I'm okay," Wade said. "Unless some bullets stopped inside my hide."

They had not, as he found out hours later. The wounds were clean. One had passed through his arm, and another had broken a rib. But there was nothing serious. His last worry was removed when he learned that Professor Galbraith had been found and brought back safely to Minos. The scientist was weak and feverish, but unharmed. He needed only rest. Wade felt that he could do with a little of that himself. . . .

It was the next day when Wade, Galbraith, Red and Dirk gathered in Cardoth's tower apartment. The little scientist was lucid, apparently completely recovered from his fever. He relaxed on a pile of cushions, fingering a small block of metal and a curious statuette.

"Yes," he said, in response to Wade's questions, "this is the secret of the valley—what Solent was after. The image." He held it up, a delicately carved bull with a replica of his own head atop the massive shoulders. "You remember this, Jim. It

was made for me by the priests when I first came here. I realized its value only lately, and made certain experiments. The statuette's substance is extremely valuable. Solent posed as a financier who wanted to back me, got into my confidence, and insisted that I try to duplicate this alloy. I couldn't. When Solent realized I'd failed, he asked me where I'd found the statuette in the first place. I couldn't tell him that, because—"

Cardoth bowed his massive white head. "True. You swore never to reveal the existence of our valley to the outer world."

"Solent kidnaped me—used truth-serum to find out what he wanted to know."

Wade grinned. "I guessed that. It was the only way he could get anything out of you."

Red turned to stare at him. "I've got a hunch you knew what Solent wanted all along."

"I did. It was pretty obvious, wasn't it? The goldleaf had flaked off the statue, and it was easy to see the thing had had rough handling. Yet it hadn't broken. It didn't break even when the professor threw it out of the window in Singapore. D'you know of anything that could stand that sort of handling?"

"Steel."

"The statuette was light—very light. It looks like stone, but it's metal. And I knew the secret of it long ago."

GALBRAITH nodded.

"It's the toughest metal alloy ever made on this planet. Tremendous lightness and tensile strength—much lighter than aluminum."

Wade agreed. "It would have industrial uses, but that wasn't what Solent was after. He wanted a weapon for warfare. Think of the cannon that could be made from this! Not to mention armor! The stuff's so light that a tank as big as—well, a regular land battleship could carry it easily. And

nothing but the highest explosive could penetrate it."

"So that was why Solent wanted to get the statue?" Dirk put in.

"Sure. He was afraid somebody might manage to analyze it, and he wanted a monopoly on the secret, so he could sell the stuff to warring nations. And that would have meant a holocaust such as has never been known on earth. Size limitations would be almost removed from mobile offense units. Tanks, planes—gigantic."

Red was scowling. "You said you'd known the secret all along."

Wade's eyes were twinkling. "Yeah! What do you suppose the *Thunderbug's* made of?"

Red's jaw dropped. "You don't mean—"

"I built the *Thunderbug* a long time ago, for Cardoth had given me the secret of the alloy before I left Minos. Not even Professor Galbraith knew that. How do you suppose the *Thunderbug* can get off the ground? It isn't made of aluminum. It's tough, light, and strong."

"I knew the hull was alloy," Dirk put in, "but I never knew just what it was."

"It came out of this valley—at least, the formula did. Solent didn't realize what was right under his nose. If he'd guessed the secret of the *Thunderbug*, he could have found it out easily enough—given me truthserum, when I was his prisoner, and made me talk. But he did it the hard way, instead."

"I'm leaving the statuette here in Minos," Galbraith said.

"Good." Cardoth nodded. "We want no more outsiders here. Their ways are not ours."

"You saw what happened when Solent came," Wade said, and his eyes swept around the room. "We're leaving tomorrow for Cairo. The *Thunderbug's* in good repair now. Aside from us, no one knows Minos exists. No one shall!"

Dirk, Red, and Galbraith nodded their agreement. The scientist sighed, rubbing his wrinkled cheek.

"But that wasn't all. There was another reason why Solent wanted the statue."

"It was this, wasn't it?" Wade said, and took a small roll of parchment from his pocket.

Galbraith's jaw dropped. "How—" he began.

"I found out how to open the image," Wade told him. "It was hollow. The lock was pretty intricate, but I finally managed to open it. And this treasure map was inside."

Cardoth's great head nodded. "That is true. When you and Professor Galbraith left Minos so many years ago, I bestowed on each of you a gift. Yours was the secret of the alloy. I gave Professor Galbraith the chart of a treasure buried in the wastelands beyond these mountains, and asked him never to use it unless he had need. I feared that if men came to search for the treasure, they might also blunder upon our valley."

HE TOUCHED the map with a lean finger.

"When we first came to Africa, from old Crete, we found the ruins of a great city on our way. It was dead when we arrived—had been, for ages. It might have been the home of King Solomon. There was much gold there, and jewels, for which we had no need. But we remembered, and it was my gift for Professor Galbraith—if the need ever came to him."

"I never needed it," Galbraith said. "I never opened the image or looked at the map. That was why Solent couldn't find out the treasure's location from me, even under truthserum."

"I guessed as much," Wade said. "But huge as that treasure may be, it would have been only a drop in the bucket compared to what Solent could have got out of the alloy. He knew that. But he also knew he'd need

plenty of dough to finance his racket. That was why he wanted the gold and the jewels. They would have enabled him to set up a company, and probably guard or destroy Minos. He wouldn't have wanted anyone else to find out his secret. Yeah, he needed the statuette, but even if he had it, he wouldn't have found the map. I'd already taken that out, just in case!"

THE treasure had best remain where it is," Galbraith said. "Perhaps sometime the need may arise. But it hasn't arisen yet. Keep the map, Cardoth."

There was a glow of gratitude in the king-priest's eyes as he obeyed.

"Minos will be safe now," he murmured. "There is nothing to draw the vultures."

The scientist nodded.

"I must get back to my Diocene fossils," he said. "It will take weeks to get them catalogued." He turned again to Cardoth. "But I want to talk to you about some unusual variations in the Cretan inscriptions, first. After all, I'm an archaeologist, and—"

He dragged out a notebook and pencil and began to question the king-priest.

Wade winked at the others and led the way out. They paused in the corridor beyond the door.

"It's time to relax," he told them.

"Relax!" Red's lip pushed out. "Do I look sleepy?"

"Who said anything about sleep?" Thunder Jim asked. "They make darn good wine in Minos. Who wants a drink?"

At any rate, nobody refused. . . .

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The King of Beasts

By PAUL ANNIXTER

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The dog nosed about the grave

“**L**OOK at that damn coyote over on the ridge,” Nate Poudler said quietly that night at supper.

As old man Hunnicutt turned to look, Nate half rose from his seat and fired across the rough board table of the sheep camp. A scarlet stain oozed

Nate Poudler Thought the Northwest Forest Was Easy to Conquer—and Planned a Ghastly Murder Coup!

down the falling man's khaki shirt. From the ground he turned upward a look of stunned, incredulous amazement.

"You'll—swing for this," he choked.

"Maybe," said Nate Pouder tonelessly. "But they ain't got me yet." His thin face was twisted and gray as he stood looking down.

"I—might of knowed. My dog did." The old sheepman's voice was a mere thread of whisper. "You got me—Pouder—but you ain't got—the dog." He sighed deeply and his head fell sidewise.

Nate Pouder jerked the leather money sack from under the dead man's shirt and went hurriedly through his pockets. Then he lifted the body and bore it a hundred yards to where a narrow gully cut its way across the desert floor.

HE DUMPED it in. With a shovel brought from the camp, he covered it to a depth of three feet with earth. Stones of all sizes were strewn about the gully bed. He worked for half an hour more building up a sort of cairn of rocks to protect the rude grave from coyotes.

Back at the camp Nate washed up, and a species of smile was on his lips as he watched the big herd coming in, drifting like a slow fleecy cloud campward. He was a rich man at last. He'd have money—money enough to enable him to live in the license he had always craved.

His knees shook a bit from nervous excitement, but he was glad the thing was over, glad old Hunnicutt was dead. That the two had broken bread together, slept in the same wagon and sat over the same fire for three months, mattered not at all to Nate Pouder. He had known he was going to put the old man away ever since the night the sheepman had told him in the fellowship of solitude about the money he had hidden away beneath the floor of his cabin on the Rio Hondo.

There had come a giddy moment as he lay in his blankets that night when Nate had known that he alone must profit by the old man's wealth. For a whole month he had thought the matter over. With old Hunnicutt out of the way there was no reason why he could not drive the big herd back to some out-of-the-way railroad town, pass himself off as the owner and sell the sheep at a good figure.

There were over two thousand ewes in the herd, most of them heavy with lamb. They should bring between twelve and thirteen thousand dollars. Besides that, he felt sure there would be several thousand dollars stashed in the cabin on the Hondo.

It was there Nate had hired out in the fall as Hunnicutt's helper. The old man had warned him about the loneliness of the life, the long treks they must make through mountain country where they'd see no one for weeks on end.

He didn't dream how well such an idea pleased Nate Pouder, who was wanted by the sheriff of the adjoining county for the slugging and robbing of a wealthy rancher. At first the emptiness, the damned stillness and desolation, gave him the willies in a way, but Nate had made it serve him. Out of that solitude had been born the impetus to carry out this neatest trick of his career.

Nate stood watching old Hunnicutt's dog swinging the herd campward. Bran was the finest sheep dog he had ever seen. He was a handsome, magnificently built animal; a mongrel, but one of distinguished blends. At least three breeds met and hob-nobbed in him with a certain ennobling emphasis on acumen and adaptation. Earmarks of collie, shepherd and Airdale stood out for the discerning eye, but it was the depth of intelligence in the fine gold-brown eyes that caught and held the attention.

If he could get the dog to work for him as he had for old Hunnicutt,

everything would be all right, Nate knew. It might take a few days before Bran would forget his master's absence, but Nate felt little doubt but that the dog's allegiance would be quickly transferred to himself. Old Hunnicutt's famous dog working its tail off to get the herd to the railroad so Nate could evade the law. The man showed his squirrel teeth in a grin at the thought, for it was a jest to his liking.

He had a good meal waiting for the dog, but Bran refused to eat. He rushed back and forth whining and searching for his master.

"He'll come to it after awhile," Nate reasoned, but in that he was mistaken. Toward morning he was awakened by the desolate howling of Bran. In the dim starlight he saw that the dog had been nosing about the fresh grave.

"Got to get out of here right away," the killer decided.

He did not sleep again but lay awake beset by innumerable doubts and worries. If Bran really refused to work for him, he would be in a devil of a fix. And the dog had never really liked him.

He had the sheep out of the bed ground at daybreak. He stood in the early light trying to judge the best course to take across the high cedar-clad plateau that stretched ahead. But he was intrinsically not of the outdoors. His narrow-eyed, suspicious scrutiny swept the empty landscape, a hand thrown up before his face as if to ward off a fancied blow. The gesture was significant, marking him for the alien he was, an urban creature to whom the plains and forests were inimical.

HE WHISTLED and called to the dog, but Bran came only a hundred yards from camp and turned back toward the grave once more. He had not yet touched any food.

Nate hitched the team to the sheep wagon, saddled the extra horse and drove the herd recklessly out onto

the plain. He had decided to head the sheep toward the railroad at once. Habit and the sense of duty, he figured, would make the dog follow the herd.

Three hours passed, however, and still Bran had not put in an appearance. During that time the man had worked himself into a fury and covered little over a mile. Leaving the team standing he would ride up and down chivvying the sheep in the direction he wanted them to go, then come back and drive the wagon ahead again. But without the dog, the sheep would scatter the moment the man left them.

Finally in a rage Nate rode back to the night camp. Bran stood by his master's grave as Nate approached, looking into the man's face with somber, accusatory gaze. The man spoke, but there was no stirring of the dog's body, no movement of his tail. Nate Pouder had a queer feeling for an instant as if he were facing some searching inquiry.

He tried to make advances to the dog. He called, coaxed and wheedled and finally threatened, to no avail. Cursing at last, he picked up a heavy stick and rushed the animal.

Before his blow could descend he was felled as by a giant's slap. He went over backwards with eighty pounds of canine fury on top of him. Instinct whipped Nate's arm up in time to protect his throat, but the savage jaws of the dog tore his coat sleeve from wrist to shoulder, lacerating his arm.

Somehow he got the animal by the throat and hurled him off. He gained his feet just in time to ward off a second assault with his club. The dog neither barked nor snarled, but there was a grim and terrible purposefulness in its silent attack.

There came a fearsome moment as the two faced in which the dog's dark suspicions seemed suddenly confirmed, in which he knew the man was responsible for the disappearance

of his master. What he saw in the lambent eyes of the animal chilled the heart of the murderer; it was as if Nature herself were accusing him through the animal kingdom, through the very earth and trees and the chill breeze winnowing down from the mountain heights above.

Only for a moment the feeling lasted. In a fury of reaction Nate hurried to his waiting horse where a rifle hung from the saddle. Fear? Rubbish. What had he to fear from a dog? Yet he would fix the brute for this humiliation. He seized the gun and threw it to his shoulder. Bran still stood by the grave, but at sight of the rifle, he melted into a clump of sage and went streaking away along the twisted course of the gully.

Nate saw all at once the trouble he was laying up for himself. Practically his only chance to get the precious herd back to the railroad was in winning over the dog. But that would be difficult. Nate was that anomalous being, the man who didn't like dogs and whom dogs in general had no use for.

As old Hunnicutt had pronounced with almost his last breath, Bran had always had an instinctive distrust of him. But Nate was banking upon hunger to finally bring the dog to time. When his belly got sticking to his ribs, the animal would be glad to work for a square meal a day.

THE rest of the day Nate stuck to the exasperating job of trying to drive the herd forward alone, at the same time managing the team and saddle horse. But it was the dog, not the herder the sheep feared; only the dog was nimble enough to keep them in order. Once assured of Bran's absence the obstinate creatures reveled in a spirit of contrariness.

It seemed to Nate Poudler that every woolly in the band took a malicious delight as they eddied disdainfully around him to scatter afar on the plain. He cursed the dog bitterly and

dwelt upon the ways he would get even with the animal when he had brought it to time.

At the end of the day Nate had covered no more than five miles and his nerves were worn to a frazzle. He took out his wrath that night by viciously kicking every blating bid-die that got in his way.

After an early supper he immediately sought his bunk in the wagon. "Tonight," he told himself before going to sleep, "the damned dog will come sneaking back."

The dog did, but not in the manner Nate had pictured.

The man had slept perhaps an hour when something brought him awake with a start. He lay still for a space, listening. He could hear the faint stirring of the sheep round about, but it was not the sheep, he figured, that had awakened him. Possibly it had been nothing at all.

Then came a panting breath in the close darkness and the scrape of pads on the floor. Nate went to his knees, skin prickling with a nervous sweat. As he did so a dark form leapt out the open door. Shakily Nate got up and looked out.

It was a moment before he made out Bran in the starlight. Between the dog's paws was a corduroy coat of old man Hunnicutt's. That coat had hung in the wagon within three feet of Nate Poudler's head. The dog had scented his master on it and pulled it down. Nate thought of his encounter with Bran that morning, of what might have happened while he slept, and a cold, sickly sensation permeated him.

He was shaking with a desire to seize his rifle and empty it into the dog, but he smothered his rage. Somehow, and mighty soon, he must make peace with the animal if he was to see any part of that twelve thousand dollars the herd represented. He had earned that twelve grand if ever a man had—risked the rope for it. No damned dog was going to cheat him of

his hard-earned jack. He stepped outside and called to the animal, holding out his hand.

Suddenly Bran rose and stood over the coat he had been nosing, stiff-legged, bristling, venting a low growl. Nate paused with an instinctive feeling that it would be better to leave the animal alone. He went inside and again made up a meal for the dog. But in the interval Bran had disappeared. Later Nate was again awakened, by a long mournful howling repeated again and again, far back in the direction of last night's camp.

Next morning when he stepped out Bran was back again. It looked as if he had actually returned for work. However, the plate of food was still untouched and the dog kept a good three hundred yards away. He continued to hang about as the herd got under way. Plainly he deemed it altogether wrong that this usurper should be directing the movements of the sheep, a task which had been the special work of old man Hunnicutt.

WHEN the herd got in motion Bran followed, making no advance toward friendliness, but keeping the sheep always in sight. Nate felt sure the dog was weakening, would soon come in and be put to work. But, the whole morning passed and Bran still made no move to help. Apparently the animal was merely following to spy on him because of an ingrained sense of duty to the herd.

That day was harder than the first for Nate Poudier. He did not even win five miles with the herd. The sheep had learned exactly how much advantage they could take and they pressed his self control to the limit. In the afternoon the man pursued a particularly contrary old ewe and beat her to death with a heavy club.

He made camp that night in a desperate frame of mind. One element he had entirely overlooked when he planned the killing, and that was his unfamiliarity with the country. Old

Hunnicutt had known every spring and water hole in the region, but now for two days Nate had pressed forward through a completely waterless country and the supply kegs had run dangerously low.

He knew the sheep could go on for days in case they did not come to a stream, but the horses needed two or three gallons each per day, and he himself consumed several quarts. It was still a hundred miles to the railroad. He must find a fresh water supply within twenty-four hours.

Nate slept that night like a dead man. Slept, that is, until just before dawn. Then in the cold grayness he was roused as on the night before by the desolate keening of Bran mourning his master.

Nate turned over and pulled the bed clothes high. A bit later close by came a different note, a fierce, challenging burst of sound that could not be ignored. With an oath the man crawled out of his bunk. The dawn was just breaking.

Fresh barking announced that Bran had seen him in the doorway. For a last time Nate Poudier played his hand to win the dog over. He went out with a plate of food. He chatted. He squatted and tried cajolery. He whistled, he pleaded, begging the dog to be friends. Bran watched apparently unmoved, and came no step closer.

The thin barrier of his control broke at last. Nate Poudier stood up in a rage and reached inside the camp wagon for his gun. But his small delay in getting the weapon cost him his victim.

Bran was gone. A hundred and fifty yards away Nate saw him melting into a patch of grease-wood. He flung the rifle to his shoulder and fired—once, twice, but without result as he was well aware. In his blaze of passion he emptied the magazine at the spot where he had last seen the dog.

When his rage cooled a bit he saw the irrevocable step he had taken.

From now on he and the dog were enemies. Hereafter he would go armed and the next time the dog came snarling around, he'd hunt the brute through all hell and part of Canada, if need be. It was a bitter disappointment to lose Bran's help, but let any rabbit-eating mongrel try to cheat him of his plunder and see what came.

Thirst took a hand in the game that day. He won a grudging seven miles from the waste, but worry rode him like a ghoul. By afternoon the kegs were all but dry. The sweating horses foamed at the mouth. As he drove himself and the woolies forward, he watched as well for the dog, but did not see him until late afternoon, slinking like a puff of smoke through the distant sage, still shadowing his every move. An uneasy conviction was growing on Nate that if he failed to keep on his guard the dog would in some way ambush him and do him in.

IF THE creature had no need of the food he might give it, had no intention of helping with the herd, why did it persist in following? It was altogether too knowing; too much like a piece of old man Hunnicutt hanging about. It had known—from the first hour it had known—it was a living confrontation of his guilt! . . . Well, let the animal come within fair rifle range and it would shadow him no more.

A dull rage burned in him that night as he turned in, only to be wakened at midnight by the threatening challenging baying of the dog in the near distance. For hours, each time he drifted to the verge of sleep, the man would be snatched to consciousness by that strident tonguing, rasping his nerves like an edge of tin. If only he had done away with the animal that first day. A superstitious idea came over him suddenly as he lay there. Until the dog was dead and out of the way he would never know peace, never realize the riches for which he had sacrificed so much.

"You got me—Pouder—but you ain't got—the dog," he heard the echo of old Hunnicutt's voice.

With the dawn Pouder screwed up his rat's courage afresh and blundered on. The last of the water was now in the canteen. Not a drop was left for the horses. Grim fear rode the man as his vision of rich reward at the railroad went glimmering. Visions of steel doors and gray corridors loomed for him instead. From the first he had received from "the damned desolation" as he called the high sheep country, a bit better than he gave and it only took this matter of thirst to completely unman him.

At midday, close to the treeline, he turned the horses loose and made up a pack outfit of supplies for himself. A miserable death awaited him if he stuck longer with the herd. He must strike out alone and travel fast till he found water. Afterward he could come back, but the chances were high that the sheep and horses would have become hopelessly scattered by then. Well, he could kiss the woolies good-bye and good riddance, for it had suddenly come over him that in getting shed of the herd he might be rid of the dog as well. And there was still reward waiting for him in the cabin on the Hondo.

Shouldering his packs, Nate turned into the forest on foot. He was attempting in his ignorance to do what not even the herders of the country would have tried—to follow the mountain forests southward ninety miles to the Hondo. It was uninviting enough in among the trees, but there'd be coolness in the woods; water, too, if there was any water in this hellish country.

Streams started in the mountain, didn't they?

He hadn't tramped for more than an hour before he became convinced that the mountain wilderness had a definite spirit. It was dark, brooding and vaguely frightening. It laid a chill on his blood. The silence was

almost subterranean. It was an alien world to Nate Pouder and his brain had trouble functioning in an orderly way.

There was nothing really to fear, though. Nate had his own ideas about who was master in the wild, and why. So long as a man kept a cool head on his shoulders and a loaded rifle in his hands he was supreme in the forest, king of all beasts. This silence and darkness; there was no real meaning to them either. They were only because of the trees. It was hard to throw off the cold spell of them though.

THE two-legged lord of creation toiled onward through the morning, a little gingerly withal, watching and listening for signs of wild things and signs of his enemy, the dog. But evidently Bran had given up following him. Habit would keep him to the grazing land. What a fool he had been to let his nerves play games with him over nothing but a dog!

At first his course led in a general southerly direction. But after a few hours he did not pay any more attention to direction. He sought only the easiest paths, avoiding the darkest stands of timber. And so by afternoon he was completely lost, though he did not realize it. He could think of nothing but water.

About midafternoon he actually found some—a brackish pool beneath a side-hill spring all brown with pine needles, but he scooped it out and while he waited for it to fill again he recklessly drank all that remained in his canteen. A wisp of the sure cool strength that had been his the day he put old Hunnicutt out returned to him.

It was just another case of using the old head. A man could always win out if he kept cool and watched his chance. The damned desolation had just so many tricks in its kit. Man always had one more. It all went to

prove out his idea about who was master in the wild. His mouth opened like a gash in his six-day beard as he grinned at his winning.

The water was still roiled and discolored when the pool filled, but the man drank anyway and washed his hands and face. Afterward he moved over to a spot where the sun slanted down through the trees and fell asleep.

It was dark when subdued sounds brought him awake with a start. The forest was brooding and silent save for the sounds which had aroused him. He popped up on his haunches, eyes striving to plumb the blackness.

Came a scratching sound somewhere nearby and a padded footfall. Had they found old Hunnicutt somehow and followed his trail? Or maybe—the damned dog—

He fumbled about and found his gun but was not certain whether it was loaded or not. And where to shoot? His hand was shaking like a fool's—he who had called many a bluff in the cities. If only he had a flash lamp!

He fired by sound as something snuffled alarmingly. For a space there was silence. In a sweat he struck a match and held it above his head. The wavering light disclosed the blinking form of a porcupine at the base of a tree. The man cursed in anger and relief. The forest animals were evidently all around, but they'd have to spring something worse than this to faze him.

He scrambled about in the dark and collected dried ferns and other litter and built a fire to beat back the darkness. His clever head still remained on his shoulders. The fear of fire would be one too many for them. He piled dead branches on the flames and squatted in the red glow that was his protection, withdrawing a grudging inch only when the heat almost roasted his flesh.

In the morning his kingship was groggy from his long vigil against

the things of the night. A dull fever burned in his blood for the water he had so cleverly found had been full of impurities. He drank more of it, but he couldn't eat.

He plodded on again, laboring up steep ridges and dropping down the other side. His trail seemed aimless. He was rather mad, thanks to the fever in his blood, and very much a suspicious animal of the rodent persuasion.

OCCASIONALLY he groaned and squirmed in pain. He scarcely remembered the reward that was to be his. The cunning of his crime and his flawless plan for wealth were past—passed played against the wilderness whose dice were loaded. He became troubled by hallucinations in which a bearded old man took form in the shrubbery roundabout. Through drifting powder-smoke he would look up at Nate with stunned incredulous amazement, sighing:

"You'll swing—fer this."

"Maybe, but they ain't got me yet," Nate answered tonelessly.

The pine-clad ridges that hemmed him in were no longer hogs-backs of trees and stones. They were entities and they were bent on surrounding him. They didn't want him to get away with old man Hunnicutt's jack. He became very sure that morning that around him life in all its olden meanings held forth, that the brooding wilderness still had strange and terrible gods.

"Why pick on me?" he suddenly screamed at those gods, an incongruous cry in the midst of the desolation.

His voice and its echo were a thin falsetto quaver.

The wilderness did not answer in words. But that was the afternoon he sat groggily by a smudge fire gnawing a strip of bacon as he wondered about the dizzy singing and throbbing in his head.

The dog was big and close before

he saw it at all, having just moved out from a thick tangle of buckthorn. Nate waited a few moments until he actually believed. Had any one of a number of things, including the time, been different from what they were, there might have been another story to tell.

His glance darted. He saw he could not quite reach his gun; the dog was closer. With amazing speed he scrambled upon a leaning log and thence flashed up the first tree, a shaggy young yellow pine.

He halted on the first limb and looked down into Bran's inimical brown eyes. He had no way of knowing that the dog was not bent on attack, that it had followed his trail only because it had found the sheep untended and scattered on the plain.

It was a farce, all right, being cut off from his gun and treed by a dog. As a man, a born master of beasts, he should drop down, give the brute a kick and boldly go about his business. But he remembered how he had gone down like a nine-pin under the animal's leap, and waited.

The dog had lain down at the foot of the tree and at every slightest sound, every move, its eyes turned upward. And at every sharp look the man felt he had been wise to stay aloft. He racked his clever head to outsmart the animal, figuring just how far away the dog must get before he could risk racing for his gun. The dog, however, did not move away from the tree. It was just as Nate had visioned it. The dog had finally ambushed him in an unguarded moment.

HE GREW stiff and dizzy and full of aches. He swung down from the lowest branch shouting and cursing the dog. The animal merely looked up at him with calculating expectancy which the man read in his own way, seeing and believing what he feared to believe.

Time passed. Heat and fever got in their work. The man became child-

ishly talkative. He argued with the dog, stating aloud his case as if to an irate policeman. He pleaded for the animal's friendship, begging him to go away. The dog listened with cocked head until the unnatural whine of his own voice snapped the man out of his idiocy.

He climbed high among the green branches to survey the world. The tree swayed and he was so weak and dizzy he could scarcely hang on. What he saw made him weaker and dizzier still. There was something final and unequivocal in the ranks of whispering pine tops, in the grim and rockstrewn desolation roundabout. Still he must hang on, must outwit his jailer till he again got his gun in his hands. Then—then would come a reckoning as his fancy dictated.

He began to be sorry for himself as night approached. He indulged in ablutions of self pity. He climbed to a broad fork limb, hooked a knee in the crotch and actually dozed for a time. He awoke much later with a jerk, feeling altogether different. He had almost toppled off the limb.

The white light of the risen moon flooded the forest and he scarcely knew where he was for a moment. But he knew when he found himself swarming down through the branches, clutching limb after limb for support. Below he made out the dog still waiting.

Suddenly he found himself chanting in a spirit of jeering levity, grimacing down at the hapless earthbound creature below. He hardly knew what he sang, saucy, taunting airs such as children use to mock each other.

All unconsciously he revived tunes he had long ago forgotten, and the voice he sang with was also a forgotten thing, high and wavering and broken with half notes. The sound of it crammed his head with memories, baffling wisps and shreds and suggestions of memory that had never before come alive in his brain.

Back and back he went, beyond

childhood, beyond birth, chanting the unknown primal chants that only his blood consciousness knew. His blood was like fire in his veins, but a giddy new life imbued him. He sprang nimbly through the upper branches and a gorgeous cry of triumph suddenly surged up in him as he swayed in the very top of the tree. It manifested in a falsetto squall and he would have beat his chest with his hands had he not needed them desperately to hang on with.

The challenge thrilled him, sent hot waves running over his skin. He swarmed down the branches again, plunging recklessly, headfirst. He gripped the limb below him with his wonderful hands, letting his legs plop down after.

Somewhere out of limbo he was cognizant of a bottomless pride in those hands and their cunning wonderful leverage, of the ages of evolution that had gone into their making since the ixladontl first lifted its spine above the ground. They were the weapons that made him arboreal lord of the treetops.

He felt his power. He was safe up here. He was at home; high and free above all handless enemies. He plucked prickly pine cones from the lower branches and showered them down on the dog.

Leaning far down, he grimaced, gibed and hooted in strange clicking syllables at the clumsy earthling below that could not climb.

ECSTATICALLY the king of all beasts raced again through the branches, showing off, unable to restrain himself. His strength was far spent, his breath came in short gasps, but the fire in his veins sustained him—and his clever, cunning head.

High, free and wide he swung by his arms, letting go to launch to some other limb in a gorgeous arc. The swaying branches and the ecstatic rush of air went to his head. Wonderful stars spun in his brain.

Then another figure seemed swinging close beside him. It had the face and beard of old man Hunnicutt. Nimbler even than Nate he was, for presently he swung airily out to another adjacent tree-top, and thence on from tree to tree over the forest roof, beckoning. . . . Of course! Of course!

Nate hung high and hard but somehow his leap fell short. His rear set of hands failed to clutch at the up-rushing branches, and down he plunged in a shower of pine needles, his body pitching and buckling like a half-filled sack.

For a moment he writhed and then he grew still as life left him.

* * * * *

In the morning the ants and the crows and certain others arrived to do what cleaning up there was. But it was midday before the dog gave over watching by the fallen one and headed out of the high hills. Once he paused to look back and a long-drawn howl was wrenched from the deepest fibers of his being. The wind crooned all its old songs as the dog hastened through the shadows. In the twilight forest the immutable calm remained unbroken.

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Desperately, McCabe
clung to the bush

THE pilot circled shadowy Cocos Island and, guided by moon-silvered wavelet tips, headed the big BPY patrol ship in for a perfect landing on Wafer Bay. This done, Fred McCabe worked with the rubber raft, getting it ready to paddle ashore.

The officer in charge of the seaplane again tried to dissuade McCabe from going ashore, but McCabe shook his head and got the rubber raft into the

Inviting Sudden, Ruthless Disaster, Fred McCabe Battles Single-Handed Against a Plot to Sink American Ships!

water. The captain leaned out to steady the raft while McCabe fitted himself into it.

"I saw no light ashore when we circled the island," the pilot persisted. "You better fly on to Panama with us and come back here on the cutter, in daylight. Maybe something happened to those two Navy surveyors."

McCabe held onto the pontoon and, disregarding the foreboding of his fellow officer, gave final instructions to have the cutter stop on its north-bound trip. Then he pushed off and settled down to his paddling. The Navy Department wanted a report on Cocos Island as a Panama Canal defense post, not excuses. The report from the surveyors was overdue and the American Consul in Costa Rica, through whom they worked, was worried. They should have been put ashore by a signaled fishing boat a week ago.

Veteran Robert G. Williams, the American Consul, had tried to get McCabe to delay, but the BPY patrol ship was on its scheduled flight back to the Panama Canal Zone. Williams met the PAA plane on which McCabe arrived and drove him to Punta Arenas, telling him en route that the Navy surveyors entrusted with reporting the availability of Cocos Island as a Panama Canal defense outpost had failed to return. This troubled McCabe, for they were to have conferred with him in Punta Arenas.

After the Navy Intelligence man contacted the neutrality patrol ship and conferred with the consul, he waited for it to refuel. McCabe had never seen the beautifully landlocked Gulf of Nicoya so busy.

"Are the tuna running this far south?" he asked Williams.

Williams squinted out over the bay, taking in the Japanese fishing boats and dozens of dugouts and sloops that were manned by both Japanese and Indians.

The consul laughed mirthlessly.

"The Japs from up around Southern California fish for a lot beside tuna. Odd, but the Burma Road opening

is a strong reason for their fishing around here."

FRED MCCABE nodded understandingly. Nothing could have been farther from the highway connecting India and China than a sweltering port in Latin America. But the two were connected, the consul and Intelligence officer agreed, through the treaty signed between Germany, Italy and Japan and the immediate reaction to the treaty from Washington and London.

"And I'm down here," McCabe mused, more to himself than to Williams, "because the Japs are more than ever interested in what goes through the Panama Canal to China, by way of the Burma Road. The Jap fishing fleet moves as far south as Costa Rica and our own Government starts dickering to fortify Cocos Island, far as it is from the Canal."

"Uncle Sam had better take Cocos Island in charge," Williams insisted. "It may not be worth much to us, but if we have it we will at least know that it isn't being used as a base for a Fifth Column tuna fishing fleet."

"When I get to the Islands I'll find out if they are using it, or not," McCabe assured the consul.

"You had better take my advice—and stay off the Islands," Williams returned seriously. He waved his arm toward the fishing fleet. "They may have taken your surveyors off by force. And there were two of them. You are alone."

But McCabe merely laughed and disregarded his advice. . . .

Alone on Wafer Bay now, his boat jostled by the wake churned up by the departing flying boat, McCabe scanned the shoreline anxiously, hoping to pick up the pin prick of a lighted lantern, concealed by vegetation from observation from the air.

The hum of plane motors dimming in the distance added to the eeriness of the tropical setting. Abruptly, and without warning, a squall obscured

the moon and a rapidly moving rain-storm, drenching the Intelligence officer before he reached the shore, threatened to swamp his boat.

The squall brought with it a faint land odor. McCabe paddled rapidly and leaped clear of the boat in knee-deep water. Pulling the boat well above the high-tide mark, he sniffed, hoping to get the smell of campfire smoke to guide him.

As suddenly as it had disappeared, the moon beamed full again on the damp beach and McCabe found the trail leading to the shelf where the surveyors had established their camp.

He couldn't remember ever having experienced such oppressive silence and he walked cautiously, calling himself a fool when he became startled at the crack of a twig under his foot. He advanced beyond the timber line and halted, sniffing again. This time his brow was wrinkled. There was an odor but not of smoke. It was the sickening sweetishness of decaying flesh!

He started forward again, his gait slower, cautious. He patted his revolver holster and got out his pocket flashlight. He was getting closer. He clamped his jaw in grim determination. Probably the boys had killed one of those big turtles and forgotten to bury it, he ventured.

"Then where are the surveyors?" he asked himself. "Not living with that smell, I don't think." He stopped, got out his handkerchief to wipe his forehead, then pushed on.

It was almost as light as day. A beautiful night, except for the awful smell of death. He topped a rise, almost bumped into a navy tent. Trying not to make any unnecessary noise, he snapped on the light, shot its beam to both sides of the tent. Nothing in sight, not even camp gear. He reached out and parted the flaps with the torch.

"What's happened here?" he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper.

McCabe played the light on two

bloated bodies only as long as he could hold his breath. He saw enough to make cold sweat burst out of his pores. It wasn't murder, but torture. Both bloated bodies were spread-eagled, hands and feet roped to pegs driven into the dirt floor of the tent.

MOMENTARILY stunned, McCabe staggered back from the tent. He shook his head violently, let his eyes travel in every direction, and listened intently. He heard it again! Crunching gravel! His hand went back for his gun, but too late. A powerful, but well shielded flashlight blinded him. At the command, "Hands up," his arms came forward and he raised his hands.

"So you came to see us, Commander McCabe." The speaker advanced into the glare of the light. "We have been expecting you. Permit me to introduce myself. I am Commander Kyoto of the Imperial Japanese Navy." The Jap's sing-song voice and confident smile infuriated the American, but McCabe gritted his teeth. "You need not shake hands, Commander McCabe," the Jap continued tantalizingly. "I would not cause an interruption to your setting-up exercises."

McCabe drew a deep breath. Two can play at that game, he told himself, and forced a smile.

"It is always a pleasure to meet a brother naval officer, Commander Kyoto," he said, bowing in mock salute.

The officer half turned his head and ordered McCabe to follow him past the tent. With the rifleman and sailor on either side of him, McCabe fell in behind Kyoto, who turned his head to explain with exaggerated politeness that they could talk when they were well to the windward from the tent.

"We will have much to say"—he paused and laughed sardonically—"before you depart this life."

McCabe made no answer and the Jap marched up over the backbone of the island toward the cliff overlook-

ing Wreck Bay. When the atmosphere was clear of the foul odor, the Jap called a halt.

"I have your permission?" he asked, facing the grim-visaged McCabe. And without waiting for a reply, he proceeded to search him.

McCabe was relieved of his revolver first. Methodically the Jap went through all of his pockets, giving sullen, curt orders to the sailor with the lamp who seemed to flash it too frequently.

McCabe's smile faded as pocket after pocket was emptied of a personal notebook, identification papers and pocket knife. He wondered if Kyoto was so stupid as to expect to find plans for the defense of the Panama Canal, or something.

As rapidly as the officer scrutinized his takings, he passed them to the expressionless sailor with the light, who stuffed them into a knapsack with his disengaged hand. The officer smiled and apologized for his actions. McCabe submitted patiently, but his eyes roved from left to right and he worked his memory hard recalling the typographical features of Cocos Island as he remembered them from a fishing expedition he had taken two years earlier.

He felt sure that he could get away from Kyoto, dive into the bush and escape, temporarily. Before taking the risk, though, he wanted to know how many Japs were on the island. He realized that he might be able to hide in a cave from three armed men, but it would be only a question of time before a dozen or a hundred patient Japs would find him.

The march was resumed then. McCabe had made up his mind to conceal his desire to kick his captor in his ever-showing teeth. He knew he need not look back. The Jap with the rifle carried his weapon in both hands, one finger on the trigger. He would remain on the alert until McCabe's manner convinced the trio that he was submissive.

Finally they emerged upon a small cleared space overlooking cliff-enclosed Wreck Bay. Kyoto sat down on a flat stone and invited McCabe to follow suit. The guard took the third stone and sat with the butt of his rifle between his legs.

The other seaman scraped brush aside and reclaimed an alcohol stove and tinned provisions. Among the provisions were American as well as Japanese labels. Kyoto, noting McCabe's interest in the American labels, acknowledged that the supplies were from the surveyor's camp.

"With these supplies, I am enabled thereby," he remarked, "to entertain you with food to suit your own taste."

With a shudder McCabe recalled the bodies in the tent. He didn't want to eat, but Kyoto was inviting him to decide between pork and beans, and corned beef. McCabe decided in favor of pork and beans.

ONE of the seamen opened tinned fish for Kyoto, and McCabe admired the Japanese thoroughness with which the can was carefully buried. Thus all clues to the presence of Japanese naval men were conscientiously eradicated. It was a fact that told McCabe that the Japs were accustomed to use the island as a temporary and informal base.

If he hadn't stumbled into them, he would not have known of their visit. But they had murdered the two defense base surveyors! That meant that something big and important was afoot. Why should men who exercise great care in burying a labeled but emptied can, murder United States Navy officers and leave their bodies unburied? There could be no harm in asking, McCabe decided. He turned to the officer.

"I am curious," he began, trying to approach the subject as left-handedly as an Oriental would do, "why my host tolerates the dead, unburied?"

Kyoto stirred, crossed his legs.

"Commander McCabe has no doubt

been aware that his identity is known to us," the Jap said. "And we trust that other facts will be made known before — ah — shall I say, before we part company?" The word "torture" hit home in McCabe's mind. "It pleased me to believe," Kyoto went on, "that it would render you more persuasive if upon your arrival you were permitted to forsee how unpleasant it becomes for ill-tempered and ill-mannered persons to discuss matters with us in a reluctant manner."

McCabe got to his feet and paced back and forth for a minute.

"Nice people, these Japs," he muttered to himself and then, looking down at Kyoto said aloud: "Surely there are more than three of you on the island?"

The Jap got to his feet and led the way to the top of the cliff.

"If you will lean far out," he said, "you will see my submarine directly below in the shadow." He then stepped far enough back to assure McCabe by his manner that there would be no treacherous push in the back if he leaned over.

McCabe took hold of a bush for support and, leaning out, looked down upon the hulk of a sub, its hatches open.

An ideal deepwater anchorage was making it possible to put supplies aboard with a block and tackle.

WHEN fully satisfied, Kyoto led him to one side and showed him two torpedo war-heads.

"Everything else is stored away," the Jap explained. "Tomorrow at daylight my captain returns. He will want to question you."

McCabe nodded understandingly. He would have until morning to live.

The Jap escorted McCabe back to the clearing and after handing him the warmed can of beans and a fork, suggested:

"My captain is a very busy man. You can spare him much trouble by being helpful. He will want to know

certain things. It is my duty to tell you of them."

McCabe raised the fork to his lips, tasted the beans and smiled.

"You will tell me everything?" he asked.

"Why not?" The Jap expressed surprise. He waved his arm toward the tent with its hideous occupants. "They will not talk."

Japanese psychology, McCabe told himself. Mental as well as physical torture. This man would tell him of plans to torpedo American ships and then laugh at him, believing that he was helpless to defeat the plot.

The Jap officer reseated himself and started a furious tirade against the United States. McCabe's blood boiled, but he remained outwardly calm. He smiled at times, but his smile was one of contempt. Try as he did, the Yank was unable to give Kyoto his full attention. An itching of a spot on his right shin had become a burning sensation. He reached down to rub the spot, but identified the cause in time. It was *pica-pica!* Scratching would only spread it.

The Jap went on talking. None of the Japs were affected by the burning weed, for they wore leggings. McCabe was puzzled for a moment. He had picked the *pica-pica* up near where the war-heads were cached. Tropical field workers tie strings around their trousers at the ankles to safeguard them from *pica-pica*.

The irritation is set up by tiny spines, much like nettles, except that every tiny spine is like a red-hot wire, invisible, boring into the pores. Scratching drives the spines deeper. The fingertips pick them up and the sufferer is driven crazy under extensive infection.

Fred McCabe fought the almost overmastering desire to dig his nails into the burning shin. He scarcely heard the Jap charge:

"Your Government is fighting Japan by helping China. You are at war with my nation without declaring

war. We, too, can fight without declaring war."

The Navy Intelligence officer let it pass, an idea forming in his mind.

"Two ships, the *Antares* and the *Salonila*, have left New York, loaded with planes and trucks for China," Kyoto went on, "now that the British have opened the Burma Road against our wishes. They, too, shall suffer some day."

"Both those ships fly the American flag," McCabe warned him significantly.

The Jap stood up and laughed mirthlessly. "My submarine leaves tomorrow morning. The Chinese will never get the war supplies your Government sends."

"But that would be an act of war," McCabe persisted patiently.

"You are forgetting, my brother officer," Kyoto retorted suavely, "there are other submarines. When the ships are lost the blame will be upon our—you call it Axis partner, no?" He spread his hands. "You see, our new submarine resembles those of Germany."

MCCABE did see and credited his Japanese captors for achieving the absolute pinnacle in treachery. A cold-blooded double-cross for an undeserving ally.

He looked down at his bare hands now. Could he risk sprinkling them with *pica-pica* while gathering the weed? Wrapping his handkerchief around his hand would help. The cambric would be partial protection. He continued listening to Kyoto, examining the natty officer critically. His eye passed over the officer and brightened. The Jap's uniform was complete in every detail. Gloves were folded under his pistol belt. . . .

Fred McCabe needed those gloves. He had to have them. He pondered for a moment and smiled inwardly. It would be worth trying, he thought. He slapped at imaginary mosquitoes on first one hand and then the other.

With each slap he swore lustily and promptly apologized to Kyoto for the interruption.

"Mosquitoes always seem to go for my hands," he explained. "I usually wear gloves when on field duty. Blast those mosquitos!"

The Jap favored McCabe with his official smile.

"Perhaps I can help you. My gloves may be too small but—" The Jap brought them out of his belt and offered them with a flourish.

Voicing his thanks, the Yank pulled them on.

"Your fingers are a little shorter than mine," he told the Jap, "but they will do nicely." And he added to himself: "It's also very nice of you to help me tie a rope around your neck."

He counseled patience and resumed his pacing back and forth. Kyoto remained seated on the rock. Discontinuing his abuse of the United States he started interrogating his prisoner. He wanted shipping data and McCabe discussed shipping freely, but in general terms. Kyoto's frown told him that he, too, had read everything McCabe told him in the newspapers.

Kyoto tried another tack and sought information on Navy plans to fortify Pacific Coast islands. When McCabe repeated what he had read in the newspapers, the Jap pinned him down to Cocos Island.

"This is an advantageous island," Kyoto said. "We use it much."

Fred McCabe sat down and returning Kyoto's stare, frankly explained:

"Plans for its fortification were being prepared. You have done away with the two men who were to draw the maps."

He stood up now, watching the armed seamen and their officer. One of the seamen had dozed off. McCabe paced back and forth again. With gloves to protect his hands he would be safe from *pica-pica* torture while gathering bushes.

He continued complaining of the mosquitoes and broke a branch off of

a brush with which he slapped his face on first one side and then the other. The Japs no longer watched him closely. He wanted to have them think of him as having an inoffensive branch in his hand. Before wandering to the edge of the clearing to get the *pica-pica* he spoke to Kyoto.

"I suppose you heard the plane coming and got ready to receive me?" he queried.

The Jap nodded. "These two men were on sentry duty up here. They sounded the alarm and I came ashore. Your capture promised to be easy so I did not arouse other members of the crew."

"I see." McCabe wanted to be sure that no more than three men were ashore. "Instead of having a deck watchman, you post your guard up here on the headland?"

"Quite so," Kyoto said. "From here the sentry commands all approaches to the island, by sea or air."

NOW McCabe's plan was complete. He knew what the Japs were up to and he had to stop them. It was no longer a question of his own safety. It was the safety of two American ships, their crews and passengers, together with Chinese supplies. By noon Kyoto's superior officer would be on the high seas, waiting for the Asia-bound ships to get out into the Bay of Panama after crossing the Canal. Once the Jap submarine fleet left Cocos Island, the ships were doomed.

The Navy Intelligence officer planned carefully. He extended the area covered in his pacing. Each time he crossed the clearing he got closer to the *pica-pica* bed. The maneuver called for steel nerves.

His eyes searched the border of his freedom before turning, hunting for plants of about the height and appearance of bean plants. He clasped and unclasped his hands behind him. From time to time he stooped to pick brush and discard it. By methodical

repetition of an appearance of harmlessness, he wearied his guards of watching him closely. He intended using the *pica-pica* to drive the three Japs out of commission as the first step. Then he meant to use the torpedo war-heads to blast and sink the submarine.

Kyoto grew tired of talking as McCabe paced and paced. While the Jap sat brooding, his eyes on the ground, McCabe spotted his first *pica-pica* plant. He stooped, and pulled it out by the roots, handling it gingerly to avoid spilling spines onto his wrist.

With the torture weed in his hand he paced back to the rocks where the guards sat. After toying with the bush, he let it fall from his hand where he could recover it quickly. Now his breathing increased its tempo. It was even harder to uproot another *pica-pica* plant on the return trip. He crossed and recrossed the clearing three times before getting the second plant.

He noted by the bright moonlight that they were perfectly ripe. In this condition the seed pods are sheathed in prickles and, when ripe, they fly off easily. A brownish cloud that might be mistaken for dust rises when well ripened plants are kicked by an unwary walker.

McCabe was not satisfied with just "enough" *pica-pica*. He wanted to put all three Japs out of the fighting with a furious one man blitzkrieg. He provided, too, for a fight if one of them got away. By the time he returned to the stone in front of Kyoto he had spotted a dozen plants where they could be grabbed up quickly, if he were forced to retreat.

One guard, sitting on the ground with his back to a boulder, slept. The other sat with his rifle stock between his feet at a little distance from Kyoto.

McCabe leaned forward, toying with a *pica-pica* bush in either hand and smiled.

"So you intend fixing it so Germany

will be blamed for sinking our ships," he said.

Kyoto shrugged. "Why not? You say all is fair in war, no?" He leaned forward and argued feelingly. "If America thinks a German submarine sank one of their ships, you will fight. And you will fight Germany. Your fleet will join the British fleet in the Atlantic, and—" His hands went out in a gesture of finality.

Then he clasped his hands over his knee and rocked his body back, looking up at the moon, seemingly wrapped up in contemplation of the genius of the Japanese.

McCabe marveled at the Oriental mind. He wondered if the sub broke out a Swastika when prowling the high seas. Now that Kyoto seemed oblivious to McCabe's presence, the American tensed his muscles. His smile disappeared, his eyes narrowed. With a *pica-pica* plant in each hand, he sprang forward toward the Japs. A switching *pica-pica* bush in his right hand blinded the guard. The bush in his left hand slashed over Kyoto's upturned face.

BEFORE they could make an outcry, he grabbed up a third bush and dived for the sleeping guard. A screaming hiss escaped Kyoto. It would be minutes before the burning agony got him. The sleeping guard jerked his eyes open. But before he could spring to his feet, McCabe dusted his face, blinding him as the others were blinded.

The momentum of his charge sent McCabe tumbling headlong to the border of the clearing. He recovered himself quickly and faced about. On tiptoe, he circled behind the Jap officer who was frantically scratching at his eyes. Deftly the Yank reached around and got the officer's revolver. Then he picked up the rifles from the ground and provided himself with ammunition by unfastening the seamen's belts.

"You're all right—now," he told

Kyoto from between clenched teeth. "It will start burning in five minutes. When it does, remember those two Americans you tortured and killed on the other side of the island!"

He turned from his victims to get the explosive torpedo war-heads. Even for a strong man, one is a load. Because of their shape they are hard to handle.

Fred McCabe banked all his hopes on being able to drop them on the submarine. One would be enough to send the craft to the bottom. As he got hold of the first one, Kyoto evidently sensed his intent. He shrieked at the top of his voice.

Grunting under his load, McCabe tried to hurry. The alarm would bring Japs scurrying out of the sub like little brown monkeys. Grimly, he struggled to the top of the cliff, let the war-head down on its side. Then he gave it a push.

Without waiting to see what happened he turned to go for the second war-head. The explosion he knew was to come knocked him to his knees, jarred the island to its very foundations. Still he kept on going. As he stooped over the second one, a shadow fell upon it. Without looking back, McCabe made a leap for safety.

The blow from behind missed his head, landed on his shoulder. McCabe heaved his body sideward, rolled over and over. Scrambling to his knees he faced Kyoto. The Jap's breath hissed between his teeth. He was managing to open one eye for flashing glances.

He caught sight of the Yank, and charged. McCabe side-stepped and got back to the war-head. His right shoulder twinging with agony, he grappled with the implement of destruction and finally staggered toward the cliff.

The bleary-eyed Jap heard McCabe's weight-encumbered steps. The one eye enabling him to see but dimly, he charged blind. Barely in time McCabe twisted to one side and let the man hurtle past. Panting from the

exertion, he got the war-head to the top of the cliff.

It was ready to go over now. But suddenly the Jap's body crashed against him and the war-head rolled free. McCabe felt himself hurtling toward the cliff's edge. He flailed his right arm toward the bush that had served as his range finder in locating the submarine, caught it.

Grimly he hung on, gathering strength. His legs, hanging off into space, were whipped by the explosion. If the roots of the bush came free— But they held! Sweating and shaky, he pulled himself to the top.

KYOTO was game, he told himself. He deserved and claimed a better death than *pica-pica* torture. Better that he was blown to atoms by the exploding war-head than to be driven blind and crazy by *pica-pica*.

The seamen lay writhing on the ground. The thought flashed through McCabe's mind then that other seamen might have got ashore or that the submarine might still be afloat. Supporting his weight on the bush that had saved his life, he swung his body far out to look down. The submarine was gone. The overhang of the cliff prevented him from seeing the beach to which, aroused by Kyoto's shriek, the seamen would have gone.

He pulled himself back. Running as fast as he could, he went for a rifle, pausing long enough to slip his own automatic into its holster. The second rifle went under a pile of stones where the *pica-pica* crazed and blinded Japs wouldn't find it. Then he dashed for Treasure Trail.

There was a turn where the beach was visible. As he feared, there were Japs on the beach. Two of them. He raised the rifle, took careful aim, fired. The leader threw up his hands and pitched headlong. McCabe's shot at the other was short and the Jap ducked back.

A wiry climber could scale the cliff at one point, McCabe recalled. He

had to get the survivor. The supply ship was due at daylight, and if the Japs landed they could bottle him up before the United States cutter came by to rescue him.

Somehow, he had to prevent the Jap ship from coming too close. He left the trail and headed straight for the beach, going over the rocks like a lizard. Brush tore his clothes, scratched his face before he took a final jump and landed in the sand. Bent over, rifle at alert, he charged. At the turn he slowed down. The moon was well past the meridian. The Wreck Bay side of the island was in deep shadows. He flattened his body against the wall of rock and slithered along.

Dirt and rubble cascaded onto the back of his neck, kicked loose by the descending Jap. Instantly McCabe jumped back, raising his rifle. He fired by sound. The second shot brought a groan. A body hurtled to his feet. He stooped over, making a hurried examination. The bullet had plowed straight up the man's spine.

Fred McCabe dragged the body close to the face of the cliff and concealed it with driftwood. The beach would be under inspection from the supply boat, he knew. He dug a shallow grave for the other body and started back to the clearing to check up on the *pica-pica* victims.

Climbing laboriously, he looked at his watch. It would be bright daylight within an hour. Suspecting the Jap supply boat would appear at daylight, he forced his body to greater exertion. Sweat saturated his clothes.

He was worried by the complete silence, for *pica-pica* victims suffer maniacal torture. Even under hospital treatment they rage and rave. It didn't seem to McCabe that the Japanese could endure such torture silently.

Reaching the top of the grade he slowed his pace, approached the clearing cautiously. It was a wasted precaution. He was the only living being on the island. True to character

the Japanese had committed *hara-kiri*. With long-bladed seamen's knives they had slit their own abdomens. McCabe walked around the bodies and sat down, his problem still unsolved. He had to stop the supply ship. But how?

Sitting with his arms akimbo, his eyes indolently surveyed the once neat Japanese camping place, finally resting upon the alcohol stove. His mind started clicking again.

The Japs had been extremely careful about leaving clues. They avoided starting fires. Wouldn't a fire tell their captain the island had been taken over by Americans? He was on his feet instantly, his fatigue forgotten. Not one fire, but three or four. Fires at various points on the island. Fires that would make the Japanese think that the Americans had established several camps, had landed in force.

He decided that three were as many as he could manage. Driftwood was abundant, but fires required close attention. Feverishly, he used a Jap bayonet to cut green limbs to convert the fires into smoky beacons.

While he worked, the rising sun set the eastern horizon ablaze. McCabe found Kyoto's binoculars in the seaman's knapsack. He needed them to search the sea for the supply ship. With an effort the Navy Intelligence officer dragged his body from fire to fire, heaping wood upon each.

This done, he managed to get back to the top of the cliff where he could

survey the sea in every direction. Abruptly, a speck appeared against the rising sun, and grew larger. He lay on his stomach, his elbows in the sand, watching the boat materialize. He identified it as a fast Japanese tuna fisher.

There was no flag. More than two miles away now, it slackened speed. McCabe felt that powerful Jap glasses searched the island. Now the boat changed its course, swinging far enough out to look into Wreck Bay. The hilltop watcher visualized, in his mind's eye, consternation aboard. The boat slackened speed again, evidently looking for the submarine. McCabe hardly breathed until the distant craft swung around and headed back toward the rising sun. Not seeing the sub, the Japs headed rapidly to safety. . . .

Two days later McCabe sat facing American Consul Williams over a café table in Punta Arenas.

"If you send a diver out there," McCabe was saying, "you can get the Japanese Navy's code book out of the sub."

The consul shook his head unbelievably. "And you mean to tell me that you not only escaped alive, but sank a submarine, single-handed?"

"I guess that's the way of it," McCabe admitted. "But as Costa Rica is a foreign country and I'm a U. S. Naval officer, it is one of those incidents in the history of Navy Intelligence that no one will ever hear about—officially."



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ACE SERVICE

By JACKSON COLE

Author of "The Fight for Freedom," "Larkin of Lost River," etc.



Colonel Tanaka sprang erect,
drew his sword

*Pinghow Tse, Prisoner of the Japanese, Plays Jim Farnum, American,
a Game of Tennis for the Highest Stakes on Earth—Life!*

A LINE of Chinese prisoners was being led down a dusty street in Ho-chow, one of the Japanese-occupied towns in the Yangtse Valley. Their uniforms were in tatters, soiled with earth and sweat, and in some cases with the clotted blood of still untended wounds.

A few staggered with fatigue but none looked crushed or beaten, although all knew that for them the war was over, and that soon enough life

would be over too. In those tired peasant faces still lurked the memory of their battles against the foreign invader, and the knowledge that others, countless others, were carrying on the fight.

Yet there was sadness in their eyes too. It was not pleasant to look forward to the firing squad. Death in battle was a free thing when a man fought for what he understood and wanted, as these men had done. But to be shot

down like dogs against a wall already stained by many such executions—that was not free, and its prospect set a pain in their hearts.

The sorry procession, under the watchful eyes of the Japanese guards, had almost reached the corner when a tall, helmeted white man came out of a restaurant. He paused to watch the prisoners pass, his lean face sobering. But suddenly he gave a start, and an exclamation broke from him.

He strode out into the road, seized the dangling hand of one of the prisoners, and in doing so stopped the march. Two of the Japanese guards ran toward him. He pumped the bewildered prisoner's hand up and down.

"Pinghow!" he cried. "You're Pinghow Tse! Don't you remember your old tennis partner at Columbia, back in the States?"

"Step back, please!" one of the Japanese, an officer, ordered sharply, pulling his short sword halfway out of its scabbard.

Jim Farnum retained his hold on the prisoner's hand.

"This man is an old friend," he said hastily. "Just let me have a few words with him."

The Japanese hesitated. Perhaps he was interested in what this American could have to say to a prisoner so indistinguishable in his eyes from the rest of the doomed batch.

"Speak quickly then," he snapped.

BUT for the moment, Jim Farnum could not speak. He was looking at the man whose hand he held. Out of the dirt and the sweat there was coming the glow of recognition, and the sight brought a lump to the American's throat.

"Jim Farnum," the Chinese murmured, and the ghost of a smile quirked his caked lips. "It is a long time since we saw each other—perhaps not so long in years, but long in events. How are you, Jim?"

"Never mind that," Jim said gruffly. The simple inquiry after *his* health,

by a man in such a position, tore at his heart. "Where are they taking you?"

"We are prisoners. To prison, I suppose."

"What are they going to do?"

"Shoot me," Pinghow said simply. "Shoot us all."

"Is there anything I can do?" Farnum asked in a low voice which he strove to keep steady.

"Yes!" A sudden fire burned in Pinghow Tse's eyes. "Go back to your country! Tell your people to send us arms! You can do nothing to aid us—here."

"Stand away!" the officer ordered, and he lifted the sword as if to sever the grip of the two hands. "Enough of this. March!"

Jim Farnum watched the procession straggle out of sight around the corner. Then, at a distance, he followed—toward the prison, he supposed, for where the prison was the army headquarters was likely to be.

Farnum, doing bacteriological research on cholera for the last three years, war or no war, was no stranger to contact with Japanese officialdom, and had come to know something of Nipponese psychology, especially the military variety. Thus far he had no plan but to make a forthright plea for Pinghow's life. That failing—well, he would see what he would see.

Accordingly, when he reached the garrison, he asked to see its commander. A show of his credentials gave him a prompt audience.

Colonel Tanaka was lean and wolfish. But at the moment, having imbibed half the contents of a bottle of wine, he was in a state of what might be called synthetic good humor. He grinned toothily at Jim Farnum when the American had finished his plea, his long and thin mustache curling with the movements of his mouth like the tails of a couple of fish-worms.

"An extraordinary request, Mr. Farnum," he said in a high-pitched voice. "You, an American, ask me to

spare a Chinese prisoner's life. Just like that."

"It isn't just like that," Farnum said earnestly. "This man, Pinghow Tse, was my friend in my own country. We were at college together. We played tennis together—"

"Tennis, you say?" the colonel queried, and Farnum detected a spark of special interest in his tones.

"Yes, Colonel. We in America are very fond of the game."

AT THIS point Colonel Tanaka demonstrated that he was a man of lightning changes of mood. He sprang erect, drew his sword. Farnum jumped, drew back. He was unarmed, did not know what this bald-pated, lean, wolfish man was going to do, or how he had offended him.

"We Japanese are also fond of tennis," he shrilled. "America has no monopoly on it."

"Why, of course, Colonel. I had no intention of implying otherwise. There is no cause for your anger."

Tanaka replaced the sword, sat down, relaxed.

"Are you good?" he asked.

"I was runner-up in the Inter-collegiates."

"Hah! Not champion."

Jim Farnum's eyes narrowed. "Only in the doubles," he said. "My partner was Pinghow Tse. Pinghow was a ranking player. Do you play, Colonel?"

"Not since Nineteen-thirty-one have I played. For eight years I have not even seen a tennis game. How long since you played, Mr. Farnum?"

"I played in Shanghai only last week. It's the only means I have of keeping in condition, and I play every chance I get. That's why I always carry my rackets. As a matter of fact, I was going to try to get a game this afternoon, having been told that there was a fairly good court here."

Colonel Tanaka rose, stood stiffly, held up his hand.

"You shall have your game," he pronounced. martinetlike. "And I, Ta-

naka, shall have my amusement. Haht! It is like the Arabian kings of old. I am bored with garrison life. This is a dead and isolated sector. That has its good points, for it enables me to do pretty much as I please. I will not be interfered with. You shall entertain me—you and the other."

"The other?"

"Precisely. The prisoner. Splendid. I am bored. I will be amused."

"But the request I put to you, Colonel—"

The lean face hardened. "I spare his life for one day," he snapped. "Go for your equipment. When you return, the prisoner will be ready. Splendid!"

The grandstand consisted of boxes that had once contained guns. These, the officers occupied. The common soldiery stood. They were prepared for rare sport.

No emotion showed on the face of the freshly washed Pinghow Tse. What emotions churned within him, Farnum could only guess. To make sport for the foreign invader—that must have been bitter indeed to Pinghow. So Farnum thought, anyway.

They came together at the center of the court, shook hands across the net. Then one of the strangest tennis games that had ever been played began.

One of the players had been through torment, was worn and weary. But his strokes still possessed all of their old skill, if not their power. Farnum kept down the pace of which he was capable, in order to make the match more even. But he could not help running off the match 6-0, 6-3 and 6-4.

The two shook hands again after the game. It was like saying good-by. Pinghow was led away.

Farnum approached the colonel hopefully.

"Notice how he improved as the match went along?" he said casually. "I doubt if I'd have as easy a time with him tomorrow."

The colonel's small cruel eyes flickered but he made no answer. With

a heavy heart Farnum returned to his rooms. He did not sleep that night. He couldn't. Finally he dozed off. He awoke with a start. The sun was up. He groaned. Prisoners were shot at sunrise.

But at ten that morning he received an order from Colonel Tanaka to report to the tennis court. He ran, and his heart leaped as he neared it. Pinghow was alive, waiting to play!

This time, when they shook hands, Farnum felt something besides flesh press against his palm. Casually, then, his hand went to his pocket. Pinghow won one set of the match this time. Again they shook hands, but this time it was a little less like good-by.

Pinghow was not executed the following morning. In fact, the other prisoners were still alive, too. Tennis, it seemed, had driven all other thoughts out of the colonel's mind.

Days passed, and Farnum and Pinghow continued playing tennis for Tanaka's amusement. Pinghow's game improved steadily. He would barely miss winning a match. This was the occasion when he first showed temper, and he knocked one of the balls clear out of sight.

Day after day, the two shook hands, and their hearts were in that grip. Day after day, Colonel Tanaka put off the execution. Pinghow came closer and closer to winning a match. And Colonel Tanaka promised himself that when that happened, and not until then, he would give up his amusement and order the execution. But Jim Farnum, through long hours of sleeplessness, had weighted the psychological aspects of the affair and correctly appraised them.

Pinghow did not win. And Tanaka kept putting off the execution, kept putting it off, until . . .

The night was moonless when the Chinese guerillas struck! They swept down from the hills, three spearheads

of lightning drive. They seemed to know exactly where to strike, as though they had received information in advance. They killed the sentries, crashed into the gunnery, seized the officers' quarters and sequestered the barracks. Last, but not least, they opened the jail, and Pinghow and his fellow fighters walked out free men!

THE youthful commander of the Chinese guerillas, grinning, opened his knapsack. Out of it he took seven tennis balls.

"How many balls did you knock out of the court," he asked Farnum and Pinghow in Chinese.

"About a dozen," Farnum said. "But only seven had writing on them."

The commander looked pleased. "Those seven are here. The others we have given to children. Our guerilla scouts did not miss a one. It is good to know that. The Japanese may occupy our towns, fondly thinking they are in control, but our scouts are ever-present, and so long as that is so, we can do things such as the one we did tonight. These balls—it would be nice to send them to Chiang Kai-shek, but I shall give you each one to show to your children. Perhaps I should give one to Colonel Tanaka, too, even though he had no reason to wish to remember the incident."

"You can give me back my sword," Tanaka shrilled, staring balefully at Farnum.

The eyes of the guerilla captain flickered.

"Yes, Colonel," he said, "you may have your sword."

And they went out, leaving Tanaka alone in the room, alone with his sword. They knew that they could return in a moment and retrieve it. It would have blood on it then, Tanaka's own blood, drawn by his own hand.

But Pinghow and his fighting men were free. It was better so, far better.

Coming Next Month: TABOO, a Jungle Story by MANLY WADE WELLMAN—and Many Other Action-Packed Yarns!

CEDAR RIVER ROLLS ALONG

By CLAY PERRY

Author of "Catfoot Carney Rolls His Own," "Patterns in Pine," etc.



It was a foul, but Tom Carney went off the log

Tom Carney, Birling Champion, and the Catfoot Logging Company Stage a Roleo With Log Contests That Put Cedar River on the Map!

THE Catfoot Logging Company and crew came home to Cedar River in May, flushed with the success of a big job well

done in the Wisconsin pinelands, where they had cut and delivered over ten million feet of fine timber for the Navy. The old home town

looked good to them all, but it seemed to have shrunk, as had the river itself, after the roaring spring freshets had passed.

After a brief flurry of spending wages accumulated through the winter months, the returned lumberjacks tightened their purse-strings to face the prospect of a summer of idleness. Only a few could be employed at the mill, making repairs and preparing for the fall exodus into the lumberwoods again.

"I'm tellink you, Pegleg, dot Cedar Rifer has gone to der hot dogs," declared Simon Barnet, proprietor of the Trading Post, the town's principal emporium. The German-born Barnet would have been the last to admit it, but he had done well with the place since he had bought it from one Klaus Seiber. "Vy, only der beobles dot are runnink roadside stand-ups and sellink hot dogs and gas and oil and such are makink any moneys, and dey haff to stretch der hot dogs to a foot long for der same price dey used to sell leetle weinies."

"Uncle Pegleg" Lane had resumed his occupation as the town cobbler, though he was treasurer of the Catfoot Company and was busily at work in the "Loafing Post," as he called his small shop on Main Street. He had plenty to do, repairing worn, torn, water-stiffened shoes and boots brought in by the jacks—and some children's pitifully wrecked footgear, as well.

"Yep," he said. "I can allers tell when things are not so good. By the kids' shoes that are brung in. But you just now said a mouthful, Simon. Hot dogs. What this town needs is to have more of 'em et—by tourists. I'm surprised you ain't thought up somethin' to boom trade. Summer business. When you first started you could smell a customer a mile away and get something in your show-window that would stop him until you could rush out and drag him in and sell him something else."

"Hunh!" Simon snorted. "I got all past dot stuff, now. But lookit w'at you're doink to my pusiness, makin' up new shoes out of old vons!"

"They ain't no tourist shoes in this lot," Uncle Pegleg chuckled.

"Vell, vy dond't der Poard of Trade do somet'ink to get tourists to stop in here?" demanded Simon. "I tell you vy. Pecause Deacon Hornbull is chairman of der poard and is runnink der outfit only for der penefit of his pank and real estate pusiness. And he is a pear on der market. Like in Vall Street. He is puyink up all der loose land in town on der pear market, so he can sell on der pull market at a big profit. He's tooken options on most de goot riverfront land, mostly aroundt der log-basin, so dot ven der demand comes for lots for cottages and cabins he'll make a killink. Vich aind't helpink Cedar River none."

"Hum! Guess we'll have to do something about it," mused Uncle Pegleg, trimming an oak sole. "Mebbe we'll have to take Deacon Hornbull by the horns, like we did a year ago. Simon, what this town needs is to git back into its history and be a rip-roarin', rip-snortin' old river-town, busy as a nest of wasps in a thunderstorm. Make a fuss over itself. Put on somethin' like a—like a roleo, by the holy old mackinaw!"

"Who you mean by 'we'?" demanded Simon, then he jumped up from his favorite loafing place by the window. "Eggscuse me, I got a gustomer," he cried, as he dashed out and across the street to his store.

Uncle Pegleg grinned. "I got him going and I'll git him into it," he muttered. "Airy! Airy! You in there? Come here. I got a idee. Where's Tom and Ma Carney? We got to hold a meetin' of the Catfoot Company, right now."

ARETHUSA LANE, Pegleg's pretty niece, and clerk of the company, came swiftly on noiseless feet because she wore beaded moccasins.

sins, a gift from "Indian Jim," whom Tom Carney had given a steady job after defeating the tough old Sioux riverman in the roleo at Washburn, Wisconsin.

"What's the matter, Unk?" asked Arethusa. "Got a pain in your cedar leg again?"

"In my wooden head this time," said Pegleg, chuckling. "Git Tom and Ma, please, right away."

Arethusa summoned them from the cottage behind the shop where they were all busy. They were making important changes in the bachelor menage in preparation for its occupation by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Carney, at a future date which Arethusa had set for the wedding.

Tom Carney had his sleeves rolled up, a hammer in hand. Ma had also bared her brawny arms and bore a putty-knife.

"What's up, Uncle Pegleg?" asked Tom, knowing well that the wise old cobbler never got excited over trifles.

"We got a big stake in Cedar River, son," said Pegleg. "We got to go to work and promote some doin's for the summer. And my idee is to stage an old-time rivertown jamboree and hold a roleo on the river basin."

"Good gosh all hemlock!" exclaimed Tom. "What do you mean, 'we'?" He echoed Simon Barnet.

"Us,' then," amended Pegleg, whacking an upturned shoe. "Everybody. Us and Simon and the Board of Trade, the lumberjacks that are loafin', all workin' together to put acrost the biggest, most specktakler event in the history of Cedar River. We, Us and Company. We timber-toppers from 'way back, and you, Tom, the world's champion birler, and Airy, the women's champion and Injun Jim that was once champion. It's a nateral, I tell you. I jest thunk it up. Simon Barnet give me the idee with a hot dog. All we got to do is raise some money and get to work and put Cedar River on the map—the tourist map. If them one-hoss cow-towns out West

can stage a rodeo and make money and advertize theirselves, we can throw a roleo here that'll draw tourists from all over the country. It's as easy as fallin' off a cork pine log."

"But Uncle Pegleg," cried Arethusa whose eyes had begun to glow, "they've already announced the world's championship roleo, to be held down at Gladstone on Little Bay du Noquet. The chairman of the committee, Mr. Mathison, was in town promoting it just the other day. Tom and I have entered for it. It's all set for the Fourth of July week-end. We can't compete with 'em."

UNCLE PEGLEG looked up at his niece and grinned.

"You don't look as discouraged as you sound," he said. "Neither does Tom, or Ma. We'll run our'n first and call it the Great Lakes Roleo. It'll help Gladstone, and they'll help us. With three champions right here in town we'll challenge the hull country. We gotta work fast. Let's hold a meetin' of the directors of the Cat-foot Company now and vote the first cash contribution. Then we'll go git Deacon Hornbull."

"For what?" demanded Ma Carney, with a snort. "About two-bits is all he'll give you."

"He'll come acrost when Simon and me git after him," predicted Pegleg. "I'm figgerin' on havin' him be chairman of the roleo committee, and referee besides. Heh, heh!"

"So you think you'll make a human being out of him!" Ma Carney laughed. "I hear tell that when you was a youngster you tried to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, to prove it could be done."

"I did not!" Pegleg contradicted. "I made a pigskin purse out of a sow's ear, though, by criminy, and here 'tis. And I'm diggin' inter it to pull up a hundred dollars as my personal contribution to the Great Lakes Roleo fund. The company oughter match that."

He dug a long, pointed leather wallet from his pocket and pulled out a roll of bills.

"All in favor, vote yes," he demanded.

The vote was taken. And with a wild, lumberjack "whoopee," Uncle Pegleg tore off his apron and dashed as fast as his wooden leg would swing for the Trading Post.

"He'll hold a roleo, in a pig's ear," snorted Ma Carney.

But at that exact moment Uncle Pegleg was beginning to put his plan into operation, as he faced Simon Barnet in Simon's private office at the rear of his store.

"You behold here, Simon, the acting chairman of the Great Lakes Roleo Committee," he announced, breathlessly. "We got to git a permanent chairman. It's got to be Deacon Hornbull. He's our leadin' citizen, after all, spite of being so measly mean, sometimes. And you're our leadin' merchant, tight-wad as you are. All you got to pony up is two hundred and wait, now, don't faint, because you're agoin' to be chairman of the costumine' committee and tell everybody what to wear."

"And sell it to 'em!" burst out Simon, catching the point.

"Yep. And help me bring the deacon over. We brung him in line last year by me runnin' for county commissioner and you threatenin' to draw all your money out of his bank. We can't repeat that sort of strategy, now. We got to make a flank attack."

"A kick in der seat of the pants would be a goot flank attack," growled Simon.

"We'll wave some caulked boots that way if we have to," predicted Pegleg. "But I figger I've got a scheme that'll git him. Lissen!"

SIMON listened, and he was a good listener when an idea was presented which promised him a profit.

"We got an app'ntment with the deacon for three o'clock, after he

closes up," Pegleg finished, and Simon agreed to accompany him to the battle-ground.

The deacon saw them coming, barricaded himself firmly behind his stained oaken desk, and began to be extremely busy and preoccupied. Plainly he was building up sales resistance to whatever project these two might have in mind.

"How'dye do, Deacon," Pegleg greeted him cheerily. "How's business? Mine's rushin'. Looks like it was gettin' back on its feet ag'in. Say, you need a new pair of Size Thirteen shoes! I'll make 'em for you, right away. I understand you've got some land to sell along the river. On the log-basin, I mean. Lots."

"Ahum!" rasped the banker, coming out of his preoccupation and twitching a pair of bushy gray eyebrows over shrewd little eyes. "Why, I have some I might sell to the right parties. You thinkin' of buyin' or does Tom Carney want to build a house for Airy?"

"I give 'em mine," said Pegleg. "But the woods is full of prospects, and me and Simon are a committee of two that's come to lay a plan before you for gettin' a swarm of customers to buy your lots. We're a-goin' to run a big roleo, the week-end of June fourteenth and fifteenth. Saturday, which is Flag Day, and Sunday. We want to make a howlin' success of it, draw people into town. We got to have a prominent man for general chairman. We want you to take it. Of course, you'll want to make a generous contribution to the fund and—"

"Ahum!" broke in the deacon, seeming to pull back into his shell, like a snapping turtle. "I'm obliged to inform you that the Loggers' and Lumbermen's Bank cannot make contributions."

"But you can," Pegleg insisted sharply. "And we don't ask for cash. We only want you to donate three lots."

"On der log-basin," added Simon.

"To be given as gate prizes at the roleo," added Pegleg.

"I should donate"—Deacon Hornbull gasped—"three lots! Good grief, d'you think I'm a millionaire?"

"You could be if you could sell all der lots you got at tourist prices," declared Simon. "And if der roleo is a howlink success, mebbe you could."

DEACON HORN BULL blinked, and a spark came into one eye and jumped to the other, but he hid it with a scowl.

"I don't see how a single two-day affair like this would—"

"If it turns out a success we'll perpechuate it as a annual institoochun," cut in Pegleg. "And our company will remodel the old sawmill into a rustic one, surround it with cedar log shanties—I mean tourist cabins—turn the hull shebang into a high class tourist camp, usin' the mill for show purposes and movin' the machinery up to the dam for real sawin', so as to make no noise or dust or mess in the middle of your nice riverside lots."

"Ahum!" rasped the Deacon, catching a point. "Well, I'll do it!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "As a matter of civic spirit. And I'll accept the onerous duties of chairman and do my utmost to carry out the program of the Great Lakes Roleo for the good of our home town, Cedar River. I am a plain man—"

And he went on for ten minutes with a speech, while Pegleg and Simon sat glued to their chairs, their eyes popping, flabbergasted to find the deacon so suddenly transformed from a skinflint to a Lord Bountiful.

"I didn't think it would vork," declared Simon, in a hushed tone, as they walked up the street, their chests bulging from their easy victory." But mebbe dere is a black feller in der woodpile. But now I got to hurry up and order outside red and black checked shirts and mackinaws and corduroy pants and—and you got to make a outside pair of drive-shoes for

der deacon. It is der official roleo gus-tome I've decided on. Everyvon hass to veer it, by criminy!"

"You old blood-sucker, you!" chuckled Pegleg. "You've got the same sort of civic spirit that Deacon Hornbull has. As for me, I'm going to make the deacon a present of the shoes. It will be worth it."

From that hour on, and during the next three weeks of early summer, the town of Cedar River bloomed into life, more and more intensively with every day. It became a veritable boom town, for Tom Carney mustered a crew of lumberjacks at this unusual season and sent them up into the Cedar Lake woods to comb out the best remaining white pine, and doubled the crew at the sawmill. The saws buzzed busily, making lumber for the shanties, slabs to "rusticate" the mill itself and to cover the exterior of a long, low building, the replica of a woods camp cook-shanty. This was to be the hot dog emporium for the roleo, with Ma Carney in charge.

Ma Carney's first and cleverest contribution to the roleo advertising campaign that Arethusa was directing, was the invention of a hot dog shaped like a saw-log with
EAT MORE OF ME AT THE GREAT LAKES ROLEO—Cedar River, June 14-15 on each.

The dogs were not only a foot long but an inch in diameter.

Preparations had to be rushed at top speed. Tom Carney offered to match a day's work with pay to every man who would donate a day, or more. Every able-bodied man in town not otherwise employed went to work on the roleo. There were old bateaux to be repaired, oars to be made, cork pine logs selected and shipped to a large sawmill at Escanaba to be turned in a great lathe to perfect cylinders of proper sizes.

UT of the woods there began to stream a migrating population of backwoodsmen, pioneer farmers and

such like, to whom Arethusa had sent news of many prizes for picturesque floats and other equipages in the parade that was to be held. They came to show their stuff. They came in two-wheeled ox-carts, in high-wheeled travois hauled by horses or mules, afoot and on horseback and in rattle-trap autos. They came and bought "hot logs," as Pegleg called the twelve-inch frankfurters, and bought gay costumes at Simon's Trading Post, and promised to be on hand at the roleo and to bring as many more.

Tourists began to stream in, too—not pass through at fifty miles an hour, but stop, attracted by the picturesque activities on the riverfront, and amused at the original and characteristic costumes which almost everyone in town was already wearing. And to watch, free of charge, the practice log-birling at the basin, which went on from daylight to dark.

The offer of a thousand dollars in cash prizes, three riverfront building lots as gate prizes and the parade prizes of merchandise, donated by merchants and others, gave Arethusa some telling ammunition for her publicity. It attracted entries that included a round score of the best birlers in the country. Every noted birler—except one. And that rather bothered the committee.

The runner-up at the last roleo, at Washburn, "Bunny" Hugg, the Pacific Coast champion, whom Tom Carney had defeated, had made no response to the invitation, although Arethusa had added a personal note to it, after signing as secretary. Bunny Hugg, the college boy birler, would have made a good crowd-pulling attraction. Arethusa began to believe that the bitterness that had followed his defeat when ruled out because of a "fluke" trick at Washburn, was keeping him away from Tom Carney's home town.

But the hope of the Great Lakes' states lumberjacks and roleo fans besides Carney, himself, was a dark horse from Eau Claire, Wisconsin,

with the suggestive name of Jimmy Running. He was coming, and was going to do his best to wet Tom Carney, "if" as he wrote, "I have to stand on my head to do it."

It would have done old Paul Bunyan's heart good to have stood on the reviewing stand—the high front stoop of the Trading Post—on the day the Roleo parade finally rolled down Main Street.

DEACON HORNBUCK sat on a grain-sack packed with hay across the axle of a two-wheeled travois, drawn by a pair of huge oxen. It was a sweltering hot day and the deacon, outfitted in the costume decreed as official, kept his heavy mackinaw coat on, over the gay, woolen plaid shirt, and wore high-laced caulked boots, thick corduroy trousers and a brief-brimmed felt hat. The perspiration fairly streamed down his face. Fortunately he did not have to exert himself with the goad and ox-driver language, for "Hooks" Harmon, the steel-handed lumberjack foreman, strode along beside the team, "geeing" and "hawing" the plodding beasts, their long horns garlanded with evergreen twigs.

Next in line came a four-horse team with "Bigger" Brown, proud owner of the Percherons, perched atop a pyramid of logs as high as a house, handling the four reins. Bigger was outfitted as Paul Bunyan, complete with a Canuck cap, a gay sash dangling to his knees, a corncob pipe projecting from under a black horse-hair mustache a foot long.

The rest of the paraders were outfitted in keeping with the occasion, and all beflagged for the day it was. The procession took an hour to pass the stand, between a double line of spectators a mile long, among them more motoring tourists than Cedar River had seen in all its history.

I'm thinkink dere's mebbe two t'ousandt tourist in town," gloated Simon Barnet. "At a quarter a head

dot's five hundred dollars admissions. Mebbe ve von't go in der hole. Mebbe ve make money."

It was not by any means entirely a costume crowd. For among the spectators as well as the parade participants were scores of genuine working lumberjacks, sporting their own individual ideas of the proper rig to wear at a rivertown jamboree. Here and there were gay girls, luridly outfitted as to clothing and war-paint. And there were some genuine fistic encounters along the sidewalks and behind buildings between ancient or newly-made enemies whose tempers came out of bottles.

The float that won the loudest and most prolonged applause was a logging-sleigh hauled by a six-horse team, with Arethusa holding the reins, and it was not even entered for a prize. It bore its prizes on long plank seats, a bevy of beauties in bathing costumes, Arethusa herself in a white lastex suit, with a gold helmet hiding her ruddy hair. These girls were contestants in the women's birling, swimming and diving events and represented all the Great Lakes states. The sleigh runners were fitted with tiny wheels, set inside and invisible, so that the runners seemed to be sliding along.

The birling began at noon at the log-basin. Deacon Hornbull stood rather uneasily on the large flat provided for the officials and raised a megaphone to his mouth. He had shed his mackinaw at last, and loomed up like a bill-board poster in his red and black shirt.

"By the holy old mackinaw!" exclaimed Pegleg Lane. "If he doesn't look like a genuwine old sport!"

"Birlers ready!" roared the deacon as two jacks jumped the log beside the bateau.

"Maybe he looks it," Arethusa retorted to Pegleg, "but he's a cheap skate. Do you know what he's done? Those lots he donated aren't worth giving away."

"Wh-why? Ain't they riverfront lots, on the basin? He promised—"

"Oh, yes. On the basin. But they're over in the swamp, across the river."

"Holy old . . . No wonder the skinflint made the committee promise not to tell who gave 'em."

"Which puts the committee on the spot!" raged Arethusa. "There'll be a howl when we make the drawing."

"When you plan to do it?"

"Just before the final birling match, which I hope will be between Tom and Jimmy Running."

"Hold it off till the last thing," advised Pegleg, squinting his eyes in thought. "I'm a-goin' to see if we can't make the deacon change his gifts. When is the drive goin' to be let loose?"

"After the final match, so as not to interfere with the birling. Tom's arranged to have the gates opened in the dam and let a big head of water down with the logs, with the rivermen ridin' 'em in."

"Hum! That gives me an idee—and I'm goin' to ride it. I'm goin' to see—"

He moved off, pushing through the crowd, careless of whose toes he stepped on with his wooden peg.

THE committee, and Arethusa especially, got a surprise on Sunday morning, when the semi-finals were started. It came in the person of Bunny Hugg, the Pacific Coast champion, who arrived and presented himself for entry.

"But—but the prelims are all over," stammered Arethusa who had charge of this detail. "You never answered the invitation and—"

"I'm answering it now, sister. Don't tell me I'm too late. Or is Tom Carney afraid of me?"

"No!" she retorted, as he gave her a bold stare and swept her from head to foot with an admiring gaze. "And neither am I! But I'm not the whole committee. I'll see if they will waive the rules and let you pass the prelims."

"Atta kid!" cheered Hugg, patting

her on her arm. "I could kiss you for that."

"Not unless you want to take a wetting in the river before you top a log," snapped Arethusa, shrugging away from him.

But she hastened to seek the other members of the committee and ask for a waiving of the rules for Hugg's sake.

Meanwhile Hugg started some propaganda by declaring to some of his admirers that the Cedar River Roleo Committee was trying to keep him out of the matches for fear he'd wet their local favorite, Tom Carney. He even attempted to get the ear of Deacon Hornbull, with a protest. But the deacon was busy. He was being implored by Tom Carney and Uncle Pegleg to substitute some lots on the right side of the river for the worthless ones he had slipped over on them.

"I pledged three lots on the log-basin," said the deacon, "and they're on it. I kept my word."

"How much'll you take to trade them swamp lots for three on this side?" asked Tom.

"One thousand dollars," declared Hornbull, without blinking. "Cash."

Pegleg snorted like a wild horse as he whirled on his cedar pin and stomped away. He went to find Bigger Brown and Hooks Harmon, who were consuming "hot logs" at Ma Carney's cook-shanty.

"There's a custom connected with the roleo which I don't believe Deacon Hornbull knows about," he told them, in private. "It's our only chance to change the deacon's mulish mind. It's set forth, right here, in the last clause of the Roleo Association rules. Read them few words and act accordin' when the time comes."

The two husky lumberjacks read and roared with laughter.

"I'm jest achin' to get my paws on him," declared Brown.

"Keep your traps shet and don't blow any alarm whistles," warned Pegleg. "He might duck."

The committee, urged by Arethusa, had agreed to waive the rules so as to admit Bunny Hugg to the semi-finals without preliminary birling, and the roleo rolled on.

By mid-afternoon the field had narrowed down to four of the best birlers. They were Tom Carney, Jimmy Running, "Little Billy" Girard and Bunny Hugg, representing Wisconsin, Michigan and Washington. Old Jim Galawayosh had succumbed to age in the semi-finals, after putting up a great battle, but his forty-odd years had slowed him, at last, to his first defeat short of a final match.

The women's events, which were interspersed with the men's matches, brought Arethusa into action—and to a wetting when she was rolled off by the speedy and pretty Cilvia Winters of Astoria, Oregon, in a straight match. But Arethusa retrieved herself by taking the trick and fancy event, hands down—or feet down.

DURING the flurry of congratulations, Bunny Hugg grabbed her hand and pulled her to him, whispering something in her ear. The resounding smack of a wet hand across his mouth that answered his proposal brought Tom Carney lunging across the float to give battle with fists instead of feet, and only the interference of the officials prevented a clash between the rivals, then and there.

"What did he do?" demanded Carney, when he had got Arethusa away and alone.

"He—he pretended that I invited him, when I wrote asking him to come—that I invited him to take me out, and wanted me to go to the old, dirty Log Cabin Hotel, after the dance tonight—with him. Now, I want you to go in there and wet him—drown him!"

"I feel like giving him logger's smallpox with my caulks," gritted Carney. "I've got to beat Girard first, and Hugg's got to beat Running, if we are going to meet in a match. But whether I beat him or not, I'm going

to invite him to a party around behind the cook-shanty, after the matches."

Tom Carney was mad all over and clear through. He wet Billy Girard in four minutes of rapid rolling. And Hugg, after an exciting duel that went through the three logs, large and small, toppled Jimmy Running from the fourteen-inch cylinder after eight minutes and forty seconds of speedy cuffing. Running got as much applause as the victor for the fight he put up.

"You kin git him at Gladstone!" yelled a red-faced river-rat, waving his hat. "Hooray fer Eau Claire, the cradle of the roleo, whar I was born!"

This did not improve Hugg's surly temper, nor did the shouts that followed.

"Take him, Tom Carney!" came the yells. "Wet him, Catfoot! Drown the measly mushrat from Washin'ton! He needs to be washed off—he's got a dirty look!"

The story of his bold and unwelcome attentions to Arethusa had got around. There was not a lumberjack in the crowd who would not have fought to the finish for the girl, to avenge an insult.

Tom Carney faced Bunny Hugg, trying to keep cool, a condition essential to success in the most difficult balancing game in the world. But anger surged through him as his old rival of the Washburn Roleo glared at him.

"Your girl friend gives a fellow a cold welcome, after me coming all the way from the Coast to this shindig of hay-shakers," Hugg remarked, with a sneer.

"I'll be glad to give you a warmer welcome after you get wet in this roll," Carney promised grimly. "Around the cook-shanty. In the nice soft sawdust where falling won't hurt—much."

There were several angry persons at the basin, at this moment. Deacon Hornbull was red in the face, not only from sunburn and itchy wool clothing

but from pointed remarks that were going around concerning "gift lots in the swamp." Bigger Brown and Hooks Harnon had started that. And the deacon was angry with Tom Carney and Arethusa and Pegleg and Simon Barnet, the storekeeper, for getting him into the too hot costume, at high cost. The deacon began to fear that his trick donation was becoming known outside the committee, and he was furious that the secret seemed to have got out, and quite uneasy for fear a ruckus would ensue among the excited rivermen when the drawing for gate-prizes revealed the location of the lots.

A motley crowd was massed along the semi-circular shore of the log-basin, watching the Roleo. There were smartly-tailored tourists, bearded wood-choppers out of the bush, paper and pulp-mill workers, farmers, dwellers in the woods near the Canadian line, sailors from the Great Lakes merchant fleets, miners from Iron Ridge, town and country people of all sorts and descriptions. Most of them were rooting for Tom Carney, but they cheered Bunny Hugg generously when he was announced.

THE match began on the sixteen-inch pine amid roars of wild cheering, which rose to bedlam as Carney attacked with a sudden, furious burst of speed and in less than thirty seconds spilled Hugg for his first wetting.

Hugg immediately put up a protest to Referee Hornbull, declaring that Carney had jumped into action before the referee's order, "Throw your poles," but it was too obvious his protest was unjustified, even for the angry deacon to honor it. But he warned Tom Carney as loudly as if Carney had hit Hugg below the belt. This did not cool Carney's temper and he attacked on the fifteen-inch log as furiously as he had on the first.

The match went for the unusual distance of twenty-two minutes, fif-

teen seconds, with Hugg on the defensive most of the time—and then, when the log was hidden from the officials' float for a moment, behind the bateau which had been used to drag it away from a boom that it threatened to bump, Hugg "jumped" the log up and down and toppled Carney off.

It was a foul, but the referee had not seen it, nor had the other officials, and the fall was allowed to Hugg. They were now even up and the fourteen-inch cylinder was taken out beside the boat.

Tom had arranged for a signal to be sent up to the gate-tender at the sluice-gate at the right moment, to raise the gate and let the drive through for a final spectacle of the roleo. He had let in on the secret all the birlers and others who might be out on the basin, on logs or the booms or the boat so that no would be caught in the rush of water and wood, un-awares. A fast running lad was to speed up the shore to the dam with the signal.

"If I can't get to you I'll send word," Carney had told the boy, "and you scamper like a rabbit for the gate."


This spectacle was to come as a grand surprise for all but the few he had notified, and was to follow the finish of the final match directly.

The final timber floated with but four or five inches of its surface out of water, but it was as buoyant and uneasy as a live thing, and faster than the first two. The rivals gripped it with their sharp caulks, each with his eyes glued to the other's feet, getting set with long poles in hand, until ready.

"Throw your poles!" bellowed Deacon Hornbull.

Bunny Hugg, between the matches, had asked for time to adjust his caulked shoes, which he said had worked loose from stretched laces. The fact was that he was feeling the

[Turn Page]



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strain of the fastest birling he had ever experienced. As he worked over the shoes, under the diving-tower, in a space reserved for the contestants, in the shade, he caught the eyes of the boy runner upon him. Beckoning him to come in, he began talking with him. No one overheard what he said, and he had soon reported at the float.

Carney and Hugg were past masters of the sport that is more tricky than walking a tight-rope, but they made it look easy, as they raced and snubbed, checked and reversed, never relaxing an instant, while the water was fretted into ripples which the sun struck and sent dazzling beams into their eyes.

The roar of the crowd, the wild whoops of rivermen, girlish screams, Chippewa Indian war-whoops, the blare of motor-horns drowned out the rumble and thunder of a wall of water and wood that leaped suddenly through a wide-open sluice-gate, upstream. Carney did not hear it, but Arethusa did, and she ran to the diving-tower and sprang up the ladder to get a look up the river.

She saw the high wave coming and shrieked a warning, but got only answering yells from the crowd which could not see what she did from her height. In desperation she launched herself in a flying dive from the top of the tower and shot in a shallow skim toward the official bateau.

"Pull me in!" she gasped as she came up beside it. "They've let the drive loose at the dam!"

THE young huskies at the oars lifted her in, dripping and panting, her helmet gone, her gold-red hair streaming. The boat was within a dozen feet of the whirling log where Carney and Hugg danced and pranced their final duel. Deacon Hornbull belated at her angrily.

"Come back here! You're interfering with the match! You've no business out there!"

His megaphoned voice quieted the crowd for an instant and Arethusa's clear voice gave response that was heard by almost everyone.

"The sluice-gate's been opened, up above! The drive's coming down. It'll be into the basin in five minutes. Tom, you wet that rabbit quick, and get ashore!"

Tom Carney, startled, gritted his teeth, but kept his head down.

"Someone sent the boy up to give the signal," Arethusa added, as the crowd's cheering broke into fragments of chatter and questions. "I think I know who pulled that dirty trick. It was someone who was afraid he'd be wet!—He's got a name and heart like a rabbit."

Involuntarily Bunny Hugg gave a swift glance up and like lightning Carney cuffed the log into a spurt that sent spray flying. Hugg raced backward desperately, but slowly, inch by inch, he began to topple, leaning against thin air as his feet flew higher, his arms waved frantically for balance—and he went in with a splash.

HE CAME up, spluttering and swearing.

"That dame did a job on me!" he declared. "Did that dive to get my goat. It's a fluke fall. I'm going to protest it."

"Protest and be blowed!" Carney answered, and he jumped off and swam for the boat as Hugg grasped the log under one arm and pushed toward the float.

At the float, Tom Carney leaped out and grabbed the megaphone from Deacon Hornbull.

"I'm conceding that fall!" he shouted to the crowd. "It's 'no match.' But it was not a foul. You are now about to see a real, old-time log-drive coming in on a big head of water. Keep on high ground and watch it. Keep off the float and booms. Here she comes!"

He was handing the megaphone back to the scowling deacon when Uncle Pegleg grabbed it and brayed in brassy treble:

"Ladies and gents, it is a custom, at

[Turn Page]

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the end of a roleo, to honor the referee—”

“Three cheers for the Honorable Deacon Bullhorn!” shouted a tipsy lumberjack, and he got a thundering response.

But Pegleg went on:

“—to honor the referee with a christenin’ in the waters of the birlin’ bowl. Here he goes!”

With his last words, Bigger Brown and Hooks Harmon seized the bulky deacon by the seat of the pants and his shirt-collar and heaved. He splashed flat on his belly, ten feet out from the float and caused a small tidal wave.

Tom Carney jumped back into the bateau, with Arethusa, and it shot out toward the floundering deacon who was helpless as a baby. Carney leaned over and grasped him by the shirt and held him, his back to the boat.

“How’d you like to trade those swamp-holes for three nice lots on this side?” Carney demanded. “Hurry and decide, or I’ll duck you! The drive will pile up here, in a minute. And in that drive there is cedar to build a new river-side town on your lots—and on mine. You come through or I’ll tell the crowd what kind of muck you donated for the prizes.”

The deacon gasped, choked, swore and struggled, but now he heard the roar of the oncoming water and logs and it finished his stubborn resistance.

“I—gulp—give in! Git me into the boat and to shore. I’ll trade!”

HE WAS dragged into the bateau. The oars bent and the boat leaped toward shore, just ahead of the hissing headwater wall that rolled down the basin, stirring it from shore to shore and bearing its million feet of wooden freight upon its crest. On the logs gayly-clad river-rats ran and jumped, whoopeeing and tossing their hats, riding the logs like a bunch of cowboys on bucking broncos.

For some time the attention of all was focused on the picturesque and thrilling spectacle, one that the hun-

dreds there had never witnessed before, and one that others thrilled to because they knew its meaning. It was a wave of new work and wealth for Cedar River.

Uncle Pegleg had climbed up on the tower to the first platform and was waving the megaphone, wildly, for attention. He got it, at last.

"Ladies and gents," he declaimed, "due to the good sportsmanship of the leadin' citizen of Cedar River, it's my privilege to announce that the three gate-prizes, now to be drawn for, was the gift of our referee and chairman, Deacon Hornbull. Three dandy riverside lots on the log-basin. Deacon Hornbull will now draw the tickets from the keg."

The crowd strained its much-stretched vocal cords again with cheers for the flushed and bedraggled deacon who glared at Tom, then managed a grin as Arethusa hoisted a small keg high. He thrust a wet hand in to pick out the numbered tickets.

A panting lad tugged at Tom Carney's sleeve.

"I—I ran like—like a rabbit, Mr. Carney, and—" he began.

Tom Carney grabbed him. "Who told you to give the signal?"

"Why—why it was—it was that—that Honey Bug—er—I mean Hugg. He said you told him to send me up and—"

"Where's Bunny Hugg?" cried Carney, looking about, his fists clenching.

"He got ashore and beat it to his car and druv away without even changin' his clo's," replied Uncle Pegleg. "Guess he got afeard of the drive. Mebbe he never seen one afore. Mebbe he didn't want to meet ye behind the cook-shanty, Tom."

"I'll meet him and beat him at Gladstone, if he shows up there, by the holy old mackinaw!" declared Tom Carney. "I had him beaten here, and he knew it. That's why he pulled that trick to have the drive come down. Well, it was a fine finish, after all. I reckon we'll have a bigger crowd at next year's Great Lakes Roleo. Arethusa, I want to see you—around be-

[Turn Page]



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hind the cook-shanty. I think I ought to get some kind of a prize."

"I think so, too." Arethusa smiled at him.

The roleo was over, and Cedar River rolled on, at high crest, the log-drive snugged up against the holding-booms. And Cedar River, the town, began to roll on toward a future as a bigger, better river-town.

THE GLOBE TROTTER

(Continued from page 13)

stories. I spent a lot of time and used up a lot of copy paper characterizing Yau before I even attempted to draw out a plot outline. When I was satisfied that I had a character which pleased me I found the writing of the story was a most pleasurable job.

I sincerely hope that all of your readers found some measure of entertainment in the trials of Yau and her family, at least as much enjoyment as I experienced in the writing of the piece. I know I spilled quite a lot of blood in the yarn, but you know how it is; when you have snow and ice, and cream-colored bears, nothing gives one a better contrast, so essential to thrilling adventure, than a splash or so of crimson.

So, there you have it: **DEATH HAUNTS THE ICEFIELD** is a yarn written after considerable study, not only of the habits of the polar bear and environs, and of color and atmosphere of the locale, but of what **THRILLING ADVENTURES** readers might like best in a diet of adventure copy.

Sincerely yours,

Harold F. Cruickshank.

Thanks a lot, Harold, and we hope Henry has all the material he needs for his school-work.

Speaking of our favorite authors—and yours—here's a lively bit of reminiscing from E. Hoffmann Price. That fellow sure gets around. And as you'll see from his postscript, he keeps an eye on the news-stands to give us the lowdown on the type of display that **THRILLING ADVENTURES** receives. Go to it, boy:

Dear Globe Trotter:

Although I do not have any story coming up, at the present, in **THRILLING ADVENTURES**, I figured I might as well drop you a line and tell you that I've been batting around again, this time in the southwest. Travel interferes with writing. I hope I won't have to quit writing, but there is no telling what a desperate fellow will do when his work keeps him too long in one place.

It is as bad as my buddy who was with the marines in Haiti; he wrote saying he was studying French, or what they call French in Fort au Prince. I applauded his scholarly habits. About then I got a letter in which he said, "Study interferes with drinking. I leave quit studying."

But to get to the point of it all: I wonder how many of you Globe Trotters know that the country around the Salton Sea, in Southern California, and the Maricopa Desert, in S. W. Arizona, are a pretty good substitute for Asiatic and African deserts? From India all the way to El Centro are date groves, usually sheltered by tamarisk hedges, the same tamarisk that someone brought from India years ago, to give a touch of dark green to our desert stretches.

There are fields of Egyptian corn. Patches of cotton. The towns have arcaded sidewalks; the buildings are low and squatty, and you can walk

from one end of El Centro to the other, never leaving the canopy's shelter except at street crossings. The climate, blazing in summer, seems to have compelled this Arabic style of architecture. The only thing lacking is some camels, some snake charmers, and maybe a few fellows wearing turbans.

Then, over in Arizona: Telegraph Pass, leading through the Gila Moun ains, heading eastward out of Yuma, is on of the eeriest places I have ever seen at dawn. Some years ago I went over this same stretch, a hundred miles of desolation. Today, there are date groves along the desert road. But the first real oasis is Gila Bend, 119 miles from Yuma. This in my opinion is Arizona at its most colorful. The horizon blocked off by sullen, iron black crags, jagged and strangely shaped. Tall sahuaro cacti dot the plain. These are weird looking at dawn or dusk, some seem to be giants raising their arms in horror.

One group, small sahuaro, looked like three hitchhikers waiting beside the road, two of them leaning against each other for mutual support. I had to look more than the usual twice before I saw it was one of the desert's little tricks. Believe it or not, some joker had been hanging old tires around the upraised arms of sahuaros. Figure it out! This Gila Bend country is done in shades of dull green. The tar-arisks seem to be confined to settlements. Out in the open, gnarled acacias of several kinds shared the country with the sahuaros. If anyone can correct my guess as to those thorny trees, sound off. I call 'em acacias for convenience.

And then the ocatillas, bare stalks with inch long thoras; the flame colod red flowers won't show up until spring. Fascinating country. A man can turn around without getting stepped on. As you go east toward Tucson, you see fewer and fewer sahuaros, and more and more yucca; the country becomes less interesting, as far as I am concerned, it takes a "fat" flavor, a dullness, at least in contrast to the striking mountains and the Maricopa Desert around Gila Bend. Although right in our own country, this region has a charm, an exotic flavor that few foreign places have.

The fellow who said see America first wasn't entirely nuts, and if some of you Globe Protters have skipped Arizona's S. W. corner, why don't you plan a safari out that way?

West Texas, as usual, always gives me a lift. In central Texas, heavy rains played the devil, and with bum visibility and slippery roads I tangled up with a yearling bull, though it may have been only a frail heifer.

Car and cow critter both continued under their own power, as I got out of the opposite ditch readily enough. You'd have laughed yourself silly, seeing that beef on the hoof bounce off the right front fender, and do a couple of loops and then disappear in the darkness and pelting rain.

The cow lost some hide and hair, the car lost a headlight, but that was a bum exchange, as I've never seen a car that could grow a new headlight. And I didn't do any noticeable laughing until after four hours of creeping through the rain to get to Houston. When it rains in Texas, it really rains. For the first time I can remember, I couldn't see the center line 10 feet in front of the car. A solid sheet of water, dense as the worst "tule fog" the west coast ever offered. But I had to drive on.

This was the lowest spot between Austin and Houston, and at the rate it was raining a flood would develop in no time. Well, I won that race with a decent margin. And dug in at Houston, with Kirk Mashburn, who used to contribute some purty good westerns to POPULAR WESTERN—I'm sure you remember the gent.

And here's a secret: I think Mashburn is going to turn out some more of those yarns which he did, right on the spot, in Harris County, which has more cows than any other county in Texas.

Time to sign off. And after a winter in New Orleans I'll be heading for the cow country and the desert, in the spring, when the ocatillas look like red-headed snakes swaying in the wind.

E. Hoffmann Price.

P. S.—Every chain grocery in Austi, Tex., and quite a few independents, offer THRILLING ADVENTURES and its companions. They seem to put food and fiction in the same bracket, which is really swell, I'd say. And judging from the way they drive down the main stem, their partiality toward the "Thrilling" group is easy to understand, provided you are able to understand

[Turn Page]



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anything at all, after a day of trying not to be knocked for a loop.

Here's good luck in old New Orleans, son. Sorry we couldn't make the Mardi Gras. Next out of the grab—I mean the mail-bag—we have a little missive from Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Lewis Stanford has a little piece to speak:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I am a member of the Globe Trotters and I thought I would write you a few lines and ask you to do me a favor. I have enlisted in the U. S. Army and I am in the corps of engineers. I would like to know if you couldn't connect me with some fellow who has a little knowledge of the conditions up around Burma and the Malay States. I plan to go there when my enlistment is up and I would like to know a little bit about those places.

I really like adventure stories, especially those of the jungles, so keep up the splendid work you are doing in the **THRILLING ADVENTURES.**

5th Company, N. C. O. School,
 Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Hope you get plenty of information about Burma and the Malay States, Lewis. I'd like to take a couple of days off and spin yarns with you about the whole area from Singapore northward. But it would take some telling, and I have to content myself with these regular armchair jaunts in the Globe Trotter Department. Now let's hear from a gent that's on Active Service with the Canadian Forces. Her's to you, Mr. Brennan:

Dear Globe Trotter:

I would like to join your club. As for being an adventurer, I am only 25 years old, stand 5 feet 10 inches, have black, curly hair and weigh 184 pounds. I have fought in China for two years, served in six battles, was wounded four times and I am still ready to go over again. I am now in the R. C. A. S. C.—C. A. S. F. I am a Yank—was born in Texas—Eldorado. It's only a small town in Texas but a very nice place to see when I get home. My mother and Dad live in Atlantic City, N. J. I have traveled all over China, Indo China, Panama, South America and England. I could tell plenty of tales from China and the war. I have written stories on it. Hoping to receive my membership card soon.

D. V. R.—H. A. Brennan, Jr.
 R. C. A. S. C.—A. F.—C. 30493
 M. T. G. A. R.—Kingston, Ont., Canada

Log-Rolling

So much for the Canadian Army for the time being. Let's hope that Private Brennan's missive is going to be only the first of a steady stream we will be getting from these boys. Now for a bit of a discussion between a Canadian logger and our own Clay Perry, who appears to have done his logging in Michigan, if we take Catfoot Carney as any criterion. C. Burridge of Blind River, Ontario, has the floor, and we'd be glad to hear Mr. Perry in rebuttal. Nothing like whipping up a nice friendly discussion.

Dear Globe Trotter:

I am a little late in writing this letter in reference to your January, 1941, issue of **THRILLING ADVENTURES.** This is due to the fact that our mail service is very irregular in the North Woods.

Regarding "Caulks Make the Sawdust Fly" I was wondering if Mr. Perry knew that logs left on skidways for two years would be destroyed by the insect we in Northern Ontario know as the "Pine Bug."

Should Mr. Perry doubt my word, I believe, any lumbering men will tell him that timber left in the bush must be peeled in order to keep this insect away. My, my, what a drive Catfoot must have had—seven days from skid to mill. Up here it takes two months at the least.

Catfoot must have gathered a bunch of green-horns around him if they had to use caulks on boomed timber. Wonder how they would make out up here, where we just dump our logs into the river and drive them down. Isn't it unusual, Mr. Perry, to have a sleikh haul directly the cut is through and to water the logs? It is up here, and just in case the terms might be confusing I will endeavor to explain.

Up in this part of the woods we put all our logs on skidways. Then when the cut is finished we load these logs on sleighs and haul them to what we term the Dump. Here they are dumped from the sleighs and are again put into skidways, but this time the skidway is on the ice and consequently when the ice goes out the logs are in the river. Then there is the other time when we call Hot Logging, where the timber has been hauled directly from the stump to the river and dropped in.

Just one more question for Mr. Perry. Since when did contractors buying lumber by the board foot engage a scaler to scale the timber for them? Mr. Perry, I am surprised. There is no scaler living that could give an accurate accounting of the number of board feet in a given number of logs. The butts of some logs, Mr. Perry, show sound, but when the log is cut into it is found to be rotten.

But in my estimation lumber is lumber and timber is timber, and so in buying lumber why in the name of wonder would they want to scale the timber.

Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson must have a very, very poor idea of the British Intelligence and of their system. Also he says that Tommy Mueller, after being held a suspected spy, was allowed a half hour freedom. This is hardly according to war-time regulations.

However, both these stories were very entertaining, but I certainly would appreciate them far

[Turn Page]

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(Continued from previous issue)

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more if the authors did not display their ignorance of their subjects so openly. **C. Barridge**
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Any of you other loggers got your ideas about this? Let's hear about it. And now, here's a little lady that feels as though she has a kick coming. We're glad to give her a chance to make herself heard. Go ahead, Miss Sagen:

Dear Globe Trotter:
I have a complaint to make. I don't see very many girls with their letters printed in your magazine, which is a first-rate one, so am going to see if I can break through the barrier.
I am 23 years old and have been a member of the Globe Trotting Club for several years. I spent the past year in Arizona; while there I went to the coast. In all, I've covered fifteen states and have been to Canada.
I like all sports, movies and love to read. I collect post marks and I would like very much to collect some pen pals. I had quite a few pen pals at one time—through your magazine. Have now lost track of most of them, so would like some more.
I live in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.
Hoping to have a lot of mail soon, I am,
Sincerely,
Stephenon, Michigan. L. A. Sagen.
P. S.—My dad likes your magazine, too. He called the "seven seas" in the "good old days," so knows what adventure is.

Glad to hear about your dad. I'll bet you're plumb proud of him, and he certainly ought to be able to spin some swell letters for our Globe Trotters. Why not get him warmed up on the idea, and see what comes of it?

THUNDER JIM WADE

We feel sure that when you've become acquainted with Thunder Jim Wade and his companions in the novel in this issue

The Globe Trotter,
THRILLING ADVENTURES,
10 East 40th Street,
New York City.

I wish to be enrolled as a member of the *Globe Trotters' Club*. I am interested in adventure and will endeavor to answer all questions asked me by other members regarding the places with which I am familiar.

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of **THRILLING ADVENTURES**, that you're going to want to read more about this new **Paladin** of the twentieth century. Charles Stoddard has come through with a story that will give you new entertainment against a different and exciting adventure background.

If you've turned six or sixty, you are familiar with Lawrence of Arabia and the part he played in the first World War in the victory of British arms. You may be the sort of a fellow that prefers to consider the organized efforts of men like Allenby and Wavell. In "Hills of Gold" you're going to find that Thunder Jim Wade is a combination of all three of these men, and the background is the same Hedjaz, Saudi-Arabia, Mesopotamia, Iraq and the rest that provided the tense heat-swept terrain over which the British troops were forced to slog and fight on the journey to Baghdad.

Holy wars or *Jihads* between the European races and the Arabs, between the Christians and the Moslems have been weapons employed by trouble-makers since the days of the Crusades, and even before. But in this twentieth century, it is a matter of historic record that the dictators have again been assuming the cloak of benevolence toward the Moslems in an effort to turn the fierce desert tribesmen against the British.

Thunder Jim Wade has his work cut out for him, and he needs all the capable help that can be supplied by his two cohorts, Dirk Marat and Red Argyle, when he tries to tear this cloak aside to reveal the true feelings in the hearts of the Axis partners. Just how this is accomplished against the background of the burning Arabian sky, and with the greenery of the Jordan and the sands of the Arabian desert as a fearful stage, provides a moving adventure story that will leave you tingling and breathless when you have followed it through to its dramatic climax.

Remember—Thunder Jim Wade in "The Hills of Gold," a complete action novel by Charles Stoddard in next month's **THRILLING ADVENTURES**. And, besides—a splendid variety of other adventure stories by favorite authors, stories that take you to every part of the globe!

And don't forget that I'm always anxious to get your letters and postcards, telling me what you think about our stories and about our new policy of presenting a full-length adventure novel. Drop me a line, won't you? And if you're looking for pen pals, why not check on the list of members of the **Globe Trotters Club** on page 111?

Incidentally, join the club—there are no dues or fees and you are more than welcome!

I'll be checking in here about the same time next month, and then we'll give the big **Globe** another spin, and see if I can't dig something up to freshen my memory of Iceland, now that the Germans seem to think it's a handy place for a machine-gunning foray.

—THE GLOBE TROTTER.

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the Case of the Crying Wife

1 Ann doesn't cry easily—but that night I found her in tears! "I can't help it," she sobbed. "All the things we were going to do—buy a car, build a home—remember? And here we are—married three years, and just barely making ends meet! I thought our dreams might come true—but it's no use." I made up my mind right then to "have it out" with the boss.



2 "Look here!" he said. "I can't pay you more unless you're worth more! And frankly, John, you lack the training a bigger job needs. Ever hear of the International Correspondence Schools?"



3 When I learned the boss was a former I.C.S. student, I signed up quick! And what a difference it made in my work! I'd never realized until then how little I knew about the business.



4 I'm happy, and Ann's happy, and I guess the boss is happy. (At least I've had two "raises" in the last year!) And here's the very same coupon that I mailed, staring you in the face!

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★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course before which I have marked X: ★

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- | | | | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Bosses | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Engine Tune-up | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundry Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Growing | <input type="checkbox"/> Mine Foreman | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist | <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Management of Inventions | <input type="checkbox"/> Management of Inventions | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Farming | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Telephony | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Works Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio, General | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Engineering | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Operating | <input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Electric and Gas |
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\$105.00 MFRS. PRICE
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Send Royal No. 10 (F.O.B. Chicago) for 10 days' trial. If I keep it, I will pay \$2.50 per month until easy term price, \$35.85, is paid. If not satisfied, I can return it express collect.

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 Check for typewriter stand (\$2.00 extra)
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CAUTION—FOR QUICK SHIPMENT GIVE OCCUPATION AND REFERENCE

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I tramped the Streets HUNGRY, BROKE, WEARY FINALLY LANDED JOB PLAYING A PIANO IN SALOON FOR EATS AND SLEEPS Then

I MADE A STARTLING DISCOVERY! AND NOW?

WELL, I LIVE IN A \$25,000 HOME, DRIVE A BEAUTIFUL CADILLAC LIMOUSINE, HAVE MONEY IN THE BANK, AND HAVE WON INTERNATIONAL FAME AND FORTUNE.

READ WHAT THOSE WHO USE
THIS POWER EVERY DAY, SAY...



YOU, TOO, CAN
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THINGS & MORE
IF YOU USE THE
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1 DEBTS PAID, BUSINESS INCREASES, HEALTH IMPROVES:
"My health has improved very much. My business, which was almost gone, has shown a steady increase, and the debts are getting paid faster than I ever dreamed possible."

2 MILLIONAIRE COTTON IMPORTER WRITES:
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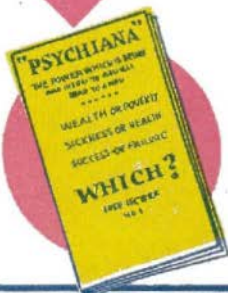
3 WORLD-FAMOUS PHYSICIAN WRITES:
"Your conception of truth which not only can make, but will make the world free, is the greatest flashlight of liberty I have ever read." Signed—Dr. M. Rose, M.D., C.M., N.D. Former Asst. Surgeon to Queen Victoria.

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EX-HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION OF THE WORLD WRITES:
"The mighty God-Power of the universe is working wonders for me. I hope to have another world's champion in time. I'll have the Power of the universe behind me."

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