

WINTER  
20¢



# JUNGLE STORIES



**KI-GOR - JUNGLE LORD**  
IN A BIG COMPLETE NOVEL  
**STALKERS OF THE DAWN-WORLD**

NOVELETS OF WEIRD AFRICAN ADVENTURE  
by WINDHAM MARTIN • PAUL SELONKE





**BRIDAL  
SET  
\$38<sup>50</sup>**

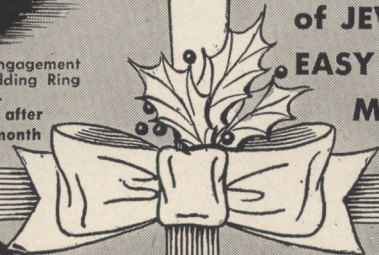
A85—Lovely 5 Diamond Engagement Ring and 5 Diamond Wedding Ring Set. Both 14K yellow gold.

Send \$1, pay \$11.83 after examination, \$5 a month

# Christmas Gifts

## of JEWELRY

**EASY TO BUY • MONTHS TO PAY  
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE**



**\$29<sup>75</sup>**

T606—15 jewel Benrus. 10K yellow rolled gold plate case.

Send \$1, pay \$8.92 after examination, \$5 a month



**\$42<sup>50</sup>**

T715—15 jewel Benrus. Tiny 10K coral rolled gold plate case, bracelet.

Send \$1, pay \$13.17 after examination, \$5 a month



**\$29<sup>75</sup>**

O605—Man's 15 jewel Benrus. 10K yellow rolled gold plate case.

Send \$1, pay \$8.92 after examination, \$5 a month



**\$39<sup>75</sup>**

O702—17 jewel Benrus. 10K coral rolled gold plate case.

Send \$1, pay \$12.25 after examination, \$5 a month

**SEND \$1 with COUPON—pay BALANCE  
OF 1/3 DOWN AFTER EXAMINATION**

**JIM FEENEY**

L. W. Sweet, 25 West 14th St. (Dept. 833-S)  
New York, N. Y.

Enclosed find \$1 deposit. Send me No. \_\_\_\_\_

Price \$\_\_\_\_\_. After examination, I agree to

pay \$\_\_\_\_\_ and \$5.00 monthly thereafter

until full price is paid, otherwise I'll return selection  
and you will refund my dollar.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

This Christmas you can give worthwhile gifts... a quality diamond, a fine watch or some article of jewelry. I will send your choice of any of these features for examination and 15 day trial. Just indicate your selection on the coupon below, giving number and price and send it with brief note telling me who you are, your occupation, draft classification, age and a few other facts about yourself.

I'll open an account for you and send selection by express subject to your examination. If satisfied, you pay the expressman the balance of the 1/3 Down Payment (required by Federal Regulations); otherwise, return the selection and your \$1 will be refunded. Shop early... orders promptly filled... all prices include Federal Tax. Send your order to me personally.

**FREE TO ADULTS:** A postcard brings our complete catalogue with diamonds, watches, and jewelry. Free and without obligation.



**\$59<sup>50</sup>**

A317—Quality Diamond Engagement Ring. 14K yellow or 18K white gold. Mention choice.

Send \$1, pay \$18.83 after examination, \$5 a month



**\$22**

I546—10K yellow gold Service Ring. Secret locket for picture. Any insignia. Mention choice.

Send \$1, pay \$6.33 after examination, \$5 a month



**\$44**

D201—Man's Twin Ring. 2 Diamonds and simulated ruby or sapphire. 14K yellow gold.

Send \$1, pay \$13.33 after examination, \$5 a month



**both  
\$19<sup>95</sup>**

E627—Matching Wedding Rings for Bride and Groom. 14K yellow gold.

Send \$1, pay \$5.65 after examination, \$5 a month

# L.W. Sweet

MAIL ORDER DIVISION OF FINLAY STRAUS, Inc.

Dept **833-S** 25 WEST 14th ST., NEW YORK



THIS IS A MAGAZINE OF FICTION. THE CHARACTERS NAMED AND INCIDENTS DESCRIBED DO NOT REFER TO ANY ACTUAL PERSON

# JUNGLE STORIES



T. T. SCOTT, President MALCOLM REISS, Editor

## A BOOK-LENGTH STARTLINGLY-DIFFERENT KI-GOR ADVENTURE

### STALKERS OF THE DAWN-WORLD . . John Peter Drummond 3

Out of the dim past that weird world had come, peopled with its deathless guardians, ruled by a brutal god that jungle weapons could not slay. Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, had to battle that ancient deity with bare hands—and if he failed to win, Helene, his golden mate, and the marooned passengers of a crashed Handley Page were doomed to die.

## TWO THRILLING NOVELETS OF AFRICAN INTRIGUE

### TERROR TREK . . . . . H. M. Sutherland 52

Captain Daunt was stalking a murderer straight into the lair of the ivory giants, knowing his first misstep would make him the hunted, his life forfeit to a killer.

### LUTEMBE THE AVENGER . . . . . Wyndham Martyn 86

A single white man and a lonely white boy were the only obstacles between a madman and his dreams of jungle empire — They and Lutembe The Avenger.

## THREE SHORT STORIES OF JUNGLE TERROR

### THE HEADSMEN OF BESTIANA . . . . . Paul Selonke 74

Bill Jagger could not retreat, to turn his back meant a girl would perish.

### MURDERER'S MOON . . . . . E. Hoffman Price 105

Ghost-men stalked Lamar's trail—and his only weapons were fifty crimson coats.

### THE FLAMING GOD . . . . . Francis Gerard 119

Sanders had to capture a god—a being whose body burned with a heatless flame.

Winter Issue, 1943-1944  
Vol. 2, No. 9



20c per copy



THIS IS A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE

JUNGLE STORIES: Published quarterly by Glen-Kel Pub. Co., Inc., 461 Eighth Ave., New York, N. Y. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted 1943 by Glen-Kel Pub. Co., Inc. All rights reserved. For advertising rates address: THE NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.  
Printed in U. S. A.





★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BUY WAR BONDS



# **STALKERS OF THE DAWN-WORLD**

*by* **JOHN PETER DRUMMOND**



**Into that weird empire of the undead, defying its ancient vicious guardians, came Ki-Gor and his lovely mate, Helene. Defeated once, Helene doomed to be a helpless sacrifice to a deathless living god, the Jungle Warrior fought his greatest battle—and found death waiting, for himself, win or lose.**

**A THRILLINGLY-NEW BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL**





*Ki-Gor strained with mighty strength, lifted Grankando high.*





# STALKERS OF THE DAWN-WORLD

By **JOHN PETER DRUMMOND**

*A complete novel of weird adventure in a land that time forgot*

**T**HE MOUNTAIN rose bleakly, its greyish-black sides sullen and brooding, from the cool greenness of the tangled jungle at its base. It towered high,

springing up and up, as though it were a lone sentinel standing guard over all of the rolling jungle and lush plains that were the Congo of Central Africa.



It was *Kagunda*, The Mountain of Death.

Scrubby trees and bushes greyed the rocky sides, like the ragged whiskers of an aged giant; and the clouds that eternally wreathed its top were the tangled hair above a craggy featureless face.

It had been there, since time began, its black pock eyes seeing the life that existed in the jungle below, its rugged features blurring through the centuries as it held against the blasting fury of tropical storms, becoming more sullen and austere as the ages passed.

It was *Kagunda*, and many were the whispered tales that cloaked its stone sides. It was worshipped by the superstitious, and many were those who had trod dim jungle trails to do it homage at its base. It was death—for never had any returned from his pilgrimage.

Except one man—and when he thought of it, his face greyed and he fingered a counter-juju against *Gimshai*, the Eater of Souls.

And now *Kagunda* stood, its blind eyes watching the flickering of silver lightning across the sky; and the cottony clouds roiled about its head as though the hoary evil monster laughed at what was to come.

A hush had come to the air, stillness pressed with visible force against the lush green jungle below; and the animals paced with nervous steps, their narrowed eyes flickering upward through the tangled branches to where the blue heavens had taken on the dull tones of silted lake water.

A lion coughed uneasily, snarled with a side-snatch of white-fanged jaws at the rustling of a *kalchi*-bush nearby; and its mate ceased the tonguing of her yellow kitten to snarl a second challenge. A *vanka* lizard thrust a red and purple head through the brush, watched with beady intent eyes, then flicked away to safety on soundless feet.

THE ROLL of thunder drifted in, like the echo of a storm once heard, then grew louder with each passing second. An elephant lifted its muscled trunk, bellowed a bull-roar at the jungle pressing about him, then shouldered his way toward the grassy plain a mile away.

A *colubus* monkey climbed through silent leaves, huddled against its mate in the hollow of a limb, whimpered a bit in

fear, then flared in sudden squalling rage as another white-ruffed male tried to invade the hollow.

Then there was silence in the darkening jungle again, and the storm sense pressed even harder upon the trees. Animals skulked where once they had walked, slinking toward hidden lairs where safety lay. Lightning flared brighter in the greying sky, smashing soundlessly for a silver moment, then disappearing, and growling thunder came rolling in its wake.

The first light flickers of rain came sifting down, spattering dust in tiny soundless pouts into the air, then coming thicker and heavier until the air was a shimmering curtain of water that rustled green leaves and glided into thirsty brown hollows of the earth.

And then from the east came a new thunder, droning at a different pitch, drilling an alien, man-made sound into the African storm.

A giraffe wheeled on the tiny grassy plain, stared in voiceless alarm, ran with the gangling awkward run of its kind toward the herd-safety of other giraffe near the center of the clearing. They swung graceful heads, stared with widened eyes at the strange winged object that fled toward them through the growing storm, then huddled together, forgetting that which had startled them, in the silent deception of the moment.

And high above the earth, the Handley Page rode the twisting currents, driving into the west, the song of its motors a ragged beating of sound against the solid drumming of the storm.

There was no sunlight now, only the oily greyness of twilight, and the fury of the elements was boiling to its bursting point with the unequalled rapidity of all African storms. Thunderheads massed, merged, then disintegrated in a flooding cascade of water that fought the fleeing plane as though it were a cottony wall that had to be slashed aside by sheer force.

The Handley Page crashed its way through the thickening curtain of rain, climbing higher by the second, trying to clear the top of the storm, slowly beating its way to the level of storm clouds.

And one motor blanked out.

It was as sudden as that. One second, there was a twin vibration, the next, one



motor roared alone. And with that break in sound, the plane sank in a twisting spiral, almost out of control. The equilibrium came again; but the plane still sank, as though seeking a landing spot somewhere in the tangled jungle below.

It halved the distance to the watching mountain ahead, speeding over the soaked jungle, seemed to hesitate above the single tiny clearing, then sped ahead as though it knew the grassy plain was too small for a landing.

Thunder laughed in the sky, and the lightning smashed streaks of ragged brilliance through the churning air. The pounding rain was an almost impenetrable curtain that billowed back from the driving plane, but which was always there, pushing the air-borne creature closer and closer to earth.

And still the plane drove forward, like a blind black bug darting toward a source of yellow heat-light, hugging the solidity of the jungle, its single motor barely powerful enough to speed it along. It was tossed again and again, as though the storm played with a drifting leaf, and the exhausts were flares of red against the grey-ness of the rain. Still it drove forward, smashing toward the single mountain that lay in its path, like a blind beast going amuck, not caring what it crushed aside.

AND THEN the mountain rose into all of its sheer black terrifying might; and intelligence came to the plane. It swung about wildly, as though realizing the implacable danger that lay ahead, tried to flee about the base of the scarred monolith.

But there was no denying the storm now; it caught the trapped plane in a terrific upsurging of wind, threw it high into the darkened sky, twisting it like a flake of chaff, spinning it over and over with a giant's callous strength. It went up the side of the mighty mountain, so close at times that the merest side-twisting of the wind would have crumpled it instantaneously into pulverized wreckage.

But the storm was amusing itself with its insensate gargantuan strength; and the plane rode the side of the mountain without touching. The single motor roared a feeble defiance to the storm that pounded its crazed mirth at the world below, and

fought to free itself from the strangling currents of whipping air.

And a hundred feet below the eternal, roiling clouds, the plane broke free. Its crimson nose dipped a bit, then swung high, and the motor sang a triumphal paean of success. The Handley Page swung away from the grim grey mountain, fled toward the west again.

For a second it fled. For one infinitesimal instant of time it broke free and was its master.

And then the storm looped force at the plane, caught it in a strangling grasp, drew it out of sight in the twisting clouds that never left the top of Kagunda.

There was no crash; there was no sound other than the pounding roll of thunder across the skies. There was only the stillness of nothing at all to betoken the snatching of the plane from the land of the living. There were no oily flames, no keening shrilling of tortured metal ripping in a final plunge. There was nothing but the storm.

And then the storm, as though its purpose had been filled, faded away with the hell-speed of its burning. The silver lightning rode into the west, taking the ripping thunder at its side, and the clouds slowly dispersed over the jungle about the single mountain rearing from the plain.

Blueness came to the sky again, the leaden pall shifting westward toward the ocean, and the first trickles of sunlight came spearing through the tangled tree-tops.

Birds shifted on the boughs still bent with water, shifted and shook their close-locked green and scarlet plumage, trilled tentative rills of songs into the fresh-washed scented air.

Monkeys stirred in their lair-hollows, fright disappearing from their eyes. A lioness cuffed her shaggy mate playfully, then began the licking of her kitten's fur, while the kitten growled fearsomely over the discovery that its tiny tufted tail was a writhing menace.

A rogue elephant bellowed a challenge to the world, breasted a path through the belly-deep grass that grew so greenly-lush in the tiny clearing, watched with habitual ugliness of temper the graceful timid giraffe that turned soft brown eyes in his direction.



Ostriches came awkwardly to their feet from grass-wallows, shrugged water from their bodies, stalked the waves of grass distainfully, their cruel beady eyes searching for enemies, even as they fed themselves.

And over all hovered the blind menace of Kagunda, sated now with its storm-offering, its shadow eyes dark and fathomless, the white fleecy clouds rolling softly like the dreamy swaying of a cobra's head after its belly has been distended from feeding.

The plane was gone, flicked into nowhere with the callous indifference which Africa used on its denizens. And now Kagunda brooded over the green jungle below, watching it come alive again, sunlight shafting down to steal away the moisture which had battered with such swift torrential strength at the creeping forest growth.

*Kagunda ruled supreme.*

## I

LAUGHTER tinkled in the jungle glade, tinkled and gathered strength and drew a momentary flush of embarrassment to the bronzed face of Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle. He dangled the yard-long hunting arrow from the fingers of his right hand, ruefully inspected the broken lengths of gun dangling from either end of the gigantic war-bow in his left hand.

"Wah!" he said. "Water is not good for the sinews of the *klipvard* antelope." He flicked his grey eyes toward the bottom twisted limb of a great ironwood tree that shafted a hundred feet above his head, scowled in mock anger.

Helene dangled slender feet into the air, laughed again, her hair a golden-red swirl of lovely brightness about her tanned features. She braced herself with spread palms upon the rough bark of the branch, blue eyes twinkling down into the grey eyes of her mate forty feet below.

"Ki-Gor the Mighty! Ki-Gor the Invincible! Wah! He is a man-boy showing off before his woman-girl. Breaking a bowstring! La! La!"

Her laughter tinkled richly in the moist warm air, and her even teeth were star-

tingly white against the poppy redness of her soft mouth.

Ki-Gor replaced the arrow in the quiver on his broad back, removed the strands of string from his bow. Bracing the bow against his bare leg, he broke the gut between his hands, muscles ridging his arms and wrists from the strain. The cords popped loudly, and he cast them aside in disdain.

He turned toward the camp at the far end of the glade, then leaped with the graceful agility of a great cat, climbed the dangling liana with the speed of a playful monkey.

"Wah!" he said menacingly. "I shall teach a woman to laugh at her man."

He was almost at the lower limb of the tree, his keen eyes sparkling with amusement, before Helene could come to her feet. Then she balanced easily, waiting for him to get close enough that his fingers *might* brush her slender ankle.

"I need no teaching, smartie," Helene laughed, and was gone on the swinging length of another vine.

She was a graceful wood-sprite flitting through the streaks of golden sunlight that barred slantingly through the tangled branches overhead. Wind ruffled her hair, brought a flush to her cheeks, and her right hand waved tauntingly as she finished the swing to the branch of a *baobab* tree thirty feet away.

"Ant-eater!" she cried in derision.

Ki-Gor perched on the limb just vacated by Helene, and smiled in satisfaction. He dusted his hands ostentatiously, balanced on wide-spread feet.

"Where now?" he asked, grinned when he saw the sudden knowledge flicker in the girl's blue eyes.

For Helene could go no farther by swinging on vines. None was near, and the one she held would only swing her back to where Ki-Gor waited. Her only chance at escape lay in climbing through the trees; and in that Ki-Gor was much her master.

"Ki-Gor?" she began tentatively.

"No!"

"Please, Ki-Gor, I'm sorry I laughed."

Ki-Gor growled deep in his throat. "A man must beat his wife every day," he said implacably.

"Every day?"



"And twice a night."

"You wouldn't dare."

"We shall see." Ki-Gor edged along the limb, rounded the bole of the tree by crossing from limb to limb.

"Ki-Gor."

"No!"

And then Ki-Gor launched himself from the limb on which he stood. He went straight down, drawing his legs up a bit to cushion the shock of landing, his hands outspread for balance. He dropped squarely to the springy branch fifteen feet below, rode its whiplike strength another two feet down, then shot high into the air again, carried there by the spring of the steely wood. His right hand grasped a slender branch, guided and aided his flight; his left hand caught at a sturdier branch, held, then flipped him gracefully to a limb five feet below the one on which Helene stood. Easily, regaining his balance with a delicate precision, he reached up, locked his fingers about the slender ankles of his wife.

"Smartie!" he echoed Helene's word and tone of a moment before.

And jerked her from the limb.

HELENE screamed involuntarily, twisted like a falling cat. And Ki-Gor reached out casually, tensing against the weight of her body, brought her into the circle of his arms.

"Oh, Ki-Gor!" Helene said fearfully.

The jungle giant laughed, held her closely. "See," he said. "Some day I shall let you drop. Then I shall get another woman—and beat her every time she laughs."

Helene pouted, but the amusement in her blue eyes belied the twist of her mouth. "I hate you," she said coldly. "Let me go."

"All right," Ki-Gor said agreeably, loosened his hold.

And then they were tight against each other, for Helene had almost dropped. Her slender arms were about his neck, and he could feel the beating of her heart.

"I love you, Ki-Gor," Helene said simply, and they were alone in the jungle, meeting for the first time as they had so many months before.

He kissed her, almost roughly, frightened at the emotions that lay in his heart,

knowing that never could he find the words to express them.

Then she was laughing into his grey eyes, and the moment was over. She grasped the vine that still trailed from where she had hooked it on the branch overhead, tickled Ki-Gor impishly, and was gone from his grasp. She had swung from vine to vine, and was already half-way to the ground, before Ki-Gor moved.

Then he simply dropped through the tangled branches below, cushioning his series of drops with the mighty muscles of his columnar legs, guiding himself with flicks of his hands against slender branches. And he was waiting on the ground when Helene slid breathlessly from the end of the trailing liana.

Ki-Gor bent, retrieved his fallen bow, nodded to his mate.

"Wait until I restrung the bow," he said. "Then I shall teach you more of shooting." He grinned. "Tembu George and N'Geeso are long overdue; you must show them your skill when they arrive."

He ran with the pacing quickness of the jungle-born to the small camp he had made beside the tiny thundering waterfall, lifted a newly-woven sinew cord from where it lay in the shade. He fitted one end loop into the butt-nock at one bow-end, reversed the bow, fitted the butt into the instep of his left foot where it touched the soft ground.

He bent the bow, bent it with all of the lithe strength of his herculean body, and it was a task such as no other mortal man could have so easily done. Muscles swelled and cabled like writhing snakes beneath the bronzed skin of his shoulders, rode the length of his arms, fled into his hands.

And the bow bent, bending slowly, for it was fully three times as powerful as the strongest hunting bow, but arcing until Ki-Gor could slip the other end of the cord about the butt-nock. He released the tension slowly, smoothing the strain evenly along the polished wood, checking the new cord to see if any flaw lay in its plaiting. The string twanged with the high note of a Bantu harp.

His right hand slipped back over his left shoulder, retrieved a quivered arrow. He nocked and fired the shaft in one smooth flow of grace and movement that was uncanny in its simplicity.



There was the zipping shriek of displaced air, then the thudding *chug* of metal striking wood. The arrow had buried itself completely within the trunk of a baobab tree, leaving only the red fletching outside the bark.

"There is the mark, Helene," he called.

Helene lifted the bow Ki-Gor had made especially for her the week before, nocked an arrow with the slightest trace of awkwardness, drew and sighted with a deliberate slowness. Her fingers loosed their hold, and the arrow whipped toward the tiny red target. It thudded into the soft bark fully fourteen inches from its mark.

"*Wah!*" Ki-Gor said in disapproval.

He came to Helene's side, waited until she had nocked another arrow, then guided her hands as she sighted and drew.

"So " he said. "The bow is straight up and down for this type of shooting. Sight the arrow slightly above the mark so that it will sink down and strike squarely. Now."

Helene fired, frowned slightly, as the arrow spatted solidly into the wood eight inches above the target.

"I'll never learn," she exclaimed in exasperation.

KI-GOR grinned, but there was a deadly seriousness in his grey eyes. Too many times had he found it necessary to leave Helene alone in the jungle, and it was only by luck that she had never had the need of a bow to protect her from sudden danger. She had used one before in the many months of their jungle life, but her skill had never been great. Now he had fashioned the bow and fletched several dozen arrows for her. Within a few weeks she would be more than proficient with the weapon, able to protect herself against any unforeseen danger.

"Ha! Was it not you who said that you could best me in anything?" he taunted her.

"All right, smartie," Helene retorted grimly, "just take a seat, and I'll do the work."

She pouted a kiss in his direction, watched as he strolled across the clearing, then nocked another arrow and began again her practice.

Ki-Gor lifted a handful of ripe blue plums from the tiny icy niche behind the

small waterfall, then stretched out on the soft grass, yawned contentedly.

He watched a purple and gold *virini* bird walk daintily along a low branch overhead, listened with a thrilling pulse to the sparkling melody pouring from the song-bird's quivering throat. A warm breeze rustled through the trees, touched his body, went softly along the glade. The ground smelled sweet and earthy, redolent of life and growing things; and the perfume of *maheena* blossoms, clustered in blue and crimson and yellow clumps among the bushes, was like a heady wine to the Jungle Lord.

"*Wah!*" He sighed in contentment, sucked contentedly at the succulent fruit in his hand.

He half-closed his eyes then, remembering many things, recalling the first days when he had known Helene. He had saved her from a wrecked plane, had given her a taste of his life, a thing such as the headline hunting, thrill-seeking Helene had never known existed.

And somewhere back in those days they had discovered that their destinies were inextricably fused, that their lives lay together. And because Ki-Gor knew no other life, and because Helene wanted no other manner of existence, Africa became their home, its broad colorful sweep of land their front yard. For lazy months they had prowled the depths of its jungles, staying where they chose, happier than they had ever been before.

Now they were at their favorite home, a sunny glade hemmed in by giant trees on three sides, with a sparkling waterfall and its silver river on the fourth, where a beach of gleaming white sand paralleled the water for a hundred yards.

Ki-Gor grunted in pure animal contentment, grinned a bit when he saw the intentness of Helene upon her task. He nodded in approval, then flicked the plum pits into the river.

A gaudy blue and red *nuhana* fish tunneled from the cool depths, showered glittering spray as it struck at the pits before they touched the running water. Then, turning with a flick of a shimmering tail, it dived back into the water, disappeared.

Ki-Gor sat, stretching lazily, digging his toes into the green grass that made a soft



carpet over the brown earth. He heard the slight rustle in the brush near the jungle's edge, flicked his gaze in that direction. A foot-high *dik-dik* deer minced daintily into view, searched the air with a delicate nose, then marched with an unconscious dignity past the Jungle Lord and toward the river.

Ki-Gor's right hand drifted out with a speed as uncanny as it was silent, and his fingers scooped up the deer, held it tightly to his broad chest. For a long moment, the deer fought to free itself, then settled into complacency, nuzzling a bit, as the jungle giant's forefingers scratched gently behind its ears.

"Oh, let me hold him," Helene cried, came running, bow and arrows in hand.

She dropped to her knees took the tiny wide-eyed deer in gentle hands, stroked its smooth soft-furred throat. It nestled contentedly in the crook of her right arm.

"I hit it twice," she said to Ki-Gor, frowned as his eyebrows came up in a silent question. "Well, almost," she amended.

"That's fine," Ki-Gor said, tickled the deer.

"I'm going swimming," Helene said, as though the subject had been long discussed. "I'm hot."

SHE PLACED the deer on the grass, watched as it went determinedly toward the river again. She wrinkled her nose in amusement, then stood and walked to the white beach.

Her skin was a golden tan against the tawny yellow and black of her leopard-skin breech-clout and halter. She shrugged one arm free of the halter strap, then slipped the halter from her firm rounded breasts, tossed it aside. Her fingers loosed the strings at her waist, and she slid the clout down her slender legs, stepped out of its confines, stood free in the soft breeze.

She was slender and smooth and supple in the golden sunlight; she was a tree-witch with her hair of spun red-gold. She poised lightly, stretching her arms high toward the sky, standing on tiptoes, breathing deeply from the sheer ecstasy of being alive.

And then she had dived cleanly into the water, was swimming with the deceptive

jungle stroke Ki-Gor had taught her months before.

"Come on in," she called.

Ki-Gor came lithely to his feet, walked to the water's edge. He blinked, wincing, when the slender hands of his wife splashed icy water at his legs. Then he dropped his knife to the sand, cut the blue-green water cleanly in a slanting dive.

He went deep, his keen eyes open, seeking the slender form of Helene ahead. Vigor came into his body, and strength surged unbidden into massive muscles from the coolness. He blew his breath in great bursting bubbles that spun with the current like vagrant thoughts, then came to the surface and stroked against the current.

Helene popped up at his side, clung to his shoulder for a brief moment. Her laughter tinkled in his ear, and he could smell the damp perfume of her golden-red hair.

"Four," she said, and dived.

Ki-Gor grinned, surface-dived after his mate, swam with great reaching strokes toward the deep pool at the base of the waterfall. Side by side they entered the pool, and almost immediately Helene darted to one side, turning near the bank, swimming back with something clutched in her fingers.

She gestured with her prize, opened her fingers, permitted the goggle-eyed *nuhana* fish to flirt to safety. Then she was off again through the water like a flashing mermaid.

Ki-Gor spun about, drove toward the opposite side of the pool, snatched with both hands at the fleeing blue and crimson fish. His fingers tightened, and turned with both prizes to display them to Helene. But she, too, had another pair to match his.

They released their prizes, swam with a quickening speed at the now-frightened fish that sped from their sanctuary. But before Ki-Gor could capture his last two, he felt a touch on his ankle, and Helene displayed her winning catch.

She laughed in triumph, and her laughter was a bubble that spun away upon the current. Ki-Gor grinned through the blueness of the water, twisted about to swim to the surface. Helene stroked to his side, and they drifted upward and down the pool's length.



Ki-Gor saw the hurtling object first, saw it through the water that still lay for feet above them. It was a black object that plunged through the sunlight, legs outspread to break the fall.

Ki-Gor whirled, shoved Helene deep, sped her along the current of the stream. Before, he had met leopards and other cats in jungle pools, and he knew the frenzied strength that lay in their lashing claws, as they fought to reach dry land.

Helene would never have a chance, and he himself would be sorely tried at having to battle an animal in the pool, particularly since his weapons were on the bank. So he forced Helene ahead, his body half-twisted so as to absolutely identify the animal that had accidentally fallen over the waterfalls.

And even as Helene was stroking to safety, he whirled about, his mighty lungs strained and aching now because of his length of time beneath the surface. He spun in the water, hands reaching for the animal; and closing his fingers, he kicked toward the surface, dragging his burden limply behind.

His blond head broke water, and he breathed in long gasps, then whirled about, swam with incredible speed toward the slanting sandy beach. Helene was just climbing from the water, and her eyes widened in amazement when she saw that which Ki-Gor brought with him.

"Why, it's, it's a—" she began in amazement, and Ki-Gor finished the thought for her.

"It's a boy, a white boy," he said swiftly, urgently, lifted his bedraggled burden to the dry sand. He clambered out in a rush of strength, turned the body over, forced water from the boy's lungs.

"*He may be dead!*" Ki-Gor finished softly, winced at Helene's almost soundless cry of dismay.

## II

THERE was a timeless instant of eternity in that tiny forest glade when death raised his scythe at the faulty breathing of the boy. Then the lad coughed, choked over the last bit of water that had been sucked into his lungs, and his eyes flickered open.

"Hello—" he said weakly, anticlimactically, and became unconscious again.

Ki-Gor bent, lifted the boy, carried him to the shady spot where he had made camp days before. Gently, he laid the boy on the bed of springy moss, straightening his arms at his side, then came erect.

"Fever," he said shortly. "The boy has been wounded with an assegai. I'll make medicine."

He turned, ran lithely back to the river, retrieved his knife, then spun about and raced to the jungle. He paused at the edge of the clearing, and softness came to his clear eyes when he saw the gentle tenderness with which Helene was ministering to the first slow tossings of the boy's body in the grip of fever.

Then he turned back to the jungle, ran lightly through the close-spaced trees. He felt a dull panic in his heart as he ran, for he knew the uncanny speed with which jungle fever could claim a victim. Within seconds, he was at the bole of a gigantic *baobab* tree and was slicing yellow sap boils from the scaly bark. Holding several in his hand, he returned the way he had come, stopping to dig several pinkish roots from the moist brown earth and to pluck half a dozen waxy leaves from a *n'lai* bush. His hands filled with the spoils of his mission, he returned to the glade, paced quickly to the side of his wife, who had dressed while he had been gone.

Helene frowned slightly, shook her head, her blue eyes strangely worried in a way such as her mighty husband had never seen before.

"Bad?" she asked.

Ki-Gor laid the stuff he had gathered aside, bent, examined the thorn-scarred body with intent eyes. Then he shook his head, smiled reassuringly.

"He will be all right by tomorrow's sun. A bit weak, but all right."

He squatted, lifted the turtle-shell bowl from the jungle dishes used by him and his mate, carefully broke the sap boils he had collected, half-filling the bowl with the milky liquid. Then he crushed the pink roots and waxy green leaves together in his corded hands, watched intently as the juice dripped drop by drop into the bowl.

He stirred the mixture with a small branch, added a few ounces of water.



Tasting it, he made a wry face, spat. "When I lift the boy's head," he said, "make him swallow as much of this as you can."

He slipped to the bed, squatted, raised the lad in gentle hands. Helene, her mouth tight in distaste, compassion in her eyes, held the bowl so that the liquid was passed into the boy's mouth. The boy fought the medicine for a moment, then swallowed automatically.

Ki-Gor laid the boy back on the bed again, stood, scowling down at the flushed face beneath the dark hair. Helene laid the bowl aside, came easily to her feet.

"I wonder who he is?" she mused.

"And where he came from?" Ki-Gor finished. "I've heard of no white hunters in this territory for months; and never do they bring children with them."

The boy moaned, tossed feverishly for a moment. "*Mother*," he muttered hoarsely, then drifted into silence again.

"He'll tell us when he wakes," Helene said.

Ki-Gor glanced at the lowering sun, shook his head thoughtfully.

"There will be no sleep tonight for me; I shall have to see that the fever does not take another hold on him."

The boy tossed again, then subsided, the first thin film of perspiration breaking on his body. Helene bent, smoothed together the ripped places in the ragged trousers and shirt. Unconsciously, her hand stroked the dark hair back from the boy's pale forehead; and Ki-Gor smiled at her utter femininity.

"Come," he said. "The boy will sleep almost all the night. He will be all right by morning."

HELENE covered the boy with the softness of a snowy leopard pelt; then rejoined Ki-Gor; and both moved away from the bed, going toward the dulled embers of their cooking fire. Ki-Gor fed fresh strips of wood to the red embers, squatted and blew flames where none had been.

"We had better eat," he said.

Helene nodded, retrieved fruit and fresh meat from the natural icebox behind the waterfall. She sliced, using Ki-Gor's keen knife, the succulent *kava*, spitted it on thin twigs, placed the slices so that they would

roast slowly near the tiny leaping flames. The fruit was a blue and purple and red heap on the green leaf she used for a platter, and the yellow skins of fresh bananas were a bright contrast to the brown *kapa* nuts which lay alongside.

Ki-Gor sliced two juicy antelope steaks from the meat Helene had brought, speared them on spits of green wood, propped them so that the barest touch of his hand would turn them for broiling.

Hunger bit at his stomach, and he grinned lazily at his golden mate. She smiled, touched his bronzed shoulder lightly, whirled as the boy moaned slightly in his sleep.

"He'll be all right," Ki-Gor said, striving to keep his masculine appearance of indifference. But his eyes narrowed slightly, and he, too, watched silently for a moment.

Smoking juices lifted from the roasting steaks and *kava*, and dripped brownly into the glowing coals of the fire. Each gouted in a tiny flame, and the delicious odor of the cooking meal filled the clearing.

Helene turned the *kava* slices, watched them glisten with the syrupy juices which would become sugar-sweet and crispy when the roasting was done. Ki-Gor indolently rotated the steak spits, swallowed hungrily, as the odor came wafting toward him from the rich-brown glaze that was spreading over the meat's surfaces.

Darkness came slowly to the clearing, starting first as lengthening shadows which crept with an insidious slowness from the trees, held back only by the darting flickers of light from the tiny cooking fire.

Then true night came, flicking in with the breath-taking suddenness which is Africa's, and the sky was a dark velvet curtain over everything, the first stars shining and twinkling like fiery diamonds scattered by a careless cosmic hand.

Night sounds came; first the chirring of waking insects, later the myriad noises such as are found nowhere else in all the world. Far down the stream a hippopotamus grunted its mating cry, and a second bulled a brief challenge. A rogue elephant blasted a shrill warning to all the jungle, and a hyena laughed its ghoulish approval of the mad one's warning.

A prowling lion coughed, and all sound went from the jungle for a moment. Then a shadow dipped from the sky, whirled



in on soundless pinions, and a brush-rat screamed its life away in the carrion-owl's merciless claws.

Life came back to the jungle, and the sounds blended into one another as they never did in the light of the sun that rode the usually-cloudless sky.

Ki-Gor and Helene ate in the flickering light of the small fire, which the jungle man fed twigs from time to time. They sat shoulder to shoulder as they had done for many nights, and there was about them an aura of respect and love and understanding as tangible as the flames they faced.

They did not speak; there was no need for talking; they knew each other's mind, and their eyes were drawn again and again to the boy who lay sleeping on their bed.

**B**RIGHT EYES flickered phosphorescently from the bushes at the clearing's edge, winked out, then reappeared, as curious jungle creatures watched the man and woman before their fire. Ki-Gor tossed a banana skin at the eyes, grinned, as they flicked from sight. He stretched looseningly, kissed the lobe of Helene's right ear with a quick bending of his leaning head, was gone before she could turn.

He went across the clearing, going toward the river that gurgled musically from beneath the *shushing* waterfall, and gathered a great armful of the scented moss he had washed so carefully two days before. Returning, he spread the sun-dried moss into a bed, then retrieved more and built the jungle mattress until it was fully three feet high.

"I shall stay up," he said. "You get your sleep."

Helene nodded, bent over the boy for a moment. There was something about her then, an aura such as her mate had never before seen, and her blue eyes were bright when she turned away.

"He seems so tiny," she said wonderingly.

Ki-Gor nodded. "About two hands of summers," he said. "He is still almost a baby."

Helene smiled, slipped into the softness of her jungle bed. She lifted her arms, held them out. Ki-Gor sat beside her, drew her close. For a moment they did not speak. Her mouth was soft and warm

and loving on his, and their blood ran hot in their bodies. Then Ki-Gor came to his feet.

"Good night," he said, went back to the fire.

"Good night," Helene echoed, and with the ease her jungle life had given, fell into gentle dreamless slumber.

Ki-Gor lay beside the fire, his great hands beneath his blond head, his calm eyes watching the orange moon rising into the sky. He felt strangely content at the moment; he was the master of all he surveyed, his wife slept but a few feet away, and the boy, well, the boy—his mind drifted.

A low moan came from where the boy was twisting in the bed again. The Jungle Lord came to his feet, paced swiftly to the other's side, forced the semi-conscious lad to drink the remainder of the jungle medicine which was still in the turtle-shell bowl. The boy sighed tiredly, drifted back into sleep.

Ki-Gor sat at his side for several hours, waiting with the patience which was an inherent part of his character, not moving, watching for the slightest recurrence of the fever. He felt no particular worry about the fact that his crude medicine might not work, for he had used it many times. But it gave him a strange feeling, a shortness of breath in his mighty chest, to feel the small hand that was clasped so tightly about the first three fingers of his own.

He heard the jungle noises rise in intensity, saw the moon come to the zenith overhead, then slide slowly toward the west. The sounds were less frequent now, the animals glugged with their evening's forays, their prowling fierceness dulling as the hours passed. A foraging lion coughed a challenge into the night, and far away a second echoed the challenge with a roar that shook the very air. A hyena sent its keening cry winging into the sky, and the wailing of the *dingoes*, the wild murderous jungle dogs, trailed the moon across the velvet heaven.

The purling waterfall sent cheerful echoes singing through the clearing, and the rilling of the silver stream was broken only when a gaudy red and blue *nuhana* fish darted after a low-winged insect and fell back with a tiny muffled splashing.



The glowing coals of the fire died completely, and there was only the silver moonlight to limn the clearing with its frosty touch. The breeze was soft and warm, and the peace of the night was a tangible thing.

Then the slightest bit of grayness came to the edge of the sky, and the moon was dropping with greater and greater speed. The stars dulled, reluctantly winking out one by one, and the night sounds suddenly were muffled and indistinct. The first ray of sunlight came spearing a slanting shaft across the clearing, and the night was done, the golden day beginning.

HELENE turned like a sleepy tawny kitten, opened blue eyes, and smiled at her stalwart husband. Then knowledge came into her eyes, and she sat, peering at the boy who slept peacefully. Ki-Gor placed his forefinger across his lips for silence, came and sat on the edge of his mate's bed.

"He will wake shortly," he whispered. "Then we shall know what has happened that he should appear out of nowhere."

And even as he spoke, the boy sat up-right, gazed at them from wide intelligent brown eyes. He flicked his gaze about the clearing, then swung it back to the jungle couple.

"Where am I, and who are you?" he asked.

"You fell over the waterfall," Helene answered. "You had a fever, so we gave you medicine and let you sleep."

Tears came slowly, unbidden to the boy's eyes, spilled slowly unnoticed down his cheeks. He shook slightly from the emotions within him, but his voice came even and clear.

"Did you send help to Mother and the rest?"

Ki-Gor shook his head. "We sent no help, boy," he said. "We did not know that help was needed by anyone, and so—" He spread his hands expressively.

"They're on the mountain; they're on Kagunda," the boy said affrightedly.

"Who is on Kagunda?" Ki-Gor asked, and his gray eyes went to Helene's face, for he had heard her quick gasp at the sound of the mountain's name.

"Mother, everybody!" The boy leaned

forward. "They'll be killed by the lizards; they'll die!"

Helene slipped from her bed, went quickly to the boy's side. "Look," she said, and confidence came reluctantly into the lad's eyes. "Why don't you let me ask the questions? Then we'll find out that much quicker. First, who are you?"

"I'm Jimmy—Jimmy Ferris. My dad's a major, and we was flying to meet him."

"Who are 'we'?"

"My mother, and sister, Jeanne, and Lieutenant Ashworth who was the pilot. We was in the plane, and a storm came up, and when the pilot tried to go over the storm, a motor quit. Then the plane was falling, and I got scared—but not much, 'cause my dad's a major—and then the plane was flying all right, but the pilot didn't see the mountain until we almost hit it. Then the wind just pulled us up and up and into the clouds." The boy's face steeled. "Somebody's gotta get some help; they're gonna die from the lizards and the monkey-men."

"Lizards? Monkey-men?" Ki-Gor frowned. "Lizards don't hurt people, and monkeys are only playful."

Jimmy's eyes became round and frightened. "Well, these lizards tried to hurt us. And they were big, big as—as a house, almost."

Helene smiled, shook her head at Ki-Gor's obvious retort. She looked down at her small charge. "And what about the monkey-men?" she asked.

"Well," Jimmy's hands clenched tightly in his lap. "We was coming down the trail, when up jumps these monkey-men and their black leader, and they tried to kill us, only Lieutenant Ashworth had his gun and killed some of them. We tried to get away, and something hit me, and I fell down the mountain. Then I was walking for help, and the drums was beating in back of me, and then I was walking, and then the sun was awful hot, and then—well, I woke up here."

"The sun has touched his head," Ki-Gor said in Watussi to Helene. "He speaks like a *takata* one."

Helene nodded, her eyes thoughtful, then turned to the boy again. "Jimmy," she asked. "What happened to the plane?"

"Why, it's stuck in the big trees, and the lizards tried to eat it, and we was all



scared, 'cept the Lieutenant, and he shot his gun at their eyes, and they ran away."

"And where were you going in the plane?"

"To Brazzaville to see my dad—he's a major in the army—and, well, gee whiz, you just gotta help my mother and sis and the Lieutenant."

KI-GOR'S hand went out so slowly the motion was almost imperceptible. His fingers arced a bit, ready for a snatch at the great shovel-headed Masai spear that was propped nearby. He could feel the perspiration popping out on the bronzed skin of his body, and the fear within him was a welling thing that he could not stifle.

"Are you sure you're not making—" Helene was saying, her tone searching, her eyes intent only on the boy.

Ki-Gor's hand was almost at the spear. He bunched the muscles of his great shoulders, knowing the instant of action would be incredibly fast and vicious. And even as his fingers touched the spear, a dry twig snapped across the clearing.

"Move, white man, and you die," a voice said brittly.

Except for the slightest of startled cries from Helene, and the hissing intake of breath from Jimmy, there was no other sound.

Ki-Gor turned his head then, turned it slowly and carefully, being extremely careful not to move abruptly, and saw clearly for the first time the flat-nosed black whose slight movement he had noticed but a short moment before.

The man was of no tribe that the Jungle Lord had ever seen before. He was squatty, almost apelike, his flat face and wide foul-toothed mouth heightening the illusion. Paint striped his body in a garish white pattern, and the nose plugs were human finger bones. The slow air brought the stench of him across the clearing, and his hate was as tangible as the odor. He wore no clout nor clothing of any kind.

But the thing that held the jungle giant trapped as surely as if he had been chained was the slim blowgun that extended from the hands of the murderous black. That blowgun was death itself; there was no other land in the world where the art of blowgun handling had been brought to such perfection. Even the fleetest of ani-

mals or the most lithe of men could not escape the poisoned *kalchi* thorns which were used for darts.

Ki-Gor said nothing, hoping his hand was hidden from the intruder, stretching his arm so that his fingers could close about the thick shaft of the spear. Then he relaxed, for the blowgun had lifted, and he knew the movement had been detected.

"What do you want?" he asked softly, the words barely carrying.

The black loosed his lips from about the blowgun mouth long enough to answer,

"The white boy," he said hoarsely. "He escaped my great chief, Grankando, once. Now I take him back."

"Back to where?" Ki-Gor swung his shoulders more about, and the movement covered the simultaneous movement of his foot toward the spear that lay so near."

"To Kagunda."

Ki-Gor's toes were almost as facile as his fingers; he touched the spear shaft with them, caught, and began drawing the spear closer to himself. He could still feel the fear curdling within his heart, not for himself, but for the woman and boy at his side.

"But why?" Ki-Gor stalled desperately for those next few life-giving seconds.

But the black had been denied long enough. He lifted the blowgun, and the madness of murder-lust burned deep in his muddy eyes. He took a deep breath, and the sound was startlingly loud in the crisp morning air.

Ki-Gor spun, caught at the spear. "Duck!" he roared, and hoped Helene and Jimmy would get free.

For he knew that he could not escape; he only hoped that his great spear, in that brief instant before the poisoned dart snuffed out his life, would slash the heart out of the black murderer before him.

Helene and Jimmy went hurtling to one side, shoved there by Helene's lithe strength. They fell in a tangle of legs and arms; then Helene thrust the boy toward the bushes, turned to stand at her husband's side.

She gasped, stood stock-still, watched with wondering eyes. And ten feet away, the muscles in bold relief on his great throwing shoulder as he held the spear in utter amazement, was Ki-Gor.

"Wah!" the Jungle Lord said in awe.



For the black was no longer a deadly murderous machine. The blowgun trailed from one hand, and he was clawing with the other at the assegai that skewered his belly from navel to spine. He screamed, and then crimson flooded from his throat, and he choked and fell.

He clawed at the spear shaft, flailed his painted arms at the unyielding ground. His body bucked in agonizing ecstasy, the toes of his bare feet kicking brown dirt into the air.

And then he was dead, his eyes staring blankly, hideously.

"Ho, Ki-Gor!" a great voice roared, and stepping out of concealment in the lush jungle to the Forest Lord's left, came two blacks, one a giant of a man, the other a pygmy whose head barely came to the giant's waist.

### III

"**T**EMBU GEORGE!" Ki-Gor cried aloud, went running across the clearing.

He tapped the mighty Negro on the chest with a clenched fist, then bent and touched the pygmy's shoulder.

N'Geeso, the diminutive chieftain of the pygmy nation, grinned up at the mighty white man, then nodded at the slain black. "*Wah!*" he said boastfully. "Tembu George made such a cast as only you could make." He glanced at the body again, spat judiciously. "It should have been lower; then the *dango* would not have died so quickly."

Tembu George frowned. "Could you have done so well, O little man?" he said belligerently, tried to hide the friendly twinkle in his bright eyes.

"Better!" N'Geeso snapped challengingly. "Had you waited but an instant longer, then would I have cut him down with a *kalchi* dart."

Ki-Gor grinned; for he had heard this eternal argument for many seasons. He had no more loyal friends in all the jungle than these two men, each a great chieftan to his own people, each the mightiest warrior of his tribe. In only one thing did they disagree, and that was as to which was the better able to serve Ki-Gor and Helene.

2—Jungle—Winter

"Enough," he said shortly. "It was a noble cast." He gestured back toward Helene and the boy. "Come, we shall need help and advice."

They strode back to where Helene was cradling the weakened boy, squatted in the cool shade of a spreading *baobab* tree.

"White!" Tembu George said in surprise.

"His name is Jimmy Ferris," Ki-Gor explained, then told the story as given by the boy.

Tembu George nodded gravely. "There was such a plane that rode the storm," he said. "It crossed my *kraal* even as the storm struck. Maybe it did crash. But—" He spat his disbelief. "There are no lizards or monkey-men in the jungle which he could not fight bare-handed."

N'Geeso made the sign of counter-juju, and greyness lay in the ebony of his small face. Ki-Gor watched in puzzled silence; never had he seen fright in the face of the tiny man before.

"What is it?" Helene cried.

"I have been to Kagunda," N'Geeso said, and the first thread of superstitious terror lay in his voice. "I was caught by the monkey-men, and escaped only because they thought me so small that I could not fight free of two of them. They spoke of the *Kando-ngala*, the thunder lizard, and were planning to feed me to his belly."

"*Faaah!*" Tembu George said in disgust. He nodded to where the corpse stiffened in the growing sunlight. "If the monkey-man are such as he, then I shall—"

But N'Geeso shook his head. "They are not exactly like that one," he said. "They have shiny black hair on their bodies and the faces of the *ingagi*, the apes of the deep jungle. The speak a strange tongue, and their chieftan is a renegade Wasuli whose tribe left him to die because he did murder in the dark of night.

"Grankando?" Ki-Gor asked quietly.

"Yes, Grankando, Feeder of the Thunder, he called himself." He shook his head. "Death lies there; if the boy's story is true, then the people he left behind are dead."

Jimmy Ferris stirred restlessly in Helene's arms. "What are they saying?" he asked. "Don't they know where I mean?"

"Hush, Jimmy," Helene soothed the boy. "They are making plans."



KI-GOR turned his eyes back to the pygmy. "What lies atop the Mountain of Death?" he asked.

"I do not know. There is but one trail, and it is guarded by Grankando's tribe." N'Geeso's eyes rolled whitely in his face. "I say that we cannot try to rescue these people who are dead by now. Those monkey-men are like animals, they know no fear; only a great war party could hope to conquer them."

Ki-Gor shook his head. "We do not have the time," he said thoughtfully. "The storm was two days ago, and it would be another hand of days before we could gather your men." His bronzed face set as though cast of metal. "I shall go," he finished decisively.

"And I," Helene said quietly, and there was no brooking the resolve that lay deep in her eyes.

"But the boy—" Ki-Gor began.

Tembu George brushed his hands carefully, grinned, his teeth glistening whitely. "I carry the white boy," he said grimly. "He must guide us; and by night, with the aid of medicines I shall make, he will walk as though the fever had never touched him."

N'Geeso scowled furiously because Tembu George had spoken first. "Then since we shall have a nurse for the boy," he said, "I shall act as the warrior at your side, O Jungle Man."

Tembu George frowned at the miniature man at his side, and then his great laughter boomed at the sky.

"Wah!" he said mirthfully. "The fly speaks like an eagle."

N'Geeso came lithely to his feet, his hand dropping to the silvery knife at his waist. Standing, he was barely taller than the squatting Tembu George, but there was no hesitation in his voice.

"Stand, O *dingo*," he snapped thinly, "and I shall open your mouth from face to crotch."

Ki-Gor placed a hand on the pygmy's wire-muscle wrist. "Peace, N'Geeso, this is no time for friendly fighting. We have a task to do, and it must be done quickly, for Jimmy's people may be injured."

N'Geeso scowled, the first flickers of amusement coming to his eyes; and when his gaze met that of Tembu George, both smiled.

"We go to help Mother and the rest?" Jimmy Ferris asked anxiously.

"We go," Ki-Gor said simply.

And then there was no time for talking; they made preparations with the quick sure movement of men to whom jungle travel was a common thing. Ki-Gor gathered what few articles he wished to take from the camp, while Tembu George retrieved his assegai, then took the stiffened body of the black into the jungle and buried it. Returning, he helped N'Geeso make small packs.

Helene gathered the few items she wished to take, slung her new bow and quiver of arrows over one slim shoulder, announced herself ready to leave.

Tembu George gathered Jimmy Ferris in huge arms, trailed Ki-Gor and N'Geeso who led the way. Helene followed close behind, her face strangely grave.

They went directly into the rank jungle, following the dim confines of an animal trail, evading the creeping vines, Ki-Gor's great bush-knife clearing away the encroaching brush that obstructed their way. The minutes fled by, grew into hours, and the straggling sunrays came spearing hotly down from straight overhead.

*Kuuna* flies rose in huge swirling clouds from the disturbed jungle, their bites acid flames which raised welts almost instantly. Parrots moved gaudy red and green and purple wings, and squawked their irritation from brazen throats, their cold eyes hating the tiny party that plodded so determinedly and silently down the dim trail.

Two monkeys chattered angrily, raced the line of the trail, warning the jungle of the trespassers, then amused themselves by throwing ripe fruits.

Ki-Gor smiled, caught a badly-aimed pear, reversed the throw with a single flip of his wrist. The yellow fruit disintegrated with a squashy splash squarely in the face of the louder monkey. The voice disappeared with a spluttered squeak, and tiny hands pawed at the crushed pulp. The second monkey, promptly voiced its approval, laughed raucously at the discomfiture of the other.

Then the monkeys were behind, and the trail debouched into a grassy plain. They went directly into the grass, awed by the single bleak mountain they had been



unable to see because of the thickness of the jungle they had traveled.

"Kagunda!" N'Geeso said, and there was fear again in his voice. Then his shoulders straightened, and he walked unafraid.

"That's it," Jimmy Ferris cried aloud. "That's the mountain where we crashed. Hurry, we gotta hurry!"

A *springbok* bounced from cover, darted away through the high grass, its white tail like a flashing blob of cotton. Three giraffe at the far end of the plain whirled about, gazed with placid eyes, then went back to feeding on the tender green leaves of young trees at the jungle's edge.

A great *vanka* lizard poked its mottled head from between two clumps of grass, flicked its forked tongue wonderingly, then whipped about, scudded to safety.

They strode on, silently watchful, for they had seen the great elephant stride from the jungle and stand, trunk swinging belligerently, its near-sighted piggish eyes searching for sight of the enemy he sensed was there.

"Rogue," N'Geeso whispered.

They froze into motionlessness, knowing the flaming rage that could whip instantly into being in the tusker's brain. They didn't move; for the rogue elephant is lightning fast, and could easily overtake them before they could reach the safety of the jungle again.

The great rogue slapped at the grass, and the *kypee* birds darted from where they rode on the swaying slate-grey back. The massive head swung back and forth belligerently; then the beast ripped loose a great swathe of succulent green grass, stuffed the wad into its capacious mouth, and lumbered aggressively back into the trees.

"Come," Ki-Gor said, went ahead, trailed by the others.

They hurried faster as they neared the trees again, for the sun was riding the lower quarter of the sky; night was but a few short hours away.

And now the going became more gruelling. There was no path to follow, a trail had to be cut time and again with gleaming blades. Only the consummate skill of the great bronze giant who led the way made any speed possible. With an uncanny sixth sense he found the least tangled of thickets, the more open spaces

between the towering trees, the narrow game trails notched into the jungle by dainty hoofs and padding paws.

They were hot and tired and dirty when, at last, they came to the first gentle rise of land that swelled near the base of the mystic mountain. They went more cautiously now, keeping near one another, keen eyes alert for the slightest signs of danger.

The trees were thinning, patches of open rocky ground appearing with increasing regularity. Ki-Gor led the way, motioning for silence, guiding his movements by the finger instructions and directions of N'Geeso at his side. They slipped through the greying shadows that slanted from the trees and bushes, trying not to permit their gazes to flicker to the great spire of slaty rock that towered monstrosly over their heads.

There was a frightening evil aura about the mountain that drove deep into their senses, cautioning them not to speak or laugh, broodingly warning them that they were interlopers, their lives forfeit in any single instant of time.

A drum began to chant.

The sound spun out of nowhere, beating like the irregular heartstroke of some sleeping giant. It pulsed with a deep deadly rhythm, booming ever louder, lingering in the still air, rolling toward the swaying clouds so high above.

"Grankando!" N'Geeso whispered, fingered a poison dart into the lip of his blow-gun.

"You walk now, Jimmy," Tembu George said quietly, deposited his burden on the rocky ground, then stretched his great arms looseningly.

HELENE came to Ki-Gor's side, stared into his face. He smiled, touched her lightly on the arm, then gestured for absolute silence, and for Helene to remain behind with Jimmy. Then, paced by the two oddly-paired blacks, he went darting ahead toward the source of the drumming.

The ground was rubbly with shattered flakes of volcanic rock, and he instinctively avoided the razor-sharp shards, hugging the deeper shadows, awed despite himself by the awful solemnity of this dread place.

And then he caught his first sight of



the *kraal* ahead. He slowed instinctively, swung his hand up for caution, drifted ahead as silently as a jungle wraith. Wonder came to his mind, when he saw the grotesque carvings at the base of the cliff and upon the great logs which were the walls about the village. There were depicted beasts such as he had never seen, each utterly crudely lifelike, each repulsive in itself. And colored juices had been used to stain each carving true to some weird life, crimson and green, brown and black, white and grey. One beast dominated each corner of the square enclosure, all rising like monster lizards, mouths agape, clawed arms extended menacingly.

"Wah!" N'Geeso said involuntarily. "They still wait for the unwary warrior."

Tembu George said nothing, but his spear hand came up, and light winked from the glittering steel of the great bush-knife he held in his other hand. Sweat rode his face, and his eyes turned to Ki-Gor.

And Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle, laughed quietly, confidently, his tawny massive shoulders square, contempt in his steady gray eyes.

"I fear nothing that is not alive," he said quietly, and his confidence flowed into the stalwart bodies of the men at his side.

Then they drifted forward again, never leaving the deepening shadows, riding the sound of the drum, creeping toward the wide slits that gaped where the log walls had lost their mud chinking. They pressed close, stared through, awed by the utter bestiality of what they saw.

There were beings in the *kraal*, but such creatures as Ki-Gor had never seen. They weren't men, and yet they weren't apes, but rather a vicious combination of both. Coarse hair clung to their squat ugly bodies, shading from the deepest of ebony blacks to the pure white of raw cotton. Rudimentary tails depended from the bases of their spines, and their feet and hands were alike in the lengths of their digits. Each toe or finger was yellow-clawed, every one scarred from walking as they did.

For they did not walk completely upright as do the true men of Earth; they walked with the knuckling of the ground, the rolling of gross bodies, the padding of flat feet, even as the great flat-faced gorillas

of the dim, leafy jungle recesses do.

Their faces were almost completely ape-like, the eyes deep-sunk beneath ridges of gristly hairy flesh, the mouths gaping, yellowed teeth like inch-long tusks fanging from blue gums.

They wore no clothing or clouts, and they danced with a clumsy rhythm that was utterly compelling because of the simple primal savagery of each turgid movement. They muttered, or mouthed, or slobbered, a weird chant which kept a deep overtone to the off-rhythm of the booming drum that stood in the center of the loose circle in which they danced.

But it was the single human who dominated the entire scene. He wasn't old, yet he wasn't young; he was a black who had the appearance of agelessness in every line of his body.

He was tall; but hunched now over the great painted drum, he seemed as ape-like as the creatures that danced in wild ugly rhythm to the booming notes his great hands drummed from the leather head.

Cicatrices raced the entire length of his body, standing bold against the red and ochre paint that made a weird design which moved when his muscles rippled. He laughed as he drummed, and his right foot kept the beat, the monkey-fur anklet flopping about his foot.

But it was his face that stilled the breath momentarily in the throats of the unseen watchers. It was a mask, drawn and etched with all of the malevolent hate of the world in it. It did not move naturally, but writhed as though worms crawled beneath the skin. The lips were thick, the teeth filed and snagged. The eyes were like pits of bloody flesh sunk beneath an overhanging brow. They flicked about the conical mud and grass huts, seemed to peer intently at the spot behind which Ki-Gor and his friends lay hidden. Then they passed on, and came back to the ape-like dancers.

KI-GOR swung his gaze upward, following the trail etched in the mountain side by flooding rain and crude tools, and knew that never could he and his friends fight through the beast-men who guarded the trail. He turned to back from the wall, and flowed into motion so swiftly, so effortlessly, that there was not the



slightest hesitation in his instantaneous movement.

His hand came down, then up. Muscles corded and rippled down from his shoulder, along his arm and coalesced their phenomenal strength in the fingers of his mighty hand. He threw, still in a half-crouch, and the glittering knife sprang from his fingers like an intelligent thing.

It spun high, drilling straight ahead, struck with a splat of muted sound which was instantly absorbed by the booming drum.

A crude spear clattered to the ground, and the ape-man clawed frenziedly at the knife which skewered his right eye. He cackled agony from his gaping mouth, then collapsed, his gross body bucking in slackening spasms of agony. After a bit, he lay still and quiet, like a black-haired ape brought to bay and slain by a hunter.

"Wah!" Tembu George said in vague relief.

N'Geeso darted forward, pulled the knife free, gestured soundlessly. The three lifted the body, carried it into the straggly clump of nearby trees, hid it beneath a bush. Then they ran toward where they had left Helene and Jimmy, Ki-Gor cleaning and scabbarding his knife as he ran.

Seconds later, they found Helene and Jimmy crouching in a deep shadow beneath a baobab tree. She sprang to her feet, sensing the urgency that lay in her mate's flight from the *kraal*.

"What happened?" she asked. "What is wrong?"

Ki-Gor held her tightly for a moment, the vague fear fading from his heart. For one long instant a short time back, he had thought that the lone ape-man sentry might have slain the woman and boy before returning to the *kraal*.

"I slew a guard," he said briefly, then motioned for the rest to crowd close. "We cannot go up the single trail," he finished, "but must find another way."

N'Geeso shook his head. "There is no other way," he declared.

"Then we shall make one."

"But how?" Helene asked, staring at the palisade of smooth rock which towered over their heads.

"A catapult," Ki-Gor said briefly, watched the slow smiles come into the

faces of Tembu George and N'Geeso.

Helene frowned slightly, her eyes puzzled; and the jungle giant explained.

"We shall find a young tree, trim the branches from its length, pull it down with a vine-rope, and use it as a hunter uses a sling. By fitting a small log to its end, with a rope attached to the log, we shall have a way of scaling the cliff to the first of the ledges above. When the log is cast high, it will carry the rope with it; when the log catches on the rocks of a ledge, then we shall go up hand over hand."

He turned away, going back around the forbidden mountain, away from the village of ape-men behind. The others came swiftly at his side. Even the boy moved with a new strength, for he had been given crude but effective jungle medicines during the day, and almost all of his strength had returned.

NIGHT was but minutes away now, and they were almost at a run, when Ki-Gor motioned for them to stop. He pointed at the mountain overhead, indicating the notch-like recess of a single ledge.

"That is the place," he said, began searching for a single tree which would do for the jungle catapult.

The party spread out, searching, and a moment later Tembu George whistled softly for attention. They gathered at the tree he had discovered, and Ki-Gor nodded in approval.

"Gather as much light green vine as possible," he instructed N'Geeso. "Tembu George will find the log which is to be cast, and I shall make the tree ready."

He shed his great war-bow, laid the shovel-bladed spear aside, then climbed with the agility of a monkey up the swaying tree. The two blacks darted to their tasks, disappeared into the sparse jungle. Helene sat with Jimmy, quieting his questions, soothing his growing fear that nothing was being done.

And high over her head, Ki-Gor clung with one hand, slashed his great bush-knife with the other. Branches were instantly severed, fell lightly to the ground. The jungle giant moved ever higher, the tree beginning to tilt a bit from his weight, lopped off the final branches, leaving a forked stub at the top. Then he clam-



bered swiftly down, dropped lightly beside N'Geeso who had returned with an armful of thin, extremely-strong vine. A moment later, Tembu George carried in a length of iron-wood, six inches in diameter by five feet long.

Ki-Gor fashioned a jungle noose in one end of the liana, lassoed the notched stub high overhead, then carried the vine about a tree forty feet away, and threw his weight upon the end. With the leverage given by drawing the vine about the tree trunk, he gradually drew the stripped tree-top toward the ground. Tembu George added his weight and strength to the task, and when the tree was arced like a straining bow, Ki-Gor fastened the vine so that the tree would not spring upright again. Then he slashed free the vine that was not stretched taut, busied himself knotting it to other lengths, until a few moments later he had a jungle rope fully four hundred feet in length.

N'Geeso fastened one end of the rope to the log, lodged the piece of wood securely in the tree crotch, while his companions laid the vine-rope in loose coils. Finished, they stood, and Ki-Gor drew his knife.

Stepping forward, he slashed the taut vine with a single stroke. The vine sang with the deep harsh note of a bass voice, shattered, and the tree swept upward like a flicking whip. It snapped high, fled to the other side, vibrated like a reed in a high wind.

And fleeing from its top, stringing rope like a great spider spins a thread, the log went hurtling up the mountain. Air swooshed as the log flashed upward through the growing gloom, and the rope hissed from its coils like a maddened snake.

And then the log reached the top of its arc, sank slightly. Ki-Gor held his breath momentarily, thinking he had miscalculated, then sighed deeply, as the catapulted missile dropped over the edge of the ledge.

He went forward, caught the swaying vine, tested its strength cautiously. The rope slid slightly, then held, and he lifted himself a foot from the ground by the strength of his arms. Satisfied, he turned to N'Geeso.

"Thou are the lightest, O N'Geeso," he said quietly. "It would be better if you

climb to the ledge, there making certain that the rope will carry the weight of the rest of us."

N'Geeso grinned, slid his long blow-gun between his clout-cord and his muscular back, then grasped the vine and began to climb.

He climbed like a monkey, using hands and feet with equal dexterity, the muscles of his miniature superbly-proportioned body rippled beneath his satin-black skin. He went upward with an amazing speed, paused twenty-five feet from the ground, looked down at Tembu George.

"Wah!" he said. "It is well that a *man* is along, for such work as this is not for children."

Tembu George grinned. "Up, little man," he ordered grimly. "Else the log may slip, and you shall find yourself without a vine to climb."

N'Geeso laughed softly, then went swinging upward. Ki-Gor held the lower end of the vine steady, so that the pygmy might climb without too much swaying; and within a few short minutes N'Geeso was but a tiny spot far overhead.

KI-GOR swung about so that he might watch through the deepening dusk, his keen eyes examining every shadow on the swell of rocky land that went toward the village of the ape-men. He felt the first thread of worry in his mind, for he had sensed a cold brutal viciousness about the creatures of Grankando, and he knew that a frontal assault by them would be fatal to his tiny party. Then the line jerked twice in his hand, and he nodded to Helene.

"Hurry," he said. "Night will come before we—"

Helene paused worriedly. "But what of Jimmy?"

Ki-Gor smiled. "I shall bring the boy," he said. "Now hurry."

Then Helene was climbing, going upward with the uncanny ability her jungle mate had taught her in the sleepy jungle depths, infinitely graceful and feminine as she sped toward the ledge overhead which could not be seen because of the overhang of the mountain side.

The seconds drifted slowly by, and then the second signal came down the rope. Tembu George began to climb, without



being told, the heavy muscles of his great back coiling and knotting with the effort, for he was not as adept at climbing as his friends. Light winked from the broad blade of his spear, which he had fastened to his back, then disappeared, for there was now only a dark dusk.

Ki-Gor waited patiently, one hand holding the rope, the other about the sturdy shoulders of the boy at his side. He felt a sense of companionship with the lad, a strange affinity that puzzled him. But there was no time for an analysis of his feelings, for the signal came that Tembu George had arrived at the ledge.

He slid his spear through the raw-hide belt that supported his small back-pack, then nodded at Jimmy Ferris.

"Onto my back," he said. "Lock your legs about my waist, and your arms about my neck. Do not be frightened."

"Who's scared!" Jimmy said belligerently, but his brown eyes were wide, and his gaze fled the dark strip of vine that raced upward.

Then Ki-Gor swung the boy to his back, made certain that he was secure, and reached out his arms for the vine.

He went upward with the unconscious grace that only he could have. Great cable muscles arched into being beneath his bronzed skin, and a lock of his yellow hair fell across his grey eyes. He swung the hair aside with a toss of his head, forced himself to climb even faster.

He felt no sense of insecurity, for this was his life, and the weight of the boy on his back was nothing to the tempered strength of the mighty forces that lay quiescent in his rangy body. He felt the warm breath of Jimmy on the nape of his neck, and the planes of his face grew more determined, making his strong features ruggedly handsome for the moment.

The ground disappeared, and he swung along the vine in a half-world where space lay on one side and rock wall on another. He smiled inwardly, liking the sensation, for he was dominant, and he sensed the power that lay within him.

Then he could feel by the tautened swaying of the vine that he was approaching the ledge. His hands were sticky with the volatile sap of the vine-rope, and the muscles of his wrists tightened even more so that he would not slip.

SUDDENLY, as though a curtain had been rolled back, he heard the angry rolling of Grankando's drum behind, heard the muffled bestial shouts of the ape-men, and knew instinctively that the body of the slain guard had been found. He went even faster, using his feet for greater speed, knowing that a hunting party would be along the mountain side at any moment, their weapons thirsting for new victims, following the party's spoor.

He could not see now, for the African night had drained all light, and the orange moon had not yet risen. He was suspended in limitless space, climbing with a monotonous speed, the coolness of the night touching his great body with gentle probing fingers.

His hands touched bare rock, and he came to a stop. Then Tembu George reached over the edge of the cliff, swung Jimmy to the ledge; and the jungle giant was climbing with a monkey-like agility to safety.

"Is everything all right?" he asked, barely made out the forms of his wife and friends.

"Wah!" N'Geeso said. "While you climbed and Tembu George held the rope, I found a slit in the mountain wall up which we can climb."

"Good!" Ki-Gor exclaimed, and whirled at a crackling sound at his back.

Then anger shook his great body, anger at his own stupidity for reaching in tiny fingers over the edge of the shelf, riding the sappy length of the vine rope, were slivers of red and yellow flame.

He dropped to his belly, edged forth until he could peer over the ledge edge, and growled like the jungle animal that he was. For, hundreds of feet below, caricatured by the leaping flames of the torches they carried, were the ape-men of Grankando.

A string of fire speared upward out of the cluster of lights below, spun along the edges of the vine he had climbed; and even as he watched, the vine disintegrated, fell in a shower of streaming sparks.

Ki-Gor came slowly to his feet, his lips hard against his teeth. He knew only too well how he had permitted himself and the party to be trapped, and the thought was bitter to his heart.



"We have but one chance now," he said briefly. "We must find Jimmy's people, then try to fight our way down the mountain."

And even as he said the words, he sensed the utter futility of fighting the beast-men led by their renegade leader. They were a hundred to half a dozen.

#### IV

THERE was no need for talking now; a given task lay ahead, and the success of their efforts rested in the speed with which they moved. N'Geeso led the way to the rocky chimney he had found, and they began climbing.

Ki-Gor went first, carrying Jimmy again, for the boy was still a bit weak from his jungle ordeal, and speed was essential. Then came Helene, followed by N'Geeso and Tembu George.

They climbed in utter silence, shattered only by the thud and clicking of dislodged shale and rocks. They were alone in an immensity of darkness, climbing by sheer instinct, feeling their way along the tortuous crack that speared almost straight upward. The chimney slowly narrowed, became easier to climb for they could make purchase with feet and hands upon both sides of the crack. Fine shards of razor-sharp rock slashed at their bodies, drew streaks of crimson from their skin; other larger bits of rock slipped from their weight, went bounding downward, threatening their lives, making the going extremely dangerous.

Then they entered the wreath of clouds that circled the crown of the Mountain of Death. It came first, like the vague wisp-like tentacles of a nightmare, touching their bodies momentarily with clammy fingers, then drawing back, only to surge in again with a suffocating thickness. Yet Ki-Gor and his intrepid party climbed ever faster.

Their breaths grew tight in their throats, for they were high now over the jungle that was their home, and each breath became a thin whistle in their throats. The clouds grew thicker, cottony and moist, hugging their bodies, blinding them even more than the night, for they had bodies and an invisible tangible strength.

The minutes grew into an hour, and still they climbed. They were tired now; even

Ki-Gor was feeling the strength being drained from his magnificent physique. But they could not halt, they must needs climb until they had reached some level surface.

Another hour passed, one of gruelling torment for the climb-weary party; then, even as Ki-Gor was tonguing the words for a short rest period, he felt his right hand claw at openness above.

"I have reached the top," he called gently, heard the almost inaudible sighs of relief from below.

Then the Jungle Lord was atop the mountain, seeing nothing because of the clouds that blanketed him within a moist cocoon, and was helping the boy from his back. Jimmy stood upright on tremulous cramped legs, stretched his arms looseningly.

"Where are we?" he asked helplessly.

"I don't know," Ki-Gor admitted, then turned to help Helene and the others from the chimney.

They stood together in an uncertain group for a moment, trying to pierce the thick haze that billowed softly about them, smelling for the first time the rank sulphurous odor in the air. Then Ki-Gor let his animal sense of direction control his mind, and, using his spear for a staff to warn him of cracks or rubble on the ground, led the way toward where there was the slightest flickering of light in the mist.

The others came behind, following closely, conscious of each other and of the blind danger that must lie all about. They could not move fast, but had to probe and grope their way along the rocky ground.

Ki-Gor's spear suddenly rested on nothing, and he stopped instinctively, wondering at the wave of moist sulphurous air that swirled dankly from almost underfoot.

"Easy," he cautioned, began to lower himself over the edge into the cloud-filled hole which he had discovered.

They went down almost in a compact group, their feet searching for tiny nicks and slashes in the rock, linking themselves together by touches of their hands now and then. Their breathing was taut, and their nerves extended tendrils of sense into the clouds, seeking anything that they might recognize.



They were like blind men, and Ki-Gor felt a helplessness such as he had never known. Always before, he could trust his strength and eyes to warn him of danger so that he might do battle, but now he was as helpless as the boy who came directly behind. He was no longer the Lord of the Jungle, for his home was far away, this land strange and unreal.

Light came crawling upward through the clouds, came swirling upward on the sulphurous winds that stirred the crowd. It surged faintly at first, more felt than seen, and then resolved into a flickering reddish revulstant haze that permeated the mist with a growing glow.

KI-GOR hurried faster now, his jungle eyes straining to see his way, details becoming less faint with each passing second. He found a twisting narrow ledge that curved downward, increased his speed. He felt dull excitement entering his mind, for the slowness of the past hours had irked his love of action.

And then the clouds were gone.

One second they had been swirling about the party; then they were gone, rising above the group's heads, and before the searchers was spread the mysterious sacred top of Kagunda, the Mountain of Death.

Ki-Gor gasped, despite his usual calm, stared with wondering eyes at the scene that lay before him. Helene came to his side, pressed close, as though by touching his great body she would know no fear and would receive comfort. Jimmy Ferris was silent, his eyes round and excited; while Tembu George and N'Geeso sucked in deep breaths, lifted their weapons as though expecting attack.

They stood on the side of a great volcanic bowl that was the top of the mountain. Light came from a great shimmering slowly-rolling lake of molten rock far across, near the opposite side of the bowl. The light seemed to twist upward with a tarry glowing slowness that spread like oil through the air and tinged everything with a yellowish-red effulgence.

There was a lake, almost black from where they stood, and in its center was a small turtle-shaped island. And about the lake, covering everything with a blanket

of weird growths such as none of them had ever seen, was a great straggling forest of gigantic trees and monster ferns and bushes.

It was a dead jungle, and yet it was alive. It should never have been, for it seemed to writhe with an uncanny life of its own, and yet it stood below like something from the phantasms of a nightmare. It was death, and yet it was life; and the uncanny sense of knowing that it was alive was something such as they had never before experienced.

An animal stirred in a tiny clearing below, scurried across, and Ki-Gor felt his hackles lift, felt the swelling of muscles along his wide back. Then the creature was gone, and the Jungle Lord blinked, not believing what he saw. It had been a creature fully as large as the mightiest elephant he had ever seen; but it had looked like an anteater, and it had great ridges of yellow bony plates along its vermilion spine.

There was an eerie sense of oppressiveness about the scene, as though it were not real. There was a feeling of agelessness about everything that was not possible. It was as though the past had been brought into the present, and the terror it inspired was instinctive.

Something moved in the clouds overhead, swooped in with a mad snake-like hissing, then vanished as though jerked back from sight by a rope. Ki-Gor spun about, barely glimpsing the reddish eyes and seeing the scaly leathery wings of the creature. He scowled, slipped his great war-bow from his shoulder, then handed his Masai spear to Helene to carry.

"Be careful," he warned the group, heard the snicking sigh of metal whispering from Tembu George's knife sheath, as the great Negro drew the blade.

N'Geeso said nothing, and there was defiance of everything in his shiny eyes, even though there was, too, a greyness in his intelligent features. He swung his blowgun free, fingered poison darts into the panel near the lip, and ranged himself at Ki-Gor's side.

"Wah!" he said uneasily. "I smell death."

Ki-Gor laughed, the sound ranging free into the clouds above, and slow smiles came to the ears of his hearers.



"It is but a jungle," Ki-Gor said confidently, then led the way again.

They went down the rain-washed twisting ledge, circling lower into the fantastic mountain cup, their senses alert for any unseen danger. And as the clouds drew higher overhead, the air grew heavier, and they breathed with greater ease, despite the gasses which flowed from the bubbling glowing pool of gummy lava that lay far across the mountain top.

KI-GOR went cautiously, despite his speed, his alert eyes questing about, his mind still trying to believe that what he saw was real. And the closer they approached the bottom of the bowl, the more fantastic became their surroundings.

There were weird trees that towered fully two hundred feet into the air, their boles so huge around the base that half a hundred men could not circle even one. Strange twisted leaves glittered waxily-green, and yellow pods dangled beside great red and green gourds among the brown branches. Ferns made great leafy curtains between the tree, each towering twenty times a man's height, each a shifting swirl of a hundred colors. And everywhere was the crimson light, subduing other colors, yet not blanketing them completely.

There was a richness of life about everything such as Ki-Gor had never seen. There were red and purple and orange fruits hanging in lavish abundance from trailing vines as thick as a man's wrist. Flowers sprang in riotous abundance from the mossy ground, their cups fully a hand's-breadth across, their colors bright splotches on the brown ground beneath the great trees and bushes.

And there was animal life, too, a strange unearthly other-life such as none of them had ever seen.

A snake hissed its challenge from the base of a towering tree, died with its head pinned by the lightning-swift knife flashing from N'Geeso's hand. It writhed in twisting reflexes, the fringed blue cape flaring convulsively about its wedge-head, the stubs of vestigial feet digging yellow claws into the turf.

N'Geeso retrieved his knife, shuddered when he saw the travesty of all the snakes he had ever seen; and even as he turned

away to clean his blade, a fang-mouthed, rat-like animal flashed out of cover, snatched the writhing reptile, spun back to safety, its black fur glittering as though oiled.

A reptile-like bird boomed a croaking warning from a branch fifty feet above the ground, glared with red eyes, while its scaly wings, with claws at the tips like a vampire bat's, flapped wildly and angrily at its sides.

Ki-Gor glanced at the bird, unconsciously shuddered at the loathsome uncleanness of the beast, then turned to Jimmy.

"Which way, boy?" he asked. "Where do you think your people are?"

They still stood at the edge of the jungle, strangely unwilling to enter its weird fastness, awed by the tremendous size of everything they faced.

"That way," Jimmy said, pointing. "There's the trail we tried to use to get out. And the plane crashed just this side of it."

Ki-Gor studied the trail which climbed the side of the bowl, then disappeared through a rocky cleft just below the line of slowly-moving clouds obscuring the sky overhead. He saw no movement, and the first tinge of relief came to his mind.

"We'll go that way," he said shortly, gestured.

They began their slow walking again, staying close together, feeling the oppressiveness of the towering jungle. They said nothing, and their nerves were tense.

Ki-Gor jerked to a sudden halt, and the war-bow came alive in his great hands. He nocked an arrow, and drew the gut tight with a surge of instinctive strength.

Muscles corded in his great wrists, cabled and twisted, then stilled for a flashing second of time. He sighted with the instinct which was his, loosed the humming string.

The arrow was a flickering streak of bright-tipped blackness winging its speeding way toward a dark shadow that moved in the lighted shadow of a towering tree. One instant the arrow flew, then ended its flight with a thudding *chug* of driving power.

A squealing bellow of rage blasted from the cover; and then into view, its mouth agape, great fangs snapping,



came the great crimson beast Ki-Gor had seen from on high.

It waddled, but at an incredible rate of speed, blasting out of the shadows, shaking its great scaled head to dislodge the arrow which had driven a full two feet up its left nostril. Its great bulk hammered the ground, and the splayed clawed feet spurned great chunks of dirt from the ground. Mad eyes rolled redly, and the head twisted back and forth on a neck as limber as a snake.

Ki-Gor drew and nocked and fired a second arrow, then stood and watched the great beast lower its head to claw at the two arrows with its forelegs.

"Aaaaaa!" N'Gesso wailed in superstitious terror. "It is *Gimshai*, the Stealer of Souls!"

Tembu George was at Ki-Gor's side in a single bound, his great spear in one hand, the gleaming three-foot knife in the other. His ebony face was grey, but his eyes held not the slightest trace of fear.

"What is it, O Ki-Gor?" he asked.

"A stegosaurus," Helene answered from behind.

"It's a big lizard," Jimmy Ferris maintained stoutly, triumphantly. "It's like the one that tried to eat us before when the plane crashed."

"It's *Gimshai*," N'Gesso said stubbornly. "I told you I smelled death; now he has come to take us down *Kastadi*, the River of Life."

The gigantic beast bellowed its rage and pain, savaged the ground, blundered toward the green jungle, then smashed away into the tangled undergrowth. Ki-Gor loosed the tension of the gut on his bow, relaxed, then turned to Helene.

"What did you say that animal was?" he asked.

Helene shuddered, disbelief still in her eyes. "It's a stegosaurus," she said. "And it has been dead for millions of years!"

A slight smile twisted up the corners of Ki-Gor's mobile mouth. He glanced at the crimson stains where blood had leaked from the monster's nostrils onto the ground.

"He was no ghost," he observed, then added, "How long is a million years?"

Helene smiled in her turn. "Long before you were born, Ki-Gor," she said.

"And what I meant was that everybody thinks all animals like that one are dead."

Ki-Gor flexed his wide shoulders. "Why should they all be dead?" he persisted.

Helene shrugged. "I don't know; that is just what I was told."

Ki-Gor dismissed the subject with the abruptness that was his jungle nature.

"Come," he said, led the way again.

They went even more cautiously now, shocked by the utter grossness and viciousness of the crimson monster that had lain in ambush for them. Ki-Gor walked with his straight jungle liteness, and wonder was piling in his mind.

NEVER in even his wildest of imaginings had he thought to see such a creature as that which he had just faced. He remembered the great overlapping scales that had made a bony crimson carapace over the creature's body, recalled the great upright plates of yellow bone that had ridged the spine. And he knew instinctively that he had no weapon that could penetrate such natural armor. Had the beast really attacked, they would have been helpless, insofar as weapons went.

It was logical to assume that there would be other of the beasts, perhaps monsters of another kind entirely; and his breath caught a bit in his throat when he thought of the danger to which Helene was being exposed. He was sorry now that he had permitted her to come along, but he had thought the trip would be almost anticlimactic in its simplicity. He had given no great credence to Jimmy Ferris' story, had dismissed the boy's references to the monsters as the ravings of a mind touched with jungle fever. But now he found himself the leader of a group marooned atop a worshipped jungle mountain, the one trail guarded by an apelike tribe of men; and surrounded by monstrous creatures the like of which he had never seen.

He glanced at his golden mate, drew his gaze along her slim body, sensed the affinity that lay between them. And as though knowing his thoughts, Helene turned, smiled into his eyes, shook waves into her gleaming gold-red hair with a toss of her head.

"There!" Jimmy said, pointed excitedly,



caught at Ki-Gor's hand, tried to pull him into a faster pace.

The Jungle Lord squinted in the hazy red light, descried the outline of an airplane's wing tip and tail section a hundred yards down a natural trail in the forest. Then from the corner of his eye he caught the slightest flicker of cautious movement in the brush.

He dropped, pulling Jimmy at his side, his outflung leg sending Helene toppling. And so highly strung were the instincts of the blacks, they dropped within a second of Ki-Gor's twisting fall.

The gun blasted with a whiplike smack of sound, and the bullet sliced the air where but a moment before Ki-Gor had stood.

He rolled, his right hand fleeing over his shoulder, drawing an arrow, then retrieving and nocking it in one continuous flow of superb muscle control. He drew the bow as he lay on the ground, drew and held the straining gut tight, his keen eyes seeking the murderous ambusher.

He was a bronze statue lying in the thick carpet of green grass, his grey eyes keen and narrowed, the heavy muscles of his shoulders ridged with herculean strength. He waited for what seemed an eternity, but what was in reality less than a fleeting second, then caught the barest of movements in the bush. He sighted instinctively, drove the arrow forward.

The missile flicked through the leaves with a shriek of disrupted air, fled into the shadow—and struck with a solid *thwock* of sound. A man sighed unconsciously, then toppled from the shadow of a tree, lay still, blood bright upon his face, a gun dropping from his nerveless hand. His face muscles twitched for a bleak moment, then he was utterly slack, brown eyes staring sightlessly at the tree overhead.

And then, in that brief instant before exaltation filled the Jungle Lord's heart, in that heart-tick of time before he could twist to search for another ambushing enemy, he heard Jimmy cry aloud, saw the boy dart toward where the ambusher lay. And the words came winging back, filling him with an agony such as he had never known.

*"Lieutenant — Lieutenant Ashworth! You've killed the Lieutenant!"*

V

THERE WERE times in the life of the White Lord of the Jungle when he cursed the lightning reflexes that were his. For years, how many, he did not know, he had roamed the lush plains and verdant forests of the Congo, living by his capacity as a hunter and stalker, never relaxing the rigid jungle code that was his. Never had he slain for the sheer thrill of killing or for fancied revenge. Always had he waited for his enemies to force the fight, and then he had used his keen mind and superb body to do battle.

And now, as he lay on the ground, watching the boy run to the body of his friend, he swore bitterly, knowing the agony his instinctive speed and jungle skill had caused the lad.

He felt no particular remorse, by his jungle code, for acting as he had. In the jungle, one does not ask the name of his attacker; instead, he defends himself as best and as quickly as he can. He was sorry only that the white man had fired from ambush, for that had been the cause of the lightning counter-attack.

But this was not the moment for regrets; this was a time for action. He came lithely to his feet, raced to the side of the fallen pilot, bent and made a quick examination. He grinned at the crying boy.

"He'll be all right, Jimmy," he said. "The arrow must have struck a tree, then vibrated; and the shaft just stunned your friend."

"You're sure?" Jimmy scrubbed at his tear-filled eyes.

"I'm sure," Ki-Gor said, then whirled to face the two women who had stepped into the clearing twenty yards away.

"Jimmy!" the first one said.

And then the boy was racing her way, there to be caught and held while a gentle hand stroked dark hair back from his forehead. He was talking, and she listening, but her eyes were frightened and questioning as they peered at the Jungle Lord and his party.

Then the second woman, barely younger than Helene, saw the injured pilot on the ground, and whiteness came into her face. She started forward, terror building in her eyes, her hands outstretched as though to protect the man.



"Bob!" she whispered, spun about, outraged love and anger in her voice as she faced the jungle giant. "What have you done; what have you done to Bob?"

But it was Helene who answered. She came about Ki-Gor, stood before the girl, and the sight of her, the sensing of that which was Helene's character, silenced the girl's outburst, even as she dropped to her knees beside the wounded pilot.

Lieutenant Ashworth shook his head, slowly blinked his eyes into focus, then his gaze centered on Ki-Gor who towered over him like some great bronze god. He caught his breath, and his hand groped automatically for his gun. Then the Jungle Lord smiled, and the tension went from the man.

"Oh, Bob," the girl whispered.

The Lieutenant turned his head, smiled at the girl, then lifted a hand and gingerly examined the bloody bruise that raced the side of his head.

"What happened?" he asked Ki-Gor.

"My arrow barely touched," Ki-Gor answered. "But why did you try to kill me?"

"I thought that you were part of the bunch that attacked us in the first place. I thought Jimmy was your prisoner, you had hold of his hand, and I thought you were forcing him to lead you to the plane." Puzzlement came into the white man's eyes, as his gaze travelled from mighty Ki-Gor to slender Helene who was like some jungle goddess, and then swung to the great Tembu George who was more than twice the height of N'Geeso.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" he finished.

Ki-Gor shrugged. "We thought to rescue you from this mountain."

Jimmy came forward, urging the woman at his side. "Mister Ki-Gor," he said solemnly, "this is my Mother, and that's my sister, Jeanne, and the man on the ground is Lieutenant Ashworth who was our pilot."

Mrs. Ferris gave her hand shyly, as though not knowing as to whether this gigantic half-naked man would understand the meaning of the gesture. She smiled from friendly brown eyes that matched her hair, and her grip was warm and firm.

"I'm grateful, Mister Ki-Gor," she said. "Much more than I can say."

KI-GOR was tongue-tied for the moment, and red crept into his tanned features. He wriggled uneasily, tried to avoid more of the same speech. He was embarrassed, for this was woman-talk, and in the jungle men did not speak of such things.

"We must—" he began.

Then Helene smiled and came to her husband's side. "There is no need for thanks, Mrs. Ferris," she said gently. "We understand."

Mrs. Ferris' eyes filled with amazement. "But you're an educated woman," she said. "Why are you—" She broke off, embarrassment filling her; for Ki-Gor had turned, his grey eyes suddenly icily bleak, and he had strode from the clot of people.

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Ferris began, and Helene nodded in understanding.

But for Ki-Gor, standing with his back to the crowd for a moment, there was only a dull sickness in his great heart. Always when he least expected it, some tiny word or bit of action would creep into his life to make him realize that he might be denying his wife that which should have been hers by right.

"Ki-Gor!" Helene said softly.

And then a slim hand slipped into his, and his mate was close, her dim perfume in his nostrils, her nearness a tangible thing that he wanted more than anything else in his life. He drew her into the circle of his arm, held her tightly; and as she tilted her head, he bent and tasted the warmth of her mouth. For a second of eternity, they were alone, spinning in a void of their own making, only themselves therein.

Then the moment was gone, and the first sparks of laughing understanding came into their eyes. They smiled, then went arm in arm back to the talking group. Lieutenant Ashworth was standing, his arm about Jeanne.

"I'm sorry about that ambush, Ki-Gor," he apologized.

The Jungle Lord shrugged the event aside, then swept his gaze about the circle. "We must go down the trail to the jungle," he said. "That is our only way of escape."

Lieutenant Ashworth shook his head. "There are too many of the savages guarding the trail," he declared. "We tried to



break through, the once when we thought Jimmy had been captured or killed; and since then, I have tried to find other trails, without success."

"You have weapons?"

"Yes, a rifle and revolver, but only enough shells to fill both guns about half full. I've had several brushes with those savages, and while they seem to fear guns, I haven't the ammunition to wage a battle the full length of the trail."

Ki-Gor flicked his keen gaze to Tembu George and N'Geeso, read the concern in their eyes. His mind probed for possibilities, seeking some way out. There was, of course, the possibility that they might escape by the same route his party had used to scale the mountain. But in all probability, he could never find that ledge again in the thick clouds, and if he did, then the ape-men would probably be guarding that route of escape. Too, these civilized people would be too soft to climb several hundred feet down a swinging rope, and lowering them was a physical impossibility.

The problem loomed even larger, as he thought, and gradually he knew that an attempt must be made to escape by means of the mountain trail. And that, of course, meant plans must be made carefully.

"We will go to the plane and make war-talk," he said simply.

Without waiting for an agreement, and with Helene at his side, he strode toward the wrecked plane. He caught the question that lay unspoken in his mate's eyes, grinned with a flashing of white teeth in his bronzed features, and confidence came into the set of his shoulders.

"*Wah!*" he said scornfully. "Have we not fought greater odds than these, and won?"

Helene nodded, slipped her slender hand into his broad palm, walked gracefully at his side. There was no need for further words.

AT THE wrecked plane, they gathered in a circle about the dead ashes of a small cooking fire. Ki-Gor gazed at the wrecked bomber, scowled in silent distaste. Lieutenant Ashworth saw the frown, spoke.

"A clogged gas line caused the trouble," he admitted. "And the storm did the rest."

The Jungle Lord still scowled, wondering what a gas line was, then dismissed the subject abruptly, remembering the crashed plane from which he had rescued lovely Helene.

"If men were meant to fly," he said with simple primitive logic, "they would have been given wings."

Lieutenant Ashworth relaxed, non-plussed, then smiled. There was something magnificent about this bronze giant, something so simple and direct about his character, that no offense could be taken at what he said. He was both civilized and primitive at the same time, with the best characteristics of both.

"Have you a plan?" Mrs. Ferris asked anxiously.

Ki-Gor shrugged. "First, I must know things."

Lieutenant Ashworth said: "I can tell you a bit about this mountain. No humans live up here, but there are plenty of animals." Awe came into his voice. "There are animals here such as the world has not seen for millions of years. I've seen stegosauri, dinotherium, therepoda, ornithopoda and ceratopsia. They're extinct, *yet they live here*. In fact, I'd stake my life that those creatures we fought on the trail are Neanderthal men. This is a lost world, a land of the living dead. The seclusion of this place, the continual dampness and volcanic gasses have kept this land as it was millions of years ago, with all of its trees and shrubbery and animals just as they were then."

Ki-Gor swung to Helene. "What are those things of which he speaks so easily?" he asked. "Never have I heard of them, and Africa is my home."

Helene smiled. "Those are but words he uses to describe the animals which live atop this mountain."

Ki-Gor shrugged impatiently. "Then we need have no worry. If men do not face us here, we need only concern ourselves with those who guard the trail." He fell silent for a moment, considering every phase of the situation. "We will leave as soon as possible," he said. "N'Geeso, Tembu George and I shall lead the way, using our weapons if necessary. You," he indicated the Lieutenant, "will follow with the women and boy, guarding them with your fire-weapons. We must



be quiet, and attack the moment we are seen. Our only chance lies in surprise."

He glanced about the group, seeing their eyes intent upon his features, then swung his gaze about the weird bowl in which they rested, shivered involuntarily.

"Wah!" N'Geeso agreed. "The plan is good. I do not like those men who walk like monkeys; I should like to bring some to earth!" He fingered his gaudy blow-gun.

Tembu George nodded without speaking, honed the razor-sharp edge of his great knife on the sole of his left foot. Lieutenant Ashworth jacked a shell into the breech of his rifle, flicked on the safety and laid it aside, then checked his revolver.

"Sounds okay with me," he said.

Mrs. Ferris drew Jimmy closer, held him tightly for a moment, then nodded. Jeanne watched Lieutenant Ashworth for a second, then turned to Helene who was already examining the gut of her bow, and nodded.

"Fine!" Ki-Gor said, came lithely to his feet. "There is no need for waiting; let us be gone."

He whirled in a half-crouch, as the bull-roar smashed in from the jungle, and reluctant wonder came into his eyes. The others surged erect, huddled together watching the primitive bestial drama that had appeared with startling suddenness in the clearing they had vacated a few short minutes before.

**T**HEY fought with great scything slashes and stroke of yellow saber teeth, their screaming roars of rage reaching toward the roiling clouds above, their tons of weight thundering vibrations from the ground. Great splayed clawed feet tore at the earth, ripped great chunks into the air, as monstrous legs drove the great armored bodies together like fantastic living tanks.

One was half the height of the other, his wicked green eyes glowing from beneath a bony brown twin-horned forehead that receded back into a flaring ridge of solid red bone that was like a great collar about its throat. Bony blue-green plates armored its back, made it grotesquely scaly, protected it down to the lashing heavy tail which had three sharp white horns growing from its length.

It fought with a clumsy quickness, darting in, mouth gaping cruelly, teeth gnashing at the hind legs of the second monster in an effort to hamstring its opponent. And each time it whirled away, the vicious tail smashed like that of a crocodile, the spearing horns ripping and gouging with terrible effect.

But if the first was quick, the second had a lightning speed. Great scimitar teeth gleamed yellowly in a gaping mouth fully a yard wide, and the head swung on a neck twenty feet long and with the darting quickness of a cobra's thrust.

It stood like a praying-mantis, the stubby forelegs tucked against its chest, the great driving hind legs and the lashing length of scaly tail bracing the tons of weight with the clumsy agility of the born fighter.

It, too, was scaled, the orange and black plates overlapping like those of a snake, only the belly, white as a toad's, unprotected. Its bellows of rage woke echoes in the dim unreal forest, and the monstrous poundings of its feet were like the boomings of an earthquake beneath the firm rocky ground.

It rode its tail time and again, lifting tons of bone and flesh into the air; the lashing hind legs, with their eighteen inch claws, smashing at the smaller dinosaur that dared to attack its might.

The smaller monster was blasted from its feet time and again, came dashing back in, maniacal bellows of anger ripping from its red throat, great blue-green scales dangling on blobs of red flesh where the teeth and claws of the second monster had gouged.

The larger beast used its blunt head as a bludgeon, smashing it on the whiplike neck, scything the teeth against the iron-hard plates that protected the other's throat.

They came together in a crash of bony flesh that rocked the ground, snarled and strained and lashed with their natural weapons like two monsters from a nightmare. Crimson gouted, stained the green grass and churned brown earth. The tail of the smaller beast smashed the larger in the belly, ripped and tore, laid reddish flesh open in a great wound that would have dropped an elephant in its tracks.

The wounded beast screamed raw de-



fiance, smashed with its head again, then reached out its stubby forelegs, caught the Triceratop's bony neck carapace tightly, and great yellow teeth grasped the plate, shattered it as though it had been *papier mache*.

Then the teeth of the greater dinosaur were sinking deep, blood flooding in a crimson stream over its lower jaw, soaking the battleground. The loser bucked in an ecstasy of agony, fought with a terrific surge of strength to free itself, succeeded. It lunged away, tried to run, fell to its armored knees.

And the larger came in for the final killing attack. The hind legs lashed, drove the smaller beast to its side; then the snakelike head flashed in, and the scimitar teeth tore the throat completely out of the downed beast's neck.

**C**HRIMSON gushed in a smoking spouting flood which slowly subsided. The Triceratop kicked convulsively, lashed with its tail again, caught the winner in the belly, the bloody horns ripping the great wound even wider. Then the green eyes glazed, were black, and the smaller dinosaur was dead. There was only the automatic reflexes of a beast far down on the evolutionary scale.

The winner coughed blood, gnashed its teeth together in triumph, hopped a few yards away, then turned and bounced its tons of weight squarely upon the body of the dead foe. The great claws ripped and slashed, tearing away the bony plates, leaving the red flesh exposed. A second later, the live monster was feeding, its hoggish grunts filling the air, shredded flesh and ruby blood dripping from great jaws, the vicious eyes glaring a challenge to all the jungle.

Then from the verdant green jungle, came slipping creatures such as Ki-Gor had never thought existed. Some slid on their bellies, others hopped, and still more walked. They came in carefully, beady reptilian eyes watching the feeding monster, then darted in, ripped great chunks of bloody flesh from the carcass, and darted back to safety, there to feast in great sucking slobbers of feeding.

A great lizard-bird dropped on silent wings, its vicious, toothed beak agape, a whistling hissing whirling from its throat.

It lighted with outspread claws on the carcass, dipped its scaly head to feed.

The great dinosaur flashed into motion, lashing its head like a snake's thrust, caught the reptile-bird, a pterodactyl, by one leathery wing. The reptile-bird screamed its anguish, fought with great beak and free wing to tear itself loose. The monster dinosaur calmly grasped the bird with its stunted forelegs, held it tightly, then ripped the reptile-bird to bloody shreds with delicate side-snatches of the monster teeth in its gaping mouth.

Then it dropped the bird and screamed, bellowing in sudden spasmodic agony.

It clawed at its ripped belly with its forelegs, turned to hop away, and fell in a flurry of convulsive kicking. It had been dying for minutes, but so basically uncomplex was its nervous system, it had not known that. With its two brains, one in the head, the other in the tail, it had not known that a death-blow had been received, until too late.

And now it lay on its side, blood cascading redly from the ripped belly, flooding toward the ground, the vicious black eyes glazing quickly. It lashed its head at one of the scavengers; then the neck had no more strength for attack, and the small beasts came surging in.

Embryonic feathers rustled against scales, and slimy skin touched them both, as the smaller beasts fed. They gorged horribly, terribly, on the still-living winner of the fight.

"Wah!" Ki-Gor said in disgust, turned away.

He had many animal feelings, did Ki-Gor, White Lord of the Jungle; but the sheer primitive animalism of the battle between those prehistoric beasts had sickened him. He wanted nothing more than to return to his beloved jungle in the lowlands.

He knew, too, in that morbid moment, that he and this tiny band of people could not fight such monsters. Their weapons would be like pebbles against a rhino's thick hide. Should the beasts attack in force, there would be no escape.

"Come," he said shortly, shrugged some of the tenseness from his shoulders.

He started the silent group on the way toward the trail, seeing the horror that still lay in their taut faces, feeling a surge



of sympathy for the Lieutenant and his passengers. This type of existence was entirely new to them, and they had not the animal instinct or strength to look at it as impersonally as those who saw the callousness with which death struck in the African jungle.

"On!" he ordered. "Success depends upon our speed."

## VI

THEY WENT directly toward the leprous-white trail which twisted up the side of the crater in a gentle grade, paused on a turn, and peered back at the cup below. The last dying bellow of the winner of the battle between the dinosaurs came winging upward, then faded in a squawk of dulled pain. Far across the bowl, the pale gray fumes rose in a single spire, like steam, from the glowing surging pool of molten lava, the fumes spreading into the clouds so high overhead.

They could see the black lake almost at their feet, descried the island that dotted its center; and for a moment, in the wavering reddish light, thought they saw movement on the island. To every side spread the silent gigantic twisted forest of green trees and snaky ferns; and in the clearings moved the brightly-colored beasts of an age long dead.

Then they turned, went again up the trail. They moved almost in a compact group, weapons ready, eyes searching for the danger they knew must lie ahead.

Ki-Gor swung easily along, grasping his great war-bow in his left hand, the massive, shovel-bladed Masai spear couched in the fingers of his right. N'Geeso and Tembu George paced his sides, and behind came the women and boy, guarded by Lieutenant Ashworth and his guns.

They said nothing as they walked, for climbing was difficult among the twisting creepers and vines which rode the path like green serpents tangled blindly.

They reached the top of the trail, began the descent between the rocky, verdure-clad walls of a narrow rock-fault. Rocks rattled now and then, dislodged by their feet, and clattering in miniature landslides within a few yards of their starting point. There was no other sound.

There was still darkness outside the mountain, and a twist of the trail cut off the crepuscular light from within the crater-tip of the mountain. Their eyes adjusted slowly, and gradually they made out the outlines of the rocks and bushes they passed.

Greyness came slowly to the sky, and a light breeze winged its way up the narrow defile. Jungle odors came stronger as the moments fled by, filling the Jungle Lord with a momentary nostalgia.

But the mood passed, was replaced with a mild exaltation, for none of the dread enemy had been seen; there was not the slightest of sounds to betoken them far ahead.

Some of the tenseness went from the party, and the lines of their features relaxed. Ki-Gor glanced about, really saw them for the first time. Mrs. Ferris walked proudly beside her son, her brown hair gleaming over a face pale with the bitter hours behind, but with an unconquerable light in her eyes. Her tailored blue dress was ripped, and her brown low-heeled shoes scuffed; there was a long scratch on her right arm, but she smiled confidently at the jungle giant as he turned.

Lieutenant Ashworth nodded shortly, his dark eyes narrowed slightly beneath straight brows. He wore the knee-hose and shorts of the British army, and carried his guns with the competence of a trained fighting man to whom weapons were a part of his natural existence.

Jeanne walked at his side, touching him now and then with the swing of her bare arm; and Ki-Gor felt a flush of sentimentality when he saw that which lay in her eyes each time she glanced at the grim features of the Lieutenant at her side. There was in her gaze then those things which the Jungle Lord had surprised in the eyes of Helene many times in the happy months they had shared together.

Helene walked like some titian-haired golden princess, her body swelling lisomely against her leopard-skin halter and clout. She smiled easily at her stalwart mate, lifted her bow a bit; and he winked wickedly, watched the blush come tiding into her clear cheeks. He grinned, then watched the trail again.

N'Geeso checked the poison tips of his darts as he walked, loosened the knife at



his waist, then glanced at Tembu George, who walked at the Jungle Lord's other side with quick catlike steps of feline grace.

"If attack comes," he said in Swahili, "stay thou behind me, and I shall see that harm does not reach thee."

"Wah!" Tembu George grunted amusedly. "Quiet, little man. If danger does come, I shall stuff you down the throat of an enemy—and there you can kick holes in his stomach."

"Wah!" N'Geeso spat disdainfully. "I would do more killing that way than you will do with all of your weapons."

He grinned, glanced at the bronzed giant at his side. "We men-warriors are always plagued by the men-boys who think they are full grown just because the elders give them weapons."

THE White Lord of the Jungle forced aside a smile, flicked his eyes to the gigantic black at his left, remembering the terrific havoc he had seen Tembu George wreak in battle before. If ever a perfect fighting machine had ever existed, such was this massive black chieftain.

"He will grow," he said gently, mischievously.

Tembu George growled deep in his throat, liking the byplay, but carrying on the farce as though he had been insulted.

"I shall have a son soon," he said darkly. "And when he is a hand of moons old, I shall have him feed this little man's ears to him one by one."

N'Geeso swelled with indignation. "This is too much," he declared. "My prowess has been questioned. I shall——"

He dropped like a speared eland, the blowgun clattering from his lax fingers, a great bloody bruise racing his forehead where the slung stone had smashed.

"N'Geeso!" Tembu George cried aloud, and turned with a surging bellow of rage to meet the gross ape-men attackers that were plunging from concealment among the rocks.

They came in a bestial wave of hairy squat bodies and bowed legs, clubs waving viciously in their prehensile hands, a weird battle cry ululating toward the lightened sky.

Ki-Gor growled deep in his throat, and the thin veneer of civilization split and

dropped from him like a shattered cloak. The great war-bow came lifting in his hands, and then his right hand swung up and over his shoulder, and his fingers had drawn an arrow from the sheath, was nocking it, and the tensed muscles of his arm and shoulder were drawing the gut far back.

The fletching reached his right ear, and he sighted with a deliberate instinctive speed. He loosed the shaft; the gut thrummed with a deep bass note, and the arrow drilled forward through the weak sunlight.

The blade drew a shrill scream of pain from the air, then drove deep into the hairy naked chest of the first ape-man, drilled and twisted and cut its way completely through in a rushing gout of spurt-ing crimson, sped completely through, and skewered the throat of a second.

The second Neanderthal man choked on a flood of blood, clawed desperately at his shattered neck, then fell in a kicking heap which tripped the next two beast-men behind him. All three were on the ground then, two trying to regain their feet, the first bucking his life away upon the rocks.

But those were only four, and behind them were a hundred more. The Lieutenant's rifle belched flame and sound, the heavy slug tearing away the face of a charging ape-man; and a second shot blasted another to death before the first was completely dead.

An arrow ripped its deadly way past Ki-Gor, cut deep into the heart of an ape-man; and Ki-Gor felt a rush of pride for his mate, for it had been her arrow that had flashed so briefly.

Then there was no time for thinking. The mob of ape-men seemed to have no sense of fear; they came blasting in, coming from both sides and from in front, while Grankando stood on a great rock, his gross black body paint-striped, and urged them on with his cries in a weird animal-language they seemed to understand, his face writhing with the mad passion that filled his mind.

Tembu George was an ebony seven-foot demon from Hell. He met the first charge with the great knife whistling in his hand, and the blade changed from silver to a flowing red that splotched him and his new victims alike. A knotty club caught him



in the side, threw him to his knees; but his blade swung upward, and he twisted the blade even as it sank deep into a hairy belly. The skewered victim screamed, the ape-face splitting in a death-grin, the club dropping from a nerveless hand. Then Tembu George was on his feet again, his face grey from the agony of breathing, the bush-knife building a wall of murderous steel before him which nothing could pass and live.

Lieutenant Ashworth's rifle roared its hail of death, slicing down ape-man after ape-man; and when the weapon was empty, the soldier used the steel barrel as a club, crushing the skulls of the attacking beasts who came closer with each passing second.

The fighting was too close now for arrow-work, so Ki-Gor instinctively slipped the bow over his shoulder, even as he stooped and snatched up the great spear that he had dropped a moment before.

And now he and Tembu George stood side to side, using their jungle weapons in a way such as normal men would have thought impossible. Their blades darted out with a lightning speed, sank deep, were retrieved with a twisting wrench such as only the Masai fighting men could do to perfection.

**T**HE DEAD piled up in a growing heap, and over the bodies clambered more of the beasts. The slobbering fang-mouthed jaws screamed a hate-defiance at the attacked, and the clubs in their hands were like light wands to their incredible strength. They took the crimsoned blades in bellies and chests and throats, died with their weapons still swinging in their fists.

Lieutenant Ashworth's rifle broke at the breach, and he bent the steel barrel in a complete half-circle over the head of a black-haired ape-man, then drew his revolver, and jerked the trigger.

An ape-man blasted backward from the punching slugging of the first bullet, his club whistling past the shoulders of Ki-Gor, who, in turn, lashed out with the shovel-blade of his spear, and killed another beast-man whose uplifted club would have crushed Ashworth's skull.

Then the three of them fought side by side. Lieutenant Ashworth's revolver was empty within a second; and reaching down, he snatched a dropped gnarly club, swung

it with the frenzied desperation of a man who protects all that he holds dear in the world.

Ki-Gor fought with a silent catlike fury, his great spear swinging like a razor-tipped switch in his mighty hands, muscles rippling and coiling with dreadful power beneath his bronzed skin, his hair a golden mane above the rocky cast of his face, his grey eyes aflame with battle lust.

He killed like a dread machine, using the sweeping razor-keen edge of his blade to slash and rip all who stood before its might. The point ripped into the belly of the nearest attacker, slid in without a sound, came free in a gushing torrent of life-blood. The creature fell, and his swinging club caught the Jungle Lord squarely in the belly.

Ki-Gor doubled, trying to evade the blow, tensing great muscles to cushion the shock, and then agony flooded his body, drove spears of blackness through his brain. He gasped, went back a full step, tried to focus dimming eyes.

Instinct flipped his hands out, drove the licking spear into the throat of a charging ape-man, snatched it free, and then lifted his body so that he could fight again. A dreadful numbness was spreading through his frame, taking the lithe strength from his columnar legs; but there was no fear in his eyes, and he snarled like the animal he was.

The spear and knife blades flashed in the weird half-light, and drew death in their wake. Ape-men screamed in dull agony, collapsed in twitching heaps, were replaced by raging others.

Helene was fighting, too, like the jungle queen that she was. Her arrows sang and zipped, painted a picture of death in the scene before her. There was no fear in her blue eyes, and she had no terror in her hands as she fought. Beside her, Jeanne and Mrs. Ferris caught up clubs, swung them like Amazons, crimson streaking the weapons, staining hands and arms. Even Jimmy tried to help, but his mother thrust her son behind her, guarded his life with the calculating ferocity of a lioness guarding its kittens.

But there could be only one outcome to the fight. The attackers were too many, and their leader urged them on even more as the seconds fled by. He stood on his



high perch, his eyes vicious, his mouth tonguing the words that drove the ape-men to frantic obedience.

Helene lifted her bow, drilled an arrow his way, grinned tightly, as the slim shaft skewered the black's arm, then could waste no more missiles upon the fiendish creature.

The battle was drawing to a climax. Twenty ape-men lay dead, wounds gaping hideously, and still the others came on. The defenders fought with a renewed desperation, trying to stave off the moment of defeat.

Then a club came winging out of nowhere, and Lieutenant Ashworth dropped into a senseless huddle, his face slack and blank, blood streaking his forehead where the thrown club had struck.

**T**HE BEAST-MEN raised an unholy shout of triumph, came surging in. Now only Ki-Gor and Tembu George faced them; and their arms were growing weary with the continual slaughter. Bruises marked their bodies, and they gasped for air, their eyes inflamed, and hating the beasts who had attacked from ambush.

But they were not supermen, and they had met their match. They fell back before the fury of the assault, trying to cover the women behind, knowing that defeat lay but seconds away.

"Run." Ki-Gor roared at the people he defended.

But the women could not run; two of the ape-men had circled the fight, were coming in from behind. The three women whirled to face that menace, and Ki-Gor fought alone at the side of Tembu George.

Four ape-men came lunging in, their mouths gaping in cries that could not be heard in the battle-roar, and the first died on the Jungle Lord's swinging blade. Tembu George slew the second with a backhand swing of his mighty knife, then swung about to face the last two of the attacking quartet.

A club flashed at Ki-Gor, and he parried it like a saber-master with the shaft of his spear. The second club smashed upward, caught him squarely in the jaw, knocking him unconscious from his feet. He fell, and Tembu George fought alone.

A scream of triumph came from the

murderous Grankando, and his remaining ape-men blasted forward.

There was no hesitation in Tembu then. He swung the great knife like a razor-edged feather, slew his two attackers with a single stroke, then bent and lifted Ki-Gor's limp body over one shoulder with a surge of desperate strength. He whirled, went toward the women, ducked past them, and his knife slashed the life from the two attackers of the women.

Then he was running clumsily up the trail, carrying the Jungle Lord like the jouncing body of some slaughtered enemy, leaving the women to face the enemy alone.

There was no cowardice in his action then; there was only the grim knowledge that this was the only way. Captured, all would be helpless; but with both himself and the Jungle Lord free, there was a chance that a rescue of the women and boy could be made later.

For Tembu George knew the native mind; he knew the workings of their intellect, and he knew that Grankando would not slay his prisoners except for some pagan sacrifice much later, after appropriate ceremonies.

And so he staggered in a rushing burst of blind speed up the trail, ducking instinctively away from the thrown clubs, feeling tiredness seeping all strength from his heavy muscles. The bloody blade still swung in his free hand, and a burning rage still blazed whitely in his mind; but he ran on and on, knowing that this was the best and only way.

He paused briefly, hearing the sounds of pursuit dying out behind, turned and saw the three women and the boy held tightly in prehensile furred hands, to be dragged before Grankando who still stood atop his battle station. Others were lifting N'Geeso and Lieutenant Ashworth, were carrying their unconscious bodies back down the trail.

Tembu George felt a dull sickness in his heart then, a surge of illness such as he had not thought possible for him to feel for people he had but barely met.

Then he shrugged the limp body of Ki-Gor into a more comfortable position on his shoulder, went again up the trail. Five minutes of climbing brought him to the top ridge, and he began the descent into



the crater. Once again, he was surrounded by the weird reddish half-light that stemmed from the lava pool, and the noxious fumes seemed stronger, after the brief period in which he had breathed the clean air of outside.

He reached the bottom of the trail, felt the first stirrings of the Jungle Lord on his shoulder. Scabbarding the crusted blade of his great knife, he held the jungle giant tightly with both hands, went toward the thick jungle ahead. He was almost there, when he heard the muted feral cries back up the trail.

Turning, he felt a dull panic stir within his heart. For coming down the trail, moving with the cautious agility of clumsy apes, were three of the Neanderthal men. Within a few minutes, at the very latest, they would find his spoor. And he knew that, in his weakened condition, with Ki-Gor to protect, capture would be certain.

## VII

OVERHEAD towered the lacy fronds of a gigantic fern, and beneath, the shadows were thick and spongy with inky darkness. Tembu George drifted into the first, then circled the waist-thick bole of the plant, began a slow trot deeper into the jungle.

He ran with a slow speed, each breath a tearing gasp from his tortured throat, his eyes searching the dim recesses ahead for the slightest signs of a natural shelter.

And then, so suddenly that he was surprised, he felt his strength dwindle completely. He went to his knees in a small clearing, cushioned the shock of Ki-Gor's landing, and laid the jungle giant in a comfortable position.

He crouched over the slack body, shaking with fatigue, then made a quick examination of the blue bruise that stained Ki-Gor's jaw. Relief came into his eyes when he saw that the injury was superficial. The Jungle Lord would be unconscious but a few moments longer.

And even as he realized that, he heard the sounds far back in the jungle that betokened the nearing of his enemies. He came slowly to his feet, unsheathed his bloody knife, then walked a few yards from his white friend, prepared to defend the unconscious man.

He loosened his shoulders, shrugged strength into his arms, and a dull flame began to burn within his clear eyes. He was almost dead upon his feet, but there was no hesitancy in his movements, no thought in his mind that there was any other way.

He saw the first of the ape-men coming through the shadows, ducked to one side so that he might have the advantage of an ambush. The searcher came closer, his bare feet paddling noiselessly on the turf, brutish eyes searching the ground, one hand knuckling the earth for support. He did not glance up until he entered the tiny clearing. And then it was too late.

The great knife made a whistling shriek through the air, chugged deep through bone and cartilage—and the ape-man's head seemed to bounce from the hairy shoulders. It fell in a looping arc, the mouth gaping in soundless surprise, the eyes already blank and staring. The squat body stayed upright for one incredible second of time, took two natural steps forward, blood pumping jerkily from the neck-stub, then toppled in kicking convulsions.

And then the two remaining ape-men came hurtling in. They made no sound now, intent only on the black man who faced them. They carried the spears dropped by Ki-Gor and Tembu George, and swung them like long clubs. The spears were heavy, and the glittering shovel-blades were scythes of death that would cut the black down in a fleeting second.

Tembu George ducked aside, still covering Ki-Gor, trying to find some means of attack which would give him any chance at all.

And the first ape-man died, a slim arrow driving squarely into its chest, smashing through and through, flashing half its length from the glossy black fur of its back.

And before Tembu George realized that he fought but one, a second arrow flashed, and snapped the life thread of the second. Then there were three gross bodies on the ground, and Tembu George was turning to face Ki-Gor who was rising shakily to his feet, his great bow dangling from the fingers of his right hand.

"Wah!" The Jungle Lord smiled.



"Thou were brave to face the three of them."

Then knowledge came to the grey eyes, and the slightly-dazed look disappeared. Ki-Gor stood erect, his gaze swinging about the clearing, panic growing in his face.

"Where is Helene?" he snapped. "Where are the rest?"

Tembu George sank slowly to a squatting position, wiped his blade on the thick grass.

"They were captured," he said slowly. "You were clubbed unconscious, so I carried you to safety. I thought that it was better for two of us to be free, than for all to be prisoners."

Anger raced into the voice of the Jungle Lord. "You thought—you thought!" He snapped. "By what right—!" His voice trailed away.

He nodded slowly, sank to the deep grass, shook his head to clear away the fuzziness of his brain. He felt the agony of uncertainty in his heart, estimated and evaluated the situation in a brief flickering of thoughts through his mind, realized that Tembu George had done right.

"Were any killed?" he asked slowly.

Tembu George shook his head. "They were made prisoners," he answered briefly. Then confidence came into his voice. "With a short rest, we shall regain our strength. Then the two of us, with our jungle skill, can do more than the entire party as a whole."

**KI-GOR** nodded. He lay back on the grass, breathing deeply, impatience burning at his heart, but knowledge of what must be done forcing him to remain quiet. Tembu George settled against a tree, the knife handy at his side, his every sense alert for other attackers.

Neither felt any fear that more of the ape-men might be searching for them; they had the instincts of the jungle which was their home, and they sensed that for the next few hours they would be unmolested.

A soft breeze came from nowhere, as they rested, brought the vague odor of bright flowers and growing life. The air was less tainted near the ground, and they breathed deeply, savoring the life-giving strength that poured from it. Above, feral eyes watched, and a squirrel-like feathered

beast raced the length of a moss-hung limb, snarled through curved fangs at the creatures below.

A blue and red, frill-necked snake slipped into the clearing, lifted six feet of its body into the air, studied the men with glassy eyes, then disappeared with a thin hiss of baffled hate.

Ki-Gor watched impersonally from half-closed eyes, then relaxed again, feeling strength creeping back into his body. With their superb recuperative powers, both men would be completely fresh again within the hour.

The minutes flowed one into another, and slowly the men regained their complete strength again. Ki-Gor rolled to his feet, came erect, stretched looseningly. Tembu George watched, as the Jungle Lord strode to the three slain Neanderthal men and retrieved his two arrows from the stiffened bodies.

"Time to go," Ki-Gor said, tried to reckon time by instinct, failed. The blow on his chin which had knocked him unconscious had also destroyed his memory of the passage of time. Too, without a sun or moon to watch, he had no way of measuring the passing of the hours by the unfailing clocks which rode the sky.

He cleaned the two arrows with a twist of grass, checked the fletching, then thrust both into his quiver again. He retrieved his bow, slung it over his shoulder, then walked quietly toward the route by which the ape-men had come.

Tembu George slipped to his feet, stepped past the dead ape-men, paced at the bronzed giant's side. Both walked with the quick sure steps of jungle men, both alive with the fresh strength that had poured into their muscles during the short rest period.

And even as they left the clearing, the first rolling thudding of the drum came booming through the air.

Ki-Gor's face went as still as though cast of metal. He paused in the midst of a stride, then hurried forward, driven by an instinctive knowledge that he could not put the keenness of his mind upon. Tembu George raced at his side, and both ran with an uncanny speed through the unearthly still jungle.

The drumming came even louder now, surging with greater strength through the



thinning trees; and a second later, as they stepped into the open near the foot of the trail, the sound came clear and unimpeded.

"Look!" Tembu George whispered, pointed with the swinging blade of his bush knife.

Ki-Gor turned his head, went absolutely rigid, his keen eyes watching the scene five hundred yards away.

Crude paddles spun great flecks of water into the air, and the ape-men paddlers swung their clumsy dugout canoes toward the island in the center of the placid inky-black lake. In the leading canoe, standing with his hand astride his hips, was Grankando, like some creature from a nightmare. Paint striped his body, and he wore a towering crest of peacock feathers which nodded and bounced with every movement of his head. In his right hand he held a great spear, and light winked weirdly from the blood-red tip. Eight ape-men drove the canoe forward, their backs bending as they clumsily held the paddles. The second canoe had but four paddlers, although it was larger than the first. But in the center, bound and helpless, lay the prisoners taken in the battle a short while before.

Following the second canoe came a dozen others, each filled with the ape-men, all going toward the rocky, tree-clad island that reared like a turtle's back from the unmoving water.

And even as Ki-Gor and Tembu George watched, the canoes were beached, and the ape-men poured onto the landing strip, where rough hands caught up the prisoners, carried them into the towering trees.

"Quick," Ki-Gor snapped. "Grankando is holding some sort of a ceremony on that island. He wears the sacrifice headdress of the Wasuli."

**THEY RAN**, running with the lithe speed of the jungle-born, their bare feet soundless on the ground, their mighty chests breathing the noxious air as though they but walked. They watched for hidden guards, as they ran, thinking that Grankando might have several posted. But the crazed black leader must have felt secure in the might of his Neanderthal tribe, for he had left none to watch for those who had escaped death before.

They came to the strip of rocky beach where marks showed the dugouts had rested, felt dismay fill their hearts when they saw that all of the boats were gone. Without a word, Ki-Gor checked his bow and arrows, settled his knife solidly in its sheath, grasped his spear tightly, then poised on the lake's edge for a shallow dive.

He rose on his toes, swung his arms for a dive—and Tembu George reached out, held him immovable.

Ki-Gor snarled like a thwarted animal, swung about, hackles lifting in sudden rage. Then he saw that the great black's eyes were not upon him, and he turned to follow the line of the man's gaze.

Cold sweat seeped onto his back, and he felt a hollowness in his stomach which he could not control. He swallowed convulsively, relaxed under the pressure of Tembu George's hand, and watched the things which were coming with an incredible speed through the water.

They were like the creatures which had battled in the glade, in the way that scimitar teeth flashed in their gaping mouths. But there the resemblance ceased. Their heads were small, like the heads of snakes, and the eyes gleamed with a reddish malevolence at the intruders on the bank. Long necks undulated until the heads were fully twenty feet above the water; and the reflections of the bodies below the surface were twisted and gargantuan.

They hissed as they swam, and the stench of their bodies was like the noisome odors rising from a moldy cavern. Water rippled against their breasts, and they came with a speed which a man could not hope to match.

"Back!" Ki-Gor whispered, led the way to the safety of the shelving bank which towered over the lake on three sides. Forty feet above the water, they squatted on the edge of the cliff, studied the beasts which hissed and threshed and lunged implacably below.

"No swimming," Tembu George said soberly.

A serpent-headed reptile clawed futilely at the bank, tried to clamber toward the men above. It fell back with a baffled roar of rage, circled slowly in the water, watching with beady vicious eyes.

"No swimming," Ki-Gor echoed dully,



swung his gaze back to the vacant canoe-strip of land.

Then he turned slowly, thinking of a raft, and his eyes were caught and held by the single tree which stood almost at the edge of the cliff, fully fifty feet away from the main jungle. Elation came into his eyes, then caution filled his features, and he considered briefly.

"I shall need help," he said at last.

"Of course," Tembu George agreed, saw that the white giant studied the trees. "What shall we do, make a raft, and fight off the monsters?"

KI-GOR grinned, and there was in the reckless twist of his lips the great daring and courage which were his. He shook his leonine head, palmed back a loose strand of golden hair, gestured at the single tree.

"A catapult," he said briefly. "Only this time, I shall be the log."

Grey came into the ebony of Tembu George's face, and he shook his head. "No," he snapped. "Were you to fall into the lake, those beasts would slay you before you took two strokes."

Ki-Gor nodded. "I know," he admitted. "Therefore, we shall draw them to this cliff by throwing rocks. Then I shall set the catapult to throw me but a few steps from the shore of the island. I shall have more than ample time to swim to shore."

Tembu George studied the proposition for a brief moment, then nodded in reluctant agreement. He came slowly to his feet.

"We must work fast," he declared simply.

They ran toward the watching jungle, racing against time now, searching the tangled trees ahead for the long creeping vines which they would need for the binding ropes. Ki-Gor saw the first, laid his bow and spear aside, climbed the tree with the agility of a monkey. He hacked through the thin wiry vine with his knife, then swung from branch to branch until he could free the other end of the trailing creeper. It dropped to the ground, where Tembu George gathered in its length, and carried it to the base of the single tree.

Ki-Gor slipped from limb to limb down the tree in which he stood, dropped the last few feet to the ground, then ran

to the bundle of vine. Grasping the end of the creeper between strong white teeth, he climbed the single tree, trailing the vine behind, then knotted it tightly to the swaying top. Climbing down, he freed the rope of all entanglements, then dropped to the ground, and jerked his arm toward the sturdy bole of a tree at the jungle's edge.

Tembu George nodded, and both strung the vine along, brought it about the mighty tree bole, used the leverage to gradually draw the top of the single tree toward the ground.

They worked with a steady patience and strength, fighting every inch of the way, drawing the top closer, measuring its strength against the knowledge in their minds, judging its whiplike snap against the load it would have to hurl for a hundred and fifty feet.

Then Ki-Gor grunted, and they squatted, walked below the taut vine, twisted the rope around the tree again, tied the free end in a heavy knot about another tree.

Breathing heavily, they inspected their handiwork, and were satisfied. They went toward the cliff edge, gathering heavy rocks, began hurling them at the heads of the beasts below. They heard the hissing screams of rage, and tiny smiles etched about their mouths.

"Wah!" Tembu George said whimsically. "N'Geeso would make but a mouthful for those creatures."

Ki-Gor nodded, looped a heavy stone squarely down the gaping red throat of a snakelike neck. The monster coughed, screamed in defiance, thrashed in raging convulsions to reach the men overhead.

"Now!" Tembu George said. "I will keep their attention, while you ride the catapult." His craggy features softened, and his heavy hand was gentle on the Jungle Lord's shoulder. "Take care," he finished softly. "Thou are like a brother to my heart."

Ki-Gor smiled past the lump that choked his throat. He nodded shortly, paced quickly back to the tree. Settling his great war-bow and quiver of arrows over a great shoulder, then grasping the long spear in his left hand, he climbed to a precarious perch upon the down-bent top of the catapult-tree, and lifted his knife from its sheath.



Tembu George smashed heavy rocks at the raging monsters below, laughed a warrior's laugh at Ki-Gor. The Jungle Lord smiled faintly, settled himself.

He poised the keen blade over the rope, bracing himself for the ordeal which was to come, the first doubts of success assailing his mind. He jounced a bit on the tree, testing its strength, wondering if he would be thrown completely onto the island, or in the water. If he landed upon the rocky beach of the island, he would be either killed instantly or crippled so that he might die without accomplishing his mission. And if the tree failed to do its job, he might be thrown close enough to the reptiles to be torn asunder by their gaping teeth.

He glanced at Tembu George, and lifted his spear in a wave of good-bye. The razor-bladed knife touched the rope, and the first fibers parted with tiny brittle pops of sound. And even as the knife slashed deep, he felt the first thrill of terror and panic in his mind. He cried aloud in a grim warning, his grey eyes caught and held by the flashing black shadow which was whipping down from above.

One glimpse he had of the leathery wings, the evil red eyes, and the snapping fang-filled mouth—then the pterodactyl smashed squarely into Tembu George, drove him from the ledge into the mass of blood-crazed monsters frothing the water madly forty feet below.

Horror held Ki-Gor spelbound for a flashing second, and he did not notice that he had sliced the vine completely through, until the lifting tree almost threw him aside. Then he locked his legs instinctively, caught his balance with a jungle ease.

One second, the tree poised, as though giving its strange rider a last glance at the space where Tembu George had stood and died, then gathered a whiplike power that strained with a gargantuan strength. It came straight up, lifting with an irresistible force, carrying the Jungle Lord as though he weighed nothing, and threw him squarely toward the island. Branches scored his legs, and his neck cracked with the shocking snap of strain. Then he was rising in a parabola, riding the air like a cast stone, defying brutal death that he might fight at the side of his jungle mate.

## VIII

THERE was no time for thinking; there was only the involuntary gasp for breath, and the catlike slacking and twisting of his body so that he would alight with as little injury as possible. He whirled like the missile that he was, then regained his balance, went forward in a great arching dive.

Below, the water was inky and disturbed, and behind, the great beasts fought for bloody shreds of flesh in the carmined water. Their bellows of bestial rage seemed to carry him even higher, for they had a titanic force and quality of brutality such as he had never heard before.

Then he had reached the apex of his flight, and was dropping. His mind caught and correlated impressions with an instantaneous speed; and he felt a surge of relief when he saw that he would fall short of the island by a full three paces. Great muscles rippled in his body, and he flipped himself about so that he would land feet first, thus cushioning the shock and protecting his head and shoulders.

The water struck his feet like solid ground, drove his knees high; and limber swelling muscles tightened and slacked to take the strain. He went deep, stroked instinctively toward the shore, holding his breath, unable to see through the black liquid.

His head broke water, and he swam with a rush of speed to the bank, clawed his way upward, turned to see that no beast came his way. Without another glance, knowing there was nothing he could do now for Tembu George, he raced up the rocky beach, going toward the towering trees and ferns ahead.

He searched the ground as he ran, flicking his keen gaze ahead, peering for the tiny clues which would betoken the break in the jungle where Grankando and his ape-men had disappeared. The drum began rolling thudding echoes into the air, pressed with a visible strength and terror upon his mind. Behind, water thrashed and churned in Tembu George's grave.

He ran lithely along the line of jungle, found the slight break in the trees, correctly read the spoor in the rocky ground. Without a pause, he swung into the jungle,



went ahead like a drifting remorseless shadow of death.

Cool rage built tiny white lines in his bronzed face, and his knuckles were taut on the haft of his mighty spear. He smoothed water from his golden mane of hair with his free hand, wiped the hand on a leg where the lake water was already beginning to dry.

He heard the drum coming louder with each fleeting second, and he ran at a faster pace, keeping to the inky shadows, eyes moving restlessly and viciously into the shadows ahead, watching for any hidden guard. He saw none, and his nerves relaxed.

A green snake hissed from beside the trail, and he dodged its darting fangs with a twist of his legs, then sped on again.

He was close now; he sensed that, and the drumming was almost violent in its intensity. He slowed, drifted through the tangled vegetation, slipping from bole to bole like a great bronzed wraith.

He thought of many things as he skulked ahead; memories of laughing golden Helene, of Tembu George who worshiped the Jungle Lord and his bride, of diminutive N'Geeso and his bravery. For months they had been companions and friends, and the ties between them had grown stronger through the passing lazy days. Now the great Masai chieftain was dead, slain on a mercy expedition which was really none of his concern, and the others were the captives of a degenerate maniac and his squatty bestial henchmen.

Too, there were the others, those whose destinies had brought them to this weird kingdom where creatures from the past walked and slew and lived, even though they were supposed to have died out many fathers ago.

Ki-Gor shrugged the memories away, smelled the first bright odors of fire ahead. He went into the nearest tree, swinging upward with one hand, catching his balance with a catlike skill, then speeding across the carpet of tangled branches until he came suddenly to a great clearing, in the center of which was a gaping circular pit.

He crouched instinctively, and horror congealed the pounding blood in his heart, while a spasm of blind anger ran amuck through his brain. He snarled like a feral

animal, then forced calmness to come to his mind.

**I**T WAS ALIVE, and it stalked the bottom of the pit like some nightmarish beast from a tortured dream. Its mouth was fully four feet across, and the gleaming yellow teeth were needle-pointed knife blades rising in a split red cavern. It bellowed as it stalked the prisoners and ape-men who were ranged along one side of the pit, and the stench of its reptile body was a strange unreal odor that choked the air of the clearing.

It was huge, larger than any beast Ki-Gor had ever seen, and the sheer unreal greatness of it took the breath from the Jungle Lord. He blinked, not really believing, despite the fact that he had seen other live monstrosities about the mountain crater, then came to his feet and balanced lightly.

The Tyrannosaurus Rex, for such it was, despite that Ki-Gor did not know its name, was fully ten times the height of a tall man, and its stubby-clawed forelegs were greater than a man's body. It hopped and slithered and moved on gigantic kangaroo-like hind legs, bracing itself with a surging, swinging tail. Mottled red and yellow scales armored the body, covering even the belly, leaving no place unguarded, and the flinty carapace was scarred from a thousand battles with others of its kind.

It bellowed in a snarling hiss, lashed with scimitar teeth at the top of its pit, tried to batter away the edge by its swinging head. The ape-men shrieked in a wave of fanatical sound, pulled back—all except one.

He tripped on a club, rolling with a startled squawk of fear into the pit.

The dinosaur flicked its vast mouth in a snatch remarkably dainty and precise for so huge a beast, and caught the ape-man before he had more than cleared the edge. Steel-like teeth closed, locked, blood spurted in a flood of crimson from the jaws—and then the monster fed, its round evil eyes glinting cruelly and expressionlessly at the creatures who roved the pit's edge in a frenzy of blood-mood.

Ki-Gor drew back, sickened by the utter crazed bestiality of the scene. He had seen death before, but never had it been so sadistic and cruel in its utter callousness.



He wiped his hand unconsciously across his mouth, stifling the impulse to vomit.

Then he stiffened, and the spear came swinging back in his power-cabled hand.

He poised in that position, holding his breath, the ache of set muscles traveling the length of his massive body. He sighted with a deliberate care, fingers curving tightly about the haft of the spear, seeing only one man through the red curtain of hate that glazed his eyes.

Then the moment was past, and he had waited too long. Grankando had ducked about his bestial cohorts, was hidden within the confines of a crude, throne-like platform that reared at the side of the pit. Only his hands could be seen, each tightly-clutched about the blackened stakes that were the front edges of the platform.

His voice rang out in a maddened shout that was like the crazed bellowings of a bull ape; and at the command, a score of the ape-men slashed loose the bindings of the prisoners, shoved them callously into the pit.

Everything happened instantly, yet to Ki-Gor the scene had the treacly slowness of a nightmare. He lowered his spear hand, the bronze of his keen features blurring with the whiteness of the passions which rode his mind. He saw the twisting arms and legs of the hapless victims, saw fingers clutch at the rim of the pit, winced as a calloused foot beat them away.

Then the prisoners were gone from sight, dropping into the den of the dinosaur; and along one edge of the great circular pit danced and grimaced and chortled madly the monstrous beasts who walked like men.

Even the drum had stopped now, for the drummer was dancing madly on bowed legs with the rest of his tribe, his gnarled fists booming his hairy chest, his great mouth gaping and slobbering in bestial pleasure. He crowed into the unreal reddish haze, his eyes wide and inflamed—and died that way, the Jungle Lord's slanting arrow completely buried from sight within his squat body.

He toppled forward, and a jolting, hairy shoulder shoved him over the edge of the pit. The dinosaur's head flashed out, and great jaws clamped shut with a crunching of bones that sounded weirdly above the maniacal screaming of the blood-crazed

mob. The teeth met, closed, and a head and both legs dropped grotesquely.

KI-GOR knocked and drew another arrow, then let the bow sag in his hands. He knew that he had not the arrows necessary to slay those beasts before him, and the knowledge was like a white-hot pain to his frenzied mind.

He saw the bleak, glassy eyes of the monster watching him over the head of the crowd, unconsciously shrank in horror from the cold merciless murder that rested in them. Then the head whipped about; and the fantastic red and yellow beast began its stalking of the prisoners within the pit.

Only the fortuitous toppling of the slain ape-man had saved the prisoners when first they had fallen. Those few precious seconds had given them time to gain their feet and to dart to the farthest side of the pit. Now they huddled together, facing the implacable death that came waddling toward them.

Then Lieutenant Ashworth stepped from the group of prisoners, bent and caught up a broken spear, stood fearlessly with the four-foot shaft to face the monster towering over his head. Jeanne broke free of her mother's protecting arm, ran forward, cried aloud, the words drowned in the sea of noise smashing from the onlookers above.

Lieutenant Ashworth shook his head, grinned gamely, kissed the girl in a sudden rush of emotion, then forced her back toward the group. Alone, armed with a splinter of wood and steel, he stood to face the Tyrannosaurus Rex.

And then he was not alone. For running to his side, his tiny face calm and determined, a shard of knife-like rock clutched in his small hand, was N'Geeso.

Side by side, they stood then, a tall blood-streaked white man, face grim and worn, and a four-foot pygmy whose courage was greater than his size. They stood to battle the beast; and as though it were amused at the midgets opposing its omnipotent bulk, the monster stopped its movement, cocked its head warily to one side and watched from cruel, bleak eyes.

Ki-Gor could not move, so tight was he held by the sheer drama of the scene he faced. He balanced upon the rough scaly



limb of the gigantic prehistoric tree, and his breath caught hotly in his throat. He felt a surge of admiration for the incredible gallant bravery of the two men in the pit, for he knew as well as they that no man could stand before those tons of armored incarnate hellishness.

He drew the arrow in his bow finally, drew it until the massive length of iron-wood squealed with strain, and the gut hummed with a high, tight note. Then he loosed the shaft, and the arrow flicked so swiftly it had no form.

The arrow splintered into minute fragments on the iron-hard scales; and the dinosaur bellowed in sudden rage, darted clumsily at the men before him.

Helene screamed involuntarily, swept the two women and the boy behind her, protected them with outspread arms. But the beast was not hunting them! Its eyes were riveted on the two men who blocked its path.

The massive scaled head flashed down, bloody mouth agape; and Ashworth and N'Geeso sprang aside with a fluid quickness, then closed in on either side.

Lieutenant Ashworth drove his spear with his entire strength at the throat of the monster, drove and thrust and smashed with the razor-keen blade—and the steel bent as though it were of lead.

And on the other side, N'Geeso hammered with a frantic strength to pierce the dinosaur's armor with his crude stone blade, found no vulnerable spot, watched the blade disintegrate in his fist.

The head scythed sideways, and the vicious mouth closed upon Lieutenant Ashworth's left shoulder.

Ashworth screamed despite himself, beat with his free hand at the yellow teeth that were ready to lock tight into his soft flesh. His face was a white blur, and his weight held the dinosaur's head momentarily motionless.

Then N'Geeso sprang from where he crouched, landed fully astride of the *Tyrannosaurus'* bloody muzzle, sledged with small-muscled fists. A bellow of rage blasted from the beast, and he opened his jaws. Lieutenant Ashworth tumbled to freedom, scuttled away on hands and knees.

But N'Geeso paid a price for that daring attempt at rescue. The monster's head

flashed sideways, like a cat shaking a tiny mouse, and the pygmy was flung against the side of the pit like a rag doll.

He fell limply, didn't move, eyes staring sightlessly at the mob of beast-men that crowded and pushed and screamed at the gruesome spectacle below.

And the dinosaur whipped about toward Helene and the people behind her.

**I**T DIDN'T hesitate now! It, too, was crazed with blood lust, and it hurtled forward with the clumsy hopping stride of its kind, the fanged mouth gaping in horrible anticipation.

There was no fear in Helene then, there was only the bright warmth of the jungle courage that was hers; there was only the calm wariness in her eyes which showed she knew that death lay but a second away.

And then, at the last moment, judging her speed with an uncanny precision, she ducked nimbly aside, ran only fast enough that the beast must follow her slender body and ignore the others.

And the mad laughter of her tormentors upon the pit's edge hammered toward the churning clouds overhead. This was what they had seen before, what they wanted to see now, what they would see in the future. This was the cat and mouse game that thrilled them to the depths of their degraded animal minds.

For the golden-red girl could not win; there was no place of safety in the pit; when she was exhausted, then she would help to sate the appetite of the monstrous reptile that stalked her with a deliberate speed.

She ran with the panther-like quickness of the jungle-born, judging her distance, trying to conserve her strength, but gradually being forced against the rocky wall by the charging beast. Twice she escaped by mere inches, and tiny lines of exhaustion were etching themselves about her blue eyes and red mouth.

And then so fast that it seemed unnatural, Grankando treacherously threw a spear between her dodging legs, tripped her—and the murderous yellow-toothed mouth dipped down.

There was no escape; there was only the flashing second of eternity when Helene tried to roll aside, and the jaws closed.

Then Helene was being lifted into the



air, caught by the sturdy yellow and black skin of her halter, crimson staining her smooth back where the jagged teeth had barely scored in closing. She dangled like a live toy, twisting to free herself—and her eyes caught sight of her mate riding the great branch of the tree.

"*Ki-Gor!*" she called, and in her tone then was all of the love and trust and courage that she held for him.

The White Lord of the Jungle met that call, driven by something within his heart that would never die. He could not win, but he gave that no heed. He dropped from the limb, landed with a catlike crouch on the ground, then charged forward with a berserk roar of animal rage that turned heads of the beast-men as though they were puppets pulled by strings.

The great Masai shovel-bladed spear slashed a path of death through the beasts, slashed and hacked and butchered with cold-blooded efficiency, swinging in the arms of the mightiest fighting man in all of Africa. Nothing could have halted that charge but death, and so startled were the ape-men, none fought to stay his progress.

Then Ki-Gor stood on the edge of the pit, his bow and spear dropping unnoticed from his hands into the pit below, the great muscles of his thighs and legs and back bunching for the moment of strain which lay so close at hand.

"*Wah!*" Grankando's laughing bellow came from where he stood on the sacrificial throne. "Match your strength with *Kando-ngala*, O jungle man."

But the Jungle Lord had no time for the sadistic butcher ten yards away. He was watching the futile efforts of the dinosaur to free itself of the thing which clung to its mouth. Then its clawed, stubby forelegs came up, ready to grasp and tear to bloody fragments the captured girl—and Ki-Gor flowed into movement.

Muscles cabled and swelled and rippled the length of his body, coalesced their power in his columnar legs, and he flung himself from the pit's edge in the greatest leap he had ever attempted in his life.

He went up and up, twisted a bit by a clutching, hairy hand that tried to seize his ankle, then straightened with a feline grace, went shooting toward the scaly head which towered from the pit, twenty feet away.

There was silence then, as though everything had stopped, struck by the sheer graceful daring of the bronzed giant who had hurled himself so fearlessly forward. And then, as he twisted about, struck and clung with hands and feet, bedlam blasted loose again.

But Ki-Gor heard none of the sound. He was clawing desperately at the scaly head for purchase, trying to hold his balance on a perch that whipped like a striking mamba snake. He felt a gushing tide of relief when he saw the leopard-skin halter rip from the supple breasts of Helene and the girl go dropping to the ground below. At least she was momentarily safe.

Then he had no time for thinking; there was only the instinct to live, and the mad rage that had boiled from his heart. He was no longer a white man—he was the true beast of the jungle, fighting for the things he loved.

## IX

KI-GOR, White Lord of the Jungle, had met his match. He could not hope to win, and the thought was like the searing kiss of a burning brand. He rode astride the dinosaur's head, mind flicking with an incredible speed, trying to grasp vagrant thoughts, trying to formulate some form of attack which would give him and his friends a chance at life.

But his mind refused to work in a logical pattern; there was only the animal instinct to guide his great body. He growled deep in his chest, clawed at the scaly reptilian head, tried to tear away the scales so that he might get at the spinal cord or the pulpy brain. Blood stained his fingers and hands, oozing from the cuts slashed there by the rough edge of the yellow and red plates. But the scales would do no more than barely give.

And the whipping motion of the *Tyrannosaurus'* head increased to a swinging flicking which threatened to throw the jungle giant into space at any moment. And that was one thing that he could not permit. Enraged as the beast was, maddened by the battle he had received and by the taste of smoking blood in his throat, the dinosaur would turn and slay with lightning speed, the moment Ki-Gor struck the ground.



And even as Ki-Gor realized that, his hands lost their purchase, and he began to fall.

He slipped, his fingers clawing for purchase again, his legs already dangling over the side of the monster's jaw. His right hand held momentarily, then slipped, and a sudden toss of the dinosaur's head threw him completely free.

He twisted, threw out his left hand instinctively—and the gripping talons which were his fingers slashed deep into the carmined nostrils of the monster reptile.

Muscles cabled in his wrist, and the fingers knotted shut. Then he was drawing himself up with the tremendous strength of his arm and shoulders. He was flipped about like a wind-whipped leaf, but his hold did not break, and then his other hand came up and caught a hold.

The dinosaur bellowed, the hot fetid breath smashing noisomely at the Jungle Lord's body. And in that split second while the dinosaur's mouth gaped open, Ki-Gor doubled his body, swung his legs into the open jaws, and sank his bare feet deep into the slimy double pit at the base of the dinosaur's tongue, just behind the great scimitar teeth.

He flicked his right hand free, dropped it, caught at the great pointed canine tooth in the left side of the upper jaw, then freed his left hand, and caught the slimy long tooth at the right of the jaw. Then bracing his legs, digging his toes for support, his hands clamping rigidly about the two teeth, he began straightening his body, trying to tear away the jaw of the monster he battled.

Power rippled along his back, rippled and spread and coalesced in his superb body. His great shoulders hunched, the mighty muscles bunching, and the cords of his hands and forearms were pencil-thick with restrained power.

He began to straighten to his great primal height, muscles lifting into bold relief, ridging the broad sweep of his back, turning him into a bronzed bloody statue which would neither give nor bend.

He looked deep into the glaring bleak eyes of the monster, saw there things that were not clean, which should not exist, and a shudder caught at his breathing. Then the barest trace of a smile lifted the cor-

ners of his mouth, and he made his bid against death.

A blasting roar bellowed from the creature, and its rough tongue battered at the columnar legs. Muscles tightened inexorably in the jaws, and the leverage was such that they closed a fraction of an inch at a time.

Ki-Gor fought, battling with all of the strength that lay quiescent in his powerful body. He strained with all of the energy in his mighty back and thighs, driving his legs straight and his spine rod-like.

And still the jaws closed.

**KI-GOR'S** mouth went grim and thin, and he threw every bit of latent power into his set shoulders, riding the strength of his determination, perspiration streaking his face, dampening the golden mane that swept over his forehead. A soundless cry swelled in his taut throat, and he dared not relax for even the slightest fraction of a second.

But the jaws gave, straining open inch by inch, and a scream of baffled pain roared from the dinosaur's throat.

Then the monster went berserk, whipping its head about like that of a convulsed snake, trying to shake its tormentor loose, gaining new power with each passing second.

Ki-Gor groaned involuntarily, and his muscles slowly lost some of their locking grip. The jaws slid tighter, and a gleam of uncanny intelligence came into the obsidian reptile eyes. The Jungle Lord fought with a desperate urgency to regain the few precious inches he had lost.

But his strength was not as it was when he was fresh; now he was tired from the tumultuous events of the past hours. Slowly, he was losing the battle, and the thought was gall to his mind.

His left hand slipped, and desperation filled his heart. He levered extra strength into his right hand, tried to regain his original hold with the left.

And the great tooth held by his right hand broke with a brittle snap of bone.

Ki-Gor went twisting sideways; there was nothing he could do to prevent the backlash of his own energy from throwing him to his left. He went twisting aside, and a toss of the snake-like head



flipped him squarely into the monster's jaws. He lay on his back, neck lying across the side teeth, legs dangling from the other side of the four-foot mouth.

He gasped in silent horror, heard the muted scream of Helene from far away—and then the ponderous jaws were closing in a steady rush of vicious destruction.

Grankando screamed his maddened hate at the helpless jungle giant, screamed, and pounded his fists against his barrel-chest. He had watched the heroic fight made by Ki-Gor, had seen the impossible almost accomplished, and the hate and envy in him were tangible things. He could not have lasted for a moment against that monster, nor could any other man, and yet the Jungle Lord had fought for age-long seconds. And had it not been for the breaking of a tooth, it was possible that the jungle man might have won his unequal fight.

**B**UT NOW Ki-Gor was doomed; nothing could save him. And Grankando led fiendish beast-men cohorts in paeans of cacophonous blood-hate. They watched the jaws tightening with what seemed a deliberate slowness, ignored the prisoners who stabbed futilely with Ki-Gor's spear and splinters of rock at the armored legs and tail of the monster reptile.

They were like creatures from a nightmare as they screamed their blood cry into the reddish sky of Kagunda. Their features squirmed with an uncanny life, like masks of devil-rage, their gross bodies dancing in a twisting mass of motion without rhythm or reason. They crouched on the pit edge, jamming together, so that they might not miss the slightest cry nor the barest bit of the horrible sacrifice.

But Ki-Gor did not cry. His hands lashed upward, and he braced wide-spread arms and hands against the roof of the crimson mouth. And so great was the leverage he could exert from his position, so muscled were his arms, the dinosaur's jaws were instantly stopped from closing.

Great teeth cut into Ki-Gor's broad back, notched gouges in his bronzed skin, but he did not move. His face was white with strain and horror, but there was no fear in his grey eyes. Gone was the flame

of beast-rage from his mind, and he could think clearly and coherently again. He fought the gigantic strength of the Tyrannosaurus' jaws, and tried to formulate some plan which would permit his body to flip free of the monster's mouth before it could close. It would be far better to take his chances on the ground now; at least that way he would have some slight respite from the terrific battling which was his.

He could feel the strength draining from his arms and wrists, knew that another moment would see him too weak to hold back the implacable power of the great jaws. He shuddered, as the slimy rasping tongue battered at his side in an effort to dislodge him. He could feel the tremendous shaking of the head, knew that he could not hold out much longer.

There was no emotion in his grey eyes then, only the raw courage which was his. He had fought his fight, had done his best. He had seen others die, had known his day would come. Now his time was here, and there was nothing that he could do. He could not quit his fight, for that was not his nature; but he knew that his sands had almost run their course.

Regret shadowed his heart, for it was in his mind that he had failed Helene and the others. He had done his best, but that had not been enough. Now they would be alone, their fate the same as his.

He groaned, and the sound was drowned in the whistling roar of pain from the dinosaur. The jaws relaxed slightly, the head dipping so that Ki-Gor could see the ground below. He looked, then barely shook his head, for he knew the impossibility of what Helene was trying to do. She stood, drawing Ki-Gor's bow with a frantic strength; and even as he watched, a slim shaft drilled upward.

The world went crazy.

An agonized bellow ripped from the dinosaur's throat, was echoed a second later—and the jaws came momentarily open.

But that was the second of eternity which gave Ki-Gor his chance at life. He reared up, sitting in the gaping mouth, reached his hand out, locked fingers in the nostril hole of the dinosaur's muzzle and jerked himself free, dangling by one hand.



Yellowed fangs smashed shut, and bloody spittle spurted. Then the Jungle Lord had caught with the other hand, was drawing himself atop the swinging head again. He gasped in mute amazement, stared at the slim shafts that had drilled squarely through each bleak, glassy eye of the Tyrannosaurus Rex—and then laughed, laughed with the full mad richness of the moment.

Helene had proven her right as a jungle queen. Using Ki-Gor's murderous bow, drawing a string that most men couldn't bend, she had drilled two of his arrows into the eyes of the reptile, had blinded it and forced it to free its victim momentarily.

Ki-Gor laughed, and stood upright on the swaying, blinded head. And then, with the feline grace of the jungle creature that he was, he launched himself into space.

He rode the blood-tainted air in a half-crouch, straightened as he landed, and his mighty hands reached out for the screaming Grankando.

Then he had the black madman tightly in his hands, and was lifting the gross body as though it weighed but ounces. He whirled, braced himself, and muscles leaped into quickening life on his bloody scarred shoulders.

He threw, ignoring the clutching hands, not hearing the frenzied screams for mercy, tossed the pleading beast-king directly into the open jaws of the blinded monster in the pit. One second, Grankando tried to claw his way from the fleshy trap that was his, then the jaws ground together, and crimson leaked in great spurts to the ground below.

Ki-Gor spun to meet the first charge of the beast-men who stood stunned by the slashing action of the past moment. And standing there, like some heroic bronze statue, he was utterly awesomely magnificent.

"Ho!" he cried. "Who dies first!"

And in that split second, in that eternity which lasted but an instant, he saw a great black man burst from the jungle, a pliant length of vine trailing from one massive hand. The vine jerked taut, swung in a great arc level with the ground, with the black swinging his entire weight on the free end.

"These, O Ki-Gor!" A great laughing booming voice spun the words through the air.

And the vine caught the mass of ape-men, caught them as they teetered on the edge of the pit, swept them over the edge as a tight rope might trip a running horse.

"HO!" the great voice boomed in exaltation, and the vine swept the last of the ape-men into the pit.

And then Tembu George had dropped the end of the vine, and was running to Ki-Gor's side. Shoulder to shoulder, each refusing to say the emotion-filled words which filled their hearts, they turned toward the pit.

There was hell in that monster's lair then.

## X

THE DINOSAUR was running amuck, its taloned feet slashing and smashing and battering at all that stood in its way. Its sightless head was a flashing battering ram, its bloody mouth gaping, as the limber neck drove the head again and again at the ape-men who floundered about its feet.

An ape-man screamed, pawed at the crimson-spurting stump of its arm where scything teeth had slashed in passing; and then the scream died in a bloody gurgled grunt, as a taloned foot squashed the screamer into the earth.

The Tyrannosaurus Rex was a blind juggernaut of death that blasted indiscriminately about the pit, searching with a blind persistence for the creatures which scuttled frenetically about its feet. Its screams of rage and agony peeled high into the sky, drove echoes back and forth, raised other weird cries from far away. High overhead, pterodactyls spun into sight on wide leathery wings, then whipped downward, ready to feast on the bloody flesh that clotted the blood-soaked ground.

The ape-men fought to get free of the monster lizard, fought each other like the beasts they were, died as they fought, their great teeth tearing out each other's throats, their animal hands ripping and shredding furry skin and muscle like wet paper. They screamed as they fought, screamed in the dull panic of awesome fear, for their god had turned the full



might of his wrath upon them, and they were the blood-sacrifices he demanded.

And huddled against one wall, their eyes wide and sick with horror, were the prisoners originally destined for the sacrifice. They watched the awful carnage that lay before them, escaped the tons of death incarnate that lunged blindly about the pit, fought coolly against the maddened ape-men who blindly attacked them in their efforts to escape.

And even as they fought in the pit below, Ki-Gor and Tembu George raced about the edge of the pit, going toward the crude ladder which lay on a far edge. They caught it up with desperate speed, carried it to where they were directly over the huddled prisoners, and scaled it down, propping it so that the prisoners might escape.

The women came first, then the boy, and last came Lieutenant Ashworth carrying the limp body of N'Geeso.

Tembu George stepped forward, caught up the limp figure in massive arms, and the hate in his eyes was as bleak as lightning.

"They killed him," he said simply, turned to go down the ladder to avenge the diminutive warrior.

"Put me down, O pig with a man's body!" N'Geeso said weakly, scowled into the face of Tembu George.

Tembu George stood the tiny man on his feet, spat indignantly.

"So you sleep while a fight goes on?" he said. "And you call yourself a warrior." He waved his hand at the monster battering blindly about the pit. "Had I not come, you would have been in that creature's belly."

"Wah!" False anger stirred in N'Geeso's voice. "I'll—"

"Enough!" Ki-Gor snapped, grinned despite the horror of the moment.

Then Helene was tight against his chest, and he was stroking the golden-red of her hair, feeling the dampness of her tears on his skin, barely hearing her words.

"I was afraid, Ki-Gor," she cried softly.

He nodded, without speaking, swallowed the lump that was in his throat. His pride in his wife then was something that he would never be able to put into words, but so tight was their bond of understand-

ing, she knew the thoughts that lay unspoken in his mind.

"We must hurry," he said urgently, shepherded all before him toward the path through which he had come.

Then they were running, leaving that pit of death behind, the screams of the dying echoing high into the air. They turned for one last look, saw the blind head of the great monster lizard questing about the edge of the pit, heard the maniacal peal of unappeased rage that ripped from the yellow teeth. Then the monster had turned, was smashing about the pit again. And dropping like gorging vultures came the murderous pterodactyls to feast on the dead in the pit.

"This way," Ki-Gor said, and they were away from the clearing, running through the black shadows of the jungle.

THEY were alone, running in a gathering gloom, for the crepuscular light of the fabulous mountain did not fully penetrate the close interstices of the trees. They did not speak, for they were running from the horror behind, and the blind terror of those tense moments still cast a grim pall of dread over their minds.

Vines clutched with fibrous fingers at their ankles, and the thin branches of bushes were whips that lashed their legs. Far ahead, they saw the clean brightness of unshadowed light, and spurred their steps. A second later, they burst from the jungle, raced down the rocky beach to the canoes drawn up on the shore.

"In," Ki-Gor snapped, waited impatiently until all had climbed aboard, then shoved the long canoe into the water with a heaving twist of his shoulders.

He sprang lightly into the craft, caught up a paddle, joined Tembu George in speeding the canoe toward the far shore. He swung his head, hearing the threshing in the water at his left, frowned slightly when he saw the vast bulk being torn to shreds by the lesser prehistoric beasts of the lake.

"A throat was soft, O Ki-Gor, and my knife was sharp," Tembu George said softly. "I fell atop the leather bird, and it died almost at once. Blood attracted the water beasts, and they fought for the body. I slid my blade into a throat or



two, let more blood into the water, then swam like a river devil to escape, while the wounded beasts battled for their lives against their friends. I barely got ashore with my life."

"Luckily!" Ki-Gor said succinctly, sincerely.

Tembu George nodded, finished his explanation. "I raced into the jungle, became lost, found the sacrificial pit only when you were fighting the beast. I could not fight with but a knife, so I cut a liana, tied one end to a tree, then ran with the other end, and cut down the monkey-men as grain falls before a reaper's blade."

"Luck, all luck!" N'Geeso said from where he sat in the bow. "*Wah!* Thou have more luck than a girl-woman."

"Sleeper, while thy friends fight," Tembu George said softly.

"He did not sleep; he fought like three men," Lieutenant Ashworth said. "I would have died had he not jumped to my rescue."

Jimmy Ferris nodded, and his boyish voice was shrill with excitement. "He jumped on that old lizard's head and tried to gouge out his eyes."

"They speak the truth?" Tembu George asked.

N'Geeso squirmed in embarrassment, spat over the side of the canoe, scratched a non-existent flea-bite. This was not the way that things should be; men did not mention brave deeds, except in bragging about a talk-fire.

"I slipped," he muttered, "tried to free myself."

Ki-Gor laughed aloud, and the laughter was infectious music that brought flickers of amusement from his listeners.

"Ho, N'Gesso," he chuckled, "it seems that I have heard that tale too many times. For a man with leopard feet, for a man who can steal eggs from beneath a *virini* bird, thou are like a boy telling of his first fight."

N'Geeso grinned ruefully, then shrugged. "Men must fight," he said cheerfully, then flicked his gaze to the island, and rage blazed in his eyes.

"Monkey-men!" he snapped.

Ki-Gor's paddle lifted in a swift arc as he whipped about. He stared silently for a second at the horde of blood-stained

ape-men racing toward the beached canoes, and regret stirred in his mind.

"We forgot the ladder," he said ruefully, and dug his paddle deep in the inky water.

The canoe leaped ahead, driven by the great arms of the Jungle Lord and Tembu George, rock grated on the keel; and then the canoe was beached, and the small party was clambering to shore.

Cries of rage and deadly viciousness smashed across the stretch of water; then the ape-men had clumsily launched their pursuing craft and were sending them hastily in pursuit.

"To the trail," Ki-Gor snapped, herded his charges into a fast run.

THEY sped along the worn trail, going toward the notch above, running with the echoes of their pounding feet riding high into the thin air. And behind, the cries came louder, then faded, as the pursuers were left behind.

They passed through the thin edge of the rank forest, raced up the trail. Jimmy faltered, and Ki-Gor scooped him up, carried his weight easily in heavy arms. They heard the cries growing louder behind, knew the canoes had been beached.

The seconds flowed into minutes, and the minutes strung slowly one after the other. Then they had reached the line of clouds, were slipping into the earth notch which led to freedom. They made better time now, even though the cleft was dark, and moments later broke into bright sunlight.

Then they were flashing down the clear trail, running easily, the worst part of their escape over, certain that they would find no interference below. Grass began to grow beside the trail, and green bushes clung with slender roots to the frost-shattered rocks.

A rock came clattering down, smashing by in a cloud of dust.

"Hurry!" Ki-Gor said, for he knew what bouncing rocks could do when hurled from above.

They were at the last stretch now, ready to take the slanting strip of rude steps notched into the bare face of the wall. More stones bounced past, were followed by large boulders, and from above came the shifting grinding thunder of rock mov-



ing upon rock tremors riding the earth.  
"A landslide," Helene called.

Ki-Gor nodded imperceptibly, watched as his charges made their way along the notched steps. No rocks could reach them now; they had only to fight any ape-men who might overtake them. And with a bit of luck, they would reach the ground below before the ape-men arrived.

And even as the thought reached his mind, he felt the grinding tremor of shifting rock increase. It became a solid thudding that shook the very steps upon which they climbed, and the noise of the slide became greater with each passing second.

And the roar increased. It gathered and grew and swelled until it was a solid ball of sound rolling down the mountain side. Then it burst like a cataract, a dusty falls, over the end of the open trail, went smashing at the village below. Great boulders bounced and smashed and tore at the rude huts, battering them into the ground, and the following debris covered them completely. Within seconds all was over, only one lonely dinosaurian corner-post still standing where a village had been, all covered by a haze of greasy gray smoke. There was quiet again.

Then the party was on the ground, staring upward. They ran away from the mountain until their line of vision showed the pass completely choked, the trail obliterated.

"They'll never come down again," Ki-Gor said grimly. "With Grankando dead, they'll become again the beasts they really are."

KI-GOR sighed, and his arm went about his mate. They stood together, a great blond giant of a forest king and his slender titian-haired queen. They watched the clouds swirling softly about the top of Kagunda; and Ki-Gor stifled the unconscious shuddering of his wife with the pressure of his arm.

"It is a lost land," he said simply, "peopled by the dead. It should remain such."

They smiled into each other's eyes, and the bond between them was a thing that would never break, but would only grow tighter and more lovely as the years went by. They turned together, hearing Jimmy's derisive voice.

"Aw, that's kid stuff," he said with the deprecation of the very young, and scowled at his sister who was being held very tightly in the circle of Lieutenant Ashworth's good arm, while his lips were tight on hers.

"Hush!" Mrs. Ferris said peremptorily, smiled despite herself.

"I shall guide these people back to the coast," Tembu George said suddenly in his great bass voice, and N'Geeso's indignant tones snapped an impatient answer.

"This is a task for brains, O pig with muscles!" he declared. "Go thou, with Ki-Gor and the Golden One."

"I go where I please. I am the Chief of Masai," Tembu George said, mock anger deepening his tones.

"A wart on the Masai," N'Geeso said flatly, spat.

Ki-Gor grinned; and both he and Helene moved to the belligerent pair's side.

"Tembu George would have jumped back into the pit to avenge thee," he said to N'Geeso.

"I would have thrown him to the beast," the great black said in quick evasive defense.

But a smile lurked deep in his eyes, and centered that of the pygmy's.

"We guide together, O flea," he said reluctantly.

N'Geeso grinned. "Together," he said.

Then laughter came to the clearing, dispelling all of the dread that had lain there so long. It spread in a contagious circle through those whose lives had intermingled, brought them closer together than any of them had thought possible; and suddenly the mountain behind them was but a mountain, its aura of death and mystery gone forever.

"Come," Ki-Gor said, "we have far to travel."

Side by side, his slender golden mate at his left, her fingers clasped in his mighty palm, Ki-Gor led the way. Behind, came the others; and for the moment the past few days were forgotten.

Ahead lay the green depths of the friendly sleepy jungle. Ahead lay the warm lazy days of perfect existence. Ahead lay adventure and surging life and friendly intimate laughter.

Ahead lay the future, and all walked unafraid.



# TERROR TREK

By H. M. SUTHERLAND

But one man had ever invaded the lair of the Black Leopard and returned alive. Yet Captain Daunt dared its dangers, trekked deep into that valley of the ivory giants—and found himself doomed by a murderer he had thought to capture.

*A Novelet of Africa's Dark Depths*







*Guns hammered death at the charging Bakussu.*

**S**HRUGGING off the fatigue of his long trek out of the jungle, Captain Christopher Daunt turned briskly into the Commandant's offices in Brazzaville. Horizon-blue uniforms of the Free French were everywhere about him, and he paused uncertainly, seeking someone who might possibly talk English.

A grizzled Colonel of the American Army approached him, and unconsciously Capt. Daunt saluted.

"You are Captain Daunt?" queried the

Colonel, offering his hand. "I'm Colonel Meriwether, on detached service here. You got my message quickly. I wasn't expecting you for several days."

"I got a message to report here, Colonel," said Daunt with a smile, "but I'm a bit puzzled as to why I was called."

"I couldn't trust those native carriers. The mission is too important to be broadcast." The Colonel took Daunt's arm. "Come into my office here where I can explain."



When they were seated at opposite sides of the broad desk, Colonel Meriwether proffered cigars.

"Daunt, I read an article about you in a magazine a couple of years ago," declared the Colonel, his eyes narrowly intent on his vis-a-vis. "The writer stated that you knew more about the jungles of the Congo, and 'back of beyond' in the 'Mountains of God' uplands, than any living man."

"Poppy-cock!" shrugged Daunt. "There are dozens of hunters and ivory men who know it better than I."

"I doubt that," smiled Meriwether. "But I recall that you were under contracts to furnish big game, lions, gorillas, leopards and what-not for the zoos, menageries and other establishments. Hasn't the war knocked that business out of joint?"

"Just about," admitted Daunt, "but that was not your purpose for calling me here."

"Right you are!" The Colonel leaned forward tensely. "Daunt, you are an officer in reserve in the United States Army, aren't you?"

"I was, up until a few years ago. I have written to the States asking my present status and offering my services . . ."

"Then they are accepted now," interrupted Meriwether. "As I told you, I am on detached service here, more in the nature of a liaison officer and good-will agent than anything else. Nazi agents are particularly active in this area, and more so in the interior of the Belgian Congo. You, of course know of this?"

Daunt nodded somberly.

"Then did you by any chance ever hear of the *Black Leopard*?"

Daunt's lips split in a thin smile. "One doesn't live in the jungle long without hearing that name."

"Tell me about him."

Daunt inhaled deeply. "I've never seen him," he said softly, "although I have crossed his trail innumerable times. He is a ghost, a deadly will-o'-the-wisp, and the most brutal killer that ever stalked the jungle trails. To my personal knowledge, he is a murderer, robber, and almost a God among those blood-thirsty, cannibalistic Bakussu tribesmen. He was at one time an IDB in Rhodesia . . ."

"IDB?" interrupted Meriwether. "What's that?"

"Illicit diamond buyer, but the DeBeers

people made it too hot for him, and he ducked into the jungles, up where the lip-plug Pelelans live. He's the king-pin in that country and no mistake about it, but how he got that way is a mystery."

"We have it on good authority," advanced Meriwether, "that he is a former Germany army officer, First World War vintage, and was cashiered under the Ebert regime. The Nazis are overlooking nothing, and they seem to have picked him up for special work in the Congo Basin."

"Such as?"

"Such as robbery, pillage, and in general a reign of terror on all white settlements and loyal natives over Tanganyika way and along the Rhodesian border. At least that is the complaint of the English. They have taken up the matter with DeJorrel here. We thought it best to send for you and talk the matter over with you."

"And what would you want me to do?" queried Daunt, relighting his dead cigar.

"**S** EARCH him out, and find out what he is doing. Take care of him if you can, and if not send for help."

"Over two thousand miles of jungle trails?" snorted Daunt. "That would take months, and the Black Leopard does not stay in one place more than a few hours."

"I know it will be difficult," admitted Meriwether, "but there is little else we can do at the moment. It is Belgian territory, and they can't or won't help. You can get aid on request of Colonel Hadley-Barksdale at Salisbury, or General Parkis at Nairobi."

"Salisbury is the best bet in case trouble breaks—as it will. Have you anyone to go with me on this little—mission?"

"Not a soul! Any of your safari with you?"

"I left my boys at Stanleyville. Shall I report back to you?"

"When you've finished the job. Do you need funds?"

"I'll manage. Any instructions?"

"Get the Black Leopard, that's all, but I want you to know that I realize how big a job you're taking on. If you're successful, Washington will know about it. And the best of luck!" He offered his hand, and Daunt met it, and then turned and strode from the room.



CAPTAIN DAUNT halted at the brink of a high escarpment and stared upward at the Mountains of God. To him they were vaguely reminiscent of his native Kentucky hills, although with a hint of nostalgia he realized that it was a far cry from the blue Cumberlands to the headwaters of the Kwilu.

The vague trail of the evanescent Black Leopard had led him over the greater part of the Congo Basin, and at last south to the Rhodesian border. Always the killer had departed several days previously, and at times all traces of him had vanished. That he was stirring the natives into a state of rebellion and violence was plainly apparent, as witnessed by the sullen reception that he and his safari had received in each of the villages visited.

With Daunt was his gun-bearer, a slim, wiry Sulu youth, whose name was beyond Daunt's ability to pronounce. The nearest he could come to it was "Sillibub," and "Sillibub" he became, apparently to his grinning delight. The latter stood beside Daunt, but he was peering with growing excitement out along the trail that led to Salisbury and civilization to the south.

Following his glance, Daunt was able to discern something that held him. He adjusted a pair of binoculars and brought them to bear on a point near a clump of trees a quarter of a mile distant. Then he stiffened with surprise and a low exclamation escaped his lips.

"Catchum plenty men kill," said the Sulu sibilantly "B'long Black Leopard, Bwana?"

"Maybe. We'll take a look."

They hurried down the embankment and then followed the trail at a trot. High grasses obscured their vision ahead until they rounded a bend into an open park, close by the wood clump, cropped close by antelope and eland. Abruptly they halted and stared at the mute, stark tragedy about them.

Fifteen dead bodies lay crumpled and pathetic beside the trail, fourteen natives, and one in the garb of a white man. It was Sillibub a few minutes later who discovered the grotesque figures of four more slain men—warriors of some Congo tribe whose faces were daubed with hideous designs in white clay. It was manifestly a surprise attack, although the attackers had paid a toll.

A ghastly feature was added to the scene by the great protruding lips of the four dead attackers, lips in which wooden discs six inches in diameter had been inserted. Their appearance was such in death that Daunt unconsciously shuddered.

"Pelele!" ejaculated Sillibub in awe.

Daunt turned his attention to the nearer dead. The natives were members of the Bantu race, tall, lean, and muscular, and bearing the marks of having carried heavy burdens on their shoulders, although of these packs there was no trace. Sillibub glided over and turned the body of the white man face up. Daunt stepped forward a single pace and then halted.

"Johnny Buckleston!" he murmured softly, baring his head instinctively. "He's taken out his last load of ivory."

Sillibub stopped and carefully extracted a feathered arrow from Buckleston's throat. He glanced at the tip briefly and then held the barb up for Daunt's inspection.

"Poison."

Daunt nodded. A cursory glance was enough to tell him that the point had been dipped in the deadly brew of stropanthin. He wheeled and stared intently at the four dead bodies, and the cicatrices which showed plainly through the white daubing.

"You're right, boy," he said to Sillibub. "They are the Bakussu from the land of the Pelele."

"B'long Black Leopard." There was a world of meaning in the young Sulu's expression and tone as he glanced instinctively in the direction of the vague line of the jungle's edge to the northeast.

DAUNT'S eyes also swept in that direction because he knew that hiding somewhere in those dank, tangled jungle-depths lurked the deadliest killer in a land of elemental hate and strife, the greatest menace of all the lethal dangers that made life a little thing—the mamba, the tsetse, the hungry lioness, the armored, charging rhinoceros.

With an effort he brought his attention back to the scene before him, staring at the crumpled figure of what had once been the careless, laughing Johnny Buckleston, a man who had the respect and admiration of every chieftain in the interior. The motive for that massacre



was of course robbery, for Buckleston had been running out some fine ivory and gold-dust during the last year.

With an effort Daunt brought himself to the practical. The attack had taken place at least thirty-six hours earlier, and it was imperative that the bodies be buried immediately.

"We'll have to bury them here," he decided. "Go to the camp, Sillibub, and bring the boys here. Tell them to bring the shovels and anything else to dig with."

The Sulu nodded and wheeled, vanishing at a rapid and tireless trot. Daunt made himself as comfortable as possible with his back to the arching roots of a gigantic baobab, his rifle resting across his knee. Warily he watched the north trail and the veldt about him, and not for one instant did he question the identity of the perpetrator of that crime. That stropanthin arrow told its tale.

To Daunt there seemed to be something behind that massacre that did not appear on the surface. It might have been robbery—the Leopard had many times been guilty of that—but this wiping out of an entire safari could mean only that there was a deep motive behind it, and apparently one of secrecy. The war had knocked the bottom out of the ivory market, and the tusks that Buckleston apparently was bringing out would have been small stuff to the Leopard.

But Johnny Buckleston was an Englishman, and his death would be a blow to English prestige in the jungle country. And light-hearted old Johnny had paid the penalty of his carelessness with a stropanthin arrow in his throat. Daunt arose and fetched the arrow back with him to the shade. The sticky substance on the steel point was not all blood. The varnish-like sheen was concentrated stropanthin, brewed from the *kombé* bean, and with them Daunt had seen the Bakussu bring the largest bull elephants to earth in an incredibly short time.

An insect zipped past Daunt's ear, and he blinked as he raised his hand. Then his eyes flew open, and he tensed in stunned surprise. In the turf between his legs, with the shaft pointing straight upward, quivered a long arrow. One glance told him that it was another of those poison-dipped Bakussu shafts, and he rolled

swiftly to the left for the cover of a thornshrub. A slight movement in the foliage high up in the baobab tree caught his attention, and he threw three quick shots into the thick leaves. For an instant complete silence held.

With a crash the tumbling body of a man came hurtling through the canopy, struck the ground at the roots of the tree, and rebounded slightly toward Daunt. The Bakussu warrior was dead before he hit the ground, and Daunt, crouching behind his thorn bush, made a long study of the baobab from top to bottom. Satisfied at last there were no more enemies above him, he moved cautiously in toward the crumpled heap.

"The murderin' devil!" he growled, his glance going irresistibly to that arrow sticking in the ground. "Left behind to spy, an' took a crack at me. What I can't figure out is how he missed." He mopped the perspiration from his brow, and then moved out into the exact center of the open space to await the return of Sillibub and his companions.

THE SUN was dropping well toward the western horizon when the Sulu and the twelve porters came in. The camp was some ten miles distant, and the men were sweat-stained from the speed of their hurried trek. Sillibub almost immediately discovered the body of the Bakussu that Daunt had shot, and bounded over to examine the body. He returned quickly.

"Two bullet b'long belly same-like." He held up his two finger tips an inch apart, and his eyes were glistening in admiration.

Daunt nodded, but offered no comment, but Sillibub was not satisfied.

"Him b'long monkey—up tree?" he demanded.

"Um!" grunted Daunt. "He was up in that tree an' he shot a poisoned arrow past my ear."

Sillibub shot an apprehensive glance up the tree, and then his teeth flashed in a grin. He shrugged expressively, and then turned to direct the gathering of the bodies and the digging of the large grave. Captain Daunt picked up a spade and began digging a hole in the shade of the towering boabab. And he dug it deep and collected large stones in order to prevent the resting place from being disturbed by animals.



He wrapped the body in a blanket, and slowly lowered it. When the cavity was filled he stood with bared head and a mute prayer in his heart for he knew and loved the spirit that had been Johnny Buckleston.

## II

IT WAS near midnight three days later when Captain Daunt reached Salisbury and found Colonel Hadley-Barksdale in his quarters, asleep. In spite of the Colonel's irascibility, Daunt felt that his news was of sufficient importance to awake him. The Colonel's face was grimly forbidding when he came into the office.

"Sorry to arouse you at this hour, Colonel," declared Daunt crisply, "but I'm just in from the bush. I found the remains of Johnny Buckleston just inside the Rhodesian border, some three safari days to the north. He and his entire safari had been attacked from ambush and slain."

"Buckleston!" The Colonel's eyes widened. "Do you have any idea who did it?"

"The Black Leopard—and his Bakussu followers."

Hadley-Barksdale stiffened in his chair. "You're quite certain of this?"

Quite. Buckleston had been killed with a poisoned arrow—strophanthin from the *kombé* bean up in the Bakussu country. There were four of his lip-plug fighters dead beside the trail. Then I got another who was hiding nearby to see what happened. The Leopard had gone—north."

The Colonel lighted a cigarette and leaned back in his chair.

"I suspect that you are correct in your surmise, Daunt," he said after a slight pause. "I've been hearing of depredations by the Leopard, but they have been across the border, and therefore out of my jurisdiction. But I say, I had an idea that the boulder was keeping clear of Rhodesia. I wonder why he came that far south. Do you suppose he has gone back into the Congo?"

"Naturally."

"Then there is little I can do save increase my patrols along that border. You have anything in mind, Daunt?"

"No. I merely came to report to you the fact that Johnny Buckleston had been murdered. You will, of course, notify his people back home. I buried him where he

was slain, and marked his grave. The Bapinji can show you the place?"

"But what do you intend to do?"

"I'm going back after the Black Leopard. You see, I have been commissioned by the U. S. Army to get him—Colonel Meriwether out of Brazzaville."

"Um! A moment, Daunt!" He rose and went to a small cabinet where he obtained a bottle, and a moment later brought in a pitcher of water. He mixed drinks and then sat down, toying with his glass.

"I may be able to aid you a bit, Daunt," he declared thoughtfully. "I have recently been informed that the Black Leopard was active in the Mountains of God sector. Now, you may or may not know that old Congo Pat McGinnis has located in that area the only elephant *death-paille* known to white men."

"No!" ejaculated Daunt. "Is that true? McGinnis' luck! It's a by-word in the Congo."

"Yes, he and an American named Smith found the *paille* and Buckleston has been bringing out the ivory. It almost certainly was a consignment of this ivory from McGinnis' cache that the Leopard got."

"Have you been in touch with McGinnis?" demanded Daunt.

"Not McGinnis, but I did have a note a few days ago from Aristides Roosevelt Smith."

"And who the blue blazes is Aristides Roosevelt Smith?"

"McGinnis' partner in the *paille*. A Kikuyu runner brought the message a few days ago. I have it here somewhere."

He searched in his desk drawer for a moment and then handed to Daunt a sweat-stained scrap of paper.

"Commander Border Police,  
"Salisbury, Rhodesia.

"If you want the Black Leopard come and get him. The lousy son of a prehistoric moral mishap, and his army of Bakussu nightmares have taken over the ivory cache that me and my partner, Pat McGinnis, located. The big shot has cleaned us out, and we want to go back after him, but we've got to have help. How about sending up a few good men—and I mean good. We are waiting ten days and then we are going after him ourselves.

Aristides Roosevelt Smith."



CAPTAIN DAUNT read the note through and then glanced at the Colonel.

"Where was this written? Or did the Kikuyu say?"

"Stanleyville." The Colonel's expression was inscrutable.

"When was it written?"

"About ten days ago."

Daunt shrugged. "Too late to reach them there, but I might head them off at Kigolo—the junction of the Lualaba and the Kwilu, that is this paille is in the Mountains of God."

"I can help you by sending a lorry to the border, but beyond that I'm powerless. You understand that, of course. Furthermore I realize that the Black Leopard does not recognize international boundaries, but that does not permit me to forget the red tape, as you Yanks call it."

"I didn't expect aid, Colonel, and I think I'll have a better chance of success with a very small party. If I can get to McGinnis and this Aristides Smith, I expect that we can manage."

"One other thing, Daunt," said the Colonel, draining his glass, "I would suggest you put up at the Red Lion pub down the street a couple of squares, and before you leave tomorrow I believe that you would do well to get in touch with an old hunter who is staying there. His name is McTavish—"

"Ivory McTavish?" interrupted Daunt. "Here?"

"You know him?"

"I owe my life to him," replied Daunt simply. "At the Red Lion, eh?"

The crash of broken glass behind them brought both men to their feet and at the same instant a slight thud sounded overhead. Daunt glanced in that direction, and in the wall a foot over his head quivered a long shafted arrow with a bright red feather. It required only one glance to tell Daunt that it was another of those stropanthin-dipped barbs.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "The blighters have followed me here."

A quick search of the grounds failed to bring to light any trace of the man who had shot the arrow. He apparently had melted into the darkness, and no sound marked his passing. That he was a spy of the Leopard's there was no doubt, and

Colonel Hadley-Barksdale insisted that a squad of men accompany Daunt to the Red Lion pub.

Daunt, having ascertained Ivory McTavish's room, knocked at the door, and a moment later the old hunter with a dressing gown wrapped about his spare figure stood in the opening. His bearded face broke into a quick smile.

"Come away, Daunt!" he cried, pumping the latter's hand. "Mon, but I am glad to see ye." He led the way back into the room, and indicated a chair. "Noo, what brings ye here at this time o' nicht?"

"I had an idea that you would be interested in knowing that Congo Pat McGinnis has found the elephant death-paille you have always been looking for, and that the Black Leopard is now hiding."

"Eh?" The old man's gnarled hands were gripping the side of the bed so tightly that his knuckles showed white through the skin. "Speak up, my lad! I've lived a lifetime for this. A moment, though!"

For two score years McTavish had haunted the illimitable depths of the jungle, and the larger part of his treks had been on the trail of the elusive elephant death-tryst, the dream of all ivory men. He had traveled the elephant country from Mombassa to Boma, and the lure of the jungle was in his blood.

Report had it that McTavish had laid aside a comfortable nest-egg for his old age, but that his interest in the elephant paille was so deep that he simply could not leave the jungles. He had apparently forgotten the once mercenary motives that motivated his search, and was only interested in proving that such a hidden tryst existed. And so it was that he seemed filled with pathetic eagerness as he sat Daunt's glass before him, and briefly tasted his own.

"Ye'll be givin' me the facts, Lad, all of them," he pleaded. "So many, many times have I been disappointed that it would be cruelty to raise an auld man's hopes only to chuck them down again. Tell me all about the paille."

When Daunt had completed his story McTavish sat motionless, staring at the wall. Then with a deep sigh he spoke with a softness that was akin to reverence.

"McGinnis' luck! He has stumbled upon it at last."

"He and Aristides Roosevelt Smith,"



smiled Daunt. "I suppose you know him!"

"Aye, I know the American and he is a str-r-range character. Almost anything can happen when he is about, and it usually does. I wish I had known that McGinnis was at Stanleyville."

"You mean that you are going with me?" queried Daunt.

"Did ye doubt it? We must be ready by morning. We must get duffle for a month's trek. Get some sleep, Lad. We're leaving at daybreak."

"I was hoping you'd be with me, Mac. It will prove interesting."

"And it may be my last trek, Lad." There was a world of prophecy in the old hunter's tones.

TWO DAYS by motor lorry, with a squad of border police as guard, brought them to Daunt's camp, where the police turned back. Then three days' trek took the small safari to the banks of the sullen, mysterious Lualaba River where they boarded Daunt's motor launch and headed down stream for Kigolo.

Two days of this, with the nights spent on sandbars, and they saw the sprawling village of Kigolo through the morning mists, spreading across the alluvial flats between the Lualaba and the Kwilu. As they neared the crude wharf McTavish half-rose in his seat in the bow.

"There's McGinnis," he declared, pointing a finger to a small knot of people gathered near a large grass hut at the water's edge. McTavish shouted his greetings, and a moment later they were shaking hands with the powerful grizzled McGinnis, and a saturnine, cynical man whom Daunt

knew instinctively to be Aristides Roosevelt Smith. With them stood a young native of the Bambalan tribe, judging by his cicatrices, who deeply interested Daunt. Those lines of scars indicated that he was a *muri*, an intermediary between the chiefs and freemen, and his bearing bespoke unusual intelligence.

McTavish with characteristic abruptness plunged into that which lay uppermost in his mind.

"So ye found it, Pat?" he demanded.

"More than that, Mac. I've taken out better than two hundred pieces of the finest stuff ye ever laid eyes on. Some of them were better than fifteen stone. Ye won't believe it 'til ye seen the place, McTavish."

"Then why are ye here?"

McGinnis frowned dourly. "'Tis plain ye've never tangled with the Leopard, or ye'd not be askin' that question."

"Aye, I know that, but—"

"Friend," interrupted Aristides Roosevelt Smith, "did you ever take a look at a couple o' hundred of those duck-billed nightmares they call Bakussu? We made a hundred miles out of there in ten flat."

A little later they were gathered in McGinnis' commodious tent, with the latter doing most of the talking. Smith busied himself with the mixing of cool drinks, for the heat of the morning was beginning to be felt. The *muri*, whose name was Ruko, and Sillibub were seated just outside the tentflap, talking in guttural monosyllables.

"It's beyond your dreams, Mac," said Congo Pat in a tone that hinted at awe. "The paille is rich to the point where it



## Servicemen's Service

### CIRCLES THE GLOBE

Service men and women of the Allied Forces are still in touch with big city stores. They can receive—or send to friends at home—gifts which volunteer shoppers find. All that's necessary is a letter to Service Men's Service, 8 East 61st Street, New York City, with a money order. (No package may be sent overseas without a permit from the service man or woman's commanding officer.) The Service will return money left over.





is unbelievable. Johnny Bucklestone has been taking it out for us, but the *goudou-goudou* brought the news yesterday that Johnny had made his last trek."

"Aye," broke in McTavish. "The Leopard done for him."

"The Leopard is a devil if there ever was one," rasped McGinnis. "He has with him a couple of hundred of those Bakussu poison-arrow fanatics. Ye've heard of them, of course. The blighter jumped us in the paille a couple of weeks ago, an' killed nine of our men. About a dozen of us, includin' Smith an' Ruko out there, got away down the Lualaba about ten rods ahead of the yellow devils."

"Since that time we've been at Stanleyville tryin' to get together sufficient men to have another go at the murderin' devil. I cabled for funds, stocked up a bit, got a few men, an' we are tryin' to recruit a few more here. We've got to hurry before the Leopard takes out the best stuff."

"I MIGHT add," spoke up Captain Daunt, "that I have it on good authority the Leopard is playing a deeper game than appears on the surface. He is a Nazi agent, and I am convinced that he is stirring up trouble throughout the Congo Basin. Have you seen any indications of that?"

"Plenty." It was Smith who replied, as he came to them with a tray of glasses. "He was sired by the devil. What else could you expect but trouble? It's a business with him."

"I've noticed," said McGinnis evenly, "that the natives through the whole Congo belt are getting surly an' watchful. There is probably truth in your suggestion, Daunt."

"And you think he is in the paille now?" queried Daunt.

"Sure!" Smith drained his glass. "An' this country's full of his agents keepin' track of every movement we make. They followed us from Stanleyville here. An Arab half-breed, one Lippoo Rob, is the leader of the Leopard's followers in this place here. He's cookin' up trouble for us now, plannin' a demonstration of his medicine tonight. Ought to be quite a show."

Gaunt was interested. "The Sacred Circle of Fire, by any chance?"

"Nope!" Smith grinned. "That's Wanderobero stuff. He puts on a voodoo act with smoke, colored power and bunk, and gets away with it with these superstitious natives. Ruko and I have a little play on tap tonight that may open their eyes—or close some of 'em," he added enigmatically.

"When does this take place?" demanded Daunt. "And where?"

"Over there in the village—before the big chief's wickiup. Ruko and I are putting on a real show. We built our platform yesterday and last night, an' I challenged Lippoo Rob to a contest of magic at sundown."

"We'll be there," promised Daunt, and even McGinnis and McTavish had stopped talking of the paille and were listening. Then Smith left the tent, and the talk drifted back to the death-tryst.

"How did ye ever locate it, Pat?" queried McTavish, the smoke from his pipe wreathing his white hair.

"'Tis a long story, but I'll make it short." McGinnis puffed until his pipe was burning freely. "'Twas about ten months ago I first heard about this paille. I was in the uplands west of Nairobi when this Bambalan appeared in my camp." He nodded toward Ruko who apparently was not listening. "Ye have heard of old Pedro Vipero, the Portuguese killer who used to work the N'gome country over Boma way. This Vipero was trailin' Ruko in order to force him to betray the secret of the location of the paille. I gave the *muri* a bit of a lift, an' these Bambalans are a grateful lot. In return for aidin' him, he led me with Vipero whom Ruko killed."

"I picked up Smith at Mombassa when I took out the first load of the ivory. He was doing magic tricks in a native theatre, and I had the idea that he would be a valuable man to have in the jungle. Ye know how superstitious the blacks are, an' he had them under his hand—until the Black Leopard came. The rest ye know."

"When are ye plannin' to start back for the paille?" asked McTavish.

"Tomorrow, if we can get a few more porters here. Depends largely on whether Smith is able to take care of that Arab, Lippoo Rob, I should say. Lippoo is trying to keep any of the natives from signin' on with us."

"Aristides Roosevelt Smith!" mused



Captain Daunt with a smile. "Strange name that."

"I asked him about that," chuckled McGinnis, "and he said that his mother was a school teacher, and that his father was a Rough Rider in Cuba in your war with Spain."

"Resourceful, eh?" decided Daunt.

McGinnis grinned. "So resourceful that I'm going back with him to that paille—even if he and I go alone. And I'll wager ye, Mac, that we'll bring back a Black Leopard skin."

### III

SMOKE from a dozen large bonfires filled the streets of the village and threw the background of thatched huts into grotesque shapes as the evening shadows deepened. The fires were in a great semi-circle about the more pretentious abode of the Chief, in front of which was a raised platform, built of bamboo and canes, and elevated some five or six feet above the ground. The floor of the platform was made of hewn poles, and at the rear of the stage a wall of interlaced plain-tain leaves had been raised.

About this platform all of the natives of the village had gathered, at least four hundred of them, and they stood muttering and whispering in subdued and frightened tones as the hour for the performance of the magical wonders drew near. Conspicuous among them was a tall figure, dressed in flowing Arab robes, and only slightly lighter in color than the motley array of black about him. Daunt knew instinctively that the latter was Lippoo Rob, who for the most part was engaged in directing the efforts of two of his men. These two were guarding several canvas-wrapped packages and boxes, palpably the paraphernalia needed in his magic tricks.

Then Aristides Roosevelt Smith came striding through the crowd, and climbed upon the platform. Ruko, the *muri*, silently glided to a position slightly behind and to the right. With a start of surprise Daunt saw his man, Sillibub, steal furtively past the fascinated blacks and slip underneath the platform. And Sillibub had a pleased grin on his lips that boded ill for someone.

At a nod from Aristides Roosevelt

Smith, the *muri* stepped to the front of the platform and began to talk in the soft, modulated Swahili tongue, universally understood throughout that section. Daunt was able to follow him.

"My master, the Son of Moloki, bids me tell you that Lippoo Rob is not your friend, but your deadly enemy. He is as false as the seemingly-peaceful rhino, and he will rob you of your cattle and your women as he and his kind have always robbed you. The great Moloki, who has control over life and death, has sent to you his true son."

He pointed dramatically to Aristides Roosevelt Smith, who took a curtain-call with a deep bow.

"My master challenges Lippoo Rob to a contest of juju on this platform at this hour. In this manner you people of this village will be able to judge who is the true son of the Moloki. I have said."

With an imperious gesture to his two helpers the Arab stalked majestically to a place on the platform near Smith. His two men carefully placed the boxes on the floor at the rear of the platform, and then stood against the rear wall, awaiting the next move.

This apparently did not meet with Smith's approval for he spoke in a low tone to Ruko who turned and led Lippoo's aides from the stage.

LIPPOO ROB eyed this procedure askance, but said nothing. An instant later he stepped forward and held up his hand.

"I accept the challenge of this inter-loper," he cried in Swahili also, "for I am the true son of the Moloki. This I will prove to you so that there cannot be any doubt among you."

With a wave of his cloaked arm he stepped back and opened one of the boxes. He thrust his hand inside and brought out an egg. This he held up to the view of the crowd, and then from the folds of this cloak he brought out a large square of yellow silk and spread it over the egg which he held in his left hand.

With a magical wave of his hand he flicked aside the cloth, and a small white rooster flew from his hand to the platform where it crowed lustily. This astonishing feat brought a gasp from the



crowded blacks, and those in the rear pushed forward while those in front stiffened to prevent being shoved any closer.

Lippoo Rob with a smile stepped back a pace or two and bowed to Aristides Roosevelt Smith. Daunt saw Ruko slip furtively beneath the platform through the same hole through which Sillibub had entered, and at the same time McGinnis took a new position near the two men whom Lippoo Rob had engaged as aides.

Aristides Roosevelt Smith with a wink at Daunt strode across the stage and caught Lippoo Rob by the arm. He then led the surprised Arab to the front of the platform, and the latter, plainly suspicious, permitted himself to do as Smith indicated. At a point near the exact center of the stage, some four feet back from the edge, Smith halted and with gestures ordered Lippoo Rob to remain motionless.

From his breast pocket he produced a brilliant crimson cloth and flung it outward. It was at least eight feet square and it rippled and flowed lazily through the air as Smith went through series of magical evolutions. Then suddenly he spread it out like a blanket between the Arab and the breathless crowd and at the same instant shouted:

"Presto!"

The silken cloth floated slowly to the floor and Smith stood alone on the platform. Lippoo Rob had vanished into thin air.

For an instant the natives stood spell-bound, and then with a shout of dismay and terror they fled into the nearest protective darkness. It was too much even for the Arab's two aides, for they, too, joined in the rout, and in three seconds the whites had the scene entirely to themselves.

Ruko came around the edge of the platform, and there was an expression of grimness on his face that brought a startled ejaculation from Smith.

The *muri* spoke so swiftly that Daunt could not follow him. Then Aristides Roosevelt Smith shrugged.

"Well, Lippoo won't bother us any more," he said softly.

"What happened?" demanded Daunt.

"When that palooka dropped through the trap-door, your man, Sillibub, cracked him with a war-club—and I mean cracked."

He grinned at Daunt. "By the way Sillibub is a sort of a drink back home, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I'll have to try it sometime. It certainly must be potent."

**B**EFORE the sun was an hour high the following morning McGinnis and McTavish had rounded up a dozen Swahili rivermen and two score porters to carry McGinnis' supplies for the re-occupation of the paille. Smith's magic and Ruko's persuasion, aided by Sillibub, had put the program over, and it was a motley crew that gathered at the water's edge—N'gomes, Swahili, Batingi, and even a couple of Bakussu who had long been ostracised from the tribe.

At Ruko's suggestion, only the Swahili rivermen were armed with the rifles, and they were to be trusted chiefly because they were always at war with all surrounding tribes, with the result that everyone was their enemy. They were quick to feel their own importance after the guns were distributed, and they lorded it over the others in a manner that brought a smile to Daunt.

It was noon before the start was made, and they paddled up-stream in the general direction of the Mountains of God. They turned into an eastern tributary of the Lualaba which bore the expressive name of "Hungry Father," and watched the vegetation overhead gradually close above them as the stream narrowed. Daunt, McTavish, and McGinnis each sat in the prow of a long dugout canoe that held twenty men comfortably, and, silently grim and watchful, searched every covert for a possible enemy.

Four days later the water grew so turbulent that McGinnis ordered the canoes beached and securely hidden in the thick cane-growth that fringed the banks. Ruko and Sillibub, long experienced in safari details, supervised the distribution of supplies and equipment. Aristides Roosevelt jealously looked after his own packs, giving particular attention to two heavy bundles. He saw to it that these two tarp-wrapped packs were given to strong and dependable porters.

"What do you have in those bundles,



Smith?" queried Daunt curiously. "More magic?"

"It's magic all right," admitted Smith with a rueful grin. "The trouble is I borrowed it from the Belgian government at Stanleyville, and forgot to tell 'em about it."

He offered no further explanation, and a few moments later set off at a swinging pace after the porters. Through the broiling afternoon, and deep in the fetid tangles of green, they toiled through the jungle, and when the sun was nearing the western rim, they reached a thorn-dotted plateau. Here they established camp near a water-hole that showed wide use through the myriad footprints of cloven and padded feet.

While Ruko directed the throwing up of the barricade of thorn about the campsite, McGinnis led McTavish and Daunt out from the camp a few hundred paces where they climbed a steep escarpment. From its crest McGinnis pointed toward a mist-shrouded line of serrated hills some ten or twelve miles distant.

"The Mountains of God, Mac," he said softly. "Ever been there?"

"No, but I've seen them from a distance," murmured the old Scot. "Volcanic, eh?"

"Aye. The strange rumblings an' the two geysers and the mists make the natives believe that the Moloki and all their other Gods live there. That's why they call them the Mountains of God."

"An' the elephant death-paille? Is it there—somewhere?" McTavish was breathing hard, like a runner at the end of his race. Into his faded eyes had come a sparkle of eagerness, and he gripped his rifle tightly and leaned forward as if to make a sudden dash toward his long-sought goal.

"It's there, Mac, off to the left a bit beyond that highest peak."

"Somehow, Pat," half-whispered McTavish, "'tis har-r-rd to believe that 'tis really true. I keep thinkin' 'tis a mirage that will vanish in those mists."

"I would think that, too, Pat, only when I see the Black Leopard in the midst of it, I know 'tis real. I'm not going to tell you about it, Mac. 'Twould spoil it all. Ye must see it for yourself." He knocked the ashes from his pipe. "Come! We

must get back to camp. Darkness comes quickly here."

Back inside their thorn boma they found that one of the Batingi had killed an eland with an arrow, and there was an abundance of meat for the evening meal. Smith was broiling steaks over a bed of coals and the pot of tea gave off a pungent aroma. After eating, they slept for four hours, but with the rising of the moon Ruko was astir, awakening the others. Swiftly and silently they trekked in the direction of the Mountains of God, and the death-paille.

McTAVISH, who was realizing his lifelong dream, was well in front with Ruko a pace or so behind, threading the thorn-studded plain with that mysterious *chumfo* that led them uneeringly to their destination. Dawn broke as they were skirting the lower slopes of the hills near the high peak beyond which lay the paille. Ruko marched the porters into a baobab grove beside a small stream where only thin pencils of light filtered through the thick canopy of leaves.

With the camp in order the Swahili and the porters were given a much needed rest, but there could be no rest for Smith and McTavish. They were close to their goal, and nothing that they could prevent was going to delay them. Wordlessly they began preparations for a quick trek to the paille to reconnoiter and plan their course of action. Daunt was forced to use stern measures to make Sillibub remain behind in charge of the camp.

In single file, with the *muri* guiding, the four whites threaded their cautious way up the slopes of the conical hill, following the general course of a deep-cut ravine that climbed a straight course to the crest. An electric thrill of anticipation rippled through Captain Daunt to his finger-tips as they drew nearer and nearer to the lair of the deadly Black Leopard and those stropanthin-arrow marksmen.

Apparently Aristides Roosevelt Smith was a mind reader as well as a magician.

"Don't let it get your goat, Cap," he said with a grin. "I don't mind admittin' that I get the heebie-jeebies ever' time I get close to this elephant graveyard. Somethin' uncanny about those great brutes



slippin' off up here to die all by their lonesome. Just to make the picture complete there's that gang of Bakussu gargoyles slippin' around like shadows. To tell the truth, this must be the country where they invented these here strategic retreats."

"Is this paille just over the top of this hill?" demanded Daunt.

"Yep. Just on the other side."

"How do we get into it?"

"We don't—not while the Leopard is in there. There's only one way to get into it, and that is along the path that the elephants have made for the last two or three million years. You see, the paille is the crater of an extinct volcano, an' this is one side of it. A part of the rim broke in, an' that is the way the elephants took. Ruko says he knows of a way down inside over in this direction, but I doubt it. The walls are straight up an' down inside."

"How do you plan to go about jumping the Leopard?"

"That's one for the Quiz Kids, Pal. All I know is that I'm goin' to get a good crack at him or bust in the effort."

For the next quarter of an hour they gave their entire attention to their slow guarded climb, carefully keeping under cover for fear of being seen by some possible guard that the Leopard had placed at a point of vantage. McTavish and McGinnis had taken the lead, and the look of grim determination on their faces boded ill for the Black Leopard.

"Look at Ruko!" whispered Smith, nodding toward the gliding, shadowy *muri* a few yards ahead. "He moves with less effort than anything I ever saw in action."

"The perfect athlete!" Daunt's admiration was stirred.

"Athlete? Listen, I could take him to the Olympics and sweep the boards. With a three-step run, I've seen him clear a seven foot barricade. An' I measured a twenty-seven foot broad jump on a sandy take-off. Athlete? He ain't human."

In truth his elasticity and ease of movement as he glided among the boulders and sparse vegetation were rhythm personified. He seemed always poised for instant action, and his every step was a silken flow of undulating motion.

A short distance below the crest the *muri* halted and requested the others to

remain motionless until he could go to the top and locate the position of the Leopard's guards, if any. Without a sound he wriggled away and an instant later vanished into the brown slope on which it seemed impossible to find cover. The four white men sat motionless and watchful, fretting in their impatience, and not daring to smoke and relax taut nerves.

The two old ivory men sat in the shadow of a boulder and stared at the crest, beyond which lay their thoughts. Daunt was restless, half-expecting a sudden attack from almost any quarter.

"Keep your shirt on, Cap," warned Smith softly. "Ruko'll make it okay. That palooka is the carbon copy of a ghost. If I had two more like him I'd take the Leopard an' his gang on in a free-for-all any time."

"I'm wondering what our chances are of taking the Black Leopard out with us," said Daunt thoughtfully.

"About as much chance as a celluloid Jap in Hell with an asbestos U. S. Marine after him."

THE PASSING minutes were almost endless to Daunt, and once he held his wrist-watch to his ear to see if it were still running. McTavish was plainly irritated by the wait, and yet they all knew that Ruko's extreme caution was necessary.

At last the *muri* reappeared, and as suddenly as when he left. The expression on his face told them exactly nothing, but when he spoke it was in a guarded tone that would carry for only a few feet.

"Twenty Bakussi warriors guard the north pass. The Black Leopard is not in the paille and is watching the river trail. They do not know we are here, but men are watching everywhere."

"They missed us in the night," guessed McGinnis. "Good! While he's out we'll slip in for an hour only, that is if you can show us that entrance you told me about, Ruko. Mac here must see the paille. He could not wait longer." He smiled at McTavish.

Ruko broke into swift Swahili.

"It will be dangerous, but we can get inside the rim from this crest. We must hurry before the Leopard catches us inside which would be a death-trap. Come!"



"Good!" This from Smith. "But I want to take a look-see of things on top here for a few minutes. There's a couple of things I want to make certain of before we start the ball rollin'."

Once again they fell in behind Ruko who moved carefully and slowly back up the slope, taking every precaution and using each bit of grass or boulder to cover his movements. In a zig-zag course, sometimes crawling on their stomachs, they pushed upward. Near the crest the vegetation died out completely for lack of soil, and upon reaching this naked terrain Ruko slipped into a crack in the lava formation that led up to the top.

Then the entire party lay flat on the rim, each staring intently into the depths of the crater below. Daunt heard someone beside him draw a deep breath, and without looking he knew that it was McTavish getting his first glimpse of the fabulous mecca of his dreams. To Daunt, there was little in the jungle scene below that he had not seen thousands of times in the Congo.

It was undoubtedly the crater of an extinct volcano, and in the center of that crater was a lake something like half a mile in diameter, perfectly round in shape, and crystal clear. Along its shores grew what seemed to Daunt to be the tallest trees he had ever seen, slender palms each trying to reach the sunlight above its fellows. The shadows under those trees were dense and if there were life of any kind in that crater, it was not visible. That discovery interested Daunt and he raised his head slightly.

"Careful, Daunt!" warned McGinnis.

Smith was not looking into the crater. Instead he seemed to be examining the crests about him.

"It's a dead open and shut cinch," he murmured to Daunt beside him. "I can handle this little job all by myself if I can maneuver it. You see, Cap, me an' that Belgian top-kick in that military post at Stanleyville got to be real pals. That plaintain hooch is plenty potent, and I borrowed some black magic off him, the kind of medicine that will be a sure cure for these duck-billed Bakussu. And when I give them a dose, the Lord have mercy on their souls—if any."

"Is that Belgian sergeant a magician?" queried Daunt with a grin.

"He'd better be—when his Commandante calls for inspection."

At a signal from Ruko they wriggled across the rim and made a slow descent along a ledge that dipped east for several yards and then vanished into the face of the sheer wall. From this point downward, their progress was perilous, each of them clinging to out-jutting stones and feeling with their feet for each new footing before trusting their weight upon it.

There was little cover for them, but as far as Daunt could discover there was little need of it. It was two miles to the north pass where the twenty Bakussu guards were on duty. After some ten minutes of breathless descent, they found themselves creeping into the protection of the undergrowth on the upperslopes of the inside jungle.

Here the going was comparatively easy, and they hurriedly sought the deeper shadows of the jungle along the lakeside. They had penetrated this jungle quite a little distance before Daunt noticed the gruesome, hoary things that were fascinating McTavish. A quick glance told him that they were the moldering skeletons of elephants. Great white tusks gleamed faintly in the deep shadows, and the fetid breeze from the lake, the uncanny silences, and the dank shadows combined to give the place an eerie atmosphere, peculiarly in keeping with that mastedonic masoleum.

DAUNT came to a halt and peered intently into the deep gloom about him. Most of the tusks seemed to be yellowed with age, some of them showing hints of decay and others partly buried in the mold and dead vegetation. McGinnis had not exaggerated. It was literally a mine of ivory, another instance of the prodigality of Africa.

"Is it like this all over the place?" demanded Daunt in awed tones.

"The tusks are more plentiful nearer the lake," replied McGinnis, and then he turned to McTavish. "Ye won't believe it, Mac, even when ye are lookin' at it."

"But there's no life, no birds, not even any insects here," half-whispered Daunt unbelievably.

McGinnis shrugged expressively. "There



are a few mosquitoes on the lake, but otherwise nothing lives here. Every livin' thing respects the death-paille of the elephants—except men. It could only happen in Africa."

"Mayhap, 'tis fear," suggested McTavish softly. "A dyin' elephant is the most deadly an' dangerous thing I ever faced in the jungle." He stood silent for an instant listening. "Pat, have ye ever seen an elephant make his last trek into this paille?"

McGinnis nodded affirmatively. "Once. An' he charged me like the devil himself. I had to stop him with both barrels of my Bury. 'Twas somethin' I'll never forget."

"If I could only see that once, I'd ask nothing more. I've seen the elephant under every other condition or circumstance, I think, but not this."

"Ye'll get that chance, Mac," promised McGinnis. "It'll take years to remove all this ivory. Lately I have been thinkin' of ye, Mac, an' Smith an' I want to give ye a one-third interest in the place. We need your help. Ye'll accept, of course?"

McTavish shook his head slowly in negation, for he plainly knew the kindly motive that lay behind the offer.

"No, it's all yours, Pat. I couldna think of takin' a part, but I'd like ver-r-ra much to stay with you for a few months to get the data for my book. The death-paille is a fitting final chapter." Under the stress of his emotion his highland burr became difficult to understand.

"As long as ye like, Mac, that is if the Black Leopard agrees to the arrangement. Have ye seen enough for today? We'd best be gettin' out before we are discovered. 'Tis a deadly trap if the Leopard an' his Bakussu find us here."

With a final glance about him the old elephant hunter sighed and turned in his tracks. The expression on his face was one of mystical elation. He had at last realized the dream that had haunted him so long, and from him had dropped his anxiety and restlessness like a mantle. They followed Ruko up the slope and clambered out across the rim. Here they halted to blow.

"I'm thinkin' one of us had best remain here an' keep a watch for the return of the Leopard," suggested McGinnis. "He

will be headin' back here when he learns that we are not on the river."

"Let me stay," volunteered Daunt. "I've a pair of binoculars with me. I rather want to get the lay of the land, anyway."

"O.K.!" said Smith, chuckling. "But if you see anything, shoot first and then figger out what it was. Save the Leopard for me, though, because I've got an unholy desire to separate that moral mishap's ideas from his habits."

"An' I'll be sendin' a couple of the Swahili to relieve you when darkness comes," promised McGinnis. "But be careful, Chris."

Then Daunt was alone. He settled himself in a protected cranny, and was on the point of lighting a cigaret when he realized how far the scent of tobacco smoke could carry in that rarified air. The lengthening shadows of the late afternoon were creeping into the depths of the paille, and somewhere, far away in the direction of the river, a bull elephant trumpeted hoarsely. Daunt felt a ripple through his spine as he recalled McGinnis's story of the dying trek of the elephant, and he wondered if that hoarse call was the death-trumpeting of a great bull who sensed the coming of the end.

#### IV

WITH the passing of the hours there came to Daunt an ever-increasing impulse to go down in the paille and witness the arrival of that dying elephant that was still trumpeting at irregular intervals. After making a thorough search of every visible inch of that volcano rim with his field-glasses, and making a minute study of all approaches, he finally decided that it would be safe to make a closer investigation. He was determined, if possible, to witness the approach of that elephant through the north pass.

Slowly he made his way forward around the rim of the crater, halting every few yards to reassure himself that he was not in danger of being entrapped. He had covered more than half the distance to the break in the rim that marked the pass when he found a ledge that ran just beneath the crest in the direction of the pass, but which offered excellent cover.

Suddenly he sighted the pass and the



trail through it, and he dropped behind a boulder to make a long study of it. That trail was a deeply-worn path, trod by the feet of thousands of elephants, winding its way from the top of the slope down into the paille. Long he searched the vicinity of the pass, seeking the hiding place of the twenty guards whom Ruko had said was on duty there. But apparently they had vanished, perhaps gone to their encampment for the evening meal.

A pebble rattled down the cliff at his back, and he whirled with a drawn automatic pistol, but there was nothing in sight. Then he felt, rather than saw, a hurtling object coming down upon him from above, and the next instant he was flattened on the ledge underneath a heavy body. At the same time a dozen black, leaping forms closed about him.

With the realization that they were the Bakussu guards, he surged to his feet, despite the gripping, clutching hands and arms about him. His was the strength of desperation, for he knew that a fate far worse than death awaited him if they took him alive. With berserk frenzy he sought to shake them off and retrieve his fallen gun.

For a few seconds it seemed that he might have a chance. Two of the Bakussu he knocked down with his flailing fists, and another he kicked in the groin. He grasped a fourth and tried to swing him in the way of a smashing club, but he was pinned against the wall and helpless by a brawny brute from behind. The swinging bludgeon caught him on the side of his head, and a blinding glare blazed before him as he sank down, trying vainly to fight off the black wave of unconsciousness.

His first realization when he regained his senses was that someone was binding his arms painfully tight with a rope that hurt damnably. Instinctively he struggled against that force, but, realizing the futility of such resistance, he relaxed, permitting his captors to do with him as they pleased. He had been lying on his face and when they turned him over he saw that he was on the floor of the paille, and that over him stood a gigantic figure who could be no other than the Black Leopard.

In addition to being bound with thongs and ropes, Daunt saw that he was tethered to a stake a few feet back of his head,

but the reason for this did not dawn upon him until later. All about him in a circle had gathered a horde of the Bakussu warriors, hideous in their white and yellow paint. At least half of them were the dreaded lip-plug killers with large discs of wood inserted in their great protruding lips. Some of them, with skulls deformed in infancy, were nightmares of bestiality and cruelty, belonging to a nether world with all the hellish horrors ever etched by the imagination of man.

Standing on widespread legs in front of Daunt, with an expression of gloating satisfaction on his sinister face, loomed the threatening and deadly figure of the Black Leopard. His huge, hulking frame, his loose, mottled jowls, his small, black, venomous eyes, and his yellowed scraggly teeth combined to make of him a savage, murderous menace.

DAUNT met his malevolent gaze with studied unconcern, determined to show no sign of the tremor and chill of fear that was beginning to grip him. Vaguely he wondered what kind of torture the Black Leopard had in store for him, because he knew that torture was certain. That tethering business was puzzling, and he struggled up to a sitting posture, and with an effort overcame the threatening wave of dizziness.

The Black Leopard folded his arms against his massive chest, and a mirthless chuckle rumbled deep in his throat.

"So you have revived!" he said in guttural English that betrayed his German origin. "You are Captain Christopher Daunt, no? Ach, yess, I know. Colonel Hadley-Barksdale sent you to spy on me and report. Is it not so?"

"Who are you?" demanded Daunt, eyeing him steadily. "Also why am I bound like this?"

"Your questions will be answered in time," laughed the Leopard metallically. "I am quite pleased with that device that has you safe for me. I anticipated a little difficulty in persuading you to tell me the position of your friends, so I have arranged this little—how do you say?—entertainment for you. When I have explained, you will say that I am very clever.

"You will notice," he gloated, seemingly pleased with his knowledge of English,



"that you are bound to a stake some eight feet behind you. The rope that holds you to that stake is made of the fiber of the baobab tree. You will further notice that another stake is driven firmly into the ground a few feet before you.

"In a short time we will bring out a great Nyalbo leopard, which my men caught in a pit a few days ago, and we will fasten it to that stake before you. The length of the rope with which the leopard will be secured will be such that when the great killer tries to reach you with its knife-sharp claws, you will be a bare inch away, although you may struggle in the opposite direction as much as you desire. The ropes are strong."

The evil grin widened on his mottled face.

"My cleverness lies in these little facts. The baobab rope will shrink and grow shorter when dampened by the dews, so that it will draw you closer and closer to the leopard. On the other hand the rope that holds the leopard will be of the zebra—what you call the rawhide. You, of course, know that rawhide stretches when wetted. When darkness comes, Captain Daunt, you may use your imagination as to the result of my clever thinking."

With a supreme effort, Daunt masked his face and stilled the horror that gripped him. No savage mind could have conceived of such a hellish torture, and not even a cannibalistic Bakussu would have put it into execution. Only the depraved brain of a moral degenerate, perverted by an orgy of crime, could have devised such a devilish plan.

"Think it over, my friend," taunted the Leopard, turning toward one of the thatched huts behind the circle of staring, goggling natives.

"Do you want your answer now?" called Daunt with a bravado he was far from feeling.

The Black Leopard halted and stared over his shoulder for an instant. Then he shrugged.

"No. With a little time to think it over you may change your mind, Captain." With that he vanished into the hut.

Interminable minutes passed, and so slowly that they were painful. The Bakussu seemed to grow tired of watching the prisoner for they dropped back several

paces and threw themselves on the ground in various degrees of indolent ease. A sudden commotion out in the darkness beyond the light of the fire brought the Bakussu to their feet, tensed with expectancy, and Daunt jerked himself to a sitting posture.

INTO the light came four stalwart men, bearing a heavy object or bundle on a pole-litter. When they drew closer Daunt saw that they were carrying a Nyalbo leopard, huge, tawny, angry, but so securely bound that it could move nothing but its tail and eyes.

With extreme caution the Bakussu loosed the thongs that bound the cat, and at the same time others were fastening it firmly to the stake in front of Daunt, running several strands of rawhide about its massive chest and forelegs. At last that task was finished, and with a shout of warning, the blacks cut the lashings and leaped to safety.

For an instant the tawny killer did not seem to realize that it had regained the use of its legs, for it remained motionless on the ground, lashing its tail and glaring at the ring of Bakussu about it, but at a safe distance. A low rasping cough rattled in its throat, and then it tensed with a deep growl that caused the natives to give back a step or two.

Daunt rolled as far as possible away from the brute, straining at his bonds to gain every possible precious inch. The baobab ropes were strong, and in his imagination Daunt felt them pulling him back toward that tawny threat. For the first time the leopard appeared to notice him, and slowly it came to its feet, its intent plainly pictured by its snarling mouth and red-flecked eyes. Daunt braced himself for the impact of its hurtling body and closed his eyes.

He heard the sound of a heavy falling body and a grunt that was almost human, and he opened his eyes to see the huge cat picking himself up almost at Daunt's feet. It seemed stunned by its fall, and slunk backwards a pace or two. Then it slowly lowered its belly to the ground and crept forward inch by inch, its wide yellow eyes shot with crimson hate and ferocity as it glared balefully at him. When the ropes grew taut, the cat reached forward



with its rapier-like claws almost scraping Daunt's knee. For a breathless five seconds that tableau held. The Black Leopard had measured the distance to a mathematical nicety.

Staring fixedly at that silken-muscled crouching cat, so close to it that he could feel its searing breath, Daunt lay motionless for an hour, an age, an eon. To him it seemed that the light over the western rim of the paille would never pale, and yet the seconds ticked inexorably on. His mind was seemingly paralyzed by the climatic emotions and he was able to formulate no plan or thought of escape. He could only resign himself to whatever the Black Leopard desired. The elemental Gods of Africa were in the saddle—venge, hate, destruction.

With that startling suddenness, characteristic of equatorial Africa, darkness blanketed the camp. No fuel was added to the fires by the Bakussu. Perhaps they feared an attack by McGinnis and his safari. Then Daunt became aware of the fact that the Bakussu warriors were drawing in an ever-tightening ring about him and the leopard. A watery moon came up, casting an indistinct light over the weird scene, and Daunt could see the still crouching cat, its green, yellowish eyes glaring in malevolent opalescence.

With a shudder he felt the dampness of the gathering dews, and he tensed himself against the drawing powers of the baobab rope. Then into the open space before him stalked the Black Leopard, but keeping well out of reach by the Nyalbo. There was something closely akin in the sinewy, threatening movements of the two killers, a betrayal of common greed and cruelty.

"Well," rasped the Black Leopard, "have to make a decision?"

"What is your offer?" Daunt sparred for time.

"Tell me where your party is encamped, and you will be freed and given a chance to escape."

"Chance?" Daunt laughed jeeringly. "What kind of a chance?"

"You will have a three hour lead on the trail to the river where you hid your canoes."

"Will the canoe be there?"

"You will take that chance." There

was that in the Black Leopard's expression that told Daunt that the canoes had been located and destroyed.

"I'd rather trust this leopard before me here," declared Daunt evenly.

"As you wish."

The Black Leopard lighted a cigaret and flicked away the match-stem with a shrug. "The dew is unusually heavy tonight," he remarked indifferently.

The Nyalbo must have felt its rawhide thongs relax slightly with the dampness because it seemed to grow more and more restless. It paced backward and forward, so close to Daunt that he at regular intervals caught and held his breath. Several times that dry, rasping cough sounded, a threat that stiffened Daunt's every muscle.

The suspense was poignant, and Daunt's self-control was reaching the breaking-point. The Black Leopard stood motionless, imperturbable, smoking with relish his long cigaret. Not a sound came from the mass of black men who formed the almost unnoticed background, and little was visible save the reflection from innumerable white eyes. Daunt clinched his fists in impotent rage.

"You damned ghoul!" he shouted so loudly that the Nyalbo cat recoiled a few feet.

AS IF it were an echo to his cry, a sudden crash of breaking undergrowth in the jungle behind them, brought the Black Leopard about to face a new danger, and the Bakussu fled wildly to each side. The Black Leopard made a quick dash for the nearest hut, and at the same instant there came a hoarse trumpet that seemed to shake the very ground underfoot. Daunt half-whirled and gasped as he saw the towering form of a great elephant swaying in the moonlight, not twenty paces distant.

For several seconds the gigantic bull stood almost motionless, his huge ears flapping slowly, and his thick trunk undulating in growing menace. An acetylene spotlight from the vicinity of the Black Leopard's hut found the elephant and limned him in bold silhouette against the darkness behind him. Beyond the lamp appeared the Black Leopard with a heavy-calibered rifle. He roared for more lights to insure his aim.



Concentrating his wrathful attention on that spotlight, the old bull steadied himself for his last charge. Daunt, utterly fascinated, completely forgot his own danger and stared. Once more that dying old mastedon sent out his defiant challenge to shatter the silence of the paille, and then he made swiftly though ponderously straight at that light, plunging directly across the crouching Nyalbo cat. The pounding of his huge feet roared like thunder as Daunt rolled back out of its path. Through it came the heavy explosions of two rifle shots.

Frozen by the kaleidoscopic play of stark drama, Daunt watched the old tusker come to a lumbering halt and rock on his feet. Again the gun rang out, and the bull's knees began slowly to buckle. Suddenly his great body crashed to the ground, almost on top of Daunt and the crouching, straining Nyalbo.

In the excitement the native holding the spotlight dropped it, and the place was plunged into almost total darkness. The camp was a bedlam with indiscriminate shouts of dismay and victory resounding everywhere. Into this melee a dark form slipped past the body of the elephant, and Daunt felt the blade of a knife against his wrists as it cut the strands of baobab fiber. He twisted cautiously to see who was there, and at the same instant the bonds about his legs gave away. He rolled quickly backward, and then came to his feet and darted swiftly into the cover of the fringe of bushes. Someone was running at his side, and without investigating, Daunt knew that it was Ruko.

Before they had traversed a hundred yards of the jungle, a cry raised by the Bakussu announced the discovery of his escape. Confusion, judging by the medley of cries, would, of course, delay pursuit for a few minutes, but when a deadly silence once again settled over the paille, Daunt knew that there was no time to be lost. With a fervent prayer that they might reach the pass before the pursuit caught up, Daunt redoubled his pace, and Ruko, apparently without effort, remained by his side.

When they reached the crest, they risked a moment to catch their breath. Not a sound came from the depths of the paille, but Daunt knew that a massed body of

the Bakussu were running on swift and noiseless feet for the pass, and that in all probability they were drawing close at the moment.

He placed his hand on Ruko's arm.

"I'll not forget what you did tonight," he said earnestly. "You faced certain death—alone. Did you bring the elephant with you?" Daunt was almost ready to believe anything.

"I followed him into the paille." There was no hint of emotion or excitement in Ruko's tones.

"Then I have certainly been the fair-haired boy-friend of the Goddess of Luck tonight!" murmured Daunt, moving hurriedly out through the pass.

## V

BACK at camp there was more than a little anxiety, and Smith was getting together several of the Swahili to go to Daunt's aid, when the latter and Ruko put in their appearance. Smith came out along the trail to meet them when Ruko signalled.

"Thought you'd had a run-in with the Leopard," he said with relief. "We sent Ruko to bring you in hours ago. What happened?"

"We ran into more leopards than I ever want to see again," declared Daunt feelingly.

"The Black Leopard?" Smith halted in his tracks.

"Come on! I'll tell my tale—inside the barricade after I've had a shot at some old rye I have in my pack."

"Huh!" Smith swung along beside him. "Sounds interesting."

Refreshed with a drink, and in the comfort and cheerfulness of the blazing fire, Daunt felt at ease for the first time in hours. His recital held his listeners motionless, and when he had finished, Smith gave expression to a low whistle of surprise.

"The murderin' son of a cobra!" he murmured. "So help me, I'm goin' to fill him fuller of holes than a Swiss cheese. We're guilty of felony each day we let that palooka draw the breath of life."

"So he's in the paille now," surmised McGinnis thoughtfully.



"May be on his way here to attack us," said Daunt.

"Then we'd best move under cover of the darkness. The Black Leopard will not be likely caught inside the paille. 'Twould be a trap. We must get him in the open—somewhere."

They gathered close to consider the best plan of campaign. The element of surprise upon which they had all been subconsciously depending was now gone, since Daunt had been inside the paille; and the Leopard would be on his guard, and in as impregnable a position as possible, backed by two hundred of the deadly Bakussu.

With the Black Leopard eliminated, McGinnis and McTavish, wise in the weaknesses and foibles of the Congo natives, felt certain that they could handle even the Bakussu and any other exigency that might come up. But getting the Black Leopard was no mean task, and this they all realized.

Ruko came suddenly into the circle of firelight, and his expression brought the heads of the white men up and alert.

"Swahili guard out on trail," declared the *muri* softly, "is dead. Bakussu poison-arrow in his throat."

"Where?" Daunt dropped his hand to his holster.

"Body still warm. Maybe ten—fifteen minutes."

McTavish with a sweep of his long arms caught up his rifle and a heavy bandolier of cartridges.

"We move now," he advised tensely. "'Twould suit our needs best if we found an open space high up on the slope of the paille where we will be having a chance against those infernal poison-arrows."

With alacrity and in complete silence they broke camp, leaving the fires burning and even adding more fuel to the flames so that they would continue to blaze for some time. Daunt secured an extra rifle and plenty of ammunition. Only shells and guns were carried by the party, and the porters with the foods and camp equipment trekked back along the river trail to a designated point to await the outcome of the fight.

The Swahili riflemen and the whites, with Ruko and Sillibub, formed an attacking body that marched like shadows through the eerie night, lighted by a pale,

watery moon. The going was difficult and often painful, and, but for the guiding of Ruko and the Swahili scouts, the advance toward the paille would have been almost impossible.

IT WAS past midnight when McTavish and McGinnis found what they sought, an open spot strewn with boulders of varying sizes which offered excellent protection in case the attack came either from below or above. The party scattered out a bit, each man seeking the shelter that he liked best, but in a comparatively compact area, and Daunt found himself behind a boulder beside Sillibub. Aristides Roosevelt Smith moved on past them, taking with him two of the Swahili who were carrying Smith's precious tarp-wrapped packs.

It was breaking day, with a faint orange tint in the east, when the sharp explosion of a rifle broke the heavy silences, and Daunt came quickly to his knees, peering over his boulder in the direction whence the shot had come. For a space of several seconds he concentrated his attention on the slopes before him, and then he ventured a sweeping glance above and behind them. Then another shot down on the slopes below reassured him. The Bakussu were on the lower slope.

Daunt discovered McTavish out a few yards to the left, and just beyond him in a slight depression McGinnis was securely emplaced. The majority of the Swahili, and Smith and Ruko, apparently were further up the slope a bit. Only a furtive glimpse of an occasional moving body betrayed their position.

Far out to the left, and up near the rim of the crater, Daunt caught a glimpse of a moving object. He watched that point closely and again he saw the movement so clearly that he knew there could be no doubt. It was a Bakussu warrior, carrying a spear as well as a bow and arrows.

"McGinnis!" he called guardedly.

The old hunter raised his head cautiously. "Eh!"

"The Bakussu are out along the rim to your left—above us."

"I feared as much," replied McGinnis after a pause. "We'll climb a bit higher.



There's a good level spot here straight up above."

McTavish and McGinnis called in those Swahili close in, and Ruko also joined them.

"Where is Smith?" demanded McTavish.

"Over to the right and high up, I think," replied Daunt. "I saw him move up that way with a couple of the Swahili.

"Then he's all right." McGinnis grinned enigmatically. "Come on! Ruko will lead us."

Once again they silently wormed their way up the slope, taking advantage of every possible bit of cover that offered. They succeeded in reaching the crest without incident; and if the Bakussu or the Black Leopard saw them, they made no outcry. Then the little party went desperately to work, throwing up a low rampart of stone and small boulders to form some protection from the deadly arrows of the Bakussu and the several rifles that spoke occasionally down the slopes.

Behind this inadequate protection they crouched, Ruko, eight Swahili, Sillibub, and the three white men. Each was armed with a rifle and automatic pistol as well as several hundred rounds of ammunition, sufficient to stand off a regular siege. The attack could only come from in front and to a certain extent from each side. The sheer wall of the inside of the crater was at their backs.

The Bakussu down below were keeping carefully under cover, undoubtedly planning some strategy to catch the whites off guard. During this breathing spell, Daunt located Smith out to the right some fifty or sixty paces, buried in a crevice in the face of the slope, and in position to sweep all approaches with bullets.

It was McGinnis who first discovered the stealthy approach of the attackers through the undergrowth far down the slopes. A thin line of warriors came worming their way forward, moving like shadows from clump of grass to boulder or any handy cover. Twice McGinnis squinted through his sights, but each time his target slipped from view. Finally he got in a snap-shot, and chuckled with satisfaction.

"Got the blighter—hard!" he grunted.

"Ought to make the others be a little more careful."

Sillibub nudged Daunt and whispered a warning, jerking his hand out toward the right near the crest. Daunt quickly saw indications of men drawing near, but they were so elusive that it seemed almost impossible to get in a certain shot. Wriggling, crawling like pythons, they rarely exposed more than a reflection of their black, glistening bodies.

Three times something stirred the air close above Daunt's head, but he paid scant attention to these interruptions until he recalled the arrow that had almost got him on the scene of the death of Johnny Buckleston. Instinctively he ducked lower behind that barricade and peered through a crevice. Across the sights of his rifle he saw the clay-daubed features of a Bakussu not more than fifty feet distant.

One end of a long bow was protruding from behind the rock which sheltered the black's body, and Daunt knew that in another instant one of those deadly stropanthin arrows would be loosed at him. With hurried aim he squeezed the trigger, and had the intense satisfaction of seeing that face jerk backward and then slowly sink out of sight.

A LOW groan behind him brought Daunt about, and then he froze in utter horror when he saw McTavish reclining against the barricade a few feet away and trying to draw one of those deadly arrows from his shoulder. Even at that distance Daunt could see that the old Scot's face was drained to a dead white.

"My God!" gasped, Daunt, half-straightening.

"Anything wrong?" It was McGinnis' voice behind Daunt.

"McTavish got it in the shoulder—with an arrow."

"Does it hurt, Mac?" came the gentle voice of McGinnis.

McTavish opened his eyes, and the hint of a smile hovered about the corners of his mouth. His left hand dropped over McGinnis' right.

"'Tis stropanthin-dipped, Pat." He spoke with difficulty, and his tongue was thickened.

His head dropped forward and a con-



vulsive shudder shook him. Then he was still, and reverently Daunt covered the old man's face with a handkerchief.

With mist-filled eyes he crawled back to his position behind the barricade. As he glanced over the wall he saw a myriad of the Bakussu come into view on the slopes below.

Methodically, steadily, he pumped bullet after bullet into the mass of attackers, making each shot count. Sillibub beside him was matching him shot for shot, and Ruko and the Swahili were firing incessantly and with such deadly effect that it seemed impossible for anything to stand up under such a galling fire. Half of that charging wave fell, but the others rushed forward with utter disregard to the dangers, with the sole purpose of coming to a hand-to-hand grip with the defenders.

The Swahili were coldly and methodically firing volley after volley into the face of that black wall. They were absorbed in their task, and in their faces showed their unholy joy in the slaughter.

**A**LTHOUGH men were dropping fast all along the front, the advance did not show the slightest pause. Deep back in those thorn thickets behind them, the *goudougoudous* beat their frantic dirge, a song of doom which, mingled with the shouts and cries of the maddened men, made it a medley of hell's harshest tones. Like a flow of black lava, running uphill, the warriors came on, as inexorably as death itself.

Suddenly Daunt realized that a new sound had entered the bedlam—a ripping, roaring tattoo that brought his head up with a gasp of surprise. *Rat-tat-tat-tat! Rat-tat-tat-tat!* There was only one thing in the world that could make that sound, that could crackle with such venomous spite—a machine-gun. Smith's mysterious magic!

That black wave of blood-lust halted not more than ten paces from the barricade, unable to understand the strange wilting of their ranks in heaping windrows. It was a horrible massacre, the blacks simply piling up to form an obstruction in the path of those behind. Aristides Roosevelt Smith was riding that machine-gun with deadly

effect, and with a skill that bespoke practice, sweeping that horde of attackers with a veritable rain of death. No courage could stand long in the face of it, and the blacks broke and fled in panic-stricken terror, a complete rout.

Into the open space some seventy-five yards distant leaped the Black Leopard, trying vainly to stem that backward tide. Daunt snatched a rifle from the hands of a surprised Swahili, centered the bead on the massive chest of the berserk killer, and prayerfully squeezed the trigger. The Black Leopard straightened with a jerk, surprise freezing on his working face, and then he slowly topped forward. Spasmodically his knees jerked, and then he was still.

In ten seconds the slopes before the barricade were cleared, save for the wounded and dead. Once more the blanket-like silence of the paille settled over the scene, for those wounded Bakussu made no cry of distress or pain. A quick look over the space inside the barricade told Daunt that only one of the Swahili had been slain, and that all the others were unscathed.

He arose and strode to where McGinnis was coming slowly to his feet. They shook hands in silence, and then their eyes went irresistibly to the still form of McTavish. For a long thirty seconds neither spoke, and then McGinnis' glance swept the littered slopes below.

"They paid—they paid in full," he murmured softly. "But that will not balance the account. The paille is ours, but we'll be missin' ol' Mac. He would 'a' liked to help—'twas his dream. 'Twas my fault that he came here in a way—" His voice trailed into nothingness.

"But we made him happy in bringing him here," declared Daunt feelingly. "Thank God, he was able to visit the paille. He didn't mind going after that. You heard him say so. He had seen the elephant death-paille."

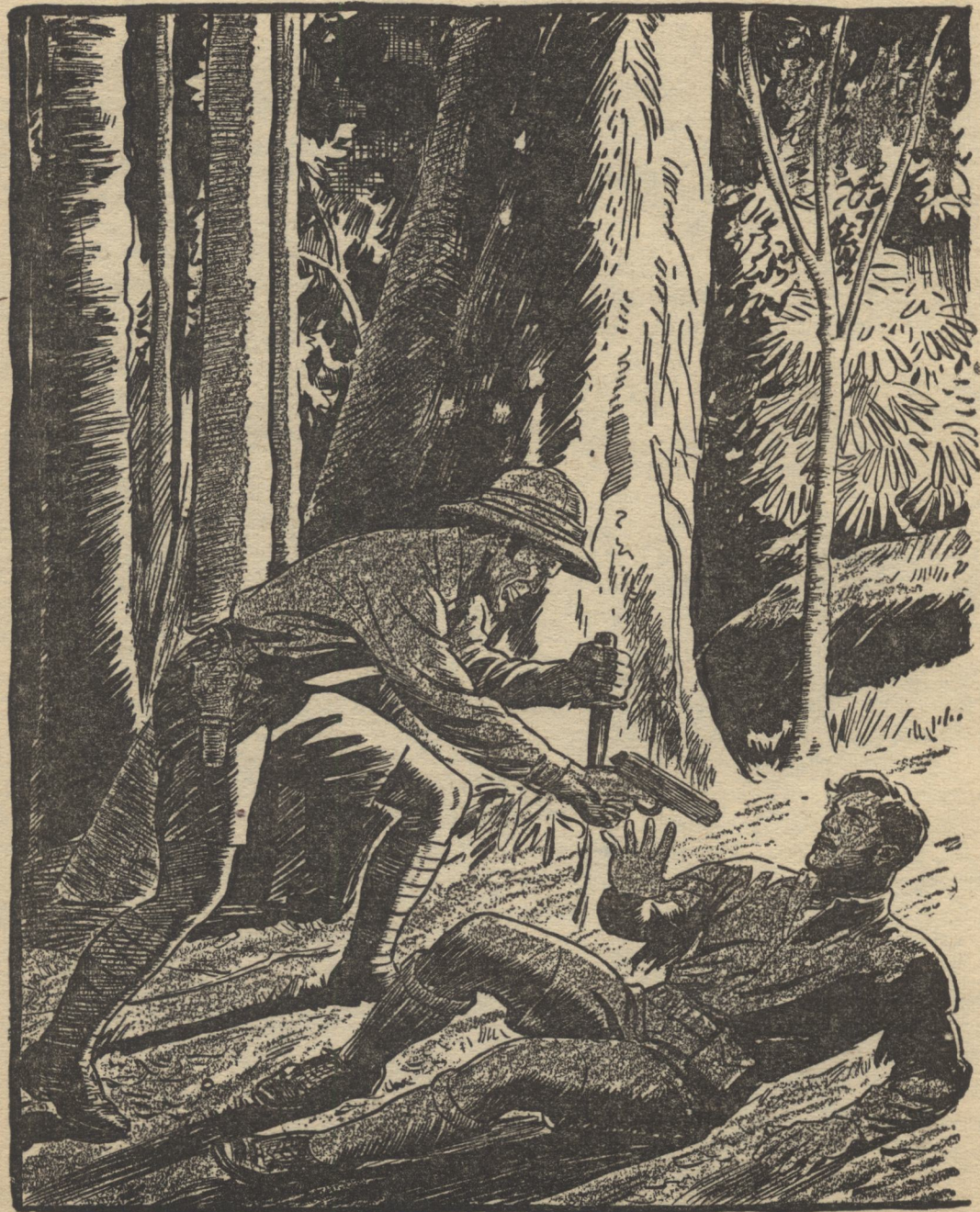
"Aye!" McGinnis blinked away the tears. "We'll cut his tomb in the livin' rock here and leave him as sentinel to stand guard over the death-tryst of his beloved elephants through the ages to come. 'Twould be peculiarly fitting!"



# Headsmen of Bestiana

By PAUL SELONKE

That Borneoan jungle was a hell-trap for the unwary—for the Bestia head-hunters were stalking the blood trail of all whites. Yet Bill Jaggar had to walk into those tangled depths to save a golden-haired girl. His first wrong move meant that he would lose his head—literally.





**B**ILL JAGGAR scowled across the table at Carlos Alvaro, who ran an exporting business in Quito. "If I am to guide you into that section of the Jivaro jungle," he said, "it will cost you five hundred American dollars—in advance. Take it or leave it."

"I'll take it, *senor*," nodded the smooth, good-looking Spaniard. "Your friendship with the wild Bestia head-hunters will be worth twice that to me."

Jaggar's gray eyes narrowed. He was

a rangy American of forty, his face burned almost black from the years he had spent in South America.

"You mean, Alvaro, that you're willing to lay out all that money merely to try and get six shrunk heads from that tribe?"

"My customer is a wealthy *argentino*. He will pay anything to get these rare Bestia heads for his private museum."

"But you haven't a Chinaman's chance of getting a single shrunk head from the Bestias," Jaggar told him. "They never





sell their trophies like other tribes of Jivaro head-hunters do."

"Don't worry," Alvaro replied, arrogantly confident. "I always get what I go after."

Jaggar growled in his throat. "I don't go for any double-crossing of the natives. Moro, the chief of the Bestia tribe, is a friend of mine."

"Have no fear, *senor*. There are ways to get results without being unscrupulous." Alvaro looked at him, anxiously. "Tell me—when can we leave?"

Jaggar's fixed scowl deepened. "I will arrange for a car so we can drive to Banos in the morning."

"*Bueno*." Carlos Alvaro nodded and rose lithely to his feet. "The five hundred will be sent to you this evening. *Hasta manana, senor*."

"*Hasta la vista*," and Jaggar watched the dandyish Spaniard swagger out of the Metropolitano bar.

ORDINARILY, Jaggar would have welcomed the chance to go into Bestiana. He would be able to visit his old friend, Casey, who was emerald prospecting in the territory of the Bestia head-hunters. Moreover, Lydia, Casey's wife was out there with the redhead. And Jaggar was worried over how the girl was getting along.

Yet he had never trusted the handsome, too-clever Alvaro. He had sensed the man was up to no good when he asked to be guided into Bestiana, and as a polite refusal had outrageously hitched up his price.

It bothered him that Alvaro had accepted those terms without protest. And the Spaniard's utter confidence in getting six trophy heads from the Bestia head-hunters made the whole thing look off-color. Everyone in Quito knew that it was impossible to buy heads from that fierce, uncivilized tribe.

Jaggar rose from the table, threaded his way through the crowd of Europeans and obscure foreign dignitaries who haunt the Metropolitano bar. His long legs carried him out of the hotel to the sun-drenched street.

He crossed Plaza Independencia and went up a sloping street to the house he had rented—a small, tile-roofed dwelling, with peeling whitewashed walls.

As usual, Martino was lazily sunning himself on the long bench beside the door, his vivid-red poncho hanging carelessly over his lean shoulder.

Jaggar said to him, "You must go to Bano at once and arrange for mules and supplies for a trip into the jungle. I am leaving for Bestiana."

Martino's teeth flashed in a wide grin as he rose to his feet. He was a slim, twenty-year old Quichua, his face smooth and brown as worn saddle leather.

"You mean, *patron*, that you have heard from your government and they are sending us there?"

Jaggar shook his head. For months, he had been making a survey of the rubber possibilities of the Ecuador lowlands. He had recently submitted his report to Washington and was waiting here in Quito for further orders.

"No, Martino. I've been hired to take Carlos Alvaro, the exporter, on a mission to Bestiana. He wants to try and get trophy heads from the tribe."

"But, *patron*, that is impossible!"

"I told him so, but he would not believe me," Jaggar replied wearily. "Go now and find transportation to Bano. We will meet you there tomorrow. Then you will return here to Quito."

"Do you mean that I am not traveling with you this time?" Martino cried in dismay.

"I'm expecting that message from my government. If it comes while I am gone, I want you to bring it into the jungle. You will be able to find me at the village of the Bestia head-hunters."

"*Si, patron*, it will be done," and Martino headed away, toward the plaza, his brown face clouded with disappointment.

As he watched the young Quichua depart, he found himself thinking of Lydia—a slim, comely Baltimore girl who had come to Quito, a few months past, as secretary to the new American minister. She fell in love when she met the carefree Casey, married him, and had followed the redhead back into the jungle, despite Jaggar's warning that Bestiana was no place for a girl. Jaggar was wondering again if the jungle had been treating her kindly.

Four days later, Quito was many weary *kilometros* behind him. He and Al-



varo had been journeying endlessly along government trails that twisted through thick, steaming green vegetation, where *bejucas*, a writhing network of creepers and lianas, strove to choke out the towering trees and made the bush practically impenetrable.

Jaggar halted on a rise and peered into the hollow below them, where the trail widened into a small clearing. He could see another government trail there—leading north and south—crossing the one they were on. It was the boundary of the territory of Bestiana.

He slid off his mule and took a water-jug from his saddle, unscrewed the cap-cup and poured it half-full of tepid water. He handed the cup to Alvaro.

"*Dios mio*, I never thought the jungle would be such hell," the Spaniard grumbled as he downed the water. He was no longer the sleek *caballero* he had been in Quito. Sweat, mud, and the torrential rains of the previous day, had reduced him to a sorry, sullen figure.

Jaggar slowly took his own drink. He restored the jug to his saddle, stepped to the two pack animals and shifted the loads to ease the mules' spines.

"We should be reaching the Bestia village soon," he said at last to Alvaro. "By all indications—"

He stopped abruptly, his eyes narrowing as he gazed down into the clearing below them. He pointed grimly down the trail. "Alvaro—look at that!"

Over a dozen Jivaro head-hunters were filing along the cross-trail—long-haired, small-featured warriors, with bright red and yellow toucan feathers decorating their heads and necks. Long blow-guns and bows were gripped in their hands, and they carried full quivers of red-tufted arrows across their naked shoulders.

"Bestias?" asked Alvaro, breathless.

Jaggar nodded and watched until the file of warriors vanished into the jungle.

Alvaro crossed himself, sighing with relief. "*Gracias a Dios*, then we have reached our destination at last!"

"Don't be too happy about it," Jaggar told him. "Bestia head-hunters never wear feathers or use red-tufted arrows except when they are out to kill. Those warriors we saw are out hunting for heads."

"Out to attack some other tribe perhaps,

*senor*. The Jivaros, I've heard, often fight among themselves to gather trophies."

Jaggar scowled. "No—the Bestia head-hunters' presence here on a government trail means only one thing. They have been roused against white men and are watching to attack any white who enters their country."

Alvaro paled. "But—but they promised to leave white men alone since the Ecuadorean government granted them liberal concessions!"

"The Ecuador-Bestia agreement states that no Bestia warriors shall come near these government trails, Alvaro. The edict has been obeyed—until now. Seeing these Bestias on a government trail means that they are angry against the white men and are out for blood."

"*Madre Maria!*" gasped the Spaniard. He looked desperately at Jaggar. "Still, *senor*, we are carrying guns. If they attack us—"

"We haven't much of a chance against poisoned arrows and blow-gun darts that come out of the jungle without the least warning."

Alvaro's eyes were alive with fright. "You are their friend! We must seek out the warriors and inform them that we come in peace!"

"I'm but a friend of their chief," said Jaggar bleakly. "In the jungle, I am only another white man to these head-hunters. They will not recognize us as friends until Chief Moro assures them of it."

"Would it be wiser to turn back, *senor*?"

"Danger now lies behind us as well as in front. It will be safer to go ahead and hope that we reach the village before the warriors locate us."

"There must be something that we can do!"

"We can pray, Alvaro," Jaggar replied quietly, and remounted his trail-weary mule

## II

AS THEY rode through the hollow and the jungle again closed about them; Jaggar *did* pray. He prayed for Casey and Lydia, who were prospecting in the very heart of Bestiana. His only hope was that Casey was also a friend of Chief Moro. That might make a difference.



It chilled Jaggar's spine that Bestia warriors were watching white man trails—a thing that had been forbidden by an agreement with the government five years ago. He did not try to figure out what had roused these fierce head-hunters. More important was the task of saving themselves from death.

And then a rifle suddenly barked in the trail behind them.

"*Que es?*" Alvaro spun nervously in his saddle.

Jaggar growled in his throat. "Some white traveler probably cornered by those savages. We can do nothing but press on ahead and—No, wait! Do you hear that, Alvaro?"

There was the thudding hoof-beats of a mule hurrying up the trail behind them.

Jaggar and Alvaro dismounted and stood with ready rifles gripped in their hands. Their tense breathing was loud on the hot, damp air of the jungle. Nearby, a parrot suddenly began screaming.

Gradually the mule-rider drew into view—a young brown-skinned Quichua with a vivid-red poncho draped over his lean shoulder. It was Martino.

His teeth flashed in his lazy grin as he rode up beside the men. "*Patron*, I saw you in the trail ahead of me and fired my rifle so you would wait."

"What brings you here?" demanded Jaggar. "Did that letter come for me just after we left Quito?"

"No, *patron*," Martino dismounted and handed him a small bag which was made of monkey skin. The bag was a bit larger than a man's fist, and its opening was sewed tightly shut with goat-hide cord.

"Finch, the jungle trader, brought this to the house," he went on. "He told me the bag was very important and suggested that I bring it to you at once."

Jaggar scowled. He knew Finch as a trader without principles or morals. He did not trust him.

"What else did he say, Martino?"

"Finch said just as he was leaving Bestiana the other day a warrior followed him and handed him the bag. The warrior told him that one of Chief Moro's wives had asked that Finch bring it to you without fail."

"But I do not know any of Moro's wives.

I can't see. . . ." Jaggar took out his knife and slashed the cords that sealed the bag of monkey skin. He reached into the bag and pulled out what was inside.

His breath caught with a sick, gasping sound as he stared at the horrible thing he held. It was a newly shrunken trophy head, dyed blue-black, with long white and red cotton cords sewed to the lips.

And the head had brilliant red hair!

"*Santa Maria!*" cried Martino in horror. "It is the head of Casey, the red-haired one!"

JAGGAR'S face was white as he, too, recognized this as the shrunken head of his old friend. He gritted thickly, "The red and white cords on the lips are Chief Moro's private mark. It is added proof that he killed Casey himself."

"But, *senor!*" blurted Alvaro. "Why would a wife of the chief send this red-haired trophy head to you?"

"As you said before, Alvaro, the Jivaro head-hunters wage constant war on each other—and most of this warfare is over women. They gather more wives by killing an enemy and taking possession of his women."

"*Santo padre!* You mean the chief took this white man's wife as his own after he killed him?"

Jaggar nodded. "That is the custom. She is now part of Chief Moro's household."

"And you mean that she . . .?"

"The way it looks to me, Alvaro, she somehow got hold of her husband's shrunken head and sewed it into the bag. Bribing one of the warriors, probably with a piece of jewelry, she got the head into Finch's hands so he would bring it to me—this in an effort that I might come here and save her from a fate worse than death."

Alvaro shrugged. "You can do nothing to save her. You are one man against all these savages."

Cold fury shook Jaggar's voice. "I'll save her or kill Moro with my bare hands! I must have had the chief figured wrong. Because he can read and speak Spanish fluently, I thought him far more intelligent than the smartest Jivaros—"

"Anything you do in an effort to save the woman will result in all our deaths,"



Alvaro told him in a crisp voice. "You must wait until you can get aid from our soldiers. Remember, you are under my orders. In good faith, I paid you five hundred—"

"I don't give a damn what you paid," Jagger snapped. "There's a lone woman out there in the jungle!"

Martino caught his infuriated master by the arm. "One moment, *patron*. Perhaps we can get aid. I saw three men on the trail not far behind me—a white man with two civilized Bestia Jivaros. They must be quite near—"

"This white man, Martino!" burst out Alvaro, his dirty, sweat-streaked face suddenly hard. "Did you recognize him?"

"*Si, senior*. It was—"

Martino's voice was cut off when a rifle thundered from the trees beside the trail. He gasped and clutched at his breast. His knees gave way beneath him. He crashed face-down in the damp, mucky trail and lay still.

Jagger and Alvaro ducked down as more rifle slugs whined about them. One of the pack mules rolled to the ground, a bullet buried in its head. The two men flung themselves down, using the body of the animal for protection.

"Get Jagger alive!" a voice suddenly cried hoarsely from the dank jungle bush. "Kill the cursed Spaniard!"

And Jagger recognized the voice. It was the voice of Finch, the trader who had brought Casey's shrunken head to Quito.

**F**INCH and his two Bestia companions were partially visible as they crouched among the tree and the vine-tangled underbrush beside the trail. Too reckless and fierce to handle guns, the natives were firing wildly, exposing their naked bodies without concern over danger as they triggered.

Jagger didn't try to understand what this attack was about. All he could think of was that Finch had shot down Martino without mercy. It made him ruthless. His rifle roared its song of death, and one of the Bestias plunged lifeless to the ground.

"Get back, you fool!" Finch yelled at the remaining man. But Jagger's inexorably accurate rifle had already smashed a slug through the second native's head. The Bestia fell heavily against Finch.

Against his will, the tall, bearded trader lurched out sideways from behind the tree where he had been crouching.

Alvaro fired and sent Finch crashing down beside the Bestias. The trader did not rise again.

As suddenly as it had begun, the battle was miraculously ended. The screaming of parrots, the ungodly shrieks of howling monkeys, disturbed by the gunfire, raised an unholy din in the trees as Alvaro sloshed through the brush to examine the fallen men.

Jagger turned to the dead Martino and rolled him over on his back. There were tears in his eyes as he gently covered the smooth, brown face with the vivid-red poncho. The young Quichua had been his constant companion for more than two years.

The parrots and monkeys were falling silent again when Jagger rose up at last. He saw Alvaro stepping back into the trail, and he busied himself in re-loading his gun so the Spaniard could not see the expression he knew was on his face.

"Finch and his two civilized Bestias are dead," Alvaro said heavily. "*Que ha de ser nada de eso?* Have you any idea why Finch attacked us?"

The sullen drone of insects was the only sound in the jungle when Jagger finally raised hot eyes to his companion. He said quietly:

"I can't understand it, either—nor why Finch wanted to preserve me from death. Somehow I've got a strong hunch that he was the rat who riled up the Bestias against white men. What reason he had—"

He stopped speaking when a wailing sound was born in the jungle beside them. It began with a moaning, rising up to a shrill, piercing shriek that broke off sharply. He spun his eyes around desperately, his sun-blackened face suddenly a little haggard.

Alvaro gasped. "*Por Dios*, what . . .?"

**J**AGGAR threw his rifle to the ground. He wrenched away the gun the Spaniard was holding and likewise flung it down into the trail.

Alvaro glared at him wide-eyed in amazement. "*Madre Maria!*" Have you gone insane?"

"Not a move!" Jagger said through



clenched teeth. "That was the warning cry of the Bestia head-hunters. The noise of the battle must have attracted them here and they have us surrounded on all sides."

Alvaro sobbed out a nervous breath. "But are we to die—like *ratoncillos* in a trap?"

"They could have shot us down without warning, Alvaro. Maybe we are getting a break."

The two men stood silent, tense. Their nervous eyes watched the motionless green jungle on both sides of the trail. The quiet drone of jungle insects was like a roaring cataract in their straining ears.

Abruptly, two head-hunters materialized stood waiting, unmoving, their red and yellow feathers gleaming eerily in the sunlight. They held arrows poised in ready bows.

"We come in peace!" Jaggar cried desperately at them in the language of the Jivaro tribes. "I am as a brother to beloved Moro, who would not want any harm to befall me!"

There was no answer to his frantic shouts. Noiseless as light, the remainder of the band of warriors glided from the jungle and closed in upon the white men from all sides. They bound the prisoners with long strips of bark and silently prodded them forward along the trail.

After the party had advanced some distance, Alvaro glanced with frightened eyes over toward Jaggar. He whispered hoarsely, "You were right, *senor*. We are getting what you *yanquis* call a break. Once we reach the village, you can speak for us to your friend, Chief Moro."

"I'm not so sure it is going to help much," Jaggar answered grimly. "Casey was a good friend of Chief Moro too—and all that is left of him is his ghastly red-haired shrunken head. . . ."

### III

THE VILLAGE of Bestiana was located in a barren, brown-earthed clearing that stood at a high point in the jungle. It was a low, sprawling *campamento* of grass-roofed log huts, surrounded by a high, crudely-built stockade of bare logs which were bleached bone-white by the relentless sun.

Women and children shrilled in frenzied hate when the captives were marched through the gate, pelting them with stones and clods of mud. The warriors paid no heed to the uproar and silently escorted the white men to the more imposing log building at the far end of the village—the house of Chief Moro.

Chief Moro was a ruggedly-built, solemn-faced Jivaro, wearing bamboo tubes in his pierced ears and a necklace of large green stones at his throat. Naked to the waist, he stood on a raised mud platform, gripping a long feather-trimmed spear in his brown hand. There was no emotion on his sharp-featured face as Jaggar and Alvaro were brought before him.

Jaggar faced him silently, filled with utter loathing. All the trust and respect that he customarily gave Moro was gone from his mind as he thought of lovely Lydia, Casey's wife, a prisoner among the women in this very house.

"*Santo emperador del bestias*," he said in a bitter voice. "I am he who has lived in your village as a brother—yet you treat me like a despised enemy. I find your warriors seeking heads on white man trails. All this is something which I cannot believe."

"All white men are our enemies," Chief Moro answered in cold, clipped tones.

"Would you bring Bestiana to its doom?" cried Jaggar. "Do you not remember the punishment for breaking the agreement? The white fathers of Quito will forever ban you from this very country which is yours!"

Chief Moro shrugged his naked shoulders. "We will be driven from our land if we do not kill the whites who trespass here. The tyrants of Quito have betrayed our agreement. They intend to banish us from our lands because the earth here is plentiful with *oro* and *roca verde*."

"But the white fathers want only peaceful friendship! If they come here for gold and emeralds, they will always share with you, value for value, as they solemnly promised."

"I know what I have learned," said Moro inflexibly. "I have read the message which was intended for Casey, the red-haired one. It told me plainly of the perfidy of the whites."

"What message, O Chief?"



Chief Moro merely stared stonily upon the white man. "Why is it you have come?"

"I come to bring this Spaniard beside me, who has reason to trade with you. When the business is done, I take him back to Quito again. That is the complete truth, for I speak these words with my hand over my heart."

MORO'S steady eyes remained fixed upon the white men for long moments. With a movement of his spear, he gestured to his warriors, who untied the captives.

"Fiel Jaggar," he said, "I give you the freedom of our village and the adjoining jungle for seven suns. Prove in that time you are still our brother and I will listen to the business the *espanola* has with me."

Jaggar caught his breath, surprised at this sudden, unexpected concession. "I am grateful for thy great trust in me, O Chief!"

"It is more than trust," Moro replied, his voice still crisp and cold. "My warriors tell me that you were attacked by a white man on the trail and that you killed him and his companions—two Bestia Jivaros who were no longer true members of our people. It means that you are an enemy of our enemies. Otherwise you would not have been set upon by one of your own race."

Thereupon the chief stepped from his platform and took Jaggar and Alvaro out to the front of his house. He had his people gathered together and explained to them that the white men were to be given the freedom of the village and adjoining jungle for one week.

Though Jaggar suspected that the cagey chief was up to something, he was more puzzled over the green stones which hung at Moro's throat. The stones were uncut emeralds—about the largest emeralds he had ever seen. He wondered where Moro had gotten them and if they had any connection with the death of Casey.

He was still pondering over that after he and Alvaro were taken to the hut that was to be their living quarters for these seven days. Their pack mules had been brought in, and their supplies and equipment were piled into the vile-smelling dwelling.

When they were finally alone, Alvaro sank weakly to the hard-packed mud floor. He sleeved cold sweat from his face.

"*Por Dios!* I had not the least idea that Chief Moro is such a devil. He would have had us killed if Finch's attack on us did not convince him that we are on his side of this uprising."

"And he is the man you're going to try and get sacred shrunken heads from," Jaggar told him. "You haven't the ghost of a chance of succeeding."

A queer gleam crept into Alvaro's eyes. "I have an entire week, *senor*. Many things can happen in that time—if you do not spoil everything with some rash act—some mad effort to rescue the red-haired man's wife."

Jaggar growled in his throat. "In other words, you value the heads more than the fate of this girl."

"I value my own head!" cried the Spaniard. "What can we do against so many savages?"

"Just leave that to me," Jaggar said in a hard, dangerous voice. "I'll find a way. . . ."

IN THE dead of that night, when all of Bestiana were asleep in their dwellings, he made his first move. It was in his mind to find Lydia and assure her that her escape was being arranged. And convinced by Alvaro's deep breathing that he also was asleep, Jaggar slipped out of the hut.

The one custom of the village—the fact that the Bestias felt secure in their stockade and posted no guards, not even before the house of Chief Moro—gave him an advantage. Even the most trivial misstep, he knew, would result in his own death. Yet he believed that the ultimate rescue of this poor girl was worth any risk.

Cautiously, he sneaked up to the entrance of Moro's silent, lightless dwelling. He stole inside and paused in the center of the eerie, barn-like audience room. For long moments, he waited there, scarcely breathing.

It was not until he was positive that the entire household was asleep that he moved forward again. He crept grimly to Moro's private sleeping chamber, sidled up to the door opening and stood there, his broad back flat against the clammy



wall. He peered over his shoulder into the barren room.

The yellowish beams of a rising moon, shafting through a broad window opening, revealed the sprawling shapes of sleepers on the hard mud floor. It lighted up the rows of ghastly shrunken trophies that stood on wall-shelves, the long lip cords dangling from the heads like frightful flagelliform exudations.

Jaggar was a noiseless shadow sliding into the room. He bent down over the four half-naked sleepers who lay on straw mats—Chief Moro and three of his wives. The wives were all Jivaro women.

With relief, Jaggar slid as quietly back out of the sleeping chamber. And he made a careful tour of the remainder of the silent house.

THE MOON was quite risen now, casting glowing blocks of silver light into every room. Jaggar located all the other sleeping women in the house. But they, too, were Jivaros. There was no sign of the white girl anywhere.

For a frantic moment, he wondered if Lydia had proved unmanageable and the chief had disposed of her. Or worse, if Moro had passed her on to one of his warriors as a gift. Women were chattels to these head-hunters, to be traded for mules or goats.

Or could it actually have been one of these Jivaro women who had arranged that Finch bring the shrunken head of Casey to him?

That was too utterly fantastic to believe, and for the first time he paused to doubt the shrunken head story Finch had told poor Martino. Could not that explanation have been a part of the weird plot which had motivated the trader's strange attack on them out there on the trail?

A Jivaro woman, sleeping on the floor at his feet, stirred, her velvet-brown body gleaming in the moonlight. Jaggar suddenly realized that he would be as plainly visible to her if she awakened. Quietly, he hurried to get out of the house.

And he collided with a man in the outer doorway!

Jaggar's hands shot to the man's throat, closing like a brutal vise. Discovery would cost him an awful price. It was

either kill—or die at the orders of Chief Moro.

But in that same furious second, he loosened his grip. The man he held was Carlos Alvaro.

Jaggar dragged the Spaniard back to their hut. He threw him down to the mud floor.

"What were you doing at Moro's house, Alvaro?" he demanded.

Alvaro was still gasping from the violence of Jaggar's attack. "*Por Dios*, I would hate to have you for an enemy. I swear my throat is crushed."

Jaggar grabbed up an electric lantern, lit it, and thrust the light into the Spaniard's face. "What were you doing there, Alvaro?" he demanded again.

Alvaro rubbed his aching throat. "When I woke up and found you gone, I imagined you were over there, looking for the girl. I went out to bring you back. *Madre Maria*, do you want both of us murdered by these savages?"

Jaggar stared at him a moment, until he felt convinced that the Spaniard was speaking the truth. He set the lantern on the floor and sat down beside it, scowling darkly.

"I'm afraid maybe I'm wrong, Alvaro. The girl isn't in Chief Moro's house."

"Not there? But you said. . ."

"I know. And if I don't manage to locate her in one of the other huts, it means she is dead."

"And if she is, *senor*. . .?"

"I will murder Chief Moro," Jaggar said simply.

"Bah! I never saw such a complete fool!" Alvaro's face was flushed with sudden anger. He took a filthy native mat that was smelling up the hut and flung it out of the door. Then he started to lie down to sleep again.

An exclamation of surprise burst from his lips, and he snatched up something that had been lying beneath the mat. He held the object aloft and cried, "*Senor*—look at this!"

It was a woman's wrist watch. And Jaggar recognized it as the very watch the American minister had given Lydia as a wedding gift when she married Casey!

He leaped up and grabbed the watch from Alvaro, examining it excitedly. "It's still running! Alvaro, this is proof that



Lydia is still alive! She must have been in this very hut today!"

"But, *senor*—if Moro took possession of the girl as a new wife—"

"Obviously she is not being held as a wife, but as a prisoner. God only knows why. In fear of us, Moro now probably has her carefully hidden somewhere."

"*Por Dios*, do you think she left the watch here for us to find?"

"I don't know," Jaggar said in a grim voice. "All I know is that we've got to find her before our week is up. Bestia head-hunters never make a practice of keeping prisoners. It makes me afraid to think of what hellishness Moro might be saving the girl for. . . ."

#### IV

JAGGAR kept a careful watch over the village the following day. He befriended many of the natives and saw to it that not one hut escaped his scrutiny. And he was soon convinced that the girl was not in the village but being held prisoner somewhere in the jungle.

He came to this decision when he saw a lone warrior vanish into the jungle, carrying a bundle of food. He vowed then that when the opportunity came that he could do so safely, he would follow the warrior to where the girl was being held.

And he had in his mind how he could escape with her. The trail which had brought him here ended at the Chambo River, twenty kilometers beyond the Bestia country. An old Quichua maintained a small trading post there and rented out canoes to anyone who dared make the swift journey down to Ambato by riding the dangerously-rapid, turbulent river current.

Once at Ambato, he would send Lydia by train to Quito. Then he'd return with soldiers from the garrison and make Moro pay for the murder of Casey.

But four days dragged by before his looked-for opportunity came about. At sundown, when he was alone outside the stockade, he saw the lone burden-bearing warrior plunging into the jungle. And he followed him.

The native led him deep into the jungle—and then vanished. Night descended, and there was nothing left for Jaggar except to fight his way back through the

thick underbrush to the native village.

Jaggar cursed himself for a fool. If he'd have handled the situation intelligently, he would have trapped the warrior and forced out of him where the girl was located. Leaving the warrior trussed up at her hiding place, he and Lydia could have reached the river by dawn.

Hours later, he got back to the village. The stockade gate already was barred for the night. It was too dangerous to batter at the gate, for his nocturnal wandering would surely rouse Moro's suspicions. He walked a distance from the gate and lay down on the ground beside the stockade wall, prepared to remain the night in the clearing. He planned to slip back into the village when the gate was reopened in the morning.

The moon rose, throwing a pale light over the barren clearing. The droning night insects were louder out here than in the village, a monotonous sound that lulled him toward sleep. He closed his eyes.

"Easy now," he vaguely heard a voice say. "This gun in your back has sharp bullets." It was followed by the tramp of feet.

Jaggar sat up. For a moment, he thought he had dreamed it. But the continued grit of feet on the barren soil of the clearing told him it was reality. Two men were walking from the gate. They were plain in the moonlight, despite that they were a good hundred yards from him.

One of them was Chief Moro, walking stiffly toward the jungle. The other was Carlos Alvaro, holding a pistol to the chief's naked back!

This was it—the thing he had feared back in Quito and which he had foolishly ignored. And now. . . .

JAGGAR was unarmed, and he knew that anything he might try would be courting death. He waited until the black jungle closed about Moro and the Spaniard. Then he sprinted across the clearing as fast as his long legs would carry him.

His heart leaped when he got into the tangled bush. He could hear the men sloshing through the wet underbrush ahead of him.

For long moments, he followed them. Then he stopped short, staring about him



as curses rose from his lips. He had lost track of the men ahead of him!

The horror sent him into wild runs—first in one direction, then in the other—as he sought to recapture the trail. The wet underbrush shredded his clothing, but in his frenzy he noticed none of it. Every passing minute was building up his sick, brain-numbing feeling of utter helplessness and doom.

Until, all at once, he jerked to a stop, every muscle of his body suddenly rigid. A muffled scream had sounded from directly in front of him—the scream of a man in agony.

He plunged forward, fighting his way through the ferns and vines that stood in his path. The scream came again. And again. He could smell smoke, and then was aware of the glow of a fire in a small clearing before him. Panting, desperate, he crept up to it.

Chief Moro was tied to a stake at one side of the clearing. His eyes blazed defiantly at Alvaro, who stood in front of him, gesturing with the bloody knife in his hand. The Spaniard was speaking without mercy.

"Where is Casey's emerald bed, Moro? You know where it is because he was sharing his stones with you—those same stones I took from your neck, *Dios, mio*, must I continue my work on you?"

Jaggar bit back his breath when he saw the blood streaming all over the chief's naked body. Alvaro had been literally cutting him to ribbons!

It was more than any decent man could stand. A wild rage sent Jaggar plunging forward . . . but the swishing clatter of the underbrush betrayed him.

Alvaro spun around, eyes gleaming eerily in the dim light of the small fire he had kindled for visibility. Growling in his throat, he reversed the knife and whipped his pistol from his hip.

Jaggar could not dodge the gun barrel that lashed without mercy to his skull. He collapsed to the ground and lay like one paralyzed, his brain whirling in a throbbing crimson fog.

He struggled helplessly to rise again, desperately, like a spent swimmer miles off shore. It took moments before he realized Alvaro was kneeling on his chest. He could feel the cold muzzle of the

Spaniard's pistol pressing against his temple.

"*Si, senor*—it was Finch who brought me the news Casey had struck that stone bed. Emeralds big as hens' eggs! Finch learned it from a Bestia warrior after he saw the necklace Moro had made from stones Casey gave him as his *parte*, and he asked me to join him so we could get hold of the emerald bed. And I did work it all out! *Ya*, a way to get Casey and his *senora* out of the way. And a way to get the Bestias out of this country so we could file papers in Quito and have the emerald bed for ourselves, *todo!*"

Alvaro's breath came in wheezing gasps as he went wildly on: "To get the Bestias to break their agreement and war against all white men, I forged a letter in Spanish. A Jivaro from another tribe was given the letter to deliver to Casey, and Finch arranged that the Bestias would intercept the note. And when Moro read the letter—which he took for a *carta oficial* from Quito—he went into a frenzy, like we thought he would. The letter claimed that Ecuador was going to drive the Bestias from their land, and that Casey was arranging the details for the dirty double-cross.

"When Finch finally returned from the jungle, he not only told me Casey was dead and his wife captured, but actually showed me Casey's shrunk head. I do not know how he got it. Maybe he stole it. Or, *tal vez*, his Bestia Jivaro servants stole it. Anyhow, with Bestiana now unsafe for whites, we next had to get some protective person to bring us here so that we could locate the emerald bed. You were the man we picked out, for you have the reputation of being practically a blood *compatriota* of Chief Moro. I came here apparently to get heads, and you were the man to see that I did not get hurt by the infuriated head-hunters. And it worked *perfectamente!*"

Alvaro's face gleamed as he continued to babble out his triumph to the raging American.

"Finch turned out to be smarter than I had imagined, the way he caught on that I was betraying him. He and I were supposed to have gone with you here together—and he must have gotten back again to Quito just after we left. I can even see



the workings of his mind. There are many trails leading here to Bestiana. To catch us, he had to follow the right one. He realized Martino would know which trail we had taken. He sewed Casey's head in that monkey-skin bag and told Martino to deliver it to you without fail. Then it was merely the simple matter of following Martino. But Finch was *loco* enough to believe that his Bestia servants would be more than a match for us—"

With a cry, Jaggar twisted his body desperately, half-knocking Carlos Alvaro from on top of him. He tried to grab the gun—

A startled exclamation burst from Alvaro's throat. The pistol discharged with a deafening roar, and it was as though a sledge had smashed against Jaggar's head.

**A**GES LATER, so it seemed, Jaggar awakened again. His eyes ached from powder burns. His head throbbed, and one side of his face was stiff with congealed blood. Alvaro's pistol, he realized, had missed its mark. The bullet had merely dug a furrow across his temple.

But when he strove to rise and discovered that he was trussed up with strips of bark, his blood almost froze in his veins. He cursed his fate that Alvaro had not killed him out there in the jungle. Now he was in a position that was a dozen times worse than death itself.

He saw that he lay in the hut he and the Spaniard had occupied. Drums throbbed in the village. He could hear the low, weird chanting of the head-hunters—

And gradually he realized why Alvaro had cried out before trying to shoot him. Bestia warriors had swarmed into the jungle clearing in that moment, their sudden presence spoiling Alvaro's aim. The head-hunters had rescued their beloved chief and had taken the white men back to the village.

Jaggar shivered. He knew what his own fate would be, but he was thinking just then of Lydia. Probably Chief Moro would extend his wrath to her. . . .

It was not until after dawn that warriors entered the hut. They released him from his bonds . . . and what followed almost made Jaggar doubt his very senses. A slim, shapely, disheveled white girl

rushed sobbing into the hut and flung herself into his arms.

"Bill!" Lydia cried. "Bill Jaggar!"

Chief Moro came in behind her, swathed in dirty bandages. He stared grimly at the white man.

"*Fiel* Jaggar," he said. "When my wives found me missing last night, they roused the village. By luck, the glow of the Spaniard's campfire was faintly visible from the stockade wall, and my warriors rescued us from this man who deceived us both. I overheard his words to you, and it told me that you still are my brother. Even as *Fiel* Casey was my brother." His voice sank a little. "And through the evil of this *espanola*, I killed the red-haired one. I killed him who was also my dear friend.

"*Fiel* Jaggar, I cared little to take his puny pale-skinned woman as a wife—so I held her prisoner instead, knowing the sentimental regard white men have for their women. I intended to use her as a weapon over any soldiers who might come to drive my people away. After you arrived, I hid her in a jungle hut. I was sure you had come to find her. That is why I offered you a stay of seven suns. If you attempted to rescue her, you were to die. I am sorry I ever had such fears of you. Now I make my amends. You and the woman are free to depart."

"You are just, O Chief," Jaggar said gratefully. And he smiled down at Lydia.

**I**T WAS high noon when he and Lydia mounted their mules to ride back to Quito. And before they left, Chief Moro pressed a gift into his hand.

"Bring this—the greatest gift any Bestia man can offer—to the white father of Quito," Moro said. "It is my pledge that I still live up to the agreement we made between us."

Jaggar nodded solemnly. "I will present it to them, O Chief. *Ya*, it is the proof that you will hold to your promises until your last dying breath."

Yet it was not until he and the silent girl were riding away that he could look at the loathsome thing Chief Moro had pressed into his hand.

It was the shrunken head of Alvaro.





# Lutembe the Avenger

By WYNDHAM MARTYN

Intrigue rode the jungle winds of Africa, bringing death and destruction in its wake. A single white man and a small white boy were the only obstacles to a bloody juju-carnage; and they carried their war squarely into the jungle—knowing any moment a crocodile god might claim them for his sacrifice.



**T**HE WOMAN, thin, bent, walking with difficulty left the two beings she loved in the shelter of a dense growth of shrubs and came to the edge of the vast lake.

Her husband was dying and her little son, himself ill and emaciated, was standing guard over his unconscious father. That the woman in this dark hour had left her husband's side was due to the imperative need for food.

It was the sunset hour when the fish

would be seeking the shallows and might be caught in the net she had made. But there was always danger in such an attempt. Just as sharks in tropic seas pursue the big fish which in turn are pursuing the smaller ones, so here in this great inland lake the equally dreaded crocodile follows to the shallow water the fish on which it mainly feeds.

The crocodile in mid-Africa leads an easy life which may account for the vast numbers of these monsters. There is al-



*Lutembe roared—and bellied forward.*



ways plenty of food. His immense mouth with its long and sharp teeth can gather in food with little effort. This the woman knew very well. Of all living things, she most dreaded and hated the crocodile. She knew, too, that the crocodiles were everywhere.

She crept through the brush by the lake side very cautiously. First of all she must be sure that no unfriendly natives were near. There is not much love and charity in mid-Africa toward alien people. She knew that two things govern the native mind. One is Fear. The other is Force. Since she had no force to protect herself and those she loved, and could easily inspire suspicion, the natives might think she was evil. And they would kill her as a witch and her death would not be an easy one.

When she was sure the shallows by which she stood were free of native fishermen she advanced carefully and looked into the water. What looked like a great floating log drifting by was more likely to be the roughened back of a monster lying in wait for a native or a native's cow. What looked like little bright floating verdure might be the wicked eyes of a crocodile whose bulk was hidden from her. Always at some time in its life the crocodile finds there are daintier meals than mere fish, and it does not forget.

The woman knew that near at hand something was terrifying the bigger fish. Now and again some of them would break water, leaping high in the air to avoid capture. The woman knew, too, of the almost unbelievable activity of these armor-protected creatures. It had been learned in a bitter way. It was soon after the three had set out on their long trek to the Lake Tchad region that the disaster overtook them.

Her husband, unused then to the wiles of crocodiles was sitting at the side of a small steamer on a wide river. The boat was proceeding at seven miles an hour; and he sat smoking, his feet half a yard from the water. Since the boat was under way he did not see how he could possibly be in danger. Then there was the sudden swirl in the river and a great crocodile leaped at him and took off a leg just below the knee. Since that day he had never been a moment free from pain. And he

had been so strong and active. Now she, a woman, was the protector of husband and son. She had to pretend that they would get safely at last to Fort Lamy where her sister lived under the protection of the French flag.

These things the woman remembered as she leaned cautiously over a pool where there were mullet. Watching her with his gimlet eyes that could look red in some lights, was a crocodile. The brute struck out with his powerful and scaly tail. It was such a sudden and unlooked-for attack that the woman had no means of evading it.

There was a shriek that cut the air like a knife as she fell into the water. There the crocodile seized her and dragging her into deep water, held her down so that she drowned. When the body floated to the surface the brute looked at it as though admiring his skill. Then he began his dreadful meal.

At the shriek, the crippled man came for a moment out of his fever-induced haze and tried to sit up. He knew that voice and he knew it held the agony of death. He tried to rise and the boy attempted to restrain him. Finally the boy's strength prevailed and the crippled man sank back. He was breathing very strangely, the boy thought, but he was for the moment more concerned with his mother's fearful cry.

**P**RESENTLY he went to seek her. He came to the edge of the pool in the shallows. He saw the net his mother had woven and he saw the print of her feet in the soft damp earth. He was used to tracking men and beasts and he saw that her steps pointed to the edge of the pool and there stopped. She had not come back. And he knew that he had lost her. He knew that henceforth her love, devotion and courage would no longer protect the cripple and the child.

He ran back to his father. And then he discovered he had no father. In a few dreadful minutes he had been orphaned. He was now alone in the forests of central Africa without weapons or friends. A little boy among aliens. Not alone could he make his slow way to far off Lake Tchad where his mother's sister lived. He left his father whose face was at last free from pain. He had with difficulty scooped



out a shallow grave and dragged branches of a fallen tree across it. Then he turned to seek human habitation. He might meet there cruelty or death, but the idea of passing the night alone in the forest gloom appalled him.

He was skilful in making his silent way through such forests. Often he had been told by his parents that only by evading hostile natives could he hope to live. By degrees he came to the edge of a settlement.

The thought of being discovered by unfriendly tribes terrified him; but it would be more dangerous to sleep by the lake side. Not only would there be danger from crocodiles and night-prowling beasts but at night the hippopotamuses came ashore and would trample over his thin body, hardly noticing on what their huge weight had rested.

Through the screen of trees that fringed a clearing he could see that some sort of a dance was going on. There were old men sitting by a fire smoking their pipes in silence. They watched the younger natives without expression on their lined faces. Sitting apart was a footless leper trying to hide his diseased body with a cape of sheepskin.

The young girls had their shaven heads painted with a color like marigold flowers. They were uttering cries of joy. This was their way of inviting the male dancers who were not yet in sight to become their partners. The orphan boy heard the shouting of men behind him and saw he was in the path of the male dancers. When he tried to escape he was knocked down in the onrush of the painted natives. But they paid no attention to him at all. He lay there, senseless.

Some old women found him and carried him to a hut. He was not one of their boys. His skin was too light for that. They were very dark of color. This stray boy must belong to one of the tribes to the north who had lighter skins than they. The men would know what to do with him. They might allow him to remain or they might kill him. They were a fighting warrior tribe and to them men of other parts were enemies. And where, the old women wondered, were his parents? Had he been sent as a spy? At the thought, they looked at the child angrily.

The boy who had only fainted from fear and general weakness woke up for a little while, realized he was in the shelter of a hut, and then dropped into a heavy and dreamless sleep.

It was while he slept that the men decided on his fate. They saw in the boy a stranger, and to them strangers could bring misfortunes and disasters. This boy was of the light hue that certain powerful tribes to the north had. Such tribes had much admixture of the Arab blood that all central Africans dreaded. And how was it that a mere child was here alone? They had scouted the neighborhood and no traces had been found of the buried one-legged man. And no traces would ever be found of the crocodile's victim. Witchcraft, they decided, was responsible.

THERE WAS an old woman named Bacheeta who in her youth had been taken from a tribe defeated in battle. She had become one of them and her voice in council was respected.

"Why should we," she said, "kill a man child who will grow up to be perhaps a great warrior and the father of great warriors? I myself have a skin that is lighter than yours and I have given many men-children to you. We do not make war on children." She tried to speak impartially but in her heart she wanted this boy to live. She had not been very happy with the tall black-skinned men, and the boy took her back to a day when she had been with her own people.

Kamrasi was the chief and he knew very well that his people had many enemies and all men children were valuable. After all, this boy was too young to do any harm and would learn, as Bacheeta had done, to be loyal. He would speak their language. He would be one of them.

Sali, the magician, wanted to sacrifice the boy to the tribal gods and his word had weight. But he was defeated. It seemed to Bacheeta that she had won her point. And then the unfortunate thing happened which brought triumph to Sali and a sentence of death to the child.

Suddenly the boy sat up and looked around him. A cry of fear went up. *The boy had blue eyes.* And that changed everything. This was a very strange and



powerful magic. In color he was one of them. And yet his eyes were the eyes of the people who ruled them, the people whom they hated in their secret hearts. People who ruled without oppression it was true, but a people who frowned upon their cruelties and their blood-rites and exercised authority over them seeking to restrain them from inter-tribal warfare. People who inoculated them against prevalent diseases. People who laughed when they said disease was brought by gods whom they had offended.

Bacheeta dared beg no more for the boy's life. After all he could not be one of her native tribe. Perhaps they were right and he must be killed to keep evil from them. The child was delirious and the words he uttered had no meaning for any who listened.

Kamrasi the chief spoke. "He must be given to Lutembe."

"*Lutembe, Lutembe,*" the others cried approvingly. It was as though they were unanimous at last. Even Sali agreed.

**L**UTEMBE was the largest crocodile in all that vast lake. He was the most celebrated crocodile in their world. Explorers had mentioned him in their books. Seventy years before, Sir Samuel Baker had spoken of a thirty-foot crocodile who lived on an island in the lake a mile or so from shore and which was regarded as sacred by the natives of the tribe inhabiting the locality. Later explorers had photographed the huge reptile. Hunters had tried to get him, until at last the white men who had the district in charge had forbidden it. Lutembe was a legend now, they believed, and it was never wise to interfere with the religious beliefs of a subject people. He did no more harm than any other crocodile. If this tribe regarded him as something sacred to them, why destroy a belief that didn't do anyone active harm? On Lutembe's island there was a big lagoon where he could get all the fish he wanted. He was over a hundred years old and wouldn't last much longer. That was the belief of the district commissioner who very rarely visited the locality.

He did not know, and no white man knew, that Lutembe was still the official

executioner of the tribe. It had become more and more difficult and dangerous to let old Sali sacrifice captured enemies in the old way. The blue eyed people objected to that. But with Lutembe it was different. With this stranger boy for example. At night he would be tied to a stake on the cleared patch at the edge of the lake. Then the tribe would go back to its huts. It was not permitted to watch the execution. If they did not see it, the white man in charge of the district could not make them convict themselves.

This blue-eyed victim was still delirious when he was tied to the stake. Only old Bacheeta felt pity for him but this she did not dare show. Nobody knew that the draught she gave him for fever had in it a herb that would make him sleep long and deeply.

When the boy was tied the natives summoned Lutembe. There was a certain beat of the drum that told the huge brute that a meal was in store. Listening closely the keen ears of the black men heard the thirty-foot long crocodile take to the water. There was no need for Lutembe to try to conceal himself by taking quietly to the water. He felt himself immune from all dangers. He was Lutembe the executioner, on his way to perform his duties.

The natives hurried through the dense trees to their huts. In the morning there would be no trace of the being they feared. Their gods would smile upon them, black gods who hated those of other colors.

When the morning came the men hastened to the spot where they had pegged out the boy. Old Bacheeta could not keep up with them but she tried desperately. When at last she came she heard exclamations of astonishment and fear. Something had impressed them greatly, something they could not understand. And because they could not understand, they were frightened.

The little boy with blue eyes was sleeping peacefully, the rope that bound him still fastened to the wooden stake. Lutembe had not taken him! But Lutembe had been there. His gigantic feet had left unmistakable marks. It was as though a circular track had been made around the victim. Never had even the oldest native seen the marks of the beast so plainly.



"This is a great magic," old Bacheeta said.

Sali knew that very well and it frightened him. He had his bag of tricks and knew what they were worth. But there was nothing he knew that could keep a man-eating and vicious crocodile from a tender morsel like this. When the natives looked to him for an explanation the old man had none to give. "It is a great magic," he admitted, "and the gods have protected the child. It may be they wish me to offer the child to them in my way."

Bacheeta laughed at this. "Could you hold Lutembe back?"

**S**ALI was in a bad spot. No self-respecting tribal witch doctor can be thought powerless. Sali was a malicious old creature and of late had not been very successful in his work. This was the moment to assert himself. "It was I who held Lutembe back," he cried. "Last night I said I wanted to offer this boy to the gods in the old way but Kamrasi would not have it." He glared angrily at the tall chief. "You cannot deny it."

Kamrasi was steeped in superstition. He had seen with his own eyes such an amazing thing that only great magic could be the answer. Sali was very old and very wise. Perhaps the gods were angry. Perhaps they would punish the chief for having denied Sali his victim. Kamrasi had just added a young wife to his household and it might be that Sali could turn her into a witch. If that happened, and it often did, his soul would be lost. In that moment all the beliefs the missionaries had tried to teach him seemed small ineffectual things compared with the superstitions that were his heritage.

Sali knew what was going on in the chief's mind. He prepared to make the most of it. "It was I," he boasted, "whose magic defeated Lutembe."

Kamrasi and his men fell for this boasting. Sali was a loathsome and horrifying spectacle. On his head was a wreath of dried and deadly herbs. Around his shrivelled neck were hanging crocodiles' teeth, little dried lizards and lions' claws. It was known he had great skill in prophesying of future events from the entrails of slain birds. And he could tell from cloud formations the approach of enemies.

Sali was not a man to offend. Those he hated, men or women who had laughed at him, died in terrible agony. That was remembered now with dread. If Sali's magic had kept the old and wise Lutembe from his victim it was only right that the boy should be given to him.

Bacheeta came of a tribe more intelligent than these men. She hated Sali. Although she dared not say so, she was convinced that the men and women he had cast his spells upon had died not from the vengeance of Sali's gods but from the subtle poisons he alone knew how to prepare. Sali had not of late done anything very noteworthy. She could see now he was making a great effort to stage a comeback.

Bacheeta could not tell why, but this lonely little boy's life had suddenly become precious to her. He, too, was a stranger. When she spoke she was listened to with respect. Bacheeta, they knew, had magic of her own and in her faraway tribe there were sorceresses as well as sorcerers.

She addressed herself to Sali. Her tone seemed very respectful. This in itself should have warned him but he was flushed with triumph and supposed she, too, was impressed by what he had said.

"You must have very great and powerful magic to send Lutembe hungry to his island. I have never seen such strong magic and I am an old, old woman."

Sali simply answered. "There is nobody so powerful as I. Men, beasts and reptiles obey me. Lutembe fears me." He pointed to where the crocodile had torn the soft earth into strips with its armored feet. "It was a great struggle as you see."

Bacheeta said quickly. "Anyone can say these things."

"But I can prove it," Sali cried, scowling.

Bacheeta turned to Kamrasi. "Do you desire, O Chief, that Sali proves this? You are all powerful and what you desire must be done."

Kamrasi shook himself free from Sali's malign influence. After all what the woman said was true. He had power of life and death over his people. He must show himself as the strong and absolute leader.

"Yes," said Kamrasi, "I desire that he proves it."



SALI found himself no longer the most important person in the group. This brown-skinned old woman had never accorded him respect and he suspected her motives. Dramatically he pointed to the child still sleeping unharmed. "Does not that prove it?"

"No," said Bacheeta. "It may be the boy there with eyes like the sky has great magic, too. It may be that Lutembe fears him."

"O Chief," Bacheeta begged, "put Sali to the test. He says it is he of whom Lutembe is afraid."

"And it is true," Sali shouted.

"Very well," Bacheeta cried and there was flash of malice in her old eyes. "You shall prove it to our chief."

Kamrasi did not know what she meant but he felt she was upholding his authority against this shrivelled old sorcerer. And like all African tribal chiefs he was jealous of the other. "You must prove what you say," he said. "It is my command."

"Then O Chief," Bacheeta suggested, "we shall know whether he is a great sorcerer or only an idle boaster. This is what I propose. Tie Sali to the stake tonight. If he is there in the morning and unharmed, we will give the boy to him to do with as he pleases."

A great roar of approval went up. The old woman had spoken well. There were many tall warriors standing there who hated Sali but were not sure he couldn't work the magic he pretended to control.

For the first time, the old sorcerer was really alarmed. He saw that many of the warriors gathered around welcomed Bacheeta's suggestion. Two young sub-chiefs seemed particularly eager for him to put his powers to the test. Sali knew why. He had taken to his home two young girls they wanted to marry and they (because of his threatened vengeance) couldn't help themselves.

Sali vented his rage on old Bacheeta. "This woman is my enemy," he shouted, "and I will not do as she says."

Bacheeta broke in. "It was not my suggestion," she lied. "It was the suggestion of Kamrasi, our great chief. Do you think I dare tell him what to do? He is clever and far-seeing. That is why he said, if you had great magic, it was your duty to prove it. Are you afraid, O Sorcerer?"

Kamrasi was quite ready to believe it was his suggestion and he saw that his men were with him. And the women, too. The young ones never knew when his lecherous old eyes might not fall on them. And some of the younger people had heard the white masters of their district laugh at this pretended magic. And occasionally they met missionaries who were all against this witchcraft. It was only the timid old people who believed. They were sure that in the morning Sali would be found alive. And perhaps at his feet would be the vast dead form of Lutembe.

They begged him to demonstrate his powers and voiced their faith in him. Old Sali glared at them venomously. Nobody in the world knew better the extent of his powers than he. It was made up of simple tricks and playing on the primeval fears of his fellow tribesmen. For a moment he wondered if by anointing himself with evil smelling herbs he might keep himself unharmed. Then a mood of despair seized him. When did a crocodile reject a meal that smelled evilly?

Then the young men formed a cordon about him and he was led away to a hut where he would be kept until sundown. In vain he struggled and threatened. Kamrasi had commanded it and they were loyal. In the background was old Bacheeta, her eyes bright with triumph. She had been fighting not for herself but for the life of the little brown boy with the strange blue eyes, and she thought she had succeeded.

## II

COMPARED with most of Africa's dreaded beasts the crocodiles of the Lake Albert district lead easy lives. The natives do not eat crocodile meat and hence do not kill them for food. These natives have no dislike of fish that smells to high heaven, but crocodile food is distasteful. The crocodile, unlike the warm-blooded animals, have no sort of family life or loyalty to their kind. Whereas the young of the great cats are looked after by their mothers and educated to evade the dangers of traps and enemies, the crocodile starts off as a lonely individualist.

In size and shape the eggs of the crocodile are like those of a goose. The mother scrapes a hole in the sand, lays from fifty



to a hundred eggs and then covers them lightly. When hatched the tiny reptiles crawl to river or lake where many of them become prey to a larger member of their own species. A few grow to a large size but Lutembe with its thirty feet was a giant among them.

In the waters around him Lutembe rarely was hungry. Many, many years ago before the white man moved in to bring some sort of order and law into their tribal lives, the natives had a way of disposing of their criminals in a manner that was very gratifying to the crocodile colony.

Such men and women as were condemned to death for offenses, and the chief charge was witchcraft, were flung to the crocodiles just as in the Matabili country they were flung to the hyenas. Lutembe in those early days, not having attained his full growth, had to wait until the big fellows had first choice. And then, as he became the greatest and fiercest of them all, there were fewer human victims.

There came an evening when the well-remembered call to feast on a human being came over the still water to where he wallowed in the mud of his lagoon. For the first time in his long life he had been tricked. There was no victim. An old native woman with an unconscious child in her arms had seen him waddle ashore and scurry to the stake where so many times he had found a meal waiting. Lutembe thrashed about in anger and had at last to swim back to his island unsatisfied.

The drum call sounded on the next night and he hurried across to the cleared space. But this time there was no disappointment. He found a lean old man shrieking for help. Not as succulent as a meal as he generally had, but Lutembe had a weakness for human flesh.

So passed the sorcerer Sali from the tribe where he had so long wielded his evil influence.

When it was light, Kamrasi and his people came to the clearing. Some of the charms which Sali had worn and had formerly terrified his fellows were now stamped into the mud but the body of the magician had vanished. Bacheeta very wisely took no part in the rejoicing. She let Kamrasi have all the glory. And there was a great rejoicing with dancing and

feasting for a black cloud had been lifted. For the moment, the strange boy and his fate were forgotten. In her hut Bacheeta brewed potions of healing herbs and watched over him anxiously. Her own children had long ago been slain by Kamrasi's father when she had been taken captive and she was a lonely old woman.

She knew that this was no place for the alien child to grow up. Sooner or later, racial enmities would develop; and in mid-Africa there is no charity toward the unprotected stranger. For a year or two he would be small and unheeded. But later he would grow to manhood and begin looking for his mate and would have to fight for her. One among so many.

The festivities over the release of the tribe from Sali's domination lasted a long time. Bacheeta was glad of it. She nursed the boy back to some measure of strength. Outside she could hear the dancing and singing. There was immense merriment and excitement and during it she, and her charge, were forgotten.

It was while the festivities were going on that the medical inspector for the district made his appearance. It was routine business with him. His job was to stamp out diseases and this tribe usually gave him little anxiety. It was luck for an enthusiastic amateur photographer to get such an opportunity. Too often natives didn't like being photographed, but everyone was abandoned to the dancing and singing spirit.

KAMRASI commanded his people not to mention the death of Sali. The inspector might not quite understand how Sali met his death. He was told only that the old sorcerer had died of old age and that these festivities were due to the fact that his three young wives had found other husbands. That was reasonable enough, and no investigation was necessary.

The inspector knew old Bacheeta and wondered why she stood in the shadow of a tree and beckoned him in a mysterious fashion. She said there was a boy in her hut who needed white man's medicine. Dr. Eccles followed her. The boy was sleeping. He was emaciated probably from a bad bout of fever but would recover. Then the boy awoke, grinned happily, and said: "Hello, mister."



"Hello," said the amazed doctor. "Come here to the light sonny, I want to have a look at you."

The boy understood him and stood by the hut door through which sunshine came. Then the doctor turned to Bacheeta. "What is a white boy doing here?"

"Is he white?" she asked. Uneasily she thought this might be true. And if it were he would be taken away and she would be friendless again.

"Of course, he's white," Eccles asserted. "He has been tanned to an Arab color by exposure to the sun but the soles of his feet show he isn't a native. "In English he spoke to the boy. "What's your name, sonny?"

"William Finch," the boy said.

"Where are your parents?"

Tears came to the blue eyes. "My father died. My mother went to catch fish and I think the crocodiles got her." Then the boy burst into a passion of weeping. Bacheeta tried to comfort him. It was evident he trusted and liked her.

"He can't stop here," the doctor declared. "Kamrasi is a good man as far as he goes but he's a native and this boy is white. How on earth did he get here, I wonder? We've had no information about three white people in this district."

"Are you taking him away from me?" Bacheeta looked at him anxiously. "I saved his life, and you can see he thinks I am his friend."

"I certainly am taking him back," the doctor said, "but if Kamrasi doesn't object you can come, too." He knew she wasn't regarded as one of the tribe. And as she was getting on in years she'd be even less welcome. He'll have to go to school and you'll find work with the white families. They are always looking for reliable servants."

"But Kamrasi may not let us go."

The doctor laughed. "Let him try to stop us. I don't expect any trouble. We do him plenty of favors and the boy is too young to be of any use yet. I'll go and talk to him. Keep the boy with you." He smiled at the lad. "It's all right, Bill Finch, you are going back with me and I'll take Bacheeta, too." He turned to the old woman. "How did you save his life?"

She told him the whole story. The doctor smiled. "Irregular, of course," he said,

"but poetic justice. Sali was a thorn in the flesh and I shall let Kamrasi know I'm on to the whole business. Don't look frightened. I'll see you aren't hurt. You are under our protection."

**B**ACHEETA and the boy climbed into the motor truck that was the doctor's operating room and medical supply depot in one. On the whole, the subjects of Kamrasi were glad to get rid of the two. For Bacheeta this was her first ride in an automobile and she was nervous. To the boy it seemed no very extraordinary occurrence. Bacheeta had for company two of the doctor's orderlies. On the front seat Dr. Eccles talked with the boy. The lad, he judged, was about eight, small for his age, if that was his age. He was now very cheerful. He had almost forgotten the hardships he had endured in the joy of this ride. First, there were forests with high trees, and then came miles of bleached land growing only thorny mimosa shrubs. There were many rivers and many habitations of natives. When he passed through these his heart sank, for, from his parents, he had learned the necessity of avoiding them. In order to make him careful they had told him if he were captured he might be tortured and killed.

But this white man had no such fear. The natives made their respectful greetings and the white man passed with a smile and a cheery wave of the hand. So the boy's spirit rose.

"Bill," said Dr. Eccles presently, "I've been in Africa many years and there's an old saying that in Africa you can always expect something new. Bill, you're a unique specimen. You pop up out of nowhere with absolutely no mark of identification and no papers of any sort."

"Oui Monsieur," Bill said politely, "c'est vrai."

Bill had remarked in the French language that this was true! The doctor spoke French well enough and without expressing his astonishment he continued in that tongue. The boy hesitated over certain words but it was plain he had been brought up to speak both English and French.

"I suppose your mother was French, Bill?"



"Yes," Bill answered. "She was from a place called Avignon."

Dr. Eccles knew Avignon was a city in Southern France. The natives were dark-haired people with dark skins. If the boy had taken after his mother the African suns could easily have turned his skin into such a hue it deceived the natives.

"Where were you going?"

"To Fort Lamy. My aunt keeps there a small shop."

Dr. Eccles knew Fort Lamy. It was a French possession to the south of Lake Tchad. There were large administrative buildings there and it was an army post. A desolate dust-haunted place, as Eccles recalled it, but through it passed many travelers and there were many curio stores. He drew what information he could from the boy and tried to piece it together.

When he arrived at his headquarters, Dr. Eccles told all he knew to the Commissioner, Sir George Darnham.

"It's a fantastic sort of story," the official commented, "and can't be true entirely. I don't say the poor little cuss is a liar but small children have terrific imaginations. Actually, I haven't any authority to dispose of him. He may be French in which case I shall have to hand him over to their care. He says his name is Finch. That's an English name, but how do we know it's really his? Where is his point of origin?"

"He doesn't seem to remember. His people have been trekking for so long his earliest memories have been erased."

"I suppose we shall have to toss him to the missionaries."

"That's the best thing, I imagine. I like the kid. I wouldn't mind taking him home when I go on leave and putting him in a good school. I'm not married and not likely to be and it would give me an added interest in life."

"There'd be a forest of red tape to cut your way through. Africa offers plenty of opportunities to her children, black or white. What puzzles me most is how the three could have got to the lake without being seen and reported on by the natives. As a rule they miss nothing."

Eccles knew that was true. By the use of drum language they could pass on to other tribes any unusual news. But it

would take time for white men to drag this from them. Then came a fantastic story of three white people, a man with one leg, a woman and a little boy who hid themselves by day and walked through the forests by night. This was exactly what white people never did. At night they took shelter just as natives did. The natives were afraid of evil spirits and white men feared the wild beasts that hunted in the dark.

Later Dr. Eccles heard the native explanation of this. The white man, they said, was a great sorcerer who kept evil spirits and wild beasts at bay because he had two magic sticks that were like lanterns in the dark. This seemed the most fantastic thing of all.

BY THIS TIME the boy William Finch was living with a missionary and his wife, Americans, who had taken a great liking to him. Dr. Eccles asked Mrs. Ames, the missionary's wife, what she made of this story. Oddly enough it was from her he obtained what seemed a reasonable explanation. The boy had been won by her kindness and, by degrees, from a little word here and there, she had learned of his father and mother.

Sometimes he lapsed into French and this Mrs. Ames did not understand. He had declared that it was true they marched by night for fear of natives. The father supported himself very well on what the boy called his *bequilles* which gave out light. She had looked the word up in a dictionary and found it was the French for crutch.

"Luminous paint," Dr. Eccles commented. "A clever stunt and just the thing to scare natives or even wild beasts. Did Bill tell you why they traveled that way?"

"They had been robbed of their money and were afraid if found they'd be sent back, but he doesn't know what they meant by that. All they thought of was to get back to the aunt with the store at Fort Lamy. I told him white people in Africa were friendly toward one another and would have helped him. He said his parents were specially afraid of white people."

Eccles made no comment on this. He thought Bill's father had got in trouble with the authorities and there were plenty



of men in Africa who had done this. "We shall never know the truth of it, Mrs. Ames. The crocodiles got the poor woman and hyenas probably ate the father."

Mrs. Ames's answer surprised him. "Little Bill says he buried his father to prevent that. It seems incredible but he's a truthful lad. He dug a shallow grave in the soft earth under a tree and dragged tree boughs and rocks. He buried the 'bequilles' in the grave. That seems silly but he has all sorts of native beliefs which my husband and I shall try to get rid of. He thinks when his father awakes from the long sleep he will need his crutches."

The doctor knew this teaching was part of the natives' creed and could easily have been absorbed by the child.

"I wish I knew where he was buried, Mrs. Ames. There might be papers establishing his identity."

"Bill knows," Mrs. Ames said. "Although he seems just a child yet he has great powers of observation. I suppose his parents instilled them into him as safety factors. He marked the tree. It was a very tall one."

A MONTH later Dr. Eccles paid a visit to Kamrasi. Bill took him unhesitatingly to the tree. There was the mark he had made with a sharp-edged stone. Apparently no animal had disturbed the grave. The tree was one of those that had struggled up through the dense undergrowth to the sunlight above. It must be over a hundred and fifty feet, the doctor saw. Hanging down from a branch over the grave were gorgeous orchids, scarlet-orange and yellow.

What Eccles and his bearers had to do was no sight for a sensitive boy. Under the care of one of the men Bill sat in the motor truck and presently fell asleep.

The body, now only bones and clinging shreds of flesh, had no horrors for a doctor. With the men it was different. They had fear in their hearts as they dug. It was only because they believed the white man's strong magic would protect them that they set about their gruesome work.

What preparation the dead man had painted on his crutches Eccles hadn't time to determine. He only knew that they glowed there in this dank grave as though they were long tubes of neonized glass.

The natives had never seen such magic as this. When their white master lifted the crutches from the grave they expected to see some dreadful thing happen. But he was not disturbed. All he seemed interested in was the little package protected from damp by its oiled-skin covering.

The skeleton was put back into its trench. The gleaming crutches were at his side. On the grave the stones were replaced and over these, the doctor fashioned a little cross. Bill's father would not again be taken from his dark shelter.

Bill awoke when the motor started. He was cheerful and smiling. What a fortunate thing it was, the doctor thought, that he could forget the horrors through which he had passed. To Bill it was an evil dream that would not come again. He was conscious now of peace and security. No longer was he hidden in shadows while his crippled father and his frightened and tired mother saw that he was safe from savages.

In the office of the Commissioner the dead man's papers were examined. Thomas Finch had been born in Londonderry and had served in the 5th Lancers. His discharge papers were in order. Later he had enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. When his service was ended, he had married Marie Louise Lebris. Apparently he had been a baker in Cape Town. There was a map of the route from Cape Town to Lake Tchad and a faded letter from the sister of Marie Louise telling of opportunities there for skilled bakers such as he and his wife who was a pastry baker.

There was one passage in this letter that set Eccles wondering. "When you come here," the sister-in-law said, "you will be in French territory and the Cape Town police cannot harm you." So the ex-cavalryman and Legionnaire had been dodging the authorities. That explained his strange method of travel.

The birth certificate of William Pierre Finch was included among the papers. With it was the last will and testament of the elder Finch which explained his troubles. He said he had been forced into a fist fight by a Cape Dutchman and had killed him accidentally. But as he was an alien among these strongly nationalistic people he could not hope for mercy.



He had adopted another name and fled into other territory.

"This disappoints me," Dr. Eccles admitted. "I was hoping I could adopt the boy and take him home with me when my time is up. I'm afraid it's my duty to take him to his aunt in Fort Lamy. I don't know how I'll be able to get him there, but it's got to be done. I shall miss that kid."

So would the Commissioner and his wife. So would the kindly American couple, the Ames. There were almost no white children in this part of Africa. Most of them had been sent home to a better climate and school.

THE Commissioner was sorry. But the boy was the son of a former soldier of the French Foreign Legion and his mother a Frenchwoman. The aunt at Fort Tchad was manifestly the person to look after him. The Commissioner thought of a way Eccles could journey north and deliver the boy to his relatives. "The French have jurisdiction over the lad and you'd better take him to the Fort. You speak French and know many of the Belgian and French authorities."

"But can I be spared?" Eccles asked. "After all, I don't go on leave until next year."

"This isn't a vacation. I'm glad to have an excuse to send you on very important business. You are to contact a certain Belgian named Claes in Stanleyville. In confidence, he is a member of the Belgian Intelligence and it's his job to report to us and the French just what the Germans are doing. You won't be suspected. The affair of young Bill is providential.

"You haven't any idea how all Africa is seething with plots. As a medical officer it isn't your job. You combat another form of danger. Listen carefully. I'm going to give you a list of key men in the French and Belgian intelligence who work with us. Their names won't mean much but you'll be horrified to learn what native chiefs have been got at by German propaganda. And in our territory, too."

"Not Kamrasi surely?"

"Particularly Kamrasi. His weakness is a love of boastfulness and a passion for comely young women. I hear he's about

to take to wife one of the daughters of Nabonga, a chief equal in rank and power to himself. The Germans have promised him all the loot he wants when they get possession."

"What German could promise this? I've seen no Germans here recently and Kamrasi never leaves his own tribe."

"I wish I could tell you. But this I know. There is some member of the German Intelligence who has talked to Kamrasi. That's why he's been so insolent lately." Sir George Darham was evidently worried. He was in charge of a large district but the whites were so few. Everywhere they were surrounded by black and threatening seas. Sir George had a much higher opinion of the intelligence of natives than most men who lived in Central Africa. He lived in dread of the hour when perhaps as he was dining peacefully, or sleeping, the drum would sound, the drum of doom. And the manner of death that would come to him and his subordinates would be terrible.

"It's a funny job for a doctor," Eccles said.

"No man is so well equipped to cope with sudden emergencies as a doctor. And there no white man is so well liked as you are. You have said they trust you. Kamrasi trusts no white man except this unknown German who has promised him unlimited lust and loot. I've lived all my adult life in Africa, but never have I felt this aura of dread as I do now."

### III

AT FORT LAMY, a dust-swept dreary station, bad news awaited for the boy, Bill Finch. His aunt had been dead for more than a year and her daughter had married a minor official in the Customs at Casablanca many miles distant. The French authorities formally took possession of the boy and his father's papers. He was to grow up as a French citizen. Eccles was informed, to let a French boy be brought up by any other nationality would be a disgrace. The Commandant talked a lot about national honor and France.

"But he can't run wild about the streets," Eccles objected.

"He will not. Already I have found a good home for him. Monsieur Laval will



love him as his own child. It is a great opportunity."

Dr. Eccles did not think so. *Monsieur Laval* owned a local tavern, a fort-like stone, square building. It seemed clean and wasn't filled with mosquitoes, rats, bats, lizards and snakes as so many African resthouses were. Little Bill Finch did not behave as a boy should who had been offered a home, friendship and a place among his mother's people. He wept bitterly and clung to Dr. Eccles, screaming he would run away. Fortunately, he said this in English, the language he was most fluent in.

Eccles had to tear himself away. The affair upset him very much. It would have been far better had he never met the boy because he knew he would never be able to forget him. So he took his lonely way southward and made his report to his chief.

Sir George was sorry about the boy, but it was a minor business compared with the necessity of finding the Nazi agent. Apparently neither the French nor Belgian authorities knew his name or anything about him that was definite. And yet Kamrasi and Nabongo, chiefs of fighting tribes with vast numbers of warriors were growing hostile after years of living at peace. Eccles knew it was his duty to add this intelligence job to his own work and to go about it secretly. Fortunately, his habits of collecting butterflies and orchids, herbs and mineral specimens was well known. If Sir George were found wandering about with a butterfly net suspicions would be aroused. But the figure of the tall, lean doctor was natural. He had been a collector for years. But this time he was collecting rumors and gossip.

Long weeks went by and he had made no progress. Then he thought it might be a good thing to call on his American friends, the Ames. They were both well liked by the natives. Ames had great skill in treating eye diseases from which natives suffered. And as America had no territory in Africa there were no American officials to gain ill will by necessary insistence on law, order and sanitary regulations.

The Ames knew nothing of any political unrest. This work filled the days. Eccles often thought the natives feigned hard luck stories to take advantage of these mis-

sionaries and get little gifts from them.

"No," said Dr. Ames, "I haven't noticed any symptoms of unrest or revolt. Kamrasi resents certain of your restrictions, of course."

"You mean he objects to our not allowing him to kill off the small chiefs and take their women. Would you allow that?"

"Most certainly not. I wasn't criticizing. I was just telling you of certain rumors that reached my ears. You know he is marrying Nabogo's young daughter when stars are favorable. There's an excess of sheer animalism about Kamrasi that disgusts my wife." Dr. Ames suddenly had an idea. "Why didn't I think of that before. If anybody knows it's that old Cape Dutchman Joost Habedank. He's somewhere near."

ECCLES knew the old man and liked him. He wandered widely in his powerful little motor truck. Originally a watchmaker, he could repair anything. He sold watches, cameras, film and the mechanical toys adored by the native chiefs who alone could afford them. He was also a taxidermist and had mounted many of Eccles' rarer specimens. Although he complained bitterly that he had no education, he had managed to pick up a great deal of it. He was a contented and garrulous old bachelor. Eccles went looking for him.

Joost Habedank had parked his truck near the administration building. It was a larger and newer van than Eccles had seen before. Habedank explained he had added radios to his stock and was agent for a very good recording instrument. Just now he was engaged in making records of native music for a London museum.

He greeted Eccles cordially. It was a weakness with him to think he could treat the native diseases as well as a qualified physician. He always asked Eccles many questions about methods of doctoring the sick. Eccles often turned over to the old Dutchman the specimens the drug houses sent him so liberally. Joost was a fat old man of sixty, heavily bearded and owner of a vast infectious laugh.

After some general routine conversation, Eccles said: "I was talking to Kamrasi a few days ago. He seems to have something on his mind. What is it?"

"Woman trouble as usual. You and I



are the sensible ones. No home dictators for us." Old Joost laughed loudly. "I will tell you something about Kamrasi. He used to think I was only an old peddler. Now he thinks I am the greatest magician in all Africa, a first-chop sorcerer. He will not murder me and loot my van as I have been warned he would. I am sacred."

"Why? What happened?"

"I made a record of his voice as he addressed his people. He did not know I was making it. Then I played it back to him! But you are right in thinking Kamrasi has something on his mind. Once he was open and frank. Now he keeps secrets from me. Resentment is brewing in his black mind."

"Why should that be? They are well treated and we've practically stamped out diseases that used to play the devil with them."

Habedank lowered his voice. Then he said an amazing thing. "The natives are being stirred up by foreign agitators. No, I am not mad. It is true. I have no proof of this, but there was a man with Kamrasi when he made the speech I recorded. It was a white man I am sure. No native would realize how a recording was made. It was this white man whom I could not see plainly who made Kamrasi demand the record. I had to give it to him. He was almost afraid to touch it. I do not speak these native languages as well as you do, but I know a little and I think he was telling his men that before long you British were to be killed. But I may be wrong. I am old and a little deaf. If I knew the language as you do I would find out so that I could tell the Commissioner. But it would be necessary to be sure."

Eccles saw that well enough. One couldn't accuse Kamrasi on such flimsy evidence as this. "I wish you had seen this stranger, Joost."

"At first, I thought it was you. He was tall and spare and dressed in shorts."

"I suppose you know that if you did dig up something important Sir George would reward you liberally. It's his job not mine. I know nothing about these political affairs." And as Dr. Eccles said this, he made up his mind to call again on Kamrasi and try to get news of this stranger. But old Joost, who was a gossip, mustn't know

of his new assignment. It was strange that Sir George had not mentioned such a man. Official records were carefully kept and all hunting expeditions passing through this territory were checked on.

While he was working on this case something happened that seemed unbelievable. Old Bacheeta, who had been taken into the Ames' household, came to the doctor's office when night had fallen. Her fine sensitive face wore an expression of joy and triumph. "He has come back," she cried, "and I have hidden him until you tell me what to do."

SHE was talking about young Bill. Miraculously he had escaped from the tavern that looked like a fort. The boy was thin and on his back and legs were the cruel marks of whips. It was hard work to drag details out of him. He feared the tavern keeper and his cruelties and did not know if he had been followed. "It's all right, sonny," said Eccles. "You are in British territory and I'm damned if anyone drags you under any other flag even if I have to declare war on account of you. You won't be beaten any more. Bacheeta and I will see to that."

Bill's long trek from Fort Lamy would not have been possible in any age but the present with motor transportation highly developed by means of good roads. Where in the days of Speke, Baker and Selous, men had to move in slow caravans, today there are motor busses on regular routes. Perhaps a boy brought up as normal boys are could not have done what Bill did. But he had been a wanderer from as soon as he could walk. He had been taught how to hide and disguise himself.

The tavern keeper who had promised to look after him as a father and see to his education had made a slave of him. Bill had learned what time the great blue motor coach passed through Fort Lamy. He knew what freight lines operated. With the calm courage of a grown man he had stowed away in such a freight truck. And when, half starved, he had come to the end of its run, he had found another opportunity. He had been on the road for six weeks. White people thought him an Arab boy. He knew native ways and tricks, and had come, at last, to the man he loved.



**B**UT ECCLES wasn't sure just how the Commissioner would solve the difficulty. As a Crown official, it was Sir George's duty to maintain the most friendly relations with other powers. He could not resist the legal demand of the French to deliver one of their citizens. Eccles knew that very well. It was old Bacheeta's suggestion that he hide the boy at the Ames' home. As an American Dr. Ames might have fewer scruples about offending the French because he had no official position and already knew and liked the lad.

The Ames were delighted to shelter him and for the moment the future of young William Finch seemed safe. With the amazing ability to forget old troubled and revel in the happy present, Bill got back his lost flesh and was soon Mrs. Ames' most diligent pupil. So far nobody had officially informed the Commissioner there was a newcomer to his district. But there was a twinkle in his eye when he said, "You seem to have become very cheerful all of a sudden, doctor. Have you run down any important clues?"

"Not yet, sir, but I'm making an official visit to Kamrasi in a few hours ostensibly to look into an outbreak of eye trouble. In reality, I want to be there when Kamrasi gives a feast. Tomorrow he marries Nabongo's sloe-eyed daughter."

Sir George looked a little anxious. He knew that at such festivities as these white men were not welcome. Strange and old tribal rites were used that were not for strangers to view. "Is that wise, Eccles?"

"They won't worry about me. I'm there to help them. I shan't want a front-row seat. I'll keep discreetly in the background. If he makes any big fuss about it I shall know the Nazi agent is somewhere near. I'm taking the station wagon ostensibly because I'm taking some hospital equipment and medicine."

"What's the real reason?"

"I'm taking old Bacheeta. While the festivities are going on she can circulate among the natives unsuspected and may find out something useful."

"You are sure she's loyal?"

"Absolutely. She's crazy about Bill, and therefore wouldn't do anything to harm me."

Dr. Eccles went off on the journey with a certain tense feeling that adventure lay

ahead which might end badly. Native passions rise high at such a feast as he was to witness. There would be dancing by men and women and magic and sorcery, and there was a spirit distilled from sweet fruit that would be free for all. There would be boastful songs of battle and old tribal glories that would inflame all who listened.

It was just before Eccles reached the edge of Kamrasi's domain that he heard a small voice. It said, "Please don't be angry, sir, but I haven't seen you for many days and I ask Bacheeta to let me come with her."

Dr. Eccles wasn't angry but he had to let the boy see that he should not have done so. "What will Mrs. Ames say? You should not have done this."

"She knows. Bacheeta told her it was your command."

Bacheeta spoke. Although she did not know English she could see her charge was being rebuked and she put all the blame on herself.

"All right," Eccles said, "but Bill must not get out of the wagon. He mustn't run any risks. And don't let it happen again."

**B**ILL was already asleep in the canvas-shielded back of the wagon when Eccles, after having inspected his patients, went to the edge of the circle where the dancing was going on.

Then when this had ceased, the tall chief began one of the traditional songs of his people, a song handed down through hundreds of years of their tribal life.

"Valiant am I, a lion with claws.

A taker-away of disgrace,

A breaker of prisons and forts  
by stratagems.

I beat my breast and cast myself  
upon my enemies.

Nor twanging bows nor glittering  
spears fear I,

For they are many, they whom I  
subdue

Who flee from whence they came."

Yes, Eccles thought, these people have had an historic past not known because they had no written language to tell its glories. Physically these men had no superiors. Kamrasi was seven feet in height and did not tower over the rest. It would be wonderful if old Joost had managed to



record this warrior song. He hoped there'd be more.

Immense applause greeted Kamrasi's song, and he prepared to sing again. Eccles had heard it before. It was a love song of great antiquity, and Kamrasi was singing of Nabongo's daughter he would wed tomorrow.

"*Limékuta lamahaba landi lake*" it began. Eccles translated the native words.

"I am ensnared in the web of thy love, O Love.

Thy charms will I extol forever.

Now I am thine,

And my soul doth rest in peace."

After that there was more dancing and the distillate of the sweet pomegranate fruit was passed around by young girls. It was the time for a wise stranger to retire and Eccles edged away and was going to his wagon when Joost Habedank spoke.

"I don't know what he said," Habedank remarked, "but Kamrasi has a wonderful voice."

"Did you make a record of it?"

"I would not take such a risk."

"Isn't it risky just being here, Joost?"

Habedank came nearer. "I've been working for you," he said. "I'm from the Cape Province and belong under your flag. It would ruin my business if I couldn't drive about in peace." Habedank sunk his voice to a whisper. "That tall spare man is here, doctor. I shouldn't be surprised if bad trouble isn't brewing. I ran into some of Nabongo's men and they had rifles. Yes, rifles, not spears. Now where in thunder did they get rifles from, and why."

"What are they doing here. The wedding is tomorrow."

"But the bride is in that hut over there. Inside she's being guarded by her women, and outside by Nabongo's bodyguard. She isn't allowed to see her bridegroom until noon. An old tribal custom."

For the moment old tribal customs weren't of much interest to Eccles. He wanted to find out about the white stranger. Later on he could check the information with Bacheeta.

"I have much news, and bad news, I fear," Joost Habedank said. "My van is over there and in it nobody can hear us."

"And I was thinking how nothing could happen tonight because of these festivities."

"If it is quiet, doctor, it is like the stillness that comes before every great and devastating storm. Enter, please."

#### IV

THE interior of Joost's new van was a sort of room. It had a table, camp bed and two chairs. It was lighted by narrow windows protected from invasion by steel bars. "I have expensive radio equipment," Joost explained, "and all natives are thieves."

"It's like a prison cell," Eccles commented, taking a deck chair and lighting his pipe. "Steel walls and ceiling and steel shutters for your windows and a door that locks automatically." The light came from a gasoline lamp swung from the ceiling.

Joost sat on a higher chair and looked about him. "It is home to me," he said smiling "but not as simple a home as you think. There are secret closets and drawers everywhere. In them I conceal my weapons, my private papers and my cameras and radios. And my money. I take in a lot of money, doctor, as you should know who have bought so much from me. And I still sell watches and binoculars. Yes, I must take care to keep them hidden. I also have some good Cape rum. We will take a tot of it together. I have so much to say." Joost took a deep gulp.

"Have you got any real information about the Nazi agent who is in command in the district? But how could you? That would be too much to expect."

"From an ignorant old peddler, you were going to say."

"Indeed I wasn't, Joost. I was thinking since you are so well known as a loyal South African people would not talk when you were near. They're damned clever, Joost."

"That is too mild a word for it. They are supremely clever. The man in charge of this district is by no means the chief of Nazi activities in Africa. He reports to a certain Monsieur Claes in the Belgian Congo. He is the head of them all."

"But that's absurd. I know Claes. He's a loyal Belgian and a famous hunter and explorer."



"Your belief in him would gratify him, am sure. Nevertheless, he is one of them, and the most important. My friend, do not doubt me. I have risked my life to learn this."

"After all it's the local *gauleiter* we're after. Who is he?"

"Dr. Carl von Sleicher who is far more intelligent than Monsieur Claes and may succeed him. He is here tonight. I am sure of it."

"So that's what you meant by having bad news."

"That's what I meant, doctor. This von Sleicher has been in Africa since his country lost its colonies. He prefers to say Germany was robbed of them. You know how those people talk. He knows more dialects even than you. Everybody loves him. None suspect him."

"But how do you know all this?"

"Because I am Carl von Schleicher and I admire myself more than any other human being."

Then Eccles saw he was being menaced by a Luger pistol. And he saw that the mask of geniality had dropped from the face of the so-called Dutchman from the Cape. It was now an evil and cruel face and there was now no mercy in it. Yet his papers were in order. Eccles knew that. He had examined them. Sir George knew Habedank and bought photographic supplies from him. In his passport was his photograph and on it was written the name Joost Habedank, occupation: watchmaker and jeweler, Cape Town, South Africa.

"You are wondering," said the man with the Luger, "how it is that Joost Habedank—what a hateful name that is to one of my blood—turns out to be a Von Sleicher." Dr. Eccles noticed that it was no longer the old Dutchman with his careless way of speech speaking. Von Sleicher now used the idiom of the educated man of position. "It was very simple. There was a poor trader named Joost Habedank. I studied him at close range for some time. And when I knew how he looked and spoke and what his work was, I removed him as I shall presently remove you. But there will be many hours of interesting talk before that."

"So you think," Eccles muttered.

"SO I KNOW, Herr Doktor. I am anxious to learn about your recent trip to Fort Lamy and whom you saw in Belgian territory. And there are details of your organization here that interest us. How much does Sir George Darham know? Who are your agents in Stanleyville, Fort Archambault and Fort Lamy."

"So far as I know we have no agents there. It isn't under our flag. And I'm not a political officer but a medical one, as you should know. I'm helping Sir George in a very humble capacity."

"My friend, you are not so stupid as you seem. You should know that news travels fast through Africa. I, who am acting under orders, often learn a great deal. I know for example that in the household of one of Claes's men you planted a spy."

"You must be mad," Eccles cried.

"A clever boy speaking many languages but ignorant of the greatest one of all—German. Yes, you planted him there and then had him taken away in the middle of the night after overhearing a conference between Claes and his subordinate. You are going to tell me exactly what this boy heard and where he is hiding."

Eccles for the moment said nothing. So Bill was being drawn into this vicious and cruel net of intrigue. The boy was sleeping only a few hundred yards distant. Did Von Sleicher know this? And it wasn't any good to tell the other the real reason of his trip with Bill. He was regarded as a skilled intelligence officer and nothing would shake the belief. His present position was extremely dangerous. Eccles did not see how he could escape. He was at a disadvantage sitting in this low chair to which Von Sleicher had motioned him. Sleicher was sitting above him and too far away for Eccles to have a chance to grab him or strike a sudden blow. Von Sleicher poured out another drink of rum but this time he did not offer one to his guest.

"Do not underestimate me," the Nazi warned. "I am thorough as all my people are and I do not make mistakes. Before I became Joost Habedank I worked as a watch-maker because it was his trade and by it he lived. I found I had a genius for such things which that poor Hollander could never attain. So do not think as you sit there with your frightened eyes wan-



dering around your prison that you can escape. I think of everything. I will smoke a good cigar while you think it over. Remember that Kamrasi is my friend, and when the wedding feasting is over—and it will take ten days at least, he leads his men to the wiping out of my enemies which I have persuaded him are his own, too. Of propaganda you and the Americans are ignorant. I am a master of it.”

Eccles sat there thinking in what way he could escape. And the more he thought about it, the less likely it became. Outside he could hear the shouting and singing. Perhaps Bacheeta like a shadow was trying to get information for him. Well, it wouldn't be of much use to him now.

It was true that Bacheeta was trying. She had left Bill asleep and did not think he would awaken until daybreak. But the noise awoke him and he could not sleep again. He was a bold adventurous lad, and night and natives had no terrors for him. He looked out of the wagon door. Then he climbed down. At last he began a little investigating. He came at length to the shining new motor van in which were two men, one about to endure torture and later, perhaps, death.

From this big van no sound came and Bill with a boy's eager curiosity turned his attention to a tall hut opposite. It must by the size of it be a chief's hut or the home of a relative of the chief. Bill shrank away into the shelter of the aloes. He did not dread in this place with its noises and light any savage beasts. They preferred the jungle depths. What scared the boy was the spectacle of a score of tall natives with rifles standing on guard. He did not know what it was all about. Never had he seen such big silent sentinels before.

**I**NSIDE the hut Nabongo's young daughter was seated on a tall chair. Around her were women engaged in getting her ready for the ceremony not many hours away. With the women of her tribe there was decreed on marriage occasions a most elaborate mode of hair-dressing. This coiffure was twenty inches high and among the dark glistening tresses symbolical herbs were placed. Tomorrow just before the ceremony bright jungle flowers would be placed. And these same jungle flowers were the rare orchids for which American

and European dealers sent their hunters. Nabongo's daughter sat there, a young princess not aware that her life was not to be as successful as she dreamed.

Bill came back to the shelter of the glistening van. In Fort Lamy he had seen such vehicles and envied their owners. In such a van he had been driven five hundred miles when he escaped. He had the modern boy's love for mechanized things.

Bill, ashamed of his panic, climbed to where he could look through the narrow barred opening. This time the heavy stranger was talking and Bill sensed the rate and enmity in his voice.

“I have given you time enough,” Von Sleicher said. “I wish to know who this boy is and what he learned in Fort Lamy. I must know the names of your key men here so that I can report to my superiors.”

“I tell you the boy isn't a spy. He's too young for that. I took him to his mother's sister at the Fort. She was dead and the Commandant put him in the home of a French innkeeper.”

“From which he escaped,” Von Sleicher said. “I suppose he had found out what he was sent for.”

What happened next startled and amazed Eccles. Von Sleicher looked up at the window over Eccles' head. Then he sprang to his feet and fired the great Luger pistol directly over his prisoner's head. He fired shots in quick succession.

“I could not miss at that distance,” he said.

“What couldn't you miss?”

“Your little trained spy, the boy Bill. He was listening to us.”

For the moment Von Sleicher was off guard. It was the doctor's opportunity. He sprang to his feet and swung a terrific blow at the jaw of the other man. The Nazi went down like a poleaxed steer.

**A**FANTASTIC ending had come to Kamrasi's feast. A fantastic end had come to Kamrasi's betrothed. Sitting on her high chair surrounded by her women death had entered. A bullet from the Luger pistol aimed at Bill had caught her in one eye and she fell back dead.

Kamrasi raved like a madman threatening death. He called loudly for Dr. Eccles whom he had not seen for many hours. He promised him any fee he might



demand if he would restore Nabongo's daughter to life.

It was the moment for the white man to assert himself. The bullet he extracted was from the Luger pistol, and he could reconstruct the whole affair. Not only was the bride-to-be hit but one of her sentries outside had been hit in the shoulder. Again a Luger bullet.

Eccles spoke impressively. "An evil man, a white sorcerer, has done this thing. But for my superior magic you, too, would have been killed. This is a judgment on you, O Kamrasi, for having plotted against the great White Chief across the wide seas. It is known to me that you were going to kill the whites. You have behaved badly, and it may be the King's regiments may shoot you all."

Kamrasi flung himself at the doctor's feet and swore he had not promised to rebel. Eccles thought this was a lie but as for the moment he was top dog and he intended to keep in this fortunate position.

"I will talk about that later," he said. "But first I will show you the white sorcerer whom I have conquered by my superior magic. Come."

Then he saw that old Bacheeta after bending low before Kamrasi was whispering in his ear. What she said Eccles could not hear but it evidently aroused interest.

Bacheeta had told him that there might be danger in killing a white man. White men had a habit of sticking together in matters of that sort. There might be investigations and a trial. Even when white man had determined upon the death of a black man who had killed another they went about it without haste and insisted on trials. They did not kill in flaming anger as black men did. One could never completely understand them.

Whatever Bacheeta said met wide approval.

"What are they whispering about?" Von Sleicher demanded. "I am surrendering to you as a Crown official and not to those black devils—"

Eccles shrugged his shoulders. "You should know by now that it is almost impossible for us to get at their secret mental processes. I can only assure you it's your fate they are deciding, not mine."

Bacheeta had done her job. Eccles could see that Bill had found her and was accompanying her to the station wagon. And that was a relief. Almost anything could happen in the present state of excitement. Bill and the old black woman were best hidden away.

SIR GEORGE DARHAM listened to what Eccles had to say. The doctor had found him looking very much worried but the secret documents Eccles had found brought triumph to his face.

"You've done marvelously," he said, "and ordinarily you would be rewarded with a decoration and a mention in Parliament. But as it is we dare not risk any publicity. What we know must be kept secret. I find it very hard to believe that Claes could be a traitor, but this evidence in his own writing is indisputable. By the way you haven't said where Von Sleicher is." Sir George frowned.

Eccles did not seem disturbed at the rebuke. "Von Sleicher in trying to get away ran to the edge of the lake, probably looking for a native canoe. Unfortunately he ran into that historic character, old Lutembe. A ghastly end wasn't it?"

Sir George was not to be deceived. He knew native ways and the customs of Kamrasi's people.

"Had you any idea that your lack of care in watching Von Sleicher might give Kamrasi an opportunity to tie the man to that horrible stake?" He smiled. "But, of course, you hadn't and no doubt you regret it as much as I do." The two men grinned at one another. There was no need to say any more. "Eccles, you've behaved magnificently and I wish I could assure you of an official reward. But I can't."

"I think there's one thing you could do that wouldn't give the show away, sir. I want to adopt the boy, William Pierre Finch. The kid has grown into my heart and so far I've been rather a lonely man."

"I'll have the adoption papers prepared. But if I were you I'd get him out of Africa as soon as possible."

"We're going home to America," Eccles said. And a great content sang in his heart.



# MURDERER'S MOON

By E. HOFFMAN PRICE

Lamar was a renegade, a man without a country, in a land where passports were the only sureness against jungle death. But he did have a mighty juju of fifty red coats—his only weapons against the ghost-men who stalked his trail.

THE HINDU trader was so near death from hardship and neglected wounds that he no longer had any thought of bargaining, nor even asking for help; he said to Lamar, "Give me a funeral after the way of my people."

Napoleon Bonaparte Lamar's horse face contracted in a fearsome scowl which actually indicated only bewilderment and perplexity; the same ferocious contortion he had worn at Louisiana Military Academy as he went down before the final assault of integral calculus. Of all the crazy things he had endured in two years of trying to convince thick-headed Africa that he was an American citizen who wanted to go home to join the army, this was the worst: a Hindu funeral!

His spade shaped chin, his prodigious nose, and his deep set eyes did not make him look reassuring, yet Lamar was sorry for the starved wreck, abandoned by his bearers, after having been speared and somehow, not finished.

"A funeral, eh?" he rumbled.

There was nothing small about Lamar. His hands were enormous, his feet were like barges. He was afraid to touch the dying man, not because the Hindu was filthy from neglect, but because he was afraid of hurting the poor devil.

"Yes—a funeral—I give you all my goods, *sahib*."

There, in the dense underbrush, were weatherproof cases. Why he had not been robbed was far from clear. Perhaps he and his men had tried to fight off the Masai spearmen; perhaps they had succeeded, and then, seeing that their employer was dying, they had fled in panic. This was Africa's secret, one of Africa's craziest.

"Sure. A funeral, old fellow. If I can find something for digging."

The Hindu's eyes became agonized.

"NO—no—no! the fire! Cremation, you understand?"

Lamar nodded. "I will do even that. Now wait till I call my bearers, you're not dead yet!"

He stepped toward the trail and bawled, "You, Ngana! All of you, come here!"

They approached, reluctantly, with Lamar's small kit. Visiting kinfolk in France, he had made good his escape when Paris fell, but without papers of any kind to prove his identity. Then to Africa, where both French and American officials had called him an imposter. So here he was, somewhere on the edge of the Belgian Congo, tired, not too well fed, and engaging to bury a dying Hindu.

"*Bwana*," the head boy protested, "it is bad *juju*. We did not kill the man."

"How in ten million little blue devils do you know anyone's been killed?" Lamar thundered. "Come here, or I'll break you in half!"

Awed by the sound and fury and size of their *bwana*, the blacks edged nearer. Ngana stuttered, "That is why we got tired, we knew there was someone dying, we just knew."

LAMAR made a helpless gesture. He could not understand why he had ever thought that New Orleans negroes were obstinate, and given to dummifying up, and having superstitious hunches.

"Fix up some chop! You understand, he is not dead, he's hungry!"

"Yes, *bwana*, we understand."

But when he returned to the Hindu, he saw that Africa was again one jump ahead of him. The poor devil was finished. Lamar scratched his hairy chest. "*Mon dieu*, now I am in for it! Me a mortician! But a man of my word."

Then, practical, he rifled the Hindu's greasy wallet, and found the keys to the



boxes he had inherited. In the rapidly failing light, Lamar saw how cheaply he had sold out. He roared, "Second hand clothes!" and booted a sheet metal locker until it boomed.

A second, a third, a fourth, all packed with scarlet tunics, apparently Indian army salvage. "Death and damnation," he grumbled, "why couldn't he have had a case of brandy?"

He went back to the porters. "Cut wood! Quick! *Fissa, fissa!*"

In a nearby clearing, he cremated the trader; he hoped that his muttered prayer would not invalidate the ceremony. "Poor devil, not Christian, not Hindu. As bad as being neither French nor American!"

But that night, as he scratched insect bites, and slapped mosquitoes, his disappointment cooled; and then it came to him, a high, clear flame in the blackness of fatigue and disgust.

Those tunics were the answer to his problem. The idea grew and brightened. The parade ground drills, the tin soldier course at school, not worth a dime in warfare, yet good for a display of military smartness: fifty black men in scarlet tunics, one couldn't laugh that off! Since he couldn't get to the States as an American, he'd convince Africa that he was a good Frenchman. They'd have to listen to a man leading fifty black volunteers.

"Look," he said to the weary porters. "Red coats."

He drew out a splendid tunic, and the multicolored sash of a lancer regiment. "Try it on!"

Ngana did so. The others lined up. Lamar fitted them. Then he peeled the tunics from the wearers. "In the morning you get them again."

He locked the chests, and stretched himself out. Bluff had to do it. If they wanted to club him and run out, this was their chance. But Lamar had to risk it.

Lamar had a battered but serviceable Luger, and a cross hilted sword; the latter, picked up in the bazaar at Khartoum, one of the Darvish blades used against Chinese Gordon, was carried by Ngana, who trotted at the master's heels. Another bearer toted a reconditioned Mauser. Somehow, Lamar had crossed one frontier after another without having his arsenal confiscated, or having a duty assessed on it.

So, he set out in the morning, his red-coated bearers stalking after him. But at the first stop, Ngana objected, "*Bwana*, this is now more than sixty pounds to the man, it is against the law; we can carry it, only the officials—"

"Ha! Is it that this jungle is full of officials? Have we seen any of the *Bula Matari*? When one comes along, hand me the extra stuff, there is no law against me carrying three men's load."

The Darvish sword slashed thorny creepers, and the lianas which clogged the narrow trail. Automatically, Lamar slapped mosquitoes and fiercely-stinging gnats. He no longer felt the individual impacts, for thorns and sharp bladed grass cancelled the insect irritation, and vice versa.

Fatigue, and the growing shortage of rations did their bit. The further he went into the Congo, the wider became the stretches of swamp and almost impenetrable bush, uninhabited except by monkeys who scolded from the safety of overhead concealment, and by leopards who waited, always ready to lunge.

Dizzy from weariness and a touch of fever, Lamar stumbled toward a village, the first in days. He had not heard drums talking, yet Africa had telegraphed the news of his approach.

He bribed the village headman with a bit of trade tobacco and a yard of calico, and in return, got some yams and two freshly snared francolins. But he could not carry on without trade goods to barter for supplies to pay guides, and hire extra porters.

"Give them some red coats," Ngana said.

LAMAR shook his head. "When we get to French Congo, we put them on, we become soldiers, do you hear? And say this to the chief: For rations and guides, we will let the men wear red coats from this village to the next. But when they go home, they leave the coats."

And so, by renting the once splendid tunics, Lamar worked his way from village to village. But when he finally reached Quai de Maracq, his porters were carrying him. He had so long overpowered them with his resolution that now, though he muttered in delirium, they were afraid to





*Lamar waited, nerves tight with dread,*



desert until they had taken him to civilization.

Just what they told the Belgian officials was not entirely clear to Lamar when his wits became clear enough for him to know that he was among white people. He knew only that his men were gone; and it seemed that the scarlet tunics had not been mentioned.

*Monsieur* Walraevens sat down beside Lamar's bunk in the municipal hospital and said, "The chattering of your porters made no more sense than what you were muttering before the fever left you, but it seems that you overcome obstacles, *monsieur*. Though for you to get to America—that is too much!"

Lamar nodded, and said, glumly, "That manifests itself. Neither French nor American, it makes a camel of me. I'm surprised they brought me in, instead of clubbing me and dumping me into the bush."

Walraeven's leathery face puckered in a shrewd smile. He fingered his pointed white beard. "You do not fit into any standard pattern, *monsieur*, whoever you are. But there is a chance for you to earn passage money, or if you can't prove your identity, then you make a living."

"And how?"

"By managing a rubber estate quite near the coast."

Lamar scowled. "No time for comedy, *Monsieur* Walraevens! What do I know about rubber except that it is something everyone is short of? If there are any Free French across the river, maybe there is military service, I am a soldier of sorts."

Still no mention of his firearms; that was odd. No, it wasn't. The porters had kept them out of sight. Oh, well—

Then *Monsieur* Walraevens' eyes narrowed. "There is more to a plantation than tapping trees. And rubber is as important as fighting. After your bout with fever, it is not certain that any army would accept you, for a while at least. Listen now: there is a pig-headed and incompetent fellow, one Morden, who mismanages an estate. The production, it is zero. Where do I get new help, with this everlastingly damned war? Do things make themselves clear?"

"It is clear that I could not be much worse than this Morden."

"Driving hungry porters all the way from Tanganyika makes me gamble on you."

"*Monsieur*, having no chance to go home or to join the Free French, it makes me gamble on what you offer."

So Lamar took the job, and wondered if he could tell a rubber tree from an oil palm; he wondered, despite good food, and advance salary, what sort of joke this was going to be. And as he recovered, he rode about a well managed local plantation to get what knowledge he could.

## II

**H**IPPOS grunted; crocodiles bellowed along the bank; flame-winged birds wheeled and circled over the sluggish river which crawled endlessly through a tangle of mangrove roots. Jungle, mile after mile, day after day, as Lamar headed downstream in a dugout paddled by half a dozen blacks.

He wondered what had become of his porters, and what they were doing with the scarlet uniforms, his rifle, his pistol, and the Darvish sword. Still, Ngana had well earned the loot!

Then, one evening, as the sinking sun sent red lances through the lianas which trailed from the tall trees, the blacks began to chatter. One pointed with his leaf-shaped paddle. And just around the bend, Lamar saw the pier, and finally, the warehouse and the *pirogues* pulled up on the bank.

He climbed up the ladder. The silence was broken only by the thumping of a far-off drum; that, and the interminable drone of insects, accented the dead stillness. Lamar shivered, and told himself that that effect of emptiness and desolation was only illusion, that the quarters of the plantation laborers might be some distance from the river, so that he naturally could not at once hear native voices, nor the cackle of fowl, nor the chatter of women and children.

Then he saw that the boatmen, who had brought his luggage ashore, were eyeing each other. They did not like it; whether what they heard, or what they did not hear, something was wrong.

He had seen the signs before. He had to do something, and quickly before they all ran out. So Lamar said, "That way!"



He headed inland, along the dirt road which, as he could already see, led among long, precisely spaced rows of rubber trees.

The breeze, little more than a humid, musty stirring, had a vinegar tang—the odor from the vats in which the collected latex was treated with acetic acid. And then, stepping into the thickening shadows of the grove, he noted that trees had been recently tapped.

Suddenly, he heard a buzzing of flies. The porters, somberly tramping after him, began to mutter. Then Lamar saw the man who lay in the road.

He was dead; his arms were gashed, and his throat clawed to shreds. He had lain there for hours, a black man in a dark, dry pool of blood.

"Leopard!" Lamar exclaimed, drawing back.

But his porters thought otherwise. He turned on them, saw them roll their eyes. Bit by bit, he pieced together their jumble of Swahili and Bantu and pidgin. Only human footprints led to and from the mangled corpse. "Leopard man, *bwana*," the head boatman finally admitted.

Lamar had heard of that secret African society, and how its members wearing leopard skins, and arming their hands with iron claws longer and sharper than those of any jungle cat, stalked their victims to tear them to death in a way to simulate a leopard's attack. The Government, Walraevens had insisted, had some years previous stamped out the cult of slayers. "Once, *monsieur*, it was bad. Those devils worked out grudges, they extorted bribes, they spread terror. But we settled them."

Thinking of those words, Lamar said, aloud, "You just think you settled them—or did you really think so?"

If these weird terrors of the jungle were prowling again, no wonder that the plantation did not produce. Lamar's face tightened. If Walraevens had knowingly sent him into a place terrorized by slaying fanatics who impersonated leopards, Walraevens could promptly go to hell with his rubber estates!

The boatmen were on the point of making for the river, and without his luggage. Their faces and their eyes told him more than did their muttering. His indignation at Walraevens had to wait.

For all Lamar's size and strength, boot-

ing half a dozen big blacks into line was beyond him. More than that, force alone never got far with anyone who bucked the jungle; it took more than muscle, which was why the four-foot pygmies were able to live, and to trap elephants.

Lamar felt the sweat crop out in big drops, a fresh rush; he eyed the soft earth, and saw that a man, and only a man had bowled over the unfortunate black. Then, on edge, desperate for a saving idea, he noticed what at first escaped him.

Near the mangled man, broken in half and trampled into the mud, was a split stick into which had been thrust a message. A bit of paper still remained in the cleft.

A few pen strokes were on the scrap of bluish paper; but not enough of the purple inscription remained to give him any clue. Yet it was now more certain than ever that no leopard had killed the runner.

"*Allons!*" Lamar thundered, and stretched his legs.

Whether the sound of authority, or the example, or the display of confidence which he by no means felt, the boatmen followed. For the moment, there was no need for the sales talk which the missing letter had suggested. Better save it until it was required.

IT WAS a good plantation. The only false note was the savage tapping, as of a desperate effort to squeeze out the very last drop of latex the trees could yield. Thus far, the abuse had not ruined them, though no grove could long endure such a terrific milking. For the moment, however, this did not mean a great deal to Lamar.

Presently, he came to the native stockade. It was deserted. The jungle drums were louder. He would have given his advance salary to know what they were saying to the boatmen: *tump-tumpa-tump-tump-tumpa-tum*—

Hoarse, growling, like the grunt of hippo, the bellow of crocodile, the fearsome roar of lions up Tanganyika way: the drums had a jungle voice, chanting jungle riddles. But all Lamar knew was that advancing was rarely as bad as retreat.

He approached the plantation bungalow, which was tin roofed, tin sheathed, and perched high on concrete piles. There was sound copper screen, oxidized by the jungle's moist, warm breath. He opened



the door of the verandah, and called, both in French and in Arabic, "By your leave!" But for a moment the only answer was an echo.

Then he heard a muttering and the sound of feet uncertainly planted; the hard shoes of a white man. A stocky, squarish fellow in dirty whites stumbled down the hall. His red face was grotesque, because it was round and jolly by design, yet now marked in lines as haggard as the expression of the bloodshot eyes. A chunky, plump man should not, cannot have a haggard look, yet this one did.

"*Monsieur*, you are Armand Morden," Lamar stated rather than asked. "Me, I have a letter—"

"Morden," he man echoed. "Yes, *Grace a dieu*, you are welcome whoever you are."

He made a jerky gesture. A gust of brandy billowed ahead of him. He was somewhat goggle eyed. When Lamar again offered the letter of introduction, Morden ignored it. "You come—to relieve me? Devil take you—I will not—leave—I stay here—I won't leave."

Lamar was embarrassed at Morden's abject, slobbering plea and protest. And it was bad too because of the blacks below. "*Monsieur*, they tell me you need help. Just that, no more. So I am here. Now ask me what I know of rubber!"

"Name of a camel!" Morden's voice cracked hysterically. "I know all about rubber! And it vanishes, you comprehend? Now those blacks—they are gone, all of them."

Morden wove and somehow, staggered without gaining or losing distance. Lamar demanded, impatiently, "You know why they run?"

"That accursed leopard men society."

"You're lucky. They killed a courier. They haven't killed you."

Morden's red face turned slate gray. He gulped, blinked, tried to get to a verandah chair, and landed flat on the floor. Lamar knelt beside him, shook him. "What is it all about, *monsieur*? I am here to help as best I can. What was in the courier's letter, for him to be clawed to death—by a man who acted like a leopard?"

Morden sat up, got to his feet, and lunged for the decanter on the table. He took a deep gurgling drag, a slobbering drag. Then he collapsed on the rattan

lounge. Either he could not, or he would not speak.

Lamar said aloud, as he had learned to do when Africa promised to drive him mad, and there was no one about who could understand any language he knew, "By damn, he is scared to death, he passes out so he does not talk too much."

The mention of the dead courier had done it. Either Morden had not known of the murder, or else he had forgotten, and Lamar's question had brought all the horror back with a shock. No wonder the blacks were thumping drums in the jungle.

Yet it was odd. Though leopard men were bad *juju*, those drums spoke of fighting something: whereas the terror aroused by the murder society, according to all Lamar had heard, left the intended victims fatalistically resigned.

"They are not all of them marked for death," he reasoned. "Just that one letter carried. I guarantee you," he went on, lapsing into New Orleans idiom, "I guarantee you, that one had news, something that Morden is scared to talk about."

As a guess, good; but it was dark now. He snapped a switch, and the battery operated system worked. There was light. Lamar called to the boatmen, "Bring it in!"

"What of the red *bwana*?"

"He is sick. Bring it in! Then make some chop!"

"*Aywah, bwana.*"

"The people of the stockade have moved out. Find yourself a hut."

The blacks eyed each other. Kabati said, "*Bwana*, we are afraid like the others. Let us stay here, you are strong *juju*, you speak and the red-faced man falls down dead."

LAMAR pondered. His hard headed Creole judgment told him that regardless of the propriety of lodging half a dozen blacks in the bungalow, he would be safer; if nothing else, the law of averages would protect him. There was too much wrong with this devil-driven plantation for him to think of ordinary distinctions. If the boatmen thought him powerful *juju*, then good; he might well need someone who believed in him, before he got out of this nightmare.

"Very well. Cook some chop, and then spread your blankets on the floor so you



can call me if anything happens tonight."

That reassured them.

He ate, ignoring Morden's wheezing and snoring and gurgling. Where he had at first been disgusted, he now felt sorry for the poor devil, and he felt none too chipper about himself.

When he had eaten, and downed his quinine, and some brandy, he stretched out under his mosquito netting; though before he turned in, he spread a netting over Morden.

Hours later, the jungle chill and penetrating damp bit into him; he shivered, and sat up. His heart was thumping a devil's tattoo. Then came a mortal cry which ended in a ghastly gurgling and coughing and wheezing.

Wire edged even in sleep, Lamar, still half awake, snatched the big pitcher from the wash stand and bounded to the front. In the misty moonlight, he saw the gleaming copper-yellow coat of a monstrous leopard.

The beast was clawing Morden. Lamar yelled, heaved the heavy pitcher. It shattered against the verandah siding. He had missed his mark.

The great cat snarled, spat, and instead of turning on him, it made a mighty bound for the open door, and into the shadows of the clearing.

But that one glimpse froze Lamar. He had caught the flash of oiled black skin: a man's legs, a man's body concealed somewhat by a leopard's hide.

Worse than that, he saw what had happened to Morden: blood poured in a dark steady stream from his throat. Morden's writhing ceased. There was nothing to be done. Lamar fumbled frantically, he yelled to his blacks as he tried to pinch severed veins, but his trembling fingers were not deft enough. A man can bleed to death in a few seconds from such slashes. And for lack of forceps or clamps, not even a surgeon could have saved Morden.

Lamar might have called it all a nightmare illusion, had it not been for the netting he had flung over the drunk. The mesh was slashed as by a keen blade; no cat's claws could have cut that way. The society of jungle slayers, Lamar now knew, had finished Morden so that he could not, when he sobered up and was

steadied by another white man's presence, tell what message had led to the courier's death in the rubber grove.

### III

AT DAWN, the plantation laborers came out of the jungle. They did not seem surprised to see Lamar. "*Jambo, bwana*," the headman said. "You are the new *bula matari*. What you say, we do it."

"There is no work today. *Monsieur Morden* is sick."

"We know, *bwana*. Death is an illness."

They looked for, but saw not a trace of change in Lamar's horseface. He was really not surprised that they should know what had happened while they thumped their drums.

"Then good. I have here a message to take to Quai de Maracq."

The headman squirmed. "*Bwana*, that is not possible. Beat us, give us no food, it is well. But we do not take messages. There was one who did. Two, three who did. That is too many."

And he saw that whether he kicked, or flogged, or killed them, they would not leave with any letters. He did not feel that they defied him, nor that he had lost face. When a Negro dummies up, whether here or back home, he is resigned to whatever evil may come from his choice; as he sees it, nothing is as bad as the evil he stubbornly avoids. So Lamar said, "I understand. For the time, we say no more of messages. *Monsieur Morden* was good to you."

"*Aywah, bwana*."

"I see that from your faces, you are all fat. Line up at the commissary, there is a stick of tobacco for each. His last present. Then you will do what is proper when a good boss is totally sick."

"You will speak the proper words?"

Lamar frowned. He said to himself, "This is monotonous, first it is rites for a heathen Hindu, they are too Christian. Now it is a funeral for this poor Morden, it is not Christian enough. It is damn well bad, like being not French and not American." Then, to the blacks: "Yes, go dig where he will rest well."

Later, he found a mildew-caked prayer book, and he mangled the Latin terribly, but the rumble of his voice impressed the



blacks. After he threw a handful of earth into the grave, the laborers brought curious trinkets to put on the mound. For the rest of the day, they beat drums, and wailed, and daubed ashes on their heads.

That evening, the porters who had left him in Quai de Maracq came stalking in. They had his weapons. But they carried the scarlet tunics carefully bundled on their heads; and Ngana led them.

"Bwana, the *bula matari* would take the red coats and the sword, the gun, the pistol from us, so we hid, we followed you by land, we came through bad country, so we took off the coats, there were thorns to tear them, and no people to see them."

"You know what has happened."

As one man, they answered, "No, *bwana*."

Which convinced him that a file of oiled and black-faced liars looked him in the eye. So he ordered them to leave the coats and the weapons in the bungalow. Lamar's plans had no shape. He could not get out, except alone. Blacks would come to the accursed plantation, but they would not leave. Not until he showed the way.

And thinking of Morden's horribly slashed throat, Lamar decided that for a while at least, the rubber business demanded his full attention.

The stout warehouse by the river was packed with sheets of crude; they were the shape of doormats, and marked with the diamond pattern of the heavy rollers through which the gum was passed. The sternwheeler, *Leonie*, made pickups at irregular intervals. She should soon arrive, judging from the accumulated stock.

"When was the boat here last?"

Burugu, the headman, told him. Lamar estimated the probable output of the plantation, and saw that the production was far above standard; no wonder, with the trees so savagely tapped. But what made him scowl and curse under his breath as he paced about the bungalow was Walraeven's cries of inefficiency and low output.

Morden's last words disturbed Lamar. "*It vanishes.*"

"But how?"

His porters were raked and criss-crossed by thorns; even for natives, the country surrounding the plantation for many miles was almost impenetrable. Porters could

not carry the stuff out. It certainly didn't walk by itself.

WHEN he dug into the account books which Morden had kept, and the journals, he found that the figures for production had been altered. The changes were in Morden's hand, and in the same purple ink he had noted on the scrap of paper which had remained in the murdered courier's cleft stick. It was only after intent scrutiny, and noting a discrepancy in addition, that Lamar detected the juggling of the records.

"Robbing his own plantation, eh?"

He shrugged. Embezzlement was not an African monopoly. And somehow, that ready answer did not account for Morden's terror, and drunken frenzy—much less, his terrible death. But Lamar finally was able to reconcile those contradictions; and the solution gave him chills, and made his skin crawl for an instant, until stubborn wrath took command.

He wore his pistol as he rode Morden's runty pony about the estate. Men and women tapped the trees, making deep gashes in herringbone pattern so that the milky sap would drain down into the little glazed earthenware cups. Others gathered the previous day's accumulation. Then, when the tapping hours ended, the crew went to work in the processing shed, while the women went to till the maize and yam patches.

The native settlement was hemmed in by a thorn laced *sariba* whose height and strength and width surprised Lamar.

"Many leopards?"

"No, not many, and not bad. It was just the custom, the blacks answered, quite too glibly.

There were in Morden's books records of the *Leonie's* pickups, and deliveries of supplies for the commissary. The stock in the warehouse was larger than any recorded shipment for more than a year.

"Me, I know nothing of rubber," he said to the silence and the buzzing insects, late that night, as he smoked one of Morden's strong cheroots, and drank his brandy. "No one tells me. So, if this poor devil quarrelled with his accomplices in robbing the plantation, I am supposed to be ignorant."

He took his mosquito netting, got the



keys, and went to the warehouse; silently, stealthily, and without, as far as he knew, attracting the attention of either the laborers, or his own men.

Lamar shivered when he passed the spot where he had found the murdered courier; like the master he had served, the messenger also was underground.

He stretched out on the bales of rubber. Night sounds kept him awake; night sounds, and the thought that this was his first definite move toward finding out what happened to the stock.

Lamar was awake most of the night. He did not need Morden's alarm clock to rout him out well ahead of sunrise, and the first stir of life in the settlement.

By day, he dozed in the saddle. But finally, he began to sleep during his vigil in the warehouse; a light sleep, and he was sure that no looters, making away with anything as bulky as an accumulation of crude rubber, could possibly get started without arousing him.

But habit dulled the edge of his vigilance, and fatigue finally caught up with Lamar. In the gloom of the warehouse he sat up, abruptly, his spine tingling, his pulse pounding. Danger—something approaching in the darkness. Above the stench of rubber he caught the feline scent of a great cat; the pungent exhalation he had noted in zoos, and in the jungle.

That first thrill and shock; and he was thinking, "It's on the way. Leopards looking for rubber—"

**I**T WAS fantastic. It was African. Lamar knew that such a thing could not be. His lips drew back against his teeth, and he reached for pistol and Morden's flashlight. No animal could have unlocked the door. If Leopard Men wanted to play games, then good.

"It's on the way—"

But he was wrong. It had already arrived. Sleep, tricking him, had scrambled time. What seemed advance warning was really a deceptive and treacherous memory of what had happened moments earlier. Moments earlier, had he pulled himself together, it would have been warning, but now it was history.

His flashlight beam picked the tawny

copper gold and the silky black spots of the leopard, the phosphorescent gleam of the eyes, and what was worse, the weird, the unnatural posture of a man who could not quite mimic the fluent grace of the beast. That one, and a second: there were two about to close in.

Lamar's pistol whipped into line. A man, alert and agile and cool, could fight it out with any leopard, even though his only weapon was a heavy knife, his only guard a blanket or turban cloth whipped about the left arm. But these were not leopards, and their claws were knives. He saw the metallic glint; he saw that, and despite the frosty wave of mingled rage and desperation and fear at having been surprised.

The Luger's whiplash whack stretched into the clang of a slug smashing through the sheet iron. His shot went wild. Claws raked his arms. Again, his pistol blazed, just as the flashlight was knocked from his hand. Claws bit his wrist, and his weapon went out of action.

He got his fingers deep into a man's throat. He booted the fellow in the stomach. He drove home, catching a forearm, throwing his weight, and heard bones snap as he applied a hold which tortured one enemy into a guttural cry, half curse, half groan.

Lamar was outnumbered and caught off guard. Thinking of Morden and the courier made him reckless, made him forget all but the chance that he might tear to shreds at least one of the beast-masqueraders before they finished him. He was done, or would be when they ganged up in the dripping gloom.

Then a light blazed into the struggle. He did not need his eyes, his big hands were taking their toll. He did not know why the steel claws of the mock-leopards had not slashed his throat, and he did not care. He cared only for the moment in which they had slipped, the racing seconds in which he could give Africa some African reprisal.

And then the light went out. For a split second, he knew that something had hit him.

His head became wood. His power left him. Lamar was open to whatever the marauders wished to do.



## IV

LAMAR was amazed that his throat had not been slashed. But he was not surprised that the shooting had not drawn any natives. Neither did he register astonishment on seeing that the warehouse had been more than half emptied. The choicest crude was all gone. Most of the standard grade remained.

Head aching and caked with blood, he staggered back to his quarters. "By damn," he swore, "this is not my rubber, it is not my plantation, but the *sacre salaud* who makes a fool of me, stealing the heap from under me, I will have his head, if it takes till judgment day!"

The steel claws had slashed his shirt and pants, and had raked his skin, yet it was plain that the Leopard Men had gone to considerable trouble to avoid killing him, in spite of his armed resistance. Bit by bit, it began to dawn on Lamar; if there were no manager, there would be no more rubber.

He began also to have a sound notion as to why the courier had been murdered, and why Morden had gone the same way. The former had perhaps had a message for Walraevens, naming the destination of the loot, and the origin of the thieves; and Morden, when he sobered up, and responded to the fellowship of another white man, might have exposed the answer he must finally have obtained.

Lamar reasoned, "I stay here and crack the whip, I have the trees tapped very deep to catch up on stock, and I am not killed. But I leave, and the woods are full of the dirty rats who are a disgrace to all decent leopards."

For a moment, he was puzzled as to his course; his rage first inclined him to showing that he, Napoleon Bonaparte Lamar, could get back to Quai de Maracq, and devil take all masquerading assassins. Then he made an about face. He would produce rubber, and by the Rod, he'd see that it wasn't stolen!

At sunrise, the porters lined up to greet him. They inquired solicitously after his health. He said, "Did you think I would catch cold? What is this? You want tobacco?"

"We heard what happened to the *bula matari*."

"Oho Now you see it didn't happen to me?"

"We see that. You are big *juju*, *bwana*."

With tons of rubber stolen from under him, he did not feel like so much *juju* after all, but he scowled fiercely, and roared, "It is time you understand that I am exactly that. Get busy and build a *zariba*. High, with close fitted stakes. No thorns, just stakes, so close that one cannot see through. And sharpen them at the top."

"*Ayawah, bwana*."

They set to work. They inclosed a space which took in every bit of clearing not occupied by the buildings and the quarters of the laborers. When this task was done, Lamar lined up the men who had followed him, despite homesickness, all the way from Tanganyika. "Now put on the red coats. I said you would be soldiers. This is the time!"

"We fight leopard men, *bwana*?"

"Does a fighting man ever care who he fights? FALL IN!"

They hadn't the foggiest idea what "fall in" meant, but he showed them. He held the Darvish sword at the carry; no hand smaller than his could have managed the unwieldy weapon, but Lamar had a fencer's wrist, by heritage, and from Creole tradition, and from many a bout at the military academy. And his handling of the ponderous sword impressed them. Its straight blade flared out at the end, and to a sharp point. The Darvish pattern had been copied from some Crusader's sword, captured in battle, centuries ago, and to this day, the fighting men of the Soudan keep to the tradition.

The blacks took turns with the rifle. Waiting for that turn made all the hardship of squad drill worthwhile; that, and wearing red tunics, and splendid sashes.

"When there are more guns, you shall have them," he promised. "Meanwhile, get spears, quietly, one at a time, in the villages. Soldiers make spears out of their guns, is that not right?"

Their eyes widened. But they had to agree.

"Very well! Since soldiers with guns still like to use them as spears, is it not better to have a spear in the first place?"

Silence. This was a radical argument.

"Sound off!" he roared. "You, Nzita! Am I right?"



"*Aywah, bwana*, that is really true."

"And the men who wore the red coats carried spears. Would men in coats like this be too poor to buy guns if they wanted them?"

"No, *bwana*."

Well, maybe some Lancer regiment in India had discarded the tunics. What finally sold them was that Lamar preferred the Darvish sword, instead of the rifle.

AFTER each day's drill, which took place while the laborers were tapping trees, Lamar made his porters take off their tunics. "And whoever says what is going on behind this fence, that man's head will be chopped off down to his ankles!"

As he spoke, he whisked the blade, so that it swished and whistled, despite its great weight. This pleased the blacks. They said, "When anyone asks, we will say that we make *juju* in the *zariba*."

When the sternwheeler came to make the pickup, Lamar started to tell the Belgian skipper that something was wrong with the plantation; but the captain shook his head. "*Tenez, monsieur!* You are too young and healthy for such excuses, or is it that you also swill too much brandy, and then neglect your work, and then tell wild yarns about Leopard Men.

First, there are no more of them left, second, they want blood and presents, not rubber, what would they do with rubber? And in the third place, it is absurd. Now come aboard and have an *aperitif*."

He chuckled. "Don't scowl that way! Listen, young fellow, I know this jungle; it does things to a man. I'm all for you. And so poor Morden tangled with a leopard. Nice fellow, Morden."

Lamar swallowed his wrath. He wondered what frantic protest the dead manager had finally penned, and why that should have brought him sudden doom, when he must have spoken often enough to the *Leonie's* skipper, even though without any effect?

When the boat churned her way downstream, Lamar said to himself, "Leopard Men, it makes no sense! But Morden finally did write sense, and then, *poof!* The throat is cut, just south of chin."

The porters, now all armed with spears, began to fancy themselves as fighting men. It was with some difficulty that Lamar

kept them from raiding the miserable villages of the jungle.

"A leopard man," Lamar told them at each drill, "is a man who can reach an arm's length. A spear can reach three times as far."

And since these fellows had come from territory where the murder cult did not exist, he saw hope of matching them against the lurking terror. He had long since given up any hope of getting information from the plantation hands, or from the boatmen who had brought him into the trap; natives of the Congo, they dummied up.

The big rollers shaped the sheets of rubber. Day by day, the stock piled up. And this time, Lamar resolved not to be caught napping.

In the medicine chest, there was a big bottle of iodine, which had suggested, during his *aperitif* hour with the skipper of the *Leonie*, asking for ammonia. "But, yes, surely I have some. May I ask why?"

Lamar had answered, "To make metal polish."

"Ha! Shipshape, eh? Then let me give you some ready mixed."

"A thousand thanks, *monsieur*, but it is my own formula. A secret. Let me give you some when I mix it, next trip."

So the skipper had humored Lamar.

Ammonia, and iodine. . . The combination could teach the jungle at least one trick.

"No more rubber goes into the warehouse," Lamar commanded. "Let no one go near the warehouse. From now on, I watch day and night, I am catching the thieves."

That made it certain that no laborer would venture within a kilometer of the river bank. They neither wished to see, nor hear any evil, no more than they cared to speak of it.

Lamar had his porters build him a shack near the pier. And he ordered them to stand by, each night, well away from the warehouse, yet ready. "If something happens to scare you," he told them, "then good! Run away, I will handle it myself. But if the leopard-devils act like men, then spear them."

He did not know how far he could depend on his porters. You can't build an African over in a couple months. They



had soldiers' discipline, thanks to red tunics and drill and pep talks; they'd fight any man, but whether they could overcome superstition was another question. "If I have the wrong answer," he assured himself, "then I do not worry, I do not live long enough for cracking my skull looking for the right one."

This had all the finality of his bout with calculus.

And once more, he was caught off guard.

He had expected a raid by water. From night after night of watching his senses had become sharper. The buzz and whisper of the jungle became many voices. As he sat back against a post, he separated the muttering and the rustling and the stealthy stirrings of Africa's night life. The oily black water had many tongues as it crept among the mangroves. The air was alive with insects, out to eat; and there were those who came to eat them.

Day or night, the jungle was divided between the eater and the eaten, but by dark, one felt this all the more. And as he sat there, skin itching, skin twitching from bites, from flying and buzzing and creeping things which he dared not slap lest he make a betraying sound, Lamar wondered whether he would eat leopard, or whether it would be the other way about.

The plantation laborers would have warned the leopard-men, to buy their own safety, that the roaring *bwana* was up to tricks. And their stroke might come silently.

And it did.

**N**O WHISPER of a paddle. No splash. Just a long black shape growing out of the blackness of water which had been cleared of mangroves.

There was no leopard scent. Yet there was a strange odor, rank and human; a whiff of it came in, clear and strong, over the reek of decaying vegetation and stagnant water.

These warnings registered simultaneously. Where the impressions must have come one after the other, it was the accumulation which struck him, and made him sit up.

Finally there was sound; guttural voices hardly higher than a whisper, and soft thumps and thuds, the muted creak and protest of the pier as the shapeless and

indefinite blackness became darker than the veiling gloom. Then a hint of yellowish light. It silhouetted men who came up the ladder to the dock.

They wore pants, soft soled shoes, and dungaree jackets; that was clear from the silhouettes. One pointed toward Lamar's concealed shelter. Only then did he see the two leopard shapes, and catch the momentary gleam of copper-golden fur: men, moving stealthily, neither crouched nor yet upright.

All told, at least twenty raiders. The pair of beast-men would be armed with steel claws, but no telling what weapons the others would have.

He could have twitched the signal wire to warn his porters, but he hesitated. Since the bulk of the intruders were not claw-equipped, they must have pistols. That they wore jumpers and pants convinced him they were white men, with faces and hands blackened; and they'd have white men's weapons. He could not drag his red coated porters into such a trap.

He hefted his pistol, and waited. Once more, they wanted to slug him, overpower him, rather than kill him.

He sniffed the breeze again. There was the scent of lubricating oil, and the acrid fumes of batteries; air foul enough to be noticeable above the swamp decay could come from no boat other than a submarine. Beyond doubt it had come upstream submerged, then made a loop in the big bend, three miles inland, to drift down, with the least possible use of the silent electric motors.

Rubber: priceless rubber for Hitler!

And now Lamar knew what Morden had learned, and why Morden had died. As long as a man babbled of Leopard Men, you laughed him off. But when he sent a message telling of U-boats creeping upstream to steal rubber, to steal all that could be stolen without taking so much that something other than a manager's inefficiency would be indicated, that was something else.

A raid by savages, all right: members of a murder cult more modern and efficient than anything Africa's jungle had ever spawned! And now Lamar hoped that his men would stand clear, they couldn't buck a pistol armed U-boat crew.

So he waited for the instant to open up



with his Luger, hose the enemy, and then bolt for whatever cover he could find.

Ignoring the warehouse, they were heading for him.

Then came a crackling and a blasting. The paved yard twinkled with spurts of fire.

## V

THERE were yells, and not in leopard talk. Every time a raider stepped on a piece of paper saturated with ammonia and iodine, the tricky mixture detonated with an ear-tearing crash; and the papers began to blaze. The old time chemistry laboratory gag—harmless enough, but dismaying, even on a small scale. And this time, Lamar had worked on a scale unheard of in school days.

The raiders, bewildered, blazed away as they ducked for cover against what they mistook, for some seconds, for a fusilade. And Lamar's Luger, chiming into the confusion, added a deadly realism.

At the alarm, the rest of the crew came up on the run. Officers shouted commands. Though there had been a surprise, there was no panic, despite Lamar's deadly work with a pistol, cutting down men silhouetted by blazing paper.

Slugs zinged about him as he bolted. He had another clip, but his shelter was no place for shooting it out. He could not understand a word of the shouted commands, but he knew that the Nazis meant business. Now that they had read the signs, and despite the surprise, had interpreted them, they knew that there was little opposition. And though while their maneuvering about for a clean-up touched off other scattered pieces of detonating paper, they were now only annoyed, irritated, resolved to nail the daring idiot who had guessed the secret.

There had to be at least one man with his throat slashed as by the Leopard Cult; and that man had to be the manager. Flashlights blazed. Brush crashed right on Lamar's heels as he plunged through thorny vines. The enemy's quick sizing up of the situation had ended in his retreat being cut off. Unless he could win that race through entangling vines and thorn armed creepers, he'd have no chance of playing hide and seek in the broad expanse

of the cultivated grove of rubber trees.

The sound of his flight betrayed him. The dense growth deflected bullets, but with enough slugs smacking about, a few would finally connect. He could not fire back. The vines which partially protected him did the same for the pursuers, and they had twenty times the ammunition he had.

Someone shouted in thickly accented French, "Surrender! We want you for questioning. We will not shoot you."

Like hell they wouldn't! They wanted him for a throat-slashing.

"Come and get me!" he yelled.

Pistols rattled. Lamar groaned. He was now knee deep in water, and he fell forward with a splash, and lay there, almost submerged. He heard their cross fire of opinions, but they had quit talking French, so he could only guess that they were debating whether he was actually knocked out, or just playing dead.

He had purposely planted that doubt. Pistol still dry, he forced himself to wriggle, slowly, silently, through the slime and muck. He had worked his way, he now realized, toward the river, and if neither Nazis nor snakes got him, he might find concealment among the mangrove roots, which made a tangle high above the water.

Though the enemy moved cautiously, they made better progress than Lamar did. They were fanning out to envelop him. This at times delayed them, but since he dared move only under cover of their louder stumblings, he was being pocketed.

Jungle men would already have bagged him. These U-boat men were out of their element; so was Lamar, yet he had somewhat the advantage. And if they finally did corner him, a submarine would go home short handed—

Then Lamar heard the blasting of a rifle; the whiplash whack of a Mauser, and the whine of a ricochet. Another shot, and another. Someone was working the bolt at a brisk pace. Lamar's pursuers yelled and began to retreat. With hell popping between them and their boat, they had reason to worry!

LAMAR turned after them. Their own noise kept them from hearing him. And suddenly he understood: though it was not until, right on the heels of his



enemies, his comprehension became complete.

A Mauser hosed the clearing. And from the inland side, a platoon of black men in scarlet coats were breaking cover. Blazing javelins whisked from the gloom on three sides.

In that wavering light, nothing was plain except the red coats, and cold glint of spear heads; there was no time to note that this was not the steel of bayonets. And then, there was Lamar in the rear, with a fresh clip in his Luger.

The Nazis had for years claimed that the Luger was the world's best pistol: and Lamar came close to justifying their boast. That deadly popping from the rear, and that charging line of men in uniform was just too much.

Uniforms, to these invaders, meant regular army; an officer to accept surrender; and surrender looked grand to the survivors. So Lamar, pistol in hand, said to the enemy as they reached for the African stars, "*Messieurs*, I am Napoleon Bonaparte Lamar, commanding Seventeenth Dismounted African Cavalry. I should demand reprisals against partisans—"

"*Monsieur*," the U-boat commander said, "we are not partisans. We are in fatigue uniform. For a legal act of war, raiding Belgian territory."

The man was tight faced, desperate, though his voice did not shake. Still and all, facing uniformed savages was not a pleasant prospect. Nor did Lamar sound reassuring when he retorted, "*Monsieur*, those two men wearing leopard skins and steel claws are certainly not in any recognized uniform of the Third Reich, though I confess it is very appropriate. I, also wearing fatigue clothes, was very nearly assassinated by your leopard men."

The Nazi commander talked fast and urgently as his French permitted: "Sir, you were not assassinated. Merely intimidated."

Lamar scowled savagely, and bellowed, "Sir, you are a liar! An officer of the Fighting French is never intimidated! If you were not a prisoner, I would challenge you! True, I was not murdered, but *Monsieur* Morden, the manager, and his courier—they were."

Then he saw that the two leopard men

had been pinned to the ground with spears. He chuckled amiably. "*Monsieur*, I shall consider that my men have already settled the matter. Those two assassins have been properly lanced through the back. As for the rest of you—"

LAMAR said to his red-coated man, "Odd numbers fall out! Pick up the guns these sons dropped!"

The command was not from any drill regulations ever printed, but after counting off, ones and threes fell out and obeyed. Then, to the Nazi: "Luckily for you, there is discipline, or you would all have spears through your bellies, where you need them. Now, answer me one question."

"Very well, sir."

"This is what I ask: how did those scoundrels in cat-skins know what went on here, and what explanation have you for the killing of Morden and the courier? Were they hiding in the jungle, or based on your U-boat? Speak quickly and to the point. My men need spear practice, and if you wish to protest through the Red Cross, very well."

The captain eagerly explained.

"We kept in touch with natives. They were afraid. So while we picked up rubber elsewhere, our—ah—anthropologists landed. They exceeded their authority—they were told only to—ah—intimidate *Monsieur* Morden, see that he sent no message. He guessed—he spied—like yourself—we could not have our secret exposed. Now, what do you propose to do with us?"

Lamar answered, "For the duration, you tap rubber trees. If the war lasts long enough, which happily it will not, you will perhaps collect enough rubber to make up for part of what you stole. We have a stockade waiting for you."

So he marched them to the enclosure where he had drilled his red coated troops. And since rubber was so important, he would not bother to prove himself either American or French, nor march his following to French territory. Not when there was rubber to collect, and prisoners to herd.

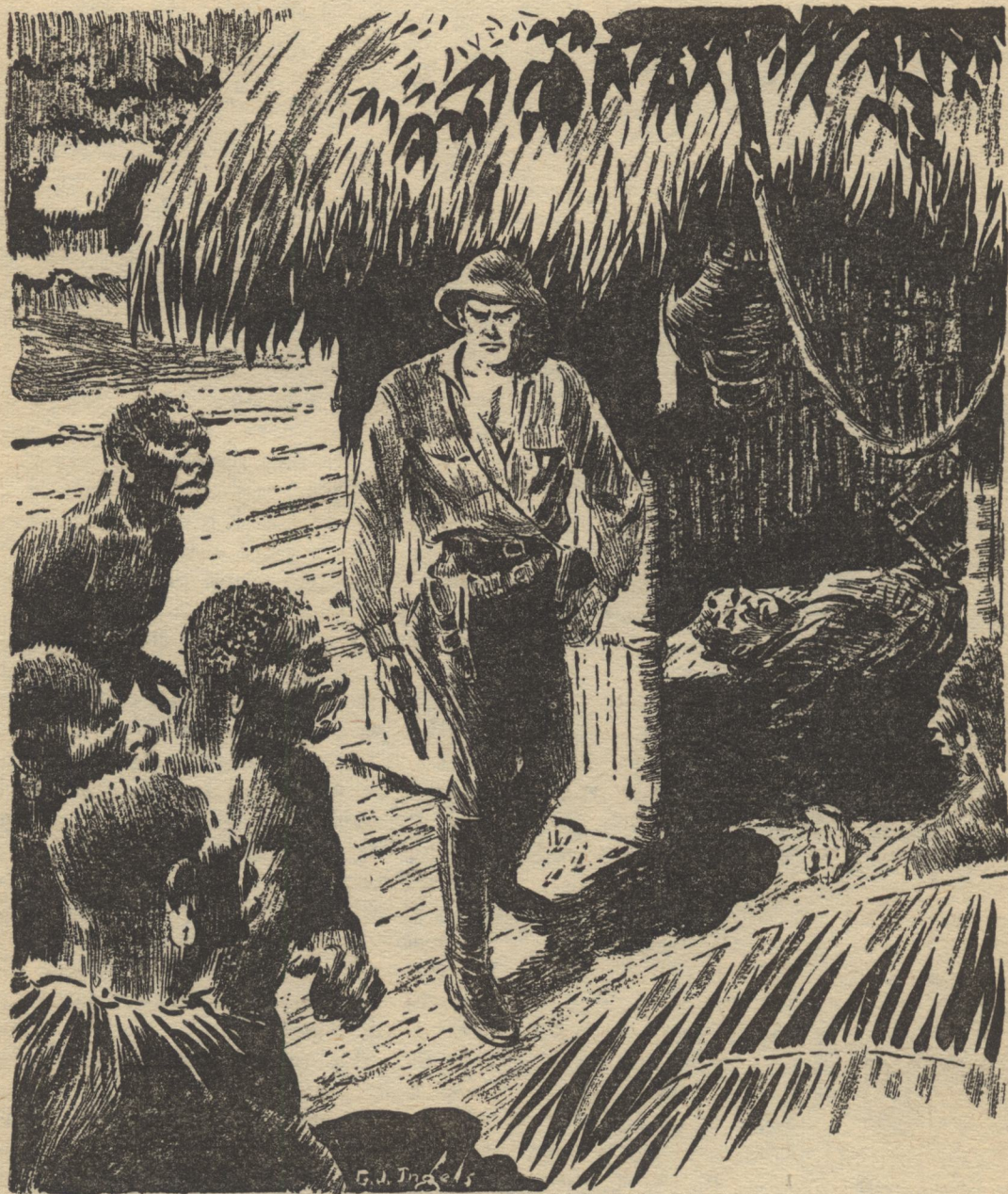
Napoleon Bonaparte Lamar was very pleased with himself. Africa wasn't so bad—after all!



# THE FLAMING GOD

By FRANCIS GERARD

It was Sanders' task to stop a jungle revolt  
—and to capture a murderous god whose  
body glowed with a silver flame.



*A continuation of the famous Edgar Wallace Character, "Sanders of the River"*

IT WAS at tiffin one broiling day when the Isisi palms across the parade-ground from the Residency danced and shimmered in the heat that Bones

made his first appearance for three days.

Francis Augustus Tibbetts had been down with a bout of fever, and he came to the lunch-table, the continued gravity



of his condition publicized by the walking-stick upon which he leaned languidly.

"Hello, Bones. How are you feeling?" asked Sanders kindly.

Bones sank down into his chair, propped his stick at his side with all the care of a cripple of his crutches and, leaning his forehead on his hand, said in a low voice, "Thank you, dear old Excellency, as well as could jolly well be expected."

"You'd better take things easy for a day or so," suggested Hamilton from across the table.

Bones gave a hollow laugh, after which he bowed in Sanders' direction.

"Pray forgive me, sir and respected superior, but comin' from Ham, that's rich. Never let it be said," he went on.

"I'm afraid it will be, all the same," muttered Hamilton.

"Never let it be said," continued Bones loudly in a voice from which all weakness had disappeared, "that I'm one of those jolly old miseries who harp upon their own shockin' old ailments. But really, Ham, I ask you."

"You ask me what, Bones?"

Bones assumed his most annoying expression with his eyes closed. "Seein' that it was you who was in a large measure, I repeat a jolly old large measure, responsible for my illness, I'm surprised."

"Go easy, Bones," said Hamilton. "How the dickens could I help your going down with fever?"

"Anyone," replied Bones, "who had any decent feelin' would have known that poor old Bones was feelin' ill when we were workin' on the jolly old company accounts."

"You always feel ill when we work on the company accounts," Hamilton pointed out.

Bones turned to Sanders and spread out his hands. "There was I, dear old Excellency, shakin' like a poor old jelly on a plate. Why, I could hardly write."

"You certainly couldn't expect me to diagnose anything from that," Hamilton chipped in. "You can't write at any time."

"If you'd had a spark of decent feelin', Ham, instead of bein' a jolly old military marmoset. . . ."

"Are you trying to make a monkey out of me?" said Hamilton. "The word is martinet."

At this Sanders cut in. "Well, it's quite evident, Bones, that you'd better take things easy for a few days. I'm going up to the Isisi to settle that palaver of the flogged headman. You'd better come with me, Hamilton, and we'll leave Bones in charge here. Ah and, by the way, Bones, I've sent for the Queen of the Talafa. You'll have to deal with her."

"Have no fear, sir. Everythin' will be in my jolly old hands."

"That's what the Commissioner's afraid of," Hamilton pointed out.

Before going aboard the *Zaire* Sanders had Bones in his office and gave him detailed instructions as to what he was to say to the Queen of the Builder People.

**I**N THINKING of the People of the River dwelling in the territories over which Mr. Commissioner Sanders had been appointed by a wise Government, you must not imagine them to be just a vast conglomeration of black folk all as similar as mites in a cheese. Sanders administered the law, controlling something over two million souls and they were divided into little tribes, bigger tribes and very big tribes, the latter approximating nations. They were totally dissimilar, and shared no common cause other than that of resentment at the payment of taxes to Sandi. Thus the Akasava were a warlike people and the Ochori, at least until the coming of Bosambo, a tribe of cowards. The N'Gombi hated the Isisi, and the Isisi always kept two fighting regiments along their side of the little river which divided their territory from that of the powerful Akasava. Sandwiched in between and scattered about the fringes of these four tribes were innumerable little peoples, some related by blood to the bigger tribes, others proud in their individuality and isolation. Also the Peoples of the River were divided in their methods of commerce, industry and agriculture. Thus the Ochori were great builders of canoes, so that it was a proverb on the river that when an Ochori dug-out foundered the sun would set at mid-day. The N'Gombi were skillful spearmen of fish and famous workers in iron, and no hunter worth the name in any of the tribes used anything but a N'Gombi spear. Each people thus had their own line in which they



were paramount, and the matter of the building of huts was the special pride and mystery of the Talafa.

In the ordinary way the huts of a village are built by the men and thatched by the women, but when a chief wished to house himself in a manner befitting his dignity, he hastily counted his brass rods and bags of salt and then summoned the Queen of the Talafa to a palaver.

THE TALAFA provided Sanders with a constant problem, for they were a nomadic people, having no fixed home and living in their canoes, in which they travelled from one village to another practicing their mystery of the building of huts such as no other people could build. It was thus impossible to draw hut-tax from them, since they did not own any settled property. They were the gypsies of the territories, and their home was wherever they happened to be working at the time. Numbering only about five hundred in all, they were much lighter in color than the other Peoples of the River and possessed straight noses and straight hair. Delving into what history and legend he could find about them, Sanders had come to the conclusion that they were of Arab stock originally, and, indeed, their art in building was so superior to anything of its kind throughout the territories that it seemed as if it must have derived from somewhere beyond the borders.

They were ruled by their queen, daughter of their late chief, and hereditary leading architect. This woman, D'Lini-Talafa—the chief always combined his own with the tribal name—was a squat, unlovely person, as strong as a man and the most cunning builder of all her people. Whenever they worked upon the erection of some chief's hut, no person other than themselves was permitted to watch, lest their mysteries be fathomed and they left without a means of livelihood. The ordinary native huts are built of saplings and woven willow with clay worked into this foundation, the whole covered by an immense thatched roof of dried reeds, but the Talafa built huts with wonderful walls of wood, covering the outside with clay, it is true, but the inside walls were smooth as the haft of a spear and most fascinating to touch.

These Builder People had two very queer customs. The first was that no man nor woman of the Talafa, with the exception of the queen who conducted the business of the tribe and who knew every tongue of the river, ever spoke a word to an outsider. They had their own language, and not even Sanders, who could speak thirty-four of the river dialects, could understand it, and they spoke only among themselves, never replying to any question put to them by N'Gombi, Isisi or Akasava. Whether they really did not understand the other tongues or not Sanders had never made out, but he suspected that it was a tribal law made to ensure the keeping of their building secrets.

The other rigid rule of conduct of the Talafa was that it was forbidden to them, under threat of expulsion from the tribe, to take human life.

The greater part of the routine of Sanders' life was made up of the collection of taxes from a people who regarded him and his Government in this respect as a gang of thieves, wherein it may be seen that the West African savage and the supposedly civilized product of a broker's office in the City hold some views in common. The standard form of taxation throughout the territories was by means of a hut-tax, but this could not be applied to the Talafa People. A small people numerically, they were actually rich, according to native standards, and the problem of their just taxation was one which Sanders had not hitherto solved. It was for a discussion of this point that he had summoned D'Lini-Talafa to a palaver, to which she was now coming, sitting in the stern of her big dug-out canoe with six strong paddlers before her and spitting accurately and contemplatively into the middle of the little swirls of water made by the paddle-blades.

"I SEE YOU, D'Lini," said Bones from his deskchair on the verandah of the Residency.

He eyed the figure of the queen squatting on the floor before him with some wonder, for even in a land of brutal ugliness D'Lini-Talafa was phenomenal with her tremendous ape-like arms and man's shoulders.

The queen scratched herself inelegantly



under the armpit and spoke, using the Bomongo tongue.

"I see you, Tibbetti, and behold my heart leaps inside me at your presence, for I had thought to see the cruel face of Sandi and in its place is the pretty face of your lordship."

Bones smirked. "Carry on, old girl," he muttered, and then in Bomongo, "Continue, D'Lini. But you did not come to speak of my pretty face, but of the payment of taxes to my lord Sandi."

The woman shook her head in assent. "Tibbetti, you are young and clean and without guile and splendid to see, even though you be the son of Sandi, and because you are without trickery and wickedness you go straight to the heart of the matter, like a bee which has its little legs covered with honey."

The simile was too much for the Houssa orderly standing rigidly to attention at Bones' side, and Bones glared at him as a strange strangled noise came through the man's nose.

"If I am a bee, D'Lini," nodded Bones, "then remember that I have that which can hurt, and let us be done with pretty talk, for though I am but the son of Sandi, yet I sit here in this place holding in my hands"—and he held out his two hands, palms upward—"all the power which is his to his wisdom. Now, D'Lini, all men in this land pay taxes to my lord Sandi for his kindnesses to them. Is that not the truth?"

Once more the queen shook her head to signify her agreement and Bones continued, "All men save the Talafa. Now is it just, D'Lini, that your people should go free of taxation when others contribute, for if you were attacked would not Sandi come with his strong young soldiers to your aid just as he would to Isisi or N'Gombi or Akasava? And did not Sandi make the chief of the northern Akasava pay you the thousand brass rods he owed for his great hut which you had builded and of which he would have cheated you?"

"Tibbetti," replied the queen, "all this is true, yet all other men who pay tax to Sandi live alike. We of the Talafa are alone in our splendour, for we live in our fine canoes, that being our mystery since the time when the world was young. All others, save we of the Talafa, pay hut-tax, but we have no huts. If Sandi can resolve

how we shall pay hut-tax when we have no huts, he is a great and clever devil."

Bones smiled behind his hand at the conclusion of the queen's speech and then nodded.

"So, indeed, I think, queen," he said. "For behold this is the word of Sandi, that for each hut that you build you shall pay him a certain part of the price, and in this way all will be satisfied."

"O ko!" exclaimed the queen in a tone which clearly showed that she was not satisfied. "O ko! Now I see indeed that Sandi is cruel and you, Tibbetti, whom I thought to be young and pure and without unkindness, are indeed his son. Now I tell you, Tibbetti, my people will grumble and talk harshly of this."

"Bid them come and talk harshly to me, D'Lini," smiled Bones, and the queen spat out into the dust.

"Well you know, Tibbetti, that this they cannot do, for it is our proud way that no man of my people may speak beyond the tribe save through me who am the queen."

She swore luridly.

"God bless my jolly old soul!" gasped Bones. "Oh, you naughty old lady! The palaver is finished," he added in Bomongo, and mopped his forehead with a violently-colored handkerchief.

THERE had been trouble in the Isisi country. A certain man, M'Boru, hitherto a fisherman of no consequence, had suddenly arisen and proved himself to be a great arguer of arguments. He first distinguished himself by confronting the chief of his village and telling him to his face that he had no authority over his fellows and that all men were equal. The scandalized chief promptly gave him a beating and sent him to his hut, where he lay in the doorway exhibiting the weals on a certain humble portion of his anatomy, and talked. Now, in all lands and climes there is born occasionally a man with a silver tongue and the gift of stirring words. M'Boru's words stirred his audience to some consequence, and that night the chief of the village lay in his hut with a sore back from the flogging his rebellious people had give him and watched through a window a carrier-pigeon circling high into the air.

Upon receipt of the message, Sanders



had read what the chief had written him, cursed the argumentative fisherman and gone up in the *Zaire* to the Isisi.

He went ashore and Abiboo had four Houssas with fixed bayonets at his back. But, though the chief was there to greet him leaning upon a stick—for the beating had been a severe one—no other villager appeared to greet him.

"I see you, Sandi," quavered the chief, who was an old man, "any my heart is sad at your coming, for behold I have put shame upon the office which your lordship gave me and have failed to keep my people from naughtiness."

"All men may fail once," said Sanders kindly, and laid a hand on the shaking shoulder.

"I am your man, Sandi," quavered the other, "for you do that which is unexpected. I had thought you would be harsh and wicked with me, and lo, you are gentle and forgiving like a mother."

Sanders walked into the village between the two straight lines of huts, and no man raised a hand in salute and no woman raised her eyes from her cooking-pots as he passed. It was as if he had not been there at all.

"O man," Sanders called, addressing an oiled hunter who was passing, "are you lost to all sense of shame that you do not see your master when he stands before you?"

"No master, white man," replied the hunter insolently, "for we are all equals."

"Is the grasshopper the equal of the elephant?" asked Sanders quietly, and at that moment his stick caught the man shrewdly across the back.

He saw the man's right hand flash to the spears behind his shield and then the hunter stood very still, his eyes staring, his lips rolled back in terror from the gums, for the barrel of the Commissioner's automatic was prodding his satiny stomach.

"I think, O man," said Sanders gently, "that you will be sorry."

"Lord," said the hunter humbly, "I am sorry already."

SANDERS made his way to the big palaver hut which stood at one end of the village on a slight eminence, and here, when the people were assembled, he caused M'Boru to be brought before him.

"They tell me, M'Boru, that you are a great arguer," he began.

"That is so, white man," nodded the other.

Sanders craned his head forward and placed one hand behind his ear. "Do my ears play me tricks, M'Boru, or did I hear a word that fills my belly with fire? It seems to me that I heard a certain word, and when I hear it my right arm goes mad," and the light walking-cane between his fingers quivered significantly.

"Sandi," replied M'Boru sullenly, "your ears played you false."

"Lord," prompted Sanders silkily.

"Lord," said the other.

The explanation of M'Boru's strange behaviour originated, the Commissioner learnt, from a certain Mr. Griggs, a trader in cheap cloth who had made his way into the territories unknown to the authorities. When Sanders caught up with him he found that Gripps' bales of cloth concealed things less innocent, being rolled around numerous square-faced bottles containing a vile synthetic gin.

"Have you a permit?" Sanders had asked him.

"Now look here, Sanders," the other had blustered.

"I am looking," came the reply, "and what I see I don't like. I'm confiscating your dunnage and sending you out of the territories."

"You can't do that," roared the man.

"Can't I? Will you go or be kicked?"

Mr. Griggs went—hurriedly.

So had ended the episode of Mr. Griggs—at least as far as the gin was concerned—but he left behind him an even more dangerous spirit than that pale liquid which sends men mad and causes them to do foolish things, such as carrying their spears to a killing. Mr. Griggs had first seen the light in Shadwell: two kinds, the light of day and the light of Communism, and he had occupied his time in between his illicit trading with his even more illicit propaganda. M'Boru had proved an avid listener and, backed by the assurance of Mr. Griggs that a most powerful devil called the Third International would afford him protection, had waded in and become a very odd disciple of Karl Marx.

Finding that the man seemed to be quite genuine in his belief, Sanders carried him



off to the *Zaire* and talked to him that night.

"This mystery of equality, M'Boru," said the Commissioner, "is one too great for you to understand. Tell me, is it in your mind that you are as great a one as I?"

M'Boru hesitated, but finally nodded, which meant that he did not think so, for the People of the River shake their heads for an affirmative and nod for a negative.

"Then know this, M'Boru, that in this world men are not equal, for if you are below me in status, behold I serve greater ones and am humble before them, and in this you shall find comfort."

"Lord," said M'Boru with unconscious humor, "it is a beautiful and comforting thought."

"Give this man food," said the Commissioner to Abiboo when their conversation was ended.

Abiboo gave him more than food, though of this he was unconscious, for a tin of magic paint was unaccountably missing when M'Boru went ashore.

This magic paint was phosphorescent, and Sanders had used it along the edge of the *Zaire's* decks where the rails did not run, so that in the darkness a man would not step overboard, for the river seethed with crocodiles and, once in the water, there was little hope.

THE Commissioner went down the river and back to the Residency in the false belief that there would be no further trouble with M'Boru of the Isisi. But M'Boru, the fisherman, had tasted the heady wine of power. For a time, only too brief, thanks to the carrier-pigeon service, he had found himself a leader among his fellows, and honored accordingly. The adulation he had received had been sweet and the fine imposed on him by the Commissioner bitter. Even worse was his treatment by his fellows, for in his abasement they jeered at him, saying that his mouth was filled with foolish words and that what he had taught was madness, for had not Sandi proved that all men were *not* equal?

On Sanders' returns to the Residency, Bones reported his palaver with the Queen of the Talafa, and the Commissioner nodded.

"Well, that's that," he said.

But he was wrong. That was not that at all, for it was not long before he discovered that D'Lini-Talafa was making a deal with her customers so that princely huts were being erected for as little as fifty brass rods, which is impossible. Recalling certain struggles with Schedule D and his conscience in the matter of his own Income Tax, he grinned sympathetically, but decided that such a practice would have to be nipped in the bud.

Hamilton took the *Zaire* and went up to the edge of the N'Gombi country, where he found a headman sitting with pride before a splendid new hut which was quite obviously the work of the Talafa.

"I see you, Militini," he said politely.

"And I see your fine new hut, N'Ropo," replied the Houssa captain significantly. "You must be a rich man to build so splendid a residence."

"Nay, lord, for the Queen of the Talafa, who has loving thoughts toward me, built this hut for very little."

"So she told you to say," prompted Hamilton.

"So she told me to say, Militini," nodded the man, and then placed his knuckles to his teeth in sudden horror at his admission.

"I think, N'Ropo," said Hamilton, his eyes narrowing, "that when last Sandi visited your village he set up a whipping-post that all evil men might be reminded of what comes to them when they break his law. Tell me, N'Ropo, did Sandi do this?"

"Lord," said the headman, shuffling his big feet in the dust, "Sandi did this thing."

"Now it enters my mind," went on Hamilton, staring blandly at the other, "that it would be a shame in the sight of men if the first to suffer upon it were the headman of this village."

"Lord," quavered the other, "it is even as you say."

"So, N'Ropo, you shall tell me with a straight tongue how many brass rods were paid to the Talafa for your hut."

Hamilton went back to the *Zaire* and proceeded to the Akasava village, where Queen D'Lini and her people were at work. The little stern-wheeler went downstream with a hundred and fifty fine brass rods in the store-cabin which had not been there on her up-river journey.



IT WAS about this time that M'Boru began to have a headache which did not leave him night or day. He used the river method to counteract it, and bound a wire tightly about his head, but this seemed to bring him no relief, and during the long sleepless hours of the night he had strange visions which culminated in the coming of the Seven Goats.

One night he rose from his bed and, taking a certain magic pot from the corner of the hut where he had concealed it, crept out and went padding on silent feet down the sleeping village. He slipped like a ghost into the hut of Ola, who was a foolish one, and here he did certain things. Then he crept out and went back to the doorway of his own hut and, picking up a large stone, threw it so that it fell against the doorpost beyond which Ola and his wife lay sleeping.

The woman awoke and turned to her sleeping husband to rouse him, and then her piercing shrieks woke the village and they came to see what caused the outcry. Ola was mystified as to why his wife backed away from him, but when he came to the door of his hut all the village could see in the middle of his forehead a round devil-mark which shone in the darkness, and they knew that he was a man apart.

At intervals during the ensuing weeks five other men in the village were marked in a similar way, and Sanders heard reports through his spies of the happenings and wondered what they could mean.

One night when darkness had fallen Ola was coming up the river path to the village, having beached his canoe, when a man stepped out in front of him and he fell flat on his face in fear, for the newcomer had three round devil-marks upon his face, and they shone with magic fire in the darkness.

"Know, O man," said M'Boru, "that you were marked for me and I am the Great Goat whom you shall serve."

"Lord Goat," quavered Ola, "it shall be as you say."

"Go now to your hut," commanded M'Boru, "but speak of this to no man, nor to the woman your wife, lest by my ju-ju you be shrivelled to the size of a monkey and walk with fishes' fins upon your feet."

"Lord Goat, I will be silent."

In like manner did M'Boru recruit his

other followers, and before the moon was out there had sprung up one of those queer little secret societies in which the territories abounded and which the soul of Sanders loathed.

AT THIS time the Builder People under their queen were working on the erection of a splendid hut for a small Akasava headman, the site of which was not far from where M'Boru had built himself a new hut.

M'Boru's new home was away from the village, and stood with its back to the Swamp of Mists, a notorious breeding-ground of devils and the home of snakes and crocodiles and leeches as big as a man's fist.

Now the story of Queen D'Lini-Talafa's quarrel with Sandi over the matter of taxation had gone up and down the river, and all men knew that the Talafa smarted with resentment at Sandi's cruelty.

To the queen came M'Boru one night, paddling in his canoe across the river to where she and her people were working. "Queen, I see you," he said, and, upon being made welcome, went on, "Now you shall build me certain cunning parts to my house, and they shall be made in such and such a manner and finished in your own magic way, and this you shall do by night so that no man may know and Sandi go empty of his tax. Behold, I will pay you fifty bags of salt this night, and thereafter you shall do the work in secret, telling no man."

D'Lini-Talafa shook her head in assent. "This is a good palaver," she said, "and one which fills my stomach with pleasure. Now it seems to me that it would be better if I alone made these parts to your hut such as you desire, and then no man indeed, other than yourself, will know what has been done."

M'Boru assented eagerly, and the following night the woman's canoe came silently to the Isisi bank and she stepped out, carrying such tools as were necessary to her craft. For the space of one week she spent the hours between dusk and sunrise laboring on the alterations which M'Boru desired.

On the eighth night the woman threw down her tools and said, "M'Boru, my work is finished."



"So indeed I think," nodded the man, and drove his stabbing-spear through her body from front to back.

"Thus it is better," he said complacently as he watched the thrashing limbs move slower and finally lie still, "for now indeed are you silent as the rest of your people."

Hastily he cleansed his spear and then, hoisting the body onto his strong shoulders, bore it swiftly into the depths of the Swamp of Mists by a path which he had learnt long ago when fishing for water-snakes, a great delicacy among the Isisi.

On his return to his hut he threw the woman's tools far out into the river, where they sank, leaving no trace.

He forgot the queen's canoe.

WHEN Sanders walked down the steps of the Residency two days later he found Ahmet, the chief of his spies, patiently squatting on his haunches in the broiling sun.

"In the name of God, peace be with you," he said to the man, who, as a Houssa, was a true Mahometan.

"In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Seeing, greeting to you, Sandi. I have news. There is a killing palaver in the Isisi. Men have been speared as they slept and others are fearful, but will say nothing. One Matakoto, who was a rich man, now has no more than fifty brass rods in his house. He has paid away his riches, but what for, lord, only Allah may tell."

"Allah and Ahmet," suggested Sanders.

The Houssa shrugged. "If my lord desires me to guess, I would say that Matakoto has paid that he might live."

"So I think," nodded the Commissioner.

"And, lord, there is other news. The queen, D'Lini-Talafa, of the Builder People is seen no more. This I learnt from a man of your lordship's who sits on the N'Gombi border. The Talafa, who worked on a hut for O'Febi of the Akasava, crossed the river at dawn to the Isisi in search of their queen."

"Why to the Isisi?"

"Because, lord, her great canoe was found beached near the hut of one M'Boru of the Isisi."

"M'Boru!" echoed Sanders, pricking up his ears. "But he dwells in the village."

"Lord, now he dwells apart, for he is a proud man and has become rich, going

with twenty brass rings upon each leg, and his hair is dressed with yellow clay in a manner wonderful to see."

"I think I will visit this M'Boru," said Sanders.

"Lord, his heart will be happy," observed Ahmet conventionally.

"I doubt it," said the Commissioner and, handing over everything to Hamilton, took Bones and twenty men and went aboard the *Zaire*.

A REIGN of terror held sway in the southern Isisi. Men who were rich became suddenly poor, but they lived. Others who were rich retained their riches—and they were found in their huts speared. The fear occasioned by these mysterious killings was heightened by the fact that the bodies were found with a little circular devil-mark upon them, and this shone with a terrifying light in the darkness. It was the hour of the Seven Goats.

There were minor mysteries, such as the sudden affluence of Ola of the Isisi, whom all men knew to be a foolish one, for he had taken to going on sudden and unaccountable journeys, returning with many brass rods and bags of salt got, so he said, in trading. But what this trading was he did not say, since, as he observed quite truly, if he revealed the source of his income all men might do likewise.

When the *Zaire* reached the fringe of the Isisi country it was surrounded by a fleet of nearly four hundred canoes, and these were painted green and blue after the manner of the Talafa.

The headman who had acted as a kind of foreman under the queen clambered aboard from the dug-out and came before Sanders.

"Sandi," he said, using the sonorous Bomongo tongue which is the lingua franca of all the Peoples of the River, "shame is come upon us and I am forced to put aside our proud way and speak to your lordship, for behold evil is befallen us, and our queen, who held the secrets of our magic work, is gone and none knows whither."

"This is a bad palaver," nodded the Commissioner, "and I come now to enquire into the vanishing of D'Lini-Talafa. Tell your people to rest assured that if she lives she will be found, and if she no longer lives, she will be avenged."



"Lord," said the headman, "we found her lovely boat near the new hut of M'Boru, yet when we questioned him he spake us evil words and we ran away, for we were afraid, for he is a Great One."

"Since when have fishermen walked as chiefs?" asked the Commissioner, but the headman would not say anything more, and Sanders went on up the river.

From the bridge of the *Zaire* as it rounded the bend of a promotory he could see through his binoculars the figure of M'Boru sitting outside his hut. As the nose of the stern-wheeler came into sight the man sprang to his feet and vanished inside the big square hut which he had built and which the Queen of the Talafa had altered for him.

Sanders kept his glasses glued upon the spot and saw that there was no other way out and, further, that the back of the hut stood actually on the little shelving edge of the swamp.

When he went ashore he knew that M'Boru had not passed out through the door. He paused outside and called, "M'Boru, come to me, for if I have to come to you, you will be sorry."

There was no reply, and after a time Sanders sent Abiboo with two Houssas in to fetch him out. They returned empty-handed and reported that the hut was unoccupied.

"Search again, Abiboo, for through my glasses which break distance I saw M'Boru go in."

"Lord," said Abiboo simply, "your devil glasses must have looked the wrong way, for there is no living thing in M'Boru's hut."

Sanders went in to satisfy himself. He frowned. He was certain the man had not come out. He went all around the walls tapping and knocking to look for a second door, but the walls were solid. There was no other way out.

"Lord Sandi," said the headman of the Talafa at his elbow, "this man M'Boru is a witch, and all your fine soldiers and the little guns that go ha-ha-ha shall not trap him, but we of the Builder People have a magic unknown to him."

Back on the *Zaire*, Sanders acquainted Bones with the fact of M'Boru's extraordinary disappearance. Lieutenant Tibbetts screwed his monocle into his eye and

stared owlishly at his superior. He then saluted twice and said, "Are you tellin' me, dear old Excellency, that jolly old M'Boru went into his hut and didn't come out again and you went in and the wicked old cove wasn't there?" He shook his head and clicked two or three times. "Don't think I'm suggestin' that your jolly old eyes are not what they used to be, but I ask you, sir. Now I believe he was there all the time up in the thatch over your respected old head. Now this is my theory . . ."

"Oh, Bones, must you?" and Bones shut up.

SANDERS went on through the Isisi, leaving word with the headman at the riverside village that he was to hold M'Boru when he saw him and keep him against the Commissioner's return.

"My young men will not like to hold this Great Goat," replied the chief candidly.

"Yet if they do not hold him, chief," replied Sanders acidly, "be very sure I will hold them."

"Lord, I think they will hold him."

Sanders discovered that the evil was widespread, and divided up his little force, sending Bones with Corporal Ali and three men to tackle the forest villages to the north, while he himself made a tour of the bush and found, as he suspected, that there was an organized system of blackmail in existence. Men paid or they died. It was as simple as that. He was satisfied in his own mind that M'Boru was at the bottom of it, and in one village he was lucky enough to arrive the morning after a man had been mysteriously speared and marked. Sanders went into the hut to see the body and ordered a blanket to be hung over the door so that the interior was plunged into darkness. He saw the devil-mark and called Abiboo to him.

"When the man M'Boru came to my fine ship, Abiboo, and talked to me after the flogging of the headman, you gave him food?"

"So your lordship ordered me."

"True," nodded the Commissioner. "Where did you feed him?"

"In the store-room of your fine ship."

"I see," said Sanders shortly.

He was away a week, and then returned to the *Zaire*. Here he found a runner from



Bones' little force to say that they had news of M'Boru and were hard after him.

Sanders noticed that during his absence the Talafa People had camped along the bank and that the fine new hut which M'Boru had built himself looked completely different. The door was gone and where the aperture had been, stretched an unbroken wall. He stared at it in astonishment and turned to see the headman of the Builder People at his elbow.

"Lord Sandi," said the man, "M'Boru awaits you."

"Where is he?" asked the Commissioner.

"He waits in his fine hut," replied the other significantly.

Sanders' eyes narrowed. "Have you killed him?" but the other shook his head.

"Nay, lord, surely you have not forgotten that that is against our law. We have two proud practices. One is to speak to no man outside ourselves, and the other is to kill no man and, lord," he went on, speaking more slowly, "M'Boru knew both these things. Behold, lord, when we examined this hut we, in our cunning, knew that D'Lini-Talafa had altered it, making a secret doorway at the back that not even your lordship's bright eyes could find, and, Sandi," he went on significantly, "this door we made even more secret, so that when M'Boru returned it should close behind him and not open again. When we had done this we made whole this other wall and, lord, M'Boru returned and is caught like a leopard in a trap. At first he cried out with a loud voice, terrifying in its anger, and we, being afraid, ran away that we might not hear."

Sanders walked up the hill. Not a sound came from inside the hut. "Open me this hut," he ordered.

**W**ITHIN twenty minutes, for all the Talafa lent a hand, an aperture big enough to admit a man had been made and Sanders, an automatic ready in his hand, walked in. It was very dark inside, but the Commissioner could make out something lying in a corner. He went over to it and kicked it.

"God bless my jolly old soul," said the man in the darkness huskily. "Where am I?" And the automatic nearly fell from

Commissioner Sanders' nerveless fingers.

"Well, Bones," said Sanders quietly, "let's have it."

"Dear old sir," said Bones, with a ghastly expression, "as soon as my poor old hand stops shakin' and I can hold a jolly old pen I shall be placin' my resignation before you."

"Don't be a chump, Bones," said Sanders. "We'll discuss that later. What happened?"

It seemed that Bones, Corporal Ali and their men really had been close on M'Boru, and Bones, convinced that he could handle the thing far better without assistance, had gone on alone.

"I followed the wicked old josser right up to his hut through the swamp and. . ."

"And you thought he'd gone in?"

"Darkness, dear and lenient old sir," said Bones, spreading out his hands in a helpless gesture. "Jolly old optics not what they are in daylight."

"As soon as poor old Bones realized he'd been had, I started in to make a row. You won't believe me, sir, but I made a dooce of a row. And what d'you think those silly old Talafa did?"

"Bolted," said Sanders.

"I have no excuse," said Bones, rising to his feet and hanging on to his chair. "I'm a failure, a miserable old failure, and there ain't room for failures in the jolly old Service. I shall never forget your dear old Excellency's kindnesses to poor old Bones, but I let M'Boru escape and I must pay the price."

Sanders' eyes twinkled, but not a muscle of his faced moved.

"Corporal Ali brought in M'Boru about half-an-hour ago," he said quietly.

"He did?" squeaked Bones. "Bless my jolly old soul!"

"I am merely going to point out," said Sanders, "that if you resign, Hamilton, of course, would have to know the reason for it. He's your superior."

Bones suddenly caught the back of his chair in both hands. He had gone very white and beads of perspiration stood out along his upper lip. "I think, dear old Excellency," he muttered thickly, "I'm going to be. . ."

A second later Sanders was alone.

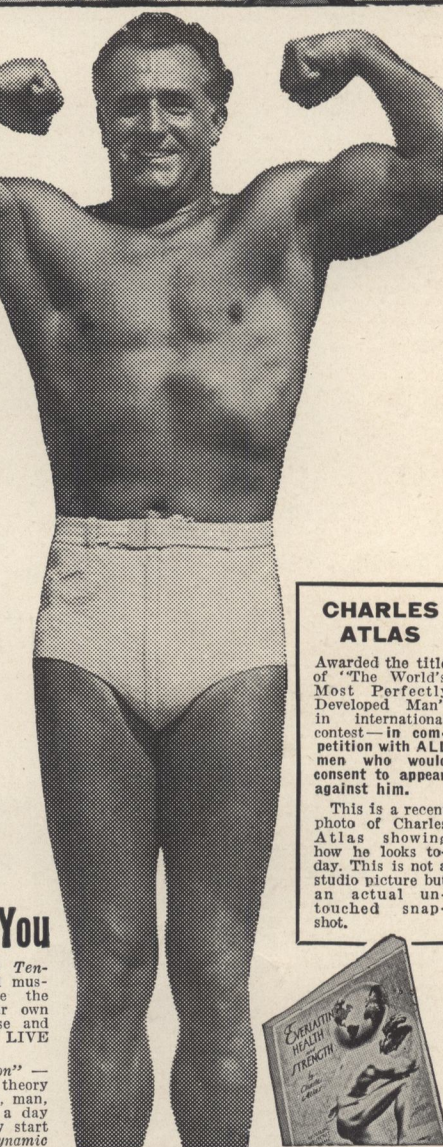




# Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?

## LET ME START SHOWING YOU RESULTS LIKE THESE

<p><b>5 inches of new Muscle</b></p> <p>"My arms increased 1 1/2", chest, 2 1/2", forearm 7/8". - C. S., W. Va.</p>	<p><b>What a difference!</b></p> <p>"Have put 3 1/2" on chest (normal) and 2 1/2" expanded." - F. S., N. Y.</p>
<p><b>Here's what ATLAS did for ME!</b></p> <p><b>John Jacobs BEFORE</b>      <b>John Jacobs AFTER</b></p>	<p><b>For quick results I recommend CHARLES ATLAS</b></p> <p>"Am sending snapshot showing wonderful progress." - W. G., N. J.</p> <p><b>GAINED 29 POUNDS</b></p> <p>"When I started, weighed only 141. Now 170." - T. K., N. Y.</p>



### CHARLES ATLAS

Awarded the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" in international contest—in competition with ALL men who would consent to appear against him.

This is a recent photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.



## Here's What Only 15 Minutes a Day Can Do For You

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add **SOLID MUSCLE** to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system **INSIDE and OUTSIDE!** I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

### What's My Secret?

"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present super-man physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop

your strength through "Dynamic Tension," you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the **DORMANT** muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into solid **LIVE MUSCLE**.

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to **BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY**.

### FREE BOOK

"Everlasting Health and Strength"

In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with inspirational pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became **NEW MEN** in strength, my way. Let me show you what I can do for you! For a real thrill, send for this book today. **AT ONCE, CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 312A, 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.**

**CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 312A  
115 E. 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.**

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name .....  
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City..... State.....

☐ Check here if under 16 for Booklet A.



