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Where Adventure Lives Forever!

Issue 8

Comic Con 2008

The Space Pulp of
EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

The MUMMY:
Tomb of the
Dragon Emperor

FICTION:

Robert E. Howard

Bill Craig

E.A. Guest &

F. Marion Crawford

The verse of

Wm Michael Mott

Barclay Flagg's
FANTOMAH!

The Dark
Western Pulp of
Keith McCleary

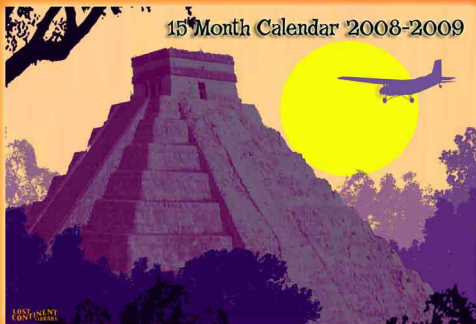


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THE MAGAZINE OF ADVENTURE AND PULP ENTERTAINMENT

WALTER BOSLEY
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Chief's Log

I should not have waited until after the Comic Con to put this issue together. This one was an ass-kicker because I was behind my usual schedule, but it was worth it for two reasons: Comic Con is the annual pilgrimage and this issue has some cool stuff. One of my favorite Robert E Howard stories just jumped out at my consciousness when I was considering which classic fiction reprint we'd run. I first read it while in Saudi Arabia, from the 'Nameless Cults' volume. One good pulp deserves another, so there's a look at Burroughs' space adventures, which I must confess I am catching up on myself. Like Chip Stone, I've mostly read the Pellucidar stuff and one Tarzan plus a few of the single volume books like *Outlaw of Torn* and such. So Chip's article is for all of us who are just now going to jump into Barsoom and Venus. We have a special review of the new *Mummy* movie from Universal, and I have put together a report on the Comic Con as I promised I would. Throw in a Bill Craig actioner with the conclusion of E A Guest and F Marion Crawford's *Tropic of Despair* and some more great graphic pieces and I believe you'll have quite an issue to enjoy this month.

With still another month left of summer, there remains plenty of opportunity for personal adventures. Even if you can't get out to exotic locales, make sure you get outside. Go camping, hiking, hit some museums. Whatever you do to satisfy your need for adventure, remember to play it smart. I recommend your local zoo or animal park, especially marine life parks. If you can, try to make it over to a national park you've never visited and explore. If you're house-bound, for whatever reason, set a chair by the window and enjoy the view, maybe put on a DVD we've recommended here at LCL and let your imagination do the exploring. Hopefully, we've given you a few good ideas.

While you enjoy this issue, I'm going to get away from the keyboard for a while. When you're done, consider writing us an email, letting me know what you think about it.

Now, let's hit the road to adventure... -- Walter Bosley, Editor



FIELD CABLES

JOHNNY TYLER, A MADCAP FROM ARIZONA, WRITES:

'THANKS FOR GIVING WESTERNS SOME SPACE IN YOUR GREAT MAGAZINE. ANY WESTERNS PLANNED FOR YOUR PRINTED LINE?'

WE'RE GLAD YOU ENJOY THE WESTERNS, JOHNNY. AS A MATTER OF FACT, WE HAVE 'THE HIDDEN TRAIL' BY THOMAS JANVIER AVAILABLE IN OUR CATALOGUE. IT'S AN ADVENTURE SET IN WESTERN LOCALES. YOU MAY LIKE IT. WE ARE TALKING WITH WRITERS ABOUT MORE WESTERN FARE. -- EDITOR

JUNIOR DINKBERGER OF DICKS BEND, WEST VIRGINIA, WRITES:

'I SURE DO ENJOY YA'LL'S PICTORIALS, ESPECIALLY THE GALS FROM THE OLD MOVIES. MAKES ME NOTICE HOW SEXY MY GRANDMA REALLY IS...'

JIMMY CHURCHWARD OF ESSEX, ENGLAND, WRITES:

'BY COMPARING THESE WRITINGS WITH RECORDS OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS, I FOUND THAT ALL CENTERS OF CIVILIZATION HAD DRAWN THEIR CULTURE FROM ONE COMMON SOURCE- LOST CONTINENT LIBRARY'

SALLY RAND, OF ATLANTIC CITY, WRITES:

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ADVENTURE CINEMA



SON OF KONG (1933 RKO)

I'm guessing many of you have at least seen this classic sequel, if you don't own it. But there may be just as many--if not more-- who have not. I recall seeing comments about it and photo stills from it in *Famous Monsters*, and the like, when I was a kid, yet it was only in recent years that I actually watched the whole thing. I must say that SON OF KONG is a pleasant surprise and a gold mine for adventure fans who are also students of ancient lore.

SON OF KONG picks up after Kong has died in New York and Carl Denham is under seige from lawsuits. Facing indictment by the grand jury, Denham decides to skip town with Captain Englehorn aboard the *Venture*. Putting together a skeleton crew of malcontents, Englehorn and Denham steam away to the far east and eke out a living taking whatever cargo they can. It is while on a small island not far from Skull Island itself that they meet up with saloon singer Hilda (played by one of our faves, Helen Mack) and also find themselves enticed by an ancient treasure that allegedly remains hidden on Kong's old home turf. Such treasure could solve Denham and Englehorn's legal woes, so they again set sail for Skull Island, this time in search of a lost city abandoned by the people who built the giant wall. Hilda is along for the adventure, giving Denham something to live for other than adventure and fortune. A mutiny puts them in a rowboat and they eventually end up on the island (I don't want to give all the details. You should watch the movie!). As you could guess, they find the lost city and the treasure -- but they also find another giant gorilla. It's never explained where the mother is, but maybe she's dead. The rest of the film concerns the little Kong displaying his nature, showing his strength, and generally winning over Denham and his companions. Ultimately, a disaster threatens the island and the little Kong comes to the rescue.

This film was thrown together pretty quickly after the enormous success of the original KING KONG, and released the same year. Interestingly, it is a better written and better acted movie in many ways. The first half is actually so interesting it leaves me wanting a further look at Skull Island, a la Merian Cooper in the 1930s, not in the overblown manner of today's Hollywood, where everything is an excuse to let artists show off with less regard to a really good story. SON OF KONG is an example of what Lost Continent Library is talking about-- rich adventure in intriguing mysterious lands. (Available from Warner Bros.)

Grog 'n Brew



There aren't a whole lot of beers out there that directly reflect what we're about here, and you all know I bust my ass seeking them out for your benefit. This month's selection was a pleasure because not only did it remind me of one my favorite travels, it's a good brew. I'm talking about good ole Cusquena from Peru. As usual, I am having one as I write this, with some popcorn. Cusquena is a malt lager brewed with Andean mountain water since 1908. That's what it says in the little booklet that came with the six-pack. I'll tell you what else it is, it's a good tasting beer with a malty flavor. It went down quite deliciously with the grilled steak I had yesterday, and was damned refreshing after a hot day outside. What's really cool is the bottle: it features the ancient wall in Cuzco with the twelve sided stone formed into the glass itself (No, I'm not scanning the bottle. Go buy a sixer of this stuff and you'll see for yourself. It's cool).

As I said, this beer reminds me of a trip I took down to Peru some years ago. I still have the Cusquena wall calendar with the dark-eyed and raven-haired Peruvian hottie hanging on a door. I'm reminded of our first night in Cuzco. We all had headaches from the altitude and these smiley little Inca troubadours wanted to serenade our table at the restaurant. Somebody slipped them a fiver to go away. Then, while waiting for our food, I got picked to get up and do this dance where some broad chased me around with a flaming lighter at my ass (a dangerous proposition in the La Fonda restaurant in Mexico City after you've had beans, but this was Cuzco, Peru, thank God).. My bunkmates later surprised me with the girls they had picked up on Pizza Street back in Lima for a bargain price that secured their services the entire week. I woke up most mornings looking at a nicely shaped bare young lady's ass the next several days, except one day when Arthur's 72-year-old ass greeted me from across the room (He's lucky I think he's one of the best people I ever met on the road). One night in Cuzco, we met up with David Hatcher Childress and Doug Nason in a bar across the plaza from the big cathedral. I can't recall the name but David said it was established by another world traveler he knew. The place reminded me almost exactly of a joint called The Falconer in Redlands, California. I believe it was this Cuzco joint in which I first drank a Cusquena and found it worthy. It was that night I gave the old lady at the closet-sized market across from our hotel three US for the beer calendar.

As I enjoy my ice cold 'Inca Gold', I recall hiking to the Hitching Post of the Sun and enjoying an ear of giant sized corn on the cob with fresh butter and salt. The sky was so blue and the horizon so very clear. Memories of the journey across the Altiplano to our guide Jorge's hotel near Lake Titicaca, where the ancient temple ruin sprouting with numerous stone penises like giant mushrooms stood nearby, are pleasant indeed. I brought several of the miniature lava rock versions of those fertility penises back and distributed them to all the ladies who work in my sister's hair salon, and they loved them. Giving a penis to a woman after coming home from an exciting trip is something I highly recommend. After, you should pour yourself a cold bottle of Cusquena malt lager and just catch your breath.

If you can't make it down to Machu Piccu, bring Machu Piccu to you. Cusquena is available at the Mo for \$5.99 a sixer and worth every penny, plus the trip. I'm heading down south soon for a job, so I'll be sure to make sure they save some for you. Or maybe not. Better get yours while you can.

-- Monty Greylock

“One girl told me she read my work during a stint in rehab. You know, it’s true what they say about crazy chicks...”

-- E.A.Guest



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GROW. IT GROWS RAPIDLY, AND
ITS TENTACLES START MOVING.

THE RAIDERS HAVE SUNK SO DEEP IN
THE MIRE THAT THEY CANNOT MOVE,
AND THE TREE-VINE REACHES OUT
WITH ITS TENTACLES, AND GRADUAL-
LY CLUTCHES THEM.

I DON'T
LIKE THE
LOOKS
OF THIS!

HELP!

I'M BEING
CRUSHED!

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COMIC CON INTERNATIONAL

WALTER BOSLEY's
Report on Comic Con 2008

LOOK FOR ANOTHER EXCITING
BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY AT COMIC CON

I first went to the Comic Con in San Diego back in the summer of 2004. That was when I was frequently traveling around the world but was on summer break to spend time with my son, Austin. He was thirteen and I wanted to find something different for us to do that season, besides the regular trips to Disneyland and the numerous movies. Brian Meyers, author of an upcoming serial for this magazine, and my best friend from high school days, suggested the Comic Con. Through the years of my association with San Diego, I had never heard of it (amazingly), but it sounded like just the thing for a kid Austin's age. We got the four-day passes and made a week out of the trip to San Diego. We loved every minute of this huge annual event that became a pilgrimage for both of us every year since (though Austin did not go last year).



The Trolley pulls into the Convention Center

For those who have never been, or may not even know what this event is, Comic Con is San Diego's major annual event and has been going for over thirty years. It started out as a comic book lovers' and publishers' convention with just 300 people attending and has steadily grown over the years, along with the popularity of the medium (especially in Hollywood). It is now a multimedia affair encompassing the comics industry, mostly comics-related motion pictures and electronic gaming. What began as a gathering of artists, publishers and collector fans has become a massively attended celebration of popular arts, especially where dramatic graphic arts are associated in theme. There is no annual event in San Diego that comes

close to matching it, and this year over 125,000 people attended.

My motive for covering this event for the magazine is to introduce you readers to the Comic Con and illustrate where adventure and pulp entertainment fit into the mix. Over the past four years of attendance, I was always happy to find classic adventure present and this year was no different. This article will not deliver a blow-by-blow diary, rather it will present the various relative elements I experienced on behalf of all of you.

This was the first year I attended officially as an industry professional, receiving complimentary badges for the duration of the convention. I had to provide credentials to receive these passes, so you know your editor is the real deal (if there was any doubt). It made all the difference in the world from the previous years, in doing business and in being able to escape the mass of humanity (by dodging into the industry lounge for a quiet cup of green tea or fresh water and a place to sit (in a chair)).

The experience of going to the Comic Con is one of escape. For us, it's always four days of forgetting the outside world, seeing friends we usually only see at the Con, and enjoying movies and restaurants in the Gaslamp. This year, we made our annual visits to Hooters and, of course, Dick's for ritual abuse. The movie we saw was 'Stepbrothers' and we laughed our asses off. These activities are a pleasant respite from the enormous throng of people one

encounters all day in the convention center, especially the gigantic exhibit hall.



Terra cotta soldier display for *The Mummy 3*

As you move through the bodies from booth to booth, adventure fans will find some really cool things. It varies from year to year, depending upon whether a big adventure movie is out during the summer, but adventure is always present. This year, with the new *Mummy* movie (reviewed in this issue), there was a display of terra cotta Chinese warriors on the lawn across from the convention center. I was one of a few people there at the right time to score a free copy of the book on the making of the film, now available at bookstores.



Dan Medart of Altair-4 Books & Collectibles



Just a sample of Altair-4's pulps collection



Some of the hardcover offerings at Altair-4

Adventure literature was present inside the exhibit hall, as well. One of

my favorite stops, where I bought the classic book on the making of the original King Kong a few years ago, is the Altair-4 Books & Collectibles booth. You will rarely find such a great offering of pulp era originals in such good condition. The Altair booth always features rare editions of pulp adventure, sci-fi and noir classics, as well as hardcover books. These are just a sample of what their store in Orange, California, has to offer. If you're a collector of pulp magazines, I highly recommend you contact Altair-4.

Another impressive exhibitor this year was Galaxy Press, promoting their new line of L Ron Hubbard pulp originals in nicely done small volumes. No matter what you think about Hubbard personally, he was a successful pulp author in the day and his numerous novels of adventure, western and science fiction are all available through Galaxy. They have even put some of the titles on audio CD. I plan to get a few of these myself. I came away with a really cool deck of playing cards featuring a pulp cover on the box and facts from Hubbard's various stories in the series printed on the face of each card.



The impressive Galaxy Press line of Hubbard pulps

One popular aspect of adventure and pulp fandom is the collectible figure. Some of the best ever made are always to be found at the impressive Sideshow Collectibles booth. They have just released the first in their Indiana Jones line, with more to follow representing all the movies. The detail in these works is astonishing, and the extras are numerous. If you look closely at the base Indy stands on, you can see little details from the opening of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Also displayed was a John Wayne figure from a WWII film, and

there was a collection of life-size replicas of interesting weapons in the steampunk vein of the genre. Sideshow Collectibles is associated with Hollywood monster makers ADI and their items are in even greater detail than the props that usually serve as the models. For the collector of fine popular art models, you must consider Sideshow Collectibles catalogue.

If retro science fiction is your main thing, Iconic Replicas of Madison, Wisconsin, has something for you. They offer an excellent model of the Seaview from *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, as well as figures and craft models from *Thunderbirds*, *UFO*, *Space 1999* and *Doctor Who*. But for us pulp fanatics, there is the 'Space Vixens' line, featuring Felicity Bliss, who happens to grace our cover this month. This character is right out of the 1920s and 30s with her glass ball helmet, art deco ray gun, and sexy curves. The second figure in the line looks to be really cool also and I can't wait to see the finished painted version.



Felicity Bliss of the 'Space Vixens' line from Iconic

There is so much in the Exhibit Hall that you could devote an entire day just to see it all, and many do. But the

Comic Con offers even more delights, such as guest speakers in panel discussions where often sneak previews of upcoming movies, TV shows and literature are presented publicly for the first time.



The always-crowded Exhibit Hall

This year, there were two panels I was able to get into. Many overlap, many are too crowded, so you take what you can get. The panel on the 75th anniversary of the original *King Kong* was really weak. Not one of these guys had ever worked on any *King Kong* movie. I attribute this atrocity to the release of the Peter Jackson remake a couple of years ago stealing all the diamond anniversary thunder from the original. It's too bad because the 1933 version is an American cultural icon and Jackson's film was a bloated homage that will never replace it. The best part of this panel for me was that the grandson of the first girl being given over to Kong when Denham and company arrive in the village was sitting among us. That was very cool and lent some much needed bonafides to the discussion. He said his actress grandmother got a lot of good tables in restaurants over the years because of that! Also, I met a gentleman in line who provided me with a great link to Kong and various other models (which I'll post at the end of this article.)

The better panel of the two, by far, was the one commemorating the 50th anniversary *Famous Monsters Magazine*. Forrest Ackerman was the guest of honor, with publisher Jim Warren and makeup master Verne Langdon. Forrie's wit was sharp as a tack, even at 92 years old. It was a real pleasure to listen to him and Jim Warren tell the story of how FM started



Verne Langdon, Forrest Ackerman and Jim Warren

out as a one-shot to make a few bucks and ended up a cultural phenomenon for boys (and some girls, too)(the really cool ones, no doubt!) across the country. As a publisher/editor of my own little magazine, it was inspiring. I think of how much easier I have it than Forrie did back decades ago. We have computers and excellent graphics programs to make even a basement press mag look like a top-of-the-line publication at the touch of a button and scroll of a mouse. Forrie and Jim did it the old fashioned way—and thank them that they did because *Famous Monsters* was a joy for me when I was a kid. I would get lost every issue in the world of the Universal monsters and the Hammer horrors. Seeing Forrest Ackerman was on my list of must-do's,

where the land of fan geekdom is concerned. I'll never forget it.

There wasn't much else for the adventure fan at this year's Con. The remaining fun was running across some pretty decent costumed attendees, among them a few Indiana Jones' and a group of Steampunkers who looked fantastic. If you're unfamiliar with the



Indy and Willie a la *Temple of Doom*

Steampunk movement, don't despair that some young whippersnappers have plundered our beloved genre for some flash-in-the-pan fad in the gaming world. On the contrary, this relatively recent variation on retro-classic adventure is populated by young fans who sincerely appreciate the origins of the theme. Their influence is primarily Jules Verne, but also the likes of Edgar Rice Burroughs, a little H G Wells, and such. The care and detail they put into their costumes shows the love for adventure and imagination in times



A new generation of retro adventure fans

gone by. One of the best exhibits were the medieval fighters orders demonstrating head-on battle in full armor. They are organized in chapters throughout the US and stage battles with as many as 300 combatants at a time! No matter how minimal the media offerings, there will always be the fans, and these costumed attendees attest to the faith.



San Diego experienced some hot days during the Con, which were no fun for waiting in the long lines outside the building. But a hot day in San Diego is still better than most days anywhere else. The Gaslamp was as packed as I've



And this is a *slow* moment in The Gaslamp!



A sample from Friday's zombie horde invasion

ever seen it, including a couple of New Year's Eves I've spent there. Comic Con crowds in the Gaslamp are usually rivaled only by Halloween, with this year's Con including the horde of about two hundred zombies that ambled down 5th Street on Friday. Lacking this year was the usual amount of hot costumed babes walking around, a sign of the mainstream PC infection intensifying, unfortunately. Still, it was another year at the Con and couldn't be missed. Even a bad year at the Con is better than a good day at the dentist, I always say. I just can't be unhappy in San Diego.



These cool broads could be your neighbors!

This year's event, for me, was the most successful where business is concerned. Lost Continent Library Magazine was received well by the many professionals I spoke with. I came away with a lot of great writers and artists who will be appearing here for the next several months, including this issue. By the time it was over, I was exhausted and my shoulders ached from lugging around my bag and camera for four days. Yet, I went away more energized by this Con than any other. Once again, as always, I'm glad I went.

I'm already thinking about next year!

-- Walter Bosley,

Editor

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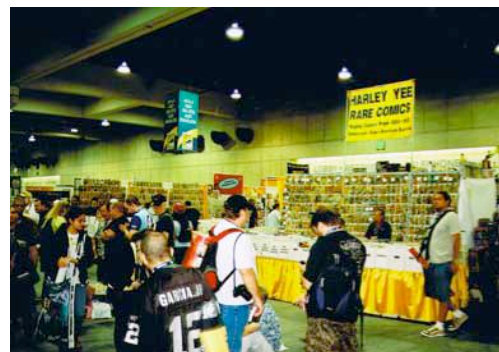
www.iconicreplicas.com



Somebody told these guys it was APE Con



Brinke Stevens, B-movie horror vixen



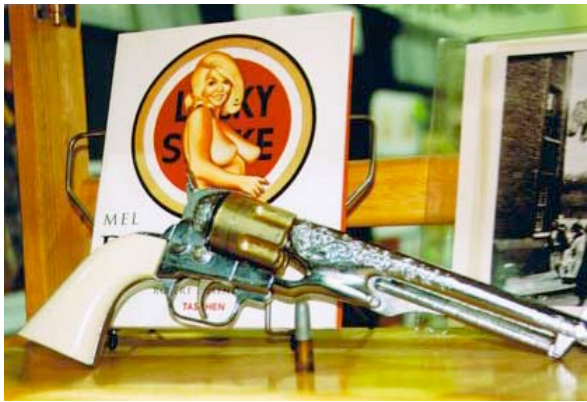
What it all started for over 30 years ago – comic books



The Felicity Bliss Ray Gun from Iconic Replicas



In the midst of it all are the artists, who make it happen



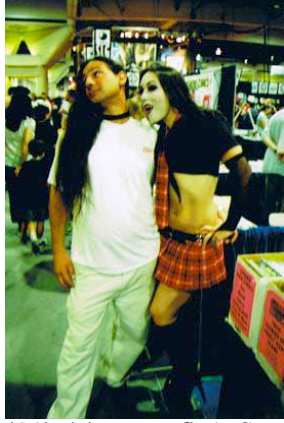
A gun from another era, at Altair-4



Ready for combat!

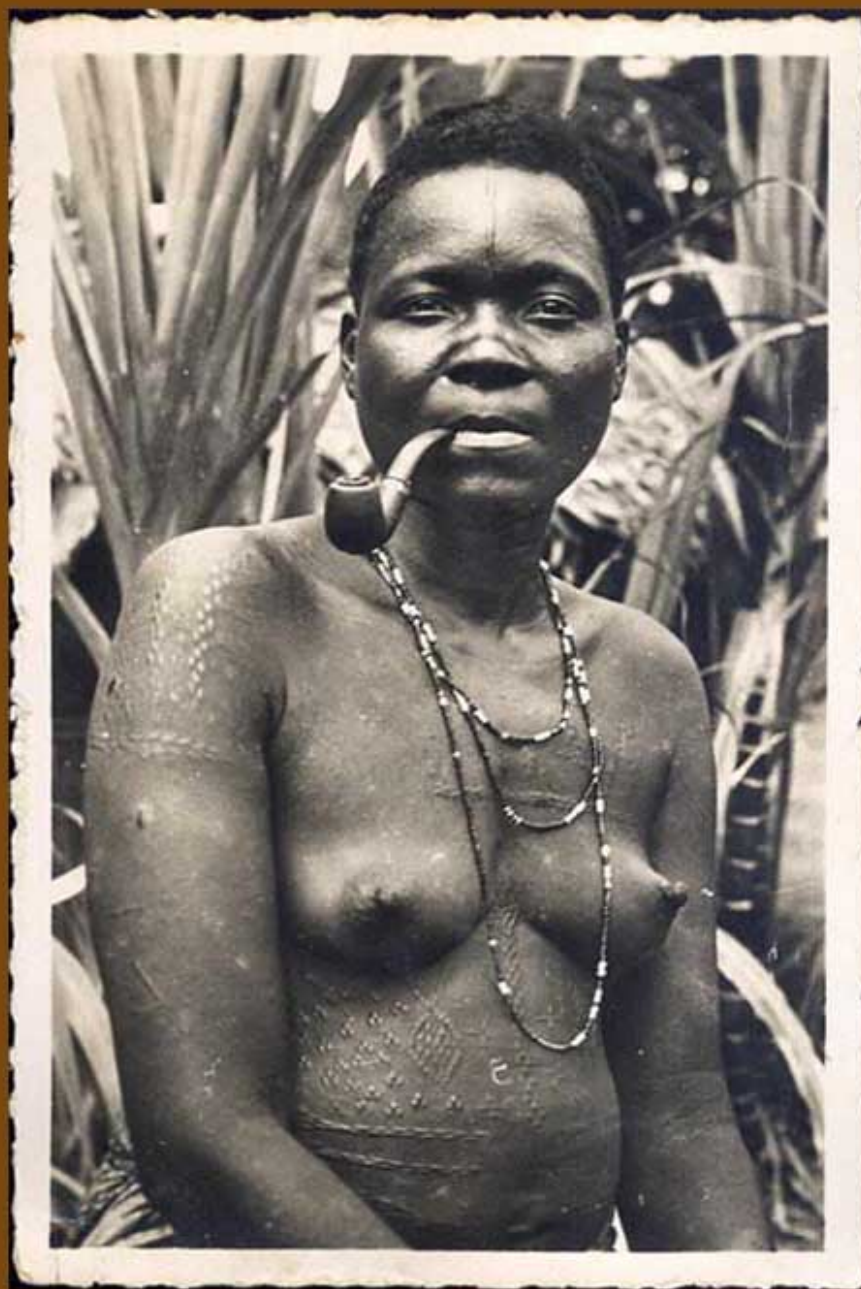


The 'Seaview' from Iconic Replicas



Real Life Adventurer Craig Guggolz encounters a Comic Con vampire.

For the urbane savage in all of us...



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Adventure for those who can take it

The Space Pulp of
EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS



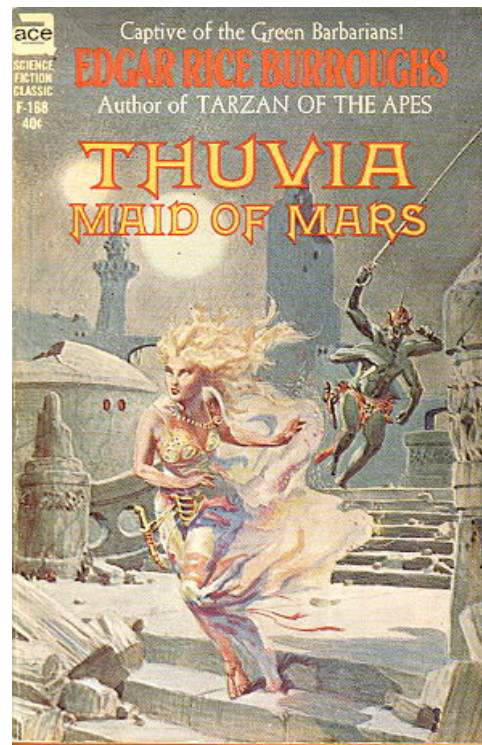
BY CHIP STONE

Most adventure fans recognize Edgar Rice Burroughs as an icon of the genre through his Tarzan stories alone, if for nothing else. But he is also known for his much-loved brand of science fiction adventure, the Martian tales being the most popular. For those who may not be familiar with Burroughs' space tales, or for readers who know them well, let's take a look at the fiction many recognize as the inspiration for the eras of pulp and golden science fiction that followed.

Burroughs was born in Chicago in 1875. Following military school, Burroughs failed the entrance exam for West Point and ended up with the legendary 7th Cavalry as an enlisted man assigned to Fort Grant when Arizona was still a territory. However, in 1897, he was diagnosed with a heart condition and was ineligible for a commission after all. Following a medical discharge, Burroughs took a number of odd jobs, including ranching in Idaho. He went to work for his father's business firm in 1899 and subsequently got married the next year, but still ended up moving around doing different jobs while providing for his family. While working as a pencil sharpener in 1911, Burroughs began writing fiction. His opinion of the pulp fiction of that time was pretty low, so he set out to do better. Burroughs' first story, *Under the Moons of Mars* was published in 1912 for which he was paid the equivalent today of over \$7,000. This motivated him to take up writing full-time. What followed was Tarzan.

But Burroughs also wrote popular science fiction fantasy stories involving Earthly adventurers transported to Venus and Mars, which he called 'Barsoom'. It is as much for these works that Burroughs is remembered by diehard fans as it is Tarzan, if not more so. In fact, Burroughs wrote *A Princess of Mars* before the legendary ape-

man came onto the scene. This novel is credited as being the first work of fiction in the 20th Century to feature a language created for it. 'Barsoomian' predates Klingonese by decades.



A Roy Krenkel cover

Burroughs' take on Mars was inspired by theories of the time, including the ideas of Percival Lowell. Barsoom was once like Earth, a wet world with continents and oceans. But the seas dried up and the former ocean bottoms became moss-covered moors surrounded by deserts, with the ruins of abandoned cities standing where once were coastlines. Only the 'Great Toonolian Marshes' and the 'Lost Sea of Korus' (at the Antarctic extreme of the red planet) remain of the mighty Martian seas. Rival city-states control the distribution of water via canals that traverse the planet, and the life-supporting atmosphere is dependent upon a single facility, though the atmosphere is becoming thin at the

time of the stories.

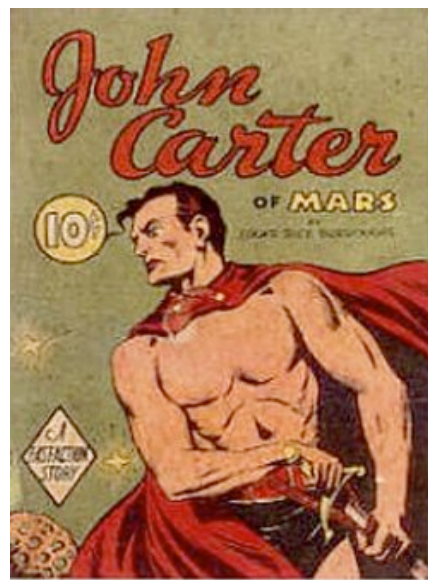
On Barsoom are several races of Martians, notably the Red who maintain the cities of Zodanga, Helium and Ptarth, and who control the canals. These Red people are the descendants of the ancient White, Yellow and Black Martians who interbred over the ages. Smatterings of these lost races still exist in far off corners of the planet, and at the poles. Red Barsoomians are essentially humans who live to be a thousand years old but are born of eggs.



But there are the Green Martians, a twelve foot tall race of beings with tusks and four arms who inhabit abandoned cities in the dead seas. The hordes of Greens torment and prey upon the humanoid Martians. There are yet other strange beings who seek to dominate the planet, among them the Kaldanes who are essentially heads and have created a humanoid race of headless bodies called Rykors, which they use as their own. There are also the unscrupulous and cowardly Kangaroo Men who have large tails and hop. The various bellicose Barsoomian races fight amongst each other with sabers and ray guns and even aircraft. The Hormads are

artificial humans created in giant laboratory vats by scientist Ras Thavas to serve as slaves, workers and soldiers. The process being flawed, Hormads tend to display monstrous deformities.

It is the hero of the stories, Captain John Carter, who has been an idol of boys for decades. Burroughs writes Carter as 'Uncle Jack', a jovial world traveler who always tells stories of his adventures. John Carter is a Civil War era military officer who carries himself tall and is the epitome of the classic



fighting man and an excellent horseman. Carter also displays the manners of a refined southern gentleman. He also never seemed to age. At the outset of war, Carter goes to Arizona to prospect for gold, which makes him wealthy. He ultimately leaves his estate to the young Burroughs. Probably the most curious behavior of Carter's witnessed by the boy Edgar is standing under the stars with his arms outstretched to the heavens.

Ultimately, over twenty years after the end of the war, Carter is found dead in a similar posture. Carter's instructions to Burroughs require that his remains not be embalmed, rather interred in an open

coffin in a tomb of Carter's own design. Carter's final instructions require that a manuscript he has left behind not be read until several years after his death. It is this manuscript that contains the story of Carter's adventures on Mars. Most intriguing is that the tomb is also equipped with a latch that can only be opened from the inside.

That is really great stuff.



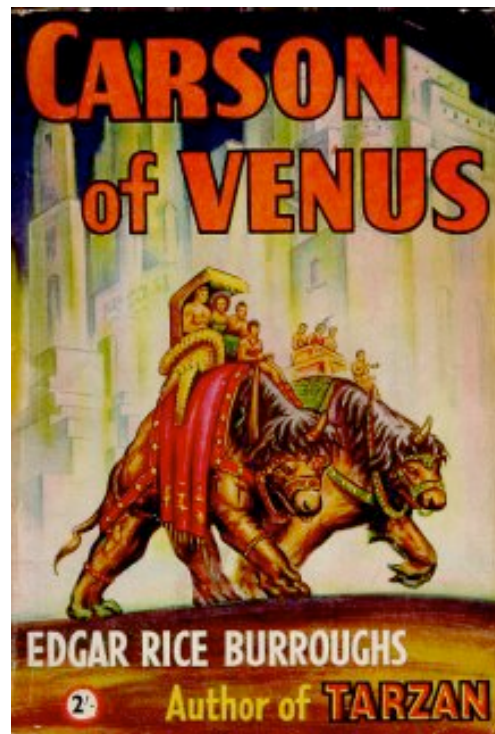
Dejah Thoris as available from Modelworks

I recall Carl Sagan once commenting on the influences of his childhood, the Carter of Mars books among them, and he admitted to many a night in his boyhood years when he'd be outside with his arms stretched up to the night sky, in hopes that he, too, could transport himself to the mysterious planet Mars.

John Carter is truly one of the great characters of the literature of Burroughs' and any other era. Of course, his beautiful mate Dejah Thoris ranks rather highly among male readers, as well. But Burroughs had more where Carter came from, thus do we also have Carson of Venus.

The Venus Series was first serialized in *Argosy*. These novels follow earthman Carson Napier's fantastic adventures after he crash-lands on Venus, called Amtor by its human-like inhabitants. Carson Napier is what you expect from a Burroughs hero, handsome and

intrepid and the ladies like him, too. Duare, another princess (like Dejah of Mars), falls in love with him, in spite of class prejudices in her world. Venus is populated by the Vepajans, refugees from an overthrown empire; thinly veiled communist Thorists; scientists who practice eugenics; the fascistic Zanis; the hideous Cloud People, and even pirates and zombies. In the course of his adventures, Carson Napier becomes a pirate and is finally made a prince.



Amtor is a lush jungle planet shielded from the sun's dangerous rays by perpetual cloud cover. It bears two continents and many islands. The vegetation is gigantic, with trees reaching into the clouds. The people are rather hostile and spread all over the place. They must deal with impassable mountains and impenetrable forests, and they do not believe they can navigate their daunting seas – yet with all this to isolate them from one another, they do all speak the same language. These humans also display an

interesting cultural spectrum that includes savages and advanced technology, such as ray guns and ships powered by nuclear energy, though they have neither radios nor aircraft of their own. Carson builds their first aircraft, of course. The world of Carson Napier's adventures is as colorful and exciting as what Carter encounters on Barsoom. Both sagas provided Burroughs with vast room for a variety of adventures that could have gone on seemingly endlessly just exploring the lost race angle the author always enjoyed.



Whatever you think of Edgar Rice Burroughs' work, you can't deny the influence it has had on generations of the genre of science fiction alone. He wasn't the first to write about adventures on other planets. John Jacob Astor, the famous wealthy American who died on the Titanic, wrote *A Journey in Other Worlds* in 1894. This novel centered upon a journey to Jupiter and Saturn and included the themes of lost civilizations found later in Burroughs' work. But Burroughs' work appears to be the first to handle

these themes with the most dramatic success.

That the tales of Carter of Mars and Carson of Venus have repeatedly enjoyed revivals over the past several decades is testimony that Burroughs achieved something more than mere pot-boilers with these works. It is obvious that these stories and their characters touch some inner chord with readers and have inspired several of those readers to create their own visions, whether they realized the Burroughs influence or not. George Lucas' adventures of Luke Skywalker in content and general essence, and the crawling head on spider legs in John Carpenter's masterpiece remake of *The Thing* each owe much to Burroughs' space epics.

The impact is lasting and will continue to be so, especially once Hollywood finally follows through. Several top filmmakers of recent years have not only expressed interest in Carter of Mars film projects, a few have actually been briefly contracted to produce one, including *Sky Captain's* Kerry Conran and *Iron Man's* John Favreau. All Burroughs fans anxiously look forward to the day of a great return of Burroughs to the screen that is not a Tarzan movie, something that will do more justice than those beloved yet flawed Pellucidar movies of the 1970s starring Doug McClure. When *The Warlord of Mars* or *The Pirates of Venus* are finally brought to the screen with a respectable budget and the latest cinematic technology, Burroughs' works will win over generations of new fans – once again. It is likely that even Burroughs detractors will be impressed.

To me, Edgar Rice Burroughs' space tales take me to a place in my imagination where an earlier era of elegance – which our times completely lack – lives on. I started

on the Pellucidar series, completely captivated by that world in the hollow of the Earth, and went on to actually read a few Tarzan books after a childhood of the ape-man in films and television. The space stories are admittedly a recent phase of the Burroughs experience for me and I don't know why I didn't start sooner. But their presence was always known, as I recall seeing them in the bookstores and was exposed to the often imitated but never replicated art of Frank Frazetta. These works capture a particular vision more vivid and textured than later treatments of space adventures that feature familiar technological hardware and focus on science, as great as the greatest of pure science fiction truly is. That is why I refer to them as space adventures for they are more H Rider Haggard and Talbot Mundy on other planets than they are Heinlein, Clarke or Niven. Not overly concerned with the joy of technology, the Burroughs stories include such marvels as they apply to the theme and plot, but the focus is on character and conflict and how those characters respond to those conflicts in the manner of a more civil time, a more resolute time. All of Burroughs' works reflect this vision, and the space adventures preserve a place in the world of science fiction for elegance, as some interpreters of Verne and Wells before him certainly appreciate.

It is too bad that Burroughs did not take the adventures of Tangor from *Beyond the Farthest Star* farther, but it was 1940 and duty called. Certainly, with this aviator who found himself transported to another planet just as a Luftwaffe round pierced his heart in a dogfight, we might have had another series worthy of the adventures of Carter and Carson.



If you have yet to read these, you are in for a great experience. Start now. I recommend you visit www.erblast.com and also Bill and Sue-On Hillman's www.erbzine.com for much more information on these great works.

If you're my age, you will wonder what took you so long. If you're a young reader, I envy the imaginative joys you will come to know as you experience Burroughs for the first time. Throw out the contemporary attitudes and artistic prejudices and you'll have a much better time. Let yourself escape. It's OK. Really, it is.

And maybe we'll run into each other one night, away from the cities, under the stars, our arms stretched upward to the heavens.

-- 2008 Chip Stone

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A THRILLING SERIES CONTINUES!



Johnny Asselberger Reviews the New Adventure Film

Just when you thought it was safe to be an archeologist again...

This is the summer for thrills and spills in ancient tombs, with the long awaited Indiana Jones movie having kicked off the summer and now the release of the latest episode of Universal's 'The Mummy', this one set in China.

'*The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*' stars Brendan Fraser once again as Rick O'Connell and Jet Li as the titular Dragon Emperor who returns after 2,000 years to continue his conquest of the world.



Jet Li as the Emperor



Li is transformed

The story takes us to ancient China, where the ruthless and power hungry emperor bullies his way to the top. He is depicted as the builder of the Great Wall, using his enemies as mortar. The world is not enough for this emperor and he inevitably seeks immortality with the assistance of Zi Yuan, a beautiful sorceress who falls in love with the emperor's right hand man sent to fetch her. They share a night or two of passion before she is whisked away to the emperor, who naturally wants her for himself once he sees her. Displeased that Zi Yuan is cold to his desires, the emperor forces her to cast an immortality spell on him under threat that he'll kill his lifelong friend whom he has realized she loves instead of him. Zi Yuan knows he intends to kill them both anyway and she casts the spell – but with a

twist. The emperor quickly learns his fate at the hands of the heartbroken sorceress and thus is he trapped in his tomb forever.

That is, until young archeologist Alex O'Connell arrives 2,000 years later to unearth the tomb. With the help of former tomb raider turned legitimate Professor Wilson, the young adult Alex (grown up since we saw him last) makes the discovery of a lifetime when he finds an army of thousand terra cotta warriors led by their emperor's chariot bearing his casket, also in clay. Meanwhile, we are treated to the humorous boredom of



Alex and the mysterious Lin in the museum

Rick and Evie's lifestyle as wealthy young retirees. There is almost a touch of the old Topper series here, with the glamorous couple not so enamored of their glamorous condition. Evie is, interestingly, now a pulp adventure mystery author (in spite of her earlier aspirations to be a serious archeologist in the previous films), and Rick is going quietly insane in his attempts to take up tamer interests that do not involve guns and horrors. of course they jump at the chance to courier a valuable relic to China, where their son has been off on his own adventure for months.

In China, we find lovable brother-in-law Jonathan running his own Shang Hai nightclub called 'Imhotep's'. The arrival of Rick and Evie foil Jonathan and Alex's pursuit

of the good life and the usual chaos ensues when betrayal results in the waking of the mummified emperor. From here we have the usual chase-the-mummy scene through the city streets, this time Shang Hai, but after that the movie takes a turn more interesting, in my opinion, than the last time the O'Connell's were in action.



Jonathan in his club



Rick back in action!

The adventure involves a devotee of an ancient path, much like the first two movies, but this time a beautiful Chinese girl with a mysterious past. Her name is Lin and she has been sent to kill the emperor with a special blade that must pierce his heart. She also possesses a self-confident and exotic presence that reaches the heart of young Alex and romance blossoms. Once the emperor is unleashed and gets his hands on the mystical object Rick and Evie carried over, the O'Connell gang is on the road to Tibet where they encounter all sorts of dangers from avalanches to Yeti, and the wonders of Shangri-La, in their pursuit to retrieve the object

and stop the evil emperor, with the help of Zi Yuan, the ancient sorceress living in the legendary Himalayan paradise.

I was not very fond of the second *Mummy* outing. It was a CGI cartoon that was blurry and annoying to me. Not a fan of children in movies (even when I was a kid), that film grated on my nerves for the two hours I spent in the theater enduring it. This third movie in the series is much better. Of course the visual effects are prevalent; it's the nature of the beast. But this time they didn't overdo it. There seemed to be a better story, and definitely a better setting, especially if you're a pulp adventure fan.

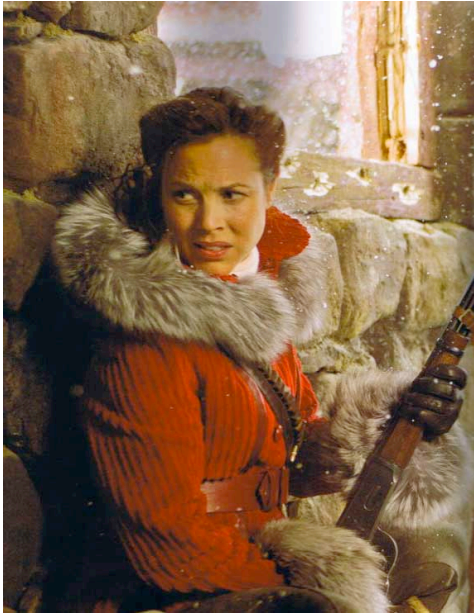


Lin calls for help

The mysterious Orient has long been a rich staple of much pulp adventure, from *Fu Manchu* to *The Shadow. Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* comes from this tradition and serves it well. It's a pleasant and fascinating step for the series to take, as evocative as the Egyptian theme from the first film. The use of the gorgon, the shape-shifting Foo creature, and the Yeti are so natural to the setting and theme that they work really well. The backdrop of China was an excellent choice for this film.

The only aspect of *Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* that troubled

me is with the casting and treatment of two characters. It's not that the actors don't do a good job. On the contrary, they all do well. However, I couldn't help feeling that Luke Ford and Brendan Fraser seem a lot more like brothers than they could ever convincingly portray father and son. Also, I love Rachel Weisz and was first introduced to her as Evie.



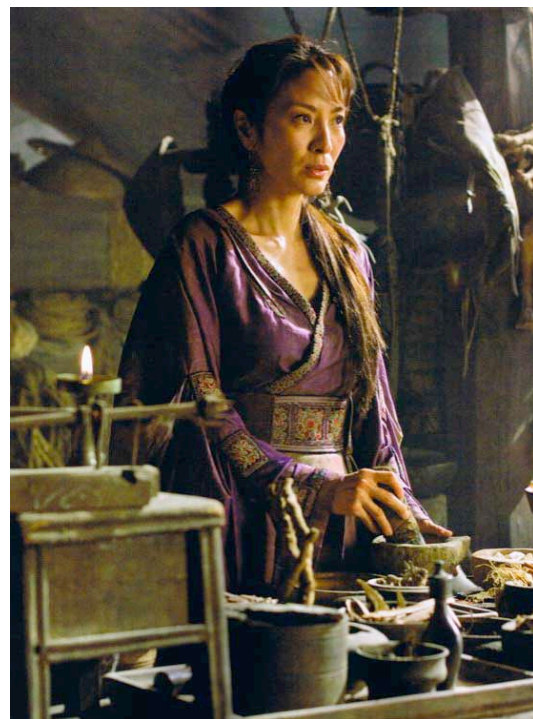
Maria Bello has shoes to fill

Weisz has a regular girl beauty and she portrayed Evie as an imperfect yet capable-when-it-counts sort of dreamer. In this movie, they opted for a more glamorous Evie as unrecognizable as Maria Bello is in this incarnation of the character. I have to say, it is noticeable enough throughout the film that we're not really seeing the Evie we know that it might have been a great idea to have had Rick widowed and the woman Maria Bello plays be a new character he falls in love with. Maria Bello is excellent in the movie and her character works very well, she's just not really Evie. Personally,

I honestly could have done without Alex, as I'm not of the generation that is constantly compelled to portray the son taking

on the old man theme (I liked my dad, never wanted to best him).

But Luke Ford does fine in the role they've written for him. And any time I get to see Michelle Yeoh in anything, I am a very happy moviegoer, indeed. She plays the sorceress Zi Yuan working her magic and making me fall for her as hard in this movie as I did for her in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Tomorrow Never Dies*. Yeoh has the perfect balance of mature wisdom and feminine sensuality to



Michelle Yeoh as Zi Yuan

bring Zi Yuan to life, and she gets to show off her martial arts chops, to boot. Jet Li is a great choice for the emperor, no question. Isabella Leong is someone I hope we see again soon, and there's no way in hell they could have done this without John Hanna.

A real side treat was the corrupt Chinese general's hot scar-faced female junior officer Choi, portrayed by Jessey Meng, a character right out of the pulps if there ever was one in this film.



The best movie Yeti yet!

If you're looking for an adventure movie for pulp fans, *Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* will satisfy. It has ancient mysticism, the alluring Orient, action and thrills, Shangri-La, dangerous airplane flights into the Himalayas, monsters, sorcery, romance and humor. For the most part, the period is depicted pretty accurately, yet I can't help but wonder how cool this movie would have been if they had taken it a step further and incorporated old cinematic style touches like screen wipes and old fashioned title cards. Homage would enhance the material and set it further apart from other fare.



Shangri-La

The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor is definitely worthy of the time and ticket expense for the classic style adventure fan. I actually enjoyed this movie on the first viewing more than I did my first viewing of the new Indiana Jones movie – but admittedly my expectations were not as high. It was nice to be pleasantly surprised.

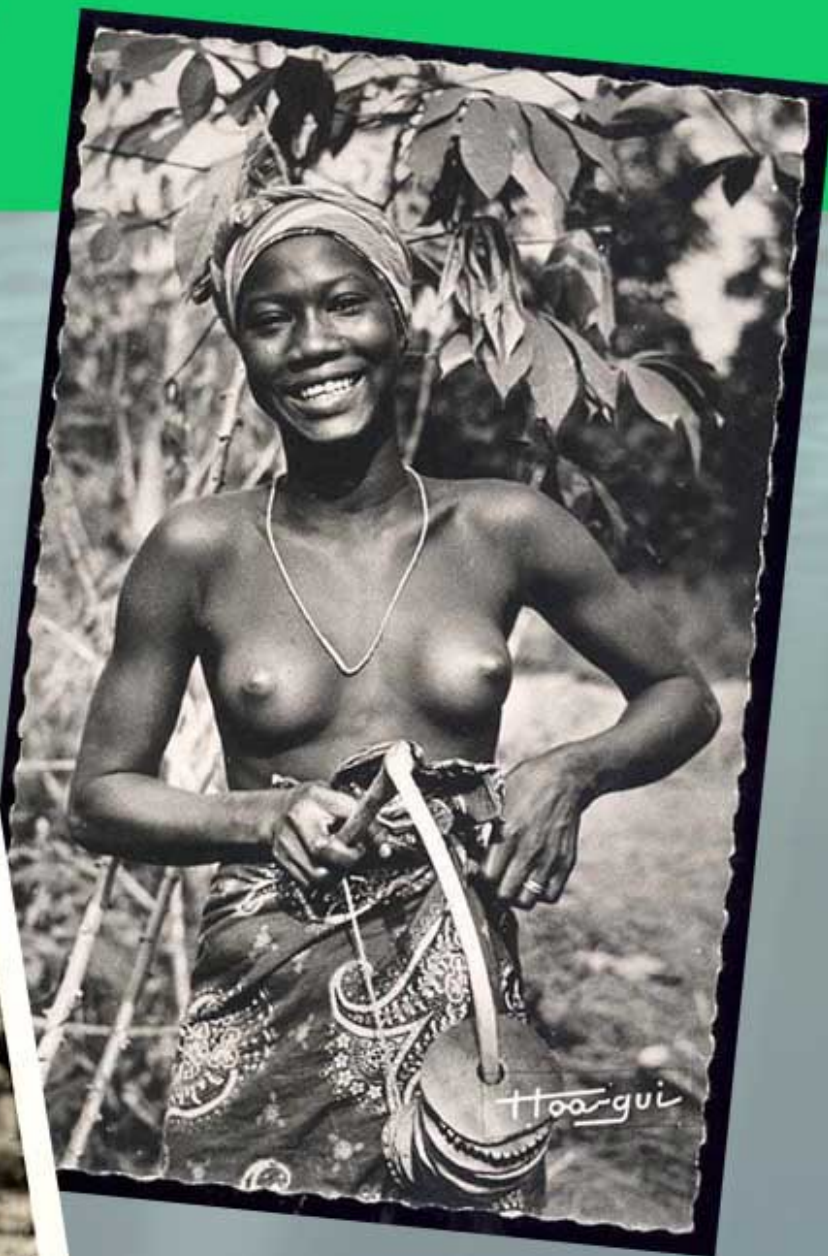


The Emperor rallies the troops

-- Johnny Asselberger

Photos courtesy of Universal Pictures

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The FIRE of ASSHURBANIPAL

Yar Ali squinted carefully down the blue barrel of his Lee-Enfield, called devoutly on Allah and sent a bullet through the brain of a flying rider.

"Allaho akbar!"

The big Afghan shouted in glee, waving his weapon above his head, "God is great! By Allah, sahib, I have sent another one of the dogs to Hell!"

His companion peered cautiously over the rim of the sand-pit they had scooped with their hands. He was a lean and wiry American, Steve Clarney by name.

"Good work, old horse," said this person. "Four left. Look--they're drawing off."

The white-robed horsemen were indeed reining away, clustering together just out of accurate rifle-range, as if in council. There had been seven when they had first swooped down on the comrades, but the fire from the two rifles in the sand-pit had been deadly.

"Look, sahib--they abandon the fray!"

Yar Ali stood up boldly and shouted taunts at the departing riders, one of whom whirled and sent a bullet that kicked up sand thirty feet in front of the pit.

"They shoot like the sons of dogs," said Yar Ali in complacent self-esteem. "By Allah, did you see that rogue plunge from his saddle as my lead went home? Up, sahib; let us run after them and cut them down!"

Paying no attention to this outrageous proposal--for he knew it was but one of the gestures Afghan nature continually demands--Steve rose, dusted off his breeches and gazing after the riders, now white specks far out on the desert, said musingly: "Those fellows ride as if they had some set purpose in mind--not a bit like men running from a licking."

"Aye," agreed Yar Ali promptly and seeing nothing inconsistent with his present attitude and recent bloodthirsty suggestion, "they ride after more of their kind--they are hawks who give up their prey not quickly. We had best move our position quickly, Steve sahib. They will come back--maybe in a few hours, maybe in a few days--it all depends on how far away lies the oasis of their tribe. But they will be back. We have guns

and lives--they want both. And behold."

The Afghan levered out the empty shell and slipped a single cartridge into the breech of his rifle.

"My last bullet, sahib."

Steve nodded. "I've got three left."

The raiders whom their bullets had knocked from the saddle had been looted by their own comrades. No use searching the bodies which lay in the sand for ammunition. Steve lifted his canteen and shook it. Not much water remained. He knew that Yar Ali had only a little more than he, though the big Afridi, bred in a barren land, had used and needed less water than did the American; although the latter, judged from a white man's standards, was hard and tough as a wolf. As Steve unscrewed the canteen cap and drank very sparingly, he mentally reviewed the chain of events that had led them to their present position.

Wanderers, soldiers of fortune, thrown together by chance and attracted to each other by mutual admiration, he and Yar Ali had wandered from India up through Turkistan and down through Persia, an oddly assorted but highly capable pair. Driven by the restless urge of inherent wanderlust, their avowed purpose--which they swore to and sometimes believed themselves--was the accumulation of some vague and undiscovered treasure, some pot of gold at the foot of some yet unborn rainbow.

Then in ancient Shiraz they had heard of the Fire of Assurbanipal. From the lips of an ancient Persian trader, who only half believed what he repeated to them, they heard the tale that he in turn had heard from the babbling lips of delirium, in his distant youth. He had been a member of a caravan, fifty years before, which, wandering far on the southern shore of the Persian Gulf trading for pearls, had followed the tale of a rare pearl far into the desert.

The pearl, rumored found by a diver and stolen by a shaykh of the interior, they did not find, but they did pick up a Turk who was dying of starvation, thirst and a bullet wound in the thigh. As, he died in delirium, he babbled a wild tale of a silent dead city of black stone set in the drifting sands of

the desert far to the westward, and of a flaming gem clutched in the bony fingers of a skeleton on an ancient throne.

He had not dared bring it away with him, because of an overpowering brooding horror that haunted the place, and thirst had driven him into the desert again, where Bedouins had pursued and wounded him. Yet he had escaped, riding hard until his horse fell under him. He died without telling how he had reached the mythical city in the first place, but the old trader thought he must have come from the northwest--a deserter from the Turkish army, making a desperate attempt to reach the Gulf.

The men of the caravan had made no attempt to plunge still further into the desert in search of the city; for, said the old trader, they believed it to be the ancient, ancient City of Evil spoken of in the Necronomicon of the mad Arab Alhazred--the city of the dead on which an ancient curse rested. Legends named it vaguely: the Arabs called it Beled-el-Djinn, the City of Devils, and the Turks, Karashehr, the Black City. And the gem was that ancient and accursed jewel belonging to a king of long ago, whom the Grecians called Sardanapalus and the Semitic peoples Assurbanipal.

Steve had been fascinated by the tale. Admitting to himself that it was doubtless one of the ten thousand cock-and-bull myths booted about the East, still there was a possibility that he and Yar Ali had stumbled onto a trace of that pot of rainbow gold for which they searched. And Yar Ali had heard hints before of a silent city of the sands; tales had followed the eastbound caravans over the high Persian uplands and across the sands of Turkistan, into the mountain country and beyond--vague tales; whispers of a black city of the djinn, deep in the hazes of a haunted desert.

So, following the trail of the legend, the companions had come from Shiraz to a village on the Arabian shore of the Persian Gulf, and there had heard more from an old man who had been a pearl-diver in his youth. The loquacity of age was on him and he told tales repeated to him by wandering tribesmen who had them in turn from the wild nomads of the deep interior; and again

Steve and Yar Ah heard of the still black city with giant beasts carved of stone, and the skeleton sultan who held the blazing gem.

And so, mentally swearing at himself for a fool, Steve had made the plunge, and Yar Ali, secure in the knowledge that all things lay on the lap of Allah, had come with him. Their scanty supply of money had been just sufficient to provide riding-camels and provisions for a bold flying invasion of the unknown. Their only chart had been the vague rumors that placed the supposed location of Kara-Shehr.

There had been days of hard travel, pushing the beasts and conserving water and food. Then, deep in the desert they invaded, they had encountered a blinding sand-wind in which they had lost the camels. After that came long miles of staggering through the sands, battered by a flaming sun, subsisting on rapidly dwindling water from their canteens, and food Yar Ali had in a pouch. No thought of finding the mythical city now. They pushed on blindly, in hope of stumbling upon a spring; they knew that behind them no oases lay within a distance they could hope to cover on foot. It was a desperate chance, but their only one.

Then white-clad hawks had swooped down on them, out of the haze of the skyline, and from a shallow and hastily scooped trench the adventurers had exchanged shots with the wild riders who circled them at top speed. The bullets of the Bedouins had skipped through their makeshift fortifications, knocking dust into their eyes and flicking bits of cloth from their garments, but by good chance neither had been hit.

Their one bit of luck, reflected Clarney, as he cursed himself for a fool. What a mad venture it had been, anyway! To think that two men could so dare the desert and live, much less wrest from its abysmal bosom the secrets of the ages! And that crazy tale of a skeleton hand gripping a flaming jewel in a dead city--bosh! What utter rot! He must have been crazy himself to credit it, the American decided with the clarity of view that suffering and danger bring.

"Well, old horse," said Steve, lifting his rifle, "let's get going. It's a toss-up if

we die of thirst or get sniped off by the desert-brothers. Anyway, we're doin' no good here."

"God gives," agreed Yar Ali cheerfully. "The sun sinks westward. Soon the coolness of night will be upon us. Perhaps we shall find water yet, sahib. Look, the terrain changes to the south."

Clarney shaded his eyes against the dying sun. Beyond a level, barren expanse of several miles width, the land did indeed become more broken; aborted hills were in evidence. The American slung his rifle over his arm and sighed.

"Heave ahead; we're food for the buzzards anyhow."

The sun sank and the moon rose, flooding the desert with weird silver light. Drifted sand glimmered in long ripples, as if a sea had suddenly been frozen into immobility. Steve, parched fiercely by a thirst he dared not fully quench, cursed beneath his breath. The desert was beautiful beneath the moon, with the beauty of a cold marble lorelei to lure men to destruction. What a mad quest! his weary brain reiterated; the Fire of Assurbanipal retreated into the mazes of unreality with each dragging step. The desert became not merely a material wasteland, but the gray mists of the lost eons, in whose depths dreamed sunken things.

Clarney stumbled and swore; was he failing already? Yar Ali swung along with the easy, tireless stride of the mountain man, and Steve set his teeth, nerving himself to greater effort. They were entering the broken country at last, and the going became harder. Shallow gullies and narrow ravines knifed the earth with wavering patterns. Most of them were nearly filled with sand, and there was no trace of water.

"This country was once oasis country," commented Yar Ali. "Allah knows how many centuries ago the sand took it, as the sand has taken so many cities in TurkiStan."

They swung on like dead men in a gray land of death.

The moon grew red and sinister as she sank, and shadowy darkness settled over the desert before they had reached a point where they could see what lay beyond the broken belt. Even the big

Afghan's feet began to drag, and Steve kept himself erect only by a savage effort of will. At last they toiled up a sort of ridge, on the southern side of which the land sloped downward.

"We rest," declared Steve. "There's no water in this hellish country. No use in goin' on for ever. My legs are stiff as gun-barrels. I couldn't take another step to save my neck. Here's a kind of stunted cliff, about as high as a man's shoulder, facing south. We'll sleep in the lee of it."

"And shall we not keep watch, Steve sahib?"

"We don't," answered Steve. "If the Arabs cut our throats while we're asleep, so much the better. We're goners anyhow."

With which optimistic observation Clarney lay down stiffly in the deep sand. But Yar Ali stood, leaning forward, straining his eyes into the elusive darkness that turned the star-flecked horizons to murky wells of shadow.

"Something lies on the skyline to the south," he muttered uneasily. "A hill? I cannot tell, or even be sure that I see anything at all."

"You're seeing mirages already," said Steve irritably. "Lie down and sleep."

And so saying Steve slumbered.

The sun in his eyes awoke him. He sat up, yawning, and his first sensation was that of thirst. He lifted his canteen and wet his lips. One drink left. Yar Ali still slept. Steve's eyes wandered over the southern horizon and he started. He kicked the recumbent Afghan.

"Hey, wake up, Ali. I reckon you weren't seeing things after all. There's your hill--and a queer-lookin' one, too."

The Afridi woke as a wild thing wakes, instantly and completely, his hand leaping to his long knife as he glared about for enemies. His gaze followed Steve's pointing fingers and his eyes widened.

"By Allah and by Allah!" he swore. "We have come into a land of djinn! That is no hill--it is a city of stone in the midst of the sands!"

Steve bounded to his feet like a steel spring released. As he gazed with bated breath, a fierce shout escaped his lips. At his feet the slope of the ridge ran

down into a wide and level expanse of sand that stretched away southward. And far away, across those sands, to his straining sight the 'hill' slowly took shape, like a mirage growing from the drifting sands.

He saw great uneven walls, massive battlements; all about crawled the sands like a living, sensate thing, drifted high about the walls, softening the rugged outlines. No wonder that at first glance the whole had appeared like a hill.

"Kara-Shehr!" Clarney exclaimed fiercely. "Beled-el-Djinn! The city of the dead! It wasn't a pipe-dream after all! We've found it--by Heaven, we've found it! Come on! Let's go!"

Yar Ali shook his head uncertainly and muttered something about evil djinn under his breath, but he followed. The sight of the ruins had swept from Steve his thirst and hunger, and the fatigue that a few hours' sleep had not fully overcome. He trudged on swiftly, oblivious to the rising heat, his eyes gleaming with the lust of the explorer. It was not altogether greed for the fabled gem that had prompted Steve Clarney to risk his life in that grim wilderness; deep in his soul lurked the age-old heritage of the white man, the urge to seek out the hidden places of the world, and that urge had been stirred to the depths by the ancient tales.

Now as they crossed the level wastes that separated the broken land from the city, they saw the shattered walls take clearer form and shape, as if they grew out of the morning sky. The city seemed built of huge blocks of black stone, but how high the walls had been there was no telling because of the sand that drifted high about their base; in many places they had fallen away and the sand hid the fragments entirely.

The sun reached her zenith and thirst intruded itself in spite of zeal and enthusiasm, but Steve fiercely mastered his suffering. His lips were parched and swollen, but he would not take that last drink until he had reached the ruined city. Yar Ali wet his lips from his own canteen and tried to share the remainder with his friend. Steve shook his head and plodded on.

In the ferocious heat of the desert afternoon they reached the ruin, and

passing through a wide breach in the crumbling wall, gazed on the dead city. Sand choked the ancient streets and lent fantastic form to huge fallen and half-hidden columns. So crumbled into decay and so covered with sand was the whole that the explorers could make out little of the original plan of the city; now it was but a waste of drifted sand and crumbling stone over which brooded, like an invisible cloud, an aura of unspeakable antiquity.

But directly in front of them ran a broad avenue, the outline of which not even the ravaging sands and winds of time had been able to efface. On either side of the wide way were ranged huge columns, not unusually tall, even allowing for the sand that hid their bases, but incredibly massive. On the top of each column stood a figure carved from solid stone--great, somber images, half human, half bestial, partaking of the brooding brutishness of the whole city. Steve cried out in amazement.

"The winged bulls of Nineveh. The bulls with men's heads! By the saints, Ali, the old tales are true! The Assyrians did build this city! The whole tale's true! They must have come here when the Babylonians destroyed Assyriawhy, this scene's a dead ringer for pictures I've seen--reconstructed scenes of old Nineveh! And look!"

He pointed down the broad street to the great building which reared at the other end, a colossal, brooding edifice whose columns and walls of solid black stone blocks defied the winds and sands of time. The drifting, obliterating sea washed about its foundations, overflowing into its doorways, but it would require a thousand years to inundate the whole structure.

"An abode of devils!" muttered Yar Ali, uneasily.

"The temple of Baal!" exclaimed Steve. "Come on!--I was afraid we'd find all the palaces and temples hidden by the sand and have to dig for the gem."

"Little good it will do us," muttered Yar Ali. "Here we die."

"I reckon so." Steve unscrewed the cap of his canteen. "Let's take our last drink. Anyway, we're safe from the Arabs. They'd never dare come here, with their superstitions. We'll drink and

then we'll die, I reckon, but first we'll find the jewel. When I pass out, I want to have it in my hand. Maybe a few centuries later some lucky son-of-a-gun will find our skeletons--and the gem. Here's to him, whoever he is!"

With which grim jest Clarney drained his canteen and Yar Ali followed suit. They had played their last ace; the rest lay on the lap of Allah.

They strode up the broad way, and Yar Ali, utterly fearless in the face of human foci, glanced nervously to tight and left, half expecting to see a horned and fantastic face leering at him from behind a column. Steve felt the somber antiquity of the place, and almost found himself fearing a rush of bronze war chariots down the forgotten streets, or to hear the sudden menacing flare of bronze trumpets. The silence in dead cities was so much more intense, he reflected, than that on the open desert.

They came to the portals of the great temple. Rows of immense columns flanked the wide doorway, which was ankle-deep in sand, and from which sagged massive bronze frameworks that had once braced mighty doors, whose polished woodwork had rotted away centuries ago. They passed into a mighty hall of misty twilight whose shadowy stone roof was upheld by columns like the trunks of forest trees. The whole effect of the architecture was one of awesome magnitude and sullen, breathtaking splendor, like a temple built by somber giants for the abode of dark gods.

Yar--Ali walked fearfully, as if he expected to awake sleeping gods, and Steve, without the Afridi's superstitions, yet felt the gloomy majesty of the place lay somber hands on his soul.

No trace of a footprint showed in the deep dust on the floor; half a century had passed since the affrighted and devilridden Turk had fled these silent halls. As for the Bedouins, it was easy to see why those superstitious sons of the desert shunned this haunted city--and haunted it was, not by actual ghosts, perhaps, but by the shadows of lost splendors.

As they trod the sands of the hall, which seemed endless, Steve pondered many questions: How did these fugitives from the wrath of frenzied rebels build

this city? How did they pass through the country of their foes--for Babylonia lay between Assyria and the Arabian desert. Yet there had been no other place for them to go; westward lay Syria and the sea, and north and east swarmed the 'dangerous Medes', those fierce Aryans whose aid had stiffened the arm of Babylon to smite her foe to the dust.

Possibly, thought Steve, Kara-Shehr--whatever its name had been in those dim days--had been built as an outpost border city before the fall of the Assyrian empire, whither survivals of that overthrow fled. At any rate it was possible that Kara-Shehr had outlasted Nineveh by some centuries--a strange, hermit city, no doubt, cut off from the rest of the world.

Surely, as Yar Ali had said, this was once fertile country, watered by oases; and doubtless in the broken country they had passed over the night before, there had been quarries that furnished the stone for the building of the city.

Then what caused its downfall? Did the encroachment of the sands and the filling up of the springs cause the people to abandon it, or was Kara-Shehr a city of silence before the sands crept over the walls? Did the downfall come from within or without? Did civil war blot out the inhabitants, or were they slaughtered by some powerful foe from the desert? Clarney shook his head in baffled chagrin. The answers to those questions were lost in the maze of forgotten ages.

"Allaho akbar!" They had traversed the great shadowy hall and at its further end they came upon a hideous black stone altar, behind which loomed an ancient god, bestial and horrific. Steve shrugged his shoulders as he recognized the monstrous aspect of the image--aye, that was Baal, on which black altar in other ages many a screaming, writhing, naked victim had offered up its naked soul. The idol embodied in its utter, abysmal and sullen bestiality the whole soul of this demoniac city. Surely, thought Steve, the builders of Nineveh and Kara-Shehr were cast in another mold from the people of today. Their art and culture were too ponderous, too grimly barren of the lighter aspects of humanity, to be wholly

human, as modern man understands humanity.

Their architecture was repellent; of high skill, yet so massive, sullen and brutish in effect as to be almost beyond the comprehension of moderns.

The adventurers passed through a narrow door which opened in the end of the hall close to the idol, and came into a series of wide, dim, dusty chambers connected by column-flanked corridors. Along these they strode in the gray ghostly light, and came at last to a wide stair, whose massive stone steps led upward and vanished in the gloom. Here Yar Ali halted.

"We have dared much, sahib," he muttered. "Is it wise to dare more?"

Steve, aquiver with eagerness, yet understood the Afghan's mind. "You mean we shouldn't go up those stairs?"

"They have an evil look. To what chambers of silence and horror may they lead? When djinn haunt deserted buildings, they lurk in the upper chambers. At any moment a demon may bite off our heads."

"We're dead men anyhow," grunted Steve. "But I tell you--you go on back through the hall and watch for the Arabs while I go upstairs."

"Watch for a wind on the horizon," responded the Afghan gloomily, shifting his rifle and loosening his long knife in its scabbard. "No Bedouin comes here. Lead on, sahib. Thou'rt mad after the manner of all Franks,--but I would not leave thee to face the djinn alone."

So the companions mounted the massive stairs, their feet sinking deep into the accumulated dust of centuries at each step. Up and up they went, to an incredible height until the depths below merged into a vague gloom.

"We walk blind to our doom, sahib," muttered Yar Ali. "Allah il allah--and Muhammad is his Prophet! Nevertheless, I feel the presence of slumbering Evil and never again shall I hear the wind blowing up the Khyber Pass."

Steve made no reply. He did not like the breathless silence that brooded over the ancient temple, nor the grisly gray light that filtered from some hidden source.

Now above them the gloom

lightened somewhat and they emerged into a vast circular chamber, grayly illumined by light that filtered in through the high, pierced ceiling. But another radiance lent itself to the illumination. A cry burst from Steve's lips, echoed by Yar Ali.

Standing on the top step of the broad stone stair, they looked directly across the broad chamber, with its dustcovered heavy tile floor and bare black stone walls. From about the center of the chamber, massive steps led up to a stone dais, and on this dais stood a marble throne. About this throne glowed and shimmered an uncanny light, and the awestruck adventurers gasped as they saw its source. On the throne slumped a human skeleton, an almost shapeless mass of moldering bones. A fleshless hand sagged outstretched upon the broad marble throne-arm, and in its grisly clasp there pulsed and throbbled like a living thing, a great crimson stone.

The Fire of Asshurbanipal! Even after they had found the lost city Steve had not really allowed himself to believe that they would find the gem, or that it even existed in reality. Yet he could not doubt the evidence of his eyes, dazzled by that evil, incredible glow. With a fierce shout he sprang across the chamber and up the steps. Yar Ali was at his heels, but when Steve would have seized the gem, the Afghan laid a hand on his arm.

"Wait!" exclaimed the big Muhammadan. "Touch it not yet, sahib! A curse lies on ancient things--and surely this is a thing triply accursed! Else why has it lain here untouched in a country of thieves for so many centuries? It is not well to disturb the possessions of the dead."

"Bosh!" snorted the American. "Superstitions! The Bedouins were scared by the tales that have come down to 'em from their ancestors. Being desert-dwellers they mistrust cities anyway, and no doubt this one had an evil reputation in its lifetime. And nobody except Bedouins have seen this place before, except that Turk, who was probably half demented with suffering.

"These bones may be those of the king mentioned in the legend--the dry

desert air preserves such things indefinitely--but I doubt it. Maybe Assyrian--most likely Arab--some beggar that got the gem and then died on that throne for some reason or other."

The Afghan scarcely heard him. He was gazing in fearful fascination at the great stone, as a hypnotized bird stares into a serpent's eye.

"Look at it, sahib!" he whispered. "What is it? No such gem as this was ever cut by mortal hands! Look how it throbs and pulses like the heart of a cobra!"

Steve was looking, and he was aware of a strange undefined feeling of uneasiness. Well versed in the knowledge of precious stones, he had never seen a stone like this. At first glance he had supposed it to be a monster ruby, as told in the legends. Now he was not sure, and he had a nervous feeling that Yar Ali was right, that this was no natural, normal gem: He could not classify the style in which it was cut, and such was the power of its lurid radiance that he found it difficult to gaze at it closely for any length of time. The whole setting was not one calculated to soothe restless nerves. The deep dust on the floor suggested an unwholesome antiquity; the gray light evoked a sense of unreality, and the heavy black walls towered grimly, hinting at hidden things.

"Let's take the stone, and go!" muttered Steve, an unaccustomed panicky dread rising in his bosom.

"Wait!" Yar Ali's eyes were blazing, and he gazed, not at the gem, but at the sullen stone walls. "We are flies in the lair of the spider! Sahib, as Allah lives, it is more than the ghosts of old fears that lurk over this city of horror! I feel the presence of peril, as I have felt it before--as I felt it in a jungle cavern where a python lurked unseen in the darkness--as I felt it in the temple of Thuggee where the hidden stranglers of Siva crouched to spring upon us--as I feel it now, tenfold!"

Steve's hair prickled. He knew that Yar Ali was a grim veteran, not to be stampeded by silly fear or senseless panic; he well remembered the incidents referred to by the Afghan, as he remembered other occasions upon which

Yar Ali's Oriental telepathic instinct had warned him of danger before that danger was seen or heard.

"What is it, Yar Ali?" he whispered.

The Afghan shook his head, his eyes filled with a weird mysterious light as he listened to the dim occult promptings of his subconsciousness.

"I know not; I know it is close to us, and that it is very ancient and very evil. I think--" Suddenly he halted and wheeled, the eery light vanishing from his eyes to be replaced by a glare of wolf-like fear and suspicion.

"Hark, sahib!" he snapped. "Ghosts or dead men mount the stair!"

Steve stiffened as the stealthy pad of soft sandals on stone reached his ear.

"By Judas, Ali!" he rapped; "something's out there--"

The ancient walls re-echoed to a chorus of wild yells as a horde of savage figures flooded the chamber. For one dazed insane instant Steve believed wildly that they were being attacked by re-embodied warriors of a vanished age; then the spiteful crack of a bullet past his ear and the acrid smell of powder told him that their foes were material enough. Clarney cursed; in their fancied security--they had been caught like rats in a trap by the pursuing Arabs.

Even as the American threw up his rifle, Yar Ali fired point-blank from the hip with deadly effect, hurled his empty rifle into the horde and went down the steps like a hurricane, his three-foot Khyber knife shimmering in his hairy hand. Into his gusto for battle went real relief that his foes were human. A bullet ripped the turban from his head, but an Arab went down with a split skull beneath the hillman's first, shearing stroke.

A tall Bedouin clapped his gun-muzzle to the Afghan's side, but before he could pull the trigger, Clarney's bullet scattered his brains. The very number of the attackers hindered their onslaught on the big Afridi, whose tigerish quickness made shooting as dangerous to themselves as to him. The bulk of them swarmed about him, striking with scimitar and rifle-stock while others charged up the steps after Steve. At that range there was no missing; the American simply thrust his rifle muzzle

into a bearded face and blasted it into a ghastly ruin. The others came on, screaming like panthers.

And now as he prepared to expend his last cartridge, Clarney saw two things in one flashing instant--a wild warrior who, with froth on his beard and a heavy scimitar uplifted, was almost upon him, and another who knelt on the floor drawing a careful bead on the plunging Yar Ali. Steve made an instant choice and fired over the shoulder of the charging swordsman, killing the rifleman--and voluntarily offering his own life for his friend's; for the scimitar was swinging at his own head. But even as the Arab swung, grunting with the force of the blow, his sandaled foot slipped on the marble steps and the curved blade, veering erratically from its arc, clashed on Steve's rifle-barrel. In an instant the American clubbed his rifle, and as the Bedouin recovered his balance and again heaved up the scimitar, Clarney struck with all his rangy power, and stock and skull shattered together.

Then a heavy ball smacked into his shoulder, sickening him with the shock.

As he staggered dizzily, a Bedouin whipped a turbancloth about his feet and jerked viciously. Clarney pitched headlong down the steps, to strike with stunning force. A gun-stock in a brown hand went up to dash out his brains, but an imperious command halted the blow.

"Slay him not, but bind him hand and foot."

As Steve struggled dazedly against many gripping hands, it seemed to him that somewhere he had heard that imperious voice before.

The American's downfall had occurred in a matter of seconds. Even as Steve's second shot had cracked, Yar Ali had half severed a raider's arm and himself received a numbing blow from a rifle-stock on his left shoulder. His sheepskin coat, worn despite the desert heat, saved his hide from half a dozen slashing knives. A rifle was discharged so close to his face that the powder burnt him fiercely, bringing a bloodthirsty yell from the maddened Afghan. As Yar Ali swung up his dripping blade the rifleman, ashy-faced, lifted his rifle

above his head in both hands to parry the downward blow, whereat the Afridi, with a yelp of ferocious exultation, shifted as a junglecat strikes and plunged his long knife into the Arab's belly. But at that instant a rifle-stock, swung with all the hearty ill-will its wielder could evoke, crashed against the giant's head, laying open the scalp and dashing him to his knees.

With the dogged and silent ferocity of his breed, Yar Ali staggered blindly up again, slashing at foes he could scarcely see, but a storm of blows battered him down again, nor did his attackers cease beating him until he lay still. They would have finished him in short order then, but for another peremptory order from their chief; whereupon they bound the senseless knife-man and flung him down alongside Steve, who was fully conscious and aware of the savage hurt of the bullet in his shoulder.

He glared up at the tall Arab who stood looking down at him.

"Well, sahib," said this one--and Steve saw he was no Bedouin--"do you not remember me?"

Steve scowled; a bullet-wound is no aid to concentration.

"You look familiar--by Judas!--you are! Nureddin El Mekru!"

"I am honored! The sahib remembers!" Nureddin salaamed mockingly. "And you remember, no doubt, the occasion on which you made me a present of--this!"

The dark eyes shadowed with bitter menace and the shaykh indicated a thin white scar on the angle of his jaw.

"I remember," snarled Clarney, whom pain and anger did not tend to make docile. "It was in Somaliland, years ago. You were in the slave-trade then. A wretch of a nigger escaped from you and took refuge with me. You walked into my camp one night in your high-handed way, started a row and in the ensuing scrap you got a butcher-knife across your face. I wish I'd cut your lousy throat."

"You had your chance," answered the Arab. "Now the tables are turned."

"I thought your stamping-ground lay west," growled Clarney; "Yemen and the Somali country."

"I quit the slave-trade long ago," answered the shaykh. "It is an outworn game. I led a band of thieves in Yemen for a time; then again I was forced to change my location. I came here with a few faithful followers, and by Allah, those wild men nearly slit my throat at first. But I overcame their suspicions, and now I lead more men than have followed me in years.

"They whom you fought off yesterday were my men--scouts I had sent out ahead. My oasis lies far to the west. We have ridden for many days, for I was on my way to this very city. When my scouts rode in and told me of two wanderers, I did not alter my course, for I had business first in Beled-el-Djinn. We rode into the city from the west and saw your tracks in the sand. We followed there, and you were blind buffalo who heard not our coming."

Steve snarled. "You wouldn't have caught us so easy, only we thought no Bedouin would dare come into Kara-Shehr."

Nureddin nodded. "But I am no Bedouin. I have traveled far and seen many lands and many races, and I have read many books. I know that fear is smoke, that the dead are dead, and that djinn and ghosts and curses are mists that the wind blows away. It was because of the tales of the red stone that I came into this forsaken desert. But it has taken months to persuade my men to ride with me here.

"But--I am here! And your presence is a delightful surprize. Doubtless you have guessed why I had you taken alive; I have more elaborate entertainment planned for you and that Pathan swine. Now--I take the Fire of Asshurbanipal and we will go."

He turned toward the dais, and one of his men, a bearded one-eyed giant, exclaimed, "Hold, my lord! Ancient evil reigned here before. The days of Muhammad! The djinn howl through these halls when the winds blow, and men have seen ghosts dancing on the walls beneath the moon. No man of mortals has dared this black city for a thousand years--save one, half a century ago, who fled shrieking.

"You have come here from Yemen; you do not know the ancient curse on this foul city, and this evil stone,

which pulses like the red heart of Satan! We have followed you here against our judgment, because you have proven yourself a strong man, and have said you hold a charm against all evil beings. You said you but wished to look on this mysterious gem, but now we see it is your intention to take it for yourself. Do not offend the djinn!"

"Nay, Nureddin, do not offend the djinn!" chorused the other Bedouins. The shaykh's own hard-bitten ruffians, standing in a compact group somewhat apart from the Bedouins, said nothing; hardened to crimes and deeds of impiety, they were less affected by the superstitions of the desert men, to whom the dread tale of the accursed city had been repeated for centuries. Steve, even while hating Nureddin with concentrated venom, realized the magnetic power of the man, the innate leadership that had enabled him to overcome thus far the fears and traditions of ages.

"The curse is laid on infidels who invade the city," answered Nureddin, "not on the Faithful. See, in this chamber have we overcome our kafar foes!"

A white-bearded desert hawk shook his head.

"The curse is more ancient than Muhammad, and recks not of race or creed. Evil men reared this black city in the dawn of the Beginnings of Days. They oppressed our ancestors of the black tents, and warred among themselves; aye, the black walls of this foul city were stained with blood, and echoed to the shouts of unholy revel and the whispers of dark intrigues.

"Thus came the stone to the city: there dwelt a magician at the court of Asshurbanipal, and the black wisdom of ages was not denied to him. To gain honor and power for himself, he dared the horrors of a nameless vast cavern in a dark, untraveled land, and from those fiendhaunted depths he brought that blazing gem, which is carved of the frozen flames of Hell! By reason of his fearful power in black magic, he put a spell on the demon which guarded the ancient gem, and so stole away the stone. And the demon slept in the cavern unknowing.

"So this magician--Xuthltan by name--dwelt in the court of the sultan

Asshurbanipal and did magic and forecast events by scanning the lurid deeps of the stone, into which no eyes but his could look unblinded. And men called the stone the Fire of Asshurbanipal, in honor of the king.

"But evil came upon the kingdom and men cried out that it was the curse of the djinn, and the sultan in great fear bade Xuthltan take the gem and cast it into the cavern from which he had taken it, lest worse ill befall them.

"Yet it was not the magician's will to give up the gem wherein he read strange secrets of pre-Adamite days, and he fled to the rebel city of Kara-Shehr, where soon civil war broke out and men strove with one another to possess the gem. Then the king who ruled the city, coveting the stone, seized the magician and put him to death by torture, and in this very room he watched him die; with the gem in his hand the king sat upon the throne--even as he has sat upon the throne--even as he has sat throughout the centuries--even as now he sits!"

The Arab's finger stabbed at the moldering bones on the marble throne, and the wild desert men blanched; even Nureddin's own scoundrels recoiled, catching their breath, but the shaykh showed no sign of perturbation.

"As Xuthltan died," continued the old Bedouin, "he cursed the stone whose magic had not saved him, and he shrieked aloud the fearful words which undid the spell he had put upon the demon in the cavern, and set the monster free. And crying out on the forgotten gods, Cthulhu and Koth and Yog-Sothoth, and all the pre-Adamite Dwellers in the black cities under the sea and the caverns of the earth, he called upon them--to take back that which was theirs, and with his dying breath pronounced doom on the false king, and that doom was that the king should sit on his throne holding in his hand the Fire of Asshurbanipal until the thunder of Judgment Day.

"Thereat the great stone cried out as a live thing cries, and the king and his soldiers saw a black cloud spinning up from the floor, and out of the cloud blew a fetid wind, and out of the wind came a grisly shape which stretched forth fearsome paws and laid them on the

king, who shriveled and died at their touch. And the soldiers fled screaming, and all the people of the city ran forth wailing into the desert, where they perished or gained through the wastes to the far oasis towns. Kara-Shehr lay silent and deserted, the haunt of the lizard and the jackal. And when some of the desert people ventured into the city they found the king dead on his throne, clutching the blazing gem, but they dared not lay hand upon it, for they knew the demon lurked near to guard it through all the ages as he lurks near even as we stand here."

The warriors shuddered involuntarily and glanced about, and Nureddin said, "Why did he not come forth when the Franks entered the chamber? Is he deaf, that the sound of the combat has not awakened him?"

"We have not touched the gem," answered the old Bedouin, "nor had the Franks molested it. Men have looked on it and lived; but no mortal may touch it and survive."

Nureddin started to speak, gazed at the stubborn, uneasy faces and realized the futility of argument. His attitude changed abruptly.

"I am master here," he snapped, dropping a hand to his holster. "I have not sweat and bled for this gem to be balked at the last by groundless fears! Stand back, all! Let any man cross me at the peril of his head!"

He faced them, his eyes blazing, and they fell back, cowed by the force of his ruthless personality. He strode boldly up the marble steps, and the Arabs caught their breath, recoiling toward the door; Yar Ali, conscious at last, groaned dismally. God! thought Steve, what a barbaric scene!--bound captives on the dust-heaped floor, wild warriors clustered about, gripping their weapons, the raw acrid scent of blood and burnt powder still fouling the air, corpses strewn in a horrid welter of blood, brains and entrails--and on the dais, the hawk-faced shaykh, oblivious to all except the evil crimson glow in the skeleton fingers that rested on the marble throne.

A tense silence gripped all as Nureddin stretched forth his hand slowly, as if hypnotized by the throbbing crimson light. And in Steve's

subconsciousness there shuddered a dim echo, as of something vast and loathsome waking suddenly from an age-long slumber. The American's eyes moved instinctively toward the grim cyclopean walls. The jewel's glow had altered strangely; it burned a deeper, darker red, angry and menacing.

"Heart of all evil," murmured the shaykh, "how many princes died for thee in the Beginnings of Happenings? Surely the blood of kings throbs in thee. The sultans and the princesses and the generals who wore thee, they are dust and are forgotten, but thou blazest with majesty undimmed, fire of the world--"

Nureddin seized the stone. A shuddery wail broke from the Arabs, cut through by a sharp inhuman cry. To Steve it seemed, horribly, that the great jewel had cried out like a living thing! The stone slipped from the shaykh's hand. Nureddin might have dropped it; to Steve it looked as though it leaped convulsively, as a live thing might leap. It rolled from the dais, bounding from step to step, with Nureddin springing after it, cursing as his clutching hand missed it. It struck the floor, veered sharply, and despite the deep dust, rolled like a revolving ball of fire toward the back wall. Nureddin was close upon it--it struck the wall--the shaykh's hand reached for it.

A scream of mortal fear ripped the tense silence. Without warning the solid wall had opened. Out of the black wall that gaped there, a tentacle shot and gripped the shaykh's body as a python girdles its victim, and jerked him headlong into the darkness. And then the wall showed blank and solid once more; only from within sounded a hideous, high-pitched, muffled screaming that chilled the blood of the listeners. Howling wordlessly, the Arabs stampeded, jammed in a battling, screeching mass in the doorway, tore through and raced madly down the wide stairs.

Steve and Yar Ali, lying helplessly, heard the frenzied clamor of their flight fade away into the distance, and gazed in dumb horror at the grim wall. The shrieks had faded into a more horrific silence. Holding their breath, they heard suddenly a sound that froze the blood in their veins--the soft sliding of metal or

stone in a groove. At the same time the hidden door began to open, and Steve caught a glimmer in the blackness that might have been the glitter of monstrous eyes. He closed his own eyes; he dared not look upon whatever horror slunk from that hideous black well. He knew that there are strains the human brain cannot stand, and every primitive instinct in his soul cried out to him that this thing was nightmare and lunacy. He sensed that Yar Ali likewise closed his eyes, and the two lay like dead men.

Clarney heard no sound, but he sensed the presence of a horrific evil too grisly for human comprehension--of an Invader from Outer Gulfs and far black reaches of cosmic being. A deadly cold pervaded the chamber, and Steve felt the glare of inhuman eyes sear through his closed lids and freeze his consciousness. If he looked, if he opened his eyes, he knew stark black madness would be his instant lot.

He felt a soul-shakingly foul breath against his face and knew that the monster was bending close above him, but he lay like a man frozen in a nightmare. He clung to one thought: neither he nor Yar Ali had touched the jewel this horror guarded.

Then he no longer smelled the foul odor, the coldness in the air grew appreciably less, and he heard again the secret door slide in its groove. The fiend was returning to its hiding-place. Not all the legions of Hell could have prevented Steve's eyes from opening a trifle. He had only a glimpse as the hidden door slid to--and that one glimpse was enough to drive all consciousness from his brain. Steve Clarney, iron-nerved adventurer, fainted for the only time in his checkered life.

How long he lay there Steve never knew, but it could not have been long, for he was roused by Yar Ali's whisper, "Lie still, sahib, a little shifting of my body and I can reach thy cords with my teeth."

Steve felt the Afghan's powerful teeth at work on his bonds, and as he lay with his face jammed into the thick dust, and his wounded shoulder began to throb agonizingly--he had forgotten it until now--he began to gather the wandering threads of his consciousness, and it all came back to him. How much,

he wondered dazedly, had been the nightmares of delirium, born from suffering and the thirst that caked his throat? The fight with the Arabs had been real--the bonds and the wounds showed that--but the grisly doom of the shaykh--the thing that had crept out of the black entrance in the wall--surely that had been a figment of delirium. Nureddin had fallen into a well or pit of some sort--Steve felt his hands were free and he rose to a sitting posture, fumbling for a pocket-knife the Arabs had overlooked. He did not look up or about the chamber as he slashed the cords that bound his ankles, and then freed Yar Ali, working awkwardly because his left arm was stiff and useless.

"Where are the Bedouins?" he asked, as the Afghan rose, lifting him to his feet.

"Allah, sahib," whispered Yar Ali, "are you mad? Have you forgotten? Let us go quickly before the djinn returns!"

"It was a nightmare," muttered Steve. "Look--the jewel is back on the throne--" His voice died out. Again that red glow throbbled about the ancient throne, reflecting from the moldering skull; again in the outstretched finger-bones pulsed the Fire of Asshurbanipal. But at the foot of the throne lay another object that had not been there before--the severed head of Nureddin el Mekru stared sightlessly up at the gray light filtering through the stone ceiling. The bloodless lips were drawn back from the teeth in a ghastly grin, the staring eyes mirrored an intolerable horror. In the thick dust of the floor three spoors showed--one of the shaykh's where he had followed the red jewel as it rolled to the wall, and above it two other sets of tracks, coming to the throne and returning to the wall--vast, shapeless tracks, as of splayed feet, taloned and gigantic, neither human nor animal.

"My God!" choked Steve. "It was true--and the Thing--the Thing I saw--"

Steve remembered the flight from that chamber as a rushing nightmare, in which he and his companion hurtled headlong down an endless stair that was a gray well of fear, raced blindly through dusty silent chambers, past the glowering idol in the mighty hall and into the blazing light of the desert sun,

where they fell slaving, fighting for breath.

Again Steve was roused by the Afridi's voice: "Sahib, sahib, in the Name of Allah the Compassionate, our luck has turned!"

Steve looked at his companion as a man might look in a trance: The big Afghan's garments were in tatters, and blood-soaked. He was stained with dust and caked with blood, and his voice was a croak. But his eyes were alight with hope and he pointed with a trembling finger.

"In the shade of yon ruined wall!" he croaked, striving to moisten his blackened lips. "Allah il allah! The horses of the men we killed! With canteens and food-pouches at the saddle-horns! Those dogs fled without halting for the steeds of their comrades!"

New life surged up into Steve's bosom and he rose, staggering.

"Out of here," he mumbled. "Out of here, quick!"

Like dying men they stumbled to the horses, tore them loose and climbed fumblingly into the saddles.

"We'll lead the spare mounts," croaked Steve, and Yar Ali nodded emphatic agreement.

"Belike we shall need them ere we sight the coast."

Though their tortured nerves screamed for the water that swung in canteens at the saddle-horns, they turned the mounts aside and, swaying in the saddle, rode like flying corpses down the long sandy street of Kara-Shehr, between the ruined palaces and the crumbling columns, crossed the fallen wall and swept out into the desert. Not once did either glance back toward that black pile of ancient horror, nor did either speak until the ruins faded into the hazy distance. Then and only then did they draw rein and ease their thirst.

"Allah il allah!" said Yar Ali piously. "Those dogs have beaten me until it is as though every bone in my body were broken. Dismount, I beg thee, sahib, and let me probe for that accursed bullet, and dress thy shoulder to the best of my meager ability."

While this was going on, Yar Ali spoke, avoiding his friend's eye, "You said, sahib, you said something about--"

about seeing? What saw ye, in Allah's name?"

A strong shudder shook the American's steely fray "You didn't look when--when the--the Thing put back the jewel in the skeleton's hand and left Nureddin's head on the dais?"

"By Allah, not I!" swore Yar Ali. "My eyes were as closed as if they had been welded together by the molten irons of Satan!"

Steve made no reply until the comrades had once more swung into the saddle and started on their long trek for the coast, which, with spare horses, food, water and weapons, they had a good chance to reach.

"I looked," the American said somberly. "I wish I had not; I know I'll dream about it for the rest of my life. I had only a glance; I couldn't describe it as a man describes an earthly thing. God help me, it wasn't earthly or sane either. Mankind isn't the first owner of the earth; there were Beings here before his coming--and now, survivals of hideously ancient epochs. Maybe spheres of alien dimensions press unseen on this material universe today. Sorcerers have called up sleeping devils before now and controlled them with magic. It is not unreasonable to suppose an Assyrian magician could invoke an elemental demon out of the earth to avenge him and guard something that must have come out of Hell in the first place."

"I'll try to tell you what I glimpsed; then we'll never speak of it again. It was gigantic and black and shadowy; it was a hulking monstrosity that walked upright like a man, but it was like a toad, too, and it was winged and tentacled. I saw only its back; if I'd seen the front of it--its face--I'd have undoubtedly lost my mind. The old Arab was right; God help us, it was the monster that Xuthltan called up out of the dark blind caverns of the earth to guard the Fire of Asshurbanipal!"

THE END

“KILLING TREE QUARTERLY”

KEITH MCCLEARY'S

Part 1: RUSTLERS!

Old Ted and Big Jim make their way through the valley, their rustled cattle moving along in relative quiet on the way to a rendezvous with their boss, Bigger Pete...





IT WAS A WEIRD OLD
FELLER TELLIN IT....

WE WAS JUST SITTIN' AT CARDS AND IT WAS REAL UNCOMFORTABLE,
CUZ THIS GEEZER ONLY HAD ONE ARM, Y'KNOW?



AND ONE EYE.

AND THE ARM WAS MADE UP FOR WITH
SOME KINDA SHINY CLAW, AN' IT WASN'T
LIKE HE WAS ALL RIGHT
WITH IT AT ALL.

HE KEPT GROANIN' AND WINGIN' EVERYTIME HE TOUCHED THE CARDS.
I COULDN'T EVEN THINK TO CHEAT, TED.



IF HE'D BEEN BLUFFIN', HE
WOULDA GOT US ALL--



JIM, IS THIS YOUR STORY?
YAMMERIN' ABOUT SOME
CRIPPLE WHO CHEATS
AT CARDS?



BUT HE DIDN'T CHEAT,
THAT'S MY POINT. HE JUST
SAT THERE, GROANIN'.

SO ONE OF US FINALLY ASKED WHAT THE THE DEAL WAS,
WITH THE ARM AND ALL.



TURNS OUT HE'S A
CALIFORNIA CATTLE
RANCHER, HEADIN'
EAST.

TURNS OUT, HE'S ON THE RUN
FROM OUTLAWS.



NEVER DID BELIEVE IN NO OUTLAWS,
M'SELF. GUNFIGHTIN', STAGE ROBBIN' --
BUNCHA HORSESHIT MEANT TO
SCARE A FELLER STRAIGHT.

'COURSE! EVERYBODY
KNOWS THAT.
BUT THIS FELLER
WAS CONVINCED.

HE SAID THERE'S THREE OF 'EM -- KILLERS FOR HIRE, HE SAYS.

AND THIS OL' BOY GOT ON
THE WRONG SIDE OF SOME
SAN FRANCISCO BIGSHOT,
AND NOW THESE KILLERS
IS AFTER HIM.

HE SAYS ANY MAN IN
FOUR COUNTIES WITH A
PRICE ON HIS HEAD BETTER
CLEAR OUT...

'CUZ THESE THREE
GOT A REPUTATION
FER GETTIN' TO A
PLACE, WIPIN' OUT
THE WANTED AND
COLLECTIN' ALL THE
BOUNTIES BEFORE
LEAVIN' AGAIN.

WELL THAT'S PURE SPITEFUL. HORSESHIT,
MORE THAN ANYTHING -- BUT A STORY LIKE
THAT COULD REALLY SPOOK A FELLER
IF HE DIDN'T HAVE 'NUFF MIND.

AHHH, HE WAS JUST AN
OLD COOT CATTLE RANCHER.
HARD TO BELIEVE HE COULD
SPOOK ANYONE.



HURM HURM HURM

YOU ALL RIGHT?
WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

I'M JUST REMEMBERIN' THE REST. WE ASKED THIS FELLER WHAT THESE KILLERS LOOKED LIKE, 'CASE WE RAN INTO 'EM. PULLIN' HIS LEG, Y'KNOW.



COULDN'T PULL HIS ARM—

AND THIS GUY
LOOKS UP
WTH THAT
ONE EYE
A'HIS...

AND HE SAYS IN THIS REAL GRUFF VOICE :



I'M BEIN' FOLLOWED BY AN
INDIAN TRACKER, A TWO-GUN HOO'ER
AND ONE SCARY ASS CHINESE.





NOW LET ME DO THE TALKIN'.
I AIN'T MET **BIGGER PETE**,
BUT HIS BOYS AIN'T FRIENDLY.

...NOW SHIT, WAS THERE A
PASSWORD OR **SUMPIN'**?
MAN, IT'S QUIET.



"I ADMIT, I FELT **BAD** FOR 'EM
RIGHT BEFOREHAND."

"THEY MUSTA BEEN THE
ONLY **FELLERS** IN THE
STATE DIDN'T **CLEAR OUT**
BEFORE Y'ALL CAME
THROUGH. NO **SENSE**
BETWEEN 'EM. THOSE
TWO."



"THEM **BOYS'D** CHEATED
EV'RY **HONEST** MAN IN
TOWN AND OWED MONEY
TO EV'RY **BAD'UN**.
SOMEBODY'D PAY
TO SEE 'EM **SNUFFED**.
THAT'S JUST YER **BASIC**
MATH, THAT IS."

"I RECKON IT WAS
LUCK KEPT 'EM
ALIVE ABOUT
A **LIFETIME** TOO
LONG, ANYHOW."

THERE WERE KILLERS OUT ON THE PRAIRIE,
AND NOT A MAN ALIVE WAS SAFE.

KEITH MCCLEARY'S
"KILLING TREE
QUARTERLY"

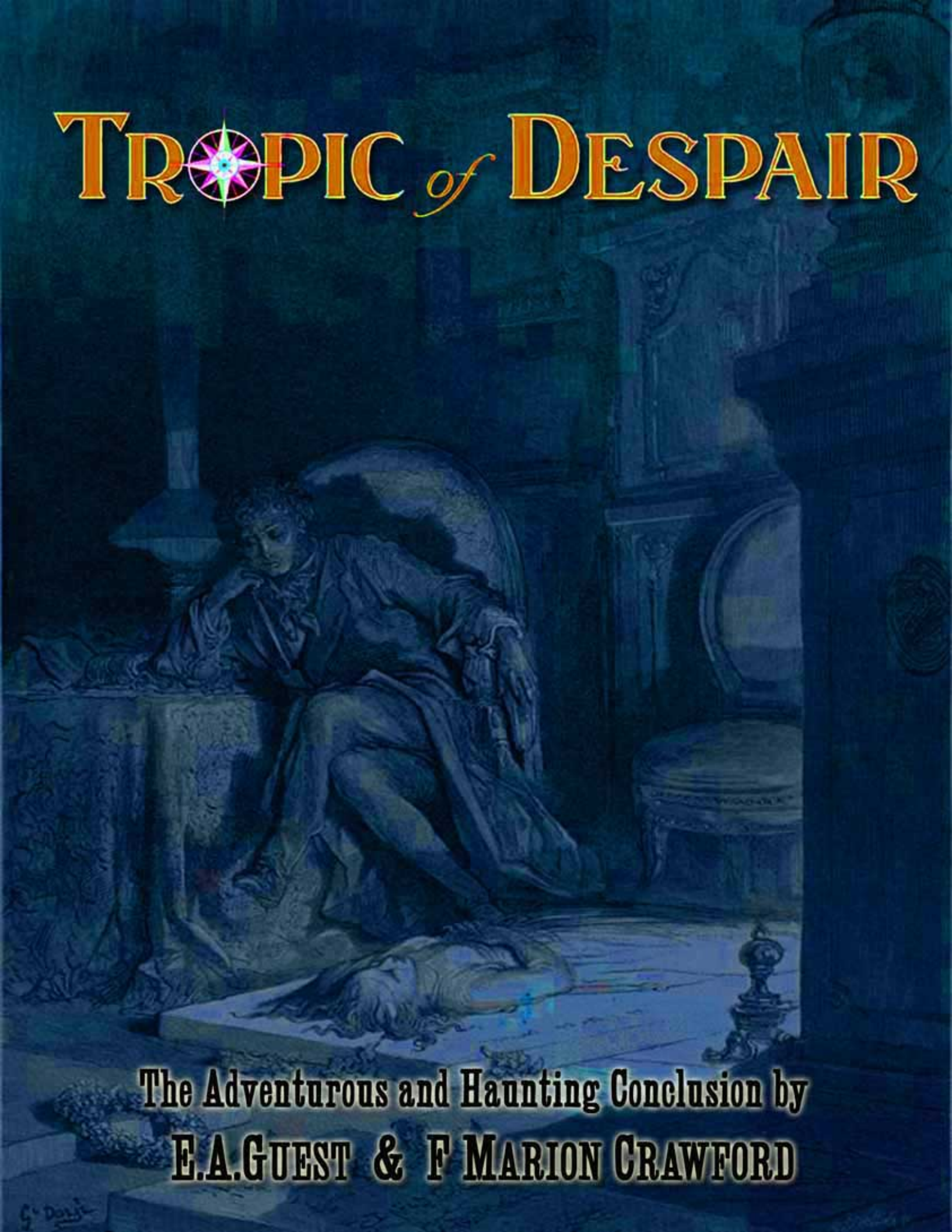
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TROPIC OF DESPAIR



The Adventurous and Haunting Conclusion by
E.A.GUEST & F MARION CRAWFORD

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Something was indeed watching us, as we trespassed through a landscape most apparently not our own. If you doubt me, pack your kit and venture away from that contrived environment man calls civilization and spend one night alone a mere hundred miles away from any human establishment. See how you feel among those for whom this world was originally intended. I was never more anxious than when Colonel Corbin and I made that hike around the mysterious mountains in the remaining daylight of the afternoon. Feeling the gaze of the watcher on my back, as the highly overcast sky grew dim with the approach of evening, I wondered how much more discomfoting the shrieking wind would be in the dark of night.

Colonel Corbin appeared less concerned, but I suspected he was as quietly attentive to the surroundings as he had been in the lair of the demons. However, this ultimately only served to heighten my fear, for it meant

he believed there was reason to be alert. To make matters worse, the last thing I wanted to hear were the next words he said, "Night's falling. We'd better make camp."

Oh Christ, how I wanted to return to the cave for the night! However, the colonel was not fond of backtracking, so we found a narrow cul-de-sac in the rocky foothills, out of view from whatever might have been watching from the plains or higher up in the mountains. Though it was a spot sheltered from the merciless treachery of the horrible winds, the shrieks and howls borne upon them were ever present. There was good fortune in the shelter of the rock walls that sheltered our fire from those winds, as the heat they captured and retained for our relative comfort. Even so, regardless of the delicious hot soup and spot of steaming tea the colonel and I prepared, I would have preferred the cave.

All through the long hellish hours of the night, the haunted wind sang its lament for the countless antediluvian dead. As we lay beneath our woolen blankets, waiting for sleep, my attention turned to the clouds obscuring all view of

the stars and dimming the light of the moon. How I wish I could see that diamond-speckled landscape of limitless space and the horned moon I knew was up there, for I might have felt we were not so alone in this horrid place. But that is the very hallmark of Patagonia, that it is cold and bleak and ruggedly damned in spite of its earthly beauty. When I eventually did drift off into sleep, it was troubled.

Morning usually brought a refreshed confidence of one's spirit.

Not here. I awoke in as worried a state as I had fallen asleep, my waking breath a sudden and deeply startled gasp. Corbin turned from the newly kindled fire, "You all right?"

I nodded affirmatively but said, "No, actually. This place There is something quite unsettling about it."

Corbin silently returned his attention to preparing coffee in the black pot, "I'll have a hot cup of confidence for you, shortly. That ought to go well with the fresh bacon and mush."

Bacon encouraged me, though cornmeal mush was not an American taste I ever took to. I quickly got up and

moved about, donning my boots and such, warming my limbs. After rolling my bedding, I gathered goat dung chips and dried weeds for the fire. Within ten minutes or so, Corbin handed me a mug of hot coffee, and I filled a bowl with steaming mush and a chunk of the heavenly scented bacon. As we ate, I inquired about various practical things, to get my mind off the howling wind. I expressed the greatest curiosity on my mind, "What exactly are we doing here?"

Corbin thought on this a moment, then, "Well, it's the actual reason I was sent on this trip. I haven't told you much, but some things will become apparent very shortly. I suppose you should know something.

"This area, Patagonia, was reported by explorers from ancient days on down to Francis Drake and Captain Cook, among others. It has always been different from the rest of this continent. Cold, old and unforgiving. The public details of this region were exotic, but the truths kept close have always been quite bothersome to some heads of state. Neither kings, nor presidents nor parliaments take too kindly to civilizations they

cannot explain. You've seen the tunnels, Roderick. They are a remnant of the secret of these parts.

"Ages back, in the misty past, someone had the wherewithal to engineer such a marvel as the subterranean network of tunnels and waterways. This entire continent bears stone cold witness that such a civilization dominated the surface of this world at one time. Something happened to them, forcing their survivors to spread across the globe. Explorers of our histories were discovering that the remnant of this great people had been pushed away from their former realms. It appeared they ended up here. Their last descendants were alive as recent as ninety years ago, according to witnesses of various seafaring expeditions. The local natives claim they still live, and that troubles the government men of both our countries."

I had a moment of clarity, "Especially your young nation."

Corbin looked at me and shrugged, "I suppose so. A young growing nation will rely more and more on mechanical advances, in the coming century. It makes sense to

learn all you can about those who mastered architecture using massive stones and electromagnetic principles. That's sort of why I'm here."

My focus edged me on, "But not the primary reason. There is a very large axe and a most intimidating saw in our complement of tools. There are no trees to fell, and I see on your belt that you carry two revolvers and several large bore gun cartridges. Since I am in the thick of all this with you, may I ask what this is for?"

Corbin took a sip of coffee then gazed wearily across the plain beyond our mountain cove. He spoke evenly, "A couple of years ago, a United States naval vessel sailed near these parts and a patrol of marines encountered the denizens of these very mountains. That patrol never returned. Nor did the search party. A fortnight later, natives told the ship's captain that human remains could be found at the southern tip of the mountains. So the captain sent another patrol overland, to this place. The patrol found the heads of the missing marines, their mouths stuffed with their own penes, and their picked-clean bones stacked neatly behind."

Oh Lord! “And you brought us here alone?”

Corbin sighed and poured more coffee, “Yep.”

I did my best to find a handle on the situation. My thoughts on two slaughtered patrols of marine soldiers did not help, “You were sent to investigate. But there is something more”

Corbin silently sipped his coffee. The wind wailed above.

“Oh my god,” I understood, “The axe and the saw! You were sent here for a trophy!”

“One head, to be exact,” Corbin clarified.

I was aghast, “Who wants this head?!”

“My president,” Corbin said calmly.

“What exactly does the president of your country intend to do with this head?”

I was truly curious.

Corbin replied with the tone of a man used to responding to people who really do not understand his work, “It will be turned over to our scientists and studied.”

This was interesting, indeed. I had an opinion, “I can’t imagine the head of a cannibal being so unique a trophy. Why, Africa and the

South Pacific islands are allegedly full of them, I hear.”

Corbin regarded me silently.

At that moment, I began to perceive a concept his silence hinted at louder than my words ever could, “Oh. There is something unique about the head you are commissioned to obtain, isn’t there? It is different somehow, thus the large axe. And the saw.” The wind cried loudly just then, as if to emphasize my point.

Corbin confirmed my suspicion, “Yeah, it’s different.”

I considered the axe and the size of the saw of sufficient length that its best application would require two men. What could possibly be so special about the cannibalistic fiends’ heads that their neck required such oversized tools for separation?

I queried further, “You say these cannibals have inhabited these lands for many ages”

Corbin nodded, “A mighty long time.”

My mental faculties were as sharp as they had been when I struggled through my final examinations at university, “That means long enough that the local natives

likely named this land based upon these unique inhabitants”

“That’s right,” Corbin was becoming amused.

“So,” I asked the next question on my mind, “Exactly what does ‘Patagonia’ mean?”

Corbin finished his coffee and took a deep breath. His gaze went skyward, to the misty snow blowing off the mountaintops. His answer chilled me, “ ‘Land of Giants’ ”

“Oh Lordy,” I replied, “You can’t really mean”

Corbin seemed not a trifle concerned by my reaction, “Giants. Drake saw them. Cook’s men, too. Others have long reported men in these parts who stand nine to twenty feet tall. Did you know there’s ruins of an ancient city in Bolivia that the Indians say was built in a night by a race of giants?”

I was unaware of such a place or legend. It all sounded like the tales of the Tuatha De Danaans told by the elder folks back home in Scotland. Wee folk and fairies. Of course, I had seen with my own eyes the gnomes in the tunnels.

“Well,” Corbin continued, “It’s a fact. But I’m down here to learn what I can

from a look around, and take some proof back home.”

“The skull of a giant,” I said the words aloud, amazed.

Corbin shrugged and grinned, “Hell, the skull, the hair, teeth, eyes, tongue and skin – the whole casaba!” He seemed positively gleeful about the whole affair. I assumed his Yankee sense of revenge on behalf of his soldier mates was an essential element to its appeal, as well.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

The wind screamed just over our heads, calling us out. I sensed Corbin would be looking to proceed on this mad hunt, and I was correct in that intuition. He went to his pack and unsheathed an American Winchester rifle of a god-awful caliber, a machete, a Bowie knife. He then provided me with a long barreled forty-five caliber Colt pistol, the machete and another Bowie knife. “I mostly expect you to stay out of the way of the fight,” he told me, “I may have you provide obstructions, but only at my commands. These weapons are to give you a fighting chance, should anything happen to me. In that

event, get your ass back to the tunnel and high-tail it to the canal. South.”

I was trying not to be overwhelmed, “Why south?”

Corbin eyed me with concern and then softened a little, “Cause that’s likely the direction your daddy went. That’s your reason for being here. Don’t let it get away from you, if we get separated.”

I understood clearly, though I hoped it would not be under that circumstance.

We exited our cozy little cul-de-sac and once more withstood the cold crying wind of the high Patagonian plain. Our goal was the southernmost extremity of the range, where the giants were said to live. As we made our way in that foreboding direction, I fought the icy breath beating against my face and watering my eyes, as I recalled something I had read in the Book of Genesis when I was a boy: *“There were giants in the earth in those days”*

You say to me now that we live in an enlightened age, and that we understand such things more confidently. Surely, you may tell me, it is a silly superstitious notion to believe there actually existed giant people. Dismiss what you

will, but continue on with my tale and learn what we found as we turned the corner at the bottom tip of the Patagonian Andes.

The wind grew ever more fierce as we stepped from east to west, its wailing force whipping what little dry grass there was, surviving as it barely did in that dry, crumbling soil. I considered what a chilled grave that soil would provide, and a shudder passed through my limbs. And then, there it was before us: the sheltered abode of those you would not believe walked the earth.

A cyclopean structure, as David Hathaway would no doubt describe it, of very large blocks of no uniform size nor shape, yet each and all fitted together so damnably perfect and lasting. Cut and dressed in unbelievably straight lines and edges equally so smooth, the grey stone blocks were astonishing. The entry of the house was trapezoidal, as were the windows adorned with wooden shutters that dropped into place when closed, as they were on our first sight of the place. The roofing was thatched with some natural materials I did not recognize, brown in color. By design, the

structure was likely intended for a single occupant -- making its size unsettling. The door alone must have been twenty feet high, the roof over twenty-five feet at its peak, and the rock chimney reached at least thirty feet into the sky at its lightly smoking top. As much as I wanted to, I could not doubt my eyes, for there it was not twenty yards from the rocky foothills.

The smoke whispering into the sky from the rock chimney raised the most concern, for it implied that the resident was at home.

From the concealment of a stand of rocks, Corbin and I watched the stone hut silently for a long moment, and then Corbin said, "All right. We draw him to high ground."

That is exactly what we did. I scaled one hundred feet to a plateau of a flat boulder overlooking the house below. Meanwhile, Corbin removed the wax seal from a metal vial he had been carrying inside his vest, and went about dripping the contents here and about between the rocks and the door of the hut, and likewise all along his climb up to meet me on the flat boulder. Looking down upon the house -- which

still appeared oversized even at a hundred feet! -- Corbin produced a flint and steel kit then labored to ignite an oily strip of cloth he had tied around a ten-pound rock. I asked, "What was in the vial?"

"Blood," he answered, "Human blood. It'll draw them out."

And draw them out it did, but a mere moment after Corbin had managed to ignite the cloth and then hurl the flaming rock down onto the thatched roof of their house. Lucky for us the flames caught quickly and spread across the dry roof, igniting the entire covering in a burning rage. I was, however, more in awe of what my eyes witnessed.

There emerged from the house a man wearing a large grey animal skin and crude leather sandals that tied over knee high fur leggings. His hair was long and dirty and black as coal. This monstrosity stood in the doorway with barely two feet of headway to spare! His dogged face was bearded and he moved his shaggy head side-to-side, sniffing undoubtedly at the scent of blood, but suddenly startled by the flames licking at him from just above the doorway. Then he called out in

a very rough voice, in a language I have never heard elsewhere or ever again, to whomever else was inside. Thus suddenly was I astonished a second time, for there appeared another shaggy dirty man of roughly same stature and appearance, except he was naked. His body was hairy and his privates jangled all about as he darted and leaped at the scent of the blood and the fire destroying the house. The two giants grumbled to each other in their rough language, both gesticulating wildly about the fire, and a rather comical sight it was to see them cackling ineffectively like two old hens. I could not suppress laughter.

But then Colonel Corbin fired a shot with his pistol and my humor dissipated instantly when the giants were suddenly looking right up at us. I exclaimed "What on God's earth?!"

Corbin holstered his pistol then reached for his rifle, "Here we go. Get up higher, into the rocks."

"What are you going to do with two of them?" I queried nervously, "Did you know there were two?"

Corbin shook his head, "Not until I saw inside the door."

His calm alarmed me. That they were inside seemed to me an opportunity spoiled, "Why didn't we just burn them while they slept?"

"They weren't sleeping," Corbin said, as he kept his eyes on the giants keeping their eyes on us. Something in his voice insinuated their activity was notable.

"What were they doing?" I admit I was curious.

Corbin chuckled, "A certain iniquitous hobby they are known for."

That was when I recalled what else Genesis said of the giants and the reason it claimed God destroyed their kind in the flood. They were the wicked offspring of fallen angels and human women. Murderous, they took to eating their victims, ultimately developing a taste for little else but human flesh. Because their females either died giving birth to their numbers or because the males ate them, they took to all manner of sodomy with each other. *Lord, I thought, was there no end of buggery in this world?!*

The Patagonian duo was climbing up toward us, thirsty for our blood and hungry for our flesh. At eighteen feet tall, the distance to us was not as far as for us, for their stride and reach made it much closer for them. Corbin sat patiently with his rifle at the ready as the shaggy giants climbed ever closer to our perch. When the two monsters were within fifty feet of us, I had my first good look at those living relics of a time most academic authorities deny ever happened. They were hideous. Wild, bloodshot dark eyes, prominent brows like ridges, oversized ears and ugly piggish noses. Their mouths were the worst, wide and armed with pointed teeth they filed with stones to make them even more terrifying. Salivations drooled forth over their lips and down their beards as they grunted in desire to crush our bones in their jaws, shred our flesh with those sinister incisors, and gulp our warm bloody mortal remains deep into their bellies. I could smell the rancid breath as they taunted us loudly in their arcane tongue. My disgust at these creatures reached an apex when the naked of the two reached down and

grabbed its sweaty member and pulled it to and fro, his giant testes jiggling freely in their hairy sack.

I decided then that I would hurl myself from this mountain, as I blew my brains out with a pistol shot before allowing these abominations to lay finger upon me.

Fortunately, Corbin spied opportunity in the genitally gesticulating giant's precarious position. The beast had shifted all his weight to his heels. With three rapidly successive and excessively loud cracks of the rifle, Corbin delivered well-placed rounds of forty-five caliber rifle shot into the monster's jiggling chestnuts, his dirty forehead, and through the hairy chest into the monster's heart.

The giant wheezed when the bullet pierced its mangy scrotum, grunted when the round popped through its skull, and briefly whined at the round entering its chest. Then, with his grip still firm on its semi-erect member, the giant stumbled backward and tumbled head over heels off the side of the mountain. It wasn't the distance of the fall that killed him, as much as it was the various collisions on the rocks during the descent. At

the bottom he lay with one leg grotesquely askew and his skull popped open like a melon; a most grisly sight. I immediately supposed that precluded any useful prize for the colonel's cause, assuming he was charged to return with a skull intact.

However, there was little time left for such considerations, for the other giant – now further enraged by his companion's demise – was steadily making his way up to avenge his dead kin. Not being a complete troglodyte, the fellow shifted his ascent around to a different approach up a decidedly less steep face where an enormous amount of snow had accumulated down from the mountaintops. The brute more quickly pursued us up the rocky surface.

Meanwhile, Corbin carefully took aim and fired four shots, three hitting their marks: leg, forearm and shoulder. This, however, did little to impede the monster, so Corbin fired three more shots. But the cretin was a swift learner, for he had begun to reduce his profile. Corbin missed all three shots. Up climbed the mad giant --- to the top.

I can honestly tell you I have seen an eighteen-foot tall man, if man he truly was. From my position, another ten feet or so beyond the giant's reach, it was an astonishing sight to see. With the big presence of an elephant, the giant pulled himself onto our plateau of safety. I could really see those teeth now—*a double row of them!*

Colonel Corbin had backed up against the face of the huge boulder holding up my position. The giant just yards before him, he called up to me, "I thought the rifle would do the job! Looks like I have one move! Get yourself back to the camp between the rocks and gather your supplies. Do not worry about me. Go south! To the bottom of the world – find your father!"

I called down, "What are you going to do?"

Corbin drew his machete in one hand and his tomahawk in the other, "Exactly what I came here to do—or die trying! Now go!"

Before I could say another word of protest, the colonel leaped off the rock face and onto the hairy chest of the giant, just below the monster's chin! With a great berserk

howl, Corbin swung and buried the machete as deeply as he could into the giant's sinewy neck. With his other hand, he brought the tomahawk's blade slicing into the other side of the brute's neck. As the monster reached up, Corbin used all his strength to pull the machete out of the flesh and bury it again – this time right into the center of the giant's throat. Blood spewed forth in a torrent, spraying Corbin like red rain. Yet this did not satisfy the colonel, for he knew his job was monumental. As the giant reached for the source of the pain, Corbin drew his knife and began sticking the mangy cretin over and over in its chin, finally causing the monster to reach for the little tenacious man clinging to its body and inflicting ruthless pain. For this foolhardy but courageous assault, the colonel would be crushed in the bastard's grip, I was certain.

I drew and fired my pistol, emptying every shot into the giant's shoulder and head, but to no avail. I knew the beast would crush Corbin in his teeth.

But I was wrong.

Before I could venture another fearful guess as to the grim fate of my brave friend,

providence assumed control. The giant stepped backwards – once, then twice, and all of a sudden, he and Colonel Corbin dropped over the edge and out of my view!

The death wail of the giant echoed off the mountains and in my ears as the horrendous creature took my friend with itself into certain death. And there followed no sound but that wretched banshee wind screaming through the rocky peaks and blowing snow into the air.

I was alone.

Hurriedly, I slid and leaped down, running to the edge with a heart full of hope. I saw only a dark gaping hole where the snow had been, and no sign of either the colonel or that bastard freak of supernature. I did not want to envision the fate of my friend, so I honored his instruction and departed the scene as swiftly and cautiously as I could, keeping a wary eye out for any other of these Patagonians who may have been lurking about for a taste of my flesh.

The screaming wind taunted me as I made my somber way back around the mountain's end, back to the cul-de-sac in the sheltering rocks where I gathered my

stashed gear. The wind laughed above my head. But I cared not, anymore. Let it mock me, I told myself. It was only the wind, but I am a man.

A man alone, true. But a man alone is mightier than all the winds of the world. That is what I learned that day from Colonel Julius Corbin.

Along my resolute path back to the tunnel cave, I wondered if the colonel was back in the arms of his beloved Esmeralda. I hoped so, for I could not imagine leading a long and treacherous life as he had in such emotionally haunting agony. Perhaps that was why he always took the perilous road, along which around every corner lurked death and thus the opportunity to reunite with the soul he missed so deeply. It reminded me of my feelings for the lass back home, that enigmatic girl who sent me off on this knight's quest; and how much I was enamored of the idea that she was even now waiting at home for my return.

Filled with youthful romantic zeal, I was rather fraught with surprise to discover the entire side of the mountain avalanched with snow. Buried somewhere was

the entrance cavern leading to the tunnel. *Good God!*

Thus was I resigned to make my journey south by overland route through the treacherous giant-haunted landscape of Patagonia.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

I trekked through the barren Patagonian wilderness with a relentless intensity of determination. Not a single hour – and there were many – of icy wind licking and slapping my face would deter my obstinate will to press ever southward. I defied the very rancor of the forgotten gods of this land bent upon subjugating me to their will – but they are lesser gods, and my will proved the stronger as day after day I marched steadily toward the bottom of the world. Through wind and rain, I slowed not a single step, and at night slept soundly, guns at my fingertips. I feared nothing but failure to reach my destination. Finally came the day when I reached the southern tip of that continent, the Land of Fires where I saw the blazing beacons maintained by the natives, themselves usurpers of this ancient forsaken territory.

My solitary journey had brought me to a rock overlooking the sea, as twilight drew upon the land.

The fog shrouding the waters just a few miles offshore hid the mysterious realm of a time forgotten – the keep of my legacy. I stared across, silently contemplating my approach and landing on the next continent I would challenge.

Antarctica!

When the antediluvians abandoned their cities, they took all signs of their presence except the cyclopean evidence of their architecture. Some believe they retreated to the ice world where no man treads, where they forbid trespass to the survivors of the deluge. Perhaps they were there now, hidden by the fog, resigned to live out the days of the lesser men on earth in frigid obscurity. Perhaps they hide there until the day comes when the present world order has run its course and former glory is renewed. Looking across the daunting misty sea of icy and tempestuous waves, I had to doubt the appeal of such a frozen hell as a retreat. I leaned toward the conclusion that the old ones had taken to the more temperate

environments of subterranea, as did my good friend David Hathaway.

I believed nothing but a terrible and lonely landscape brooded across that miserable expanse.

Why?

Because as I stood there on that rock, as doubtless many others before me had, I happened to glance down and notice the marking and names of those varied and numerous explorers who had once contemplated the same mysteries that awaited on the other side of the fog. And, thus upon further inspection, I found the name that stirred excitement in my heart – scraped onto the very rock upon which I stood:

LORD ANGUS BURNS, SCOTIA

My father *had* been here! He had stood right in this spot and eyed the very same mist-obsured, alien landscape of white ice and black rock that I would soon feel beneath my boots!

There was nowhere to go but across that cold dark water. No other place my father could have gone but through that mystery to whatever lay hidden within.

There lay his fate and there awaited my destiny. I would not wait until morning. The dawn of my life was rising with the full moon now glowing above the horizon.

Managing to find one bonfire-tending villager willing to take a share of sterling, I secured passage across that last obstacle impeding me from my legacy aboard a vessel of native construction. At my instruction, along with the inspiration bought with a few coins of the realm, I commandeered a work party out of the crew and loaded my gear swiftly. Soon, we were off, across the cold night waters.

The vessel took advantage of sails and oars and all man-power, save her skipper and myself. My concentration and the speed at which we rolled over the angry waves prevented discomfort, as I suffered nothing more than a slight yet manageable anxiety. It also helped that one of the mamas of the local crewmen provided me with a tankard of some exotic tea, and clipped small silver doodads to each of my earlobes. I was not seasick at all throughout the crossing, and very soon we were maneuvering through floating

ice as our boat neared the white shore, finally visible through the thick fog.

Certainly I have taken liberties by avoiding all the details regarding the requirements of such a crossing, but the point of my story lies not in the much-analogued trials of sea travel. For my purposes, accept that I crossed from Tierra Del Fuego to the shore of Antarctica.

My father had not likely ventured too deep into the continent. Legends say it isn't necessary in order to observe any of the wonders to be found in this land. After so many miles traveled – nay, endured – it astonished even me that my goal could be close at hand. Would there not be yet another tremendous Odyssean challenge from the gods?

I stood gazing into the mist-shrouded mountains of craggy black rock bearded with cruel white snow and ice, and I set my jaw firm. Bundled in fur-lined arctic clothing and with snowshoes strapped to my boots, I secured around my waist the rope attached to the sledge bearing my food and gear. With compass slung around my neck, and rifle strapped over my shoulder, I

took my first steps into that unforgiving mystery of all the lands of the world—the one most likely to hold the greatest secrets of the distant past until the last moment of discovery – knowing in my soul that out there possibly lay my father’s final imprint on this earth.

Onward, step by harrowing step through the hours, I trudged through the mist and ever increasingly blinding snowfall. I had merely raised a hand in farewell to the worried crew of the native boat before commencing my mad march, and did not burden myself with the memory of the woeful expressions they wore on my behalf. Yes, I was quite mad to have set off into that god-forsaken hell of the most merciless territory I have ever seen. Undeterred, I persisted – imposing my will upon my legs and charging forward, steadily through the snow.

Eventually, I had become the common image in the imagination and annals of arctic chronicles alike: dusted with snow crystals, my beard iced white, as were my eyebrows. The very image of a pilgrim on a visit to Santa Claus, only – at this extreme of the globe – it was more like a visit to that saint’s fallen

cousin. The snow blowing against me, wind howled from Satan’s own frontier, but I did not relent. I defied the belligerence that had been the very destruction of the shy Old Ones who had since turned nature’s ire into their shield. No wonder God smote them – for they took the fabric of his wrath and made that their comforter, making even Him feel defeated. Just like those airy and doomed antediluvians, I stood opposed to the worst that wind and sky and tilt of planet could muster – and I did not falter.

At last there appeared through the mists an even blacker mountain, rising from the snowy plain like a jagged stone axe-head. I knew I must be close and there was the moment I paid the penalty for convenience: feeling my knees give way, I wobbled. As the mocking wind whipped snow and hail against my cheeks, I collapsed to the ground in exhaustion. I drew in gulps of crackling cold air. No human should breathe such air and survive, but I did – barely.

Death should have borne me away in that moment, but God Almighty had other plans. As I lay there wondering what in hell could

have possessed me to venture so far from my safe, fair Scotia and the redheaded lass who waited for me, I wanted to cry. Never had I doubted this cause for a single instant since that spontaneously inspired carriage dash to the sea – but now a wave of doubt flooded my heart, crushing my errant fantasies with regret. Yes, I should have died right then—and wanted so very much to, thus escaping the abyss of despair from which I felt I could never emerge.

That is how the demons get you, you know. Within a mile's walk of your triumph, they attack the weakest spot in your armor—your resilient ability to maintain pure, simple faith.

So there I lay, wallowing in horror at my folly, being dusted over by endless snow drifting across the freezing ground, ready to give the ghost to whatever ethereal authority would have me. *Oh God, what had my foolhardy nature wrought upon my soul?*

And then came a light in the dull image of a figure out of the blowing snow and thick mist. Who could it be out here? Certainly it was the Reaper, wasting not a tick of

the cosmic clock, his scythe at the ready to sweep down and collect my miserable soul. As the figure drew closer and yet even closer, I discerned its features with more specific clarity. I realized with sudden fright that this dread spirit's bare feet did not touch the ground! I felt the textured current of terror that comes with the visit of a haint, and I was mortified stiff, unable to remove my gaze from the approaching apparition. I cried out to the heavens, "Oh God! Send this phantom away!"

But that frightful revenant floated ever nearer until I could hear the word crossing its pale lips to take flight on the chill breeze that carried to my ears, "*RODERICK!*"

Oh God! It knows my name!

"*Roderick!*" the ghost wailed again.

This is it! I cried in my mind. *The terrible end for me! My legacy at last! A cold night's death.*

"*Roderick,*" the ghost now hovered over me, but I could not look upon its face. I only saw its bare, pale feet floating a good nine inches above the snow. Only in that instant, as I expected the blade

of fate to slice through my neck, did I think one distracting thought: the voice was familiar. It spoke again, softly, "*Roderick*"

I knew that voice! It had been so long, but I knew it!

"*Roderick,*" the ghost commanded gently, "*Look at me*"

I was convinced this was designed to provide my heart a last ghastly shock. Yet, I again sensed the familiar in the voice of the spirit. Did not demons parrot the voices of loved ones to gain entry? Who was this? Who was this spirit that taunted my heart with the sweet voice of the woman? Who was this demon that floated inches from my face, wearing the pale delicate feet of a lady? Who was this?

Who?!

"*Look and see,*" the ghost responded to my thought!

So, in what I believed was my last gut-wrenching moment of life, I did as commanded, and I looked upon the face of the haint.

As if the sun had burned through the fog and the ice crystals and the snow, and as if God reached down with a finger and touched my pitiful existence in a singularly

glorious instant, all fear drained from me. All my woes fled and my heart was drained of despair and wonder poured into it, and there were no more tears.

"Mother!"

Smiling down upon me was that dear woman, alight with the essence of the heavens. Her pale countenance drew color and she suddenly appeared as vibrant as I had remembered her before the vile sickness that dragged her slowly to her grave. A face I had not seen since I was a little boy who watched his mum die—until that wretched aunt revealed herself-- and there it smiled at me in this last moment of my own life. "Have you come for my soul?"

She grinned, "*Heavens no, lad! You are not going to die here. It isn't your time. You have many years before you.*"

That was a relief, as you could imagine. "I do?"

"*I haven't much time, my son,*" her expression was serious now, "*You must get to your feet and move forward. Now, laddie, to your feet!*"

I conjured the strength, first in my mind, and forced it through my trunk and then my limbs. Through sheer will, I pushed against the ground, up

onto my knees, and then I stood up on shaky legs.

"Come, Roddy!"

Forcing my legs forward, I stepped into the snowy maelstrom, led by the vision of my spectral mother. I thought of all I had been through with Corbin and David Hathaway and Sissyfuss, and I thought of Trsae and the red-haired lass, and even Nana Judith. I realized I could not give up just yet, and I let my mother's words beckon me onward, "Come, Roddy! If you hope to claim your legacy and return to the woman who is truly yours to love, you must keep moving!"

Each step was a struggle, the ice cutting my cold skin, the whipping wind wailing all around—yet each step made the next all the more easy. I forged on through knee-deep snow, following the lead of my mother's ghostly visage, until she stopped and bade me goodbye with nary a whisper. The look in her eyes I shall never forget. It was the last time I saw her, as she faded away.

Reaching out in desperate hope, I noticed that some other image began to appear, this one solid in our

sense of existence. My mother's spirit had led me to something I could very well touch—and I knew instantly what it was.

There in the snow, reclined against an icy rock jutting out from the ground were the ghastly remains of a man: waxen lips stretched unnaturally back from a skullish grin of blackened gums and bleached teeth, nose rotted away, and an odd pair of spectacles covering his eyes.

My father!

At last, I had found him-- the man who disappeared when I was barely out of the nursery; the man who was my daddy, and who had left me of comfortably independent means. This was the man who had given me an adventure with which to impress my ladylove. Reduced to a frozen carcass, he was a silent monument to all who might set a foolhardy foot on the shore of this forsaken land. Here he lay after a very lonely death so far away from the world he knew, so far from those who remembered him. I wondered why it was not his spirit that appeared to me, but I would never have an answer. Dropping to my knees, my sobbing eyes icing shut, I fell

into the snow face down. I would have slipped into a sleepy death, had I not forced my eyes open one last time and noticed the position of my father's yellowed, dead hand.

His hand protruded from the snow and then it was I realized his arm was outstretched beneath the white powder, as if he were pointing. A new energy surged through me and I mustered the determination to dig through nine inches of icy snow until I found what his posture indicated was there.

My father's rucksack – some feet away to where he had flung it in whatever mood of desperation preceded his death, thus the appearance of his guiding hand. I freed the rucksack from its crystal bonds and found it to be exceedingly heavy. Dragging it nearer, I loosened the straps and pulled the flap open for a look inside at what had been so precious in my father's last moment of life that he would not let it go even to save his own life.

I must say the inventory was quite astonishing. Devoid of any foodstuff, medical kit, orienteering devices or any of the items required on perilous

voyages, the bag was filled to the brim with only one thing.

Gold!

Nuggets and lumps and rocks of pure solid gold! A fortune had I not had one already. I understood the irony of my fruitless final predicament, for even so much of the stuff kingdoms had been fought over for ages still did not save my father from his death. Nature's cruel joke, it was. Gaining my composure, my curiosity ventured to the odd spectacles my father's corpse still wore. I pulled them from his ears and face – revealing eyelids reduced to nothing, seeing his wide open stare of horror in the eyeballs that still remained. It was difficult to look upon without being startled.

The lenses of the spectacles were perfectly round and very thick, and I wondered just how bad my father's eyesight had become. As a person is wont to do, I put the spectacles up to my own eyes to see how strong they were.

The veil was lifted!

You might find this beyond your limit of acceptance, but the spectacles were not simply the optical sort. Their purpose was, indeed, vision, but not to compensate

for aging eyes. I put them on and adjusted them to my comfort, and something truly wondrous happened. It was as though I saw glowing lines of energy beaming up from cracks in the snow, naturally meandering in veins of golden light!

I realized what I was seeing. It explained the rucksack.

The spectacles gave one sight of all gold veins in the area under one's feet! I cannot explain how, but gold is precisely what the spectacles revealed. I knew not where my father had come by them, or the history of their manufacture, but I suspect they were a product of some forgotten craftsmen – as the tunnels and the canals had been dug by master builders of another age more fantastic than our own, so are the spectacles product of a technology so far advanced beyond us as to be alien to our understanding. Yet, they were of human ingenuity for the purpose of our usage. I would come to learn much about the true history of this world through my ownership of the spectacles.

But that is another story.

So there I was, alone at the tempestuous bottom of the world with a bag full of gold and the means by which to refill it endlessly. Yet, I was stranded in a blizzard with food and water lost under the snow, certain to die right here beside my father's corpse. It was the cruel sort of humor the lesser gods enjoy so much at our expense, this irony that rattled my heart with dread anxiety. Accepting that not even my desire to return to the red-haired lass, nor her faithfulness to my return, would be of any relief from this fate, I considered for a moment the pistol on my belt.

As hope faded from an ember to a tiny dying spark, and I began to despair at what insanity might encroach upon me in my final hours, there emerged from the thick white mist that whom I did not expect but would never forget for the remainder of my days:
Colonel Julius Corbin!

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Corbin traveled swiftly over the icy snow, drawn on a sled by dogs, cracking whip over them with the self-confidence of an Arctic

esquimeaux. I could not believe it, but I did; for this was the one man I ever knew who could have survived the battle with the awful giant and the potentially fatal fall from the mountain ledge—and then cross the unforgiving Antarctic sea and find me in a blizzard!

“Roderick!” Corbin called out, as the dogs drew to a tail-wagging stop, “Are you all right?”

Was I all right? Now I was!

Corbin stepped off the sledge and ran over to greet me with a helping hand to lift me to my feet, “You’re not hurt?”

I was relieved beyond description, “I’m fine. My supplies are buried somewhere. Rather hungry, actually”

Corbin assured me he had all we would need, and then, “We’ll have to dig in for the night. I have oilskin canvas for shelter. We’ll dig in about seven feet and stretch it overhead. That and the furs will make it a fine warm night.” Ever ready, Corbin had the plan and the means, and together we rapidly constructed a surprisingly comfortable shelter—complete with fur blankets, lanterns and a small fire. We consumed a

large amount of broth and fine green tea Corbin had obtained from a China trader, and as I watched the wisp of smoke from the fire glide upward and out through the opening in the fold of the tarp, we brought each other up to date since the day of our parting.

“I thought you were gone for sure, after that fall,” I confessed, “Did you get your trophy?”

Corbin had brought a very large canvas bag into the shelter and patted it gently, “Complete with double row of teeth—and eyeballs. Want to see?”

I took his word on it.

When it came my turn, I told him about everything but the spectacles. I suppose I could have shared that detail with him, for he is a man of honor. But I believe my father intended my legacy to be my own, so I said nothing of the magical lenses. I finished the night, drifting off to sleep, warm and safe, and with hope for my future days.

Thus rescued from most certain death by the most courageous man I have ever known, I woke the next morning with a gladness of heart that not even the obstinate storm could

discourage. We packed our gear and were soon off on the sled, working our way north, to the shore where the native boat waited. We returned to the South American continent where I prepared my treasure for careful transport home—this time via a comfortable cabin aboard a somewhat luxuriant vessel more conducive to tourism. Corbin would accompany me as far as Rio de Janeiro.

During the cruise northward along the Argentine and then Brazilian coasts, I treated the colonel to fine cuisine, most excellent of vintage wines aboard, and the very best cigars. I was pleasantly surprised to discover the scotch on hand to be equally fitting. Corbin stayed in a cabin as well appointed as my own. It was a welcome improvement to bathe and shave every day, and the lazy schedule afforded me the opportunity to see yet another dimension of my good friend. His sophisticate personality was charming to the ladies in the extreme, yet won over the men, as well. By the afternoon we sailed into Rio, several ladies aboard were enamored of him, and as many men had found a new personality to

emulate. When we shook hands and embraced in farewell, I felt truly saddened at our parting, for there are few men like Julius Corbin. I watched him walk away from the dock, toward the city, his precious trophy securely sealed in a wooden barrel (contents buried in wax) on a cart pulled by a strong boy he paid a few coins.

And then he was gone.

I wonder how long it took him to realize how much heavier was his rucksack, to which I had added as many gold nuggets as I could fit.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

I suppose parting from friends in adventure brings to the forefront of the mind the very reason the adventure starts in the first place. There was naught for me to do but return home a changed man. Suddenly quite filled with anxiety to see the familiar old estate, I was hell-bent upon returning to see again the lovely face of the warm-hearted lass who waited for me.

For that singular reason, the remainder of my journey could not have passed swiftly enough for me. The ship continued north to Caracas, where it took on a few more passengers, as well as the supplies and coal necessary for the Atlantic crossing. I spent much of the days on the decks, contemplating how damned eternal was the sea. Wide and seemingly endless, it was what it was through all the days of all the lives of men, and would be so until God Almighty decided otherwise. To this day, whenever I wish to remind myself of the eternity of my soul, I go to the sea. The antiquity of her wisdom revives me and the woes that bring me to her shores are washed away, and I laugh.

Many troubles in my soul were assuredly washed away by that return crossing. The serenity in my heart, no matter how temporary, gave me the clear mind to let myself dream of what awaited me at home in Scotia, and the rest of my days I would spend with my sweetest red-haired lass. For several days, before we made port in Cadiz, I thought of nothing else but getting to know my bonnie girl, in the

way as friend and husband. Those daydreams were no match for the actualities that were to unfold.

Upon arrival in Cadiz, my belongings were transferred from the ship to a private carriage, under my constant supervision. I appreciated the careful command the driver took to ensure a smooth ride as I relaxed on the finest of leather couching I shared with no one. When we shortly arrived at the train station, again under my personal scrutiny were my few trunks transferred to the cabin I had obtained for the long ride to Amsterdam.

The train was elegantly appointed and I need not have left my cabin for anything, however I sought the company of others and thus groomed for dinner. I suppose you may expect that I encountered that blue-eyed lady with the owl feather hat, but I must admit the dinner car provided no such *dramatis personae*. There were merely other travelers of obscure title or minor fortune who enjoyed my carefully edited discourse on adventures in the Amazon jungle. So it was, it appeared to me, that I had finally become what others

might wish to be—and this struck me as truly humorous!

It also occurred to me that I no longer feared the shadows of my unlucky childhood, especially that Old Woman of the Water—for look at the oceanic journeys I had made! That old fey spirit paled in comparison to what I had seen and survived. My trusty Nana Judith would be proud.

The train lumbered on eastward into France, where we took on water and supplies, exchanged a few faces, and turned north to Belgium. Finally, we rolled onward into Amsterdam.

As I contemplated transfer of my belongings to the channel boat, patting my vest pocket containing the hardened case that concealed the amazing spectacles, I began to feel an increase in the excited anxiety to return home to my lass. It seemed that no matter what feminine wiles had availed to me in my absence from home, the girl who possessed my heart was that fair-skinned, wide-eyed, red-haired young daughter of Scotia whom I knew waited for my return. The greatest adventure would be the rest of my days living with her and

the children we would share. I had to get to her!

The desire to arrive home was so strong, I barely remember the channel crossing – other than it was typically cold and damp—and recall even less details of the landing and transfer of baggage to the privately hired train coach. Travel, as I learned, is much the often transfer of baggage from conveyance to the next. I became beside myself with impatience on the train to Edinborough, and was far too preoccupied with reaching the estate to properly greet my old carriage driver when he met me at the home station. I did make it up to him later over a fine dinner and a good stout.

Finally, my carriage rolled down the path to my familiar mansion. The place looked well tended and was lit with a welcome glow of candles in every front window. The wheels had just skid to a stop when I leaped out, ordering a horse brought to me immediately. I merely nodded to the wide-eyed servants who lined up to greet the unexpected returning lord of the manor.

Nana Judith glared at me in some cross manner, but I could not stop moving about,

issuing orders regarding my baggage, so she could not get in a word to me. By the faces of the domestics, you would have thought I was not expected to return alive. Their expressions were of glassy-eyed hesitation as if they were not quite certain it was I who had finally returned. Rather melodramatic, I thought in that moment, for they had even dressed in their Sabbath finery for the event, black ties and shawls. I promised them all that we would sup together upon my return from a most important errand to the neighboring estate.

They looked to Nana Judith with tentative expressions, and before she could say anything to delay my hasty departure, I ordered the kitchen staff, "Go on! Prepare the finest food in the pantry for a holiday feast! Enough for us all!" And then I was up in the saddle and spurring my horse down the gravel path, riding off to claim my prize.

My thoughts were so focused upon seeing my ladylove that I shan't bore you with the details of a ride I vaguely recall myself. What you must know is the sudden pounding in my heart and the

uneasy feeling in my stomach as my horse charged down the path to the big house of the neighboring estate and found it illuminated, several carriages filling the front drive. I reined my steed and leaped from the saddle just as Scoggins, the main domestic, bedecked in his black finery, appeared from within the entry. "Lord Burns," he said, "So good that you returned well, however—"

I stopped him, "Is there a party, Scoggins? Where is everyone?"

Scoggins barely managed his response, "In the chapel, Sir, but—"

I gave him no opportunity to finish before I was off around the mansion, to the back where the family chapel was alight with candles and lanterns, and I could see the heads of all the attendees of whatever festivity had gathered them.

What sort of party would gather them in the family chapel? I wondered as I approached. Then I noticed the beautiful white blossoms wound around the railings of the steps before the arched doorway. The worst thought crossed my mind and frightened my soul. Could it be?

Was my lovely lass
about to wed another man?

Had she given up on
me in my absence and
acquiesced her hand to a less
foolhardy man?

I had to stop her!
Despite the gathered friends
and family, I had to stop her
from making the biggest
mistake of both our lives! I had
dreamed of her for so long and
returned from near fatal
encounters with revenant
spirits and treacherous villainy
and monstrous giants and all
the forces of nature! I had
returned to be with her!

Up the steps and
through the doors I charged,
running down the silk-laden
aisle to the surprise of all those
gathered for the event. I would
stand before them all, at the
altar of God, and declare my
claim to her, I would! She was
to be *my* bride!

And so I charged like a
lion to that altar, astonishing
all including the minister who
had paused mid-speech the
moment the doors had
slammed open. I commanded
the nuptials cease immediately,
“No!”

That was when I
looked upon my fair lass for
the first time in months.

She was so beautiful.
Her white gown of satin was
dressed out with pearls and
ribbons of silk. She held a
single white lily in her delicate
pale fingers. Her pretty lips
were reddened and her cheeks
dusted lightly pink with blush.
There could never have been a
more lovely bride than she,
even as she lay without shoes
on her pretty feet and her
splendid red hair spilled about
the silken white pillow under
her sleeping head, her eyes
closed in eternal repose under
the leaded crystal of her coffin.

Beautiful, though she
was, she would be no man’s
bride.

All my dreams and I
collapsed on weakened knees
and I begged God to let me
drown in the river of tears that
burst from my eyes in that
instant. If I could have died
right then, I could have caught
up with her on the path to
eternity. What good was my
life to be without her?
Certainly nothing. Kneeling
there, my arms thrown across
her exquisitely etched
sarcophagus, I wept.

And, as all those grim,
black-adorned attendees wept
with me, one thought
wrenched my soul: My mother

did not say that my true love was dead.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

In the first few days that followed my return and heart-shattering discovery, I did not leave my bed. A week passed before I felt strong enough emotionally to rise upon my feet and venture out from the dark room. The servants had done very well in quietly tending to my needs. Upon seeing that I was up and about, they smiled kindly and ignored my unkempt appearance. My first attempt at mundane life was a walk to the kitchen for a silent breakfast, after which I spent the day in grim contemplation on a chair in the study. I took my sullen dinner alone in the dining room. This became my routine for almost another week.

A month following my return and I was sadly back in touch with the melancholy that not even my favored garden could remedy as it had before. I suppose it was because I wished so hard to see her ghost walking amid the fountain waters at midnight. Oddly, my

maudlin state felt laced with a sense that an end was coming to my grief. Perhaps this was the prize to be gained from adventure, that my emotional constitution had been tempered into something more resilient than it had been before. One night I simply let go of the midnight garden and found my mind focused on the mementos and trophies of that perilous journey.

For a few more weeks was I able to divide my thoughts more equally between my saddened loneliness and the soothing distraction of fond memory. While in such dark spirits, I concluded that life was merely one painful loss after another, with occasional misleading moments of hope and exhilaration in between. I lulled myself to sleep every night with fine scotch, in the shadowy realm of the study.

Boom!

There came the miserably rainy night when, as I sat staring into visions the embers of the fire revealed to me, there erupted a frantic pounding on the main door of the mansion. I heard it only because the study door was ajar. At first, I thought I was mistaken, that I had merely heard far off thunder

heralding an approaching lightning storm.

BoomBoom Boom!

But there it was again--
A frantic pounding on the door!

With a deep sigh, I got to my feet and lazy legs carried me from the room into the grand foyer, where I met my very old butler in his very old nightshirt and bid him to return to slumber, "I'll see to it."

The old man nodded and turned back down the hall, as I dragged my heavy scotch-sodden limbs toward the massive door of wood and steel. Perhaps God had heard my prayers after all and this was the black angel of death here to collect my useless and timeworn spirit. My candlelight played dancing shadows as I moved, providing a most eerie effect on the framed visages of my ancestors, and the pounding erupted again as I came within not more than three steps from the entry.

Boom, Boom, Boom!

"All right!" I called out, "I'm on my way! In a hurry are we?"

I turned the large key-bolt, released the latches and slid back the bar. Then I gripped the great iron handle

and pulled the carved oak door open. "What the devil--?"

She rushed inside from the pelting rain and threw her hands around my shoulders beseechingly. Instantly, I recognized the raven black hair now glistening wet, the beguiling beauty of the dark featured face, and the enchanting green eyes presently wide with terror and glassed heavily with fretful tears.

Trsae!

I could feel her limbs trembling, and her voice was broken, "Oh, Roderick, please! You must help me! I have no one else—please! He follows me! You're all I have now!"

Closing the big door and sliding the bar into place, I tried to calm her, "Yes, you are safe. Calm down, Trsae. Tell me what is the matter? Who follows?"

That was when I noticed her condition. Under the dark green cloak, Trsae was swollen many months with child. I latched and locked the door, then escorted Trsae to the study, seating her in a chair before the fireplace. As I rebuilt the fire to a comforting roar, lightning flashed outside and thunder rolled and cracked overhead the roof. I did my

best to assure her, "You're safe here. Tell me What has you so upset? How did you get here?"

A couple of gulps of brandy settled Trsae enough to sketchily bring me up to details on the months since our night in that jungle. She related a falling-out with Otto that forced her to flee from him. Hiding the best she could, Trsae had managed to get from Morocco to Spain, and eventually to Portugal, where she tried to find David Hathaway. Naturally, not finding him, she stayed at Peter Vasca's a few nights until he had collected from his sources that I had returned to Scotland. The days at Peter's were troubling, as her mother would certainly have heard from Otto and not been able to resist meddling on his behalf. Trsae had laid low, fearful of being seen by her mother's agents who would have carried her to the pernicious bitch that had sold her own daughter into iniquity in the first place. By the end of this recounting of events, Trsae was visibly calmer.

"What exactly happened between you and Otto?" I queried, noticing how

the firelight played so delightfully on her features.

To this, Trsae related in terror-induced tone all that she had seen in the secret vaulted temple on the night she fled Otto's estate. As I reacted with silent horror, Trsae assured me, "That is what he intends for my baby. That is what he plans for this child who grows inside me. *Our* child, Roderick."

My God. I had bred with my own half-sister, and here she was clinging to me for refuge. I, a most grievous sinner, an incestuous heathen! What hideous guilt had I now borne upon our shoulders? I should have been horrified beyond grasp of any rational thought, but I was oddly serene with the facts of the unborn child's paternity. It was because there was something even darker than my sin.

Even with all that I had seen on that ship of the damned and in the underground lair of the demons, I had never dreamed such depraved, reprehensible things could ever be committed upon a child! The full reality of Trsae's predicament and the pure evil madness of Otto of Cappadoccia became clear to me then. I took Trsae's lovely hands in my own and looked

into her frightened yet unnaturally lovely green eyes, and understood finally to whom my mother's spirit had been pointing me.

I took Trsae in that night and she has never left my side in all this time.

Our son was born less than a fortnight after her arrival, and we set up ourselves in my old nursery to be with him through the nights. He was a year old before I stopped sleeping beside his crib with a pistol in my hand and his mother curled up beside me. We moved him to our bedroom, which we had begun to share following our nuptials some months prior.

For the first time since I was a child, the mansion has been warm with cheer. Raising and protecting our child revealed to Trsae and I that the horrors and joys we knew separately were what bonded us together as kindred spirits, possessed of perspective few others know and none may confess openly. Our perspective drew us together because there would be no other souls we could hope to relate to and, in spite of our literal relation, this resulted in the inevitable union between us as man and woman. Since our bond and its

result is not palatable to the many, we agreed to be left with the few who come around and know our happiness as a state of bliss between two wed cousin siblings who merely keep to themselves.

The truth is we are more content to spend the days alone together without leaving the estate much. Ours is an increasingly wonderful life with each passing day of the years. We shall never want for anything. Neither shall our children, nor our grandchildren. The magic of the spectacles and their ancient technology provides us with riches beyond a king's belief. In the end, my adventure was the means by which our adventure together has continued to this day.

I wonder about David Hathaway and hope he has found his destiny in the hollow of our planet. I believe my friend Sisyfuss is truly happy, the only man among those most interesting Amazons. I hope that wherever Julius Corbin may roam, he takes more steps toward inner peace and a deserved reward.

I know I have found my greatest reason for living, especially each night I spend lost in the passionate charms of

Trsae, who is every woman I could ever desire and the only woman for me. She never knew our father, but I try to keep the best of him alive as a father to our children. By the time of this account, she has given me four healthy bright little ones: two boys and two girls. We live each day to love one another, both aware that somewhere out there waits a madman hell-bent on wicked retribution for us having deprived him of his moonchild.

Sometimes late at night, when Trsae's warm flesh, damp from our unquenchable and incessant need for one another, clings tight against me, I see in her worried eyes the visions of what horrible crime that evil bastard would commit upon our oldest boy. I hold her naked body close, my lips to her delicate chin, and I remind her how much I love her and will protect her.

Together, we shall face whatever dark shadow approaches our door, for we have navigated through the straits of hell and found each other by the waters of our own paradise. No man shall hurt those whose blood I share and not know my wrath. Trsae, the mother of my children, is my happiness: daughter of my

mother's twin, child of my father's loins and my most beloved bride and passionate lover. They are my fortune, my children and their mother: A gift greater than all the earth's gold.

I look for that night when the sorcerer appears on our doorstep. I watch for him, ready for the moment he reaches out to lay hand upon my son, and I'll take those hands as grim trophies. I will bind him up in chains and carry him across the cold sea to that horrible place under the mountain, and, as he slides down into the arms of Satan himself, I will not raise a finger to save his soul from eternal damnation.

No one, man nor sorcerer, shall harm my children or their mother -- my beloved half-sister, my haunted wife Trsae. For I am her strength: an island of hope in her tropic of despair.

THE END

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Julius Corbin returns in

Black Apples

MYSTERY WOMAN OF THE JUNGLE

FANTOMAH

BY
BARCLAY
FLAGG

FANTOMAH, THE MOST MARVELOUS WOMAN EVER KNOWN, HAS SUCH A REMARKABLE INSIGHT THAT SHE CAN SEE ALL THAT EVER HAPPENS IN JUNGLELAND... BY USING HER STRANGE POWERS, SHE HAS DISCOVERED TWO WHITE MEN PLANNING TO ROB THE JUNGLE OF ITS MOST SACRED TREASURE, THE JEWELS OF "THE GREAT AVENGER".....

SHE WATCHES THEIR GIANT PLANE SOARING OVER THE JUNGLE...



IN THE HEART OF THE DENSE JUNGLE, SURROUNDED BY TOWERING PALMS, LIES THE ANCIENT CITY OF GOLD, CONTAINING THE SACRED JEWELS OF "THE GREAT AVENGER".....



LOOK! THERE'S THE SECRET CITY WE'RE HUNTING FOR!



WE MUST FIND A PLACE TO LAND!

THERE'S A GOOD SPOT!



FANTOMAH, INVISIBLE, WATCHES THEM LAND UPON A SAND BAR IN THE THICK OF THE JUNGLE.



I WONDER HOW WE CAN REACH THE CITY OF GOLD?

WE MUST BE CAREFUL! THE CITY IS GUARDED!



WE'LL HAVE TO USE OUR COMPASS!



FANTOMAH WATCHES THE TWO WHITE MEN STRUGGLE THROUGH THE VINES AND DENSE UNDERGROWTH. . . .



AT LAST!! THERE IT IS!



THE KEEN SENSES OF A NATIVE GUARD DETECT THE PRESENCE OF WHITE MEN. . . .



THE SOFT PURR OF HIS JU-JU DRUM SOUNDS THE WARNING.



THE INTERIOR GUARDS PREPARE AGAINST INVASION.



FANTOMAH DRAWS NEARER TO THE CITY.



THE TWO WHITE MEN COME TO THE EDGE OF THE JUNGLE.



CONFOUND IT! I BELIEVE THE GUARDS HAVE HEARD US!



LOOK AT THAT CITY! ALL GOLD AND JEWELS! WE MUST TAKE A CHANCE, FOR THE REWARD WILL BE WORTH IT!

ALL RIGHT! WE'LL DRIVE THEM OFF WITH OUR TOMMY GUNS!

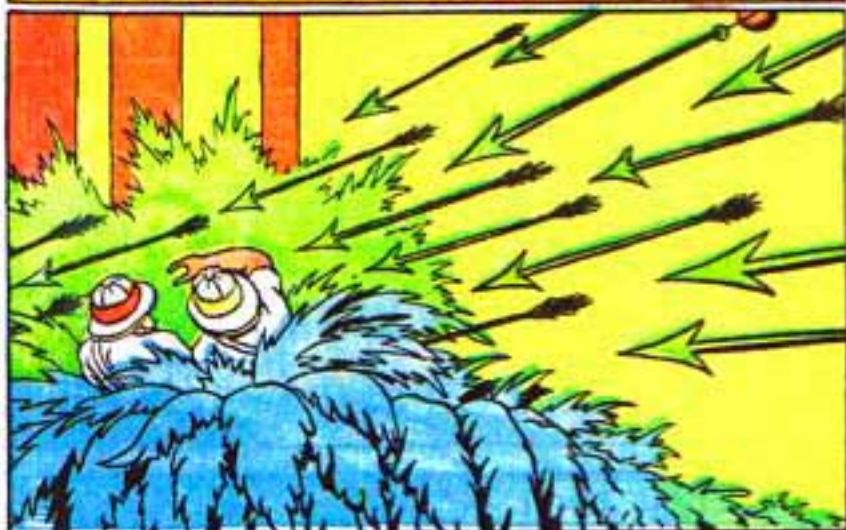
THE GUARDS ARE READY, AND AS THE MARAUDERS MAKE THEIR ATTACK, A VOLLEY OF NATIVE SPEARS AND ARROWS FILLS THE AIR.



WATCH YOURSELF! THOSE ARROWS MAY HAVE POISON ON THEM!

THE MACHINE GUNS BELCH DEATH AMONG THE PRIMITIVE MEN.

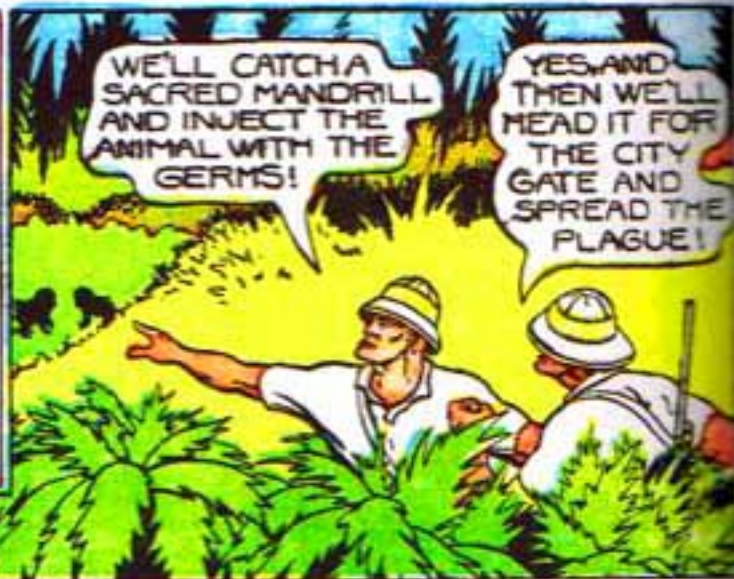
BUT THE WHITE CROOKS ARE UNABLE TO EN-
DURE THE FIERCE ONSLAUGHT



THEY ARE DRIVEN BACK INTO
THE JUNGLE



THE TWO
VILLAINS
PREPARE
THEIR
SECRET
INJECTION
CONTAINING
THE
DREADED
GREEN-
DEATH
GERMS,
THAT WILL
KILL MEN
IN A FEW
HOURS . .



FANTOMAH LISTENS TO
THEIR PLANS



A MANDRILL IS CAP-
TURED AND TAKEN
INTO THE UNDER-
GROWTH



THE INJECTION IS MADE, AND
THE ANIMAL BEGINS TO FROTH
AT THE MOUTH

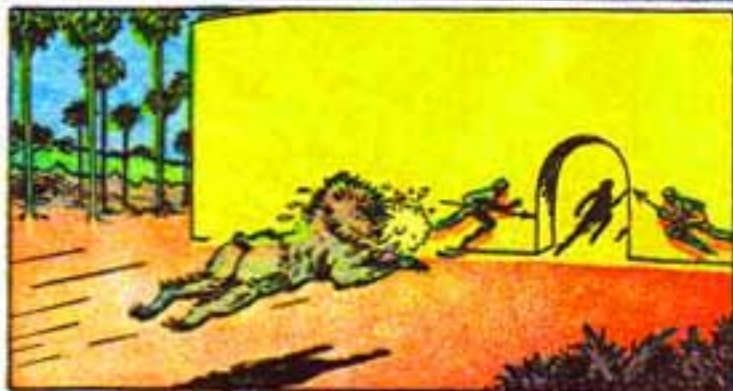


HE'LL SOON BE MAD AND RUN WILD!

WE'LL HEAD HIM STRAIGHT FOR THE GATE!



THE NATIVE GUARDS BECOME PANIC-STRICKEN WHEN THEY SEE THE MAD MANDRILL, FROTHING FROM THE GREEN-DEATH PLAGUE



LOOK! THE GUARDS HAVE ALL FLED!



COME ON!! STRAIGHT FOR THOSE JEWELS!



TURN THIS WAY!



GREAT GUNS! LOOK AT ALL THAT WEALTH!

JEWELS GALORE!



MEANWHILE, THE SACRED MANDRILL IS MYSTERIOUSLY CURED AND STANDS IN A PROTECTIVE AURA. . .



AS THE GREEDY MEN SCRAMBLE FOR THE JEWELS, A SIMILAR AURA FOLLOWS THEM.



THE AURA TAKES DEFINITE FORM.



THE MARAUDERS, PAYING NO HEED TO THE WARNING, ARE SUDDENLY ENCASED IN A TERRIFYING AURA...



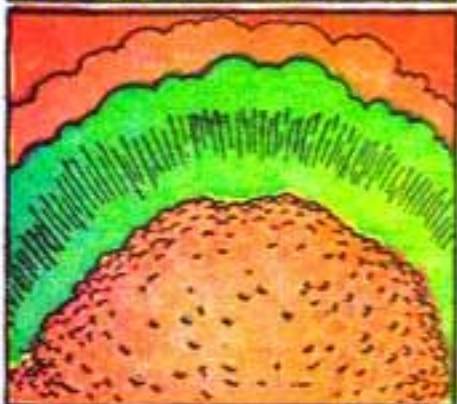
THEY CHANGE VERY RAPIDLY.....



FANTOMAH WILLS IT!



AN AURA SUDDENLY FORMS AROUND THE DISLODGED JEWELS.



AND IN THE NEXT INSTANT THEY ARE MYSTERIOUSLY RETURNED TO THEIR PLACES.



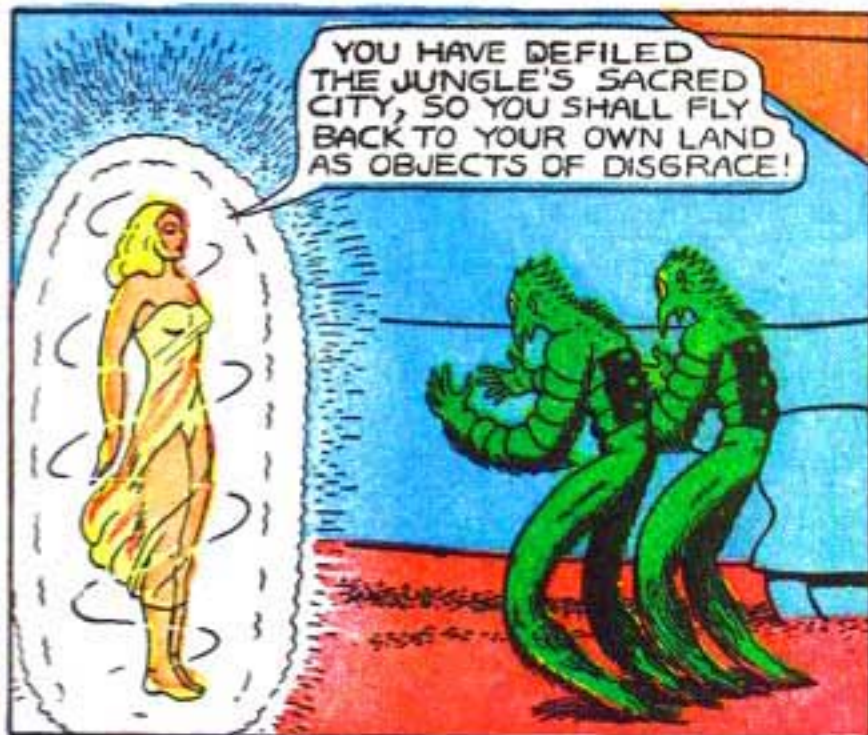
MEANWHILE, THE GUARDS COME BACK TO THEIR STATIONS.



FANTOMAH WHISKS THE TRANSFORMED MEN TO THEIR PLANE.....



YOU HAVE DEFILED THE JUNGLE'S SACRED CITY, SO YOU SHALL FLY BACK TO YOUR OWN LAND AS OBJECTS OF DISGRACE!



FANTOMAH WILLS IT !!



NOW, GO!



STRAIGHT FOR CIVILIZATION HEADS THE BIG PLANE, WITH ITS TWO STRANGE FLIERS...

CRIME DOESN'T SEEM TO PAY!

YOU'RE RIGHT!



IN THE NEXT EXCITING ISSUE OF JUNGLE COMICS, FANTOMAH FOILS THE WILD LEGIONS OF BEAST-MEN!



BILL CRAIG

THE EGG *of the* **PHOENIX**

Sweat burned Paul Sabre's eyes as he raced through the jungle. A thick white ground fog hung in the underbrush, rolling away as he ran through it. Somewhere up ahead, Muldoon and Cartier had Shelly and Jake. He should have known that the unscrupulous treasure hunters would force them to go along once the man thought that Sabre had been killed. What Muldoon and Cartier didn't realize was that he was pretty hard to kill!

Sabre paused to brush his dark hair out of his eyes. He could see the top of the ancient temple to which the map had lead him. He only wished that he'd had the time to hide the precious treasure that had been concealed there centuries ago, before Muldoon and Cartier had struck. Now there was a chance that the two villains might make off with the prize and that was something he could not allow!

Sabre's dark brown eyes scanned the jungle, picking the path of least resistance. There was a chance that he might be able to beat them to the temple and hide the treasure before

they arrived. If the Egg of the Phoenix fell into the hands of the Japanese Emperor, he could harness the power of the firebird. That couldn't be allowed to happen. Then it would be a matter of rescuing Shelly and Jake. Once he had them to safety, then he could concentrate on dealing with Muldoon and Cartier.

Shelly Newmar had come through too much to be taken this way. She had lost her brother before Sabre had been able to reach Jason Newmar after Jason had sent him a cable asking for help. They had grown close during the search for the ruins of Komola. Jake Winston was a treasured friend they had picked up along the way. Jake had proven his worth by saving Sabre's life in Cambodia. He didn't deserve this fate any more than Shelly did. Winston didn't look like the scrapper that he was, but looks as Sabre had found, could be very deceiving!

It took him several minutes of scrambling through the undergrowth, over exposed roots and under low hanging, thorny vines,

but he finally reached the ruins of the temple. Had he got there in time? The sound of voices sent him ducking for cover. He grimaced. Muldoon and Cartier had arrived.

“You are sure that this is the place?” Jean Cartier’s voice carried across the courtyard.

“Aye, Lad, I am sure enough! According to the map our old pal Sabre left with the girl it is. The Japanese Emperor is willing to pay a cool million for this rock,” Muldoon stepped into view. Sabre felt his face tighten in anger as Shelly and Jake were shoved roughly forward. Cartier followed them into view a German Lugar aimed at their backs. Sabre jerked his own twin blue-steel Colt 1911-A .45’s from the shoulder holsters that were strapped to his body. As much as he wanted too, Sabre knew he couldn’t risk a shot yet. A stray round could hit his friends. He would have to bide his time.

First things first, Sabre knew he had to get to the Egg. Muldoon had called it a rock, as if it were a mere bauble. Muldoon cared

little for the treasures that he plundered. His aim was to get rich. Cartier on the other hand might actually have an inkling of what they were actually after.

An old friend in Tibet had asked Sabre to recover the long lost Egg and to return it to Tibet for safe-keeping. Given the world climate, Sabre agreed that would be the best choice, especially with the Japanese running rampant over Asia. Plus, it seemed that Tojo was taking a leaf from Adolph Hitler’s book and going after religious and occult artifacts. Given what the Egg represented, it would be a magnificent prize for The Japanese Emperor and self-styled Sun God and could even make his claims of Godhood more believable.

He had found the Egg two days ago but had been unable to safely remove it at the time. There had been a patrol of Japanese soldiers in the area. He had taken the map he had made back to the local village that he and the others had been staying in and left it with Shelly. Some of Muldoon’s men had caught him heading back the next day and sent

his truck crashing off a cliff into a deep gorge. They had not counted on him jumping from the vehicle and landing on a ledge as the truck had toppled past it. It had taken him a full day to climb back to the top of the cliff and make his way back to the village.

By that time, Muldoon and Cartier had taken Shelly and Jake prisoners and headed for the temple. It amazed Sabre that he had actually managed to catch up to them! For now, however, he had to get to the Egg before Muldoon and Cartier did. Sabre slipped into the temple through a door hidden by vines. He darted through the shadowed passageways of the temple, his clear brown eyes picking out the best places to step so that he could move quickly yet silently. He had to reach the staircase to the upper level before they did!

With his fists full of his Colt .45 automatics; Sabre darted up the staircase, moving with the grace and ease of a stalking tiger. As he ran, his mind drifted back to a time when he and Jean Claude Cartier had not been bitter enemies, but rather

Comrades in arms in the Big War. Muldoon had never been more than a thug, even during his time in the Army during The Big War. Sabre remembered them both. They had not served in his unit like Jason Newmar, but their paths had crossed.

Cartier had changed during the war, had become more savage, a killer. Sabre knew the fate of his friends if Cartier and Muldoon got their hands on the Egg. They would be murdered in cold blood. "But that ain't gonna happen," Sabre muttered grimly, and kept running.

Jake Winston stumbled into a wall after being shoved by one of his captors. He dropped to the floor for an instant, his hands sliding along the broken tiles. He smiled as one of them jerked him to his feet, though he was careful to keep the man from seeing it. The men guarding Shelly Newmar and himself were merely paid thugs, brutal to be sure, but not nearly as smart or as alert as the ones called Cartier and Muldoon. Of the two, it was the Frenchman that worried him the most.

He had the cold dead eyes of a shark. The Frenchman was the one to fear.

Jake smiled to himself as he secreted the long sharp shard of rock in the sleeve of his shirt. He had picked it up when he had slid his hands along the broken floor tiles. If nothing else, he could take at least one of their captors with him. He had overheard Muldoon tell the Frenchman that Paul Sabre was dead; that his truck had plunged over a cliff into a gorge. Shelly had heard the news as well and had taken it hard. Jake didn't believe it.

Jake had seen how fiercely that Sabre had battled the men that had murdered Shelly's brother Jason after they had caught up with them in the ruins of Komola. None of the criminals had survived. No, Jake knew that Paul Sabre was somewhere nearby and would do everything in his power to rescue them. What he, Jake Winston, had to do was to be ready. He knew the American adventurer was out there. Hanging his head in mock defeat, he surreptitiously allowed the rock shard to slip down to the ropes that bound his wrists,

working the edge, sawing against the rope.

Jean Cartier paused to mop sweat from his brow with a white silk handkerchief. The prize this time was legendary. The Egg of the Phoenix. The mythical bird who would die in flame and then be reborn in the fire. Cartier didn't believe for a moment that the opaque stone egg actually held the embryo of such a fantastic creature, but he did know that the Egg had once been in possession of Alexander the Great, and that the Macedonian conqueror had been nearly invincible while he had carried the Phoenix Egg in battle across the face of Asia. Not until its theft by religious zealots, the very men who had built his temple, had Alexander's campaign had taken a disastrous turn. He could understand why the Japanese would wish to own such a magnificent artifact. However if Tojo was willing to shuck out a million dollars for it, Hitler would be willing to double the price. Of course Muldoon might be hard to convince, given his

dislike of Germany in general, but then no one lived forever.

Cartier smiled at the thought. The burly Scotsman had outlived his usefulness. Still, he had managed to get rid of Paul Sabre. Or so he claimed. Cartier's smile dropped a notch as he considered the alternative. Sabre was legendary for getting out of tight spots. He had done so many times during the Great War. Despite Muldoon's assurances, Sabre could still be alive. Given that possibility, Cartier was certain of one thing. They had to find the Egg and find it fast!

He lit a torch and held it aloft, using the flickering light to scan the interior of the temple. Muldoon had lit a torch as well and was moving deeper into the shadowed interior. Outside the temple, monkeys chattered in the trees and birds called to one another. As Cartier moved deeper into the dark ruin, some animal sense stirred deep within him, alerting him of danger. The small hairs on the back of his neck stood up, and Jean Cartier knew it could mean

only one thing: Paul Sabre was alive and he was nearby!

Paul Sabre tucked the sack holding the Egg into the messenger bag hanging cross body from his left shoulder to his right hip. He could hear his adversaries down below. They were getting close. There was no way around it. He would have to fight his way out and hope that Jake and Shelly were prepared. Sabre flexed his hands and drew the twin Colt .45 automatics. He took a deep breath and stepped into the opening of the stairwell. Looking down, he saw Muldoon and Cartier were starting up the stairs. Jake and Shelley were no where in sight. Smiling grimly, Sabre leveled his pistols and opened fire!

Thunder and hot lead filled the air as the twin .45's roared a greeting. Sean Muldoon fell; two large holes gaping in his chest were the lead slugs from Sabre's guns had found their mark. Jean Cartier leaped off the stairwell, hitting the floor and rolling away from the

opening as slugs from the thundering .45's chewed up the temple floor. Cartier leveled his Webley revolver, firing at the stairwell.

The best he might be able to hope for was that a ricochet might strike his adversary, but judging from the amount of fire coming from the stairwell there was no such luck. A scream sounded from near the temple entrance and then more gunfire from there as well. The prisoners were escaping!

"Merde!" Cartier snarled a curse as he pushed to his feet. A bullet ripped the air above his head sending him ducking for cover.

Paul Sabre hit the temple floor at a run. He spotted Cartier darting off down a corridor and sent a couple of shots his way to lend wings to the man's feet. Then he headed for the main entrance where he hoped to find Shelley and Jake. Alive? That was anyone's guess. He had heard gunfire and screams echoing from the temple entrance, at almost the exact moment he had opened the deadly dance on

the stairwell. An image of bullet ridden corpses, flashed in his mind's eye, Shelley sightlessly staring up at him in accusation at having failed her the same way he had failed Jason.

"No, damnit!"

A loud roar sounded from the direction he had last seen Cartier running, and it was a sound that Sabre recognized. A hunting tiger. He felt a brief moment of pity for the Frenchman, for he knew that the revolver that Cartier had been carrying was no match for a full grown Bengal tiger! A moment later a scream sounded from the far side of the temple. Sabre shivered. No one deserved to die like that! Not even Cartier. He shook his head as he slowed near the entrance to the temple.

"Paul?"

Sabre slid to a stop at the sound of the voice. "Jake!"

Jake Winston stood up from behind a pile of rubble just outside the entrance, a rifle in his hands. "I was wondering when you'd show up."

Sabre grinned stepping out of the temple.

Shelly charged from her place of concealment and threw herself into his arms. Sabre caught her, wrapping her up and pulling her close.

She kissed him long and hard before putting her feelings in words. "Thanks for not being dead."

"I agree with that sentiment," Jake walked up and pounded him on the shoulder.

"The guards?" Sabre looked at him.

"Any that survived ran off into the jungle. I don't think we need to worry about them."

"Take me home, Paul," Shelly whispered looking up into his eyes.

Sabre held her gaze. "Where is home, Shelly? Back to the plantation?"

"Home is wherever you are."

"First, we have to make a trip to Tibet, then, back home to San Francisco," Sabre grinned.

"That," Jake Winston looked at them both, "sounds like a plan."

"Yeah," Sabre agreed as they headed back into the jungle, heading for the path that would take them back to civilization.

Jean Cartier shuddered as he watched the tiger kill his man. Then he slipped away as the tiger focused on its meal. This setback was just one more that he owed Paul Sabre for! One day, he would get his revenge on Paul Sabre. And when that day came, he would make the American pay!

The End

-- Copyright Bill Craig

Looking for that forgotten corner?



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what Grandpa did
for entertainment
in the days before
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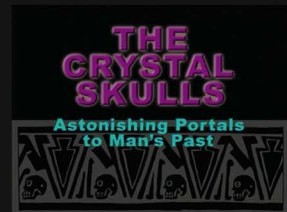
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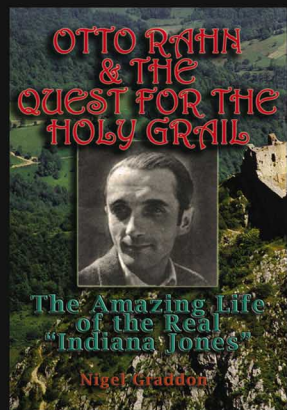
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REAL LIFE ADVENTURE & STRANGE PHENOMENA

Alexander Braghine

from his book
"THE SHADOW OF ATLANTIS"

All that we know concerning the history of Guarani Indians is based only on a very uncertain foundation of popular tradition and myth. Such, for instance, are the local versions of the universal flood, mentioned by the erudite jesuit, Father José Guevara. There are two versions in existence: the first calls the hero of the Paraguayan epos Tume-Aranda, and the second, Tamanduare. The latter and his sisters, Guarasiave and Tupinamba, were the children of a great prophet, Rupave, and together with two brothers Carive survived the Flood. The Carive brothers married the two sisters of Tamanduare. Guarasiave became the progenitor of the Guaranis, and Tupinamba of the Tupis. This circumstance shows clearly the relation between the Guaranis and the Tupis.

The Guarani legends tell that their forefathers inhabited a splendid capital, 'The City of Shining Roofs,' and Dr. Bertoni connects this circumstance with the legend concerning Atlantis, where the roofs, according to Plato, were covered by brilliant oreichalkos. But the first Spanish *conquistadores* took this Indian legend literally and thought that somewhere in the interior of the continent still existed a town with golden roofs. They even gave to this mythical Indian capital the name of 'El Dorado' ('Gilded'). The covetous adventurers many times started the search for this capital, and their hazardous expeditions contributed very much to the enlargement of our knowledge of the New World. Perhaps the same Indian legends also gave origin to the tradition concerning the existence of a splendid prehistoric capital among the forests of the Matto Grosso: it is known that the unfortunate Colonel Fawcett, starting his last expedition to the Brazilian wilderness, intended to try and find this mysterious city.

Dr. Colman cites one interesting tradition of the Guaranis concerning their forefathers: the Indians affirm that their ancestors possessed a secret method of obtaining fire by means of a certain strange apparatus. This tradition does not refer to the common method, well-known among the wild tribes, of obtaining fire by the swift rotation of a pointed wooden stick in a wooden

THE SHADOW OF ATLANTIS

cavity, but specifies that the forefathers of the Guaranis obtained bright sparks, the description of which brings to mind the sparks of an electrical machine. In addition to this hazy information we should mention a discovery by certain investigators of large prehistoric buildings on the high Colombian table-lands: these cyclopean halls and galleries do not possess either windows or stoves, and it remains a mystery how these vast buildings were lighted and heated? These regions are sometimes cold, but no traces of fires, or spots blackened by smoke, have been found anywhere in these ruins. The Colombian natives assert that the builders of these structures possessed a mysterious method of lighting and heating without fire. Perhaps those prehistoric races in Colombia and Paraguay were familiar with electricity?!

In the surroundings of the Paraguayan locality called Paraguari, in the middle of a monotonous plain, rises an isolated rocky eminence called Tadoo-Cooa. Recently the Paraguayan writer N. R. Colman discovered there accidentally a very interesting artificial grotto, but unfortunately did not record its exact site and, when he went there again to make more detailed investigations, he could not find its entrance. Thus all that we know about this find of N. R. Colman is recorded from a recollection of his first accidental visit there, described in his book *Nande ipi Cuera*, written mostly in Guaraní. This Paraguayan writer saw in the grotto the sitting statue of a naked Indian. The head of the statue was adorned with a kind of tiara and a triangle was carved on its forehead and another on its bosom. The apex of the upper triangle was directed upwards and the apex of the second one downwards. Although the Indian was sitting on a kind of throne, the over-all height of the statue was twice that of an average man. Its feet reposed upon a heap of spherical stones, some of them carved in a strange fashion. The walls of the grotto were covered with hieroglyphic inscriptions. Colman brought away some of the above-mentioned stones and made a picture of the statue, which is printed in his book. The author of *Nande ipi Cuera* believes that this statue represents the hero of many Guaraní legends, a kind of local Hercules. The triangle on his forehead symbolizes spirit, and the other triangle, matter.

N. R. Colman in his book mentions also other monuments of Guaraní prehistory. In the surroundings of Villa Rica, for

THE SHADOW OF ATLANTIS

instance, on the mountain of Ibitirusu, there is a subterranean gallery with its walls covered with ideograms and signs resembling Scandinavian Runic characters. In the cavern of Teyucare ('The Dragon's Grotto'), on the shores of the upper Parana, one can see signs, resembling Egyptian hieroglyphs, which resemble certain cyphers of the Mayas and the mysterious ideograms of the Paraguayan cinerary urns. On one mound in Yariguazu were discovered stones with inscriptions resembling the old Egyptian hieroglyphs and the enigmatical texts found in the Amazonian forests. The well-known South American ethnologist, Dr. M. Bertoni, affirms that at least one-half of the Yariguazu hieroglyphs is identical with the old Egyptian hieroglyphs.

All these finds and the study of the Guarani folklore led N. R. Colman to the conclusion that the culture of the Guarani race was at one time very high. It was apparently connected with other enigmatical cultures of prehistoric South America and with the pre-Egyptian civilization. The causes of the later degeneration of the local tribes are a very interesting problem: what was the catastrophe which destroyed the cultures of the native races?



Black Hound



In shuddering fog comes the dog
With no hearth or fire by which to rest
Along the road, by moor or bog
As lonely travelers oft attest—
Eyes burn lambent, red as gore
With witching inner hell-lights' gleam
To light the way to cottage door
But ne'er to cross the running stream.

Lines of latent earthly power
Draw the beast which stalks the roads
To frighten those who dare the hour
Of visitation, and of woes.
Breath burns cold while sunlight cowers,
Hair bristles sharp as blackest glass
When barguest roams from field to tower
And someone somewhere breaths his last.

Guytrash, hellhound, Black Shuck stalking
Drawn by scent of coming doom,
Finds the man or woman walking,
Shows them where true shadows loom.
Eyes like coals on kindling pyres
Blaze to stagger human mind
With promise of deep hung'ring fires
Waiting for all humankind.

Curled at Odin's banquet, gnawing,
On the souls of hangéd men
Who missed Valhalla's horn, a-calling
To their braver viking kin.
Down through deepest ages, muddled
Memories of frozen, forgotten world
When man-things in dark caverns huddled,
By their fires fearful-curved.

Centuries on the paths a-padding
Hellhounds loosed in a primal age,
Sent on evil errands, adding
Terror to their undead rage.
Banished by a Name Triumphant,
Cut in twain by true-steel sword—
Held at bay by scraped circumference
Of a circle for a ward.

≡ Wm Michael Mott

CHOICES...



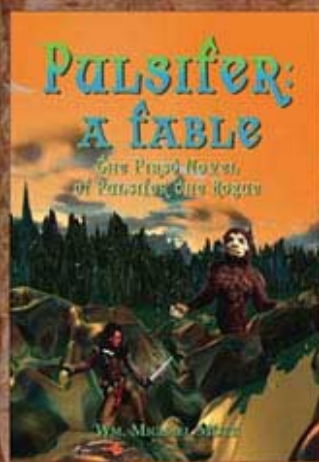
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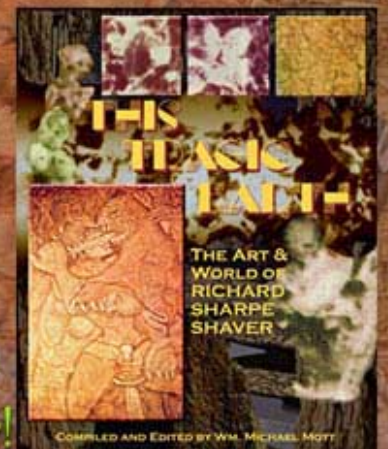
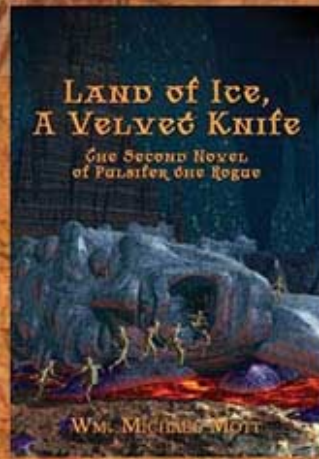
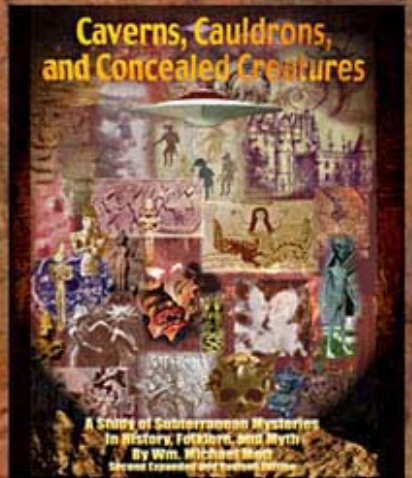
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SPACE OPERA

HOW IT ALL BEGAN



The crew of *Space Patrol's* Terra IV (left to right): Lyn Osborn, Ken Meyer, Virginia Hewitt, Ed Kemmer and Nana Bara.

Star Trek is considered, by most people, to be the finest Space Adventure TV show ever created and, judging by its awards and worldwide acclaim, one would hardly argue the point. But it wasn't the first show of its kind; the journey from kiddie show fodder to top-rated adult series was a long, hard trip for Space Opera, with a lot of disappointing stops on the way. But how **did** it all begin? What was the **first** TV Space Opera?

On June 27, 1949, a brand new science fiction TV series from New York premiered. It was called **Captain Video**, starring Richard Coogan as Captain Video and a 15-year-old Don Hastings as the loyal Video Ranger. (In 1951, Al Hodge took over the role as Captain Video and he is the one best known for the part.) But though the crime-fighting Captain used scientific gadgetry to bring spies to justice, he did not fly into outer space until

another sci-fi TV show made its debut.

From Los Angeles, a young producer by the name of Mike Moser launched a series on March 13, 1950, which he titled **Space Patrol**. The *Space Patrol's* Commander-in-Chief was Kit Corry, who was replaced early in the series by his brother Buzz Corry because the actor who played Kit had problems remembering his lines. Lyn Osborn, the actor who portrayed Cadet Happy on the series, called a fellow actor and former World War II flying ace, Ed Kemmer, and asked him to try out for the part of Buzz. Kemmer agreed to read for the part and was hired immediately. Kit Corry faded into a "voice" over a communicator, the "voice" of another actor, Ken Mayer, who eventually became Major Robbie Robertson, Corry's second-in-command. With beautiful Virginia Hewitt as Carol Carlisle and sultry Nana Bara as Tonga, the **Space Patrol** crew

policed outer space aboard the rocket ship Terra IV, protecting the 22nd Century Earth from the likes of such villains as Prince Bacaratti and Agent X.

Both **Captain Video** and **Space Patrol** were runaway hits, and so it was inevitable for a third space opera to enter the fray, this one with a literary birth. In 1948, the famous science fiction writer Robert A. Heinlein wrote about the trials and tribulations of a young Matt Dodson as he went through rigorous training as a "Space Cadet." Matt Dodson's name was changed to Tom Corbett for the TV show and on October 2, 1950, a mere 6 months after **Space Patrol's** premiere, **Tom Corbett, Space Cadet** aired.

The episodes followed the adventures of three Space Academy cadets: the level-headed Tom, the naive Venusian Astro and the wisecracking troublemaker Roger Manning (played respectively by Frank Thomas, Al Markim and Jan Merlin). Their personal struggles often contrasted their conflicts with alien visitors and renegade guardsmen. Aboard the Polaris rocket, the three incorrigibles put aside their differences as they trained to become Solar Guardsmen, which often involved exploring the jungles of Venus or engaging in space races with rival cadets.

By now **Captain Video** had also become a planet-hopping spacer. Aboard the good ship Galaxy the Captain travelled to such places as Torion, where he was subjected to the paralyzing psychic powers of the natives, and the arctic, there to search for a hideous monster.

The public could not get enough of these intergalactic heroes. More adventures were scripted in the form of comic books, radio shows, movie serials and even hardback novels. Al "Captain Video" Hodge made numerous personal appearances. A replica of the **Space Patrol's** Terra IV was constructed and toured several states under the guidance of Carol and Tonga. Toy stores were glutted with plastic ray guns, tin models of the Space Academy, rubber spacemen, windup rocket ships and spacesuit costumes.

More space adventure shows appeared—**Rod Brown and the Rocket Rangers** starring Cliff Robertson and Jack Weston aired on April 18, 1953, but it was a weak imitation of **Space Cadet** and lasted for only a year. Comic strip hero Flash Gordon was brought to TV in 1953 with paperback cover model Steve Holland in the title roll.

The best of the lot of newcomers was **Rocky Jones, Space Ranger**, which debuted



Captain Video's Don Hastings and Al Hodge.

in January of 1954. Besides fine acting by Richard Crane as Rocky and Sally Mansfield as Vena Ray, the show boasted high production values. The sets of its predecessors were often little more than painted cardboard panels against canvas backdrops, while the props consisted of kitchen and toolshed appliances with parts glued on. (In one case, a spaceship's flight was simulated by holding the ship in a black gloved hand against a black curtain!) However, **Rocky Jones, Space Ranger**, used state-of-the-art special effects and realistic looking props. Miniatures were also realistic and detailed.

Rounding out the Space Opera shows of the 1950s were: **Commando Cody** (an early version of **The Rocketeer**), **Buck Rogers**, **Captain Midnight** and **Captain Z-Ro**.

The little known **Captain Z-Ro** had a singular attribute: he was a Time Traveler, which allowed a unique educational slant to his show. All of the space adventure shows emphasized education along with adventure, but **Z-Ro** enjoyed the company and escapades of such historical figures as Daniel Boone, Christopher Columbus, Molly Pitcher and Napoleon Bonapart.

They all were thrilling. They all were wonderful. And they all laid the groundwork for such sci-fi shows of today as **Star Trek** (in all its variants), **Babylon V** and, of course, **Captain Cosmos**.

Most of the information used in this article came from Joe Sarno's magazine series, "Space Academy Newsletter," and it is printed here with his consent.

THE MEDUSOID FLOWED THROUGH THE SILT-CRUSTED MOORS WITH A POETIC FLUIDITY UNMATCHED BY ANY LEGGED BEAST OF BURDEN. BUT THE BEAUTY OF ITS RHYTHMIC POURING OF LIQUID BODY INTO PSEUDOPOD WAS UNAPPRECIATED BY THE TINY RIDER WHO URGED THE SLOW-MOVING 'JELLY' ON WITH ABUSIVE SHOUTS.

JAYMEE WAS TO ATTEND A PARTY AT CASSIE'S HOUSE, SEVEN BILLION MILES AWAY! BUT FIRST SHE HAD TO GREET THE WINDSINGER, THE SCOUT SHIP OF THE STAR FREIGHTER, BEDEVERE. HE WOULD BE ABOARD!

CAPTAIN COSMOS

THE LAST STARVEYER

CREATOR AND WRITER:
CAPT. NICOLA CUTI
ARTIST: JOE STATON
LETTERS: B. PEARSON



SQUISH, YOU ARE A TRIAL! HOW DO JELLIES EVER GET ANYWHERE? JUST BECAUSE YOU HAVEN'T ANY BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO DOESN'T MEAN I DON'T! I HAVE DINNER AT MOM'S, THEN CASSIE'S BIRTHDAY PARTY ON ALPHA PROX-TWO, AND RIGHT NOW I WANT TO BE THE FIRST TO GREET HIM.

BUT THE WAY YOU'RE SLOGGING ALONG, EASY AS YOU PLEASE, HE'LL BE AT THE FARMHOUSE, HUGGING AND KISSING EVERYBODY...

...WHILE WE'RE STILL OOZING WITH THE BREEZE, SLOPPING THROUGH THE BOG, FLOWIN'--

HI JAYMEE, WE FIGURED YOU'D BE OUT HERE.



Captain Cosmos, the Last Starveyer, No.2, Spring 2001. Published by Ni-Cola Productions, 27940 Solamint Road, Ste 9-205, Canyon Country, CA 91351.™ and © 2001 Nicola Cuti. All rights reserved. Space Patrol and Tom Corbett, Space Cadet are licensed by Wade Williams Enterprises. Captain Video is licensed Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. Rocky Jones, Space Ranger is licensed by Roland Reed Productions. Captain Midnight is licensed by CBS Entertainment.



DADDY!

WELL, LOOK HOW MY LITTLE GIRL HAS GROWN!



I WAS HOPING YOU'D SEE ME FIRST. LOVE YOU BIGGER THAN SATURN.

LOVE YOU BIGGER THAN JUPITER!

SO GLAD YOU REMEMBER ME, SQUISH.



ZEN-YA! I KNEW YOU'D BE HERE TOO.

I WOULDN'T MISS VISITING WITH YOU, LITTLE SISTER. FOR ALL THE MOON-STONES ON GANYMEDE.



MOM'S GOT DINNER COOKING FOR YOU TWO. BOSH-GOD DUCK! EVERYONE'S WAITING AT THE FARMHOUSE.

LET'S NOT KEEP THEM. I'M ANXIOUS TO SEE MY ENTIRE FAMILY AGAIN. I'VE BEEN STARVEYING FAR TOO LONG!



NICK COSMOS HAD BUILT THE FARM WHEN HE MARRIED LILLIAN, AND THEY BOTH LEFT THE STARVEYERS. THEY RAISED FAT 'JELLIES' AND A FAMILY OF SONS AND DAUGHTERS. THEN HE RETURNED TO THE STARS. IT HAD COST HIM HIS FARM, HIS WIFE AND HIS CHILDREN. BUT HE WENT BACK TO THE STARS. THIS VISIT WAS JUST A SHORT VACATION. HE WOULD ALWAYS RETURN TO THE STARS--

HELLO, NICK. IT'S NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

HELLO LILLIAN, BEN. I APPRECIATE YOUR INVITATION, ZEN-YA TOLD ME IF WE DIDN'T SPEND OUR LEAVE HERE SHE WAS GOING TO SCUTTLE THE SHIP.

HE'S KIDDING. WELL, ACTUALLY HE'S NOT.





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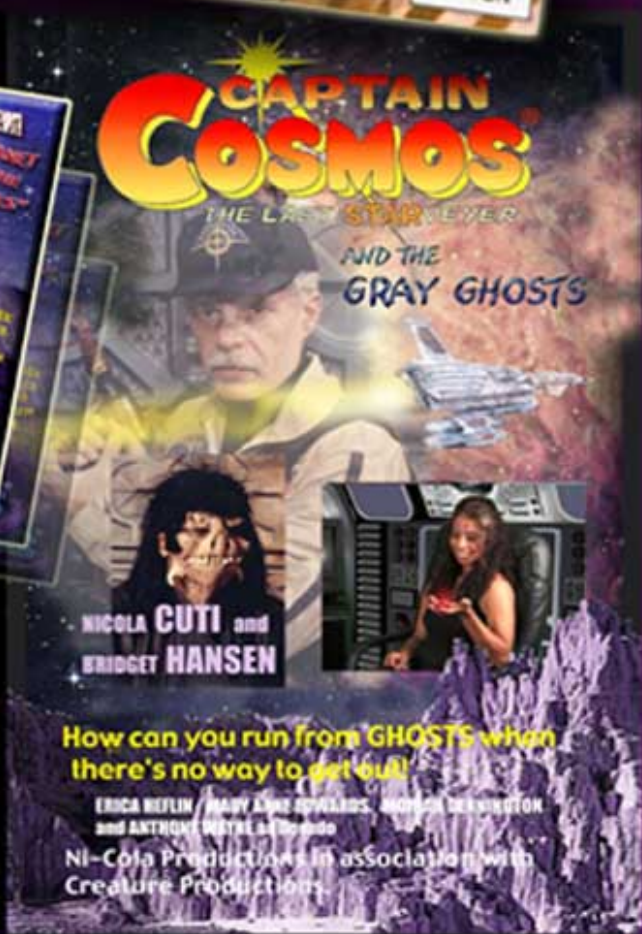
**CAPTAIN
COSMOS**
THE LAST STARVEYER
AND THE
GRAY GHOSTS

NICOLA CUTI and
BRIDGET HANSEN

How can you run from GHOSTS when
there's no way to get out!

ERICA REFLIN / MARY KATE SWEENEY, ANTHONY DIXON
and ANTHONY DIXON & DIXON

Ni-Cola Productions in association with
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Horizon

So, how was that?

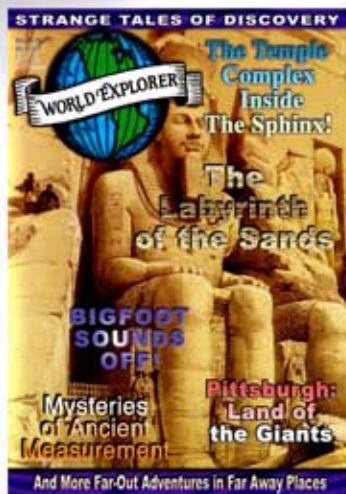
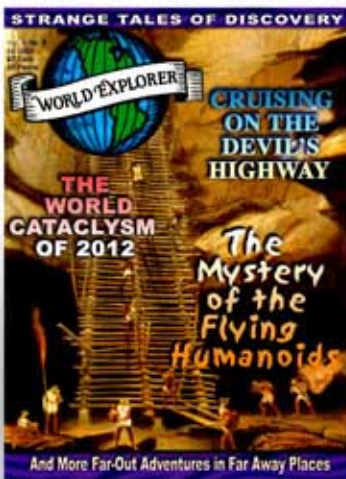
I hope we kept you as entertained and informed as you've come to expect from a trip to the Library. If this was your first visit, be sure you drop in again every month. As always, I invite an email or letter from all readers. Tell me what you think, or make a suggestion on a story we might want to present.

Next issue is beginning to take shape already and I'm sure you'll be ready when September rolls around. It's not far off.

Until then, thanks for riding along!

-- Editor

lostcontinentlib3@yahoo.com



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