

ZANIGEW THE KILLER

by Rick Lai

© 2007 Rick Lai rlai@optonline.net

An often overlooked adversary of The Shadow is Zanigew. Possessing a skull-like visage and a gigantic physique, Zanigew was the only other opponent to equal Shiwan Khan in ambition and ability. Although he only appeared in one novel, *Shadow over Alcatraz* (December 1, 1938), his grandiose plan to establish a criminal empire by liberating the elite prisoners of Alcatraz was one of the most devastating schemes foiled by the Knight of Darkness. The probable origins of this unforgettable mastermind need to be explored.

Walter Gibson, The Shadow's biographer, revealed nothing concerning Zanigew's antecedents. Certain hints imply some connection between this super-criminal and London, the city where Sherlock Holmes fought an earlier Napoleon of Crime, Professor Moriarty. However, there is a closer parallel between Zanigew and another mastermind whose rise to prominence after the death of Holmes's nemesis in 1891. This English criminal is Harry Killer, the villain in one of Jules Verne's lesser known works,

The aptly named Killer is depicted in Verne's *The Barsac Mission* (1919), which was published after the author's death in 1905. The book was translated into English by I. O. Evans and published by Arco Publishers as two volumes in 1960: *Into the Niger Bend* and *The City in the Sahara*. Paperback editions of these books were printed by Ace Books.

There are several physical similarities between Zanigew and Killer. Both were huge muscular men. Facially, each possessed a wide forehead, a square jaw, inwardly caving cheeks, and brilliant eyes. On the other hand, Zanigew had thin eyebrows and straight tight lips while Killer had bristling eyebrows and thick lips. Zanigew's face gave the eerie impression of a Napoleonic death's-head, but Killer's denoted a wild beast in human form.

While neither Zanigew nor Killer was a scientific genius, they both demonstrated the ability to recognize technical advances. Although others scoffed at a rain-producing machine that created fog, Zanigew stole it because this device would construct the perfect camouflage for a ship sailing in fog-laden waters. The shrewd felon also utilized an invention designed to disperse fog for the opposite purpose of dispensing it, and quickly grasped the offensive capabilities of a sleep-inducing nerve gas and an electrical field generator. In Africa, Killer encountered an absent-minded French engineer, Marcel Camaret, who dreamt of conquering the air and controlling the weather. Most people regarded Camaret as a crank, but Killer deduced him to be a brilliant savant. With Killer's financial backing, Camaret not only built rocket-propelled missiles and helicopter-like aircraft but also a rain-making machine. Unlike the invention purloined by Zanigew, Camaret's creation actually caused rain to fall from the clouds.

There are correlations between the criminal empires envisioned by the two miscreants. The Shadow's Napoleon of Crime sought to recruit the inmates of Alcatraz as his Marshals. From a ship armed with scientific devices, Zanigew and his followers would have plundered the banking centers of London and New York. With Camaret's machines, Killer was able to construct Blackland, a city covering twelve hundred square miles, on an African location that had once been an arid desert incapable of supporting

human life. To this citadel, Killer invited leading European crime figures to serve as his lieutenants. Three or four times a year, Killer and his cohorts left Africa by steamer to institute a series of daring raids on the banking houses of England and other European nations.

Both men were megalomaniacs who delighted in the inducement of fear into those unfortunates who had fallen into their power. In dealing with their captives, these criminals suffered from overconfidence. Zanigew foolishly failed to impose severe restrictions on the movements of The Shadow's allies when he held them prisoner on his ship. Thus, Harry Vincent and Vic Marquette were in a position to provide valuable assistance to The Shadow when he crashed through Zanigew's defenses in a specially insulated autogiro. By comparison, Killer allowed a captured French expedition almost unhampered movement in Blackland. This enabled the explorers to stir up a revolt among the African workers enslaved in Blackland and to turn the eccentric Camaret against Killer.

Camaret unleashed a series of explosions which leveled Blackland. Killer's dreams of power were seemingly ended for all time when one of the blasts caused the tower upon which he was standing to collapse. Did Killer truly meet his end, or did he survive to adopt the alias of Zanigew and combat The Shadow? The Voodoo Master, an opponent of lesser caliber than Zanigew, was able to physically withstand a similar holocaust in *City of Doom* (May 15, 1936) and confront The Shadow in *Voodoo Trail* (June 1, 1938). Although he withstood the destruction of Blackland, Zanigew, like the Voodoo Master, was physically scarred. This explains how Killer's bestial face had evolved into Zanigew's skeletal countenance.

Verne disclosed only a few facts about Killer's parents. The real name of the diabolical felon was William Ferney. His father had served as an officer in the British navy. After his father's death, William's mother, Marguerite, married a widower named Lord Blazon. The young Ferney detested his step-father and devoted his life to victimizing Blazon's natural children.

Before accepting the Zanigew-Killer identification, there are two obstacles to overcome. The first is Killer's alcoholism. Zanigew was a master of self-control and displayed no signs of addictive vices. Undoubtedly, Killer attributed the Blackland fiasco partially to his abuse of alcohol. He was able to curb his indulgence in his later illegal endeavors. It may be significant that there was no mention of Zanigew partaking of the alcoholic beverages at the feast given for the escapees of Alcatraz.

The second barrier which needs to be broken is the age discrepancy between Killer and Zanigew. Killer was about forty-five in Verne's narrative. This would put Zanigew in at least his seventies when he met The Shadow. No man so elderly could engage The Shadow in deadly hand-to-hand combat as Zanigew did. At least one other contemporary super-criminal, Fu Manchu, had found a method of retarding the aging process. Could not the same be true of Zanigew?

For the secret of Zanigew's remarkable longevity, let us take note of a pair of ape-like henchmen that he dispatched against The Shadow. Isaac Coffran, the villain of *The Eyes of The Shadow* (July 1931) and *The Shadow Laughs* (October 1931), also employed a simian underling in his first battle with the cloaked avenger. According to *Shadow over Alcatraz*, Zanigew had figured as a hidden force in some of The Shadow's earlier cases.

The usage of anthropoid subordinates by Coffran and Zanigew implies that the former was a subordinate of the latter.

Zanigew's ape-men remind the reader of the bizarre inhabitants of the lost city of Opar in the Tarzan novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Could Zanigew have visited Opar and recruited some local denizens to serve him? If Zanigew had found Opar, he could have also stumbled across other African lost cities from the Tarzan series. *Tarzan's Quest* (1936) was concerned with immortality pills manufactured in a hidden civilization. Perhaps Harry Killer discovered these pills and lived long enough to fight The Shadow as Zanigew. Even if Zanigew unearthed the secret of immortality, he did not discover a means of invulnerability. Falling from the bridge of his ship, Zanigew's long life of evil may have flashed before his eyes prior to his massive skull being crushed as it struck the deck.