

The Best of Adversaries
By Matthew Baugh

(A sequel to "Taverel Manor" by Robert E. Howard and Richard A. Lupoff)

1 - A Chance Encounter

"So there is no hope Doctor?"

Costigan stared at me forlornly, his plate untouched. The American was a strapping man, six feet tall and a solid fourteen stone, but worry and lack of sleep were wearing down even his strength.

"There is always hope my boy." I said gently, "You have to believe that."

"What hope?" Costigan demanded, his black eyes blazing with anger, "You've admitted that you have no idea what sort of drug it is that's killing her! If you don't know, what hope is there?"

I bit my lip, unable to say anything. As much as I hated it, he was right. I had no idea what the toxin was that was eating away the life of his beloved, and I had good reason to believe my experience with exotic drugs and poisons was equal to that of any practitioner in London.

Costigan sighed, "I'm sorry Petrie. I know you've done as much as anyone could. It's just that when I think of Zuleika, dying like this..." His voice trailed off and he flexed his powerful hands in a helpless gesture. "I always thought I could protect her from anything, but this..."

"I know," I said, "I've thought what it would be like if it were my Kara who were affected. But we can't give in to despair! You must be strong for Zuleika's sake! You know that's what Smith would say!"

That brought a brief, sad smile to his lips.

"Smith," he said, "Yes, that does sound like him, doesn't it? He'd have snapped my head off for being so maudlin."

Costigan stood. His face had resumed the mask-like composure that it usually wore. That stoicism, along with his straight black hair and sun-bronzed skin always made me think of the Red Indians of his homeland. Even in a Saville Row suit he looked every inch the savage warrior. He stood and pushed his chair in.

"I'm sorry Petrie," he said, "But I can't finish this." He nodded to the steak dinner at his place.

"Be reasonable man." I implored, "You need to keep your strength up!"

"No," he said quietly, "I need to be by her side."

I would have argued, but the resolve in his voice brooked no dispute. In any case it seemed a healthier frame of mind than the impotent anger he had been feeling. I nodded.

"I understand." I said, "You do what you must. I'll be back at hospital within an hour myself."

After we said our goodbyes I turned my attention to my meal but found my own appetite wanting. The dinner was splendidly prepared, but the recent death of my dear friend had robbed my world of taste and color. It was only with a mechanical effort that I was able to eat.

I was finishing my coffee when the woman came in. A tall brunette of exotic beauty, with dark almond eyes. She had fair skin but with an olive cast that spoke of faraway lands and other times. She wore a daring ensemble of the latest fashion. On a woman of lesser beauty it would have been absurd but on her the effect was stunning. It was as if the Queen of Sheba had arrived, fresh from the shops of Paris.

The headwaiter showed her a great deal of deference as he showed her to a table. As I watched I could not help wondering who she was, and who she might be waiting for.

I did not have to wait long to find out. A few moments later the mysterious beauty was joined by a man nearly as exotic as she was. He was slender and of medium height, dressed in black and with a dark complexion that made me suspect there was a touch of the Asiatic in his blood. His beard was small and neat and the black of his hair was broken by a jagged streak of white at the temple.

With a start I realized that I knew the newcomer, he was Anton Zarnak, a man with the reputation of a modern Sainte-Germain. He spoke a dozen languages, held advanced degrees from several of the greatest universities in Europe and America, and was even rumored to have rediscovered the secrets of alchemy. It was the sort of reputation that usually accompanied a charlatan, but Smith had spoken of him with high regard.

My mind whirled. If even part of Zarnak's reputation were true he might hold the key to Zuleika's recovery.

Even if he couldn't help, there was nothing lost in asking. I rose and walked to his table."

"I beg your pardon," I said, "But are you Dr. Anton Zarnak?"

The woman's eyes flashed brilliantly, though with derision or humor I could not say. Zarnak regarded me calmly.

"Dr. Petrie, isn't it?" he said.

"Why yes. Though I confess I'm surprised you know me."

"Don't be modest Doctor," he said, "I've read your monograph on the pathology of tropical mycotia. A most insightful study. Besides, no one acquainted with the career of the late Sir Denis Nayland Smith could be ignorant of his Boswell." His face clouded slightly. "You have my sympathies Doctor, his passing diminishes us all."

"Thank you," I said with some feeling, "Dr. Zarnak, I'm afraid I have to impose on you."

"Yes?"

"There is a young woman at St. Bart's," I said, "She is dying of a poison that we cannot identify. My expertise has failed, and no specialist I can find has managed any better. I was hoping that you..."

"How would you rate her prognosis?"

"She has only days left. Perhaps hours."

Zarnak rose smoothly to his feet. He paused to kiss the slender fingers of his companion.

"I am sorry my dear Isis," he said, "But this is something I must attend. Please give my warmest regards to your father. I hope to call on you again soon."

She smiled mysteriously and nodded. "I understand," was all she said.

Zarnak caught my arm as we walked out. "My car is outside."

He said, "Tell me what you can as we go."

2 - Petrie's Story

"You said you believe the young woman is suffering the effects of a poison?" Zarnak asked. The evening traffic was light and his town car was making excellent time.

"Yes," I responded, "She was kidnapped weeks ago and held for some time. Her fiancé and some friends were able to affect her release, but not before the fiend given her drugs. At first we thought he had addicted her to opium to bind her to his will, but the standard courses of treatment have failed to produce any result. Her symptoms are like those of withdrawal, but they steadily continue to worsen. Frankly I don't know how she is still alive."

"Perhaps you should tell me of the kidnapper." Zarnak suggested.

I nodded, "Two years ago the police became aware of a single mind directing most of the vice and narcotic traffic of London, a mastermind known as the Scorpion. Nayland Smith was assigned to investigate and found that this was true. The man was a devil, who had used drugs to create unwilling servitors. Zuleika was the Scorpion's slave at that time, and her fiancé, Stephen Costigan was one of his drug-thralls.

Fortunately Smith was able to free them and defeat the monster. For a time we thought he was destroyed, blown to bits in an explosion that shook the city, but he returned.

"Smith was working on breaking up an opium ring, and had made Costigan his special assistant. A separate investigation took them to Tavares Manor up on the northern coast."

"The home of Sir Rupert Taverel?" Zarnak cut in.

"Why, yes." I said, "That is until his recent death. It is now in the hands of a distant kinsman of his, Sir Haldred Taverel. Why, is it important?"

Probably not," Zarnak said, "But I knew Sir Rupert a little from a time when we were both in the Far East. He was a man of interesting connections.

"I shouldn't be surprised." I said, "Sir Rupert's death drew Sir Haldred into the old manor house where he vanished under mysterious circumstances. Nayland Smith was an old family friend of Haldred's fiancée Marjory and he and Costigan went to investigate. It turned out that the Scorpion was behind Sir Haldred's disappearance. Costigan managed to track the fiend to Calais, but not before Smith was killed."

"And the Scorpion?" Zarnak asked.

"Costigan says he killed the fiend with his bare hands." I replied, "But the Sûreté never found the body in their search of his headquarters."

"Who was he?"

"Ah," I hesitated, "That part of the story is the most difficult to believe."

"Doctor, I assure you, I am anything but a cynic about such things."

Zarnak said, "And neither my opinion of you nor my promise to help your patient will be swayed by anything you have to tell me."

"Very well," I said, "The Scorpion seems to have been a survivor of ancient Egypt, or perhaps Atlantis. Costigan believes him to be a million years old or more."

"It seems unlikely that all three are true." Zarnak commented.

"I say!" I protested, "After your assurances I certainly don't appreciate..."

"Please Doctor," he said calmly, "I am not being flip. One of those theories is likely true, but it may be important to determine which. Please continue."

"I'm sorry," I said, "I only know what Costigan has told me. He says that the Scorpion is a living mummy, as if he had used the techniques of Egypt to preserve his body and found a way to use them to preserve his life as well. His skin is as thin and dry as parchment and his face is so badly withered that it resembles a skull. Costigan sometimes calls him 'Skull Face' but his true name is Kathulos."

Zarnak started visibly at the name, but said nothing and gestured for me to continue.

"We can't say with any certainty where he came from," I said, "The only story Costigan knows is that a sealed sarcophagus was found drifting in the Atlantic far from any shore. A passing ship picked up the box and found Kathulos sealed inside. He and Smith were never able to verify the story."

"But several years ago," Zarnak mused, "That would be around '26, the year of the Maracot deep sea expedition."

"I'm afraid I don't know about that." I said.

"Most people don't." Zarnak replied, "The findings were suppressed by the government shortly after the Maracot party returned. Suffice to say, I think we know where this Kathulos comes from. If he is indeed a survivor of Atlantis that may provide a clue to the nature of the drugs he has used on your patient."

"Thank God." I breathed.

"Not yet Doctor," Zarnak cautioned, "Even if this idea bears out it may not help us much. Most of the secrets of Atlantis are lost to us."

"Tell me," his voice softened a bit, "How did Nayland Smith die?"

"A trap," The words nearly caught in my throat. It had been scarcely a week since I had learned of my friend's death. "He was leaving the manor when Costigan saw him struck down by what looked like a lightning bolt. That devil Skull Face delights in electrical traps, one of his own men was killed by one inside the great house."

"What about the body?" He persisted, "Was an autopsy performed?"

"There was no body." I said bitterly. "Costigan had to leave for France immediately to save Zuleika and Sir Haldred. He didn't have the chance even to notify Scotland Yard about Sir Denis. By the time they finally reached Taverel Manor the body was gone. We can only assume the Society of the Scorpion disposed of it in some manner."

"I see." he said, "And what of Taverel Manor?"

"What of Taverel Manor?" I snapped. "Doctor Zarnak, I can understand your curiosity but the life of a young woman hangs in the balance. I promise to satisfy your curiosity at the first convenient moment, but for now we must focus on the task at hand."

Anton Zarnak regarded me coolly for a moment. When he spoke his voice carried a distinct sharpness.

"Doctor Petrie, you clearly have no idea what lies in the balance."

I started to protest but he cut me off with a gesture.

"I will cure your patient Doctor, but there is a price. If you want my help you must answer my questions! If I give you instructions you must follow them exactly and without hesitation!"

"Now see here!" I said. His high handed manner was becoming too much to bear!

"No Doctor!" He said with a quiet anger that stopped me cold. "It is you who must see! With your help I will save your patient, and there is no telling how many others. If you refuse me their blood is on your hands! Everything I say, everything I do is for a purpose. If you are too dense to see that purpose that is of little consequence! Now tell me about the manor!"

The force of his personality was like the blow of a pollaxe. My own outrage had vanished in the face of it and I felt vaguely embarrassed.

"What, um... what would you like to know about it?"

"What did the police find when they searched it?"

"I'm not certain." I said, "I don't know that they've bothered to search it yet."

"Not bothered?" he demanded, "Why on earth not?"

"Well," I said, the Scorpion is dead, his society scattered. What would be the point?"

"What indeed?" Zarnak said bitterly. "What about this Sir Haldred Tavares? Has he taken up residence there since all this?"

"No," I answered, "The whole affair has put him off the Hall for the time being. He and his fiancée Marjory Harper are staying in his parents' home in the south for several weeks."

"So the manor is empty?"

"No," I said, "Marjory's brother Harry is also engaged. His fiancée has taken on a few servants and is working to put the place in shape before the wedding."

"And who is this fiancée?"

"Miss Joan La Tour," I responded, "She is an American who has only recently..." I trailed off for Zarnak implacable face now wore a stunned expression.

"What is it?" I asked, "Do you know her?"

"Doctor Petrie," Zarnak said dryly, "Your patient is rapidly proving to be the most interesting consultation I have had in a very long time."

3 - Return to Taverel Manor

Costigan was silent as we drove up the coast. He was not one to complain aloud but I could tell that he was anything but pleased with the assignment Zarnak had given us.

"Go to Taverel Manor." He had said, "I will meet you there as soon as I can. Until then keep your eyes open."

"I'd like to know what this is all about." Costigan had protested, "Just what do you expect us to find there?"

"I cannot say," Zarnak said, "Minions of your Skull Face perhaps, or an ally. Perhaps even Kathulos himself. As you have noted he seems to be nearly impossible to destroy. There is simply no way to tell at

this point so best to be prepared for anything."

"We should take a squad of police." I suggested, but Zarnak had forbidden it.

"I think that a great deal of what happened to Mr. Costigan in Calais was meant to throw him off the track." he said, "For the present it is better for our enemies to think we have been deceived. Your story will be that you are

looking for some sign of what has happened to Smith's body. Say nothing to anyone about any other purpose for being there, and be certain not to mention my name!"

Costigan had still resisted, and so had I but in the end Zarnak won out. It was partly by virtue of his force of personality and partly because he had worked such a change in Zuleika's condition. He had applied a poultice to her made of an unusual flower, which was milk-white in the bloom and nearly jet black at its roots. When I had asked what it was he had smiled wryly.

"Do you know your Homer Doctor?" he had asked. "It is the herb Odysseus used to overcome the spells of Circe."

"Moly?" I was shocked, "That's just a myth, isn't it?"

"It is real enough." Zarnak replied, "As the poet said, *'it is hard for mortal men to dig; howbeit with the gods all things are possible.'* "

"It was a curative against a number of poisons in antediluvian times. It seemed reasonable that it might work against a drug from Atlantis. It is very rare, but I have managed to cultivate a small growth of it in my greenhouse."

"Will it cure her?" I asked.

"No," he said, "I suspect that only the one who poisoned her will have the cure. But it will keep her alive and reasonably comfortable until we can find it."

Taverel Manor came into sight as we rounded a bend in the road. It was a massive structure overlooking the coast, more a castle than a manor house. In the evening twilight it looked like an ominous gray monster, squatting on the landscape.

Joan La Tour was surprised to see us, but welcomed us warmly. She kissed Costigan's cheek and inquired after Zuleika's health. She was delighted to learn that the Circassian girl was improving. "Perhaps my wedding day is coming sooner than I dared hope!" She said. "And yours as well Stephen."

"Joan and Marjory Harper have both agreed to postpone their weddings until Zuleika is well enough to act as maid of honor." Costigan explained and he clutched the young woman's hand with real affection. "I hate to hold you to it Joan. It means a lot that you'd make the gesture, but I don't like making you postpone your happiness."

"Nonsense!" Joan said fiercely, "The thing that will make our happiness complete will be to share it with you."

Joan led us in and offered us a late supper. It was simple but good and our long drive had made us hungry. As we ate I watched her and wondered how this strange American girl had come to be here. She was certainly lovely enough with her wealth of night-black hair and the large almond eyes that revealed her Eurasian heritage. Even dressed as she was in conservative western clothes she seemed to belong to another world. I wondered how the locals in Harry Harper's parish would take to his exotic new wife.

Costigan had told me that Joan had been a resident of Chinatown while she lived in America and had been involved in the criminal underworld there. I wondered how she had come to meet and fall in love with a

young gentleman from the English countryside. From the little I had seen of him, young Harry was a good chap, but rather conventional, very unlike the vivacious woman sitting across the table from me.

Of course, the same question could be asked of Costigan and his beautiful Circassian lover. Zuleika had spent much of her young life the slave of the evil Skull Face.

For that matter, their story was not very different from my own. For many years my wife Kâramanèh had been the slave of a man who was, if anything, even a greater villain than the Scorpion.

Perhaps such odd matches were not so unusual after all.

"I don't know what you hope to find." Joan said sadly, "The police have already examined the place where Nayland Smith was struck down."

"The rural police aren't always as thorough as Scotland Yard." Costigan replied, "Besides, Dr. Petrie has experience that no policemen has. If anyone can pick up the trail, he can."

She turned her dark eyes on me.

"Is that so Dr. Petrie?"

"I will certainly do my best." I said. I hated deceiving the poor girl like this, but Zarnak's instructions had been clear.

After dinner she showed us around the Manor, while several brawny young men carried our bags to the guest rooms. They were locals I surmised, part of the staff Joan had retained to work on the castle. As she showed us through the great hall, full of relics of the world travels of generations of the Taverel family I saw Costigan's eye fall on something at the far end.

"So that hideous thing is still with us eh?" he said.

"Yes." said Joan with a shudder. "I had hoped Sir Haldred would let me sell it, but he wants to have all of this appraised first."

"The object they referred to was a shrine of some sort. It consisted of a black carved pedestal on which squatted a blasphemous idol the size and shape of a man with an apish demon's face. The idol was carved of some ancient yellowish stone and set with semi-precious stones for its eyes.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A heathen idol." Costigan supplied, "Thibetan and used in the devil-worship of some of the hill tribes. The barbaric thing has seen its share of human sacrifice in its day." He indicated some dark stains on the idol's base. "I'd be happy to take a heavy hammer to it for you Joan."

"I'd probably sleep more easily," she smiled, "But it isn't mine to dispose of."

The rest of the tour was brief. Costigan already knew the lay of the land and I was weary. He decided to stay up a bit and walk the parapets while I retired. Joan showed me to my room before going off to bed herself. In the morning she promised, she would find the time to help us with our search.

I unpacked and readied myself for bed. Zarnak had insisted that we come armed so I took the revolver I had brought and placed it on the bedside table. I extinguished the lights and lay down.

In my younger days I could drop off to sleep in fairly short order, a useful skill for a companion of Nayland Smith's. Now, after fifteen years of marriage I find it difficult to sleep without my wife near me. There are a hundred small things from the warmth of her body to the smell of her hair and the rhythm of her breathing that relax me. When I am away from her I feel off-balance, and a simple task like going to sleep becomes difficult.

On this night that probably saved my life.

I had lain there in the dark for well over an hour when I felt a tiny stirring of air. I had left the small window cracked a little and now it was opening. I was fully awake in an instant but I made no movement to give myself away. I strained my eyes against the darkness but could not see a thing. There was no noise from the window but I fancied I felt something entering the room.

I lay there trying to see or hear anything so that I could be certain, but there was nothing. Then I heard a slight noise, a "whuffing" like a large hound that has just taken a scent.

With a speed that surprised me I found myself leaping from the bed and seizing the revolver. As I did though a pair of arms caught me from behind. I twisted and fought but the arms had an ape-like strength, they bore me to the ground with frightening ease. Leathery fingers sought and found my throat in a grip that cut off my breath.

I was being strangled!

Desperately I pointed the revolver backward over my shoulder and fired off three shots. The thing's hold did not lessen. With its free hand it swatted the gun out of my hand and I heard it slide across the floor to the far side of the room. I continued to fight but it was useless. I could feel my head pounding from lack of oxygen, my thoughts were starting to go fuzzy.

Suddenly light flooded the room. I heard a gasp, then a woman's voice said something. I couldn't make out the words but the tone was a challenge. Three more shots rang out and the terrible pressure on my throat vanished. I collapsed and must have lost consciousness for several seconds. When I opened my eyes Joan La Tour was kneeling over me in her nightdress. She wore a look of concern and held my revolver in one hand.

"Dr. Petrie!" she said, "Are you alright?"

Before I could make myself answer, Costigan burst through the door, a pistol in one hand and an electric torch in the other.

"What happened?" He demanded.

"There!" Joan pointed across the room, "He went out the window!"

Costigan rushed to the window and attempted to thrust his upper body through it but it was too small. He was only to force his head and the arm with the torch through. After several moments he pulled himself back inside.

"Nothing human left that way!" he said.

4 – Some Revelations

We slept on sofas in the great hall the rest of the night. I was reluctant to intrude on a lady's privacy but Costigan pointed out that the threat to life and limb was the greater concern and Joan readily agreed. She even volunteered to take a turn at watch but he insisted on staying up the whole night himself.

In the morning we examined my room again. It was a confounding problem. The window was large enough for someone of Joan's size to squeeze through, but the man or thing I had wrestled with had

seemed much larger and heavier. Even if it had been an exceptionally strong dwarf, the wall outside was smooth, with no possible purchase for climbing in any direction.

Joan and I searched the ground below but found no trace of ladder marks and no imprint of the kind a falling body would certainly have made. Costigan found a way onto the roof, thinking the assassin might have let himself down to the window on a rope. This proved fruitless as well. The accumulated soot left clear tracks where he stepped but aside from the marks left by squirrels and pigeons his were the only prints.

We even came up with the idea of tapping the walls of the room with an iron bar, thinking there must be a secret passage, but even that failed to prove anything.

Joan wanted to telephone the police but Costigan refused. He told her it was because our story was too wild to be believed but I knew he was remembering Zarnak's warning. The police might frighten away our enemies, then all chance to catch them would be gone.

We were still puzzling it over in mid-afternoon when a car drove up. Joan was delighted when Harry Harper emerged. She ran to him and kissed him affectionately, but when Anton Zarnak got out I thought she paled a bit.

"Joan darling," Harry said, "I'd like to present Dr. Zarnak. He is the most amazing man."

"The Doctor and I have already met." She responded coolly.

"Really?" Harry said, "How remarkable."

"Miss La Tour and I were near neighbors in America." Zarnak said, "My house at number 13 River Street is in the same environs as Chinatown. I regret that I knew her only in passing." He bowed gallantly and kissed her hand.

"I knew you a little better," Joan returned, "By reputation at least. Everyone in our community knew and respected the name of Dr. Zarnak."

Zarnak nodded in acknowledgment of the compliment but I still felt a tension between the two. Before there was any more exchange though another person stepped out of the car and captured Zarnak's attention. She was a small, plump woman with a motherly air about her.

"Miss La Tour," Zarnak said, "Gentlemen, may I present Mrs. Hecht."

The small woman smiled shyly and gave her best curtsy.

"Mrs. Hecht is very tired after the drive," Zarnak said to Joan and Harry, "May I impose on you to show her to a room? "I'm afraid I must talk with Dr. Petrie and Mr. Costigan for a few moments."

"Of course." Joan replied and escorted Mrs. Hecht and Harry to the house.

As they moved away Zarnak eyed me intently.

"Are you all right Doctor?" he asked. "By the bruises on your neck I would say you had a close call with a man with very large hands... and long sharp nails."

I told him of my terrible encounter the night before and he listened intently.

"You are lucky to be alive Petrie!" he said when I had finished. "Few men have ever survived such an encounter."

"You know what it was?" Costigan asked.

"I think so." Zarnak answered, "But let's not talk of it here. Show me the place where Nayland Smith was struck down."

I thought the request somewhat abrupt. I glanced over at Costigan but he only shrugged his massive shoulders, his face expressionless.

Zarnak took a moment to rummage around his luggage and removed something small which he dropped in the pocket of his jacket. He left his baggage for his chauffeur to unload and followed us down the path towards the village.

"Here's the spot!" Costigan grunted. We could see that the heather on either side of the narrow path was blackened and burned.

Zarnak knelt and examined the charred vegetation closely.

"Lightning would make a mark something like this." He commented.

"It was no natural lightning!" Costigan said, "Skull Face had a trap here. I told you he killed one of his own men up in the castle. We found he had rigged a suit of armor with wires and powerful batteries to deliver a fatal electrical shock. I'm certain he had something similar here."

"Indeed?" Zarnak seemed thoughtful, "I am surprised that a scion of Atlantis would use such a device."

"He is an electrical wizard." Costigan said grimly, "He even had tiny remote cameras hidden throughout the castle to monitor us."

"Cameras?" I said, "But how did he retrieve the film?"

"He claimed that they could transmit pictures remotely," Costigan said, "I don't know how, but I don't question that he did it!"

"The technology is impressive to us in this day and age," Zarnak said, "But crude by the standards of ancient Atlantis. I wonder if he is borrowing someone else's method."

"Possibly," Costigan replied, "The Society of the Scorpion was around before Kathulos emerged from the sea. I believe they have used advanced science before this."

"Of course!" I said, "Nayland Smith told me about them. The Society was a branch of a greater organization called the Si Fan! They were headed by a man name Fo-Hi who wore the mantle of the Scorpion and

used electrical devices for his own sinister ends. When Fo-Hi died the Society was thought destroyed."

"Until Kathulos set himself up as the new Scorpion!" Costigan concluded. "Perhaps the agents of Fo-Hi were the ones who gave him this science. But how does any of this help us?"

"All knowledge is useful." Zarnak said. "For example, knowledge of arcane Thibetan lore would seem useless in the English countryside, but it is through that knowledge of that I know who and what attacked Dr. Petrie."

"What was it?" I cried.

"I believe you were attacked by a tulpa or a thought projection." Zarnak said, "A powerful adept can use a focus of some sort to give his thoughts tangible form. Effectively he can think a creature into being, which will then carry out the adept's will. That is why it could enter and leave your room so easily. As a creature of manifest

thought the tulpa is not bound by the same limits than physical creatures are."

"You can't be serious." I said.

"But I am." Zarnak said, "Generating a tulpa is difficult and requires a great deal of time and energy. Nevertheless I have done it myself on occasion. I assure you that Kathulos can do the same. Thibetan mental skills derive largely from Atlantean lore after all."

"How do we fight it?" Costigan asked.

"With this!" Zarnak reached into his pocket and produced the small wrapped object he had placed there earlier. As he unwrapped it I saw it was a knife carved from some black metal. The blade was triangular in cross section, making it a strong thrusting weapon but useless for slashing. The handle was ornately carved with pagan symbols and two hideous faces glared out from opposite sides of the pommel."

"A Thibetan phurba." Costigan murmured.

"Very good Mr. Costigan." Zarnak said, "A potent talisman against demons and evil spirits. They are said to flee at even the sighs of the phurba. Some spirits are thought to be immune to any earthly weapon, but this knife was made from meteoric iron. Since it is not of this earth it is especially potent."

"It sounds like childish superstition." I said.

"Nonetheless Doctor," Zarnak replied, "I am going to insist that you keep it with you at all times. It will protect you better than any firearm."

"It's a good idea Petrie." Costigan said, "I don't know that I buy all this hocus-pocus either, but you can always use a good stout knife in a pinch."

I agreed, reluctantly and dropped the strange weapon into my jacket pocket.

"Now what?" I asked.

"Now dinner," Zarnak replied, "Afterward I recommend several hours of rest. We'll need to be up and fresh at midnight."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"To raise the dead of course." Zarnak answered.

* * * * *

"A séance?" Harry Harper asked, "I've been to several of course, but I can't say I see the point."

"It's quite simple." Zarnak said, "We need information, and there is no one living who can provide it for us. I believe that Taverel Manor was the center of Kathulos' operations for a reason and that he led Mr. Costigan to Calais to disguise that reason."

"But what reason?" Harry asked.

"That," Zarnak said, "Is something I hope this experiment can discern. I believe that there is something hidden on these grounds that our enemy covets but which remains hidden so well that even the resources of Skull Face have been unable to uncover it."

"What is this hidden thing?" Costigan asked, "A treasure? A weapon?"

"I don't know yet, Zarnak replied, "Something powerful I believe. Some relic of ancient science or sorcery that will further his plans. You see, this is not the first time that the Taverel family has come into contact with the remnants of Atlantis."

We glanced at each other, surprise and curiosity registering on each face. Zarnak was silent, letting us take in the import of his statement. I rather think he enjoyed the melodrama of the moment.

It was Costigan who broke the silence.

"I think you should tell us what you're talking about."

"Of course." Zarnak smiled slightly, "Sir Haldred was kind enough to let me look through his family records when I visited him. I found mention of a family dispute that bears on our situation."

"Over three hundred and a half centuries ago, at a time when the owner of this manor and all the Taverel estates was Sir Hilderl Taferel. (The name was modernized to Taverel in the 1750's). Sir Hildred was an elderly man without children of his own. He had a beloved niece Marylin, to whom he wished to leave everything. Unfortunately, in 1590 the ten year old Marylin disappeared and was believed dead. The only remaining heir was her cousin, Sir John Taferel."

"Sir John was the family's black sheep. He fought a number of duels ever matters in which he was at fault. His last fight was chosen unwisely and he died on the other man's sword. That would have been in 1592 I believe. In any case, as he lay dying he confessed that he had been responsible for Marylin's disappearance. He has kidnapped her and sold her to an infamous Barbary pirate."

"The girl changed hands several times, eventually ending out in the lost city of Negari. This was a surviving outpost of old Atlantis which still practiced a debased form of the ancient religion."

"Marylin was to have been the human sacrifice in that terrible city but fate in the form of a Puritan adventurer intervened. Single-handed he freed the young woman and brought her safe away from Negari. In 1599 she returned to England and the bosom of her grateful uncle. Marylin never married, but did adopt Sir John's orphaned children and raised them as her own."

"And the uncle's name was Sir Hilderl Taferel?" Harry laughed, "So similar to our own Sir Haldred Taverel. Quite a jolly coincidence!"

"Perhaps," Zarnak said, "Though a friend of mine would say differently. His 'Theory of Cycles' claims that acts of violence or passion connected to certain places or objects tend to replay themselves over and over, with only the details of the characters involved changing."

"Whether or not he is correct, I do not believe that young Marylin returned empty-handed. She brought back something from Negari, an object that Kathulos wants. I believe that only she can tell us what and where it is."

"So it is she you propose to raise?" I asked.

"Yes Petrie." Zarnak said, "Kathulos may have powers and resources not available to us, but we have something he does not." He gestured to his plump housekeeper.

"Mrs. Hecht is the greatest unconscious medium in all of Europe!" he said. "With her help we cannot possibly fail."

We agreed to Zarnak's plan. After dinner and brandy I excused myself from the men, intending to write in my journal for a while before midnight. As I left the sitting room and headed up the stairs I heard a soft voice call my name.

"Doctor Petrie?" It was Joan. She was alone and carrying a lamp.

"Yes my dear?"

"I was going to the west wing," she said, "One of the servants told me that there was a portrait of Marylin Taferel there, and another of the Puritan who rescued her. Would you like to come along?"

"Wouldn't you rather wait for your fiancé?" I asked, "I'm sure he'll be along any minute."

"Harry?" she smiled and shook her head proudly. "He will be occupied with his brandy and cigars for hours! My curiosity will not wait that long.

"You needn't come along if you don't want to Doctor, but I am going now!"

I admired her impetuous spirit, so unlike the cringing fear Harry had ascribed to her. As awkward as the thought of going alone with another man's fiancée was, the thought of letting her explore the Manor alone was worse.

"Very well." I agreed and offered her my arm.

The portraits were easy to find. They were beautifully done and set close enough to one another to provide a real study in contrasts.

Marilyn Taferel had been young when her portrait was painted, probably in her mid-twenties. She was a lovely woman with a wealth of red-gold hair. Her ordeals had given her face a gravity beyond her years but her gray eyes blue eyes were clear with life and vibrancy.

The tall Puritan was a frightening figure. He was of middle-age with a spare face and a stern expression in his steely eyes. His clothes were all black, their severity broken only by the swept hilt of the rapier he wore at his side.

"Those eyes!" Joan gave a little shudder and clung more tightly to my arm. "It's as if they can see into your soul."

"He is an intimidating chap." I agreed, "But he's been dead and gone more than three hundred years now. There's nothing to fear."

Suddenly I felt a stinging pain in my arm. Joan drew away from me and as she did I saw a tiny needle projecting from the ring she wore." Joan, what..."

It must have been drugged. Already I felt my head swimming. It was hard to focus my eyes. I took a step toward her, then another. Then my strength failed and I collapsed to the stone floor.

5 – Interview With the Devil

When I awoke I was in a different room, a chamber with no windows that I could see, but well lit with electrical lights. The walls were made of stone blocks, though a different workmanship than in the manor. I tried to stand up but a wave of nausea forced me back to a prone position.

"The drug will wear off shortly Dr. Petrie," said a voice from beyond my field of vision, "It is an alkaloid of my own devising which will rob a man of consciousness very quickly. Alas I have not yet removed all the unpleasant side-effects."

The voice was cultured, and stressed both sibilant and guttural sounds. It was horribly familiar. In spite of the drug's effects I forced myself to sit up so my eyes could confirm what my ears had told me.

The man I saw was over six feet tall, and his slender build made him seem even taller. He wore a black robe embroidered with a peacock done in silver thread. His high skull was shaven and surmounted by a black skullcap with a bead of coral in its center. His eyes were the green of a jungle cat's and his face was that of Satan himself.

"Fu Manchu!" I breathed.

We had been chasing one devil and had found another, a fiend easily as dangerous as Kathulos himself. Smith and I had faced him before and only just managed to foil some of his horrible schemes. My mind whirled as much from this new revelation as from the drugs. What was the Devil Doctor doing here? What was his connection with Skull Face? If these two had joined forces I feared for the world!

"I admire your bravado Doctor," Fu Manchu said, "But it is to no good purpose. Lie back and let the symptoms pass."

"See here Fu Manchu!" I said as I struggled to my feet, "I demand to know what your part in this is!"

He did not seem to change expression, but his gaze froze me before I could say more. I had forgotten the terrible of the Devil Doctor's eyes to hold a person as the gaze of a cobra paralyzes a bird.

"I have attended the best of your western schools." Fu Manchu said, "I am a Doctor of Philosophy from Edinburgh, I am a Doctor of Sciences from Heidelberg, I am a Doctor of Medicine from the Sorbonne; my friends have the courtesy to address me as *Doctor*¹."

I swallowed nervously. For all his evil ways Fu Manchu did have a strange sense of honor, and of propriety. It would not serve any purpose to antagonize him.

"Forgive me Dr. Fu Manchu." I said in a quieter voice. I hope you understand if the circumstances of my visit, and other recent events have put me off a bit."

"The death of Sir Denis Nayland Smith." He said, "I do understand Dr. Petrie. Would it rest your mind to learn that I had nothing to do with that?"

"I don't believe it!" I blurted out. I regretted the words as soon as I said them, but the Devil Doctor was nonplussed.

"You British," he said mildly, "There really is no limit to your discourtesy. I have demonstrated to you on several occasions that I am a man of my word. I give you my word as a mandarin that I am innocent of any actions against Sir Denis."

"Is not Kathulos your agent then?" I asked.

"That creature has insinuated himself into the Si Fan, yes." Fu Manchu responded, "But he is no true ally! When Kathulos appeared several years ago he pulled together the remnants of my old ally Fo-Hi's organization and assumed the role of the Scorpion. This came to the attention of the Ruling Council of the Si Fan and we confronted him. I urged his elimination but some on the Council were dazzled by the ancient secrets he possessed. They overruled me and give him a position of power. Since then he has done much to undermine both me and my policies.

"The time is not yet come for the Si Fan to rise again to challenge your Western imperialism. The wiser heads in the council know that we must be patient until the moment is right. Kathulos rails against this, insisting that all we need is sufficient force. By promising to deliver this force he has swayed the impetuous and there is internal strife in the Si Fan. Kathulos would use this strife to gain power over them. He would make himself President of the Council and use the Si Fan for his own schemes of conquest."

"Why are you telling me all this?" I asked.

"I would like to see Kathulos fail." Fu Manchu said, "But while he enjoys the favor of the Council I am limited in my actions. I must first persuade them that my suspicions are correct and so I am here to study him. I must learn more about his motives and about what he means to accomplish in this place.

"You know more about this matter than I do." He had been facing off to the side with his hands clasped behind him like a lecturer. Now he turned his eyes on me again and they shone with flame-like intensity.

"I know that Dr. Zarnak has conferred with you and Mr. Costigan in secret." he said, "I would have all the information you possess on Kathulos and his plans. I desire that you tell me everything you know."

"Why should I?" I demanded. I had seen the horrors Fu Manchu had committed in the past and knew that he was no better than Skull Face. Let the two of them continue their struggle for power. With any luck they would destroy each other and undermine the sinister organization they served with their struggle.

"I will not insult you with threats of torture and drugs." Fu Manchu said quietly, "You have seen my methods and know that they will break any man, given time."

I shuddered and clenched my jaw. The ways of Fu Manchu were too terrible to contemplate, they were certain to break me. I only hoped I could find some way to end my own life before that happened.

"You are a brave man," he continued, "I believe you could resist me long enough that the knowledge you possess would be moot. Besides, I would regret the ruin of such a fine mind."

"You don't expect me to just give you what information I have, do you?" I asked.

"Not freely of course," the Devil Doctor answered, "I shall buy them with three promises. If you aid me I give my solemn word to work against Kathulos' plans. I promise that I shall dissuade the Si Fan from any present action against England and the West."

¹ When I repeated this incident to Anton Zarnak he showed some sympathy for Fu Manchu, having offered similar rudenesses.

I was shocked. Was the threat to Fu Manchu's power so great that he would forswear, even temporarily, all actions against the western world? Yet I knew him well enough to know that he honored his word with fanatical single-mindedness. Once given, the promise of Fu Manchu was inviolate.

"And the third promise?" I asked.

"The one that will mean the most to you Doctor," Fu Manchu said. "I promise I will return to you the life of your friend, Sir Denis Nayland Smith."

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I was stunned! I had barely come to terms with Smith's death and now his greatest enemy was telling me that he still lived! It was impossible, but I did not repeat my earlier mistake and challenge the Devil Doctor's veracity.

"I told you that I had nothing to do with Sir Dennis' death." He continued, "Indeed, I could not have for Sir Denis is still alive. Kathulos' minions fired a drugged dart at him, then used the electrical apparatus to produce a flash and to char the ground. I am certain that the drug he used was my own creation, *f. catalepsis*."

I remembered the name well. It was the drug Fu Manchu had used to simulate the deaths of several leading scientists. Once the men had been buried he secretly recovered their 'corpses' from their graves and gave them the antidote. He was then free to wrest their secrets from them while the world believed them dead and gone. And now a different devil had done the same to Smith!

"I believe you." I said, "But why? What does he hope to gain?"

"Knowledge is power," Fu Manchu replied, "Sir Denis knows all the secrets and inner workings of the British government and its police. Also, I do not doubt Kathulos hopes to learn about me from my most persistent foe.

"He will break Smith Dr. Petrie, and when he has learned everything he wants he will dispose of him. If you aid me I promise I will do all I can to destroy Kathulos and to save your friend."

"I don't know." I said, "It all seems too easy. If you and Kathulos really are enemies how do you know so much about him? And how is it you manage to stay hidden in the same tunnels he is using? We are in some chamber beneath Taverel Manor I presume?"

"You are not far from being correct." He answered, "The passages beneath the manor are numerous and some of them of remarkable antiquity. The chamber we are in now are not under the house proper, but beneath the ruin of the old rectory a mile away. A tunnel connects us to the main complex but Kathulos' attention is not focused in this direction.

"As to your other question," he continued, "I knew many months ago that Kathulos had turned his attention to this place. I made certain that I had an agent here to observe him."

"Do you mean Joan?" I asked bitterly. I had liked and trusted the girl. Her betrayal was a hard thing to accept.

"Do not judge her too harshly Dr. Petrie." He said, "Miss La Tour is not my agent by choice. I have a means of controlling her, as once I controlled your lovely wife."

"You devil!" I snarled.

"Come Doctor," Fu Manchu's tone was infuriatingly reasonable, "Do not be disingenuous. You have known for years that I employ such methods, just as your own government does when it suits their needs. Rather than curse me you should rejoice that the young woman is vindicated. Your romantic notions about the 'fair flowers of the East' need not be disrupted by her actions."

I bristled at his tone, but remained silent. There was no point engaging the fiend in debate with so much at stake.

"Miss La Tour was involved with a branch of the Si Fan in America." Fu Manchu continued, "As I needed someone with her skills who was unknown to Kathulos' operatives. Her arrival in London was most fortunate.

"Now stop prevaricating Doctor." His tone had become demanding. "I have been patient with you but I need the information you possess! What does Zarnak know of my enemy? What has he told you?"

"I will not betray him!" I said, hoping it sounded much braver than I felt. I knew that Smith would never forgive me if I helped this monster, even to save his life. Besides, what information I did possess was so scant that Fu Manchu was likely to have me killed anyway. By remaining silent perhaps I could buy a few more hours of life.

"Fool!" Fu Manchu stepped closer, his eyes clouded with that maniacal rage I had seen several times before. I braced myself, hoping he would come within striking range. I was still weak from the drug but with luck, perhaps I could overpower him before his men had a chance to kill me.

Whatever slight chance I might have had was lost as the door opened and one of the Burmese dacoits Fu Manchu often used as his bodyguard stepped in supporting Joan La Tour. She was weak and seemed unable to stand on her own. The Burmese helped her to a wooden chair where she collapsed."

Fu Manchu barked a question at her in Mandarin and she responded in the same language. The exchange lasted for several minutes. When he finally turned his attention back to me his eyes were clear again.

"It seems my questions are no longer relevant." Fu Manchu said, "Even as we have spoken Kathulos has made his move. Now I must make my counter. But you Dr. Petrie shall be no part of it! You are a pawn which has lost it's value, to be removed from the board."

He gestured and several dacoits emerged from the dark recesses of the chamber. At a command two of them took my arms and began to propel me out of the room. I struggled, but they were much stronger than I and seemed well versed in all the tricks of ju-jitsu.

The words of Fu Manchu stopped us at the door.

"A warning Doctor," he said, "In case you happen to live out this day." He said, "Do not trust your friend Zarnak. I dwelt for several years among the hideous Tcho Tcho people and learned of him there. He may seem a refined scholar but he was once the high priest of the Tcho Tcho's blasphemous religion. They believe in ancient gods who will rise one day and wipe humanity from this world. They pray for this day and practice unspeakable abominations in their temples to ready themselves for it.

"Do not trust Anton Zarnak." He repeated.

6- Joan's Story

The room the dacoits placed me in was truly a cell and not some other chamber conscripted into use. It was small, with a heavy wooden door set with a barred window. It and two others identical to it looked out into a central dungeon complete with a rack and other tools of torture now rusted with age. What such a room was doing beneath an ancient rectory I did not care to know.

Once I was locked in one of the dacoits left the dungeon while his companion remained to guard me. He pulled a chair to where he could watch the door of my cell easily and proceeded to sharpen a wicked looking parang².

I tried my strength against the door but it was distressingly solid. The dacoit's impassive face lighted with a wicked grin at my efforts. He raised his parang and made a number of cutting movements, then pointed at me. The meaning was clear, if I managed to get through the door he would demonstrate each of those cuts on me.

I moved to the rear of my cell (which was only about five feet from the front) and slumped down. My friends were in terrible danger by two foes, one of whom they did not even know of. If only there were a way I could warn them, but there was not.

Long minutes passed as I listened to the sound of steel sliding across the whetstone. After what seemed a very long time the sound stopped and I heard voices. I rose to look out of the barred window.

Joan La Tour had entered and was speaking earnestly to the dacoit in Mandarin. He listened, then grunted and shook his head.

She spoke again, her tone was more emphatic and she gestured towards my cell. He continued to shake his head and a loud argument between the two commenced. Finally the dacoit raised his

² A heavy bush knife used in Malaysia. The Parang is comparable in size and function to a macheté.

weapon as if to strike her.

Joan cried out and fell to her knees at the man's feet. Her tone had changed to one of desperate pleading. I cringed seeing her in such distress. The dacoit laughed.

Then the man gave a small cry and grabbed his leg where Joan's hand had brushed against it. On her finger I saw the same ring she had used on me earlier.

The dacoit realized what had happened. He swung the parang with terrible force. Joan barely managed to roll away from the blow, then sprang to her feet. The dacoit cut at her again but she dodged away with cat-like speed. Again he tried and missed. His third swing was feeble as the drug began to take effect. Joan caught his wrist and took the parang from him. Before she could strike he collapsed to the floor.

"Joan!" I cried, "Get the key! We have to warn the others!"

She moved to the cell.

"He has no key Doctor." she said, "That was what started the argument. He had been told to admit no one unless they brought the key with them. Fortunately I learned how to pick locks long ago."

She bent and began to work on the padlock. It was free of rust and looked modern in design.

"I know he has a hold on you," I said, "Is it a loved one?"

"My little sister," she replied in a grim tone. "Six years ago I left her in a convent school in Poitiers. I meant to protect her from the sort of life I knew awaited me in America. I had thought her safe there until I received word that she was awaiting me in London. Dr. Fu Manchu had her at his own school. She was well cared for, but it was clear that I would never see her again unless I obeyed his commands."

"It is an old trick of his." I said.

"He told me to become engaged to Harry Harper." She continued. "In that way I could learn about Taverel Manor and Kathulos dealings there.

"Poor Harry, I think he really loves me."

There was guilt in her voice. I tried to change the subject to ease her feelings.

"What is your sister's name?" I asked.

"Jirel." She responded, "Papa named us after two great heroines of France."

"Don't worry!" I said, "Nayland Smith is alive. If anyone can save your sister it is he! Especially with the help of Costigan and Zarnak."

"Save her from Dr. Fu Manchu?" she asked, "No Dr. Petrie, I will not see little Jirel again. I betray Fu Manchu because what he and Kathulos seek is too terrible for any man to have. They must be stopped, even if... ah, there!"

This last came as the lock made a `clicking' sound and sprung open. In a moment the door swung wide and I was free.

"We should kill this one." Joan said, nodding at the fallen dacoit.

"No," I replied, "The only thing that matters is freeing our friends."

She nodded and led me out of the room. After a few twist and turns we came out in a tunnel about eight feet square. The walls were set with stones and shored up by heavy columns. This slowed our progress as the columns made excellent hiding places and I had to probe them carefully with the light of Joan's electric torch as we passed.

"Tell me," I said, "What is this weapon that Kathulos and Fu Manchu seek?"

"I learned of it at the séance" she said.

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"We gathered at midnight." Joan began, "Your absence was the cause for concern so Costigan and Harry went to find you. Zarnak was impassive, but from the way he watched me, I think he suspected.

"You don't know what sort of man he is Doctor!" Her voice held a note of genuine fear, "In Chinatown they say he is immortal, that he reads minds and casts terrible curses. Some say that he is not human at all but an ancient demon in human form!"

I was struck by this display from a girl I knew to be as fearless as any man. It echoed the words Fu Manchu had spoken earlier. I wondered what kind of a man I had allied myself with.

"When they returned they were alarmed." she continued, "Costigan wanted to search for you but Zarnak insisted that the séance must be done at once or the opportunity would be lost. He prevailed and the five of us joined hands around a small table.

I have seen seances before, the kind the gypsy women on River Street use to take money from wealthy Americans. This was nothing like those.

There was no crystal ball, no spirit rapping, and Mrs. Hecht did not speak in strange voices. Instead, her eyes rolled up in her head and her body went stiff and cold. I was on her left and the feel of her hand became like the grip of a corpse in rigor mortis.

I feared she was dead, but Zarnak told us to remain calm, that this was all part of the normal process. After several moments her mouth opened wide and a thick stream of white fog began to pour forth. The fog gathered at the center of the table and took the form of a woman. The same woman we saw in the portrait, Marylin Taferel!"

"I have come." She said. Her voice was not like the voice one expects of a ghost. It was as warm and human as that of a living woman, though it seemed to come from far away.

"Marylin Tafarel," Zarnak said, "We have called you here because we need your guidance. Your ancestral home is still haunted by the presence of that which you brought back from Africa."

"That which I brought?" her voice was sad, "Solomon told me it was a thing of the Devil but I thought it beautiful. I hoped to do good with it, but he was right. It is a bringer of grief and horror."

"Tell of us of this thing." Zarnak persisted.

"It was a ruby." The phantom said, "The largest ever seen! A fabulous treasure shut away in that dark and corrupt city. It had been one of four great gemstones of old Atlantis which were said to be filled with their own life and power."

"What is this power?" Zarnak asked.

"The power that let me keep it, and the power by which I lost it."

She said sadly, "My Captain, the man who rescued me bade me not to keep it but I discovered that when I held it I could override his will, or the will of anyone I met. By its power they were bound to obey me. Whatever I commanded, they did.

"I was a child then and in my mind I saw only the possibilities. I could command generals to end wars. I could make the wealthy champion the poor... I could command my brave Captain to love me."

"What became of the stone?" Zarnak asked.

"The Captain warned me of it's power." The phantom replied, "Finally I knew that he was right. I hid the stone where I hoped none would ever find it. My Captain approved, but without the ruby to hold him he was soon gone."

"There were other stones," Zarnak said, "Tell me of them."

"The ruby's companions were a diamond, an emerald, and a girasol," she said, "Each has the power to command the will of others. Together their power grows. In ancient times when all four were gathered together their reach extended across the known world. Yet there were a few who were unaffected by the power of the stones.

They stole them and scattered them through the world."

"Where is the ruby hidden?" Zarnak demanded.

"I will not tell you!" She responded. "It can bring naught but suffering and slavery!"

"You must!" he said, "We seek to protect the ruby from one who would use it to gain great power. He is Kathulos, the Atlantean."

"Kathulos?" her voice seemed farther away, "He is not as ancient as the stones, but old enough to know of their power. In ancient times he sought them and would have used them to bring terrible suffering to the world. He could not find them though, and when Atlantis was lost to the seas his threat was ended."

"He has returned!" Zarnak said, "He seeks the ruby still and he will have it, unless we find it first!"

"Very well," the phantom said, "It lies buried beneath the very stones of this room. Follow my light and you will find it."

With that her form became less and less distinct until all that was left were thin streamers of mist and a ball of light, like St. Elmo's fire. It floated through the great hall until it stopped above a certain stone in the floor, then it sank into the ground and disappeared from sight.

"There!" Zarnak cried.

We rushed to the flagstone, but it resisted even Mr. Costigan's great strength.

"We'll never get this way." Harry said, "The stone is too... Good Lord!"

We all turned in the direction of his gaze. Somehow a man had entered the room without our being aware of it. He was tall and lean, with sun-darkened skin and in his hands he held a glass globe the size of a grapefruit.

"Smith!" Costigan yelled, "You're alive!"

"No Costigan," Nayland Smith replied in a wooden voice, "I have passed through death. Now I return with a gift from my Master."

He raised the globe over his head.

"Sir Denis, no!" Zarnak spring forward, but too late. The globe shattered on the floor and the smell of mimosa swept through the room.

7 – A Contest of Devils

"Mimosa!" I said, "That is Fu Manchu's anesthetic gas."

"The men were rendered unconscious within seconds." Joan said. "I only escaped because Fu Manchu gives his agents special breathing filters to help them safely handle the mimosa. As it was I barely managed to get out of the room."

We had reached the main house and Joan now took me through a series of passages she seemed to know by heart. Without her to guide me, I would have been hopelessly lost.

Abruptly she stopped and extinguished her torch.

"We are coming out in a spy chamber overlooking the great hall." She said, "We must be as silent as possible."

She took my hand and guided me up a spiral of narrow stairs and into a niche where there was barely room for the two of us. Dim light came from a narrow viewing slit cut into the wall. When I looked out I saw that we were over the great hall, just as Joan had said.

There were a score of rough looking men of all races in the room, standing in positions of readiness. Our friends were there as well. They did not appear to be restrained in any way, but they knelt on the floor making no move to escape. They all faced a throne like chair on which sat a figure I knew could only be Kathulos.

He was aptly called 'Skull Face' for he resembled a human skeleton wrapped in opulent robes. His sinews looked as dry and thin as dead branches. His skin was the color of ancient parchment, and looked as brittle. He made me think of the mummies I had often seen in the museums in London and Cairo, minus the wrappings.

"... my old foe," he was saying in a croaking voice. "I am pleased to see you one last time. Tell me, how is my sweet Zuleika?"

"Go to H---!" Costigan roared.

"But that is a place of demons Costigan," Skull Face hissed, "I belong in the heavens now, as a god!"

"I know where I'd send you if I could just reach you!" Costigan raged, "You're nothing but..."

"Silence!" Kathulos cried.

In the time I had known him I had never seen Costigan bow to the will of another. Now he became silent, totally and instantly, with no sign of resistance.

"Prostrate yourself before me!" Kathulos commanded. To my horror Costigan fell on his face with a jarring impact and lay there in an attitude of worship.

Kathulos raised his right hand and in it I saw a huge ruby. I am not an expert on gemstones but I did happen to see the fabulous Culloden Diamond once before it was cut. At three thousand carats it was the greatest diamond ever taken out of the ground, and vastly larger than any ruby. This uncut stone was easily twice the size of the Culloden!

"I find I enjoy having this kind of power over you Mr. Costigan." Kathulos croaked. "What shall I do with it? I pitted you against your friends once, perhaps I should again. A contest of gladiators to the death!

"Then again, I could order you to strangle each of them in turn, and to stop breathing yourself. Ah, there are so many possibilities."

"Don't waste those possibilities." Zarnak said.

"What do you mean?" Skull Face asked.

"If you are too quick to kill your enemies," Zarnak said, "You may find you have disposed of your best opportunities as well."

"What opportunities would those be?" Kathulos croaked. "What have any of you creatures to offer me?"

"Do you not recognize me?" Zarnak said, "Does the name of Zhar-Nak mean nothing to the one who bears the name of Kathulos?"

"Zhar-Nak?" Skull Face repeated, "That is the ancient language of the Tcho-Tcho people. It means 'Mouthpiece of Zhar.' Who are you o man?"

"I am many things," Zarnak said, "I am the anointed High Priest of the Cult of the Twin Obscenities, Zhar and Lloigor. Just as you are high priest of the elder god whose name you bear."

The parchment lips opened and a horrible laughter poured out. It was a mad sound and that made my brain reel and ache.

"So the final mask is fallen away at last is it?" he shrieked, "Yes! Call me Skull Face, Scorpion, Kathulos of Atlantis, or any of a thousand other names I have worn. Beneath them all I am Kathulos, High Priest of Great Cthulhu who will rise again to own this world!

"But stay O Priest," he continued in a saner tone, "Why should you oppose me? When Mighty Cthulhu is freed from his sleep in sunken R'leyh will not he also set free his kindred, Zhar and Lloigor? Should not we two be allies?"

"I would have thought so," said Zarnak, "Yet I would be certain of your own motives first."

I did not understand this talk of 'elder gods,' though the names the two men spoke filled me with a strange instinctive horror. I could easily believe that Skull Face was a part of some diabolic religious cult, but Zarnak? The words of Joan and of Fu Manchu came back to me with terrible force as I watched the drama unfold. Clearly Zarnak

knew a great deal about Kathulos and his strange gods. Was that where his loyalties really lay?

"You question me Priest of Zhar?" Kathulos sneered.

"Aye!" Zarnak said, "You claim to serve the Great Old Ones but you have taken up the mantle of a lesser god. As the Scorpion you champion one race of men against another! You seek to establish a new human order in the world!"

"Fah!" Skull Face made a terrible sound as he tried to spit from his mummified mouth. "What do you know of it Priest? Do you think that I care anything for the struggles of Europe and Asia? They are all human scum to me! Only for the races of Africa do I have the slightest affection. It was there that our greatest outposts lay in

the days of Atlantis! Negari and Opar! Kaji and Ligur! Alas, all have fallen into barbarism and ruins now.

"But no passing fondness will save the peoples of Africa! Dominion over these humans is only a step on the path to awakening the masters. They shall cleanse the world of the living filth that infests it and walk free once again!"

"No!" A new voice rang out with a sibilant power that I knew well. I felt Joan's fingers bite into my forearm and her hand trembled slightly. At the far end of the hall Dr. Fu Manchu emerged from the shadows, flanked by a dozen dark-clad Dacoits.

Kathulos laughed his mad laugh.

"So, my honored ally, you have come." He said mockingly, "Alas, I fear you are too late. The Ruby of the Taferels is already mine!"

"Not so creature," the Devil Doctor replied, "You have overstepped yourself. You have usurped a place of honor in my organization. You have taken the treasure I covet. You have struck down a foe who was mine alone to deal with."

"You think such things matter to me?" Kathulos voice was shrill with madness.

"Your greatest crime is against mankind!" Fu Manchu said, "I have spent my life bringing man toward a golden age. Under my rule there will be no war, no poverty, all men will live as brothers. But you would betray humanity and give the world over to alien blasphemies."

"Fool!" Kathulos snarled, "I serve gods and you would defy them for the sake of cattle! I will not tolerate such insolence! You will kneel to my gods!"

Kathulos raised the great ruby over his head.

"YOU WILL KNEEL!"

All of the dacoits fell to their knees immediately but Fu Manchu remained standing. I don't know if it was his indomitable will, the mental disciplines he had studied, or an inborn resistance of some kind. He raised his hand, which held a tube-like device about eighteen inches long. His thumb pressed a button and the tube projected a brilliant flash of light. The beam struck the great Taferel Ruby and, in an instant nothing remained of it but a thin cloud of reddish dust.

Kathulos staggered backwards and slumped into the great throne-chair. He stared at the smoking stump that had been his hand with more surprise than pain. Then he pointed his good hand at the Devil Doctor.

"Kill him!" he croaked.

The Scorpion's men surged forward and the dacoits moved to meet them. Kathulos had the larger force but the rays from Fu Manchu's strange weapon were thinning their ranks. Then Costigan rose from the floor with a roar and bashed the heads of two of Kathulos' minions together with bone-shattering force. The others were on their feet more slowly but Kathulos' forces were suddenly faced with a battle on two fronts.

Contemptuous of knives, Costigan strode towards Skull Face. One minion rushed at him only to be laid on his ear by a powerful roundhouse right. Three surged forward together and managed to bear the big American down, fists flailing.

Smith also went down grappling with one of the Scorpion's men over a knife.

"Doctor!" Joan was pulling on my arm, "Hurry, we must go to them!"

I followed her without protest. The narrow stairs wound downward to a small landing, then out. We emerged behind one of the tapestries in the main hall.

The room was a chaotic scene with dacoits and the Scorpion's men fighting everywhere. I looked for Smith but didn't see him. Costigan was battling his way to Harry's side. The younger man was down and bleeding, and a knife-wielding thug was attempting to finish him off.

Kathulos was still slumped in his chair. He looked as if he might have died, though that semblance was not particularly new for him. I noticed that there were tendrils of mist rising from his body which swiftly congealed into a solid form. It was a bestial parody of humanity. Its yellow skin, apish arms and amber eyes were those of the Thibetan idol. I knew instantly that this was Kathulos' tulpa, the same monstrous projection that had nearly killed me.

As I watched the tulpa advanced on Fu Manchu, brushing aside his dacoits with frightening ease. The Devil Doctor tried his weapon against it, but the creature seemed unaffected.

Fu Manchu stood his ground. Nayland Smith had often said that the man seemed to know no personal fear. He seemed to know that flight was a futile against such an agile beast and had determined to die fighting. I felt a strange sympathy well up in me for this evil genius.

Suddenly Anton Zarnak emerged from the melee to stand beside Fu Manchu. He held up a talisman of some sort and began to chant. The creature paused for an instant, then roared and continued to bear down on the two men.

With a start I realized that I still had the phurba in my coat! Zarnak had said it was the key to fighting this monster!

"Hold on!" I yelled and plunged towards them.

I don't know how, but I made it through that battlefield without a scratch. I reached Zarnak's side just as the creature did. With a loud cry I plunged at it and struck with all my might! The blade pierced the beast's side, but he showed no sign of pain. With one sweep of his powerful arm he hurled me away. The wound I had made in his side was already closing.

The tulpa pounced on Zarnak and caught his throat in its massive hands.

"Petrie..." he managed to choke out, "...statue!"

In an instant I grasped what he was saying! A tulpu must have a physical object to serve as a focus for its summoning. If it appeared in the form of the idol then the idol must be its focus! Already Zarnak's face was purpling. I had only seconds to act. I said a quick prayer and threw the phurba at the hellish statue.

In all my youthful days as a cricket bowler I never threw as powerfully nor as true as I did then. The knife turned twice in flight and struck point first against the idol's chest. It actually penetrated, perhaps half an inch, and stuck there.

The creature released its hold on Zarnak and straightened in agony. A hideous cry issued from its throat, which was echoed from the lips of Kathulos. As I watched, Skull Face stiffened and writhed in agony while his creature dissolved into streamers of mist.

I rushed to Zarnak's side. He was coughing and gasping but he managed to speak.

"You did it Petrie!" he said, "It will take him some time to recover from that!"

"No Doctor!" came the harsh tones of Fu Manchu, "He will not recover at all!"

He raised his arm and pointed his terrible weapon at the fallen Kathulos.

If I had moved swiftly I could probably have deflected his aim, but I simply watched with grim satisfaction as the strange ray reduced the mighty Atlantean sorcerer to the dust of the ages.

"Now, `Zhar-Nak'" The Devil Doctor said as he turned his weapon towards us, "I regret the death of so noble a foe, but a high priest of the Old Ones is too dangerous to let live in this world."

"No!" I protested and interposed my body between Fu Manchu and Zarnak.

"Dr. Petrie," the Devil Doctor hissed, "I owe you my life, but this runs much deeper than life and death. This man is capable of unleashing on the world the same horror that Kathulos would have. You do not want to defend him."

I held the baleful stare of those cat-green eyes the best I could. "I won't let you kill him!"

"The choice is not yours Doctor," Fu Manchu said, "The risk is too great. I will not allow my world to harbor such a danger any longer."

"Then you'll have to kill me!" I managed to say.

Fu Manchu glared at me for a moment, then turned away. "Your chivalry is misplaced Doctor." He said, "I hope the blood of the world will not be on your hands and mine for this decision. Never the less, neither you nor Dr. Zarnak will die by my hand this day. You have my word."

The fighting had died down. Fu Manchu's dacoits had proven superior to the Scorpion's men. Thanks in no small part to Smith and Costigan. Only three survivors remained and they cowered under Costigan's watchful eye as he loomed over them, a captured Khyber knife in his hand.

"What now Fu Manchu?" snapped a familiar voice.

Though he had only just recovered from his hypnotic trance, Nayland Smith was already taking charge of the situation.

"It seems we have a truce, for the moment at least." He clipped.

In response Fu Manchu's weapon flashed three more times and Costigan's prisoners were reduced to ash. Growling a curse Costigan surged forward but Smith caught his arm. His face was pale and tense.

"Now we have a truce Sir Denis." The Devil Doctor said, "But do not make the mistake of presuming on my good will. My agents and I will leave now. Any attempt to follow us will be fatal. Will you give me your word you will not attempt it!"

"Yes blast you!" snapped Smith.

"I am pleased that this creature did not kill you Sir Denis." Fu Manchu said, "If you are to die by violence I prefer that it be by no hand other than my own."

"You'll have the chance to try soon enough!" Smith snapped.

Fu Manchu did not respond to this. Without another word he turned and strode out the way he had come.

8 - Two Gifts

"Is there any hope Doctor?"

"The medicines I am giving her will keep her alive and comfortable for some time." Zarnak said, "Perhaps for months. Beyond that I cannot say."

"I guess I should think it's worth it." Costigan said, "What's the life of one girl against the chance to end the menace of a devil like Skull Face?"

"We do what we must Costigan." Zarnak replied, "I wish the cost could have been less for you."

"We'll keep trying." I added, "Don't despair, we won't give up on her."

"I appreciate that Petrie." Costigan said, "If she does pull through I'm taking her back to Texas with me. I hate to leave Smith in the lurch but I need to get her as far away from Skull Face and anything that reminds her of him as I can."

"He'll understand." I said, "I'll tell him when I check on his wounds if you like."

"I'd better see to that myself Petrie." he said, "Thanks anyway."

He paused.

"Say," he said, "If you see Joan let her know I'm sorry."

"I shall."

Zarnak and I left him there as I continued on my rounds.

"What did he mean," Zarnak asked, "I haven't seen Miss La Tour in several days but I thought her wounds were not serious."

"Joan broke off her engagement to young Harry." I said, "He was pretty broken up about it, and she feels awful as well. I'm on my way to check on her now if you care to come along."

"Thank you Petrie," he said, "But broken hearts are not in my line."

I nodded and was about to say my farewells when I felt a tug at my sleeve. I turned to see a young girl, about twelve years old standing there. Her dark face was very serious.

"Pardon me sir," the girl asked, "Are you Dr. Petrie?"

"Yes, I am." I answered, "Is there something I can do for you?"

"My headmaster sent me to bring something to you." She said, "He wanted me to say, 'as a gesture of respect to a chivalrous opponent I offer two gifts.' Then he wanted me to give you this."

She held out her hand in which there was a stoppered vial of a cloudy green fluid.

I grabbed it and saw that it bore a label. On it in small, precise printing it read, "*Zuleika – 4 doses to be given, one every six hours.*"

"I looked at Zarnak in astonishment.

"How can it be?"

He didn't respond, but turned to the girl.

"The message said 'two gifts. Where is the other?'"

"I don't know sir." She responded, "I was only given the one."

"What is your name child?" Zarnak asked.

"Jirel sir." She said.

I looked at Zarnak with open-mouthed wonder. He laughed.

"I think we have faced a most excellent adversary." He said.

Thanks to the members of the NWNMS for encouragement and to Rick Lai for the use of some of his theories.