

Island of the Devil
by
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Chapter One

A Voice from the Grave

Dr. Stephen Ling stared at the telephone as if it were a poisonous serpent. It was a fairly innocuous piece of equipment, a little old-fashioned if the truth were told. It was one of the models on which the earpiece is connected by a short cable so the user must hold it to his ear with one hand while holding the mouthpiece with the other. It was less convenient than a newer model, but hardly capable of making a strong man's heart race with fear the way Stephen Ling's heart was racing now. Of course it wasn't the telephone itself that had caused his fright, it was the call.

Stephen Ling looked at the clock on his bedside table. The hands were set at a quarter past three. That wasn't terribly unusual, as one of the few physicians serving Chinatown Dr. Ling was often called for emergency situations in the middle of the night. It had been the voice on the other end of the phone. Stephen Ling had recognized it at once. It was a woman's voice, with clear bell-like tones speaking in Mandarin Chinese. The connection was fuzzy, as if it had been long-distance, but he was certain the voice had been that of his wife, Lotus.

The problem was that Lotus Ling had been dead for nearly a year.

Stephen Ling took a couple of deep breaths. He had strong nerves, a fact that had helped him in a number of bad situations in his life. As shaken as he was, he needed to find out what was going on, and he would lose his opportunity if he didn't act quickly. He picked up the phone and jiggled the arm. In a moment an operator came on.

"Operator," he said. "This is Dr. Stephen Ling. A call just came through to me at this number, but it was cut off. Can you tell me where it came from?"

"I'm sorry sir," the operator's voice was stiff and a little sleepy. "I can't really help you with that."

"I am a physician," Stephen Ling could sound both important and impatient when he tried. He put that to full effect now. "I have reason to believe that this was a medical emergency, possibly a matter of life and death. I need that information right now."

"Just a moment Doctor." The operator sounded wide awake now, and impressed by his urgency. A moment later she was back on the line.

"I'm sorry Doctor, but that was transferred from the overseas operator. All I can tell you was that it came from out of the country."

"I see. Thank you operator."

Stephen Ling hung up the phone, more confused than ever. He sat and thought for a few minutes, then rose, threw on a robe and headed to his study. He pulled out an old medical book on rare tropical diseases. He hadn't had any occasion to look at it in years. He opened the book but instead on reading it he reached his hand inside the dust jacket and felt around. A moment later he pulled out a small piece of paper. It was the size of a business card but it had only a telephone number printed on it.

He went back to the bedroom and dialed the number on his telephone. It was answered on the first ring.

"Hello?" There was a woman's voice on the other end. It had a calm, professional tone and Stephen Ling felt a little heartened to hear it.

"Hello, my name is Dr. Stephen Ling. I was given this number to call if anything unusual ever happened to my wife."

"Yes sir," the voice replied, "Has something happened to Mrs. Ling?"

"She died nine months ago." Stephen swallowed hard, "I don't understand it but I just received a telephone call from her, not five minutes ago."

"I understand." The voice betrayed neither surprise nor disbelief. "Can you hold a moment Dr. Ling? I'm going to put the call through to someone who can help you."

"I'll hold."

A there was a sound of clicking on the line as the call was transferred. Seconds later a man came on the line. He had a deep, powerful voice that made Stephen Ling think of a growling bear in a cave.

"Dr. Ling?"

"I'm here." Stephen Ling answered, "Can you tell me what's happening? I don't understand anything."

"I'm going to help you sort this out." The voice rumbled, "I just need to confirm a few things first."

"Go ahead."

"Your wife's name was Lotus Ling, is that right?"

"Yes."

"And she was Lotus Sung before she married you?"

"That's right." Stephen felt a touch of temper. These mysterious goings on were getting on his nerves.

"And she's Eurasian rather than pure Chinese?"

"Lotus was adopted. She said she never knew the nationality of either of her parents. Say, what has any of this got to do with anything? What difference does it make whether she's Eurasian?"

"Holy Cow" rumbled the voice, "Don't blow your stack Dr. Ling. I just had to be certain of who she was."

"Why is that so important?" Stephen Ling snapped. "What is all this mystery about my wife?"

"It's a lot to tell you on the phone." The big voice said, "Stay where you are, I'll come over and bring you back here. Then I'll answer all of your questions."

"Why should I trust you?" Stephen Ling demanded, "Listen, I've had enough of this runaround! You're going to tell me what's going on right now or I'm not taking one step out of this house."

"Would it make any difference if I told you where I wanted to bring you?" the voice rumbled.

"I don't see how it could."

"We're coming back to the Empire State Building. When you get here we're going to get on an express elevator that is going to bring you straight to the eighty-sixth floor." The big voice paused for effect. "Does that answer your questions?"

Stephen Ling sat down on the edge of his bed and swallowed several times. When he answered the anger was gone from his voice.

"You work for Doc Savage?"

"I do, and that should let you know that you're mixed up in something serious. I'll tell all about it, but I need to make sure you're not in danger first."

"I'll be ready when your car gets here."

"Thanks." The voice boomed, "Now, if you can hang up and stay off the phone for a bit I'll see about having that call traced."

"I've already tried that." Stephen said, "The operator said it was an overseas call, and she couldn't trace it."

"Yeah? Well you just let me worry about that."

Stephen hung up. He dressed in a hurry, not bothering to shower or shave. There was a photograph of his wife on his bedside table. He'd meant to move it because of the grief he'd felt each time he saw it, but he had never been to. It showed the smiling face of an intensely pretty woman. As the voice on the phone has suggested, she was Eurasian, her face gracefully blending the best features of east and west. He touched the picture gently.

A mix of emotions ran through him. He was frightened, angry, sad and hopeful. Mostly, he was confused.

The mention of the eighty-sixth floor had calmed these feelings. Stephen Ling knew that the entire eighty-sixth floor of the Empire State Building was leased to Doc Savage. His full name was Clark Savage Jr. and he was one of the most amazing men in the city, if not the world. He was a modern Renaissance man of a sort that had been in short supply even in the actual Renaissance.

People said that Doc Savage had the raw scientific genius of an Einstein, the inventiveness of an Edison or a Craig Kennedy, the physical strength of Tarzan of the Apes, and the moral character to match. According to the stories Stephen had heard, Doc Savage had dedicated his life to righting wrongs and finding justice for the little guy. He had crossed the world a dozen times breaking criminal rackets, deposing petty dictators and endowing charitable public works in the remotest places.

If it had just been stories, Stephen would have written them off as exaggerations, but he had actually met Doc Savage once. It had been at a medical conference six years earlier. Stephen had been awed by the sheer size and physical perfection of the man, but it had been his medical knowledge and his winning humility that had impressed him more. The mention of Doc Savage's name reassured him.

He paced the floor for some time, his gaze frequently returning to the telephone. Abruptly there was a knock on the door.

"Hello?"

"Dr. Ling!" the answering voice spoke in Mandarin. "Please help me, my wife is very sick. You must come at once."

Stephen Ling was torn. He had to wait for Doc Savage's men. If there was even a chance Lotus was alive he had to find out as much as he could. But his life was dedicated to the welfare of the people of Chinatown. He couldn't ignore a sick woman, not even for this.

He opened the door to admit two men. The first was a middle-aged Chinese man in pyjamas and a robe. The other was a short man with almost absurdly broad shoulders. He wasn't Chinese. Stephen thought his features looked Burmese, or possibly like one of the Tcho-Tcho people of Central Asia. "I'll be right with you." Stephen said and turned to his desk. "There is someone coming and I need to leave him a note explaining where I'll be."

As he picked up the pen, the small man pounced on his back. One powerful arm locked around his shoulders while the other clapped a rag across his mouth and nose. The rag was soaked in something that smelled sweet. The room began to spin.

Chapter Two Danger in Chinatown

In the eighty-sixth floor headquarters of Doc Savage the owner of the big voice hung up the phone, then picked it up again and dialed another number.

The man was as big as his voice suggested, fully six feet four inches tall and two hundred and sixty pounds of bone and muscle. Col. John Renwick, Renny as he was usually known, was one of Doc Savage's five closest aides and one of the leading civil engineers in the world. He was also the owner of a pair of freakishly large hands. Even on a man of his size they looked gigantic. Those hands could shell walnuts as efficiently as any nutcracker, and were useful when Renny got the urge to bash through the panels of an oaken door. They were less useful in dialing a telephone, so Renny used his pinky to place the call.

A young man with an efficient voice answered the phone on the first ring. He was one of a large number of private detectives who worked exclusively for Doc Savage and had their offices on another floor of the mighty building.

"Yes sir?"

"There was an overseas call placed to the home of Dr. Stephen Ling a few minutes ago," Renny said. "I need you to get in touch with the overseas operator and find out exactly where that call came from."

"I'll get on it right away sir."

"Good." Renny replied, "And put this ahead of anything else you're doing. I need to know as quickly as possibly."

"Yes sir!" The young man sounded excited to be given so important a task.

Renny hung up the phone moved through the skyscraper headquarters until he came to the laboratory. It was outfitted with a set of experimental equipment so modern and so complete that the professors of the great universities would weep with envy to see them.

The laboratory was empty except for a small, pale man in a lab coat who was letting out a string of curses as he worked over a small electrical device. Renny, who had lived much of his life around rough construction workers couldn't remember ever having heard such language.

"Holy cow! He rumbled, "You're going to burn out those vacuum tubes with language like that."

"Yeah?" The small man scowled and took a step towards him. "I suppose you came here at this hour just to razz me about it?"

The man was nearly a foot shorter than Renny and had a scrawny build and a sallow, unhealthy-looking complexion. Despite this the engineer took a half step backwards and raised his big hands in a placating gesture. He had known Major Thomas J. Roberts a long time and knew that he was healthy enough and tough enough to whip his weight in wildcats.

"Take it easy Long Tom." He rumbled, "I was on telephone duty tonight and something came in that I thought I should tell you about. Let's leave the feuding to Monk and Ham, when they get back."

Long Tom quieted. Monk and Ham were the last people he wanted his behavior likened to. They were two more of Doc Savage's aides who were known for their constant, childish feuding. They had ended out in a South American jail on a recent adventure, and even Ham's skills as a lawyer had done nothing to shorten their confinement. They wouldn't be back until their sentence expired in a few weeks.

"So, what's the emergency?" Long Tom asked.

"Something strange has happened with one of the College graduates."

Long Tom perked up at mention of the College. It was one of Doc Savage's most closely guarded secrets, a reform center in upstate New York where he sent many of the criminals he caught in the course of his adventures. At the College these people were subjected to a special type of brain surgery Doc had perfected. The procedure would repair the defective part of the brain that caused criminal behavior, and would wipe clean the person's memories. Then the staff at the College would re-train their patients, giving them useful skills and preparing them to re-enter society.

There had only been several times in the College's history that there had been trouble with one of the graduates but each time had meant terrible danger for Doc Savage and his associates.

"I just got a call from the husband of one of our graduates." Renny continued, "It seems that she telephoned him earlier this evening. Thing is, she's been dead for months."

"So, which graduate was it?"

"Lotus Ling."

Long Tom's eyes widened. "Is that who I think it is?"

Renny nodded. "I'm on my way to pick up the husband right now."

"I'm coming along. Just let me give Johnny a call."

The phone rang three times before a sleepy voice answered.

"A cognizance of the chronometric orientation is a hagiological endowment."

"If you're asking whether I know what time it is, I do." Long Tom snapped, "Listen Johnny, we've got an emergency." He spoke rapidly, fleshing out the situation for his friend. When he finished Johnny spoke.

"Lotus Ling. Isn't that the name that Lo Lar ended out with?"

"The pirate queen herself." Long Tom answered, "We don't know if this means the Cult of the Feathered Octopus is up to it's old tricks again, but it's best to be prepared. We're headed down to Chinatown to pick up the husband now. Why don't you meet us back here as soon as you can?"

Johnny agreed and Long Tom hung up. A moment later he joined Renny at the express elevator reserved for Doc Savage and his associates. The elevator was Doc's own design and could take a passenger to the ground floor faster than he could reach it by parachuting out a window. The car moved so fast that it's passengers were actually in free fall for about sixty-five floors of their trip. The drawback was the brutal deceleration, which left both men with sore knees and a ringing in their ears.

Ignoring these familiar sensations they selected an inconspicuous sedan from the small fleet of cars in Doc Savage's private parking garage. The traffic was non-existent in the early morning and the two made good time to Chinatown.

Stephen Ling's apartment was easy to find. He lived on the second floor of a storefront on River Street, directly above his medical office. A small manservant answered the door. He was barely five feet tall, with a brutish face and enormous shoulders. He didn't appear to understand English but made gestures that they should follow him upstairs.

"Funny," Long Tom quipped. "I didn't think Monk had relatives in the Orient."

Renny chortled. Though the resemblance wasn't at all close, the small man's long arms, powerful shoulders, and ape-like gait did call to mind their simian friend, Monk Mayfair.

The door opened and a middle-aged Chinese man wearing a bathrobe and spectacles welcomed them.

"Gentleman, I am Stephen Ling. I am terribly sorry to have disturbed you for nothing."

"Nothing?" Renny growled, "What do you mean by that?"

The man looked embarrassed.

"I'm afraid I'm not adjusting well to my wife's death." He said, "Lotus was everything to me, and I can't seem to let her go. I often dream that she's still alive and calling to me."

"Are you saying this was just a bad dream?" Long Tom demanded.

"A particularly vivid bad dream." The man said, and shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid that I was still half-asleep when I called you. I'm terribly sorry to have bothered you with my morbid fantasies."

"That's okay Dr. Ling." Renny muttered, "You know, I was in China a while back and I heard a proverb that might fit this situation."

"Oh?"

Renny nodded and spoke briefly in flawless Chinese. Long Tom couldn't follow the proverb and, judging by the expression on Dr. Ling's face, neither could he.

"That sounds like Cantonese, Mr. Renwick." He said, "I'm afraid I only speak Mandarin."

"I can translate," Renny offered. "It says, 'Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.'"

"I don't get it." Long Tom said.

"This guy's a phony." Renny said, "The voice is almost the same but not quite. The Dr. Ling I talked to on the telephone didn't have much of an accent, but it was definitely Cantonese. Besides, I never said that my name was Renwick."

The robed man smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose I understand your concern," he said. "But the difference between the accents is so slight that I could mistake it myself, and I lived in China for half my life. As for recognizing you, I've seen your photograph in the newspaper several times, along with those of Mr. Roberts and your other associates. There's no need to be suspicious."

"Maybe not," Renny replied. "But you're coming with us anyway. I've got someone checking on the call you received. If he finds that there really was a call, you'll have to sing another tune."

"I'm afraid that won't do." Ling said, "I was hoping to avoid killing you, but there's nothing for it now."

As he spoke, the doors to the bedroom sprang open and half a dozen men, closely resembling the apish servant, poured through. Wicked looking knives and hatchets gleamed in each man's hand.

Chapter Three

Hatchet Men Strike

Long Tom's hand slipped into his jacket, reaching for the shoulder holster he wore there. He hadn't managed to pull his pistol free before a thrown hatchet caught him in the chest with terrible force. Long Tom made a small bleating sound and collapsed.

Renny surged forward, his face grim and his big fists swinging. He was effective when he connected but the small men were surprisingly quick. One lay on the floor, the side of his face pushed out of shape by the caress of mammoth knuckles, but the others were still swarming over the big engineer, sharp blades slashing.

The man who called himself Ling watched this. A pleasant smile played across his face as if he were enjoying a Broadway show instead of witnessing a bloody fight. Then the smile faded as he realized that Renny wasn't bleeding.

"Fools!" he yelled in Mandarin, "He's wearing some sort of armor! Aim for his throat and head!"

His voice was drowned out as a bull-fiddle roar filled the room. Long Tom was back on his feet and firing

what looked like an oversized automatic pistol into the melee. Three of the little men went down under the stream of bullets.

"Holy Cow Long Tom!" Renny barked, "Try not to shoot me while you're at it."

Ling hissed an oath. In the space of seconds his trained assassins were on the verge of defeat. He pulled something out of his pocket, a flat glass object the size and shape of a cigarette case, and dashed it to the floor. A pale yellow vapor rose from the shattered glass and Renny and Long Tom began to feel groggy.

"Gas!" Renny cried. He threw off the last of his attackers and staggered backwards towards Long Tom. Ling barked an order and his two men who were still conscious retreated into the bedroom after him. Long Tom snapped off another few rounds but the gas affected his aim.

Then Renny did a strange thing. He grabbed the collar of his jacket and tore it loose, revealing a clear plastic hood that pulled over his head and inflated. Long Tom followed suit.

The hoods were an invention of Doc Savage's, designed to protect his men from gas attacks. They would supply Renny and Long Tom with breathable air for half an hour before they had to be discarded.

"Ling and his goons weren't affected by the gas at all." Long Tom said. "They must have been wearing some sort of nose filters."

"That's pretty fancy stuff for ordinary Tong killers." Renny agreed. "I wonder what we're getting into?"

Both men had their pistols out by now. Renny smashed the door off its hinges with one swipe of a massive hand. The bedroom was empty and the window stood wide open.

"The fire escape." Long Tom thrust his head out the open window and swore. "They had a sedan waiting for them."

He was out the window in a flash, Renny right behind him. The two men fired bursts from their weapons at the escaping vehicle, but to no effect. The rounds they were firing were a special kind of 'mercy bullets,' little more than a thin shell housing a potent anesthetic liquid. The bullets were very effective in rendering the people they hit unconscious, but useless in piercing automobile windshields or doors.

Renny started for his car, but it was too late. The dark sedan was already around the corner and lost to sight.

"I guess we didn't do such a hot job." He rumbled bitterly.

"At least we've got some prisoners." Long Tom countered, "I'll bet they can tell us something useful when they wake up."

He fingered the tear in the front of his jacket the hatchet has made. "Good thing we decided to wear our long johns."

"The `long johns' were another invention of Doc Savage's. They resembled thermal underwear in that they covered the entire body and were worn under clothing. They were actually chain mail suits, like those worn by the knights of the Middle Ages, except they were of a much finer mesh and were made of a secret alloy that was stronger than steel and much lighter. They would stop most pistol bullets, and provided excellent protection from small weapons like knives and hatchets as well.

The two returned to Dr. Ling's apartment where they handcuffed the unconscious forms of the four ape-like men. Then they began to search the main room for any clue that could tell them more.

"Look at this."

Renny looked at the picture Long Tom had taken from the wall. It was a wedding photo of a couple in traditional Chinese garb. The bride was the woman they had known as Lo Lar, there was no mistaking her gem-like beauty. The man was handsome and young. He looked to be nearly six feet tall with an athletic build.

"That's not the Dr. Ling we just met." Long Tom said, "Not by a long shot."

"I figured he had to be an impostor." Renny replied. "I wonder what happened to the real Ling."

Both men were so engrossed in the picture that they failed to hear the front door open.

"Both of you men," a voice said. "Put your hands in the air and turn around, slowly."

Chapter Four

The Doctor Prognosticates

Renny and Long Tom complied. As they turned they saw that a small Chinese man had entered the room and was covering them with a large revolver.

"Who are you men?" The newcomer asked in flawless English, "Where is Dr. Ling?"

"Easy with that cannon pal." Renny replied, "We're on your side."

"I'm Thomas Roberts," Long Tom added, "This is John Renwick. We work with Doc Savage."

"Long Tom and Renny?" The newcomer asked, "I've heard of you, and you certainly look like the photos I've seen in the papers. What goes on here?"

"Dr. Ling called us earlier." Long Tom answered, "He'd gotten some strange news about his wife and he'd asked us to help check on it."

"Lotus? But she's been dead nearly a year."

"It gets stranger. When we got here there was some fellow masquerading as Dr. Ling who tried to get rid of us. Renny caught on to his game and he sent these pretty fellows after us." Long Tom gestured to the small pile of bound assassins.

The newcomer gave a low whistle and put away his pistol.

"I'm sorry I doubted you." He said, "If these are your enemies, we really are on the same side. Do you know what you've got here?"

"What?" Long Tom asked.

"These are Dacoits. They are some of the worst killers in Asia."

"Huh?" Renny grunted, "I've heard of dacoits but I thought that was just what they called bandits in East India."

"There's some truth in that." The stranger replied, "Dacoitry is a Hindi legal term for robbery committed by a group of men. In the broadest sense, anyone in India who commits a robbery as a part of gang is considered a dacoit. There's another meaning though. There's a cult of assassins that has used the name for centuries.

"They operate in Burma and India but they're ethnically connected to the Tcho-Tcho people. In their language the word for `sacred assassin' is something like `da-kuit.' Over the years the two terms have gotten garbled together and both groups get called dacoit these days.

"Cult of assassins huh?" Renny asked, "Have you ever heard of them being connected to the `Cult of the Feathered Octopus?'"

"Feathered Octopus?" The man's brow furrowed in thought, "That's a new one for me I'm afraid. I think I've heard of some of the Tcho-Tchos being involved in an octopus cult though, so maybe."

"You seem to know a lot about them Mr..." Long Tom let the sentence trail out and the newcomer looked embarrassed.

"Tam." He said, "Dr. Roy Tam. I'm a colleague of Stephen Ling's, and a friend. I suppose I do know a lot about these fellows. I try to keep track of the different secret societies and other groups in Chinatown. People here don't like to go to the police so it's often up to people like me to head off trouble. I'd like to help you find Stephen."

"We appreciate that Dr. Tam," Renny said, "But it could get pretty dangerous. Besides, once we get these guys to talk, there shouldn't be any need."

"If you can make them talk." Tam countered, "These dacoits tend to be fanatically loyal."

"We've got ways." Long Tom said wryly. He produced a small case from his jacket and opened it to reveal a syringe and several small vials of variously colored liquids. He filled the syringe with a small dose of a clear fluid and injected it into the arm of one of the dacoits.

"I don't recognize these drugs." Dr. Tam commented.

"The first was to counteract the anesthetic in our mercy bullets." Long Tom said, "This one," He filled the syringe with a pale blue liquid. "Is a truth serum that Doc Savage has developed. It's many times more effective than sodium pentathol, but doesn't have the usual, harmful side effects."

Dr. Tam watched with obvious interest. Within a few moments the man's eyes opened, but their gaze was unfocused.

"Who do you work for?" Long Tom demanded. A scowl crossed his face when the dacoit remained expressionless.

"This mug's tougher than I thought." He said sourly.

"I suspect he simply doesn't understand English." Dr. Tam suggested. He repeated the question in his native tongue and the small man babbled an answer."

"He says his master is Lu Chow." Dr. Tam translated. He's a small time tong leader, but he's rumored to have important connections overseas."

"Where can we find this Lu Chow?" Renny asked.

The question was translated and the man answered. Tam gave the Doc Savage aides an address deep in the heart of Chinatown.

"It's bound to be dangerous." He added, "I'd like to go with you, perhaps I can help."

"No deal." Long Tom said, "Look, Dr. Tam, we appreciate your desire to help, but we're prepared for danger. You've never been in a situation like this before. You'd just be in the way."

An ironic expression crossed Tam's round face.

"I've probably seen more than you imagine." He said, "At least let me take you to the building. I can tell you the best way to get in then wait for you in the car. I can be your 'wheel-man' if you need to get away quickly."

Renny and Long Tom exchanged a quick look. Tam seemed on the up and up. He didn't look much like a man of action but he had steady nerves and a clear mind.

"Okay." Renny nodded, "But you're to follow our instructions without any question. Got it?"

"Got it."

Chapter Five **The Dragon's Fang**

Half an hour later the three men pulled up to a curio shop several blocks from Stephen Ling's office. The sign read "Lu Chow Emporium" in English with Chinese characters directly over that.

"Be careful." Tam cautioned, "I've heard that Lu Chow keeps a pair of mastiffs in his store to guard against burglars."

"We've got that covered." Renny whispered. He and Long Tom slipped out of the car and moved to the

emporium's front door. Long Tom produced a small set of lock-picks and began to work on the door. After a moment he grunted.

"What is it?" Renny whispered.

"Lu Chow has got this door rigged with an electrical alarm." Long Tom replied.

"Can you get past it?"

Long Tom's only reply was an expression that made Renny wish he hadn't said anything. The puny-looking man was one of the world's leading authorities on electrical systems of all sorts. He didn't like having his expertise questioned.

After a moment the door opened. Long Tom threw several objects like glass marbles in and shut the door. The marbles were filled with a clear liquid that would create an odorless gas as once they shattered. It was Doc Savage's own version of the knockout gas bomb their enemies had used against them earlier.

Renny counted off a minute on his watch, which was enough time for the gas to mingle with the air and lose its potency. The two men opened the door and stepped across the sleeping forms of the two mastiffs into the room.

They found a locked door behind the cashier's desk. Long Tom worked his magic on the lock and they saw that the door opened to a stairway going down. They descended the stairs in silence to a hallway at the bottom. The hall was empty, but was lined with closed doors.

"Where do we start?" Renny wondered aloud.

"You mean you're not going to just bash in one door after another?" Long Tom sneered.

There was the sound of a telephone ringing towards the end of the corridor to their right. The two hurried down the hall toward the sound. They paused in front of a large double door and listened. The ringing stopped and a woman's voice began to speak in Mandarin.

"What's she saying?" Long Tom hissed.

"Not much," Renny whispered back, "Mostly just 'yes' and 'no.' Wait, she's saying that she'll check on the prisoner, right away. Now she's hanging up."

The two men flattened themselves against the wall on opposite sides of the door. A moment later it opened and a small figure stepped out. Renny surged forward. One big clapped across the woman's mouth while the other arm circled her waist, trapping her arms.

The woman fought back with a strength that belied her slender form. She banged her heels against the big engineers shins and instep, bit his finger and shot her head back to smash into his jaw. Renny bit back a howl of pain and tightened his hold. Long Tom stepped in front of the woman, brandishing his super-firing pistol.

"Take it easy sister." He said, "We don't want to hurt you, but I won't hesitate to give you a taste of this if you make any more trouble."

The woman relented and the big-fisted Renny let her go. She was Chinese and, without the giant hand obscuring her face, she was pretty enough to make even the dour Long Tom catch his breath. Her beauty was marred only by the cold expression on her face.

"You are fools," she said in a quiet voice. "Those who steal from Li Chow cannot expect to continue long in this life."

"We're not burglars." Renny countered, "We're here for Li Chow, and the prisoner."

"Li Chow is an honest businessman. He has no prisoners."

"Stow it sister." Long Tom snapped, "We heard you on the phone."

"I don't know what you thought you heard," the woman said. "But I am Ming Dwan, the personal secretary to Mr. Li Chow. I was on the telephone confirming that a vessel containing a shipment of curios my employer was expecting has just docked."

"Sure." Long Tom said, "Why don't you take us to where Mr. Li Chow is and we can confirm that with him." Ming Dwan eyed the pistol. A touch of fear could be detected beneath her cold expression.

"Mr. Li Chow is not here. He was working late last night and has returned to his home to rest."

"In that case," Renny said, "Why don't you take us to where Li Chow keeps his best curios."

"And if we happen to run into Stephen Ling there," Long Tom added, "So much the better for you."

Ming Dwan gave the men a poisonous look, then glanced at their pistols again and nodded. She led the two

to the far end of the corridor.

"He is behind this door." She said. "He is guarded by two men."

"Call them out." Renny said, "And remember, I know enough Chinese to know if you try to warn them."

Ming Dwan nodded and called through the door. A moment later there was the sound of a bolt being thrown and the door began to open. Renny grabbed the door and pulled it wide. Long Tom opened fire on the two dacoits inside. One went down but the other was much quicker than he had anticipated. The ape-like man came barreling out, driving his head into Long Tom's midsection. The electrical wizard made a loud 'whuffing' sound as the breath shot out of him and fell.

Renny let go of the door and tried to bring his gun into play, but the dacoit's speed thwarted him also. The small man leaped for him, thrusting a huge dagger at his unprotected face.

Luck was all that saved the big engineer. Ming Dwan had also chosen that moment to spring on him. Her slender form collided with the dacoit's in mid-air, ruining his aim. The dagger slashed harmlessly down Renny's chest, laying open his suit and exposing his chain-mesh armor.

Renny responded with an uppercut that literally stood the dacoit on his head. Tough as he was, the assassin slumped unconscious from that one blow.

"Holy cow" Renny looked at Ming Dwan with amazement. "That was almost like you saved my life on purpose."

"Fool," the woman cried, "I only want you to die."

Her face a mask of rage, Ming Dwan snatched up the guard's dagger and stabbed Renny in the chest. The blade rattled off the chain mail, and Renny instinctively countered with a right cross to the jaw. He had presence of mind to pull the punch enough to keep from seriously injuring the girl, but the force of the blow was still enough to stretch her out full-length.

"You okay?" Long Tom clipped.

"Yeah," Renny said running a massive hand over the links that covered his chest. "Lucky she didn't notice my armor. I wonder how she could have missed that?"

"Just be glad she did." Long Tom said, "How is she?"

"She'll be okay I think." Renny said. He didn't like the idea of hurting a woman, even a venomous hellcat like this one.

"I guess she'll have a pretty bruise when she wakes up."

"It'll match her lovely personality." Long Tom snapped. "Come on, let's get Ling and get out of here."

The room was like the main chamber of a jailhouse, with four cells adjoining it. Stephen Ling was the only prisoner. He was still groggy, but otherwise unhurt.

"Dr. Ling." Renny said, "We're Doc Savage's men. We're taking you out of here."

"Thank you." Ling muttered sleepily, "I can't seem to walk very well."

"That's the gas they use." Long Tom said, "It should wear off soon."

They half-carried the Doctor to the corridor. Renny paused for a moment as they left the room.

"Holy cow. The girl, Ming Dwan. She's gone."

"Playing possum." Long Tom said, "You should have hit her harder."

They were at the top of the stairs when an alarm bell began to ring. Renny barricaded the door while Long Tom got Stephen Ling into the car.

"Stephen!" Roy Tam cried, "Thank goodness they found you!"

Renny joined them a moment later and they sped off into the early morning gloom.

Chapter Six

The Fifth Rider of the Apocalypse

"What is going on?"

Stephen Ling was pacing in front of one of the large windows in Doc Savage's eighty-sixth floor

headquarters. The view of Manhattan at sunrise was stunning, but he was too overwrought to give it more than cursory notice.

"While a veracious summation eludes the finitude of procurable data, it seems a certitude that an arcane and possibly necromantic malefaction has transpired."

Stephen scowled at the speaker, a tall man who was so thin that the flesh that held his bones together seemed an afterthought. "So, my wife calling me from the grave just before I'm kidnapped strikes you as mysterious and spooky?" Ling's voice thick with angry sarcasm, "That's reassuring, I thought it might just be me."

Long Tom and Renny exchanged a glance.

"Well," Renny muttered, "At least someone in the room understood what Johnny just said."

The man called Johnny stroked his lean jaw with a bony hand. William Harper Littlejohn might have looked like an under stuffed scarecrow, but he was actually one of the nation's leading lights in the fields of archaeology and geology. He was also another of the five men who usually accompanied Doc Savage on his adventures.

"Forgive me Dr. Ling." He said calmly, "As my associates often observe, I do have a propensity for hyperlocution. I assure you that I was not engaging in hyperbolic obfuscation when I mentioned necromancy."

Stephen Ling's expression was one of disbelief.

"Are you trying to tell me that black magic is involved?"

Johnny unfolded himself from his chair. He was close to Renny's height but his emaciation made him seem more like seven feet tall.

"Logical ratiocination axiomatically precludes the supernatural." He said, "But there are habitually more perspicacious expositions possible for occult seeming phenomena."

"What do you mean?" Stephen Ling asked.

"He's not the only one who's confused." Long Tom cut in irritably, "You lost me and Renny the minute we walked in the door. Why don't you throw out the thesaurus and just tell us what you mean?"

Johnny sighed.

"I'm saying that what is happening here, though macabre, may have a perfectly rational explanation. There are certain toxins that can approximate the semblance of death. It has long been suspected that practitioners of voodoo use such a toxin on their enemies. The victim is pronounced and buried, only to be disinterred again a short time later."

Stephen Ling turned an unhealthy looking shade of pale.

"Are you saying that my wife may be alive? That someone may have drugged her into a cataleptic state then..." his voice trailed off as the horror of what he was saying hit him.

"It certainly seems possible." Johnny continued, "In the practice of voodoo, the revived person is kept drugged and made a slave. The process is called zombification."

"Holy cow Johnny." Renny interjected, "Give the poor guy a break. We don't know that anything like that happened to Mrs. Ling."

Johnny looked embarrassed. He had a habit of lecturing that took over when matters drifted into his areas of expertise. Sometimes he was so caught up in disseminating facts that he failed to notice the effect the information might have on his audience.

"You're right of course." He said, "There's no way to know if that is the case at all with Mrs. Ling. I only meant to suggest there is a precedent to lend weight to the idea she might be alive."

"I don't see how it could have anything to do with voodoo." Long Tom said, "This looks like some sort of Tong business, and I've never heard of the Chinese doing voodoo."

"There was a message waiting when I came in." Johnny replied, "The detectives were able to trace the call made to Dr. Ling's home. It came from a telephone in Haiti."

"Haiti?" Stephen Ling sounded thoroughly confused. "What on earth would Lotus be doing in Haiti? And what could this possibly have to do with Li Chow and his men?"

"I've heard rumors of something for a number of years." Johnny replied, "There seems to be a sort of master-cult operating in the world, coordinating the efforts of many groups that would seem to have no natural connection. The voodooists of Haiti, the Yellow Hats of Tibet, the White Lotus of China, the Thugees of India and many other

groups from across the world seems to have connections, and common purpose. Though their cultural norms and religious tenets are far different, these groups all have in common that they operate in secret, and they are opposed to the western powers.

"That sounds outlandish." Stephen ling said, "Like the sort of `Yellow Peril' nonsense I've been hearing ignorant people aim at the Chinese all of my life."

"There is a basis for this." Johnny countered, "I agree that the `Yellow Peril' had always been a chimera. There is no deep-seated plot for the east to rise up and overwhelm the west. Indeed, it is the west that has exerted a sort of colonial hegemony over the Orient. America and the European powers control huge sections of the world whose people would rather rule themselves. This breeds anger, and anger breeds secretive resistance groups. If the rumors I have heard are true, a single power had united many of these resistance groups, inspiring them to look past their differences to the common goal of pushing the colonial powers out of the east."

"Is that what we're facing here?" Renny rumbled.

"Impossible to say." Johnny said with a shrug of his bony shoulders. "Still, it is a hypothesis to be examined, especially as we see the confluence of three disparate groups, the Tong of Li Chow, the Voodoo cult, and the Cult of the Feathered Octopus apparently working at common purposes."

"The Feathered Octopus?" Stephen Ling frowned, "Who are they? What do they have to do with any of this?"

The three Doc Savage aides exchanged uncomfortable glances. After a moment Renny spoke up.

"The Feathered Octopus was the god of a pirate cult operating in the South Pacific. The cult was really old, but it only hit the big time a few years ago when a new couple of leaders reorganized it. The man was an American but he took on the traditional name of the leader of the cult. He called himself High Lar, and he dressed in the feathered robes of the high priest. He was a loony, but he was also brilliant at planning organized piracy. His wife was called Lo Lar. She was the sane one of the pair and, if anything, she was more intelligent than he was." He paused a moment.

"Lo Lar was your wife."

"My wife?" Stephen shook his head in disbelief, "That can't be possible. Lotus would never..."

"Doc Savage has a special way of dealing with the criminals he captures." Renny continued, "It's a brain surgery that eliminates the impulses that make people get involved in crimes. It also clears away most of the person's past memories. Doc has them retrained to go back into society, as honest citizens."

"Brain surgery on prisoners? That sounds like something from a horror story."

"It is one of Doc's more oddball ideas." Renny confessed, "But he believes everyone should have a shot at redemption, and the prisons aren't so hot at that. If he hadn't invented the process, Lo Lar never could have become the woman you married."

"In any case, Doc's College keeps track of all of its `graduates.' That's why you had that phone number to call if anything strange ever happened to your wife. It looks like someone was smart enough to figure out that she used to be Lo Lar, and resourceful enough to grab her."

"I suppose so." Stephen admitted, "In any case, there's no point arguing about it now."

"Not when there's traveling to do." Long Tom said.

"Traveling?" Stephen asked.

"Circumstances dictate an immediate departure for the source of the enigmatic communication." Johnny said.

"But what about Li Chow?"

"He's a small fish." Long Tom answered, "There's no need wasting time trying to catch him. We'll have the police pick him up and see what they can learn from him."

The matter decided, Renny went to the wall and opened a hidden panel. The chamber beyond looked like an elevator car except there were a number of seats in it, which were bolted to the floor. Following the others, Stephen Ling sat in one of the seats.

"Have you had any breakfast?" Long Tom asked him.

"No."

"Good." The pale man answered with a wry smile, "It's not very pleasant to ride the flearun on a full stomach."

It wouldn't be a picnic for the rest of us either."

The doors closed and the car seemed to drop into space. The car was much more than a regular elevator. It was a pneumatic conveyance Doc Savage had designed to cover the distance from his skyscraper headquarters to his secret hanger at the East River in record time. It literally dropped the length of the building before a cushion of air redirected it at a right angles, then it sped through a subterranean tube until it arrived beneath a dilapidated warehouse with the sign "Hidalgo Trading Company" painted on it.

At that point the hatch was supposed to pop open, giving the passengers access to the warehouse interior. This time the hatch didn't open.

"What the blazes?" Renny growled. He grabbed the handle and twisted to no effect. Applying both massive hands he turned with all his strength. The metal handle bent very slightly, but the door didn't budge.

"Someone's jammed it." He growled.

"That's impossible!" Long Tom snapped, "I designed the security devices in this thing myself. There's no one alive who could break in to do this!"

A noise, like the jangling of a telephone came from Long Tom's belt. Reaching to his waistband he pulled out a small electronic device. It was a two-way radio set which Long Tom had helped Doc Savage perfect. The device was amazingly compact yet had the ability to send and receive messages with a range comparable to the field telephones used by the Army.

"Hello?" He said into the device.

"Thomas J. Roberts," came a female voice from the radio, "I hope you boys weren't planning to leave town without me."

"No!" Long Tom groaned, "This can't be happening."

"What is it?" Stephen Ling demanded, "Is it an enemy?"

"Worse!" Long Tom replied, "It's the fifth rider of the Apocalypse."

Stephen's look was blank so Renny took over. He ticked off the names with his fingers as he said them.

"There's War, Famine, Pestilence, Death, and Miss Patricia Savage. We just ran into the least agreeable of the five."

Chapter Seven Flight into Peril

Long Tom pushed the 'transmit' button on the radio. He had left his thumb off of it long enough to compose himself a little without Pat Savage being able to hear any of the conversation.

"Pat, What in blazes do you think you're doing?"

"Why Long Tom, I don't know what you mean." Pat's voice was honey and innocence, "I was just feeling the need for a little Caribbean vacation so I thought I'd come down and see if I could hitch a ride."

"And what makes you think we're going to the Caribbean?"

"Don't sell me that." Pat retorted, "Haiti's in the Caribbean. That's where you boys are going, and you aren't going to leave me behind."

"Look Pat," Long Tom was gritting his teeth, "I don't know how you found out, or how you broke into the warehouse, but it doesn't matter. Doc says you don't go on any of our missions, period."

"But Doc's not here, is he?" Pat purred, "He's off at his 'Fortress of Solitude' where no one can reach him. If we hurry, we can make it to Haiti and back, and Doc never needs to know you let me come along."

"You can save the sweetness routine for Monk and Ham." Long Tom snapped, "No one here's buying it."

"Are you suggesting I'm trying to coax you with my feminine wiles?" Pat's voice had become a few degrees cooler, "Honestly Long Tom, I always believed you thought more of me than that. Just because Monk and Ham lose their heads over anything in skirts, don't think I've ever encouraged them."

Long Tom's ears flushed bright red.

"That's not what I meant."

"I'm not the kind of girl who does that sort of thing." Pat went on as if he hadn't spoken, "Especially not when I have something much better to persuade you with. You monkeys are taking me along, or you'll all grow long, white beards waiting for this door to open."

Long Tom started to protest when Renny plucked the radio from his grip.

"Pat," he said, "This is Renny. You're coming with us. Now open the door and let us out."

"What...?" Long Tom started, but the look on Renny's face quieted him.

"Fight with Pat on your own time." The big engineer said, "I'm not going to waste my time trying to put off the inevitable."

A moment later the door opened letting the men into the warehouse's big interior. It was filled with all manner of vehicles for land, air and sea, but Stephen Ling's attention was riveted by the person who had opened the door.

To say that Pat Savage was a looker was like saying the Great Wall of China was a nice fence. She was nearly as tall as Stephen with a stunning figure and a stylishly arranged wealth of bronze-blond hair. She had the face of a magazine cover girl, though her expression suggested that she might be nearly as much at home on the cover of "Prize Fighter Weekly."

"So," she said cheerfully. "Who's trying to kill us this week?"

Johnny started to fill Pat in on the events of the last night while Renny and Long Tom did a pre-flight check on a big tri-motored seaplane. She listened patiently for several minutes, then waved her arms at him to stop.

"Honestly," Pat said, "I'd need a dictionary handy just to find out from you what the weather was like outside."

She turned to Stephen Ling.

"I don't suppose you can tell me what's going on without making my brain throb, can you?"

Stephen did his best and found that Pat was a sympathetic and intelligent listener. She didn't stop him to ask questions and didn't bat an eyebrow at even the most macabre details of his story.

"Believe it or not," she said when he had finished. "That's not the strangest story I've heard in the years I've known Doc." She gave him a dazzling smile and raised three fingers in the Boy Scout's salute. "We'll get to the bottom of this, I promise."

A short time later they were airborne. Renny and Long Tom took the pilot's seats while Johnny settled in with a large volume on Haiti and its customs. Stephen fidgeted until Pat talked him into a game of gin rummy to pass the time. He surprised her with a string of wins.

"Say, what gives?" Pat demanded, "I thought I was pretty good at this."

Stephen smiled.

"I don't play that often," he said. "But the strategy is similar to mahjong, and I'm pretty good at that."

"You'll have to teach me." Pat eyed Stephen Ling appraisingly. "You don't seem the least bit airsick. Have you flown before?"

"A few times." He admitted, "The last several times I traveled to China I flew on the Clipper. I've always been amazed at how fast it makes the trip. This ship seems nearly as fast."

Johnny chuckled.

"What's so funny?"

"The archetypal adumbration."

"He's just laughing because Doc's ship is much faster than the China Clipper." Pat supplied. "The clipper has a maximum speed of 180 knots and cruises about 15 knots slower than that. This crate is cruising at 200 knots right now. We should make it to Port au Prince in just under seven hours."

Stephen gave a soft whistle of amazement. He wouldn't have believed such a big craft was capable of that kind of speed.

At that moment Long Tom made his way back into the cabin.

"We just heard from the cops." He said, "They went to pick up Li Chow but they missed him. It seems he caught a plane out of town early this morning. Anybody want to guess where he was heading?"

"Not Haiti?" Stephen ventured.

"You win the cupie doll." Long Tom replied, "They're going to contact the French authorities to pick him up as soon as he lands."

"I believe I have a scenario that will provide superior efficacy." Johnny interjected, "Our arrival will supercede that of Li Chow by a significant interval. We can surreptitiously intercept him without recourse for the constabulary. That will enable us to concatenate."

"Trail him back to his lair?" Long Tom looked thoughtful, "That's pretty good Johnny, except he's seen me and Renny. If this is the old High Lar crowd, they probably know what you and Pat look like too."

"There is an academic confrere of mine on the island." Johnny said, "If I can contact him I believe he would be most admirably endowed for the undertaking."

"Okay, we'll call the coppers off." Long Tom agreed, "Just remember when you're tailing to them, these are regular flatfeet, not college professors. Give them a break with the language."

Johnny went forward to work with the radio. About half an hour later he was back with a smile on his face.

"My learned compatriot will endeavor to accommodate us in our quest." He announced.

The rest of the flight was uneventful. They had some head winds and the trip was closed to seven and a half hours than to Pat's estimate. Even at that, Stephen was amazed at the time they made.

They were coming in to Port au Prince in the mid-afternoon and everything was still and clear. Johnny had replaced Long Tom at the controls and Renny was working the radio, making arrangements for their landing.

"Holy cow!" Renny said suddenly.

"What is it?" The urgency in his friend's voice was enough to prompt Johnny into using little words.

Renny pointed out the starboard window. Johnny craned his neck in time to see the wing-mounted engine fall to pieces.

Chapter Eight **The Ghost of Africa**

One moment the engine had been purring with efficient motion, the next it began to vibrate ferociously as if it were working against itself. The propeller came loose and spun down into the ocean. The engine continued to rattle and small pieces shot out of it. Then it stopped completely, and smoke began to pour out of it.

The plane lurched as Johnny struggled to regain control. Between his piloting skills and the remaining two engines he was able to steady the craft quickly.

"What was that?" Renny rumbled.

"A querulous conundrum." Johnny adjusted some controls. "But I postulate that the remaining thermantidote dyad should be efficacious to precipitate a harmonious debarkation."

At that moment the plane lurched again as the starboard engine burst into flames.

"I'll be superamalgamated." Johnny breathed.

"We're under attack." Renny called back into the cabin, "Long Tom, Pat, get to the gun ports and see if you can spot where it's coming from."

He scanned the sky around them. There were no other airplanes in sight except a few at anchor. Here and there a small fishing boat or pleasure craft bobbed in the blue waters, but there was no sign of where an attack could have come from.

"There!" Johnny barked, pointing a bony finger at the marina. Renny looked in time to see a flash of light from the deck of a small charter fishing boat. The air sizzled as a bolt of brightness shot through the cockpit. It was gone in an instant, leaving a perfectly round hole, the diameter of a grapefruit in the windscreen.

"What was that?"

"Whatever it was," Johnny answered, "It sheared one of the blades off of our last propeller."

Renny kept watch on the distant vessel but the flash he expected never came.

"Why doesn't he shoot?" He rumbled, "He's got us dead to rights."

"Don't appropriate superfluous calamity." Johnny advised, "Our status is sufficiently precarious."

Despite Johnny's misgivings, the big plane touched down in the harbor smoothly. Renny, Long Tom and, Pat climbed onto the wings as Johnny taxied to the charter boat. The vessel seemed quiet.

"What do you see?"

Stephen Ling had clambered out on the wing near Long Tom.

"Hey," the pallid electrical wizard barked, "I told you to stay inside. It could be dangerous."

Stephen ignored his warnings, and craned his neck for a better view. "It looks like the crew's unconscious."

The two men aboard the boat were unconscious, though there was nothing in evidence to suggest why this should be the case. They were two of the same sort of dacoits Renny and Long Tom had fought in New York. They seemed to be sleeping peacefully. A quick search of the boat turned up no sign of any weapon they could have used.

They bound the dacoits to turn over to the authorities and taxied the plane to a mooring. A small crowd of Haitians gathered around the plane speaking a mix of English, French and the island's peculiar Patois. They wanted to be hired to carry the group's luggage.

Long Tom discouraged the crowd as the others unloaded the plane. He was a past master at giving the brush off. Abruptly the would-be porters grew silent and parted to let a single individual through. He was a colossus of a man, taller even than Renny with ebony skin and the proud dignity of a warrior prince. His face was tattooed with the ritual scarification of some of the West Coast tribes of Africa, and his shirtless physique was that of a Hercules of the Dark Continent.

"You are the Doc Savage men?" The giant asked without any preamble.

"Who wants to know?" Long Tom shot back. Despite a tremendous difference in size, the plucky electrical wizard didn't seem to be intimidated in the least.

"You are not wanted here." The man continued, ignoring Long Tom's remarks. "You should go away. You should not even stay to have your aircraft repaired. You should leave tonight on the first boat or plane you can buy your way onto."

"We're not going anywhere pal." Long Tom countered.

The big man looked down for the first time. The expression on his face was what might be expected of a lion that has just noticed a yapping Pekinese at his feet.

"Do you think that you can command me?" The big man smiled grimly and raised his powerful voice to carry across the crowd. "Do you think that you can do as you please on our island? For too long have white men come here with their money and their guns and thought that their word was law."

He moved his face inches from Long Tom's and his voice dropped to a dangerous pitch.

"This is not your island, white man. This is our place and you are not welcome in it. Go away, or what happened to your airplane will happen to you."

"What do you know about our airplane?" Renny demanded, coming up to stand by Long Tom.

The giant grinned maliciously and reached into the pouch he wore at his side. He pulled out what looked like a child's toy, a crude airplane made of wood scraps lashed together with palm fronds. The airplane had three propellers, obviously in imitation of their craft. There were three long needles inserted into the miniature craft. Two were in the engines that had failed and one was piercing the cockpit.

"Do you know of voodoo?" The giant asked, "I put the needles into this, and your airplane fell from the sky. If you do not go it will be a simple thing for me to place my needles into dolls of you. Such is the power of Bigomba."

"Bigomba huh?" Long Tom quipped, "Well, voodoo or not you're going to come with us and answer some questions."

"I will not come." The African said, "And you are too weak to force me."

"Weak?" Renny didn't have much patience with tough guys. He had decided to give Bigomba a hard dose of reality. Without warning his massive fist shot out in a beautiful right cross, aimed at the giant's jaw.

Bigomba's arm moved with dazzling speed. One hand caught Renny's wrist, stopping the punch cold. The other hand caught the big engineer's belt buckle. The giant African hoisted Renny's bulk into the air as if he weighed no more than a cat and pitched him neatly off the pier into the Caribbean.

Long Tom leaped at Bigomba but the giant caught him in mid-air. The next moment he went flying to collide with Johnny. The two men went down in a heap. Before the two could untangle themselves, Bigomba had them each by the shirtfront. With appalling strength he hoisted them and tossed them neatly into the water.

"Stay back!" Stephen Ling had stepped in front of Pat Savage and dropped into a fighting stance he had learned in China. He surged forward throwing a dizzying barrage of hand strikes. Bigomba retreated slightly, a mocking grin on his face as he slapped away each attack. One giant hand shot out in an open handed shove that sent the young physician sprawling on his back.

"That's about enough of that!" Pat Savage had one of the super-machine pistols out with the muzzle trained on Bigomba's massive chest.

The mocking grin grew larger. "Do you think I am afraid of that toy little girl?"

"Don't say I didn't give you a chance." Pat said as she squeezed the trigger.

The pistol splattered half a dozen mercy rounds across Bigomba's torso. Their only visible effect was to take the smile from his face. An ebony hand flashed out and Pat was astonished to see her pistol vanish from her hand. Bigomba dropped the weapon and hoisted Pat over his head.

"Put her down!" Stephen Ling had recovered his footing and was in his gung fu stance again.

Bigomba complied, more-or-less. Instead of throwing Pat he tossed her to Stephen Ling, who chivalrously caught her in his arms. Sadly this placed him off-balance and a small shove precipitated them both off the pier with a splash.

Bigomba grinned down as five floundered in the water.

"As I told you," he said. "You are not wanted here. Leave while you are still able."

He tossed the toy plane down. It settled in the water near Johnny's head and floated there. From above, they could hear the crowd laughing and cheering as they followed Bigomba away."

"I've about decided I don't like that guy." Renny grumbled.

"An unadulterated malefactor." Johnny agreed.

"He is." Pat said, "But he's also a real hunk of man."

Chapter Nine

Interlude With Music and Voodoo

Dripping and discouraged, the little group made their way to the hotel where they were to meet Johnny's friend. Port au Prince in the late afternoon sun was a charming, picturesque sight, but it did little to take their thoughts off of the mysterious Bigomba.

When they entered the lobby a big man in a smart tropical suit rose to greet them.

"Johnny." The man said warmly, shaking the bony archaeologist's hand. "It's good to see you. But what happened?"

The stranger's gaze took in their soggy clothes and hair. He has an intelligent face with neatly cut black hair and a thin moustache.

"The transpirations in all their specificities," Johnny said, "Are an interminable narrative."

"Long story or not," The man replied. "I'd like to hear it."

Johnny smiled and nodded.

"Please palliate my delinquencies of etiquette." Johnny said, "Mr. John Thunstone, these are Renny Renwick, Long Tom Roberts, Dr. Stephen Ling, and Miss Patricia Savage."

"Gentlemen." Thunstone shook each hand in turn, "Miss Savage. It is an honor to meet all of you. Your friend Li Chow's plane isn't due in until nearly midnight. That should give you a chance to freshen up after your flight. And it gives me a chance to treat you to dinner at the Club Damballa.

The group split up as Johnny and his friend took Stephen Ling, who had not had the opportunity to pack a change of clothes, to Thunstone's tailor. As the trio walked away, Long Tom noted that the big man carried a slender Malacca cane.

"Huh," he grunted. "A clothes horse with a fancy walking stick. I guess I won't have to miss having Ham with us now."

Renny chortled. Ham Brooks was one of the absent members of their little group. Where Thunstone dressed well, Ham dressed exquisitely. They said tailors would follow him down the street admiring the way clothes should be worn. Ham also carried a slim, black walking stick that was a sort of trademark.

"I don't suppose he's got a sword blade hidden in that thing, like Ham does." Renny added, "I thought he might be just a fancy playboy type at first, but he's got a heck of a strong handshake."

"I like him." Pat announced. "He's got character and he's not bad to look at with those shoulders."

"Nose and all?" Renny asked, "It looked to me like his schnoz had been broken at least twice."

"I like the rugged type." Pat replied.

"Like Bigomba?"

Long Tom's question was answered with a poisonous look, then Pat went off to her room.

An hour and a half later the group met in the lobby. All were dressed for dinner.

"This looks like everyone." Thunstone said, "Except Miss Savage of course."

"Dames." Long Tom complained, "Well, she'd better not keep us waiting long."

At that moment, the elevator door opened and Pat stepped out in heels and a deep green gown. If she had seemed lovely in casual clothes she was radiant now. Even the dour Long Tom's found himself staring, slack-jawed.

It was a short cab ride to the Club Damballa. The place catered to American and European tourists and was designed with a Voodoo theme.

As they entered the club Pat was struck by a picture on the wall. It was of a beautiful woman with deep-brown skin posed as if dancing in ecstatic frenzy. An impossibly long water snake was twined around her body as if it were her partner in the dance. The woman wore no clothing, only an abundance of jewelry and garlands of flowers.

"What is that painting?" She asked.

"That's Erzulie," John Thunstone answered, "She is one of the *loa*, as the gods of Voodoo are called. She is their goddess of love, beauty, dance and earthly luxuries. You see the three rings she wears on her wedding finger? Those are for her husbands, Damballa, Agwe, and Ogun."

"Voodoo is extraordinarily syncretistic." Johnny added. "Ecclesiastical hagiography is commingled with the animistic manifestations of African myth."

"Very true." Thunstone agreed, "When the African slaves were converted to Roman Catholicism they held on to their tribal gods by blending them with the saints of the Church. For instance, Erzulie is usually identified with the Virgin Mary."

Pat smiled wryly.

"There's not much Madonna-like I can see about that gal. Especially not with three husbands." She looked at the picture a moment longer, "She doesn't look like rest of the art I've seen around here either."

"No." Thunstone said, "This Erzulie was painted by an American named Thorne. He's been doing a number of works like this, stripping away any vestiges of the saints and painting the *loa*, as he believes they 'really' are. I believe his model for this was a dancer named Flammario. She's quite well-known in the Caribbean."

"By the tone of your voice," Pat ventured. "I'd say you don't like this Thorne character. "

Thunstone shrugged his big shoulders.

"I've never met the man. From what I hear I doubt we'd be friends if that ever happens."

The group found a table and ordered their dinner. In the back of the room they could hear Raymond Raquello and his dance orchestra warming up. Johnny reached into his jacket and brought out the miniature airplane. He passed it to Thunstone.

"What's this?" Thunstone asked.

"That," Johnny replied. "Is precisely what we hope to apprehend with your expertise."

Thunstone turned the replica over in his hands.

"I'm afraid I'm not really an expert." He said, "This looks like a variation of the classic 'voodoo doll.' Where did you get it?"

"A big guy called Bigomba gave it to us." Pat replied, "He didn't seem to like us very much."

"I've heard of Bigomba." Thunstone said, "In fact I've had a couple of run-ins with him myself. He's an upstart voodoo leader with growing following. The authorities are worried that tensions between him and the established Voodoo leaders could get violent. They've asked me to debunk him, if I can."

"What's the story on this guy?" Pat asked.

John Thunstone looked thoughtful for a moment.

"He claims to be a legendary figure from nearly four-hundred years ago." He said, "In the early 1600's a group of West Africans was captured by Spanish slavers and loaded on a ship for the West Indies. One of them was a man of extraordinary strength and charisma named Bigomba. He eventually managed to break his chains and organized a mutiny. The Africans slaughtered the slavers, but the ship was wrecked on the shoals of an island, the stories differ about which one. Bigomba and the freed slaves came ashore and formed an alliance with the local Indians.

"He became a great hero in the minds of the African slaves. There were so few Africans who were successful in resisting the slavers that he took on a larger than life status. They say that he ruled his island like a king, strong but wise. With his own hand he sank any ship that came against him, Spanish, Portuguese, English or French. One day he grew tired of fighting and retreated to a secret cave on his island, but he promised that one day he would return and lead his people to freedom and victory over the whites."

"And this guy claims he's Bigomba come back after all these years?" Pat pursed her lips, "Do people really believe that malarkey?"

Thunstone smiled pleasantly.

"Not everyone is as skeptical as you are Pat." He said, "You're a bright, independent young woman who has probably seen her share of smooth-talkers. It makes sense for you not to take things at face value. The people of Haiti are desperately poor, and there's a lot of old resentment against the colonial powers. They take Bigomba seriously because they want to believe in a deliverer.

"Besides," he added, "He puts on a very effective show."

"What sort of show?" Stephen asked.

"A lot of the usual," Thunstone replied. "From what I've heard, he's walked on fire and handled hot coals with his bare hands, charmed snakes, and stared at rocks so intensely that he's burned holes in them. The big thing he's done has been to heal a lot of people."

Stephen leaned forward, clearly interested in the story.

"What sort of healings?"

"They say he'll reach his fingers right into a person's body to mend bones or pluck out a tumor and leave no sign of an incision."

"I've seen folk healers in China do the same thing." Stephen said, "It's a trick, some sort of sleight of hand."

Thunstone nodded.

"That's actually a trick I know." He said, "A magician friend named Norgil showed me how it's done a few years back, but I had to promise not to reveal the secret. The thing that I haven't figured out about Bigomba yet is that many of the people he's claimed to have healed actually seem to have overcome some serious medical conditions."

"He sure put on a convincing show for us." Pat said, "I can't figure how he could have stood up to those mercy bullets like that."

"Maybe it really is a power we don't yet understand."

Thunstone replied, "I'm not an expert on Voodoo, but I've seen some things that make me wonder if there isn't something behind much of what we call occult."

"An individual of your profound capacity for cerebration is injudicious in electing to rationalize such shibboleths." Johnny retorted.

"Forgive me," Thunstone turned his big hands palms upwards, "I've managed to drag all of you into an old debate I have with Johnny. He is always the rationalist, while I am fascinated by the romance of the unseen."

"Not to change the subject." Renny interjected, "But what happened to the other Bigomba? The one back in

the seventeenth century."

"He does seem to have become a kind of king for some time," Thunstone replied. "But his reign was short-lived. There's an old British sea captain's log, which contains an account of seeing Bigomba killed. The captain says he died in a duel with a pirate named Terrence Vulmea."

Johnny nodded his head.

"But the cognomen still possess considerable ascendancy."

"Enough to make him a rival to be taken seriously." Thunstone agreed, "That makes him a threat to Queen Mamaloi."

"And who is Queen Mamaloi?" Pat asked.

"She is the reigning Voodoo leader on the island," Thunstone said. "And possibly the dominant power of Voodoo in the entire Caribbean. No one had heard of her until about three years ago when she rose out of nowhere. Some say she is a white woman, but most of the people I've spoken to say she is probably an octoroon. She has black hair, and the sort of ivory complexion they call 'high yellow' down here. They say she is a woman of surpassing beauty. They also say she can raise the dead when she chooses."

"And she's on a collision course with Bigomba?" Stephen asked.

Thunstone nodded.

"There's some big gathering in the hills that Queen Mamaloi's called in two days. The rumor is that Bigomba will be there to face her down. I plan to face him tomorrow and expose him if I can."

"That sounds like a tall order." Pat said, "Anything we can do to help?"

"At the moment there's only one thing I can think of." He replied with a grin. He rose and extended a hand to Pat. "You can do me the honor of sharing a dance."

Chapter Ten

The Snapping Fingers

Li Chow was anxious and frightened as he got off his plane in Port au Prince late that evening. His task had been a simple one, yet somehow he had failed. The price for failure was high in the organization to which he belonged and he knew his only chance was to plead for his life, and perhaps pass on some information the organization might find useful.

He was traveling alone, with only two bags so he made it through the terminal quickly. On the curb he hailed a taxi but when one pulled up a big American stepped up to it.

"Excuse me." Li Chow said, "That's my cab."

"Pardon me." The American replied, "but I hailed it first."

Li Chow glared sternly at the American. He wished now that he has brought along several of his dacoits. The man was very big, and looked like an athlete.

"Don't take it like that." The American's face softened into a good-natured smile. "Where are you going? If we're heading the same way maybe we can split the fare."

"I'm staying at the Hotel Tropicale." Li Chow responded. He didn't relish the thought of sharing a cab, but it wouldn't do to make a scene.

"Capitol!" the big man said, "I'm at the Tropicale too. Here, let me help you with that."

Li Chow started to protest but the American ignored both him and the cab driver. He scooped up the bags and tucked them into the trunk.

The ride to the hotel was awkward as the American tried to make conversation about various trivialities. Li Chow remained silent but his companion seemed to seize on this as a chance to talk all the more.

Finally they arrived at the hotel and parted company in the lobby. Li Chow took his bags to a third floor room. He noted to his displeasure that the big man had taken a room just down the hall from his. He curtly returned the man's wave and locked the door behind him.

The big man didn't unpack. He tossed his suitcase under the bed and dialed an outside number on the

telephone. A moment later a voice answered.

"Yeah?"

"Long Tom, it's Thunstone." The big man said, "I'm checked in just a few doors away from Li Chow. Are you getting a good reception from the transmitter I planted on his bag?"

"Loud and clear." Long Tom answered. "He just used the telephone to report in. The conversation didn't tell us much, but it sounded like they're sending someone to his room to meet him."

"Good. Why don't you bring your equipment up to my room? We can respond faster from here if something happens."

Long Tom agreed. A few minutes later he, Pat Savage and Stephen Ling appeared at the door. Long Tom had a briefcase, which he opened up into a sophisticated radio set on the room's small table.

"Renny's watching the lobby." Pat supplied, "And Johnny is covering the fire escape. One of them is sure to spot whoever comes to meet with Li Chow."

The Tong boss's room was mostly silent, except for a radio station Li Chow turned on. Sometime later the listeners heard a knock at the door.

"Yes?" Li Chow's voice called. When there was no answer, they heard him rise and unlatch the door. There was a fierce whisper but the words were indistinct.

"Of course, forgive me!" Li Chow's voice held a note of fear. They heard his take the chain off the door, then shut it after his visitor entered.

"You?" The Tong man's voice sounded startled, "I never imagined the Council would send such an exalted personage."

"This is not an honor for you, worm." The voice was a woman's. It was low and throaty and held an exotic trace of accent that none of the listeners could place.

"I have information for the Council." Li Chow replied, "It was so important that I deemed it necessary to come and report in person."

"Liar!" the woman hissed, "You were given a simple task. You were to hold the physician and to discourage anyone looking for him. You failed and you have come to plead for your miserable life!"

"It was not my fault o glorious one." Li Chow stammered, "The doctor had contacted Doc Savage before I could reach him."

"Doc Savage?" the feminine voice was harsher than ever, "Fool! Don't you know what his involvement could cost us?"

"But that is what I came to report." Li Chow hastily replied, "Doc Savage is away. It is only two of his men who are involved, the ones called Renny and Long Tom. If we can eliminate them, the problem will be solved."

"You make that sound like a simple solution." The woman said, "Your incompetence has placed us in a position that will require all the resources of the Council to correct."

"But I..."

"Silence!" The woman snapped. "You know the penalty for such gross failure. Remain here and contemplate your fate."

"I obey." Li Chow's voice sounded defeated.

There was the sound of the door opening and closing again. Long Tom picked up the hand held radio each of Doc Savage's aides carried.

"Renny, Johnny," he said, "There's a woman leaving Li Chow's room right now. She needs to be followed."

"A woman?" Renny rumbled, "I haven't seen any woman go up the whole time I've been here. Have you Johnny?"

"A negative substantiation." Johnny echoed.

"So you missed her coming in." Long Tom snapped, "Just don't miss her going out."

"Got it." Renny replied.

The minutes passed without any word. When the tension grew too great, Long Tom picked up the little radio again.

"What's going on with the woman?" he demanded, "Why haven't you two reported in?"

"Holy cow Long Tom." Renny's voice came back. "Don't you think I would have called if I'd seen anything? There's been no woman through here since the last time I heard from you."

"She must have come through there." Long Tom insisted. "Maybe you missed her because she was dressed as a maid, or disguised as a man?"

"There's been no one through here I tell you." The big engineer growled, "The only other human being who I've seen is the desk clerk, and he hasn't moved from his post in hours."

"There has been a paucity of individuals traversing the exterior of the edifice." Chimed in Johnny.

"I don't get it." Pat Savage said, "Is she still in the building? That doesn't make any sense."

At that moment a sound came over the radio. It was like several pairs of snapping fingers, which rapidly swelled in number until it seemed dozens of fingers, were snapping in the room. Li Chow began screaming, a sound of pure terror and pain that drowned out the snapping noises.

"Renny! Johnny!" Long Tom shouted into the radio, "Get in here, there's something happening to Li Chow!"

The four raced down the hall. John Thunstone reached the door and tried the knob. The screaming had stopped but the sound of the snapping fingers could still be heard.

"Locked!" Thunstone gritted.

"Stand back!" Pat had pulled a huge pistol out of her handbag. It was a big, single action revolver that looked like the kind of weapon used in the days of the Old West. The large caliber pistol fired once, shattering the lock.

John Thunstone pushed open the door and swept on the light switch. The snapping had stopped and, except for Li Chow's body, the room was empty.

Stephen Ling ran to Li Chow and tried to find a pulse. It was hopeless. The body was clad in pyjamas and huddled against the headboard. The bedclothes had been thrown off.

"What happened to him?" Pat breathed.

"I don't know." Stephen replied, "But it looks as if every drop of blood has been drained from his body."

Chapter Eleven

The Queen and King of Voodoo

The police had asked a great many questions. At first they wanted to take the group into custody, until they found out who they were. Doc Savage and his men held high-ranking honorary positions in many of the world's major police departments. The Police Department of the Democratic Republic of Haiti was not one of those, but the local officials were impressed nonetheless.

The inspector, a middle-aged man named Dupond took their statements and told them he would let them know the results of the autopsy as soon as it could be performed.

"I'd like to help with the autopsy." Stephen Ling offered.

"That is most irregular Monsieur." Dupond replied.

"Dr. Ling had been very helpful to us." Renny said, "We would really appreciate it if you gave him a chance to do this."

"I am pleased to extend any courtesy to Doc Savage's men." The Inspector said, "But I am afraid that the good doctor is not such a person."

"Would the jurisdictional conundrum be resolved by my prolonged presence?" Johnny asked.

"He means, would it clear things up if he stayed for the autopsy too." Pat translated, adding a smile that could have melted butter.

"But of course," Dupond said, returning the smile, "I only regret that we cannot perform the autopsy immediately. Our coroner is away and will not be returning until late this afternoon."

The group returned to the hotel where they got what sleep they could. Later, over brunch they discussed their strategy.

"I wish I could help you more," John Thunstone said. "Unfortunately I had a message from Father Ambrose this morning confirming that Bigomba is going to be holding a secret gathering after dusk tonight. It's my best

chance to show him up."

"Maybe we should come with you." Pat suggested. "You've helped us a lot and we'd like to return the favor."

"Yeah," Renny agreed, "It's not like we have any hot leads of our own to chase after. Besides, I've got a feeling that this Bigomba is mixed up in this mess somehow."

Late afternoon found Renny, Long Tom, and Pat moving quietly through the dense forest. The three had gone on many adventures with the famous Man of Bronze, which had taken them to parts of the world overgrown with tropical jungle. In those places their survival had depended on learning to their way through dense vegetation quickly and quietly. To their surprise, John Thunstone seemed as skilled a woodsman as any of them.

After several hours of rough going they came to a spot overlooking a small glade.

"That's where the gathering will take place." Thunstone announced, "It's close to the beach on the other side so I don't expect anyone else to come the same way we did."

"We could have just walked along the beach and saved ourselves all that trouble?" Pat wiped sweat from her pretty face, "Brother, you sure have a funny sense of how to do things."

Thunstone chuckled.

"It was a lot of work, but it gives the advantage of surprise, which will be invaluable."

Pat made a disgusted sound.

"Just promise me we get to go back along the beach when we're done."

"I'm going to get in a little closer." Thunstone said, "The rest of you can cover me from here. Please don't interfere unless I'm in real trouble. We can demoralize this movement more easily if I am seen defeating Bigomba alone."

"I'm just not sure how we'll stop him." Long Tom said, "That mug just shrugged off our mercy bullets last time."

"Don't worry about that." Pat pulled out her big single-action revolver, "I'm not planning on using mercy bullets."

"Good grief!" Thunstone's eyes widened, "Pat, you'll blow his head off with that thing!"

"Don't I know it?" Pat smiled.

"Okay, but don't use that cannon except as a last resort. If Bigomba's killed he becomes a martyr to his people. That would undermine everything we're trying to accomplish."

John Thunstone slipped into the jungle.

"I wonder if Johnny and Stephen are learning anything?" Pat said.

They're probably learning that even a morgue beats being in the middle of a jungle with a chatterbox." Long Tom said sourly.

Pat made a wry face and lapsed into silence.

At twilight the fireflies began to come out, lending an eerie beauty to the forest. A little later, torches could be seen coming in through the jungle as a number of Haitians moved in to the glade. The drummers came first and began the seductive rhythm that would guide in the rest of the worshipers.

They came by ones, and twos, and threes, swaying with the sound of the drums, murmuring in tones too quiet for the three to hear.

There were perhaps a hundred people in the glade when Bigomba appeared.

He didn't enter the glade, at least not that anyone could remember later, he was simply there as if he had melted out of the jungle. A hush fell over the crowd as the giant strode through them. When he reached the tree line he turned and gazed at them impassively, then his face split into a huge grin.

"My children, I have returned!"

The group of people screamed and cheered. Bigomba let them for a moment then he raised his great hands and quieted them.

"I have returned because of the sorry state of things on this island." He looked across the crowd, his gaze stern.

"For too long, our people have been used by the white men." He continued, "You know that our ancestors came from Africa where they were proud and free? You know that they were brought to these islands where they

were forced to work as slaves for the white men? I know these things too. I was a great king in Africa until the Spanish came with their chains and their guns. They took me, and many of my people, and bound us on a ship for these islands.

"But we are strong, are we not my people? I broke my chains and freed my brothers. Together we took the ship and killed the white men who would have made us slaves. You also were bound by white men and made slaves, but you also possessed hearts that could not be conquered. You broke your chains and took up arms. Under the leadership of Toussaint, my brother in spirit, you overthrew the white men and built a black nation where our people could live free!"

Another cheer broke out from the crowd and it took Bigomba a moment to still it.

"There is glory in an unconquerable spirit!" he shouted, "But there's only shame in giving away your soul without a fight."

The crowd grew silent. Only the steady rhythm of the drums could be heard.

"You wonder of what I speak?" Bigomba cried, "You wonder what I call the soul of our people? I speak of our faith in the loa, the spirits of Voodoo. This is something that has come with us out of Africa. It is something that the white men with their guns and chains were never able to take from us. But in the end, they did not need to take it away for we gave it away."

A murmur of dismay passed through the crowd.

"Do you claim this has not happened?" Bigomba demanded, "You say to me that you have not given the secrets of our deepest faith and our greatest power to the white men? Do you not remember the man Legendre? How many years has it been since that white man lorded over the hounngans and bocors of the islands? And after him, did another among you reclaim the rightful leadership of the most African of all religions? No! You gave it over to Doctor Mocquino and his mad ambitions."

The audience was quiet now. Bigomba's words had touched a sensitive chord.

"And now it is the woman who calls herself Queen Mamaloi." His voice was heavy with sarcasm. She is a stranger to these islands, and no daughter of Africa, yet the honor of leadership and the secrets of Voodoo are passed to her freely, like Legendre and Mocquino before her. This is why I have returned! I come to renounce all such impostors and see the secrets of our faith and the leadership of our people returned to the children of Africa, now and forevermore!"

The cheering was wild this time and Bigomba made no attempt to stop it.

"I wonder when Thunstone's gonna make his move." Renny whispered.

"I don't know." Pat replied, "I hope he hasn't waited too long. Bigomba has those people in the palm of his hand."

In the glade a cloaked figure stepped forward. It was much too small to be John Thunstone but it seemed to be a person of some import. As the figure moved towards Bigomba the crowd hushed.

"Bigomba!" the hooded figure cried, "Yours are the words of a true son of Africa, but not all of your words are true. Legendre and Mocquino were a plague on the islands, but Queen Mamaloi works only for the good of her African children."

"Who are you woman?" Bigomba demanded, "Show us your face!"

The woman shrugged back her hood, revealing a stunning face with an ivory complexion framed by a cascade of black hair. She was of mixed racial background, fair enough to pass for Caucasian, yet her face would have been exotic in any setting.

"I am Queen Mamaloi," the woman said in a clear, bell-like voice. "I greet you Bigomba as a companion in serving the gods of Voodoo and the children of Africa."

"I have heard many stories of you woman." Bigomba countered, "But you are not of our people. How can I trust you when so many other outsiders have taken the power of Voodoo and used it for selfish ends?"

"Shall I prove my power to you?" she asked. "Very well, you who claim to be an African king reborn, see that my power indeed comes out of Africa."

Queen Mamaloi's eyes flashed green fire.

"Anyoto!" she called.

Half a dozen men melted out of the brush. They were clad in garments made of leopard-skins with the heads draped over their faces to form masks. Sharp metal claws extended from their gloves.

The crowd moved back at the sight of these strange figures, but the giant threw back his head and laughed.

"Do you think that Bigomba fears such as these? I know their kind of old, both the black leopard of the *Wakanda* and the spotted leopard of the *Anyoto*. I know that they were once fierce but they have grown weak. It was not ten years ago that they sold themselves to the white worshippers of Papa Le Bas, only to be defeated by the British and the French. Still smarting from that defeat they were humiliated by a single Englishman in the heart of their homeland. Now they serve another outsider."

"Be careful Bigomba," the woman purred, "At a word from me they will tear you to pieces. I would not like to see that."

Bigomba laughed again.

"Does the lion cringe when the leopard growls? Let them slink off to the shadows before I strip them of their pretty hides."

"Very well," Queen Mamaloi replied. "We shall see."

She nodded her head and the leopard men crept forward to surround the big man.

"Holy Cow!" Renny whispered, "That guy's just bought himself a passle of trouble."

The leopard men moved in together, hoping to overwhelm Bigomba's obvious strength with their numbers and weapons. The big man grinned and began to do an odd dance to the rhythm of the ever-present drums. As the leopard warriors drew in he began to spin in an acrobatic dance. His body twisted and flipped out of the way of every attack while his feet lashed out to take a devastating toll on his opponents. In less than a minute the six leopard men lay stretched out on the ground. Bigomba strode to each of them, stripped off his leopard skin and tossed it to the cheering crowd.

"I've never seen anything like that." Long Tom muttered.

"It's capoeira," Pat said.

"Capo-what?"

"Capoeira is a form of hand to hand fighting." Pat explained, "It was developed by African slaves living in Brazil and it's based on acrobatic tribal dances. The slaves would have bouts with each other and runaways would use it to fight their Portuguese masters. The slaves often has their hands shackles so capoeira focused on dodging and on using the feet as weapons."

Both men were staring at her now. Pat shrugged.

"I vacationed in Brazil last summer. I managed to pick up a thing or two."

Queen Mamaloi had watched the fight with an impassive pose but her eyes gleamed with excitement.

"You are everything I hoped you would be." She breathed, "You truly are the hero of Africa come back to life!"

She moved to Bigomba's side and gazed into his eyes. Her voice dropped as she reached out to place one hand on his mighty chest.

"I would not be your enemy o king of old. Our goals are the same and I am not blind to your many gifts. I will take you to Damballa himself, and I will plead that you be allowed to join with us. Imagine, Haiti restored to the wealth that is her birthright. Imagine her as the crown jewel in an empire of all the islands, swept bare of the French, the British, the Americans and all others who would exploit our people. Imagine a black kingdom as strong and grand as any Africa has seen. Imagine ruling over your loyal people... with me by your side."

"That little hussy!" Pat whispered, "She's trying to seduce him."

"More than that." Renny said, "The way she's using her voice and eyes, she's trying to hypnotize him."

Pat realized that he was right. Even this far away the woman's musical voice cast a spell that made her want to listen.

Bigomba laughed harshly and caught the woman's slender wrist in his hand.

"Your tricks hold no sway over me little queen." He boomed, "Bigomba's will is not to be bent, unless it is by his people."

He turned to the crowd.

"What have you to say my people? What say you to the thought of being ruled by Bigomba and Queen Mamaloi together?"

The cheering was thunderous now.

"Very well," the giant grinned, "Show me a sign that you hold the favor of the gods of Africa and perhaps I shall come with you."

She stepped back, a smile of triumph on her lovely face. She reached into her girdle and pulled out a slender metal rod, about eighteen inches in length. She pointed the rod at a tree across the glade and thumbed a tiny switch. A bolt of blue-white light shot out of the tube and burned a perfectly round hole in the bole of the big tree.

"You see?" Queen Mamaloi shouted, "Who else but the gods has such power? Who else but Shango himself, hurler of thunders, could grant this to his servant?"

"Holy cow!" Renny nearly forgot to whisper in his surprise, "How did she do that?"

"It's some sort of radiation charge." Long Tom said, "The reason we could see it was it ionized the air as it passed, like a lightning bolt or the arc on a Tesla coil."

"Tesla coil?" Pat asked, "But those make a zig-zaggy path. So does lightning for that matter."

"That just means the energy isn't electricity." Long Tom shot back, "An electrical arc is crooked because it follows the path of least resistance. Other forms of energy always travel in a straight line, like light for instance."

"Say, Long Tom," Renny growled, "That wouldn't happen to be what our plane got shot with, would it?"

"That what I was just thinking." Long Tom whispered back.

In the glade, only Queen Mamaloi and Bigomba were standing. The Haitians had fallen prone when the deadly bolt struck.

"Rise my children!" Bigomba cried, "Rise, for this is a glorious day. I will go with this woman to meet with Damballa himself, and when I return, Haiti will have a new king and queen."

"So the two frauds have joined up at last, have they?"

John Thunstone had stepped out of the forest and was walking toward Bigomba and Queen Mamaloi with a confident stride.

"We'll see how eager the people are to follow you when I show them how phony your so-called powers are."

Chapter Twelve **The Fingers Snap Again**

The morgue in Port au Prince was surprisingly modern given the general level of poverty in the country. There were a number of refrigerated niches against one wall, and two autopsy tables in the center. Li Chow's body occupied the table closest the entryway.

"I apologize again gentleman," the little man said. "We really don't have emergencies that require my presence here very often."

"You were down in Jacmel?" Stephen Ling asked.

Dr. August Thierry nodded. He was only about five and a half feet tall, but carried himself with a gravity that magnified his presence.

"I run a small clinic there." He explained, "Medical care in Haiti is close to non-existent for most of the people. I like to do what I can."

"You apportion your applications between convalescents and cadavers?" Johnny asked, "A most paradoxical confluence of vocations."

Dr. Thierry chuckled and rubbed a brown hand over his head, which was bald on top.

"I suppose so." He said, "Still, the government pays me for tending to the dead. That helps me to care for the living, who often cannot pay for themselves."

"I doubt Li Chow ever imagined he would be such a philanthropist." Stephen Ling said dryly.

"From the little you have told me," Dr. Thierry replied, "I doubt Mr. Li Chow ever imagined he would be dead."

"Have you seen one like this before?" Stephen asked.

"The snapping death?" I'm afraid I have, "But as to the cause of death... I cannot say."

"Inexplicable exsanguinations?" Johnny suggested.

"That sounds about right, but it isn't coming up with a good label that has thwarted me." Dr. Thierry turned down the sheet reverently, as if not wishing to disturb the pallid form."

"No, my dilemma has been learning what could have happened to the blood."

"There has been disquietude likened to manual percussidigitation," Johnny said. "Perhaps this is the agitation of the pendulositys of hemophageous chiropterae."

Dr. Thierry and Stephen Ling exchanged glances.

"I've had an excellent education Johnny." Stephen said, "But I didn't quite get that one. Could you reprise your neologisms a bit?"

Johnny smirked.

"I merely wondered if the `snapping fingers' might be the noise of the wings of vampire bats."

"You're not the first to suggest that," Dr. Thierry answered. "But bats use their teeth to cut neat incisions and then lap the blood. As you can see, there are no wounds on this man's skin."

"There are no visible wounds." Stephen said, "How carefully have you examined the skin?"

"Not in exacting detail, I confess." The Haitian coroner replied. "I have focused mainly on the internal organs, hoping to find a clue there since the skin was so obviously unmarked."

"I would like to take a section of skin to look at under the microscope." Stephen said, "I have a suspicion I would like to check out."

They went to work and within a few moments had a specimen of Li Chow's skin under one of the laboratory's microscopes. Stephen studied it closely.

"There!" he said with satisfaction, "Do you see that Dr. Thierry?"

He stepped aside to let the older man at the microscope.

"What am I looking for?" Thierry asked, "No, I see it! A triangular puncture wound. My God, how did we miss this? It's quite large, maybe an eighth of an inch across."

"But it's nearly invisible," Stephen said, "You didn't find it because there is no swelling or discoloration. The blood has been removed so perfectly that the wound is practically undetectable."

"What could make such a wound?" The older man asked.

"I don't know," Stephen replied. "But I suspect we'll find that Li Chow's body is covered with wounds like this. To lose all of his blood through something this size, there would have to be hundreds."

The overhead lights went out at that moment, leaving a standing lamp to illuminate the room. Dr. Thierry sighed.

"My equipment is top flight, but the wiring in this building is not I am afraid. This should only take a moment while I find the fuse box."

"He walked to the door. As soon as the shadows engulfed him the noise started. It was like fingers snapping, first a few, then a dozen, then what sounded like hundreds. Dr. August Thierry let out a terrible scream.

"Doctor Thierry!"

Stephen lunged towards the shadowy, writhing form on the floor. His body wanted desperately to run the other way but he forced himself to move to the man's rescue. Only Johnny's bony arms pulling him away saved his life.

"There's nothing we can do." The lanky archaeologist said, his horror reducing him to an ordinary vocabulary. "We have to get away."

Small forms were leaving Dr. Thierry's body, humping along the ground like oversized inchworms. They were each about the size of a man's finger. Some were actually leaping, moving nearly a yard through the air by throwing their bodies straight. The sudden motion was what caused the distinctive finger-snapping sound.

Johnny and Stephen froze in horror at the sight. The worm-things still attached to Thierry's body were bloated to five times their normal size or more. His cries had died away to soft moans and still the things fed.

"They're not getting any closer." Stephen whispered.

"They're remaining outside the boundary of the lamp's illumination." Johnny said, "They must be photosensitive. As long as we remain here..."

Johnny didn't get to finish his thought, for at that moment the light bulb in the floor lamp shattered. His heart seemed to freeze in his chest at the snapping grew louder. Then he felt Stephen Ling hauling him to his feet.

"The niches!" The young doctor cried as he dragged Johnny towards the back wall. Those things must be able to squeeze in through doors and windows, but the niches are sealed like a refrigerator. They can't get through that!"

They opened a niche, and Johnny half scrambled and was half-pushed into it.

"What about you?" he cried.

"Don't worry, I'll be in the next one!" Stephen shouted back just before he banged the door shut.

Johnny ran his hands over his body but couldn't find any of the worm things. As he did, he heard the door to another niche bang shut, and breathed a sigh of relief. A few moments later the snapping noises stopped, abruptly. He knew that someone must have turned on the lights. Not knowing whom it was he was reluctant to open the door and look out.

A thought struck him. He ran his hands across the inside of the door. Only smooth cold metal met his fingers. Of course, he realized, there was no reason to put a latch on the inside of a morgue niche. He was trapped.

An hour passed in the cold and darkness, then another. He could tell the passage of time because the dial of his watch was daubed with radium paint, causing it to glow in the dark. The cold was not intense but it grew progressively harder to take until Johnny's entire body was shivering.

It was a quarter past ten when he heard a noise. There was a scream in the main room, then he could make out words. "Mondieu! Mondieu! Il est mort!"

"Hey!" Johnny yelled at the top of his lungs and pounded his bony fists against the door. "Hey! L-l-let us out! W-w-we're t-t-trapped in here!"

There was another scream and the faint sound of running feet.

"G-g-g-reat!" Johnny shivered, "He m-m-must apprehend that I'm a n-n-necrom-m-mantic m-m-manifestation."

It was another twenty minutes before the door finally opened. Johnny crawled out on numb hands and feet to be greeted by half a dozen Haitian constables with their pistols drawn. Inspector Dupond was there as well, and ordered blankets, hot coffee and brandy at once."

"D-d-doctor T-t-theiry?" Johnny managed to ask.

Dupond nodded at a sheet-covered form on the floor.

"Was it the snapping fingers again?" he asked.

Johnny nodded vigorously.

"M-m-must open other n-n-niches." He stammered, "D-d-doctor L-l-ling inside."

Dupond snapped an order and his men rushed to the other niches. They had them all open in seconds.

"I'm sorry Dr. Littlejohn," the Inspector said, "they are all empty. Your friend is not there."

Chapter Thirteen **Black Colossus' Vengeance**

"What does he think he's doing?" Long Tom hissed, "He's going to get himself killed."

Down in the glade John Thunstone had stopped a few yards away from where Bigomba and Queen Mamaloi stood.

"Fool," the Voodoo priestesses snarled, "The only thing you shall gain is your death!"

"She raised her wand and pointed it at Thunstone's chest. Before she could press the button, the giant Bigomba caught her arm and pulled it gently down.

"No my queen," he said. "You have given me the sign I asked for and now it is my turn to offer you proof that I am truly the chosen of the gods."

He turned to Thunstone.

"You have a choice white man." Bigomba raised his voice so everyone could hear "You may bow down and acknowledge my power, or you may pit your strength against mine."

"I'm not afraid of your magic Bigomba."

The giant grinned.

"I don't want to beat you with magic white man." He said, "You are tall and strong, and you carry a sword within your stick do you not?"

Bigomba reached out a hand and one of his followers stepped forward and put an old-fashioned cutlass in it.

"They say that the pirate Vulmea killed Bigomba once in a fair fight. Perhaps you can show these people how he did that. Or perhaps Bigomba will show them the lie of that story."

Thunstone said nothing. He pulled on the handle of his cane, revealing a slender silvery blade with letters engraved on it.

Bigomba looked at the sword and grinned.

"Your blade is not big enough white man. Would you prefer to borrow a cutlass instead?"

"This has always served me." Thunstone replied, "I'll trust it again."

"What are those letters on the blade? Is it a spell of some kind?"

"It's a scripture," Thunstone said. "It's from the book of Judges. *'Sic pereant omnes inimici tui, Domini,'* which is Latin for 'Thus perisheth all thine enemies, O Lord.' St. Dunstan forged the blade. He's the patron saint of silversmiths and was a great foe of the Devil."

"Do you hear that my people?" Bigomba's laughed, "The white man brings saint magic to defeat me! He must think I am the Devil himself."

He turned back to Thunstone.

"To you and your kind, perhaps I am the Devil," he said, "But for me and my people, the only Devil is the white man."

Then he struck with the strength and speed of a jungle cat. Thunstone parried with the skill of many years of training.

In the forest, Pat Savage took careful aim with her pistol as the two combatants closed. Before she could fire, Renny laid a big hand on her arm.

"Easy Pat," he whispered. "Remember, we promised Thunstone not to interfere. Besides, if you shoot Bigomba now, our man will never get out of that place alive."

The two men seemed evenly matched. Both were quick and powerful, but Bigomba seemed to have the advantage in size and strength. Thunstone fought with more fencing skill, but that was balanced by the Voodoo priest's ferocity. He never seemed to tire and launched a vicious series of attacks that drove Thunstone steadily back. Then Bigomba aimed a deadly slash at John Thunstone's head. The American managed to duck and the cutlass lodged in the bole of a tree.

With the perfect opportunity to strike, Thunstone hesitated.

"This is no time to play fair!" Long Tom groaned.

Apparently Queen Mamaloi shared the sentiment. She raised her tube and pointed the deadly end at John Thunstone's back.

"Not today you don't sister!"

Pat had no time to take careful aim, but years ago her father had taught her the trick of firing an accurate snap shot, after the fashion of the old gunfighters. The bullet struck the deadly tube near Queen Mamaloi's hand, smashing it from her grip. The strange weapon flew a dozen feet to land amid the crowd. It was bent at a forty-five degree angle and sparks were issuing from it.

The Haitians scrambled to get as far from the strange device as they could and just managed to get clear before it exploded.

"Whast the devil?" John Thunstone turned at the sound. He was only distracted for an instant, but that was long enough for the wily Bigomba to reach into the pouch he wore and bring out closed hand. When Thunstone turned to face him again the giant opened his hand and blew a powder into the American's face.

John Thunstone staggered back two steps and dropped his sword cane. He made several feeble fending gestures with his hands, then fell.

Pat Savage let out a shriek and charged the clearing, her old pistol thundering with each report. Renny and Long Tom followed close beside her, their pistols moaning as they shot forth streams of mercy bullets.

"Bigomba, come!" The Voodoo priestess called, "These fools cannot be allowed to ruin everything!"

She dropped her long cloak. Under it she wore only a brief swimming costume. She turned and bolted for the woods like a deer. Bigomba hesitated only a moment, and then shot after her. The crowd of Haitians was scattering, too startled and confused to fight back. To them it must have sounded as if a company of Marines had appeared from the forest.

As she reached the clearing, Pat Savage paused a moment to take careful aim and fired her pistol again. Queen Mamaloi cried out and went down, clutching her leg. Bigomba stooped to pick her up. He continued running, not slowed at all by her weight.

"You boys look after John," Pat cried. "I'm going to get those two!"

She plunged into the forest, not knowing whether Renny and Long Tom were following or not. Pat had been raised in the wilds of Canada and could run through the thick forest at breakneck speed. The jungle here was thicker and more tangled than in her childhood home, but she still made excellent time. She doubted that there were many people alive who could have kept up with her.

Unfortunately, Bigomba seemed to be one of those rare few. Even with the burden of a woman in his arms he was flying through the dense growth at a speed that matched hers. She only caught glimpses of him, never good enough to waste her remaining two shots. Despite the fact that he was carrying an injured woman, she never seemed to gain any ground on him.

Ahead she saw a change in the light. The gloom of the forest was lifting. They must be coming to the beach that Thunstone had spoken of. She caught a glimpse of Bigomba's dark form ahead of her and fired. Queen Mamaloi's tinkling laughter told her the shot had missed.

A moment later she burst out on the beach. Bigomba was already up to his waist in the water.

"Stop right there!" Pat yelled, "There's no place you can go anymore."

In response, Bigomba dived into the surf. Pat fired her last shot after him but couldn't tell if she hit her target or not. She paused to reload, keeping an eye on the water for either of the couple's heads to break the surface. She wondered how long Bigomba could hold his breath. The man seemed nearly superhuman. Of course it didn't matter how long he could stay down. The woman with him was mortal enough. She would drown if they didn't surface soon.

A full minute passed and Pat wondered about diving in after them. She chose against it. Her old fashioned pistol wasn't as watertight as the super-firers Doc had designed, and she didn't want to face Bigomba with wet powder.

Renny burst out of the forest. He glanced around, and then trotted up to Pat.

"What happened to our pigeons?"

"I think they turned into fish." She replied, "They went in the water awhile ago and I haven't seen them since. No bobbing heads, no bubbles like the kind you get when a drowning person's lungs give out, nothing."

Renny looked up and down the broad expanse of beach.

"Well, they must still be in the water." His big voice boomed, "There's no place they could come ashore without you seeing them."

She nodded uncertainly.

"That wouldn't make sense, would it? Then again, there's not much about that Bigomba that makes sense. I almost wonder if he does have magic powers." Pat paused a moment, "Say, where's Long Tom?"

"I left him to take care of Thunstone."

The two kept their eyes fixed on the surf, watching for any sign of their enemies, alive or dead. They were still watching fifteen minutes later when Long Tom walked out of the woods.

"Tom," Pat cried, "What are you doing here? What about John?"

Long Tom shook his head slowly.

"John Thunstone is dead."

Chapter Fourteen They Gather by Night

"And that is the story Father Ambrose." Renny said, "We know that John Thunstone was helping you."

The stout priest shook his head in disbelief. He was a heavyset man in a Jesuit's habit with a pleasant face who carried a stout blackthorn. His eyes, normally wise and sleepy looking, were sorrowful.

"I'm sorry to hear of his passing. He was a good man, if somewhat unorthodox in his beliefs. I shall miss our conversations. I am sorry to hear about Dr. Ling as well, I shall pray for his safe return."

"We would like to finish the job Thunstone started." Renny continued. "We own him that."

"I would be grateful." The priest said, "And the people of Haiti would owe you a great debt. These villains, Queen Mamaloi and Bigomba, were dangerous enough on their own. Together they could spark a revolution that could sweep through the Caribbean, and perhaps all of Latin America as well."

"Are you serious?" Long Tom demanded.

"I'm afraid I am," Father Ambrose replied. "The cult of Voodoo is larger and more pernicious than most imagine. Its influence reaches even into your own country. I have heard that as many as half a dozen criminals have launched terrible plans against your nation using the mysterious powers they learned on this island. Perhaps you have heard of some of them?"

"Father Ambrose," Pat cut in, "We have run into a lot of crackpots with earth-shaking plans, and I'm sure there are some out there with special voodoo gimmicks. But for right now, we'd probably do better to stick to the two we know about."

Father Ambrose smiled at her.

"You are wise beyond your years daughter. Very well."

He pulled out a map of the island.

"I cannot say where Bigomba will be," the priest said, "I have heard no new rumors, and his comings and goings are most mysterious. Queen Mamaloi is another matter. Tonight is the great ceremony of the Full Moon, and she will be presiding."

He jabbed a finger at a spot on the interior of the island, near the border of the Dominican Republic.

"The ceremony will be here, on Morne la Selle, the Magic Mountain."

Just before dusk the group left, taking a car as far as the roads would carry them, then they began the long hike up the mountain. There were other pilgrims on the path, mostly Haitian but a surprising number of foreigners. The four had dressed in shabby clothes as a crude disguise but they were greeted with such a lack of curiosity that they began to wonder if even that was needed.

After more than hour of walking in the moonlit darkness, Johnny signaled a halt. The path they were on narrowed a little ways ahead to a declivity that was the only visible entrance to the valley beyond. A tall mulatto stood on the path, acting as a guard. He had stopped a pair of pilgrims ahead of them.

The two men were Europeans by the look of them, one young and the other middle-aged. The younger of the men held out a token of some sort. The Mulatto glanced at it, and then asked him a question. The words were impossible to discern, but the language sounded like English.

"*Uskût!*" the younger man snarled in a voice loud enough to be heard. "*Daraga âwala!*"

"*Ahu hîna Damballa!*" the older man added in an angry tone. Then he held out a talisman of his own.

This seemed to mollify the mulatto. He folded his arms across his chest in a peculiar bow and let the pair pass.

"Arabic." Renny whispered, "I wouldn't have thought those two mugs were Arabs."

"A duplicitous potentiality is existent." Johnny whispered back. "Their shibbolethic verification was chimerical. Ow!"

The last syllable was in response to Pat Savage, who had kicked Johnny sharply on one bony shin."

"Look professor," she hissed, "The situation is tricky enough without having to figure out your over-educated gobbledygook!"

Johnny looked abashed.

"The language is Arabic," he said, "But it's nonsense, just random phrases strung together. I'd venture it's a password of some sort."

"That makes sense," Pat agreed, "But it looks as if there's some sort of token we have to show as well."

"You guys stay here," Renny rumbled, "I'll see if it's possible to bluff our way through. You come with me Johnny. If he wants to start a conversation your Arabic's a lot better than mine."

The two men stepped onto the path and walked up to the mulatto.

"What is your name and number?" the fierce-looking man demanded. "From what place do you come?"

"*Uskût!*" Renny growled, "*Daraga âwala!*"

"*Ahu hîna Damballa!*" Johnny added.

A look of confusion passed across the mulatto's face. He held out a hand.

"I must look on your amulet."

"Feh!" Johnny spat and began to berate the mulatto in angry Arabic.

"You cannot pass unless I see your amulet!" the mulatto responded, his own voice growing louder.

Renny nodded and reached a pocket. He held out his monster hand, clenched around a small object. The mulatto leaned in close to look and the big hand opened to reveal what looked like a clear glass marble held between Renny's thumb and fore-finger."

The man looked confused, then angry. Before he could say or do anything, Renny crushed the tiny ball between his fingers. The mulatto's eyes rolled up in his head as the anesthetic gas took effect. He sank to the ground, unconscious.

The others joined them.

"So that's how you're going to bluff him, huh?" Long Tom asked sarcastically.

Renny shrugged.

"C'mon," he muttered, "Let's hide this guy before someone else comes down the trail."

They bound and gagged the mulatto and hid him in a small thicket about twenty yards off of the path.

"I hope they don't miss him too soon." Pat said as the little group headed down the path to the shadowed valley.

They decided to arrive in smaller groups to attract less attention. Renny and Johnny went first, Long Tom and Pat followed. The rhythmic beating of the drums was much louder here than on the path and people had gathered in a broad circle. As on the trail, most of the people were native Haitians, with a smattering of European and Asian observers. A number of the Haitians had shed their clothing as they entered, but most of the others were fully clad. The clearing was roughly illuminated with lanterns and torches showing, at one edge of the circle, a small building resembling a shrine. In front of the shrine's double doors was a raised wooden platform.

"They've got a stage and everything." Pat whispered, "Do you suppose there's going to be a floor show?"

As if on cue, the drums faded to nearly nothing. A great unseen voice cried out a word none of them recognized. Then the double doors opened and a graceful woman clad in barbaric splendor glided from the shrine, her green eyes shining eerily as they caught the torchlight.

"That's her." Pat Savage breathed, "That's Queen Mamaloi!"

Chapter Fifteen

Damballa Speaks

The woman on the platform was the perfect image of a beautiful pagan goddess brought to life. She wore a skirt, belted with the kind of jeweled girdle seen in ancient Egyptian murals. Her breasts were bound with a narrow band of cloth, leaving the ivory skin of her midriff and shoulders bare. Her slender arms were likewise bare, except for a profusion of jeweled bands and bracelets. Her dark hair was piled high on her head and obscured by a glittering

headdress. She moved as gracefully as a dancer, but Pat noticed that she had a nearly imperceptible limp.

"Make obeisance!" Johnny whispered urgently. When no one moved he hissed, "Bow down!"

The group flattened themselves prostrate just as the rest of the worshipers fell down.

Queen Mamaloi began to speak, her musical voice beginning in Haitian, then shifting to French. Finally she settled on the unknown language of the voice, which had announced her.

"I've often heard that Voodoo had a secret language." Johnny whispered, "Something like Church Latin, dead except for ceremonial usage. This must be it."

The bell-like voice stopped and people began to rise to their knees, assuming an attitude of prayer. A soft chant began among them. "*Ihro manda, ihro manda...*"

As the chant filled the air the clear voice of Queen Mamaloi rose above it in invocation as she stood motionless, arms held high.

*"Legba choi-yan Zandor—
Zandor Legba, imole'-hai!"*

"What are they saying?" Long Tom queried.

"It's the prayer to Legba." Johnny whispered back, "He is the `opener of the door' and is always invoked before any of the other gods are called.

A shadow passed across the moon and the chant shifted. Now the woman sang,

*"Damballa choi-yan Zandor—
Zandor Damballa, imole'-hai!"*

After a few moments of this, Queen Mamaloi fell silent. The chorus of voices immediately lapsed into silence as well, though the steady beat of the drums continued.

Then, magically, the queen was answered by a disembodied voice. It spoke first in the unknown tongue, then in Haitian, French and finally English.

"I, Damballa, have been called. I answer." The voice was harsh and guttural, and carried with it an almost inhuman force of personality.

"I am here among you." The voice continued, "But your blind eyes cannot see me. I come because there are traitors here, spies—those who work not for the glory of the African races but to gain for themselves. Tonight there shall be a great smelling-out. True men—stand fast. Spies—I shall find you! To me, my servants, Damballa speaks."

"The jig's up." Renny whispered, "Everyone, be ready to move fast!"

Six men ritual masks and brandishing torches came forth from the shrine and took up positions on either side of Queen Mamaloi. A seventh followed, a towering Hercules wearing mask and robe and carrying a heavy scimitar.

"Is that Bigomba?" Pat whispered.

"If it is, we're sunk for sure." Long Tom hissed back.

"Guys," Renny rumbled, "I think that shrine must be the entrance to a bigger complex. If we get the chance we should rush it and try to get inside.

"The smelling out begins!" the unseen voice cried, "Sons and daughters of Damballa, you are safe..."

The harsh voice repeated the phrase in all the languages it had spoken previously. Then, the `smelling out' began with the giant moving through the circle. He paused by each person, inspecting each face. The voice of Damballa moved along with the massive swordsman, seeming to hang in space beside the giant. After each inspection it would bark a single word in that unknown tongue and the giant would continue on. Then, as the swordsman paused in front of a Haitian man, the voice spoke a different word.

The sword flashed out in instant response. Instead of cutting down the man it struck with the flat, stunning him and dropping him to the ground. Several of the masked figures darted in to seize the man, and dragged him into the center of the clearing. This continued until ten people designated `traitor' lay weeping and moaning in the judgment area.

"I smell more enemies..." This time the unseen voice had spoken in English, "More light—more light!"

Torches and lanterns clustered at this command, illuminating the swordsman and those closest to him. It was the two men who had entered ahead of Renny and Johnny. As the voice approached them the younger of the two, apparently panicked into action, leapt forward and swung a punch at the empty air where the voice had last been heard. He seemed to hit something for his body recoiled slightly. Then, as if by magic, a disembodied green hand appeared, hovering in the air near him. Then a ghostly, greenish figure shimmered in and out of existence.

As the ghostly figure appeared practically the whole assembly, masked warriors included, fell on their faces in awe. The only two who seemed unaffected were Queen Mamaloi, standing motionless and regal on the platform, and the giant swordsman. As quick as a striking adder his scimitar crashed down on the man's head, the flat of the blade rendering him unconscious. The giant grabbed the still form and hauled it to the center of the clearing.

"This is our chance!" Renny boomed.

The group rose up as one and raced for the double doors. Immediately the masked figures were on their feet and moving to intercept them, but bursts from the super-firers cut down those in their path.

The giant pulled off his mask, revealing himself as Bigomba. He hurled the scimitar through the air causing Johnny, who was in the lead, to throw himself flat to avoid it. The giant then leapt on the dais where he caught up Queen Mamaloi in his arms and carried her out of harm's way. Renny and Long Tom directed streams of mercy bullets after him but the giant moved with uncanny quickness and was behind cover before the mercy slugs found their mark.

"Nuts!" Pat Savage swore, "I had a bullet with that little Minx's name on it!"

"You'll get your chance yet." Renny snapped, "Right now let's get these doors shut!"

Fortunately, none of the masked men seemed to be using firearms. Moving quickly, Renny and Johnny got the big doors closed while Pat and Long Tom covered them. There was a heavy beam on the inside that they used to bar the door.

"The veracity of Renny's hypothesis is confirmed." Johnny said. The others followed his gaze to the back of the room where a large stone stairway descended into the earth.

"Whatever's going on must be centered down there." Long Tom said.

"What are we waiting for then?" Pat Savage started down the steps before any of the others could object. The three men shot each other exasperated glances. They had known Pat long enough to know that, even more than any of them, she was a danger seeker. There seemed to be something in the Savage family blood that craved excitement even to the exclusion common sense. They also knew from experience there was nothing, short of stuffing Pat in a sack, that would keep her away from such dangerous impulses.

Besides, the way she was leading was the only route open to them at the moment.

The three hurried to catch up with her.

By their best estimate they had descended about thirty yards when the hewn-stone corridor leveled out. They rounded a corner and founded that the torches had given way to electric lighting in the ceiling.

"Curiouser and curiouser." Pat muttered softly.

"Pretty nice lighting system." Long Tom commented, "These guys know what they're doing."

"They have managed a sophisticated approximation of Pre-Columbian stonework as well," Johnny added, "Though this is of considerably more recent vintage."

Suddenly a steel panel shot across the path behind them, sealing the route by which they had come. Ahead of them another panel slid into place on hidden tracks. Renny banged his massive fist against the barrier but with no effect.

"Holy cow! This feels like it could be an inch thick."

"I've got some explosives." Long Tom offered, "We'll blast our way out."

"That would not be advisable, Major Roberts." Said a voice from the air. It was impossible to locate just where the voice had come from, but there was no mistaking those guttural tones. It was the voice of the unseen Damballa they had heard in the clearing.

"Where is he?" Pat turned this way and that trying to find a place to point her pistol.

"I am not in the corridor with you Miss Savage." The voice said, "My voice is reaching you through a

loudspeaker system. "I am thus quite safe from any harm you could cause me. Still, you are most resourceful, and I am certain that you could find a way to escape my little trap, given time. I would hate to see such resource wasted so I am giving you a chance. Lay down your weapons and surrender."

"Nuts to you pal!" Renny growled, "Maybe we can't get out, but your men can't get in either without us shooting them down. It's a stalemate."

"You overestimate your position Colonel Renwick." The sibilant voice replied, "You will surrender now, or I will unleash something that you cannot hope to fight. I make this offer only once."

Renny looked around at the faces of his friends. Each wore the same defiant expression.

"Do your worst!" he boomed.

"As you wish."

As the guttural voice spoke, the lights in the corridor switched off, plunging the four into total darkness. Then the noise started, like the snapping of dozens of pairs of fingers.

Chapter Sixteen **Mysterious Journey**

Stephen Ling heard the snapping die away and reached for the door of the morgue niche. It was sealed firmly from the outside. He had felt himself over for leeches without detecting any, but he knew that this meant nothing. Leeches secrete a natural painkiller to keep their victims from becoming aware of them. Despite this, he wasn't too worried. If there were and leeches attached to him, the cold of the refrigerated chamber should render them dormant before they had a chance to do any real harm.

He was more worried that he and Johnny might suffer the effects of hypothermia before they could get out of the niches. Stephen had learned some meditative disciplines in his homeland that might help, but he worried about the gaunt archaeologist. Johnny didn't have even a modicum of extra flesh to insulate him from the cold.

Suddenly the niche was flooded with light as someone opened the door. He saw a pleasant, youngish face looking in at him. The man smiled and pointed a pistol.

"Dr. Ling I presume?" The man said. He had a cheerful manner and a British accent. "You can come out now, and don't worry about the pistol. I have orders to bring you safely back to base. Of course, if you behave foolishly I've been given considerable discretion to deal with you."

Stephen clambered out and took in the room with a slow glance. His British captor seemed to be the only man in the room. His eyes froze as he came to the body of Dr. Thierry.

"Bad show about him." The Englishman said, "We were supposed to extract you without anyone getting hurt. Feng Wu got excited and let loose the `Snapping Fingers' before I could stop him. Don't know why the Master uses these dacoits. Never trust a heathen for an important job I always say. No offense meant of course."

Stephen ignored the man's chatter as he looked him over. The Englishman was a fit-looking and about thirty. They were about the same size, though the newcomer was a little shorter, and more solidly built. He wore a strange green coverall that included an open-faced hood. A small electronic device of some sort sat on the top of the man's head.

"Wondering about the Vortland Lamp, eh?" The Englishman grinned, "Pretty remarkable device. Don't worry, you'll get an eyeful of what it does momentarily, or rather you won't get an eyeful."

"We need to let Dr. Littlejohn out."

Stephen reached for the handle of Johnny's niche. Without warning a green hand materialized from nowhere and seized his wrist in an iron grip. Stephen tried to pull away without success. The hand didn't seem to be connected to anything but that didn't reduce the effectiveness of its grip.

"None of that now." The Englishman smiled, "I've got no orders about your Dr. Littlejohn which means I'm not going to do anything about him."

"He'll freeze in there." Stephen Ling said.

"Perhaps so, though I reckon it's more of a sporting chance than he would have had with the `Snapping

Fingers." The young man smiled, more grimly this time. "Not going to set him loose. Not going to kill him either. Just going carry out my assignment."

Stephen didn't reply. He twisted his body a certain way as he pulled again against the green hand's grip. He felt a man's body roll across his hip to crash into the tile floor. A ghostly green form appeared then solidified into one of the squat dacoits, dressed in the same sort of green costume.

"Here now." The Englishman growled, "That's enough of that fancy jujitsu."

"Your `Vortland Lamp.'" Stephen said, "It makes people invisible somehow, doesn't it? His hand must have become visible when he extended it past the field of the lamp's influence."

"You are the clever one, aren't you?" The Englishman replied, "Perhaps that why the master wants you. I reckon Feng Wu owed you that shot, but no more tricks. Feng Wu is going to bind your hands now and I'll shoot you dead if you resist. Then we're going out of here. You won't see me, but I'll have my gun trained on you every minute."

Stephen didn't struggle as the dacoit bound his hands in front of him with a thin filament. It was only slightly thicker than a human hair, but seemed to have incredible strength. He let himself be led out of the room and through the nearby forest to a small clearing. A monoplane sat neatly in the open space. The plane had stubby wings and no propeller.

"Get in." the disembodied voice said.

Once Stephen was strapped securely in the seat, his two captors switched off their Vortland Lamps and removed their cumbersome headgear.

Stephen wondered how the plane would take off from such a small area and was astonished when the craft rose noiselessly, straight up.

"How is this possible?" Stephen wondered aloud.

"Don't understand all the details myself." The pilot said, "It would be far beyond you I'm afraid, old chap."

"I'd like to judge that for myself."

"A cheeky one, are you?" The pilot's smile took on a hard edge, "If I told you it was accomplished with a swainsten disc and an Erickson Wave projector you'd know all about I suppose?"

Stephen didn't respond. He had shifted his attention to the swiftly changing topography. He had been impressed by the speed of Doc Savages big airplane but this strange craft was even faster.

"We must be doing better than two hundred knots." He said.

"Closer to three hundred." The pilot replied proudly, and on a good day I can do nearly three hundred twenty in this beauty."

"You're British, aren't you?" Stephen asked, "I'd expect to find you in London with the Royal Air Force with all the fighting over there right now."

"I would be." The man responded, but I found a more important cause. "The group I'm with plans to end that conflict, and eliminate the possibility of all future wars. I rather miss the action, but I expect I'll be flying against the Jerries soon enough. My `bat' will show them a finer time than I ever could in a Spitfire."

"Won't your people consider you a deserter?"

"I doubt it." The pilot said with a chuckle, "A dead man can't desert."

"A dead man?"

"Strictly a formality in my case." The man replied, "It was necessary to arrange my death when I signed on. I didn't really have to die and come back as a zombie, like some of the Master's conscripts. By the way, please forgive my beastly manners. Name's Allington, James Allington, formerly squadron leader in the RAF."

When Stephen didn't respond, Allington frowned.

"Bad form old fellow," he said, "Just because fate has put us on different sides for the moment that's no reason to uncivil."

Stephen Ling barely heard the words. The phrase "...die and come back as a zombie" filled his mind. Was that what had happened to Lotus? What did it mean? Visions of shambling, soulless things from the movies filled his mind. He pictures his beautiful wife as an animated corpse and barely kept from sobbing aloud.

The `bat' began to slow. Stephen looked down to see a large complex of buildings sitting at the summit of a

mountain.

"San Damian Sisal Plant." Allington announced cheerfully, "Home sweet home."

The plane made its eerie landing by descending straight down. The roof of a storehouse opened to reveal it was actually a hanger for a dozen of the flying machines. The engine purred noiselessly to a stop and the three got out. Stephen watched for a chance to escape but Allington kept him covered with a pistol while the dacoit unstrapped him from the safety harness.

"Companion Allington," came a harsh voice.

Allington turned and instantly snapped to attention.

"Sir!"

The owner of the voice stepped out of the shadows. He was a tall, lean man with Chinese features and cat-green eyes. The force of his personality seemed to flow out of him like a physical thing.

"Report." The man said.

"Sir!" Allington snapped off a neat salute, "The mission was successful sir! We have appropriated the person you desired to see without any serious incident, sir!"

The tall man nodded his bald head in the barest affirmation. He had the kind of brow often associated with great genius and the sort of face Stephen associated with childhood stories he had heard about the Judges of Hell.

"Dr. Stephen Ling," the man intoned in a voice that was guttural and sibilant at the same time. "It is a pleasure to meet you face to face at last. Perhaps you have heard of me? I am Dr. Fu Manchu."

Chapter Seventeen **A Devil's Bargain**

Stephen stared in awe for a moment, then bowed deeply. All his life he had heard stories of the legendary Fu Manchu. He was a cultural hero on the order of 'Ten Tigers of Canton' or Wong Fei Hung. He was said to be a man of extraordinary ability who had fought relentlessly for his country, and who often had prevailed against the west where the governments of Asia had failed. Stephen knew that his adopted country, the United States, and the rest of the western world, considered the man an outlaw and a ruthless killer. Possibly both views were correct in their own perspective, he thought. In any case, Stephen Ling knew that he was in the presence of greatness.

"Rise." Said the imperious voice.

Stephen found himself looking into those jade eyes. Even without a word being spoken, Stephen felt the hypnotic power of that gaze.

"I am pleased that you were not harmed in your journey." Fu Manchu said, "I regret that I had to resort to such methods to bring you to us."

"I am most honored to be here mighty one." Stephen said in his best Mandarin. His native dialect was Cantonese, but it might be deemed disrespectful to use that language with a man who actually was a Mandarin. "I regret to say that Mr. Allington's report was not correct."

"In what respect?" Fu Manchu answered in the same language.

"A man was killed in the process." Stephen said, "He was Dr. August Thierry, a good man."

"How did he die?" Fu Manchu's voice and face had remained completely impassive during the exchange.

"The `snapping fingers.'" Stephen said, "I barely escaped them myself."

"Were their other victims?"

"Johnny Littlejohn, a man who had been helping me." Stephen replied, "He was not killed but he was trapped in a dangerous situation and I am worried for his safety."

"Dr. Littlejohn is known to me." Fu Manchu said, "He has a fine brain and could be of use to me in certain areas."

He turned back to the pilot, who was still standing at attention.

"Companion Allington," Fu Manchu said, shifting effortlessly to English, "I am informed that there was a fatality on your mission."

"Yes sir!" the flier responded without hesitation, "Feng Wu turned loose the `snapping fingers.' I was able to turn the lights on in time to save Dr. Ling here, but the local coroner was killed. Nothing I could do sir."

"Was it you who broke the lamp that Johnny and I were using for shelter?" Stephen demanded.

"That was Feng Wu sir." Allington protested, casting an angry glance at Stephen. "I would have cried out to stop him, but we were using the Vortland lamps. It would have given away my position."

"So you allowed your subordinate to compound his error." Fu Manchu continued for him. "And what of Dr. Littlejohn?"

"I had no instructions involving him sir!"

"The British race has always perplexed me." Fu Manchu said, "It has an unusual set of strengths and weaknesses. Among her strengths, England has produced many of the finest fantasists in the annals of world literature. This makes your lack of imagination all the more striking Companion Allington."

The British flier stood mute before the full force of Fu Manchu's gaze.

"Return to your chambers. You are demoted two steps in rank."

"Very good sir!" Allington looked relieved, though the glance he shot at Stephen was pure murder.

"Should I leave him alone with you sir? I mean..."

"Dr. Ling is no threat to me." Fu Manchu said calmly, "And you would be wise not to question me again."

"Yes sir!" Allington left as quickly as he could manage.

Fu Manchu then turned to the dacoit and spoke harshly to him in an unfamiliar language. It could have been Burmese, but Stephen couldn't say for certain. After the first few words the dacoit threw himself on his face and remained there in a position of utter servitude. He did not move or make a sound while Fu Manchu continued to berate him. When the Chinese doctor stopped speaking the frightened dacoit rose and, bowing profusely, backed out of the room.

"My dacoits are mindless in their loyalty." Fu Manchu explained, "But wholly lacking in the skills of rational thinking. I find I must punish each mistake harshly or others will repeat it."

"What will become of him?" Stephen asked.

"I have told him to return to his quarters. He will wait there while I contemplate the method of his execution."

"What if he tries to escape?"

"Such men are incapable of treason." Fu Manchu replied. "Come Dr. Ling, I wish to show you the scope of my operation."

Fu Manchu led Stephen out of the hanger into a large quadrangle. Living quarters, storehouses and an office complex all surrounded a large common area. Down the slope was the colossal factory where the sisal was processed.

"The San Damian Sisal Company is a real business concern." Fu Manchu said, "It was already a well established company in Haiti when my organization, the Si Fan, purchased it several years ago. We found it useful when we lost our base in the Mediterranean."

"Venerable sir," said Stephen in Mandarin, "What is the Si Fan? I have spent much of my life in China but I have never heard of it."

"That is to be expected." Fu Manchu replied, "I trust you have heard of the White Lotus Society? The Hip Sing Tong? The Jeho Fan?"

"Yes, those are all secret societies. Tongs that operate in China and in Chinese communities around the world."

"If you were an initiate of the highest level in any of these, you would know of the Si Fan." Fu Manchu said, "Mine is a society that is like a vast spider web. Its strands extend into these, and a hundred other groups like them. I draw information and aid from each."

"Forgive me sir." Stephen said, using the most polite word-forms he could, "But the groups you speak of were all organized to oppose the rule of the Ch'ing Dynasty, the Manchus. You are a mandarin. I would expect them to see you as their enemy."

"And so it was at first." Fu Manchu replied, "But the Si Fan has helped them to see that Manchu and Han-

Chinese have a common enemy in the western powers. To deal with this greater threat they have happily accepted my leadership and that of several other former mandarins."

They had reached the office complex. Fu Manchu led Stephen through a series of corridors until they came to a heavy door guarded by two more of the ape-like dacoits. The door opened and the two stepped inside.

"Here you must change shoes."

Fu Manchu was wearing a long black robe with a silver peacock embroidered on it in painstaking detail. On his head he wore a black mandarin's skullcap surmounted by a coral button, and his feet were clad in thick-soled rubber slippers. To this ensemble he added a rather incongruous white lab coat. He indicated that Stephen should take off his shoes and put on a set of the strange rubber footwear himself.

The two entered an area outfitted with scientific equipment of every type and description.

"This is my private laboratory." Fu Manchu said, "Here are the cumulative results of the work of myself and the many geniuses who serve the Si Fan. It was here that we perfected the Vortland Lamp, based on the research of the late Johann Vortland. Here also we perfected the `bats' as I have designated the aircraft, like the one that brought here."

"Allington mentioned a `swainsten disc' and an `Erickson wave projector.'" Stephen said, "He said I wouldn't understand them."

"Allington is a poor judge of men." Fu Manchu replied, "While yours is not the first class brain of a brilliant scientist, you are far more intelligent than the norm. The physics will be beyond you, as it is beyond all but a few specialists, but the basic principal is simple enough. Swainsten is a rare substance that counteracts the force of gravity. It is named after its inventor, though the Englishman Cavor claims to have made the discovery first. The Erickson wave is a form of energy that can cause molecular disintegration. When matter is disintegrated in the Erickson chamber it produces a powerful jet of plasma."

"So the anti-gravity gives lift, and the jet provides thrust?"

Fu Manchu nodded slightly.

"The most efficient aircraft in the world. When an additional Erickson projector is added as a weapon, it is also the deadliest."

"All the electricity these things use," Stephen said, "It that the reason for the rubber shoes?"

"Most especially the Erickson generators." Came the reply, "They build up a high charge of negative ions near the ground. Without the insulated shoes, simply walking across the room could generate a static charge capable of electrocuting a man. The high negative charge also acts as a highly efficient lightning rod. For a time we were forced to suspend use of the devices for days at a time when there were thunderstorms over the island."

"For a time?"

Fu Manchu nodded approval.

"You have a good ear for subtleties. One of my scientists has developed an `ionic disperser', which allows us to use the Erickson generators without such danger. The rubber shoes are largely unnecessary now, but I am loath to abandon a safety protocol until I am certain it is no longer needed.

At the back of the laboratory stood a large tank, like an aquarium. The leaping leeches responsible for the horrible `snapping fingers' were there along with an assortment of insects, plants and animals equally loathsome.

"How horrible." Stephen said at last.

"Horrible in their effect." Fu Manchu replied, "But magnificent in the way they have adapted to their specialized environments. These creatures each serve me in their own fashion. Indeed, the horror they produce serves me best. It demoralizes my enemies, allowing me to accomplish my goals with a minimum of bloodshed. In their own way they are instruments of mercy."

Stephen Ling shuddered.

"It is truly impressive," he said. "But why are you showing all of this to me?"

"Because I wish for you to join me." Fu Manchu replied, "You do not have a singular skill I would find indispensable, but you have several useful qualities. I know of your activities in occupied Manchuria. Your courage and resourcefulness in serving our homeland is laudable."

One of the dacoits entered the room. He bowed low and spoke rapidly to Fu Manchu.

"Forgive me." The doctor said, "My attention is needed in a matter of some urgency. I will escort you to your quarters where you may rest until tomorrow."

They left the office building and crossed the moonlit common area to a row of bungalows. You shall have number 12." Fu Manchu said. "Think well on what I have told you."

"I promise." Said Stephen, "But I must ask something from you in return."

Fu Manchu gazed coolly at the young man and said nothing.

"Johnny Littlejohn has been a friend." Stephen continued, "Please, send one of your men to rescue him before he freezes to death."

"Loyalty is a trait I prize." The green eyes shone eerily in the moonlight as he spoke, "I shall investigate the matter and, if it is in my power to save your friend, I shall. You have the word of Fu Manchu."

"I am deeply grateful sir!"

"I have many means of persuasion at my disposal." Fu Manchu said, "But I now leave you with one who may, in your case, be far more persuasive than even I."

The door to the bungalow opened and a slender figure came out.

"Stephen?" The familiar voice sounded tentative, but hearing it drove every other thought from his brain.

"Lotus!" He raced to meet her and she threw herself into his arms.

Chapter Eighteen

Mutiny

"To me my servants!" Called the unseen voice of Damballa.

Bigomba had watched as the four associates of Doc Savage had disappeared into the shrine. He had heard the steel shutter bang closed, sealing them in. Now he turned and followed the guttural voice to the camouflaged at the edge of the clearing.

'Damballa' was inside the cave. He had switched off the strange device that rendered him invisible to reveal a tall, gaunt man in a strange green suit working over a small electronic control panel. As Bigomba watched, Renny Renwick's voice boomed out of a small speaker.

"Nuts to you pal! Maybe we can't get out, but your men can't get in either without us shooting them down. It's a stalemate."

"You overestimate your position Colonel Renwick." The Voodoo master replied, his cat-green eyes blazing. "You will surrender now, or I will unleash something that you cannot hope to fight. I make this offer only once."

"Do your worst!" the big voice came back.

"As you wish." The man in green reached for a switch.

Bigomba started forward, and then paused as he realized that his master was merely turning off a light switch and switching on a sophisticated magnetic tape player. From the machine came the recorded sound that was so ling the snapping of dozens of pairs of fingers.

Bigomba's brow was furrowed in wonder.

"What have you done?"

"A wise man of my homeland once wrote, *`all warfare is deception.'*" The man in green answered, "I desire to capture these helpers of Doc Savage alive. My best weapon for doing so is my mimosa gas, which would render them unconscious. However, I have learned that they have a defense against this weapon."

He nodded to the tape player.

"This causes them to prepare for a different attack. As they prepare to defend against the 'snapping fingers' I release my mimosa." He reached a green-gloved hand to another switch and threw it.

"It is done. Within seconds they will be overcome."

"The wisdom of Fu Manchu is great." Bigomba said, "Still, I prefer to face my enemies in open combat rather than through deceitful means."

"Bigomba are no stranger to deception." Fu Manchu replied, "Your powers of Voodoo are impressive but I

know the same secrets as you. My own imposture of Damballa is very much like your claim to be the hero of Africa from three centuries past."

Two of the dacoits entered, leading Queen Mamaloi by the arms. She came with the regal stride of a monarch but her eyes were filled with violence.

"Fool!" she hissed at Bigomba, "You could have ruled at my side."

"Silence daughter!" Fu Manchu crossed to the woman and struck her roughly across the mouth. She fell to a sitting position and stared up at him as he ranted at her in Mandarin. Her face showed defiance but a growing fear was there as well.

Bigomba watched, fascinated. The normally imperturbably Chinese doctor was nearly berserk. He wondered if this shift in moods was evidence of a great mind slipping into madness.

Fu Manchu stepped back, his eyes milky with rage, as if a film lay over them. His speech switched to English.

"Once again you have betrayed me!" He hissed, "You have used your position in the Si Fan to conspire against me!"

"We would have succeeded," she spat back, "If he had not betrayed us."

Fu Manchu glanced at Bigomba.

"Don't blame your new lover my daughter." His voice was nearly back to normal, and the cloud over his eyes had lifted. "I have known of your cabal for some time. When Bigomba came to tell me of your treachery, I had already planned the 'smelling-out.' You have betrayed me for the last time."

He pulled a tube out of his robe and Bigomba recognized it at once. It was an Erickson ray projector, similar to the one Queen Mamaloi had used in the forest earlier.

"Wait!" He stepped between father and daughter. "I helped you and now I claim a prize."

Fu Manchu hesitated. He made no reply, but did not lower the weapon, which was now pointed at Bigomba's chest.

"When she came to me, she promised me many things." Bigomba spoke calmly, as if unimpressed by the death facing him. "She promised me wealth and power. She promised me a kingdom where my people would have abundance and be free of the white men. She also promised herself to me. When I told you of her plans, you said that everything she promised, you would give me."

"You have served me Bigomba," Fu Manchu agreed, "I shall keep my promises to you, after I have killed this treacherous offspring."

"You cannot give her to me if she is dead." Bigomba said, "She is a part of the promise you must keep."

"Think carefully Bigomba," the Devil Doctor replied. "Twice she has betrayed her own father. You would be taking a poisonous serpent into your bed."

"You say you can fix people's minds to serve you." The giant shot back, "Fix hers to serve me."

"Her venomous nature will always prevail." Fu Manchu said, "When she was known as Fah Lo Suee, she betrayed me. I gave her new memories and a new identity, but as Koreâni she betrayed me again."

"If you cannot fix her mind then perhaps I will pull her fangs for you."

Bigomba caught Queen Mamaloi by her slender arms and jerked her to her feet. He crushed her against him as he kissed her roughly. She responded by struggling and when he released her, his lip was bleeding where she had bitten him.

"A challenge worthy of a king." The giant chuckled, wiping the trail of blood with the back of his hand.

"Very well," Fu Manchu's arm lowered. He barked an order to the dacoits and they caught Queen Mamaloi's arms once again. Then they led the captive daughter of Fu Manchu away.

"You have your reward Bigomba," he said, "But your choice means I will never be able to trust you fully. One day I shall tell you the names and fates of all the men she has turned against me. Then you may understand the folly of your choice."

He turned and went out after his daughter, leaving the giant African in the room. When Bigomba was alone, a strange thing happened. An eerie musical trilling filled the air. It seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere as it slid up and down the musical scale. After a moment the trilling died away and Bigomba followed after the others.

Chapter Nineteen

Lotus Remembers

Lotus Ling was not a zombie. At least she was not the conventional type of creature that shambled along in horror movies, Stephen assured himself. They had not talked much during the night, but he had satisfied himself that she was as real, as human, and as vital as she had ever been.

He hadn't slept at all, though it was now past two in the morning. Despite his weariness, his mind was too full to relax. He had lain next to his wife, listening to the night sounds of the forest, and the soft rhythm of her breathing.

He heard the noise of several of the `bats' returning to their hanger. He closed his eyes for a moment and pressed his face close to Lotus' hair, savoring the scent of perfume he hadn't smelled in nine months.

He wanted to lie there forever but something compelled him to slip out of bed and go to the window. The roof of the hanger had closed, and a group of people were exiting the building and heading across the quadrangle toward the administration complex. He recognized the tall form of Dr. Fu Manchu in one of the green Vortland uniforms. The giant Bigomba followed close behind, then a group of men in coveralls carrying stretchers.

Stephen frowned, he didn't know what this signified, but it worried him. Who were the people on the stretchers? What had happened to them? He had been turning the decision he had to make over and over in his mind with no easy resolution. He wondered if learning what was happening could help him make his choice his decision. He pulled on some clothes and reached for the doorknob.

"No."

He hadn't heard Lotus rise. Hadn't been aware of her until he felt her small hand on his arm. He turned to meet her eyes.

"It's not safe," she said. "When you serve Fu Manchu you learn not to notice strange comings and goings in the night. If you investigate you take your life in your hands."

Stephen frowned.

"This man wants me to work for him. Do you want me to make a decision like that in ignorance?"

She pressed herself against his chest and held him tightly. His arms responded, encircling her automatically."

"I want you safe, my husband." She whispered in a fierce voice, "I thought I had lost you forever and now you are back. I will not let anything take you from me again."

Stephen found himself stroking her hair, hoping to soothe the pain he heard in her voice."

"I won't let anything take me away Little Flower." He spoke in Cantonese, using her pet name. "It's just so confusing. I need to understand the situation better before I can choose. Fu Manchu is a hero in our homeland. He is the only man in the world with any real power who seems to care about the fate of the Chinese. I've seen what the Japanese have been doing in Manchuria the last few years, and the suffering in Nanking. I have to wonder if Fu Manchu is not our only hope."

"You must agree to serve him." She whispered, "No man can resist the will of Fu Manchu."

Stephen pulled away from his wife. He laid his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes again.

"That can't be the reason for my decision." He said, gently but firmly. "I won't be forced."

"You have other reasons."

He nodded.

"He said he would try to save the life of a friend of mine."

"If he promised it, he will do it." She said, "Fu Manchu has never broken his word."

"Then there is the most important thing of all that he has offered me." Stephen's hand brushed Lotus Ling's cheek.

"Then you have made your decision?"

He shook his head.

"Fu Manchu is..." He searched for the words, "He is magnificent, but terrible. My Jesuit professors would

have likened him to a fallen angel. I read Milton in college, and I can see the parallel. His cause is noble but his methods are diabolic."

"I think I understand." Lotus whispered. "You hate this man and admire him at the same time. You despise the things he has done but you are grateful to him for bringing us together again."

"Yes," he said, "I guess that sums it up. It's just... One of my professors had a favorite scripture he liked to quote. 'What profit it a man if he gain the whole world, but lose his soul.' I'm worried that's what could happen to me."

Lotus didn't answer for a moment.

"Stephen," she finally said, "I always wanted to tell you about my past, but I never knew it. Now I can. Fu Manchu has lifted the veil that lay across my mind." She hesitated, "I should tell you everything before you make your decision."

She turned her back to him and began to speak. Her voice was almost monotone, as if the memories hurt her.

"I have always been a part of the Si Fan." She said, "My father was a high ranking agent whose name was Fo Hi. My mother was a white woman, the daughter of an American pirate. Her name was Lorelei. My mother ended out on the Pacific island of Ral where she became the priestess of the Cult of the Feathered Octopus, which controls many of the pirate clans in Asia. The Si Fan desired control over the pirates and it was arranged that Fo Hi marry my mother.

"I was raised alongside Fu Manchu's own daughter. My name was Zarmi then, but my playmates called me Lo Lar. We all had childish nicknames then. Fu Manchu's own daughter we called "Sweet Perfume" though her disposition was far from sweet."

Lotus had seemed wistful for a moment, but now her voice hardened.

"Children like me, of 'mixed blood' are despised in China. Perhaps even more than in England or America. Fu Manchu is above all such prejudices, but he saw me only as a weapon in his arsenal. With my father's consent, he had me trained in the skills he desired. I learned to dance in a way that would enflame men's passions, and I learned how to kill, quickly and silently."

Stephen Ling put his hands on her shoulders.

"Lotus, it doesn't matter..."

She shrugged away from him.

"I have to tell it all." She said, "If you still think it doesn't matter, tell me then."

"I did everything Fu Manchu asked of me." She continued, "I seduced men, I killed men. I did it gladly because I believed in the Si Fan.

"My mother's family had powerful enemies. Just before the Great War I was working against the British. My mother's enemies bribed one of the Si Fan's agents to rape and murder me." Stephen felt a shudder run through his wife's body, "He was a Greek named Samarkan, and he would have succeeded if I hadn't put my dagger in his heart.

"The British were coming, and my fight with the Greek had left me barely able to move. I was fortunate enough to have a vial of *F. Katalopsis* with me. It is a drug that Fu Manchu developed which perfectly simulates the symptoms of death. I injected myself with the drug and the British, believing me dead took me to the morgue. Fu Manchu knew better. He recovered my body and gave me the antidote.

"I was deemed of no further use in the immediate service of Fu Manchu. Too many of his enemies in England knew me, and if word that I still lived had reached my mother's enemies they would try to kill me again. Under the name Lo Lar, I went back to my mother's people, the pirate clan on the island of Ral. I took on the mantle of the High Priestess of the Feathered Octopus and planned operations for the pirates. I had learned much from Fu Manchu. Under my guidance the pirates gained greater profit at less cost of life. But the things I planned caused much suffering and death."

She paused a moment, gathering strength to go on. It seemed to Stephen that her conscience must have been tearing at her ever since her memories had come flooding back. Things she would not have thought twice about at the time were now almost unbearable. He wanted to hold her and tell her it would be all right, but he realized it was better to let her finish.

"I married for the first time on Ral." She said, "He was an American who wanted to use the pirates to seize

control of a number of American airlines. He called himself 'High Lar' as a clumsy joke."

Lotus shook her head sadly.

"The poor man was mentally unbalanced. His plan was preposterous. I tried to guide him as best I could but we were doomed from the start. Doc Savage and his men became involved. They crushed the pirates and made me a prisoner. Savage sent me to his 'College' where he took away all memory of Zarmi, or Lo Lar, and made me into Lotus."

"And then I met you, that rainy spring day in New York. You were kind and strong, and you loved me. You were a man of standing in the community but you thought nothing of marrying an orphaned woman of mixed ancestry. You were the first truly good man I had known in my life and I..."

She turned back to him, tears in her eyes.

"I am not the woman you thought I was." She said, "The things that I've done, they would shame a decent man like you."

He drew her to him and kissed her. Her body was stiff at first, then she melted and kissed him back passionately.

"There is nothing about you that could ever shame me Little Flower."

"Nothing?" she asked.

"Perhaps there is one thing." He said. The corner of his mouth quirked in a smile.

She stared at him, silently waiting to hear.

"I thought that you were twenty-five when we met," he said. "But now you tell me that you were working for Fu Manchu before the Great War. Just how old are you my love?"

Her lips struggled into a smile.

"Stephen, that is an indelicate question."

He smiled back.

"So, what do I call you? If you're not really Lotus would you like me to use your real name?"

"I like it best when you call me your 'Little Flower.'"

Stephen nodded. Then his expression sobered.

"You never told me what happened to your first husband."

"On Ral the cult kept a gigantic octopus." She said in a strained, quiet voice. "It is a living icon of the god they worship. When Doc Savage and my husband fought, High Lar was cast into the tank. He was eaten."

"Eaten?" Stephen imagined what it must have been like for her to learn that.

"You see," she said, "Everything you said about Fu Manchu I feel for Doc Savage. I despise the things he has done, but I know that he is a great man. And I know that he gave you to me."

Stephen shook his head.

"So what should I do?"

"That is a question for tomorrow." Lotus answered as she took his hand, "Tomorrow you may choose to serve Fu Manchu or to serve his enemies. In either case, tonight you belong to me alone."

As she led him back to the bed Stephen reflected that he didn't care that much for the whole world, there was one thing in the world for which he would trade his soul.

Chapter Twenty **The Hidden Stronghold**

Bigomba was not sleeping either.

Since coming to this place he had made a careful study of his room and was satisfied that there were no hidden monitoring devices. He went to the mirror in his washroom (it was not a two-way, he was certain) and checked his makeup. The dye that tinted his skin from bronze to a deep brown was holding up well but he daubed a little more to touch up several spots to be safe. The special putty that changed the shape of his face, and the glass lenses that changed the color of his eyes from flake-gold to black were holding up as well.

Doc Savage took an eyedropper out of the satchel he carried as Bigomba, and put several drops in each eye to protect them against the effects of wearing the lenses for such a long time. He made certain the wig was properly affixed to his head, then pulled out a set of black garments and began to draw them on.

Things weren't going according to plan, Doc reflected, though that was hardly unexpected. He had made a huge number of plans in his strange career. As carefully as he mapped each one out, events never went just as he had anticipated they would. That seemed the way of the world. It wasn't that a plan went awry that surprised him, it was the specifics of how.

It had been a several weeks ago that the government had contacted him. An English official named Nayland Smith had been in Washington where he had convinced the powers that be that Fu Manchu had established a base of operations in the Pacific. Smith presented the man as a greater threat than Hitler or Mussolini and claimed that he had the power to sink the American navy, or to destroy any major city in the US at will.

The powers in Washington had been skeptical, but they had been concerned enough placed a division of marines and Smith's disposal, and to give him a free hand in his investigation.

They had also contacted Doc Savage. The President was uneasy with the fact that a British citizen was leading the only effort against Fu Manchu. He set Doc the task of investigating and resolving the situation on his own, and had placed the resources of the government at his disposal.

Doc had come to suspect Haiti and Queen Mamaloi while Nayland Smith's attentions were still focused in Panama. He had come up with the plan of posing as a Voodoo leader and infiltrating the movement, and had consulted with several experts to learn all he could about the mysterious religion. One of those men, a retired jurist named Pursuivant, had told him the story of the original Bigomba and suggested the disguise.

The plan had gone well, but the arrival of his cousin Pat and three of his aides on the island had complicated things. He had tried to discourage them, but they had been too determined to be put off. Now he had their lives, and the life of Dr. Ling to worry about.

Even more worrisome was Queen Mamaloi's attempted coup d'etat. Nothing in his investigations had prepared him for the tumultuous internal politics of the Si Fan. Now the person he had hoped would be his closest ally was imprisoned as a traitor and he had to improvise. He had found the Devil Doctor's headquarters, but had seen only a fraction of it. He needed to explore the whole area and find the best way to disable the operation.

Doc finished putting on the black clothing and pulled a close-fitting black hood over his head. His disguise as Bigomba was still too useful to discard. He opened the back window of the Bungalow and slipped into the night.

From infancy, Doc Savage had been trained in a wide array of skills designed to help him carry out his mission of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers. One of those skills, taught to him by an elderly Pottawatomi Indian, was the ability to move quickly and silently through any sort of terrain. Doc used that now.

The quadrangle was too well lit to allow him to cross unseen so he kept to the jungle as he circled to the administration complex. He reached the complex easily enough and made his way inside through an unlocked window. He made his way to the entrance to the labs, where the two dacoits stood guard. Doc would have preferred to find another route, but was imperative that he procured a pair of the rubber-soled shoes before penetrating the lab.

He took a small glass globe and pitched it around the corner. It shattered against the wall above and behind the two guards releasing a fine white powder. Then Doc walked around the corner. The two dacoits continued to stand at attention, as if they didn't see the bronze giant. The men didn't move even when he paused to pull on a pair of the rubber shoes, or when he walked past them and through the laboratory door.

The powder in the globe was a new tool for Doc Savage, which had been given him, by Dr. de Grandin, one of the Voodoo experts he had consulted. It was used by the Yedizees of Persia to help them seem to vanish and appear at will. The powder caused the conscious mind to blank out for several moments but left enough unconscious control that the person's body would not move. When the two guards awakened they would not be aware of anything that had happened while they were under the powder's influence. They would not even be aware that they had blacked out.

Doc moved through the lab, which was eerily quiet in the small hours of the morning. As he passed the glass cases something behind the screens rushed out. He recognized as a Sumatran 'soldier spider.' It was bigger than a man's hand and he knew it possessed a deadly neurotoxin for which there was no antidote. The creature watched him

from behind the glass as he passed. Its multiple eyes carried the disturbing impression of intelligence.

At the rear of the lab was a stone passage leading into the side of the mountain itself. The passage was spottily lighted and down the way he could see a series of glowing objects set into the tunnel wall itself. As he drew closer Doc saw that they were a large number of upright crystalline boxes the size and shape of coffins, illuminated from within. Through the clear material of the 'coffins' he could see people, the prisoners he had helped to escort back from the Voodoo gathering.

As Doc moved further down the corridor he got a clearer look at the faces of the captives. They were frozen in position and he had the odd sense that they were awake in their strange confinement. The Voodoo worshipers were all arrayed in the same costume, or lack thereof, they had worn at the gathering. Queen Mamaloi stood in a pose of regal defiance, wearing the same barbaric costume.

Only Doc's aides were dressed differently. Renny, Johnny and Long Tom had been stripped of their outer clothing and their chain mesh undergarments. Pat Savage had been reduced to her underwear as well. Doc knew that she hardly ever wore the bulletproof armor but the reputation of his associates for carrying cleverly concealed devices had prompted the Si Fan to take no chances.

Doc examined the cases closely. He was certain he could open them and free his men, but he couldn't possibly get them out without raising an alarm. He had to put the mission first and trust that he could come back to rescue them later.

At the far end of the chamber stood a sliding door behind which Doc could see a set of elevator cables. He pushed the door aside and leaned out over the shaft. There was light, but it came from many hundreds of feet below. The elevator shaft was deeper than any he had ever seen; even the shafts in the Empire State Building were small in comparison. As splendidly trained as he was it would be beyond even Doc Savage's abilities to descend the elevator cables by hand.

He pressed the button calling the car to the top of the shaft. Moments later it appeared. He entered and pressed the switch to take him to the bottom. The descent was rapid but still took some time. He was descending into the very heart of the mountain, which he knew to be a volcano, long extinct.

When the elevator stopped, Doc emerged in a huge cavern, comparable in size to the inside of St. Paul's Cathedral. Most of the floor of the cavern was underwater and it almost seemed a hidden quay surrounded by sheer cliffs of black rock.

For a moment the illumination confused Doc. It seemed that the entire chamber was bathed in bright sunlight. Looking up he saw a huge globe suspended from the ceiling. Fu Manchu must have perfected the means of producing brilliant artificial light that was effectively no different from the illumination of the sun.

There were crews of workers laboring below in the perpetual sunlight. They were unloading crates from several small craft on what passed for a waterfront in this strange place. Doc slipped closer, wishing to investigate the craft for himself.

The laborers were Haitians, and only a few European overseers and dacoit guards were in evidence. This gave Doc an idea. He found a hiding place behind a stack of crates and watched the workers until one passed near. The man was a big, muscular fellow. Not as big as Doc Savage, but close enough for his purposes.

As the man passed Doc grabbed him and pulled him into the hiding place. The big man struggled, but was helpless against the bronze man's great strength. Doc's fingers went to work, manipulating the muscles at the base of the big man's neck in a way that would temporarily paralyze him. With this accomplished, he stripped off the black clothing and donned the worker's clothes.

From his pouch, Doc Savage took a small makeup kit. There was no time to make himself look like the worker, but he could make himself look much less like Bigomba.

Doc worked quickly, using spirit gum to add a beard and moustache. He removed the tribal scarring of the Bigomba disguise and added a golden hoop to one ear. The man's clothing was tight on him, but other than that, Doc was satisfied. Moving swiftly he joined the gang unloading the ship.

The vessel was carrying machine parts, no doubt to expand Fu Manchu's underground complex. Doc was less interested in the parts than in the ship that had brought them. It was a closed craft, looking like a small submarine. In fact, Doc guessed, that was exactly what it was.

The vessel had no propeller and there were no diesel fumes in the air.

As the gang finished it's work, Doc Savage contrived to stay inside the small craft. He found that the controls were logically outlined and left no doubt that this was a submarine. He moved down to the engine room and found it similar in design to those of the `bat' aircraft. If his suspicions were right this vessel had no need of ballast tanks. A disk of swainsten was all that was needed to allow it to surface and descend more efficiently than any conventional submersible. Propulsion appeared to be generated by letting water into an Erickson chamber to create the same sort of plasma jet the `bats' used.

A desperate plan began to form in Doc's mind. If he could free his friends and get them down here, a pirated submersible could easily carry them to safety. He was confident that he could maintain his guise as Bigomba long enough to disable the stronghold's defenses allowing the military to take it.

"You!" snapped a voice, "What are you doing there?"

Doc Savage let an easy smile come to his face.

"Hey," he said, affecting an island accent, "It's no problem mon. I just wanted to see this boat, how she work."

"You know coolies aren't allowed on board." The man snapped. He was a young American who was dressed in pseudo-military coveralls similar to those of the `bat' pilots.

"Nah," Doc drawled, "I'm just thinking how nice it be to buy one of these. I could rent it out for deep sea fishing, huh?"

"Stow that nonsense!" the American said, "You get your lazy self out of here and just be grateful that I don't report you."

"No problem mon." Doc rose to go.

At that moment an alarm began to blare.

Chapter Twenty-One Discovered!

The American's eyes narrowed when he heard the klaxons and he reached for the pistol at his side. Doc Savage hit him three times in the space of a second. The man slumped to the deck, unconscious.

Doc moved to the hatch and peered out. The workers were running to a central barracks, while uniformed men, dacoits and a few of the *anyoto* warriors had begun a systematic sweep of the docks. He thought about taking the submarine down, but quickly decided against it. He could carry useful information to the Marines, but information alone wouldn't prepare them to face Fu Manchu's arsenal of death. Besides, it was not in Doc's nature to leave his friends behind in danger.

He slid out of the hatch and into the water.

"There!" a voice cried, "Coming out of the `shark.'"

Bullets hit the water around Doc as he dived. The water slowed the projectiles so that they were harmless only a few feet down. The Ericksen Ray was a different matter. It plowed a burning path through near his head. Fortunately the water was an inky black, probably with volcanic dust, and the person aiming the ray couldn't see him.

Doc reached into his satchel and found a small packet of pills. He broke the seal and popped one into his mouth. The pill began to dissolve, generating oxygen. It would allow him to extend the time he could spend underwater.

The problem was, Doc couldn't see where he was any better than the men on shore could. He aimed as best he could for the far end of the dock. He estimated it would take him at least three minutes to swim there underwater. It was unlikely they would be looking for him that far from where he had gone down.

He missed his mark by half a dozen yards, and bobbed up between two of the 'sharks' at their moorings. No guards were in evidence so he pulled himself out of the water, using the small vessels as cover. Doc moved carefully so his exit from the quay wouldn't make a telltale splashing noise.

"Here he is!" came a voice from above. A sailor on of one of the 'sharks' had spotted him. The man had been

sitting quietly on deck and had been lucky enough to be in just the right spot. He leaped as Doc in a flying tackle, but the bronze man was no longer there. The man hit the wooden dock with enough force to drive the air from his body.

Pistols barked and bullets whirred past Doc Savage as more men rushed at him. He made a running dive behind a stack of crates. The boxes were filled with machine parts and the bullets ricocheted off. Then an Ericksen ray hummed and a round hole appeared in the crate beside Doc's head. It seemed that steel did not do much to impair the deadly rays.

Doc flattened himself against the ground as several more rays pierced his cover. He pulled a small globe, the size of a tangerine from his satchel and tossed it high.

The device landed amid the knot of men firing at him. It let out a cloud of thick, black smoke. Doc hesitated for a second for the cloud to have full effect, then sprinted from his cover. It would have been suicide to charge directly into the cluster of men. A moment later they began firing blindly at Doc's last position.

Having anticipated this, the bronze man had run at right angles to the group. When he believed he was out of their field of fire he turned and raced towards them from an unexpected direction. It was a dangerous strategy, but it worked. In a moment he was in their midst, a whirlwind of hands and feet, seeming to be everywhere at once.

Some distance away another group of the Si Fan soldiers gathered. These were armed with rifles and Ericksen rays.

"As soon as the smoke thins, cut him down!" the leader barked. "Don't work about hitting our men. This one's too dangerous to take chances with.

As he spoke there came a humming from within the cloud of smoke. A beam of light stabbed up at the artificial sun far overhead. A moment later the sphere shattered into a million fragments, plunging the cavern into darkness.

"The Ferris globe!" the leader yelled, "Bring hand torches! Fire now! Don't let anything out of that cloud alive!"

Rifles fired and ray wands hummed to life. There were cries from the target area. A moment later several soldiers ran forward using the light of powerful electric torches to scan the area. They found their own men, many dead and badly wounded.

"He's not here!" shouted one of the scouts.

Many yards away Doc savage moved silently through the darkness. He regretted that there had been nothing he could do to save the lives of the Si Fan. The loss of any human life galled him, but there was little he could do about it in this situation. He was badly outnumbered and it would take all of his resourcefulness just to get topside again.

He had made it most of the way back to the elevator when he sensed several forms closing on him. He froze but the men continued to move quickly towards him, as if they could see in the dark. One leaped at him. Doc shifted and heard claws whistle past his face. He launched an uppercut and felt it connect with a furry torso.

The others were on him then and the bronze man went down under their combined weight. He could feel that they wore animal pelts and knew they must be two of Fu Manchu's leopard men. A hand shot towards his throat. He caught the wrist and squeezed hard. There was a crunch of bone and a gasp of pain, followed by the sound of metal claws falling on the stone walkway. The other man was trying to hamstring Doc until the bronze giant kicked out and sent him hurling away.

Doc moved away swiftly. The way the leopard men had moved in the dark had unnerved him slightly. He had no desire to run into more of them.

He reached the elevator. It was lit by a lantern, which seemed to generate the same sort of radiance as the giant Ferris globe. In its light stood ten armed men guarding the entrance to the cage. One of the guards looked his way. Doc slipped behind an outcropping of rock that barely hid his giant form.

"There's someone there!" The guard cried, "Turn the lights on that rock!"

Half a dozen lights blazed directly at the bronze man's hiding place. Doc realized he couldn't move away from his inadequate shelter without being seen. He could barely move a muscle without showing himself.

"You there!" The head guard called, "Put your hands in the air and come out slowly. Remember, if you even try to move, we'll kill you."

The guard waited a moment, and then called again.

"You've got to the count of three, then we start shooting. Don't think that little rock is going to help you. The Ericksen rays will burn through that in less than a second.

"Don't shoot mon, I'm comin' out!"

Doc moved slowly, his hands empty and held high. He stepped into the circle of guards, covered from every direction.

"Hey." another guard said, "What's that on his feet?"

Doc Savage had discarded his sandals and he held half a dozen marble-sized glass balls between his toes. Even as the man spoke he flexed the digits and the globes shattered releasing their colorless, odorless gas into the air.

The guards looked confused for an instant, then sleepy. In the space of several seconds they had all sunk to the ground, unconscious.

Doc stepped into the elevator and pressed the 'up' button. The cage began to ascend. Miraculously, there were no guards waiting at the top floor. Doc listened for a moment and caught the sound of movement down the corridor. A gang of guards was coming his way.

He hurried to where the crystal coffins stood. Several of the bizarre cages were empty. He slipped into one and pulled the door after him, taking care not to let it seal. A group of dacoits and several of the uniformed guards came down the path. Doc willed himself to an absolute stillness. His heartbeat slowed, his breathing practically stopped, even his mind and emotions quieted. The guards passed by Doc's shadowed form as if he were invisible.

When they had gone he slipped out of the box and hurried back into the lab. The door was unguarded. The two dacoits stationed there must have been part of the group he had passed in the corridor. Doc retraced his path through the administration building without incident. For all the turmoil inside, the quadrangle was quiet. He reached the window of the bungalow and eased back in.

Doc Savage took a deep breath. He had experienced many close calls in his strange career, but few closer than this. He seemed to have successfully eluded his enemies, but long experience had taught him to take nothing for granted.

"Bigomba!" a loud pounding on the door accompanied the voice. "Open at once! The Master requires your presence."

Chapter Twenty-Two Double Judgment

"What is it?" Doc made Bigomba's voice sound sleepy and annoyed. As he spoke his hands moved with dazzling efficiency. He stripped away his beard and earring, then began to peel away the coolie's clothes.

"Your presence is required." The voice was impatient. The pounding resumed. "Come out now!"

A moment later the impatient speaker burst into the room to see the giant Bigomba, girded in a loincloth glaring angrily down at him.

"Fool!" He snarled, "I will go as the Master bids but never think that it is given to such as you to command Bigomba."

"I..." the guard was overawed and had trouble finishing his sentence. Doc brushed past him contemptuously and strode out into the quadrangle. He saw guards leading others to the administration building. He recognized Stephen Ling and the woman he still thought of as Lo Lar. They had obviously been roused from sleep as well. He wondered what it portended that they had both come from the same bungalow.

The guards took them to the lab, where they went through the same ritual with the rubber shoes. They were led back to the terrariums where Fu Manchu waited. He had shed the lab coat and was arrayed in his regal black robe with the embroidered silver peacock.

Behind him, in one of the cages, stood a dacoit. The case seemed to hold only tall grass, but Doc knew it was the habitat for Hoemadipsa, the land leeches responsible for the 'snapping fingers.' The man glanced around the

case, terror evident on his face.

"There is a spy among us." Fu Manchu's terrible eyes scanned each of the three in turn.

Lotus Ling dropped her eyes submissively as the gaze swept over her. Stephen placed a protective arm around his wife's shoulders and tried to meet that stare. A moment later he looked away. Only the dark skinned giant met the Devil Doctor's eyes without flinching.

"A short time ago," Fu Manchu continued. "Some person penetrated this laboratory and made his way down to my submarine base deep in the heart of this mountain."

"Your what?" Stephen Ling was clearly surprised, "A submarine base?"

Fu Manchu ignored the question and went on.

"It was a person with skills of stealth and combat." He said, "This spy engaged my guards and managed to escape. There is only one way into the base. I must believe that the spy came from this compound.

Aside from my daughter and the members of her sad conspiracy, the three of you are the only people here who I do not yet trust fully."

"My husband is innocent." Lotus spoke up, "I have not let him out of my sight."

"Which means I can trust both of you, or neither." Fu Manchu replied, "There could have been two spies, or three."

"This is foolish." Bigomba snapped, "Have you brought us here to play games?"

"I have brought you here to witness the justice of Fu Manchu." He motioned to the glass case, "Do you recognize this wretched dacoit Dr. Ling?"

Stephen nodded his head.

"He's called Feng Wu. He's the one who killed Dr. Thierry."

"Do you recall me telling you that I must always mete out punishment to those who have failed me?"

Stephen was silent. His face had gone pale.

"This room has soft ambient lighting." Fu Manchu continued, "When I turn off the Ferris globe it will become dark enough for the `snapping fingers' to feed but still light enough for us to observe."

"That's monstrous!" Stephen cried.

"Monstrous that I must punish this man?" Fu Manchu asked, "Or monstrous that I would have you see it? I despise hypocrisy Dr. Ling. Any who serve me must understand the necessity of such things. Your dear wife has witnessed many such demonstrations. I have never once known her to flinch from the unpleasant reality."

Lotus dropped her eyes, refusing to meet her husband's questioning look.

"Not until today." Fu Manchu murmured.

He moved to a wall switch.

"This is the control for the Ferris globe. Come join me Dr. Ling, I want you to throw the switch."

"What?"

"This creature failed me, which is crime enough, but you have suffered the most at his hands. It was your friend who he killed. It is only fitting that you act as his executioner."

"I won't do it." Stephen said.

"The man is guilty of murder, by your own testimony." Fu Manchu countered, "The unnecessary murder of a good man. Do you doubt that he deserves to die?"

"It doesn't matter what I think," Stephen replied. "It's not my place to judge this man. Certainly not to kill him."

"Thus speaks the physician." Fu Manchu replied, "But you are also a man who will fight when he must. You would have killed this dacoit in the morgue to protect your friend. Now I offer you the chance to avenge him."

Doc Savage was watching Stephen's face closely. The strain of confronting Fu Manchu was starting to tell on him. The power of the Devil Doctor's eyes, his hypnotic voice, and the invisible force of his will was almost impossible to resist.

"I don't believe in revenge." Stephen said.

"All men believe in revenge." Fu Manchu countered, "It is a universal human sentiment that is soften cloaked in the illusion of propriety. What is an execution but the sanctioned revenge of society?"

"I can't say. But there's a difference between that and this damnable thing."

"What difference?" Fu Manchu asked, "Every government had methods reserved for the execution of criminals. Is my Si Fan so different than a government? They call what they do 'justice' while I am a criminal for doing the same. All because my power is not confined to a spot on a map and I have no diplomatic portfolio."

"The governments of the world don't execute people by feeding them to giant leeches!" Stephen protested.

"My methods are more colorful, but no less humane." The Devil Doctor replied, "The `snapping fingers is a quick and painless death. The leeches anesthetize their own wounds and the sensation of death by exsanguination is like that of drifting off to sleep. Compare this to the gallows, the firing squad, the electric chair."

"I won't do it." Stephen Ling repeated.

"You are a fool to show mercy to the killer of a man you deemed good." Fu Manchu snapped. "Your civilized proprieties have no meaning in this world. You must come instincts that a worthless life must often be sacrificed to protect a life of greater potential. This is no different than a surgeon excising diseased tissue to save a limb."

"No matter," Stephen said. "I won't do it."

"And what if I told you I would spare this wretched one if you were take his place in the chamber? Do your scruples extend that far?"

Lotus grabbed her husband's arm. Her eyes silently pleaded with him. It was only with great effort that Stephen managed to turn away form her.

"If that's what it takes." He said.

"No!" Lotus thrust herself between her husband and Fu Manchu, prostrating her body.

"Master," she said. "If you judge against my husband I beg to take punishment in his place.

"Silence woman!" Fu Manchu snapped. "You have nothing to say in this."

"If he cannot be spared," she continued. "Then let me share his punishment. If I do not die with him I will not rest until I have avenged him."

"Little Zarmi," Fu Manchu's voice sounded almost weary, "Of all my female operatives you have been the finest. Never before did you let the feelings of your heart interfere with your service. Now I find you are as capricious as any."

"She's only trying to save me." Stephen protested.

"She makes my case," the Devil Doctor replied. "Even the 'gentle sex' is vengeful at heart."

Lotus had partly risen and was staring at Fu Manchu with open defiance.

"I have no intention of punishing your husband. Though I should have you whipped for your words." He turned to Stephen, "Your ideas are naive and self-destructive, but they are backed with admirable character. In time you will see the correctness of my way and you will become useful to me."

Fu Manchu turned his terrible eyes on the giant African.

"I exonerate the Doctor of this task." He said, "The execution falls to you Bigomba."

The giant folded his arms across his massive chest.

"You ask a king to do the work of a common executioner?"

"I ask a man who claims to be an ally to demonstrate his loyalty." Fu Manchu responded. "Surely a warrior like Bigomba will not hesitate to kill one who so richly deserves it?"

"Bigomba kills with the sword and the spear." The giant's voice dripped contempt, "Or he kills with his bare hands. Not with crawling things."

"Yet, you killed John Thunstone with the power of Voodoo. Are your powders really so much more honorable than my `snapping fingers?"

Fu Manchu's voice lowered dangerously and Doc Savage wondered if the Devil Doctor had somehow pierced his disguise. Without seeming to he scanned the room, his mind formulating a plan of action.

"Of course, I cannot verify that you actually killed Thunstone." Fu Manchu continued, "It could have been an illusion, like that created by my own *F. Katalapsis*. The man my guards fought was dressed as a black coolie. A man of great size and strength. All of this makes me wonder about you my new ally. Perhaps you are not Bigomba at all. Perhaps you are Doc Savage in disguise. But Doc Savage would not kill a man given the choice, not even a vile toad

like this dacoit.

"If you want me to believe that you are Bigomba and not Doc Savage, all that you must do is throw the switch."

Doc blurred into action. He lashed out both hands in powerful chopping blows to either side. The two nearest dacoits fell as if poleaxed. The bronze man reached into his satchel to pull something out.

"Clark Savage, stop!" Fu Manchu's voice rang out across the room. He had raised one hand with a small device in it. Doc recognized the device as a radio transmitter. He froze in mid-motion.

"Doc Savage?" Lotus Ling gasped, her eyes wide.

"This control is keyed to the confinement chambers." Fu Manchu said, "If I press the switch, a deadly neurotoxin will be released into each chamber. The gas is quick and painless. There is no antidote. All of the prisoners will be dead within fourteen seconds of its release."

Doc dropped the satchel to his feet and stood erect.

"What do you want?"

"What I have wanted since I first met you Clark Savage," the Devil Doctor replied. "I want your brain."

At a signal from Fu Manchu one of the guards approached Doc with a hypodermic in his hand. He moved cautiously, though the bronze man never moved a muscle, not even when the needle was plunged into his arm.

His sight quickly became blurry after that, and his legs became weak. The last thing he saw as he slipped into unconsciousness were Fu Manchu's green eyes, burning with triumph.

Chapter Twenty-Three **Auld Acquaintance**

Doc Savage awoke in a comfortable bed. His highly trained senses told him immediately of a number of things he would not have expected. His sense of touch told him that he was wearing silk pajamas and lying between linen sheets. His hearing told him of a clock on the wall, and the breathing of two other people in the room. One breathed in the relaxed rhythms of a sleeper while the other's breath was interrupted periodically as he puffed on a pipe. Doc's sense of smell told him the blend of the man's tobacco, which was a familiar one. The pipe smoke in the room was mixed with the antiseptic scent of a well-run hospital.

He opened his eyes and sat up. His vision confirmed what his other senses had told him. Doc Savage was in bed in a small hospital ward. Another patient, his head bandaged, lay in the bed across from him. Doc glanced at his hands and to confirm that they were once again their normal sun-bronzed hue. The dye he had used for his Bigomba disguise had been removed.

The pipe-smoker sat in a comfortable chair by Doc's bedside. He was a scholarly looking man in a white lab coat. He wore glasses with thick black frames, and had sandy hair and a thick moustache. He looked about forty, but Doc knew he was a good deal older.

"Hello Dr. Ericksen." He said.

"Hello Clark." The professor's voice was as affectionate as Doc had remembered it. Ericksen closed his book and laid it on the bedside table. Doc recognized it, a bound copy of a mathematical treatise on asteroidal dynamics. Dr. Henrick Ericksen was one of the few men living who could make sense of the work, let alone read it for pleasure.

"How long have I been asleep?"

"A little over thirty hours I should say." Ericksen smiled, "The guard was over-enthusiastic with his hypodermic I'm afraid.

Doc nodded.

"You're looking quite well, sir. You don't seem to have aged a day since the last time I saw you."

"Yes, that would have been the fall of 1913, wouldn't it?" Ericksen replied, "Not so long before my death."

"My father and I came to the funeral."

"I heard you did." The older man looked vaguely sad. "It's a shame I couldn't have told you then, but you

weren't ready. No one in my old life would have understood."

"Your wife and son were devastated by the loss."

"Of course they were. That's only to be expected of a man's family. But the deception was necessary. You do understand what happened, don't you?"

Doc nodded.

"You were working on your disintegration device when I was studying with you. Fu Manchu learned of the device and arranged your `death' and your subsequent revival. He has done the same with dozens of scientists since."

At the mention of the devil doctor, Ericksen's eyes lit up.

"Fu Manchu." He spoke the words with the tone a priest used with the name of a beloved saint. "I have a brilliant mind I have always believed, but he has the genius of any three men I have known. He has involved himself in my work until he knows it as well as I do myself, and he has mastered a dozen disciplines that I do not begin to understand. His mind has a breadth and depth that I have only encountered one other time.

"When I first met you Clark, you were still a child. Imagine, your father wanted to bring his twelve-year old boy one of the world's leading physicists for private tutoring. I thought it was absurd at first, but the speed with which you grasped my concepts humbled me.

I have often regretted that you have never been inducted into the Order of the Si Fan."

"I would have thought you would rather have had your family with you."

"Not at all!" Ericksen waved a hand dismissively, "My wife and son were bright enough, in their own way. But in the end they were ordinary minds, and this isn't the place for the ordinary. This is a place where men like you and I can come together to probe the deepest mysteries of creation. This is where you belong Clark."

"Were you aware that you have a grandson?" Doc asked.

"Oh yes," Ericksen smiled broadly. "He has the makings of a great genius. Our organization secretly procures copies of his school papers and brings them to me. He's already winning awards, you know? He's not yet up to the standards of the work we do here, but in a few years, when his thinking has matured, he will join us. Dr. Fu Manchu has promised me."

"You realize that means taking him from his family, his plans?"

"My poor Clark." Ericksen shook his head again, "You have such an amazing brain and still you can't see? The Si Fan is working for the very same things you have spent your life trying to accomplish. We will eradicate war, crime, poverty and the bigotry that sets nation against nation. Our goal is one world, united by one government, speaking one language. It will be a new Golden Age, and when it is accomplished there will be no limit to the scientific wonders we can achieve! We will play a part in transforming the world. What are prosaic things like family ties and career plans next to that?"

Doc was silent. He could tell that argument was useless. Whether through mind-control, his own free choice or some combination of the two, his old teacher had been seduced completely by the vision of the Si Fan.

"Clark," The professor went on. "You have a chance to be a part of this."

"Sir, I..."

"Please Clark!" Ericksen cut him off with a fatherly smile. "The days when I was your tutor are long gone. You are more than my equal for your achievements have eclipsed mine. I would like it if you would call me `Sven' as all my friends do."

Doc had heard others use the nickname, but had never heard how Ericksen had come by it. Being offered such a kindness from a man he had loved and respected as a youth brought up powerful emotions. Hearing this same man speak in praise of the monstrous plans of Fu Manchu evoked strong emotions of a different sort. Yet neither warmth nor revulsion showed on the bronze man's impassive face. His lifelong training to bear all things with stoicism served him well.

"I am surprised that I am not restrained." Doc commented. "Has Fu Manchu given you one of the radio transmitters to keep me in check?"

A guilty look crept across Ericksen's face. He reached into the pocket of his lab coat and brought out a compact radio device identical to the one Fu Manchu had held. Doc noticed that the device had three buttons on it. One was the trigger for the fatal gas. The functions of the other two were unclear.

"I never meant to use it Clark." Ericksen said, "I told Fu Manchu that I could make you understand without any threats. That's why I volunteered to be the one to talk to you."

He paused a moment, seeming to gather his thoughts.

"It's only fair to tell you though, he has given identical devices to many of the staff here. If you cause any trouble, or if you disappear, we have orders to press the red button. There's no way you can escape Clark, you couldn't possibly stop everyone."

Doc nodded his understanding.

"I am glad you volunteered sir." His voice had taken on a soothing rhythm and his flake-gold eyes seemed to whirl with special intensity. "I remember the day my father first brought me to your home. We sailed up the fjord with the Stronjan Glacier hanging over us. The same route you must have traveled many times."

"Yes," Ericksen agreed pleasantly, "I traveled that route many times."

"There were a thousand tons of ice and snow hanging over us, but we knew we were safe. All was calm."

"Ya," the professor repeated, his voice had become dreamy. "All was safe... safe and calm."

"I remember the road to your ancestral castle." Doc continued in the same hypnotic tone. "Do you remember the castle?"

"Ya... the castle was my home."

"As a boy I was always fascinated by the gargoyles over the gate. Do you remember the gargoyles?"

"Ya... the gargoyles."

"Who many gargoyles were there?"

"Gargoyles..? Seven gargoyles I think... Ya, seven."

"I want you to count the gargoyles for me." Doc said, "When you reach the last one you will fall into a deep sleep. You will still be able to hear my voice and answer me. Now, count the gargoyles."

"One... two... three..." Professor Ericksen's voice grew steadily more drowsy. When he reached seven his head slumped to his shoulder and his breathing grew quiet.

"Do you hear me Professor Ericksen?" Doc asked.

"I hear you."

"Do you remember who I am?"

"You are Clark Savage Jr." Came the answer, "You are my pupil... my friend."

"Professor, I want for you to imagine yourself in your ancestral home. Can you see it?"

"Ya," I am in my family's castle."

"I am there with you." Doc said, "Do you see me?"

"I see you."

"Your wife and son are there as well." The bronze man continued, "Can you see them?"

"I see them."

"You can remember all of us very clearly Professor, isn't that so?"

"Very clearly."

"You remember us, but someone has blocked the emotions that go with those memories." Doc's voice was still soothing but a note of urgency had crept into it. "I want you to picture how those emotions are being blocked."

There was silence for several moments as Ericksen's face wrinkled in concentration. Finally Doc spoke again.

"Do you see the block Professor?"

"I see it."

"What does it look like?"

"It looks like a shadow, a spot of darkness in my mind."

"I need you to disperse that darkness." Doc said, "Imagine your mind is the beam from a lighthouse. Shine it into the darkness to dispel it."

"I don't want to."

"Buy you must Professor Ericksen. The thing that lies behind the darkness is something you need. You need it desperately. Do you understand professor?"

"I understand."

"Then do it now. Disperse the shadow."

"I can't!" Professor Ericksen's voice nearly broke, "I'm frightened."

"There is no need to be frightened of the darkness Professor." Doc's voice was gentle but unrelenting, "Darkness has no power, it is only the absence of light. Shine the light into the darkness and it will disperse."

"There are eyes peering out of the darkness." Ericksen said, "Cat green eyes, warning me not to do this. They are HIS eyes."

"He is not here Professor." Doc said in that same hypnotic tone, "There are only the two of us here. The eyes cannot harm you, and the darkness is only a shadow. Shine the light on it and it will disperse."

"The eyes," Ericksen moaned, "They burn like a green fire. They will burn me if I oppose them."

Doc frowned. He had hoped that his ability at hypnotism would be enough to counter Fu Manchu's power over the man. Unfortunately, the Devil Doctor had foreseen such an attempt and had planted powerful post-hypnotic blocks to prevent just such a thing.

"Professor," he said. "Do you remember my eyes?"

"I remember." With the change in topic the professor's voice calmed.

"What color are my eyes?"

"Your eyes are golden," Ericksen said, "Very strange eyes."

"I want you to keep the image of my eyes in your mind professor." Doc said, "If you see the green eyes again I want you to change them into the image of my eyes. Do you understand?"

The professor was silent.

"I want you to picture the shadow again." Doc continued, "Do you see it?"

"I see it."

"Shine your light into the darkness Professor."

"The eyes." Professor Ericksen's voice grew frightened again. "The green eyes watch me!"

"The eyes are not green Professor, they are golden. They are my eyes, do you understand?"

Ericksen moaned with fear.

"What color are the eyes Professor Ericksen?"

"Gold... no, Green." Ericksen's voice rose the tension as two titanic wills seemed to battle for control of his mind.

"Gold eyes?" he sank out of his chair to his knees. He raised his hands to the sides of his head and moaned. "Eyes! Green eyes... gold eyes... watching me... making me do things... Why can't they let me be?"

Ericksen's voice grew louder as he struggled with the tension in his mind. In a moment the guards would hear and it would be over. Doc Savage caught the Professor's arms and gently raised him to his feet.

"There are no more eyes Professor," he said soothingly. "You are moving away from the darkness now. You are coming back to me. The eyes will not follow you here. I am going to count to three. When I have finished you will waken, refreshed and at peace. You will not remember anything that happened while you were asleep. Do you understand?"

"I understand." Ericksen's voice was much calmer.

Doc counted to three. Professor Ericksen's eyes opened and a smile returned to his lips.

"Forgive me," he said. "I seem to have lost my train of thought. No matter I suppose, I'll think of it eventually. Once you're with us, we'll have all the time in the world to talk."

"I haven't said yet that I'd join you." Doc said.

"You will." Ericksen smiled warmly, "Everyone does, eventually. Now, why don't you get dressed? I'll wait outside the door to take you on a tour as soon as you're ready."

Chapter Twenty-Four Face to Face

Doc found a set of clothes which were not his own but which had been beautifully tailored to fit him. He dressed quickly and performed his basic toiletries, then stepped back into the ward.

He nodded to the other bed.

"The man I hit?"

"He is an English journalist named Kerrigan, or so I'm told." Ericksen replied. "He seems to be acting as some sort of spy."

"How is he?"

Doc's calm voice masked the concern he felt. He has struck the man to maintain his cover as Bigomba. It was only meant to be a glancing blow but Kerrigan had twisted into the way and the flat of the heavy scimitar had caught him squarely.

"Oh, he'll be alright in a day or two." The older man said, "Dr. Marriot Doughty has the finest facilities imaginable here."

The bronze recognized the name. Dr. John Marriot Doughty had been one of England's most brilliant physicians before his untimely death in the spring of 1937. Now, Doc understood that he hadn't died; he was another of Fu Manchu's 'zombies.'

Professor Ericksen led him outside, where the tropical sun was shining brightly. Doc judged it to be about one in the afternoon and realized that he was hungry. The sisal plant was in full operation, providing a flawless cover for the headquarters of the master villain. No one, coming here would see even a trace of what lay beneath the surface.

As they crossed the quadrangle Doc spotted Stephen Ling and his wife walking hand in hand near the bungalows. The young physician caught Doc's gaze and then looked away. Lo Lar, (Doc mentally corrected the name to Lotus) gazed at the bronze man with fierce eyes.

"Interesting couple." Ericksen commented, "Several times the Master's female operatives have been seduced from his service by young men. This time it seems it is the other way around. Dr. Ling wants to join us, and will prove a valuable ally after he's had the treatment."

"Even though he's joining willingly?"

A strange look crossed the scientist's face. When he spoke his voice seemed sad, almost bitter.

"Alas, yes. There are often memories in even the most willing subjects that can blunt their loyalty. Several blank spots can do wonders to keep one's priorities sensibly arranged."

They entered the building, where a powerful looking man met them. He had the features of Nubian, but his skin was as white as that of an albino.

"I must leave you now." Ericksen said, "Hassan will escort you to the Master."

Fu Manchu was seated behind a large desk. He wore a white lab coat over a black jacket and trousers of Chinese design.

"Be seated Professor Savage."

Doc sat in the chair opposite the desk. Gold flecked eyes locked with green and held for a long moment.

"I have long awaited this opportunity." Fu Manchu said, "After my own, I consider your brain to be the finest in the world. Indeed, in some areas your learning and inventiveness has outstripped my own."

"So you have said before." Doc replied.

"Yes," the devil doctor admitted. "I was frank in my admiration for you when we first met in Central Asia. And I repeated my estimation when we fought in Limehouse."

"On several occasions people who I suspect of being your agents have tried to abduct me." Doc commented.

"Your suspicions were well-founded." The green eyes burned with triumph, "And finally my efforts have been rewarded. You have delivered yourself into my hands. I relish the thought of what we two shall accomplish together. There are so many fields of study, but there is one that is more pressing than any other. I speak of your brain surgery technique.

"Your form of mind control is more impressive than my own. The rate of recidivism is almost non-existent. My own techniques are far in advance of any other, yet several times they have failed me."

"Your daughter?"

"In so many ways, she is my most spectacular failure." A touch of anger slipped into the fiend's normally calm voice. "There was also the German dictator.

Doc said nothing but his interest was plain.

"Two years ago, Adolph Hitler came to Venice secretly to meet with his brother dictator, Mussolini." Fu Manchu continued. "I took the opportunity to warn them to give up their ambitions of empire. Fascism is a force of chaos in the world. After the puerile ideologies of Stalin, it is the greatest threat to my vision of a world at harmony.

"When Hitler would not listen, I seized him and subjected him to my methods of mind-control. I was astonished when he shook them off. I would have repeated my effort but my old foe, Sir Denis Nayland Smith interceded and managed to rescue the German."

"I don't envy Smith the choice between you and Hitler." Doc said dryly.

"You can be glib," Fu Manchu countered. "You have not looked into Hitler's eyes as I have. I practice what you call cruelty to accomplish a discrete purpose. He will practice cruelty for it's own sake, and on a scale the world has not yet seen."

He looked thoughtful for a moment.

"I have often wondered what enabled him to resist. Strength of will? Madness? Or perhaps he is already subject to another powerful form of mind control."

"But you think my technique would have worked?" Doc Savage asked.

"Why not?" the devil doctor asked, "You perfected the technique to prevent criminals from harming others. I would use it to neuter the greatest criminals of all. Imagine, Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini all stripped of the will to dominate. It would be the greatest boon to humankind imaginable."

"But it wouldn't stop there, would it?" Doc replied, "What about the leaders of free, democratic nations?"

"Do you really think men like Roosevelt and Churchill are so different?" Fu Manchu hissed, "They do not have the personal mania of Hitler, but they are otherwise his brothers. I would remove the threat of all such men from the world."

"I would make the world safer also." Doc Savage said, "By removing the threat of Fu Manchu."

The devil doctor seemed on the verge of a fit of the demonic rage that sometimes possessed him. By sheer will power he fought it down.

"Regrettably, you shall not have the chance." He said, "While your friend's lives are in my hands you will cooperate with me. Eventually, I am certain it will become necessary to control you with an injection of the 973 compound, but that can dull the mind, if only slightly. I want you unimpaired when you teach me the technique you employ.

"I have gleaned most of the technique already," Fu Manchu continued. "When my agents brought me rumors of your 'College' I arranged to have one of my people taken there."

"Lo Lar?" Even Doc's facade was shaken by the revelation.

"Yes," came the reply. "I hoped she would capture you, but I knew well how difficult a task that was. When High Lar was killed, didn't it surprise you how meekly his wife volunteered for your form of rehabilitation? I had implanted the post-hypnotic suggestion in her brain to do so. Then my agents watched the Chinese communities of the United States until they found her. Nine months ago I brought her here and performed my own surgery to learn what changed you had wrought in her brain."

"You could have killed her." Doc said quietly.

"True, though I believe I am at least your peer in surgical technique." Fu Manchu said, "And if she died, the autopsy would have yielded valuable information."

The bronze man gazed evenly at Fu Manchu.

"I have arranged a surgery." The devil doctor said, "Tomorrow morning you shall perform your operation and I shall assist."

"Who do you intend to operate on?"

"I wish to ensure you perform to the peak of your abilities." Fu Manchu said, "Therefore the subject shall be one of your four friends."

Chapter Twenty-Five The Choice

Doc was startled. His reaction was slight, but didn't escape the notice of Fu Manchu.

"Do you think me cruel?" The devil doctor asked, "You must have known that I would want such remarkable individuals in my service."

Doc nodded. That was exactly what he expected of the devil doctor, but that wasn't what had caused his response. Doc had noticed a small round object at one corner of Fu Manchu's office window. It was obscured by shadows and hard to see, but the bronze man's keen senses had spotted it and immediately discerned that it was the end of a stethoscope pressed against the glass.

"Which of my men is it to be?" the bronze man asked. He wanted to keep the conversation going so Fu Manchu would not turn and see the listening device.

"Your men?" came the reply, "Why not the woman? I think Miss Savage would make an excellent subject."

Doc said nothing.

"Come," Fu Manchu said, "I will take you to them. We shall decide then."

As the two men left the room, Stephen Ling removed the stethoscope from the window. He moved away to a nearby clump of bushes. His wife, who had been keeping watch slipped across the open area to join him.

"You heard something?" she asked.

"Quite a bit." Stephen replied, "It makes the decision easier, though it does not help us plan our next step."

"Tell me."

The bodies were as Doc remembered. Neatly arrayed in glass cases and frozen in the same positions they had been before.

"How do you keep them like that?" he asked.

"The caskets have a closed ventilation system," Fu Manchu explained. "It keeps a mixture of oxygen and a special anesthetic flowing through them. The gas is my own compound, which I have designated number 1219. It holds the body in a paralytic state while not affecting the mind."

"They're awake?"

Fu Manchu nodded serenely.

"They can hear every word you and I say, but they cannot so much as twitch an eyelid to react. The gas also numbs them to even the deepest pain. It is the ideal operating gas. Once removed from it the patient regains full control of motor skills within several moments and experiences no after effects."

"That would be a boon to surgeons throughout the world." Doc commented.

"And so it will." Fu Manchu replied, "Though the boon is presently limited to my own circle of surgeons. You will find all of my procedures similarly advanced."

"I do not doubt it." Doc said.

"I respect your decisions as a surgeon." The devil doctor gestured to the row of coffins, "Which shall it be?"

Doc remained silent, gazing at the still forms.

"Shall I make the decision for you?" Fu Manchu demanded, "Very well, it shall be Miss Savage. Though highly intelligent, she possesses no valuable scientific training. There is less risk of losing something of consequence."

"No." Doc said quietly.

"You have another choice"

"Take Long Tom."

"Very well." Fu Manchu answered. He raised the control device and pressed one of the two side buttons. Long Tom's case opened with a soft hiss. Two of the guards who had followed them stepped forward and caught the pale electrical wizard's body before it could fall out.

"It is wise that you do not attempt anything." Fu Manchu commented, "Even if you could take this device from me, you could never free all of the prisoners before my men released the poison gas."

Doc Savage remained silent. It was his habit when comments seemed unnecessary, or when he had not yet reached a conclusion about something. It often frustrated his friends and infuriated his enemies. Fu Manchu seemed serenely unaffected by the habit.

"My men will prepare Major Roberts for the procedure." He passed the bronze man a clipboard and pencil, "Please list everything you will need."

Doc took the pencil and wrote down a concise list in his machine-perfect block printing. The list was half a page long.

Fu Manchu looked it over.

"Most of your requirements are readily available in my lab. He said, "Several of the more exotic may take a full day to procure. We shall operate the first thing tomorrow morning."

Chapter Twenty-Six

Loyalties

Lotus Ling's face was expressionless.

It was a peculiar kind of expressionlessness that Stephen knew well. When his wife had become angry or disgusted, she had never let it show, but her face had become mask-like. He could only imagine what feelings were seething behind those exquisite features.

He waited for her to say something. When several moments had passed he spoke gently.

"Little Flower, I know who you feel about Savage, but what Fu Manchu has done to you..."

She silenced him a fierce look. Her face was blank but her eyes blazed fiercely.

"Lotus." He tried again after a moment, "I'm telling you the truth."

"I know." She hissed, "I know well what Fu Manchu is capable of. I have done so many terrible things in his service, and for all my loyalty I was still only a pawn."

She trailed off. When she spoke again her voice had softened.

"I know that you are not lying my husband. You have never lied to me since I met you. I have been used by a great man, but I have been loved by a good man. I know where my loyalty lies. Tell me what you desire."

"We have to stop Fu Manchu." Stephen whispered, "But if Doc Savage failed, I don't know what we can do."

"If we fight him we will die." She said flatly, "Fu Manchu is all-powerful."

"We can't face him directly, that's for sure." Stephen replied, "But maybe we can escape from this place and alert the authorities."

Lotus shook her head.

"Fu Manchu does not fear the authorities. With the weapons at his command he would crush them like bugs. This base is impervious to any attack short of a major offensive by a modern army with air and sea support."

"I suppose that's true," Stephen Ling admitted. "But I have to try something, and I can't think of any better plan."

Lotus said nothing but her eyes seemed to shine with pride.

"We might be able to climb down the side of the mountain," he continued. "But that would be slow. There is the road, but we'd be seen. Even if we could manage to steal a car I don't think we could get away that way. The only other thing I can think of is the rail the San Damien Company uses to haul men and supplies up and down. If we could stow away in one of the cars, that might work."

"I will provide our way down." Lotus Ling said.

"But how?"

"Trust me Stephen." She said, "Wait for me in the bungalow after dark and I will provide a way."

She turned and slipped away into the thick forest before he could protest. Stephen watched her go, wondering about this woman he had married. She had the same restless intelligence, the same spontaneity that had always drawn him to her, but there was more. He had never seen such ferocity in her eyes. The Lotus he had known had been a gentle, gracious woman. This woman was as fierce as a tiger.

He wondered what she must have been like as Zarmi, or as Lo Lar. The thought of that feral savagery undiluted by any gentler traits frightened him. Could he have loved her if he knew her then? What if the human tigress was the real woman and his Little Flower only an illusion?

Stephen Ling closed his eyes for several moments, then he shook his head angrily. He cursed himself for having such doubts. His wife had returned from the dead, and it was clear that she was still devoted to him. He would find a way to love her, no matter how she had changed.

He circled through the jungle and came out of the forest near the bungalow. On an impulse he turned and looked back. There was movement in the foliage, sunlight on a spotted pelt, then it was gone. A chill went down Stephen's back as he wondered if it had been one of the *anyoto* warriors. If a leopard man had been stalking them, and had gone to report, then he and Lotus were dead.

Unfortunately, he couldn't think of anything he could do about it. The watcher, if that was what it had been, was gone. He could try to run but that would mean leaving Lotus behind, and he wasn't prepared to do that. Summoning all the calm he could muster, Stephen walked back into the compound.

Chapter Twenty-Seven Changing Spots

As Doc Savage examined the surgical theater three guards in different sections of the room watched him. He could have found a way to incapacitate one, he thought, possibly even two. Three was too many even for him. If he made an attempt, one of the men would succeed in pushing the button and Pat, Renny and Johnny would all die.

He glanced down at Long Tom's pallid form on the operating table. His examination had confirmed that the electrical genius was as healthy as a horse. Despite that, Long Tom looked perfectly at home as a patient on an operating table. A mask kept the remarkable anesthetic gas flowing into the small man's lungs. Long Tom couldn't move a muscle, even though he was perfectly conscious.

As he moved through the room inspecting equipment, Doc Savage began to hum a peculiar tune. It was a folk song he had learned in the high Andes of Peru, plaintive and sweet. After a moment he began singing softly, nonsense words that had a musical quality of their own.

"Guards, please step outside for a moment."

Doc stopped singing and turned toward the voice's owner. It was Professor Ericksen; he had come into the theater and approached the chief guard.

"I'm sorry sir." The guard replied, "I have strict orders, there are to be three guards with the prisoner at all times."

"Companion Dupuy," the older man said. "I understand your orders, as I hope you understand my position of importance within the Si Fan."

"I want to talk to Dr. Savage alone."

"May I ask why sir?" The guard was deferential, but was not awed by the great scientist.

"It is something of a personal nature." Ericksen replied, "Something I meant to tell him earlier. I am certain the Master would approve."

"I understand Companion Ericksen," The guard said. "But my orders are clear. Mr. Savage is to remain in the line of sight of at least three guards at all times. I'm afraid we simply cannot leave you alone with him."

"Surely you can watch him from the doorway?" Ericksen asked in a patient tone, "Or the gallery for that matter?"

"You are extremely valuable to our cause Companion." The guard aid, "If we let you too close to him we will not be able to protect you."

"There is no cause for concern." Ericksen replied, "I have known this man from his youth. His training has left him morally incapable of assassination. He is like the proverbial leopard, no matter how it may rankle, he cannot change his spots."

The guard looked doubtful.

"The Master understands," Ericksen continued. "That is why he saw fit to leave me alone with Savage in the sick ward earlier. This is no different."

"But sir..."

"On my personal authority Companion Dupuy, I ask you to withdraw and let me talk to him." Ericksen's voice had become stern.

The guard hesitated a moment, then saluted. He signaled his men to move to the gallery over the theater. When they were in place he took up a position by the door.

"You aren't going to make a liar out of me, are you Clark?" Ericksen asked in a quiet voice. "That would be most embarrassing."

Doc said nothing. Something about the Professor's manner was puzzling.

"Seeing you again is good." Ericksen continued, "It brings back many memories."

There was an odd emphasis on the word 'memories' Doc noticed. It was as if the professor was trying to tell him something.

"I'm glad that it has been pleasant for you sir." He replied.

"Is there nothing I can say to you?" the older man asked, "It would be so good to work together."

Doc noticed the subtle inflection again. This time it was the way Ericksen said the words, 'work together' that caught his attention.

"It seems I must work for Fu Manchu," the bronze man replied. "I have little choice in the matter."

"Nonsense Clark." Ericksen smiled. "A man like you cannot be forced. You will do what you must because you know it to be right."

"And what do you judge is the right thing to do?" Doc asked.

"Clark, in the short time I taught you I came to think of you almost as a son." Ericksen took Doc by the arm, "I would hope that you see enough of a father in me to want to follow my example."

Doc Savage looked his old teacher square in the eye for a long moment.

"I will certainly consider it sir." He said.

Ericksen nodded.

"That's what I wanted to hear!" The older man smiled and clapped Doc on the shoulder. "Clark, I would dearly like to believe that a leopard can change his spots."

"I have always had faith that it is possible." Doc replied.

Ericksen nodded and walked to the door. The guards relaxed a little as they saw him go and moved back into their original positions. Doc watched his tutor leave. He seemed to stand as motionless as a bronze statue. Only a trained magician would have noticed him pocketing the small radio controller that Professor Ericksen had slipped into his hand.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

The Bat Flies Low

The day passed with painful slowness, or so it seemed to Stephen Ling. He had tried reading, exercising, and even talking to the guards and the sisal workers. All of these things were equally frustrating. All he could think about was Lotus and the possibility that the two of them might have been observed.

At dinner there was still no sign of his wife. He took a tray of food from the cafeteria back to his bungalow to eat in solitude. The food was excellent, but he couldn't seem to focus on it. He took a few bites of chicken and a swallow of ginger beer before giving up. A local radio station was playing dance tunes, which depressed him. He switched to a station playing classical music and left the radio there.

It was after eleven when he heard the tapping. The room was air-conditioned and he had left the window closed against the tropical bugs. When he first heard the tapping he thought it was a night bird or a small animal. Looking out he saw nothing at first, then a hand appeared against the pane, clad in ebon black.

Stephen started, then peered more closely. The black clad hand was small, and decidedly feminine.

"Lotus?"

He opened the window and his wife slid noiselessly in.

"What's happening?"

"Put these on." She thrust a bundle of black clothing at him "Hurry, we have only a few minutes."

Stephen Ling didn't ask any more questions. He doffed his clothes and put on the strange outfit. It proved to be a close-fitting black coverall with a hood that covered everything but the face. When he had zipped it up, Stephen looked inquiringly at his wife.

"Follow me!" She was back out the window and into the woods with amazing speed. Stephen followed as best he could. He was no mean outdoorsman, but compared to Lotus he felt clumsy and loud.

They emerged from the woods at the front door of the warehouse that was secretly a hanger. Lotus fished in her blouse and pulled out a Voodoo fetish in the shape of a serpent. She passed it in front of the door and it opened with a click. The two stole in.

"What did you do?" he asked.

"The doors are magnetically sealed." She explained, "There is a sophisticated electroscope attached to the locking mechanism. When a radioactive element, like the one hidden in this fetish is brought close it opens the lock."

"Amazing." He breathed, "But where did you get that?"

A look of regret passed across Lotus' pretty face and her hand touched the handle of a dagger she wore at her side.

"I have done what I must." She said, "Please Stephen, don't ask me any more than that."

She guided him to one of the `bats' and used the same talisman to open the cockpit.

"Lotus." Stephen protested, "I don't know how to fly a conventional airplane. Let alone something like this."

"I do," she replied, "Fu Manchu made certain I knew how to operate all of his equipment. I can also fly a monoplane or an autogiro if the need arises."

"Little Flower, you are a revelation."

They buckled in and Lotus sent the radio code to open the roof. Stephen glanced over the controls in the co-pilot's seat. Most of them defeated him, but he did recognize a radio and the aiming mechanism for the nose-guns.

"This is brilliant!" he said, "We'll have built-in proof for the authorities, and this crate may even give them an idea of how to beat Fu Manchu's weapons."

Lotus nodded. He noticed that she was biting her lip in concentration. She activated the *swainsten* disk and the strange craft began its uncanny vertical ascent. There was a jarring impact as the tip of one stubby wing scraped the roof hatch. The craft wobbled but continued to ascend. On the ground klaxons began to sound.

"Can you get us out of here?" Stephen asked.

"Can you do better?" his wife snapped back. "I am not an expert at this."

Stephen watched the ground below as the strange craft rose. Men were running back and forth and lights were going on in the quadrangle. Abruptly a bolt of light stabbed out from the administration complex, narrowly missing the `bat.'

"Lotus!" Stephen cried.

The small woman cursed softly and intensely in Cantonese. Then the craft shot forward as another Ericksen ray stabbed through the space they had just occupied.

Lotus manipulated the controls and the `bat' nosed down. It began to rocket ground-ward with terrifying speed.

"We're falling!" Stephen shouted.

"We're diving." His wife shot back. "We have to fly low or they'll hit us easily. Now be quiet, I need to concentrate!"

The strange aircraft leveled off no more than fifteen yards above the treetops and skimmed forward.

"Find a map." Lotus said, "We need to find our way to Port au Prince."

It took Stephen several moments to find a map and several more to get a rough idea of how to read it.

"I think we need to head that way." He said, pointing off at forty-five degrees to the left.

Lotus turned the aircraft in the direction indicated. It was an odd sensation, for the `bat' did not bank like a

regular airplane. The anti-gravity influence of the *swainsten* disc kept it as level as an automobile driving on flat ground.

"I think we're going to make it." He breathed.

A bolt of light came from above, spearing a perfectly round hole in one of the craft's wings. The ship lurched as Lotus fought to steady it. Another bolt sliced through the tail section of the plane.

"Can you bring us around?" Stephen asked. "If I can get a bead on them maybe I can shoot them down."

Lotus shook her head grimly.

"I can barely fly this ship." She said, "If I point it at anything it will be a miracle. I'm going to try to land safely."

Then another bolt of energy tore through the craft. This one struck the Ericksen generator in the engine compartment. With a blinding flash the engine exploded and the `bat' plummeted earthward.

Chapter Twenty-Nine Matters At Hand

Doc Savage ran to the window as soon as the alarm sounded. He saw the `bat' rise into the sky and his strange trilling filled the room. Someone was escaping from the compound. He wondered who it could be. Possibly it was one of Queen Mamaloi's rebels who had escaped detection at the `smelling out'. It could have been the Englishman, Kerrigan, or one of Doc's own aides, though he doubted either was a real possibility. The most likely solution, Doc decided was the young physician, Stephen Ling.

The bronze man frowned. He didn't have any way to follow, unless he managed to slip away and steal one of the bats himself. He didn't think that was possible. His bungalow was under constant surveillance. He doubted that even he could get out without being detected. And if he did, the act of stealing a `bat' would certainly doom his friends to a swift death.

Worse than that, such a precipitous move would wreck his plan to strike back against the devil doctor. The plan was uncertain enough already, and without it, neither Haitian nor American forces would stand a chance against Fu Manchu's terrible weapons.

It galled Doc to see an innocent put in harm's way and do nothing. He knew the young man was resourceful, and that his wife was a highly trained agent of the Si Fan. But even that meant little against a foe like Fu Manchu.

There was nothing for it, Doc realized. Ling had made his decision and no one could save him from the consequences. He silently wished the young man luck, then turned back to the room's small table to continue with the delicate work he was doing.

Chapter Thirty The Hunted

"Lotus! Stephen shouted, "Are you all right?"

The crash hadn't been nearly as bad as it would have in any other aircraft. As they fell, Lotus had used the *swainsten* disc to reduce the velocity of their fall. The final crash hadn't been much worse than a low speed auto accident.

"I'm here!" Lotus called. She had already slipped out of the safety webbing and was opening the hatch. He could see her silhouetted against the moonlit sky; she held a pistol in one hand. Lotus stared up at the sky for a moment.

"He's coming back slowly." She announced, "He's using a searchlight. I'm sure he means to kill us."

"Get into the woods!" Stephen snapped, "Hide the best you can. I'll follow just as soon as I get loose."

She tossed a small knife to him.

"Cut yourself free, quickly." She replied.

Lotus Ling slipped out of the hatch and dropped to the ground. A moment later a shadowy form drifted by overhead. A powerful beam of light stabbed down. Stephen froze in the act of sawing through the safety harness.

Then a pistol sounded several times. There was a sound of glass being smashed and the searchlight went dark. The shadow of the `bat' drifted silently in the direction of the shots. There was a flash from an Ericksen ray, followed by more pistol fire.

Stephen Ling cursed in Cantonese and sawed more furiously at his harness. He knew that the shots were from his wife's pistol. She was using the puny weapon to lure the 'bat' away from him, a ploy that was certain to get her killed!

The knife parted one webbing strap, but there were several more to go. Then Stephen realized he was still positioned to slip his seat into the weapon turret. He pulled a release lever on his chair and was thrilled when the seat slid smoothly into place. The craft had landed on its belly and the turret didn't seem to have been damaged by the landing.

Stephen found a switch marked `power'. He thumbed it on and felt savage delight when lights came on. There was a whine as the weapon powered up. He moved the turret until the enemy craft came into view. He heard two more pistol shots and saw an answering stab of light from the strange aircraft. Stephen said a quick prayer to his ancestors, that they would protect Lotus. It took him another moment to line up the cross-hairs, then he fired.

The flash of light stabbed through the `bat' but didn't disable it. The ship remained in place and swiveled to face him. Its weapon was pointed directly at him. There was no time to take careful aim; he squeezed the trigger again, firing another bolt at his enemy.

The ray struck the other 'bat's' Ericksen ray projector with dramatic results. There was a blinding explosion and the ship tumbled from the sky, its own swainsten disc slowing its fall. Stephen returned to work on his harness. Within a few moments he was out of it and climbed out on the wing of the craft.

"Lotus!" he called.

A dark form emerged from the rainforest and hurried towards him.

"Stephen!" A familiar voice responded. "Get away from the ship!"

He jumped down without any hesitation and followed the slender figure. When they reached the woods there was a great flash of light. Looking back he saw that the ship was gone and a smooth crater was scooped out of the earth.

"Fu Manchu takes no chances that his technology will fall into enemy hands." Lotus explained. The Ericksen generator begins to create an overload as soon as the `bat' is disabled. Self-destruction occurs within five minutes."

"I'd hoped we could have shown that to the authorities."

"We will be lucky to reach them ourselves." She replied. "When you shot the other `bat' down, I saw several men emerge from it. They will be hunting us."

"At least we have a lead." Stephen said.

"Fu Manchu will have sent his leopard warriors." Lotus answered, "They are said to track prey like the animals they emulate."

Lotus pressed the pistol into his hand and drew a wavy-bladed dagger with a ten-inch blade for herself.

"I think I saw a camp of some sort." She said, gesturing to the northeast. "We must try to find it before they find us. Use your bullets carefully, there are only two left."

The two moved into the jungle. Lotus led the best she could, and her small kris made an acceptable substitute for a machete. Stephen was impressed again with his wife's skills in navigating the jungle. Despite this, the best they could manage was a fast walking pace. The jungle was not heavy near the ground level, but the canopy was thick enough to blot out virtually all of the moonlight.

They went on for what seemed like hours, and Stephen stumbled often. Once, as he rose he felt Lotus' hand tighten on his arm.

"I heard something." She whispered.

A silent form sprang out of the darkness at them. Stephen fired but the figure ducked aside and the bullet missed. The figure was nearly invisible in the gloom, but moved with uncanny precision.

The shadowed form leaped at Stephen and he fired the last shot at point-blank range. It fell to the ground and

was still. Crouching low he verified it was one of the leopard-skin warriors. He wondered how the man could move like that in darkness. It was as if he had the eyes of a cat.

Lotus cried out and he turned to see her dodge away from the attack of another of the *anyoto* warriors. Her dagger flashed in the dark. Stephen started to move towards the two when something hit him hard in the back of the head.

He went down in a heap, and was only dimly aware of a dark form moving past him in his wife's direction. Stephen Ling shook his head to clear it and was rewarded with a burst of pain. He was just able to clamber to his feet.

Lotus was moving like a dancer in a weird ballet. The leopard men would move in and slash and she would dance away and riposte with her kris. Her speed and grace were impressive but there were already claw marks in her costume and her flesh where she hadn't been quite fast enough.

Stephen raised the pistol and fired.

The hammer fell with a `click' on an empty chamber.

"Jolly bad luck that!" said a mocking voice from behind him.

Stephen spun to see Allington. The British flyer was wearing one of the Vortland uniforms, though the lamp was not turned on. He held an automatic pistol in his hand.

"Just you stay out of it old son." He said pleasantly, "I can't do anything for that little minx. Her death has been ordered as an example of the rest of the Si Fan. But if you're a good lad, I might be able to get you back alive for re-education."

There was an unearthly scream from one of the leopard men. Allington and Stephen turned to see the man go down, Lotus Ling's dagger embedded in his heart. The second anyoto warrior closed on the now unarmed woman, metal claws cutting intricate patterns in the air.

Stephen recovered from the surprise an instant before Allington did. His foot slashed out in a lightning-quick arc, smashing the automatic out of the Englishman's grasp. He followed up with a rapid series of hand strikes, but Allington dropped into a boxer's stance and blocked the attack. He came back with a stiff jab that sent the physician staggering.

"You've got spirit, I'll give you that." The man grinned. "Won't do you much good I'm afraid. Neither will your heathen fighting tricks. Before I joined the Si Fan I was contender for the middleweight championship of the RAF."

He moved in with his own series of punches and Stephen defended the best he could. He used the flowing, spinning movements of the Hung Gar fighting style he had studied in his youth and managed to avoid most of the attacks. Even then, several painful blows caught him in the ribs.

Under normal circumstances it might have been an even match. Allington was the stronger of the two, but Stephen was more supple and a more intelligent fighter. As it was, there was no real contest. The young doctor was exhausted and battered. His head still rang from the leopard man's earlier sneak attack and that upset his timing and his equilibrium. In his current shape he would be destroyed in a matter of minutes.

Stephen decided to do the unexpected. He waited for Allington to try a one-two combination. He parried the left jab, then dropped low under the right cross. He spun his body as he went down, lashing out his leg to sweep the flyer's feet from under him. Allington went down heavily.

As Stephen rose from his crouch his fingers brushed metal. It was his empty pistol. He caught hold of it. As Allington rose to his feet, Stephen saw a split-second opportunity and threw the weapon with all of his might. The automatic struck the Englishman in the solar plexus. His air came out in a rush and he fell back to the ground.

Stephen turned to see that the surviving leopard man had pinned Lotus to the ground and was forcing his claws towards her throat. She was using both arms to hold him back, but he was clearly stronger.

With a cry, Stephen raced at them and tackled the leopard man. His momentum hurled them several feet from Lotus and they landed in a tangle. The metal claws raked across Stephen's chest, opening four long wounds.

He realized that grappling with the man on the ground was hopeless. The only way not to be torn apart was in a standing fight. Stephen managed to double his leg up against the leopard man's chest and thrust him away. Then he stood and assumed his fighting stance. Behind him he could hear Lotus' ragged breathing as she also struggled to

rise.

"That's enough!" Allington's voice had lost all its humor. The British pilot had recovered more quickly than Stephen would have imagined. Now he moved forward, his automatic covering both Stephen and Lotus.

"That's not cricket what you did." He said in tone that showed he was still in considerable pain.

"Am I supposed to play by the rules while your thugs murder my wife?"

"Fair point." Allington admitted. "Though standing up for her just means you share the same fate."

"Are you sure that's the loaded pistol?" Stephen asked. He tensed to move as he spoke, but he could see it was useless. Neither he nor Lotus could cover the distance in time to prevent their deaths.

"I suppose you're right." Allington said with a trace of his good humor coming back. "Two pistols, one loaded, the other empty. Which one do I have? Only one way to find out."

He raised the weapon and two shots rang out.

Chapter Thirty-One **The Devil Doctor**

Doc Savage was slightly past the middle of his two-hour exercise routine when the knock came at the bungalow door. He ignored it, even when it was repeated several times. Finally the door opened and an angry looking Si Fan operative entered. It was the same man who had summoned Doc when he had still worn his Bigomba disguise.

The man stopped with his mouth open at what he saw. Doc Savage at rest was an impressive individual, in motion he was awe-inspiring. Great muscles rolled under a sheen of sweat. Powerful tendons stood out like cables as Doc pitted one muscle against another.

Every day since he was a youth, the man of bronze had gone through this ritual. It was what gave him his almost superhuman strength, agility and stamina. Each exercise was designed to push his giant body to its limit. Ten minutes would have been exhausting for a trained athlete. Just watching made the Si Fan feel weary.

"The master requires your presence in the surgical theater now!" the man snapped.

Doc ignored him and launched into a new series of exercises that was almost painful to watch. The Si Fan made his angry demand twice more. When it became obvious that Doc didn't intend to pay him any mind he left the room, slamming the door.

Five minutes later he was back, with a chastened look on his face.

"Excuse me Dr. Savage." He said, "The master apologizes for intruding on your exercises. It is my sad duty to inform you that the operation cannot be delayed but that he will understand if you are late. He will have to begin the procedure on Major Roberts unassisted.

Doc stopped immediately and reached for a towel.

"Please tell your master that I am on my way." He said.

Ten minutes later Doc Savage stood across the operating table from Dr. Fu Manchu and Dr. John Marriot Doughty. Several nurses were in the room as were the ever-present guards. Everyone was dressed in surgical gowns and masks. Long Tom Roberts lay on the operating table, a mask carrying oxygen and the powerful anesthetic gas was fastened over his mouth and nose, and his head had been shaved.

"All is in readiness." Fu Manchu said, and handed a scalpel to Doc.

Under the influence of the gas, Long Tom couldn't even blink his eyes. But even without the smallest twitch of expression, the bronze man thought he read fear in the electrical wizard's face. He kept his own face blank with some effort and touched the instrument to Long Tom's scalp.

"I will begin the incision here." Doc said, "You may want to stand at my left shoulder for an optimal view."

Fu Manchu moved around the table without hesitation. A look of alarm came across Marriot Doughty's face. He clutched at the devil doctor's arm as he passed.

"Sir," he said. "You shouldn't stand so close. What if he..."

Fu Manchu cut him off with a baleful look from his green eyes. The British doctor let go and took a half step

back. Fu Manchu moved to Doc's left shoulder and stood there calmly.

Doc Savage was impressed with the man's nerve. At this distance he had the ability to kill Fu Manchu in any of a dozen ways before the guards could react. He would die also, and so would his men, but the devil doctor would be gone. He wondered whether it would be worth it to rid the world of such a menace.

At the same time, Doc couldn't help admire his enemy's courage and confidence. Most of the would-be world conquerors he had fought had been cowards at heart. They reminded him of schoolyard bullies operating on a grand scale but still tied to the pettiest of motives and tactics that were almost childish in their cruelty. In Fu Manchu he had found an enemy he could, in many ways, respect.

"I prefer this approach because it allows access to the desired area of the brain with the least intrusion." Doc said calmly, "It will require the removal of only a small circle of skull, which may be grafted back into place at the end of the surgery."

Fu Manchu nodded, his eyes taking in even the smallest of Doc Savage's gestures. Doc caught a glimpse of a tremendous mental discipline, rivaling his own. He knew that any attempt to delay the surgery, or perform the wrong technique would be spotted instantly.

As it turned out, he didn't need to resort to anything like that. A jet of flame suddenly shot from under the table, washing across their legs and setting Fu Manchu's gown on fire.

"Look out!" Doc clipped, "He caught the devil doctor around the waist and pulled him out of harm's way. Then he leaped, clearing both the flame and the table to land on the far side next to a cringing Marriot Doughty.

"Stop!" Fu Manchu cried. His command was not for Doc Savage, but for the guards who had raised their radio devices, preparing to trigger the poison gas that would doom Pat, Renny, and Johnny. The men froze, their controls half raised.

"Do not use the controls!" Fu Manchu snapped, "Doc Savage is not trying to escape."

Doc scooped up Long Tom's still figure and carried him safely away from the blaze. One of Fu Manchu's men put out his burning garments with a fire extinguisher, and then turned the device on the jet of flame to no effect.

"It is the oxygen line." Fu Manchu said, his voice stern but calm. "Shut off the pressure."

It took only a few moments to extinguish the blaze and find the source of the problem. The line carrying the mix of oxygen and anesthetic gas emerged from the wall at ankle level. The hose carrying the mix to Long Tom's mask had been improperly fastened and had been kicked loose. The blaze came from a smoldering cigarette, which had been lying, on the floor near the valve.

"My God!" Marriot Doughty cried, "This is gross incompetence! Who is the man who readied this line? I'll have his head."

"Unnecessary Doctor." Fu Manchu said, "The culprit is most obvious. You caused this convenient 'accident' didn't you Savage?"

"I do not smoke." Doc replied.

"Nor do you lie." Fu Manchu replied, "At least not directly. But your ethics allow the use of a burning cigarette or a misleading statement when they are called for."

Doc said nothing.

"You found a way to tamper with the line when you examined the room earlier." Fu Manchu continued, "I congratulate you on your subtlety. I am also curious as to how you managed to use a lighted cigarette without the aroma of tobacco giving you away. That was a trick worthy of the late Houdini himself."

Doc still didn't reply, though the accuracy of Fu Manchu's guesses made it hard to stand mute. The cigarette had been pilfered from the pocket of an unsuspecting guard. The trick of lighting and dropping it into position undetected had indeed been learned from Houdini.

"You are too resourceful even for my security." The devil doctor continued, "I shall have to take more severe measures to control you."

Fu Manchu turned to the guards.

"Take Major Roberts back to the confinement chambers. We shall be using a different subject for the surgery."

"I assume that would be me?" Doc said.

"Regrettably, yes." Fu Manchu answered, "I will use my skill to the utmost to avoid damaging your brain."
Doc nodded.

"I have confidence in your abilities." He replied.

Marriot Doughty was examining the gas valve.

"There is a little damage sir," he said. "It should take only an hour or so to correct, though we can jury-rig something if you want to operate right away."

Fu Manchu shook his head.

"We shall not proceed with anything less than optimal conditions. In the meantime, Savage shall be placed in a confinement chamber alongside his friends." He turned to Doc.

"Roll up your sleeve."

Doc complied and Marriot Doughty injected the contents of a hypodermic syringe into his veins.

"The drug is a liquid form of the 1219." Fu Manchu said, "I have never subjected myself to its effects. I shall be interested in hearing your observations after the surgery."

Doc noticed that the effects came quickly. There was a lack of pain, then a lack of sensation of any sort. He tried to keep from collapsing but lacked the control to do so. It was as if his mind had been set free from the physical world. He noticed his body fall to the floor but didn't feel the slightest sensation. It was like watching it happen to a different person.

When Doc's body hit the ground something slipped out of his lab coat pocket and clattered on the floor. A nurse picked it up and presented it to Fu Manchu. It was the radio control that Professor Ericksen had given him.

"You are indeed resourceful." Fu Manchu said, then turned to one of the guards. "Find out where Savage obtained this and report to me."

The man left and another entered. He was a lean man with graying hair.

"Excuse me sir." The man said. He had an American accent.

"Report Companion Horton." Fu Manchu responded.

"Mr. Kerrigan is starting to come around." The man said, "Companion Marriot Doughty wanted to be on hand when he revived."

"Bring Kerrigan to my office when you have spoken to him." The devil doctor commanded. "Once I have finished it will be time for Savage's surgery."

Chapter Thirty-Two **The Operation**

Doc was placed in the chamber next to the one Pat occupied, but he could not turn his eyes to look at her, or the others. The bronze man usually had an infallible sense of time but, cut off from any physical sensation, even he was unable to tell how long he had been there.

It was an odd sensation. Without even the slightest physical pain or pleasure to anchor him, Doc found himself entering a state of mind akin to the deep meditation of the Tibetan lamas who had tutored him as a boy. Only the periodic travel of Si Fan agents down the corridor to the elevator brought him back to the real world.

At some point Fu Manchu came to the chambers. Young Kerrigan was with him and Doc was pleased to see that his head was no longer bandaged. The devil doctor was almost unrecognizable in his fury. He approached the chamber of one of the rebel Si Fan and let out a stream of verbal abuse in the Haitian dialect. Finally he laughed and turned away.

"Do not suppose, Mr. Kerrigan," he said, "that I waste my words. They can see—they can hear."

"What?" The Englishman seemed stunned.

Doc listened as Fu Manchu described the conspiracy the prisoners had participated in. Then the devil doctor approached the last of the coffin-like boxes, the one that housed Queen Mamaloi. He let out another stream of abuse, this time in Mandarin. His eyes filmed over during this fit and his hands clutched into talons as if he would tear open the box and strangle the lovely Voodoo priestess.

Finally the tirade ended. Fu Manchu, Kerrigan, and the dacoit who accompanied them stepped into the elevator and were gone.

Sometime later Fu Manchu returned. Doc thought it was many hours later, though it was impossible to say. The mad genius was furious, though he kept himself in check better than he had earlier.

"I am surrounded by enemies!" he hissed, "Kerrigan is missing, Hassan is missing, even Ardatha is missing. You are responsible for this, I know. You would deny it if you could, but the gas makes that impossible. It does not matter! I know you. You are my nemesis as even Nayland Smith never was. Perhaps you are in league with him.

Fu Manchu closed his eyes and Doc realized that he was using his vast will power to control the mania that had swept through him. He wondered about the charges the devil doctor was leveling. He had not helped Kerrigan, not caused Hassan to disappear, and he had never even heard of Ardatha. Still, he filed these facts away as potentially useful.

When Fu Manchu opened his eyes the filmy look was gone and he was master of his emotions again.

"It does not matter. I am prepared for any action you and your allies could take against me. My weapons would cut down an army." He nodded, serene once again, "Soon you will tell me all about my other enemies. After the procedure you will be happy to cooperate in any way you can."

He went away. A short time later several of the guards appeared. They took Doc from the container and gave him another injection before wheeling him to the surgery. The bronze man called on all the techniques he knew, but it was useless. His body failed to respond. He watched as the nurses shaved his head but didn't feel anything of their touch.

Dr. Marriot Doughty leaned over Doc, checking pulse and other vital signs in a final preparation for the surgery.

"Steady there," he said pleasantly, "I know you're an unwilling patient, at least for the moment, but it's all for the best. I must say that I am awfully excited at the prospect of working with you in the future. Your papers on..."

The physician stopped in mid-sentence and his face took on a grave expression. Doc Savage had stopped breathing. He held an ear to the bronze man's chest, then touched his fingers to the carotid artery in his neck.

"Nurse!" he cried, "This man has no heartbeat!"

"I don't understand." The nurse replied, "How can that be?"

"It must be a reaction to the gas." Marriot Doughty snapped, "Quick, get that mask off of him!"

"But the master's orders."

"Blast the orders!" the physician cried, "If Savage dies the master will have our heads!"

He reached up and pulled the mask from Doc's face.

"Get me a syringe of adrenaline!" he cried, "We must stimulate his heart."

The nurse passed the needle and Marriot Doughty plunged it into the bronze man's massive chest. He placed a stethoscope over Doc's heart and listened carefully. A grin spread over his face as he heard a heartbeat, then another, and another.

"Dr. Marriot Doughty," Fu Manchu's voice came over a loudspeaker, "The surgery will be postponed. The sentries report several jeeps entering the compound. This is the move I have been anticipating. It may be Nayland Smith himself."

"There is another problem sir." The physician responded.

"What is happening?"

"Savage had a bad reaction to 1219, but I have it under control now."

"What?"

The door opened and Fu Manchu entered the room.

"It's alright sir!" Marriot Doughty said, "He's going to live!"

His elation was cut short as a great bronze fist clipped him across the jaw.

Doc Savage surged to his feet, but his muscles were still not working properly. He tried to spring at Fu Manchu but ended sprawling on the floor. As he struggled to his feet two of the dacoits caught his arms and held him tight.

"You have brought this on yourself Savage!" the devil doctor hissed. He held out the radio control and his

thumb pushed the fatal button.

Chapter Thirty-Three Two Minutes to Live

"Put him back on the table. Fu Manchu said. "Reconnect the mask."

Doc resisted, but his muscles were still too sluggish to fight off the powerful dacoits. They got him onto the operating table.

"Sir, he'll die." The nurse protested, "His heart stopped earlier."

"That was not the gas." Fu Manchu replied, "This man has learned the secret of entering a deep trance in which the heart slows almost to a stop. He must have realized that 1219 paralyzes only the muscles that are consciously controlled. A man with his training still has control over unconscious muscle function."

Doc turned his head from side to side, trying to avoid the mask but he knew it was only a matter of seconds.

A bright ray of light shot across the room and hit Fu Manchu in the chest. He staggered and fell. The nurse cried out and ran from the room as two more rays struck down the dacoits. With an effort Doc sat up to see Professor Ericksen standing over him with one of the ray tubes in his hand.

"Clark, are you hurt?" there were tears in the older man's eyes.

"I'm fine sir." Doc accepted Ericksen's help getting back to his feet. He was feeling stronger by the moment.

"I couldn't bear it." Ericksen said emotionally, "After I spoke to you it came back to me how much I missed my friends and family. My little boy's entire life was snatched away from me and I didn't notice somehow. It's very strange."

Doc nodded and grasped his old tutor's shoulder.

"It wasn't you sir. Fu Manchu had placed selective blocks on your memories that kept you from realizing you were his slave."

"But I'm free now." Ericksen replied, "and that devil is finally dead. Perhaps I can go home now."

"I'll take you home Professor Ericksen." Doc promised.

Another bolt of light crossed the room. This one struck Ericksen in the chest, making a perfectly round hole through him. The scientist touched the edge of the hole, a look of disbelief on his face, then he fell. His weapon dropped from his limp fingers and hit the floor with the sound of breaking glass.

Doc caught the professor's body as it fell and spun to see Fu Manchu standing erect with his own Ericksen tube in hand. A neat round hole was burned in his lab coat, revealing green material underneath. The devil doctor opened a small panel in the wall and pressed a switch. Doc felt an invisible pressure filling the room.

"Do not try to escape Savage." Fu Manchu said, "I have activated several screens of the Erickson force. They surround you like a cage. If you make any attempt to escape, you will be disintegrated."

Doc did not respond. He had lowered Ericksen to the ground and was checking his pulse. It was weak and getting weaker, but the scientist still clung to life.

"We may be able to save him." Doc said.

"The Ericksen ray is fatal."

"You're still alive."

"The treated material we use to make the Vortland suits is impervious to most levels of radiation." Fu Manchu replied. "That is essential, for the Vortland lamp generates a kind of radiation that is destructive to human tissue with prolonged exposure. The fact that the suit also offers some protection against the Ericksen ray was an unforeseen benefit."

"Professor Ericksen has been a valuable asset to you." Doc persisted, "It may be that you and I can save him. I give you my word I will not take advantage of the situation."

"I would save him if I could." Fu Manchu replied, "But you have placed me in an untenable situation. You are much too dangerous to deal with when I have anything less than my full resources, and Ericksen has wounded me with his misguided attack. Now my enemies gather round and I do not have the luxury of mercy."

He pressed another control inside the panel.

"I have set the Ericksen screen to contract." Fu Manchu said, "I doubt you understand the regret I feel in doing this. You and Ericksen have three minutes of life left."

He turned and left the room, carrying himself stiffly. Doc wondered how badly Ericksen had managed to wound him.

"Clark."

Ericksen's voice was so weak that Doc had to bend close to hear him.

"Power source... behind wall." The scientist gasped. He pointed his finger at a blank section of wall. "Shoot there... curtains of force will stop..."

Doc Savage picked up the ray wand and pointed it at the section the professor had indicated. He thumbed the switch but, as he had expected, nothing happened.

"It's broken sir." He said, "I heard something shatter when it hit the floor."

"Vacuum tubes..." the scientist gasped, "Flaw in design... tubes break and... can't function..."

"Don't worry sir," Doc said, "I'll get us out. Just try to hold on."

"Clark..." Ericksen gasped, "If you can... take me home..."

The professor gave a long sigh and his body went limp.

"I promise sir." Doc said softly.

He rose and held the Ericksen tube in front of him. The tip of it disintegrated as it touched the curtain of force. Using the broken device as a feeler Doc judged the boundaries of the cage and confirmed that it was closing in. No physical object could pierce that deadly barrier. No known force could stop it from stop its inexorable progress. Doc judged that a full minute had passed since the devil doctor's departure. He now had two minutes to live.

Chapter Thirty-Four The Fight in the Tunnel

"Holy cow! We're alive!"

Renny's big voice held a note of amazement. He and the others had heard enough to know how Fu Manchu was forcing Doc's cooperation. When he heard the electrical relays activate in the cell he had been certain it was to release the poison gas and kill them. Instead the doors had opened, releasing them to tumble out in the corridor.

"An unanticipated eventuation." Johnny agreed.

"It's part of Doc's plan," Long Tom said, "If we're free it means things have started to happen."

"Plan?" Pat Savage asked, "What plan is this? How come I don't know about it?"

"Doc only had a chance to tell me." Long Tom answered, "He spoke to me in Mayan while they were setting up for my operation. I don't think the guards ever had a clue what he was doing. Doc had gotten a hold of one of the radio-controls somehow. He told me that he had rewired it. He disconnected the control to release the gas and wired that button to open the doors of these coffins. He told me he would try to swap it for the one Fu Manchu carried."

The others understood instantly. Like Doc, they had learned the language of the ancient Mayan Indians of Central America. On an early adventure together they had befriended people of the lost Mayan civilization in the 'Valley of the Vanished' in the small republic of Hidalgo. No one in the modern world spoke the language so it made the ideal code to use with each other in situations where their plans might be heard.

"So when Fu Manchu pressed the button to kill us, it set us free instead." Pat's eyes lighted with admiration, "That's our Doc!"

"Yeah," Renny agreed, "but Fu Manchu would only press that button if Doc defied him. That means he's in big trouble!"

"We need to find him." Johnny said, concern causing him to drop his big words.

"Fools!"

It was Queen Mamaloi who had spoken. The exotic beauty was on her feet and staring poison at them with

her green eyes.

"Ease up sister." Renny growled, "In case you don't remember it was Fu Manchu who put you in that coffin along with all of us. We've got the same enemy."

"I would see my father displaced as ruler." The woman replied, "But that does not mean that I would ever betray the great goals of the Si Fan!"

Her bell like voice rose to a scream.

"Kill them all!"

Doc's friends got to their feet to face the rebel Si Fan. Their muscles were still recovering from the effects of the gas, but so were those of their enemies. The problem was they were outnumbered five to one.

A tall mulatto leaped at Renny with a fierce cry. A maul-like right hand caught him in mid-air, pushing his handsome features out of shape. Renny moved into a knot of men, his face mournful and his huge fists churning. Bony Johnny caught two men in his arms and bashed their heads together. Long Tom tackled the biggest of their opponents and had him in a painful jujitsu hold seconds later.

But there were too many of the Si Fan, and they were too well trained as fighters. Pat Savage saw the tide of battle begin to turn and decided to do something about it. She slipped free of the brawl and launched herself as Queen Mamaloi.

The Voodoo queen saw her coming and dropped into a flowery looking fighting stance. Pat grinned; she came from the rough-and-tumble school of fighting and had little use for pretty techniques. She launched a stiff left at the other woman.

Queen Mamaloi deflected the punch with a small motion of her hands and kicked Pat solidly in the stomach. She caught a handful of bronze hair and pulled Pat's face into position for a strike with the heel of her hand. It was meant to be a killing blow but Pat twisted and took it on her cheekbone. She locked her arms around the other woman's slender waist, lifted her in the air and slammed her to the ground.

The two rolled across the floor together. It was too close for punches so they bit and clawed and tried for jujitsu holds. Pat grabbed for the voodoo Queen's throat but missed. She got a dangling earring instead. It pulled away with a small piece of ear still attached and she rewarded with a cry of pain. Queen Mamaloi responded by trying to sink her teeth into Pat's neck.

Queen Mamaloi's headdress had come off in the scuffle and her long dark hair hung loose around her shoulders. Pat Savage grabbed a double handful of the mane and pulled the woman's head back. Then she butted her own head full into the Voodoo priestess's face. While her opponent was stunned, Pat slipped behind her and applied a chokehold.

Half of the Si Fan were down but the rest had swarmed over Doc Savage's men. Renny was the only one still on his feet, but there were men clinging to each of his arms making it impossible for him to use his fists to good effect.

"Give up or Queeny gets it!" Pat shouted.

The fighting died down for a moment.

"My life means nothing!" Queen Mamaloi cried, then Pat tightened her grip and speech became impossible.

"We will not endanger the life of our priestess." One of the men said.

They released the Long Tom, Johnny, and Renny and moved away from them. Pat eased up on her grip and Queen Mamaloi used her breath to shout abuse in Haitian at her followers.

The elevator light came on and all eyes turned to it.

"My father's men!" Queen Mamaloi's voice held a strange mix of bitterness and glee.

"We are all dead now!"

The door opened and half a dozen forms came out.

"The Marines!" Long Tom whooped.

There were actually only three Marines. The others in the elevator were John Thunstone, Stephen Ling and Lotus Ling. They rounded up the Si Fan prisoners and two of the marines were assigned to watch over them.

"Don't get me wrong." Pat said to John Thunstone, "but aren't you supposed to be dead?"

The big man smiled.

"It's a long story." He replied, "I promise to tell you all about it over dinner when we get back to New York. For now I'm just glad we've found you. We'd discovered an entrance to the cave that Fu Manchu didn't know about some time ago, but we would have had a hard time infiltrating this far without Mrs. Ling as a guide."

"We escaped last night." Stephen explained, "Fu Manchu sent his men after us but we got close to the Marine camp. Thunstone and an Englishman named Nayland Smith heard the fight and saved us."

The memory was still vivid in his mind. He and Lotus had expected to die when two rifle shots had sounded. One had killed the remaining leopard man outright. The other shot, Thunstone's, had smashed the pistol out of Allington's hand. Thunstone had hoped to capture him for questioning, but the airman had activated his Vortland lamp and slipped away invisibly.

"Have you secured the prehension of the subterranean anchorage?" Johnny asked.

"No." Thunstone admitted. "The submarine base is too heavily manned. We've only put in a small scouting party. We came in earlier and managed to liberate one of Fu Manchu's captives, the man Kerrigan. Even that was chancy. Rather than try to take the base, we're going for a blockade. A naval force is planning on scuttling a big freighter on top of the sea entrance."

He glanced at his watch.

"It should be happening just about now."

"The timing sure worked out." Long Tom said, "Listen, I need to get back into the laboratory. Doc told me a way to fix the Ericksen dampener, if I can find it. We'll need that or Fu Manchu's batteries will cut the Marines to pieces."

"The dampener isn't in the laboratory." Lotus Ling said.

"Traitoress!" Queen Mamaloi hissed, "My father will see you suffer for this."

"Where is it?" Long Tom asked.

"A level below this one." Lotus answered, "I will show you."

"You see to that Long Tom." Renny boomed, "Me and Johnny are going to find Doc."

"No." Lotus replied, "You cannot pass through the laboratory without the special shoes. You would be electrocuted instantly."

"Is there another way?"

"Yes," Lotus replied, "if we go through the lower level."

The group left Thunstone and the Marines to shuttle their prisoners down to the main force in the cave. Long Tom argued that Pat should go with him, but she stubbornly insisted on staying.

"You boys aren't going to get me out of the picture so easily." She said.

The elevator took them to the chamber that Lotus Ling had mentioned. It was only about thirty feet deeper in the mountain. Two dacoits guarded the elevator door but they were taken care of swiftly. Long Tom tackled one and banged his head against the floor several times. Johnny subdued the other with a well-placed chop to the side of the neck.

The group passed through another corridor, like the one that held the crystal coffins. At the end was a metal door. They pulled it open and Long Tom grinned as he saw the massive electrical devices it housed.

"Here we go." He said and stepped forward. Lotus' small hand on his arm stopped him.

"Do you see the lights on the panels are glowing?" She asked, "That only happens when the Ericksen ray batteries above us are charging to fire."

"Then I have to get in right away!"

"You don't understand." Lotus replied, "When that happens, the room floods with low-level Ericksen radiation. Any who goes into that room will die!"

Chapter Thirty-Five **The Brewing Storm**

Doc Savage felt the pressure of the Ericksen waves all around him. They had an oppressive effect and he

wondered how much damage they were doing. He closed his eyes and focused on his breathing. Then a strange noise filled the air, the musical trill that Doc unconsciously produced in moments of stress. The eerie sound rose and fell for a moment, then lifted to a high note and sustained it, growing louder and louder.

The note would have been painful to listen to if anyone else were in the room. Still, Doc forced it to grow louder, all the time holding on to the same piercing note.

There was the `pop' of breaking glass behind the wall and the stifling feel of the Ericksen waves stopped. Cautiously, Doc Savage reached out with his tube. There was no effect. The screens of force were gone.

The bronze man had duplicated a trick that some opera singers have mastered. Certain musical notes operate at a `resonant frequency' with glass. By finding the right note and sustaining it, a soprano can cause a wineglass to vibrate and shatter. That was what Doc had done with the glass vacuum tubes in the Ericksen wave generators.

With a last glance at Professor Ericksen, Doc made his way out of the room. He moved like a bronze shadow, slipping past nurses and guards as he made his way through the building. He reached a window in the front and looked out across the quadrangle. The sky was dark with storm clouds though it had not yet started to rain. As Doc watched, a mighty bolt of lightning split the sky, illuminating the area.

Several cars were parked in front of the administration building. They bore Haitian government license plates. Nayland Smith and his allies must be making their move. Prematurely, Doc realized. They had no defense against Fu Manchu's diabolical weaponry. He stepped from the building and walked boldly across the quadrangle. The respectable facade of the Sam Damien Sisal Company was a double-edged sword. It allowed Fu Manchu to operate behind a respectable mask, but it also allowed others to come and go with relative impunity.

As he neared the building a man came out. It was Allington, wearing a coverall uniform and a holstered pistol. When he saw Doc his eyes widened in shock.

"Savage!" His hand darted to the pistol but Doc was faster. He plucked the weapon from the flyer's grasp and tossed it away.

Allington dropped into his fighting stance and fired off a flurry of punches. Doc slapped them away with bewildering ease, then responded with a powerful right cross. The punch slipped past Allington's guard and landed neatly on the point of his chin.

Doc caught the flyer as he fell. He had pulled the punch enough to stun the Englishman rather than render him unconscious. He pulled him around the corner and began to hypnotize him.

In his groggy state, Allington couldn't resist the power of those strange flake-gold eyes. Within several moments he was in a trance.

"Where is Fu Manchu?" Doc asked.

"I'm not certain." Allington mumbled. "Might be in the lab. He said he would confront his enemies there."

"What enemies?"

"Nayland Smith and his men."

"What does he plan to do with them?" the bronze man demanded.

"Doesn't want to kill them." The pilot replied, "He's always had a sneaking fondness for Sir Denis. Never kills him, even when it would be easy."

"Then what?"

"The laboratory is set up to trap people between screens of the Ericksen ray." Allington said, "My guess is he'll trap them and deal with them after..."

"After what?"

"I just made report to him. A ship's been scuttled at the entrance of the submarine base. He'll want to go down and inspect."

"Can I enter the lab?" Doc asked.

"Not if the Ericksen screens are activated. It's sealed off then."

"Is there another way into the elevator?"

"Pulleys are housed up the mountain behind this building." Allington replied. "Hidden in a cave."

Doc reached around to the back of the man's neck and manipulated the nerves there. The flyer would remain paralyzed until this had all played out. He rose and sprinted around the building.

The administration complex was actually built into the side of the mountain, which was very steep. Doc reached the cliff and swarmed up it with agility that a monkey might have envied. His fingers clung to the smallest outcroppings as he moved speedily up.

It was only a sixty-foot climb to the hidden cave where the great motors and massive pulleys that operated the elevator were housed. Looking down into the shaft, Doc could see that the car was rising. He stripped off his shirt and tore it in two, then wrapped the pieces around his hands. Stepping out into the shaft, the bronze man caught the cable and slid down. He passed by the sealed door and landed on the roof of the ascending car. Working quickly, Doc pulled off the emergency hatch and dropped into the car. A moment later it docked and the doors slid open.

Doc Savage was staring into the face of Fu Manchu.

Chapter Thirty-Six A Snowball's Chance

"There has to be some way." Renny rumbled, "Holy cow, what if they needed to get in there and fix something while the rays were in operation. I can't believe they'd make an engineering blunder like that."

"There are protective suits," Lotus Ling replied, "but I do not know where they are kept."

Long Tom swallowed.

"It's up to me." He said, "I'm the one who knows what has to be done."

"A chimerical hypothesis." Johnny snapped.

"He's right," Renny said, "Any of us can go in. If I go you can shout directions to me."

"I'll go." Stephen Ling said, "I'm the most expendable."

He started to move but Pat Savage caught his arm.

"Hold on." She said, "We'll figure something out without the need for that kind of heroics."

She was wrong. Before another word could be spoken Lotus darted through the entrance. It took Pat and Johnny's combined strength to keep her husband from following her.

"Get out of there!" Renny bawled.

"It is too late." Lotus replied, her exquisite face sober. "Already I feel the rays weakening me. Tell me what to do and quickly or I will not have the strength."

Long Tom forced the instructions out of a throat that had suddenly gone dry. The plan was to reverse the function of the dampener so that, instead of dispersing the ionic build up caused by the Ericksen ray, it would amplify it. If it worked it would effectively make the weapon into the biggest lightning rod in history.

The woman worked efficiently, changing settings and splicing wires. Several times she paused and wiped away sweat. Once she swayed, but she caught herself before she could fall. Even from the door, Stephen could see her becoming paler by the moment.

"You're done!" Long Tom finally barked, "Get out of there!"

Lotus Ling straightened and passed a hand over her eyes. She took two steps forward, then collapsed.

Stephen fought down the urge to scream. He surged forward but Renny caught him.

"I have to go in!"

The big engineer looked into the physician's eyes for a moment and nodded.

"Human chain." He rumbled, "You may not make it out otherwise. Pat, you're the anchor."

Normally Patricia Savage would have had a barb to throw about being put in the safest position. Realizing that time was of the essence she simply nodded and took hold of Johnny's bony hand. The gaunt archaeologist and Long Tom linked up next, and then the electrical scientist put his pale hand in Renny's monster paw.

Stephen joined the end of the chain and walked swiftly to Lotus. He felt the effect of the rays at once. They not only weakened him physically, they also made it hard for him to focus his mind. It was as if his brain were a radio set plagued with static. He marveled that Lotus had withstood it as long as she had.

The chain was just long enough for Stephen to get a grip on his wife's unmoving body. Then muscles surged and the group hauled him out. Pat Savage shoved the heavy door shut after them.

"We made it." She breathed.

"I guess so." Long Tom said sourly. He didn't want to tell them that the brief exposure they had received might still be enough to kill them. Without knowing more about the Ericksen waves it was impossible to be sure.

Renny looked down at Stephen Ling as he cradled his wife's body.

"How is she?"

"Her pulse is very weak."

"We'll get her to Doc." Pat Savage said gently, "If anyone can help her it's him."

Stephen nodded. He picked Lotus up in his arms. It seemed strange to him that someone capable of the things she had done in the last few days should seem so small and fragile.

"We can't go through that room." Stephen said. "Another exposure would kill her, and possibly the rest of us as well."

"Back up to the lab then." Pat said.

"And fast!" Long Tom added. "The force of lightning depends on the difference in electrical potential between earth and sky. With all the ions that machine is putting out it's going to be the biggest lightning bolt since creation."

They hurried down the corridor to the elevator and Pat Savage hit the button.

Nothing happened.

"Holy cow!" Renny muttered, "Who took our car?"

Chapter Thirty-Seven Clash of Titans

For perhaps the first time in his strange career Fu Manchu looked startled. It might even have been a touch of fear that flashed across his satanic visage. The two dacoits with him sensed this and froze, disoriented by their master's strange hesitancy.

"You pursue me like the furies Savage." He said. His face quickly returning to its usual diabolic calm.

"An apt parallel." Doc replied and started forward. He stopped before he could take a full step, frozen in his tracks by the hypnotic force of the devil doctor's sheer personality.

"Your attempt at physical violence is useless." Fu Manchu hissed, "I am an adept of the school of Rache-Churan. I have mastered the secrets of animal magnetism. You are helpless before me."

Doc said nothing. He had wondered earlier how his own hypnotic prowess stacked up against the devil doctor's. Now he had his answer, and he didn't like it. Fu Manchu was overpowering him psychically just as certainly as he would have won a physical contest. Still, if he was unable to break free entirely he could focus all his resistance on a simple act.

Doc's left hand began to move. Sweat broke out on his face from the force of his concentration. He could feel Fu Manchu's will trying to stop him but hand continued to move. Inch by inch it slipped into his pocket and grasped the small object it found there. Moving just as slowly he brought his hand back out. He was drenched in sweat now, and perspiration had broken out on Fu Manchu's impassive features as well.

The progress was slower as he raised his arm to chest level, the object hidden in his clenched fist. Then, with a Herculean burst of will the bronze man opened his hand slightly and used his thumb to flick the thing at Fu Manchu.

The tiny object flashed brightly as it spun through the air. It was shooting straight towards the devil doctor's face. Fu Manchu stepped to the side and the object shot past him to land with a 'ping' on the hard floor. It was a silver dime.

Doc Savage started forward. Flipping the small coin through the air had been as difficult as any feat of strength he had ever performed. Fortunately it had worked. Fu Manchu had dropped his concentration and the man of bronze wasn't going to let him recover it. He barreled out of the elevator like an express train. Fu Manchu pulled

the Ericksen ray tube from his lab coat and pointed it at Doc, but he was too slow. A chopping blow smashed the weapon from his hand and sent it spinning, broken across the floor. Doc's charge bowled the older man over. He landed hard on his back with the bronze giant crouching on his chest.

Doc raised a mighty fist for the decisive blow, but it never fell. The two dacoits landed on him, knocking him off of their master. Ferocious under normal circumstances, they were berserk now as they defended the man they regarded as their master and their god.

The dacoits were adepts at the deadly Burmese fighting art of Bando. They were especially deadly at close quarters, where they had learned to use knee and elbow strikes to crippling effect. Doc shielded the best he could, absorbing bone-shattering impacts with his forearms and shins. He caught one of the dacoits with a short hook to the ribs and the man went down. Almost instantly, he was up again. His fanatical devotion to Fu Manchu seemed to make him impervious to physical pain.

Doc was at a loss. The dacoits weren't giving him enough opportunity to use his nerve pinch and normal attacks weren't working. He could almost certainly crush a windpipe or break a spine, but Doc had sworn never to kill. That was a personal rule he was loath to break, even in such extreme circumstances.

He let the two drive him back into the elevator cage. The cramped space limited even their close quarters fighting skills. Then he took a page from their book of tricks. His elbow caught the first dacoit across the chin, whipping his head to the side. The whiplash movement caused the man's brain to impact the inside of his skull, as it often does in a boxing knockout. Even the dacoit's berserker fury couldn't keep him conscious after that.

The second man launched his own strike, but Doc caught the elbow and spun him around backwards. Then he applied pressure to the nerve centers at the back of the neck and the dacoit went limp.

Doc rose. Outside the cage Fu Manchu faced him. His arsenal was expended, his lackeys gone but the Chinese doctor still stood with unflinching confidence. He looked like a king, calmly surveying the carnage of the room. Only the blazing hatred of his eyes revealed the emotions he felt.

The bronze man sensed the end was near. He took a step towards his enemy. Then the elevator doors closed.

Doc leaped forward, trying to catch the doors before they were sealed. He was a fraction of a second too late. He tried to work his fingers into the cracks of the door. Before he could make any headway the cage lurched and began its speedy descent.

Chapter Thirty-Eight Leap of Faith

"This is it." Renny muttered as the cage came to a stop. "Be ready for anything."

The doors opened to reveal Doc Savage and two unconscious dacoits.

"Doc!" Pat Savage cried joyfully.

"Well, I'll be superamalgamated." Johnny breathed.

"Get inside." Doc rapped, "Fu Manchu is on the floor just above us."

"You are a sight for sore eyes!" Long Tom said as the group piled into the small car.

"The Ericksen dampener?" Doc asked.

"Done." Long Tom answered. "Now all we need is a good thunderstorm."

"We have that." The bronze man replied.

Doc Savage reached out a cabled hand to touch the pulse at Lotus Ling's throat. His face turned grim.

"Can you help her?" Stephen was doing his best to keep his emotions in check but there was raw pain in his voice.

"I'll do everything I can."

The car came to a stop and the door opened. The corridor was empty.

"Spread out." Doc rapped, "He can't get back into the laboratory without taking down the barrier he's using. He must still be here somewhere. Be careful, he is the most dangerous man we have ever fought."

The friends spread out as directed and began combing every inch of the corridor. They had gone more than

halfway down when Pat cried out.

"The elevator!"

The doors were closing on what seemed to be an empty cage.

"The Vortland lamp!" Doc cried, "He slipped past us using his invisibility device."

He raced to the elevator doors, the others hard on his heels. The cage was already speeding down to the hidden submarine base.

"Let's pry off the panel." Long Tom suggested. "I bet we can short-circuit it and strand him."

Doc shook his head. In his mission to bring evildoers to justice he had never faced a more dangerous and resourceful foe. It was his sworn duty to stop Fu Manchu, but there was another oath he had taken that was, to him, even more sacred.

"Mrs. Ling has to be our first priority right now. There is an excellent medical facility on the other side of the compound but we have to get her there as quickly as possible.

The small group headed back down the corridor. They had nearly reached the laboratory door when there was a blinding flash. A sheet of white light filled the room and the floor pitched and rolled.

Doc recovered first from the temporary blindness the lightning had caused. He was mildly surprised to discover that he could see in the corridor. The lights had exploded with the tremendous electrical surge, but part of the ceiling had been torn away and an almost unbroken string of lightning bolts illuminated the room. In the erratic brilliance they could see that the section of the corridor leading to the laboratory had caved in.

"How do we get out?" Renny bawled. Even his big voice was nearly lost in the constant din of thunder.

"Follow me!" Doc cried back. "Be careful, the inside of the mountain is crumbling into the cave."

The man of bronze moved as swiftly as he darted back to where the elevator shaft had been. Now there was only a gaping hole in the center of the mountain. Doc thought he could see the gleam of water in the anchorage far below.

"Doc!" Long Tom screamed, "We have to find a way out. After a strike like that it's only a matter of time before the generators blow. They'll send out a wave of Ericksen radiation that will disintegrate the whole top of the mountain!"

"I know!" Doc called back. "All of you stand as close to the edge as you dare. I'll be right back."

Then he leaped out into the darkness and was swallowed by the abyss.

"He didn't really just do that, did he?" Stephen Ling asked.

As Doc fell, he angled his body like a parachutist, trying to position himself as close to the center of the water as he could manage. He remembered hearing that striking water from such a great height was akin to landing on a steel floor.

While there was a grain of truth to that adage, Doc knew that it was actually more complicated than that. A falling body didn't continue to speed up forever. After a relatively short distance, it would reach terminal velocity. How fast that was depended a lot on how much surface area it presented. According to Doc's experiments, a limp body would reach terminal velocity at something like a hundred and sixty miles per hour. A diver who went headfirst and kept his body as streamlined as possible could reach speeds of over two hundred miles an hour. On the other hand, a falling person who flattened his body out could increase wind drag so much that his top speed was no more than a hundred and twenty.

Doc was traveling at about that speed right now. It was roughly twice as fast as the velocity of the famous cliff divers in Acapulco. If he could maintain this attitude until the last possible moment then go into a diving position he might survive. His only problem was judging the moment to switch positions in the blackness of the cavern. If he were off by even a fraction of a second, the fall would kill him.

Of course he would also be killed if the water wasn't deep enough, or if he hit at the wrong angle and broke his neck, or if he missed the water entirely and hit rock. But those weren't things he had any influence over, so he tried not to think about them.

The lightning flashed above and Doc saw it reflected from a dark surface close beneath him. He twisted his body into a diving position an instant before the impact.

Doc Savage hit the surface about as perfectly as humanly possible. Despite that, the impact was enough to cause him to black out. He awoke underwater to the realization that he had lost most of his air and swallowed a lot of water. He also had no idea which direction was up.

Even with his years of disciplined training, the bronze man nearly panicked. With a great effort he kept his body still and breathed a little of his precious air out. The bubbles drifted towards his feet so he knew that must be 'up.' He shifted his body and headed towards the surface with powerful strokes.

It seemed endless. The impact with the black water had forced most of the air from his lungs. His arms felt like lumps of lead and his lungs throbbed. He had no idea how far it was to the surface but he realized that he had only seconds left before he would pass out. Doc's head broke the surface as a flash of lightning illuminated the subterranean lake. The flash revealed a buoy a short distance away. He paddled to it and clung there for several minutes as he recovered his strength.

Doc later found out that the buoy marked an area of the cove that was so deep even Fu Manchu's technology hadn't been able to find its bottom. At the moment he only knew that the floating marker had saved his life.

In the intermittent lighting, Doc saw several of the 'sharks' cruising aimlessly. He guessed that they were still inside the crumbling mountain because Nayland Smith's forces had succeeded in blocking the exit.

One was drifting about thirty yards from Doc's position. He struck out towards it and reached it in a few minutes. The hatch was open and a crewman was sticking his head out. The man was gazing at the cave ceiling. Doc guessed he was watching for falling rocks, though the idea that such an activity could keep the vessel safe was absurd.

He slid out of the water onto the deck of the 'shark.' The lookout was too engrossed in the storm and crumbling rock overhead. He wasn't aware of anyone close to him until powerful bronze fingers applied a paralyzing pressure to the back of his neck.

Doc dropped the man down the hatch and jumped in after him. There were only two others in the vessel, the captain and an engineer. The ship must have left the dock too quickly to have waited for the full crew.

The captain pulled a gun only to have it plucked from his grasp. A stiff-armed shove forced him back in his seat. The engineer had a wrench in his hand but the sight of the bronze giant was too much for him. The wrench fell to the deck with a clatter and the man raised his hands.

"Listen carefully." Doc rapped, "I will try to get all of us out of here safely but I need your help."

"What must we do?" the engineer asked in a German accent.

"I assume there is a set of governors on the swainsten disc." The man of bronze said.

"Yes, of course. Without them our ability to submerge or to surface would be uncontrolled."

"The swainsten disc is quite powerful, isn't it?" Doc asked, "Much more powerful than is required simply to surface?"

"Ja." The engineer agreed, "We use a disc that is more than a dozen times as powerful as those in the 'bats.'"

"Then we must disconnect the governors at once!"

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Flight of the Shark

"Pat, get away from the edge." Long Tom snapped, "You're going to fall."

"Nuts to you." Pat Savage shouted back, and leaned a little farther over the sheer cliff.

"He's right Pat." Renny said, "That's not going to do any good."

"We are relegated to a station of reposeful cognizance." Johnny agreed.

"Watching and waiting may be fine for you." She retorted, "but I'm not made that way."

As if to demonstrate, Pat leaned out even further over the abyss, then gave a cry of terror as the rock under of one of her hands crumbled away and she started to tumble headlong. Renny lunged forward, catching Pat's ankle in one massive hand and hauled her back to safe footing.

"Holy cow Pat, you're going to give us all a heart attack."

"Sorry," Pat muttered, "I just can't help worrying about Doc.

Whatever rabbit he's got up his sleeve this time he'd better hurry. This place isn't going to hold together much longer."

Renny and Johnny exchanged gloomy looks. Though neither man would say so they believed the worst. They had seen Doc Savage take million-to-one chances many times in the past. Somehow the bronze man's luck and skill had always managed to see him through. But this time the odds were more than a million to one. Even if Doc had survived his insane dive, there was nothing he could do to rescue them.

Long Tom, in the meanwhile was making to make himself useful. He had found a place where rainwater was flowing down the cave wall. The pallid scientist had removed his undershirt and soaked it in the stream. Now he brought it to Stephen Ling, who accepted it gratefully and squeezed a few drops into his wife's mouth.

The cold water helped to revive the woman. She opened her eyes and tried to sit up, but the effort defeated her.

"Stephen?" she whispered.

"I'm here."

"I can't see anything."

He passed his hand in front of her eyes but there was no reaction.

"Don't worry about that right now." He said, "We're going to get you out of here."

"When Doc comes back he'll be able to help." Pat Savage chipped in.

"No." Lotus whispered, "There's no time."

Stephen shushed his wife.

"Don't talk like that." Stephen's voice was gentle but stern. It was a tone he had practiced on patients over the years when he had tried to give them the hope to go on.

"There is something I must ask." Lotus Ling's voice was weaker now.

"It can wait."

"No," she said, "I need to know if you can forgive my past."

"I can forgive you anything." He replied. "I love you."

"I've hurt so many people."

"Holy cow Mrs. Ling." Renny said, "I've seen the worst you've done and I don't hold it against you."

"You're a different person now." Pat added.

"And a swell one to boot." Said Long Tom.

"A unanimous sentiment." Johnny chimed in.

"Thank you." The petite woman whispered. Tears had come to her eyes.

"Stephen?"

"What is it Little Flower?"

"Do you regret..." her voice trailed off before she could finish.

"I regret nothing!" he said fiercely, "I don't regret a single moment with you!"

But Lotus Ling was beyond hearing anything.

In the silence that followed Pat looked over the edge again.

"What the devil?"

Her startled exclamation brought Renny and Johnny to the edge with her. Far below they could see something rising from the darkness. As it grew closer they could see it was an oblong metal shape.

"Veritably an enigmatic apparition." The bony archaeologist observed.

"It looks almost like a flying submarine." The big engineer replied.

"It's Doc!" Pat cried, "It has to be!"

As the object drew closer the hatch opened and Doc Savage's upper body appeared.

"I'm throwing you a line." He rapped, "Make it fast right away, I can't control the `shark's ascension."

The aides caught the rope and attached it to a solid outcropping. The ship came to a stop and bobbed like a balloon on a string.

"You'll have to climb up!" Doc called.

Pat Savage laid a hand on Stephen Ling's shoulder.

"I'm sorry." She said gently, "We'll have to leave her."

The young doctor nodded. He kissed his wife's forehead and laid her on the cavern floor. Then he joined the others as they climbed the rope and entered the bizarre craft. When the rope was cut the `shark' drifted up through the hole and into the storm. They had floated a short distance when the Ericksen generators exploded, vaporizing the top of the mountain and the remains of Fu Manchu's laboratory. The shockwave caught the tiny craft and sent it tumbling end over end through the stormy sky.

Chapter Thirty-Five **A Last Message**

The vessel drifted half a dozen miles before Doc and Long Tom discovered how to bring it safely to the ground. Doc had caused the submarine to float by releasing all of the anti-gravity power of the swainsten disc. It was just a matter of adapting the `dive' controls for the greater power the disc generated without the governors that usually kept it in check.

It was only a short time before a troop of Haitian militia found them and reported their location to the English-American-Haitian task force under Sir Denis Nayland Smith. Sir Denis gave orders that the group was to be returned to their hotel in Port au Prince where he would debrief them the following morning.

Nayland Smith was a tall, lean man with iron gray hair whose skin was nearly as sun-bronzed as Doc's. His manner was somewhat off-putting as he barked out questions in sentence fragments, but Doc sensed he was a man of great intelligence and dedication.

Smith was frankly astounded at what had happened behind the scenes.

"Took too many risks." The British official barked at Doc. "Should have informed me of operation."

Sir Denis subsided when Doc reminded him that he had been under strict orders from the US government to tell no one. Even his men had been kept in the dark. His only confidante had been John Thunstone.

"Doesn't matter I suppose." Smith clipped, "The important thing is that Fu Manchu is dead. My work is over at long last.

Doc said nothing. He wished he could be as certain of the devil doctor's demise but he wasn't. Thunstone had reported that Queen Mamaloi had been snatched from her guards by what the Marines described as an invisible force. The bronze man thought it would have been easy for Fu Manchu to have followed the troops out of the secret path into the cave. For that matter, he could have taken one of the `sharks' and used the Ericksen ray to carve his way through Smith's blockade.

After the debriefing Doc Savage sought out Stephen Ling. The young doctor was sitting by himself on the terrace gazing in the direction of the shattered cap of the mountain where the San Damian Sisal Company had stood. A folded letter was in his hand.

"I am very sorry I could not help your wife." The bronze man said.

Stephen smiled sadly.

"You're the second person to apologize to me in two days." He said, "I don't blame you for what happened to Lotus any more than I blame her for her past. It's just so hard to lose her again.

Doc nodded.

"This is from Fu Manchu." Stephen said, holding out the letter. "It was waiting for me at the hotel."

Doc took the note and read it.

Dr. Ling,

I am pleased that you have survived our encounter. You are a gallant foe and I admire your

integrity. Our homeland has need of men like you in her continuing struggle for freedom. I regret the passing of your wife. I know it means little to you to hear that she was the most prized of all my female agents, but I say it anyway. In her memory I give you a parting gift. When she was living under the identity of Lo Lar, she had a daughter. She lost the child shortly before Doc Savage brought an end to High Lar's schemes and believed her dead. I have recently learned that the girl is alive and is being raised as the next priestess of the Feathered Octopus. I would return her to you, but the cult has severed all ties to the Si Fan. Though we have been enemies, I bear you no ill will. You the word of Fu Manchu that my men shall not molest you or your family again. I wish you good fortune in your life.

The note was sealed with a mark that Doc Savage recognized as the seal of the Si Fan.

"What will you do?" The bronze man asked.

"I would like to stay here awhile Stephen replied. Then I would like to try to find Lotus's daughter.

"I will do everything in my power to aid you." Doc promised.

Doc Savage remained on the island himself for a few days after his aides left. He explained that he had some unfinished business.

"Watch yourself Doc." Pat Savage had warned, "They never found that Bigomba character. If he's around I'm not sure even you could handle him. He's a lot bigger than you and is an amazing fighter.

Doc nodded but didn't reply. He was keenly embarrassed by his imposture and hoped that Pat and the others never found out.

Actually it was as Bigomba that he wanted to finish his business. He had manipulated the people of Haiti. It had only been to stop the threat of Fu Manchu, but that didn't ease his conscience.

For the next few days Bigomba made appearances at the major voodoo gatherings across the island. His message was always the same. He had come to help free the people of the leadership of Queen Mamaloi and her bogus god, Damballa. Having done that, it was time for him to depart, never to return. It was now the people's responsibility to guard themselves against outsiders who would come to exploit them and their religion.

Postlude

At many times in his life, Rowley Thorne had benefited from his instinct to get out while the getting was good. Now, he thought, it was time to get out of Haiti.

The big man was carrying several suitcases, which were packed with all of the most valuable things he possessed. If the customs inspectors caught a look at some of the art treasures in the cases they would have locked Thorne away for a very long time. Fortunately, he was adept with a well-placed bribe.

"Rowley Thorne!" called a voice.

Thorne's big bald head swiveled in the direction of the speaker. He saw two men striding towards him. One was tall and gaunt, the other of more normal proportions.

"It's been too long." The gaunt man said, extending his hand and offering a smile that held all the warmth of an undertaker's.

Thorne shook the hand, recognizing the man as he did.

"Since that serpent ring fiasco in New York," he replied, "It's good to see you again von Altmann."

"This is my associate, Dr. Sangre." Von Altman said indicating the shorter man with him. "I know Mr. Thorne through our mutual interest in the Thule Society."

"Heil Hitler!" said Sangre, extending his arm in salute rather than accepting Thorne's extended hand.

The bald man made an ugly frown.

"Mr. Thorne isn't a party member." Von Altmann explained, "His interest in the occult is academic, not political."

"I meant no offense." Sangre said.

"I'm not offended in the least by your politics." Thorne replied, "I'm just used to having my hand shaken when I offer it."

"Forgive my rudeness." Sangre's tone was chilly, but he did shake Thorne's hand.

"Running into you was a stroke of luck!" von Altmann said. "I'd heard you had spent several years here studying the local Voodoo. That's what Sangre and I are down here to do as well."

"We believe certain aspects of the practice may be useful in our cause." Sangre added. "Particularly the making of zombies. We'd be grateful if you would see fit to add your expertise to our efforts."

"I'm sorry gentlemen," Thorn replied. "But I am leaving Haiti today. Things have turned sour here for my type of research."

"What do you mean?" von Altmann asked.

"There was quite a stir here over the last few weeks." Rowley Thorne said. "A woman called Queen Mamaloi had wrapped up all of the Voodoo groups in the area but she disappeared mysteriously. Her biggest rival, a man called Bigomba, made a big speech after that.

He told the people that the loa had punished Queen Mamaloi because she wasn't African. He said that the people have been giving away their Voodoo secrets to the white men for too long. He told them that, if they ever taught the secrets to another outsider, the loa would turn away from them.

"That's why I'm leaving. The mood here has gotten ugly. It isn't safe for a white man who's interested in learning about casting curses or making zombies anymore. If you take my advice gentlemen, you'll leave too. Try your plans in this climate and you'll come to a bad end, I guarantee it."

"But, we've come so far." Von Altman protested, "We can't turn back without even trying."

"That's your affair." Thorne said brusquely, "I've said my piece, now I've got a plane to catch. Good day gentlemen, and good luck."

They watched him go. After several moments, von Altmann spoke.

"Do you suppose he's right?"

"It doesn't matter." Sangre replied, "We have a mission to perform. If we don't do it Germany will be much more dangerous for us than Haiti could ever be."

"But the Haitians," von Altmann complained. "How can we succeed if they won't tell us anything?"
"Come, come my friend." Sangre said with a thin smile, "We have ways of making them talk."