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The actors and actresses in the rehearsed photos are over 18 years (see [here](#) for a list of sites from where they were extracted). The anime/hentai/cartoon/3D/CGI images depict sexual fantasies of many Adults and as strictly drawings of erotic art are harmless and (at one time) were not subject to any legal restrictions (see [here](#)). These images were created to be over 18 years old by their artists.

These short-stories do not have an "editor-in-chief". Many individuals contributed to different sections in a story. So it is possible that some questionable images "slipped through the cracks". If any image is judged to be illegal by a newer law, please contact kelli@hotlegsinlove.com and it will be removed.

All of these images were retrieved from "free" public (i.e., non-paysite) websites including Google. Some have a massive collection from fake-celebrity-sex to BDSM to incest to bestiality images [such as 8muses.com]. The assumption was that if these somewhat-realistic images were illegal, the legal authorities would have had them removed a long time ago. But they are still there and so they are being used here and saving you a lot of web-surfing time.

If you are someone who might be offended by such fiction or the prevailing Laws of your locale do not permit viewing ***"Forced Sex"***-type material --

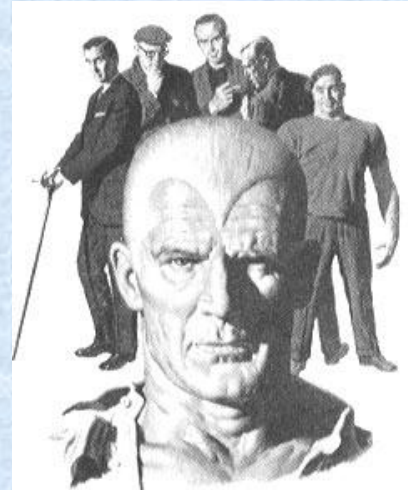
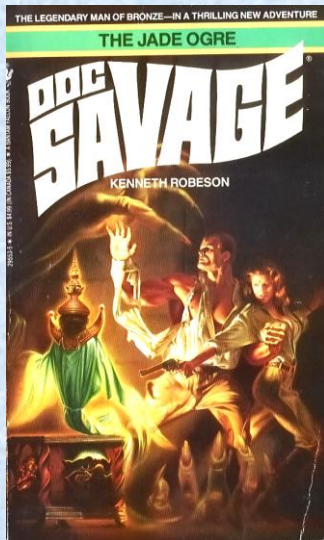
and especially if you are under 21 years of age --

DO NOT READ FURTHER .

Doc Savage #187XXX - "The *Jade Ogre*"

by Will Murray - October/1992

(XXX material added by kelli@hotlegsinlove.com)



XXXXXX Not For Viewing By Anyone Under 21 XXXXXX

Deep in the spider-haunted ruins of Cambodia broods a twisted armless Creature with a face of *Jade* whose power to project deadly disembodied arms to any place on Earth makes it the most dangerous foe that Doc Savage has ever faced. (with *Patricia Savage* !)



<http://www.hotlegsinlove.com/PSXXX.htm>

XXXX This is a 'X'-rated version of the original novel. XXXX

The Perils of Patricia Savage

modified by kelli@hotlegsinlove.com

**** Not For Viewing By Anyone Under 21 ****



Thanks to Blackmask.com , Worldlibrary.net , Munseys.com and the other websites who previously converted these Doc Savage paperbacks into electronic format. They were used as the base for inserting the XXX material.

The Adult **images** that accompany the XXX material were from free public sites such as LuxBabes.com , Twistys , [Hot Pornstars](http://HotPornstars) , Richards-Realm.com , and Celebritiesmix.com .

The fantasy XXX material was in part created by inspiration from Rebecca at RebeccaHAP.com and those wicked and talented **BDSM** erotic artists at DoFantasy.com and 8Muses.com .

note: to skip to images of **Pat Savage In Peril**, do a <Ctrl>-F (Find) on **XXXXXX** .

I -- The Waylaying

San Francisco is a city of fogs.

From the first sultry breeze of Spring to the dwindling days of the Fall season, the cottony stuff pours in through the Golden Gate like ghostly combers to was over San Francisco Bay and envelop the peninsula on which the metropolis reposes.

Unlike those of London (another famous fog-bound city), the fogs of San Francisco are not stagnant masses of moisture having the consistency of pea soup. On certain days, they do lumber in like a damp prowling animal to deposit a clammy residue on all the touch. Meteorologists refer to these mists as "wet fogs".

There is also a species of stratus (another word for fog) known as "dry fog". In contrast to the wet variety, the dry fog is as smooth as tobacco smoke and as sinuous as spider silk. It is not as unpleasant to wander through, although it is every bit as impenetrable to sight.

On this day, the fog that enwrapped the hills of San Francisco was of the "dry" variety. It had formed close offshore and prowled inland without opportunity to collect ocean moisture (thus its dry quality).

It lacked but an hour to sunset, so the fog was not unpleasantly dreary. In fact, it was rather bright. A poet (and San Francisco had no shortage of these) might have dubbed it "white murk". It had settled low upon the city so that only San Francisco's many precipitous hills poked up to receive the sun, giving the metropolis a fantastical aspect like an archipelago in a sea of haze.

A man shoved through this vaporous atmosphere. He was a squat, powerful individual, possessing a belligerent strut somewhat remindful of a bulldog. An expensive gabardine coat strained to contain his rolling shoulders. Its collar was pulled up to his ears to fend off a late Spring chill. The brim of a tasteful soft hat was yanked down lower than good taste would ordinary permit.

As the man walked, he clutched a cloth handbag which he held close to his body. Close so that it was not obvious that the bag was manacled to his wrist with steel handcuffs that had been deliberately soiled so they would not reflect any light.

The fog was thick. It was impossible to see more than a half-dozen feet beyond one's nose. Yet the man strode along as if the opalescent atmosphere was as transparent as glass. The spectral stuff seemed to swallow the sound of his heavy shoes as they tramped along the worn cobbles.

The din of the city -- clanging of streetcars and the ceaseless foghorns and ferry blasts from out on the bay -- might have explained the seeming silence of the man's progress.

Often, the man paused cocking his head to one side as if listening. He evidently detected no sounds other than the normal clamor of civilization because each time he proceeded as before.

The man seemed to have a specific destination in mind. He deviated from his path only once. And that was when his nostrils wrinkled up at the spicy *tang* emanating from a part of the city where neon lights threw *vermillion* and *emerald* glare into the low-hanging puddle of fog.

The man stopped ... hesitated ... and muttered a single word to himself.

"Chinatown."

Under the yanked-down hat brim, his dark eyes narrowed.

Abruptly, he barreled across a busy street, dodging a whining taxicab ... went south 3 blocks ... then east for 2 more.

He paused often listening ...

... and hearing nothing he deemed out of the ordinary, he continued on.

At the foot of steep California Street, the bundled-up bulldog of a man paused outside a drugstore before which a streetcar was being turned. Some trick of atmospheric turbulence created a zone of clear air around the bulky car.

Evidently intrigued, the wanderer stood watching as the streetcar (which had just disgorged its allotments of passengers) was turned about on a circular track. Several men did this by pushing and shoving the car by hand (a knot of them pushing the front one way and the back the other) until the flat nose of the car was pointing back up the hill. They had to "put their backs" into it".

The conductor jangled the bell, adding to the ceaseless din. Passengers -- among them a number of those who had assisted the strenuous turnabout maneuver -- climbed aboard.

But the loitering bulldog of a man had by that time lost interest in the proceedings. His eyes scanned the surrounding white blanket of *vapor* which was slowly reclaiming the zone of clarity. He fingered an ear forward.

Then he slipped into the drugstore whose sign proclaimed it to be the Wise Owl Drug Store. The owl seemed to <blink> its eyes every so many seconds. (It was an illusion accomplished by the simple action of 2 light bulbs timed to <wink> on-and-off at intervals.)

At a pay phone, the man made a terse telephone call.

"Hello? ... Connect me with San Francisco Municipal Airport."

After a pause, he asked: "Is the *Solar Speedster* still due in a 9:00? ... You say it will be a half-hour later? ... Thank you."

He dropped another nickel into the slot and requested the steamship pier.

This time, he spoke in low tones such as would thwart an eavesdropper should any be lurking near by. Evidently the other party had difficulty understanding his speech. He was forced to repeat himself.

"I asked if my luggage had been put aboard," he said testily. "The *Mandarin*. She sails in the morning."

Upon being assured that all was well, the man in gabardine left the booth with his face (what could be seen of it) screwed up into an unhappy knot. He silently purchased a package of gum at the counter.

He paused under the bright <winking> eyes of the electric owl to peel the tinfoil off a stick of gum with a practiced one-handed maneuver. He shoved it into his mouth and began masticating it thoughtfully, his eyes and ears alert. He *sniffed* the air surreptitiously.

Satisfied that he was not being shadowed, the man in gabardine coat resumed his eastward progress.

"Blast this fog," he muttered.

The man had not ventured 7 blocks when he passed an alley that was like a fallen cracker box stuffed with smoke. As if scenting an unpleasant odor, his nose wrinkled up as he passed it. Bulldog-like, he bared his teeth in a grimace.

The man quickened his pace.

At the next corner, he sidestepped onto the cross-street ... set his broad back to a brick wall ... and spit out his gum. His free hand (it was his right) fumbled the buttons of his gabardine coat open ... snaked in ... and withdrew a single cigarette which, oddly enough, he crushed and placed in his mouth. He began chewing furiously.

The hand went back into his garment and came out again filled with a big revolver. It was a .45. The barrel was bulldogged off until it was less than an inch in length. The thing was capable of blowing a young posthole through a man's innards.

The man set himself. His jaws ceased their animated chewing. Oddly, he sniffed the air like a hound as if not trusting his other senses. Which in the muffling fog might have been a wise thing to do.

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As if stepping from another plane of existence, a figure emerged from the bulwark of fog.

He was a Chinese. The way his slanted orbs narrowed made that clear. Otherwise, he was dressed as any other inhabitant of San Francisco. They days of the pigtail and the colorful brocaded silk jacket were long past.

The Celestial possessed a wizened body surmounted by a face that was as yellow and wrinkled as a dried tangerine. In one shriveled claw, he clutched a **red** rubber sponge. From the other dangled a loop of **scarlet** cord, apparently of silk.

"Stranger, eh?" growled the man in gabardine.

At that, the wizened individual jumped as if snake-bit. His narrowed eyes flew wide as he whirled toward the unexpected sound ...

... and received in his eyes a squirt of saliva mixed with tobacco juice.

The fellow made a squeaking sound and sprang backward. The fog immediately swallowed him up.

In a blind attempt to brain the wizened one, the man in the gabardine coat swung his handbag into the fog.

The bag connected. It brought a high-pitched yelp of *pain!*

"What's the matter, Chinaman? Can't take it?"

The Celestial lunged from the fog. He had lost his sponge. But the *red* silken cord now stretched taut between 2 lemon-colored claws.

"I no stlangle you," he snarled.

It was an absurd denial under the circumstances. The Oriental <blinked> and squinted as the painful tobacco juice seared his slant eyes.

"No?" said the other. "Then you won't be needing this!"

The bulldogged revolver barrel swept up, the gunsight hooking that taut silken noose. The latter snarled as it parted, leaving 2 ragged ends hanging useless from too-tight fists.

Suddenly bereft of his tool of murder, the Celestial closed in holding one smarting orb open with boy fingers. He kicked out.

The waylayer in gabardine grabbed the foot before it could connect. He used his left hand. The heavy handbag swung free from his manacled wrist. It made a heavy *clicking* sound like the action of the tumblers of a combination safe.

The kick had been a bit of Oriental trickery. The Chinaman flipped his free hand out and accomplished his purpose. One fragment of the noose of *red* silk settled about the other's thick neck. The silk had been unusually long.

The man in gabardine turtled his head down inside his burly shoulder. Throat muscles like ropes tightened against the garrote cord. Still holding the Chinese by the ankle, he struggled to pint the stubby revolver in a useful direction. But the Celestial cannily slipped around behind him.

The noose tightened further causing a grunt of pain to well up from the man's throat.

He reacted to this by levering with the hand that clamped the Celestial's ankle. The latter squawled in *agony*, producing a sound such as a grass blade makes when it is blown between the hands.

There was not much flesh over the Oriental's ankle bones. As they broke, the *pop!* produced a distinct report.

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The Chinaman made more squawling noises. He flung his spindly weight on the garrote cord. It cut through the resistance of the struggling man's neck muscles plugging his straining windpipe.

Convulsively, the man who was struggling to avoid strangulation lifted his revolver straight up and fired twice. The sound was loud. But it seemed to have become lost in the incessant tooting of foghorns and squeal of passing streetcars.

The Oriental was fighting like a crippled rat. His opponent swung a foot and kicked the yellow man's remaining leg from under him. But the jerk as the fellow fell only set the garrote cord deeper into flesh.

The victim's face was **reddening**. Sweat streamed down his nose. He lost his hat, exposing rough muscular features and sweat-plastered blondish hair.

Grunting and scraping his feet, the man finally succeeded in dragging his would-be throttle to the grimy face of the corner brick wall. The strangler -- intent upon his strenuous work -- was pulled along in spite of himself.

When he heard the click of his sawed-off gun muzzle against brick, the man in gabardine gave a mighty grunt and swung his thick body around, sending the Chinaman hopping into the wall.

The Celestial bleated in **pain**. His grip loosened a moment.

But a moment was all that was necessary.

Inhaling a sobering gulp of air, the man in gabardine threw himself into the energetic task of slamming his muscular body into the wall repeatedly.

The unfortunate Chinese caught between the human wall and the one of brick was pummeled into submission in this fashion. His fingers let go of the **red** silken strangling cord. Left with only one good leg for support, he sat down hard.

"Who sent you?" grated the man in gabardine towering over the other.

"I lefuse to say," the beaten Chinese sing-songed stubbornly.

"Wan Sop?"

*The waylayer's **bloodied** lips thinned.*

"Quon?"

"I know not that name," the waylayer who had been waylaid mumbled evasively. His eyes were squeezed tight squinting against the sting of tobacco juice.

"Liar," said the man in gabardine.

He promptly knocked the Chinese unconscious with the stubby muzzle of his weapon. But only after breaking open the cylinder and removing the bullets with the same practiced one-hand manipulation that told he was used to operating with his left hand manacled to the cloth handbag.

The Celestial made no sound. He simply went slack where he sat. His rat-like chin came to rest in his coat front and his breathing became nosier.

Pocketing his revolver, the man in gabardine got down on his hands-and-knees and felt around the pavement for the dropped garrote. He cursed the low-lying fog which swallowed his groping hands to the wrists as if they had disappeared into another realm of existence.

He soon found both torn ends along with the **red** rubber sponge. Ripping the cords in twain, he bound his insensate victim's wrists and ankles with expert skill. Lifting the man's head by his coarse black hair, he popped the **sponge** into the gaping mouth whose teeth were red-black with the staining that comes from a life of chewing betel nuts.

Finally, he tied the sponge in place with the shortest remaining length of silk. He stood up.

"Give my regards to Wan Sop when you wake up, Chinaman," spat the man in gabardine just before he melted into the smoky silk of the afternoon fog, rubbing his chafed raw throat.

A witness (and there were none) might have noted that the man in gabardine retraced his path, returning the way he had come. His progress was as before. Except that he took pains to give Chinatown a wider berth on the return walk.

A little less than 20 minutes later, the same man was inserting a key into an aperture below a frosted-glass door panel on which the following legend was inscribed with tasteful black enamel:

GOLD COAST PAIDARY

J. Baird, Prop.

The key grated the lock mechanism into submission and the man shoved in using one thick shoulder for that purpose. He kicked the door shut with the heel of his shoe, his free hand simultaneously sweeping upward toward a wall light switch. The door banged shut!

In the darkness, he froze. His nose wrinkled with evident distaste while his hand hovered at the light switch.

"Damn," he muttered.

Then more loudly, he said: "I know someone is in here."

"You must have eyes like cat," a sing-song voice intoned.

"No. But I recognize the stink of joss house *incense* when it tickles my nose," the man grunted. "And this room reeks of it."

"Since surprise has been lost to us, you need not delay turning on light."

The man hit the switch. Light flooded the reception area of a mid-sized office suite disclosing a gaggle of lemon-skinned individuals.

They wore the raiment of modern Civilization. But their placid almond-eyed countenances bespoke the Orient. There were five of them.

As the man in gabardine took them in with hard unflinching eyes, his gaze went to one in particular who stood out from the rest by virtue of the saffron quality of his complexion. The others ran more to brown.

"Hao jui mei jin," hissed the voice that had spoken from the darkness.

"Speak English, dammit!"

"I said 'long time no see'," stated the calm voice, "Jason Baird."

"It's Baird, you damned rice-eating footpad!" spat the one addressed as Jason Baird. "And I happen to know you speak English as well as anyone."

"I prefer to be addressed by my honorable name," said the Celestial, his dark eyes glittering with menace.

He was slender, emaciated with a gnarled yellow rope for a neck and a head that was like an old skull that had been stuccoed with lemon peel. His teeth were big; the lips were so thin that the shape of his teeth showed through. His eyes were remindful of dirty clay marbles in his fleshless skull. His pate was perfectly hairless.

"There's nothing 'honorable' about it," snarled the man who was evidently Jason Baird, proprietor of Gold Coast Lapidary, "Wan Sop."

"And there is nothing wise in your attempts to thwart the will of *Quon*," retorted Wan Sop. "In fact, it is very foolish of you to do so. You see, we know that you have enlisted aid in your cause.

"Then you know what you are up against," Baird countered.

Wan Sop shrugged unconcernedly.

"We do not fear a mere mortal no matter how formidable his reputation. For we serve one whose power is beyond challenge. And whose *jade breath* is as inescapable as Fate."

Jason Baird's lips writhed in a humorless grin.

"Bunk!"

"You will come to fear the searing touch of our illustrious Master," asserted skull-headed Wan Sop.

He cackled something in an unintelligible lingo. His men started forward ...

Jason Baird lifted his right hand toward his open coat front.

"*Hul soun!*" Wan Sop shrilled. "Watch out! He has gun!"

The bulldogged revolver never emerged, however.

A brown-skinned Asiatic made an up-and-under motion like a man pitching a horseshoe. It could be seen that the sleeve of the man's modern business coat was cut wide in the Oriental fashion. Something *flashed* from within. The space between his suddenly outflung fingers and Jason Baird whizzed like a typewriter carriage returning.

Something struck Baird in the precise center of his forehead. With an explosive grunt, he fell forward -- a dragon-hilted dagger clattering on the bare floor by his crumpling figure. It had emerged from one of the ridiculously wide sleeves (no longer quite so ridiculous now that its true purpose was revealed).

"*Ho ho*," said Wan Sop eyeing the sprawled figure that was Jason Baird. "Very good. You are a true servant of the *Armless One*, Sing Fat."

"*Dor ja*," said the one addressed as 'Sing Fat' in the manner of a person acknowledging a flowery compliment. "I strive for worthiness before the inscrutable jade visage of He-Who-Will-Breathe-Death-Upon-The-Universe."

Wan Sop advanced on the sprawled figure who gave out a groan when kicked.

"Such a foolish one," he clucked. "Strip him, Oh limbs of the *Jade Ogre*."

The satellites of Wan Sop fell to their knees and rolled insensate Jason Baird onto his back. They began picking apart his clothing, insinuating spidery fingers into pockets and turning them inside out. Contents were examined. A fat billfold was offered to Wan Sop who after a careful examination of its contents pocketed it.

"Nothing, *Sin Song*," said a man respectfully.

Sin Song was evidently some form of address akin to "Master".

"Remove his shoes," directed Wan Sop.

At that, Jason Baird began kicking furiously! An Asiatic picked up the dragon-hilted dagger and laid the wavy edge of it against Baird's throat. The burly bulldog of a jeweler subsided.

His shoes were swiftly unlaced and his socks removed.

Wan Sop leaned down to examine the bare soles of Jason Baird's feet. The jeweler began kicking anew. Yellow and brown hands were laid across his ankles pinioning them.

"A thousand pardons," said Wan Sop who dug 2 curved fingernails into the leather hide that was the sole of Jason Baird's left foot.

The nails seemed to penetrate the flesh. Sharp points actually disappeared from view. But strangely, no blood seeped.

With a vicious yank that brought a *yelp* from Baird's lips, Wan Sop reclaimed his fingernails. A ripping sound accompanied this grisly procedure. Jason Baird threshed and howled as if in excruciating pain. The Orientals displayed fierce grins, clearly enjoying the torture being inflicted upon the jeweler.

Grinning, Wan Sop held up a curling swatch of what seemed to be raw flesh. He allowed this to twirl in the light showing it to be merely flesh-colored adhesive tape to which was affixed a folded square of paper. The bare sole of Jason Baird evinced no injury.

Delicately, Wan Sop pulled the paper free, discarding the flesh-colored tape into a nearby wastebasket. The paper unfolded under his careful fingers.

A small *silvery* key fell out. Nimble yellow fingers flashed out cupping it before it fell to the floor.

"Your ways are known to us, Jason Baird," intoned Wan Sop. "This item is meant for others should an unfortunate fate overtake your worthy personage."

"You go to Hell, heathen!" spat Jason Baird.

Wan Sop pointedly declined to answer this invitation. His gray almond-shaped eyes were on the paper. They narrowed as they absorbed the words scrawled thereon.

"Perhaps you are more clever than we supposed," enunciated Wan Sop slowly.

"Just catching on to that, are you?" Jason Baird retorted hotly.

Just then, a *shadow* appeared at the frosted panel of the office door.

Wide-mouthed jacket sleeves shivered as ornate daggers were shook from places of concealment and into waiting hands. Lean bodies tensed expectantly.

"Wait!" hissed Wan Sop. "It is Seed."

A hand reached for the doorknob and then yanked it open.

In the sudden wash of light, a man was framed. He was a white man. But his furtive air proclaimed him to be a confederate of the group of Orientals that had gathered in the office suite for the purpose of waylaying its owner Jason Baird. He was short, spindly, and as dried-up as his namesake.

"Enter. Quickly!" ordered Wan Sop.

The man addressed as 'Seed' scurried in.

The door closed. He glanced down at the prostrate form of Jason Baird.

"I see you glommed him," he muttered.

"No thanks to your illustrious person," said Wan Sop, his tone tinged with irony.

"I pulled my weight," Seed said defensively. "It was that damned Fung."

Wan Sop frowned like an evil moon.

"What of Fung?"

"I found him in an alley all trussed up like a Christmas turkey," explained the one called 'Seed'. "He was supposed to grab this bird Baird at a certain corner. I was to distract him by caging a cigarette while Fung got him from behind. But neither showed. So I went huntin'. Fung's still in that alley, colder than a mackerel."

Low voice mutter raced around the room. A foot reared back as if to kick helpless Jason Baird in the ribs ...

But the blow never landed. A warning hiss from skull-visaged Wan Sop put a stop to that.

"No. He must be made to talk first."

"Do your worst, heathen," spat Jason Baird. "I've nothing to say to your or your yellow cutthroats."

"I wish very little from you," purred Wan Sop. "Merely the time and place of your rendezvous with the **bronze man Doc Savage**."

At the enunciation of the name 'Doc Savage', a hush fell over the office suite. The satellites of Wan Sop seemed to lose all animation and become standing Buddhas bereft of all menace and confidence. Their crafty eyes became cat-like slits. Here and there, a pale tongue emerged to worry thin, bitter lips.

Only the one called 'Seed' displayed any outward emotion.

"Hell's Bells!" he said bitterly. "Is **Savage** involved in this?"

"Not as yet," said Wan Sop, his soiled eyes going to the face of the man called 'Seed'.

He passed the note excavated from the sole of Jason Baird. Seed read it ... then paled.

"Does this portent bother you?" inquired Wan Sop.

"Bother me?" Seed snorted. "I'll tell a man! **Savage** is the original trouble-buster. Birds who cross his path always come to grief!"

"And those who challenge the might of the **Jade Ogre**," asserted Wan Sop, "spend the Afterlife being pursued by phantom talons whose touch means terrible agony. This **Doc Savage** will be no different. You will see."

Seed twisted unwashed fingers nervously.

"Maybe," he said. "But if it's all the same to you, when **Savage** mixes into this little affair of yours I'll just hike myself to parts south. Like Mexico."

"Fool!" barked Wan Sop. "You cannot quit the **Jade Ogre**. You have been chosen to serve him. And serve him you shall!"

"Well, I don't like it. I don't like it one dame little bit!"

"That is of no moment. We have a task before us."

Wan Sop cast his narrow eyes down at the unfortunate face of Jason Baird.

"You will not reveal what you know?"

"Never!" the other gritted.

"Then you shall be made to do so at a place where resistance to the *Jade Ogre* is impossible. After that", Wan Sop shrugged unconcernedly, "your destiny is unavoidable."

From a voluminous sleeve, skull-faced Wan Sop produced a hypodermic whose needle was tipped by a protective bit of cork.

He pulled this free ... thumbed the plunger until a thin stream of bilious liquid drooled forth ... and knelt down to empty the contents into the wrist of Jason Baird at a point near the manacle circlet.

It took all 6 men to hold the husky jeweler down while this was accomplished. They retained their grips until long moments after their prisoner had ceased to twitch and strain. His breathing became shallow. Then relaxation seized his muscular limbs.

"It is done," pronounced a sibilant sing-song voice.

"It is the will of He-Whose-Breath-Is-Death," said Wan Sop solemnly.

"I still don't like this," muttered Seed uneasily. "**Savage** is poison!"

Ignoring the complaint, skull-faced Wan Sop employed the key which had been cunningly affixed to the sole of Jason Baird's naked foot to click open the handcuffs manacled the black hand bag to the jeweler's wrist.

The Celestial shook the bag experimentally. It was heavy for its small size. The contents shook and rattled like children's play marbles.

"What do you suppose is in it?" wondered Seed licking his thin lips. "Jewels?"

"I do not know," said Wan Sop slowly. "And there was but one key upon Baird's person."

Seed shrugged. "Tough."

Wan Sop regarded the locked bag for several moments fixedly. His crafty eyes went to the handcuff key.

On an impulse, he inserted into the handbag lock. It turned. The metal mouth of the bag popped open like toothless jaws.

"He is very clever this man Baird," murmured Wan Sop taking the open bag to the nearby desk and scattering the contents on the well-used blotter.

A scintilla of *illumination* seemed to catch the overhead light and shout back brilliance.

A collective gasp came from the lips of the assembled ruffians. With the sole exception of the contemplative Wan Sop.

"**Diamonds!**" Seed breathed. "Worth a small fortune, I'll bet."

Wan Sop emitted a tittering laugh.

"A mere drop in bucket compared to the wealth that lies before us."

Seed shuddered involuntarily.

"This business is no good," he grumbled. "I can't stand thinkin' about it. All them people gonna die."

"Think of your share, Seed," remonstrated Wan Sop. "Fix it in your mind and your conscience will trouble your days no more. And your slumber not all."

"That don't mean I gotta like it," Seed returned, shuffling uneasily. "It's different for you China boys. I may be bad. But I'm still white. It's my kinda people who are gonna die when this thing picks up steam."

Wan Sop looked away from the scatter of *diamond* stones. His eyes were thin slits that might have been made the action of a knife blade across puffy closed eyelids.

"The imagination is no friend to the industrious," he said pointedly.

"I don't follow that," Seed mumbled, his eyes shifting to the cluster of Orientals who regarded him in impassive silence.

"I believe in your tongue this item of wisdom could be rendered as 'Idle Hands are the Devil's Friend'," explained Wan Sop.

"Eh?"

"You will go and obtain a fitting vehicle for the removal of this troublesome one," added Wan Sop without answering. "There is much to be done now that this obstacle to the great plan of the *Jade Ogre* is about to be removed."

"Have it your way," Seed mumbled and shuffled out the door.

After he had departed, Wan Sop carefully scooped up the diamonds and returned them to the black bag. His satellites watched this operation with sullen inscrutability. It was plant that their chief had no thought of dividing the spoils among his henchmen.

Outside a bank of windows, the foghorns mourned the passing of day. Ferries hooted like frightened owls. And the fog pressed against the window glass in a way that made it seem as if the office buildings were packed in cotton.

When the last cold brilliant had dropped into its receptacle, Wan Sop said: "The tool known as 'Seed' is as a sword whose edge has been dulled and chipped by many battles. Such a one can only bring misfortune. He will have to be eliminated."

"It is the will of the Jade Ogre," several Orientals sing-songed.

Coming up later ...



*... Miss Vine gets into **TROUBLE !***

II -- The Metal Man

Air travel is fast becoming a commonplace in the modern age.

Where only scant years before flying was the province of the daring birdman, ordinary folk today traverse great distances for business and pleasure. Airlines are doing much to promote the sky lanes as a reasonable and safe alternative to rail or boat travel.

Nonetheless even in this air-minded time, the general public has not quite become accustomed to the seemingly miraculous fact that for the price of a ticket, one can span the continental United States in comfort and safety by transport plane.

The passengers on the Union Airlines New York City-to-San Francisco run designated 'Trip No. 28' were unnaturally quiet as the great tri-motored duralumin bird *Solar Speedster* droned through the last leg of a voyage that not many years before would have made a celebrity of the aviator who accomplished it.

The passengers (there were less than 20 of them seated in comfortable wicker seats) fidgeted as travelers will after long stultifying hours in transit. At the cabin's back end, a few played bridge on a folding table set up in the aisle.

The throaty **snarl** of the big radial engines penetrated the partially-soundproofed cabin. Their thunder was not a sound conducive to slumber. So none of the passengers slept in their seats as they might have had they been, for example, traveling by rail.

Instead of resting, the passengers cast frequent glances toward the front of the plane. The pilot was visible through the open windows of the partition separating the control compartment from the rest of the aircraft.

He could be seen jockeying the control wheel with expert skill. Yet the curious eyes of the passengers were not directed toward the pilot.

The **object** of their rapt attention (the cause of their quiet, in fact) occupied the seat directly behind the pilot on the port side of the aisle where the seats were strung in a single row.

Even seen from behind, this individual was impressive. He wore a quiet brown suit that seemed molded to his broad shoulders. What could be seen of his skin (the back of his **cabled** neck and occasional glimpses of his lean corded cheek when he turned his head) showed it to be of a deep **bronze** hue. Not quite so dark as the strange individual's hair, however, which lay smooth as a **metallic** skullcap.

The entire effect was that of a man sculpted from metal. Only when the **Bronze Man** moved was this illusion dispelled. As soon as he lapsed once more into repose, it resumed. Uncanny this phenomenon!

Through the long hours of flight, the passengers had watched, fascinated by this unusual personage. Only the stewardess had conversed with this remarkable **Man of Metal**. And then only to have him decline the typical fruit juice and cellophane-wrapped cheese sandwich that passed for airplane fare.

It was not that the **Bronze Man** radiated a "do not bother me" aura. Far from it. His handsome, regular face suggested calmness. His countenance held no discernible expression, suggesting neither aloofness nor approachability.

Perhaps it was the **size** of the **Bronze Man** that made the curious hesitate. He dwarfed the seat in which he sat. His smooth **bronze** hair came near to grazing the parachute basket above his head. He was a veritable **giant!** Many people find such large men intimidating.

And so the **Bronze Man** had been left to reading a magazine.

Near the end of the flight, the assistant pilot emerged from the forward compartment to stroll the aisle. He answered questions and conveyed to the passengers (some of whom were first-time-uppers) the utter unremarkability of commercial flight. It was good public relations. Not to mention something for him to do. During the long voyage, only one man needed to be at the control at any given time thanks to a modern robot-pilot mechanism.

The copilot paused to nod in the direction of the **Bronze Man** seated behind the pilot's compartment. The latter returned the nod and resumed reading his magazine. On closer inspection, it seemed to be a scientific journal.

The assistant pilot made his way down the aisle stopping often to speak with passengers. They represented a typical sampling of traveling humanity. There were prosperous businessmen and talkative drummers in seersucker suits. A buttery-looking Chinese gentleman lounged near the rear. A white-haired man of middle age whose manner and black valise suggested a member of the Medical profession was gazing intently out a window with an expression of thin-lipped concentration.

"Is it true?" a young woman whose golden curls peeped out from under a chic cloche hat asked in a hushed voice.

"Is what true?" asked the assistant pilot in a friendly manner.

The blonde pointed in the direction of the **Bronze Man**, trying not to be obvious about it.

"Is it true that that man is **Doc Savage**?" she wondered in an awed tone.

The copilot smiled. "Yes. It is, Miss."

A gloved hand flew to her mouth.

"My goodness! I've read about him. But I never imagined I'd actually see him in person!"

*The blonde was a cute number and the copilot was unmarried. He warmed up to the subject of the **Bronze Man** called 'Doc Savage'.*

"A great many people would pay good money for the privilege of meeting the **Man of Bronze**," he related.

"I can see why they call him that," noted the blonde girl. "But why is he flying as a passenger? I understand that **Doc Savage** is an accomplished pilot himself and owns a fleet of ultra-modern airplanes. It's even rumored that he recently purchased an airline.

The assistant pilot's grin widened.

"That's right, Miss. **Doc Savage** owns this airline. Mr. Savage is with us today because he thought he should see first-hand the type of service we provide. I imagine after this trip is over with, he will be inaugurating a change-or-two."

The copilot's voice was tinged with ride.

"Imagine that," the blonde girl said. "The owner going to all that trouble to improve service."

"Oh, I suppose Mr. Savage has business in Frisco as well," the copilot added in a genial tone. "But I don't know what that might be."

"I read in a magazine that he's as rich as old King Midas himself," the girl went on, her eyes transfixed on the nearly-immobile **Bronze Man**.

The copilot laughed heartily.

"I read that, too."

"But he takes no pay for the work he does," said the blonde girl.

Her pretty eyebrows knit together in perplexity.

"How did he ever get to be so wealthy?"

Seeing the focus of conversation stuck on the subject of **Doc Savage**, the copilot swallowed his cheerful grin.

"Beats me," he admitted and reluctantly excused himself to converse with his remaining passengers.

If the assistant pilot was expecting to discourse on the subject of his airline and the wonders of flight, he was very much mistaken.

Many questions were put to him. All concerned the remarkable **Doc Savage**.

The assistant pilot did a good job of answering these inquiries even when he found himself fielding the same one several times.

Yes, Doc Savage was a very famous person, he agreed. It was said that he was put into the hands of the World's greatest scientists for the sole purpose of preparing him for the work that he now pursued. Namely the dangerous task of righting wrings; aiding the oppressed; and punishing evildoers where he found them.

The results, the copilot cheerfully related to a curious drummer, was that Clark Savage, Jr. (to call 'Doc Savage' by his given name) had developed into a king of super being. He was a combination of **Muscular Marvel** and **Mental Genius**. No field of Science had he failed to master. Yet his greatest skill lay in Medicine. It was said that **Doc Savage** was the greatest surgeon in the entire World.

Doc Savage, the copilot told another passenger, was not alone in his work. Five assistants accompanied him on his perilous adventures. Each was a specialist in his respective line. One aide was a chemist; another a lawyer; and the remaining three a geologist, electrician, and engineer.

They were reputed to be the best in their chosen fields save one. The **Bronze Man** exceeded them all.

Doc Savage -- the tiring pilot told a matron with a babe in arms -- maintained a **Headquarters** in the tallest skyscraper in the World back in New York City. It was a famous place reputed to contain the most complete **Laboratory** in existence. Few had visited the place. It was there that people went to Doc Savage in their hour of need.

He seldom turned any away. And then only because their needs were better met by others to whom the **Bronze Man** referred them.

By the time he had reached the rear of the air giant, the assistant pilot was hoarse and exhausted. But he had answered every question put to him. It was his job.

As he flopped into the rearmost row beside the stewardess, the young man reflected that he had never earned his pay more than just now.

He took out a handkerchief ... doffed his uniform cap ... mopped his sweating brow and began to "make time" with the stewardess.

It proved not be an easy undertaking. It was not that she was not receptive to his attempts at "sweet talk". It was the **crunching** sounds coming from the seat directly in front of them that hindered conversation.

There, occupying one of 2 seats (the other was empty), the Chinese passenger the color of butter was industriously consuming a bag of peanuts.

This was in no way unusual. Chinese were not infrequent passengers to San Francisco. It was the chief port of embarkation for the mysterious East.

But this one seemed not to join in the camaraderie of long-distance air travel. He had been eating peanuts for the past half-hour. The same interval of time that the copilot had taken to work his way along the complement of passengers.

The Chinaman had been picking the nuts one-at-a-time from one brown paper bag. He shelled them with plump fingers and after harvesting the fruit inside disposed of the broken hulls in an identical bag sat in the empty seat beside him.

Frowning, the copilot hoped that the first bag was not full. The relentless dry **crackling** of the shells was getting on his nerves which were already rubbed raw by his ordeal in the aisle.

It reminded him in miniature of the sound a small plane makes when it crashes. The assistant pilot had witnessed a good friend of his perish that way. The awful rack had never completely left him.

With an effort, he forced the sound to the back of his awareness and went to work on the stewardess who had very pretty **blue** eyes.

Time passed. The tri-motor thundered westward chasing the setting Sun. The *Solar Speedster*, of course, lost that race.

Darkness clamped down on the air giant. In the control compartment, the pilot <flipped> a switch, illuminating cabin lights. A warm glow suffused the cabin.

And here-and-there, drowsiness finally overtook certain passengers. The fact that the harried copilot had satisfied their curiosity regarding **Doc Savage** might have had something to do with it.

Although the reflex that causes people to nod off when night falls probably did more to explain the phenomenon.

Tragedy befell the *Solar Speedster* as the plane began to descend.

The copilot was regaling the blue-eyed stewardess with pilot yarns and corny jokes with one eye on the control compartment when he felt the tri-motor lose altitude.

This was a signal that the aircraft was nearing its destination. Soon the copilot would be needed at the controls. If he were going to succeed in sweet-talking the stewardess into dinner, he would have to do so very quickly.

The copilot did not see all of it. Or if he did, he did not see the thing that happened clearly.

He was first aware of the passenger he assumed to be a doctor getting up from his seat to visit the washroom which was situated in the tail of the passenger bus. The man looked prosperous and affected a black Van Dyke beard which created the impression in the copilot's mind that he was a member of the Medical profession.

The copilot noticed the supposed medico cast a bilious glance in the direction of the plumply placid Chinese passenger who was still working his way through his bag of peanuts. It could be assumed by the doctor's stern expression that he found the noisy shelling sounds distracting.

The doctor disappeared into the washroom. The copilot glanced up the aisle through the open windows of the control compartment in the expectation of being summoned to duty.

The pilot sat tall in his bucket, his uniform-capped head swiveling as he surveyed the lights on the ground unrolling before him. The air grew bumpy.

At that moment, the bronze man known as **Doc Savage** suddenly flinched as if a pesky fly had buzzed his cheek. A *tendon*-wrapped bronzed hand lifted to his corded cheek.

And in the control bucket, the pilot slumped over the controls like a puppet whose strings had been cut by invisible scissors.

The robot-pilot had obviously been disengaged in preparation for landing because immediately **the air giant corkscrewed into a violent tailspin**. The weight of the inert pilot pushing the control wheel forward caused this.

The dark carpet of lights below reeled. Baggage was flung about the cabin. People, too.

Passengers screamed! A woman fainted. The doctor poked his head out from the washroom, his face at once annoyed and alarmed.

Wide-eyed, the assistant pilot leaped for the aisle.

He could have saved himself the trouble ...

...for up from his seat exploded Doc Savage!

The **Bronze Man** moved like chained lightning unleashed.

The partition door was flung open with a crash. He lunged into the control compartment, flinging himself into the copilot bucket. Strong *metallic* hands seized the controls.

The *bronze giant* had no sooner laid hands on the control wheel than the air giant -- its motors a-bawl -- strained its nose heavenward, righting itself once more. It was as if the tri-motor were a great winged creature responding to the reassuring touch of its master.

The *silvery* wings wobbled and strained at their brace wires as they came level with the black light-sprinkled terrain below. The craft was back on an even keel before the frantic copilot had worked his way to the control compartment.

"What happened?" he demanded hoarsely.

"That remains to be determined" came the steady unperturbed voice of **Doc Savage**.

It was a remarkable **voice**. Controlled and powerful, it might have been a human counterpart to the throaty roar of the plane's motors. It had the instant effect of soothing the assistant pilot's frazzled nerves.

The copilot turned his attention to the pilot. The latter was slumped over his control wheel which moved in sympathy with its counterpart in the Doc Savage's hands. The copilot had an inkling of the **Bronze Man**'s formidable *strength* from the ease with which he handled the wheel which was being pressed forward with the pilot's body weight.

Doc hauled the pilot from the wheel. The man fell back into his bucket. His face was a peculiar *aquamarine* color like *blue* and *green* inks mixing. He did not look at all natural.

"I think there's a doctor on board," the copilot gulped.

Then his ears *reddened*.

"Oh, I forgot! You're a doctor aren't you, Mr. Savage?"

"It would be best if I attended to the task of flying," the **Bronze Man** told him without emotion. His *eyes* (they were an unusual *flake-gold* coloring) were intent upon the funnels of ghostly light that the tri-motors floodlamps were burrowing in the night.

"Yes Sir," said the copilot, moving back into the cabin with haste.

He found himself trying to push through a knot of passengers. Once the plane had been righted, they had jumped out of their seats to press anxiously toward the control compartment.

"Let me through!" the copilot said sharply, no longer the polite airline employee. "I need the doctor to come forward."

A man demanded: "Is everything all right?"

"Are we going to crash?" asked another.

"No."

The copilot cupped his hands around his mouth megaphone-fashion.

"Will the doctor who is on board come forward, please."

"Let me through," a deep professional voice called back. *"I am a physician."*

It took some doing. But between the stewardess and the copilot, they convinced most of the passengers to resume their seats. A few stragglers, however, insisted upon impeding the doctor's forward progress.

"It's all right," the copilot said in exasperation waving his arms. "**Doc Savage** is flying the plane."

That seemed to do the trick.

The aisle was swiftly cleared although the passengers craned their necks to see into the control compartment like gawkers along a parade route.

The medico bustled up to the flustered copilot.

"I am Dr. Mawson Harper," he announced in a precise authoritative tone.

Dr. Mawson Harper had a mature face. His hair was crisp and white, marred (if that was the term) by a streak of virile black that crawled back from his hairline to the point where his natural part disappeared. It made the copilot think of a skunk pelt in reverse.

The doctor's chin was decorated by a neatly-clipped Van Dyke beard that by some weird quirk was a dab of black streaked with white. His bushy eyebrows matched the ebony streak in his hair as if painted by the same unkempt brush.

"The pilot fainted or something," the worried copilot explained.

"Let me see," said Dr. Mawson Harper pushing forward. He walked with careful mincing steps and toted his black leather valise.

They squeezed into the control compartment. It was not exactly commodious. Fortunately, Dr. Harper was a small-boned bird of a man.

"I think you will discover that the pilot is dead," Doc Savage in a calm voice pitched not to carry back into the cabin.

"I have heard of you, Savage," Dr. Mawson Harper said firmly. "Your reputation is impressive. Still, I would prefer to reach my own conclusions if you do not mind."

The **Bronze Man** nodded. He kept his attention on his flying.

Steadying himself against a bulkhead, diminutive Dr. Mawson Harper took a simple square mirror from his valise which he had carefully laid open on the floor. He brought this to the pilot's gaping mouth and -- registering no cloudiness that would denote respiration -- pulled back the man's eyelids one-at-a-time. The pilot's orbs were rolled up into his head so far that their color could not be determined.

"Dead," pronounced Dr. Harper.

He turned to the copilot who was suddenly ashen and said: "Help me carry him back into the cabin."

"The passengers will be upset if they see him like this," the copilot protested.

"This man is doing no good here," Dr. Mawson Harper retorted stiffly. "And the passengers can see that fact quite plainly."

"We bring him back and they'll know that he ... he's ..."

The copilot stopped. He was having trouble with his words.

"They need not be told the truth," Doc Savage inserted quietly.

*Such was the calm reassurance of the **Bronze Man's** simple statement that a disagreement was averted.*

Dr. Mawson Harper and the white-faced copilot gingerly eased the limp body of the pilot from his control bucket and back into the cabin. They deposited him into the wicker seat previously occupied by Doc Savage.

First, because it was the most convenient receptacle for the deceased man. And second, because it would thwart close examination by the passengers. It was for the latter reason that Doc Savage had originally reserved that seat.

Dr. Mawson Harper took out his stethoscope and other tools of his profession and began what was under the circumstances as close an examination of the dead man as was possible.

"I will not need you any longer," Dr. Harper told the distraught copilot in a crisp tone.

"Y-you sure he's ... gone?" the copilot gulped.

"I am sorry," Dr. Harper said absently.

The assistant pilot swallowed audibly. He had been a good friend of the late pilot. They had completed many grueling transcontinental hops together.

He glanced back into the cabin, his morose eyes running over the strained faces of the passengers.

"It's all right," he called weakly, summoning his voice.

There was a "frog" in his voice. A tiny one. He hoped that the passengers would not notice.

"Everything is ... fine."

Because he needed to feel useful, the assistant pilot claimed the late chief pilot's seat.

Doc Savage was talking to the "goat head" at San Francisco Municipal Airport obtaining a weather report.

"San Francisco is socked in," the **Bronze Man** reported. "Fog. No ceiling."

The copilot (technically he was in command now) nodded wordlessly. His eyes took in the mist the great tri-motor was thundering through. The floodlamps made it as luminous as ectoplasm. The wingtips were lost in the stuff with only the roseate-and-lime radiance of the navigation lights visible. They were like fairy creatures keeping pace with the ship and not part of it.

The copilot asked tightly: "What... what do you suppose happened?"

Doc Savage said nothing in reply.

The copilot started to repeat the question. But he remembered that the strange **bronze giant** in the latter's capacity as the new airline owner -- his superior.

*He did not know that this was a peculiar quirk of the **Bronze Man's** (pretending not to hear a question that he preferred for reasons of his own not to answer).*

But the copilot noticed that Doc Savage's **metallic** lineaments reflected in the windscreen. And his odd **eyes** like pools of **flake-gold** constantly stirred by tiny winds were quite animated.

A few moments later, Dr. Mawson Harper entered the control compartment. The copilot removed his earphones in order to catch what the medico had to say.

"It was a heart attack," Dr. Harper pronounced gravely.

"You are certain?" asked Doc Savage without emotion.

Dr. Harper nodded. "There is the telltale **blue** of heart failure. It is a tragedy. He appears to have been a young man."

"He turned 28 last month," said the copilot woodenly.

He swallowed again. It was plaine that he was taking the death of his fellow birdman hard. Only his sense of professional responsibility kept him from tears. Those would come later.

The copilot returned his earphones to his aural organs. He listened to the long interlocking 'A' and 'N' of the radio beam that indicated the tri-motor had returned to its true course.

"Are you up to landing?" Doc Savage asked.

"I...I think so. Sure."

"Ride the beam," the **Bronze Man** instructed. "You should do fine."

"Thanks," said the copilot, strangely buoyed by the *bronze giant's* confident manner.

Doc Savage heaved out of his seat.

He had been looking into the mirror that enabled the pilot to monitor the well-being of his passengers. The way he moved purposely for the back of the cabin told that something had caught his attention.

No sooner had the **Bronze Man** entered the cabin than the stewardess emitted a piercing *scream!*

Very shortly ...



*... sophisticated Miss Vine gets **RAPED!***

III -- Death's *Ghostly* Touch

Doc Savage was a student of human psychology. He had studied the subject intensely just as he had mastered many other disciplines.

He knew that the stewardess's scream would bring the passengers out of their seats with aisle-blocking results.

He got a break.

The stewardess had fainted. The passengers began lifting out of their seats, the better to see.

But there was nothing to see. The stewardess had fallen behind a seat. And that kept them seated a moment longer.

The **Bronze Man** sprinted the entire length of the cabin while the passengers were still swiveling their startled faces in the direction of the ear-jarring sound.

He flashed to the next-to-last row of seats. On the starboard side of the cabin, the butter-hued Chinese gentleman who had earlier been dining on peanuts laid a sprawl both seats as if lost in slumber.

Catching up, Dr. Mawson Harper took in the strange *greenish-blue* tint of the Oriental's face and exploded: "My word! Not another one!"

The Celestial's almond eyes were open in a glassy stare that told he was dead. His lips were slack and a thread of spittle crawled from one corner.

Doc Savage moved on to the stewardess ... saw that she still breathed ... and lifted her into a solitary seat. He reached into his coat and brought forth a vial which he uncorked and passed under her nose.

She jerked and recoiled from the repellent odor of smelling salts, her *blue* eyes fluttering open.

She blurted out: "I...I... Did I faint?"

"It is all right," the **Bronze Man** told her in a steady tone. "Breathe deeply, please."

The stewardess pointed across the aisle and jerked out halting words.

"I...I think ...that ...man...is..."

"I know."

The **Bronze Man** straightened. Turning to bird-boned Dr. Mawson Harper, he gestured toward the medico's black valise saying: "May I?"

"By all means," returned the doctor offering his medical bag.

As the passengers watched in growing bewilderment, the *bronze giant* undertook a cursory examination of the *blue*-faced Chinese. He felt of the man's plump wrist ... checking the eyes for life with a darting penlight ... and noting the man's temperature by feeling his fingertips.

Dr. Harper did not have to perform his own examination to come to the same conclusion as the **Bronze Man**.

"Dead," he said, fingering his neat black Van Dyke.

Doc Savage nodded. His weirdly active *golden eyes* were taking in the placid-faced Chinese's odd coloration.

"No doubt a heart attack victim," added Dr. Harper with just a trace of sadness in his tone. "He is just as *blue* in the face as the poor pilot."

"It would be an unusual event for 2 persons to succumb to identical ailments at virtually the same time," the *Man of Bronze* pointed out, slipping a paper sack out from under the dead Celestial's crumpled arm.

"But not entirely unheard of," Dr. Harper said quickly. "When the pilot lost control of the ship, this man was undoubtedly seized by panic. If he had a weak heart, fright could have brought on sudden death.

Doc Savage said nothing. He was looking into the paper sack.

"What have you found?" Dr. Harper asked, his mustache points quirking like curious cat's whiskers.

"Peanuts," Doc replied, emptying a tiny amount into one *metallic* palm.

Dr. Harper nodded. "Yes ... I recall now. This man had been eating peanuts. And making a commotion in doing so, I might add. It brought me out of a sound sleep twice."

Noticing that the peanuts in the bag were whole, the Doc Savage began hunting among the seat cushions, carefully moving the body about. Although the Chinese gentleman was no flyweight, the **Bronze Man** repositioned him with evident ease.

Soon, he dislodged another paper sack. This one contained the broken shells that had been carefully deposited there. He held this up to the light so that Dr. Mawson Harper could peer inside.

"I hope," Dr. Harper said solemnly, "that when it is my time to go, my last meal is more sumptuous."

Doc Savage plunged a *metallic* hand into the bag and brought it out full of cracked and broken peanut hulls. He did this several times, letting the shells sift through his impressive fingers. No outward expression registered on his sculpted features.

"Sometimes a man will swallow something wrong," Dr. Harper said thoughtfully, "and begin to choke. The resulting panic could induce a heart stoppage. Although I cannot recall reading of such a case induced by a mere peanut."

Doc let the last of the peanut hulls rattle back into the bag and gathered up both bags. He started forward.

The *bronze giant* had to duck slightly to negotiate the aisle. The tri-motor was designed for the comfort and convenience of its passengers. Gazes followed his big body as he moved with a cat-like and soundless grace. The occasional passenger dawdling in the aisle melted back into his seat like snow pushed aside by a plow.

Carrying his black leather valise, Dr. Mawson Harper trailed him, impressed in spite of himself by the **Bronze Man's** great **size**.

"There is nothing to be alarmed about," he assured the passengers in a loud voice. "A passenger suffered a heart attack, that is all."

The fact that Doc Savage did not contradict this unequivocal assertion did more to quiet the nervous passengers than the assertion itself.

"I trust this unfortunate occurrence will not impede our timely arrival," Dr. Harper said as he followed the **Bronze Man**.

He was looking worriedly at an old-fashioned pocket watch of the turnip variety.

"I must catch the liner *Mandarin* before it sails in the morning for I have important business in Hong Kong."

"We should be no more than an hour delayed in arriving," Doc told him.

"I would be interested in your opinion of the pilot's ... er, state, Savage. It is unusual that a man of his youth would succumb to heart failure. These airline pilots must pass a rigorous medical examination before they are certified to fly."

Doc Savage did not reply to that.

Instead he said: "We should be landing shortly. I will be needed at the controls."

Dr. Mawson Harper took the hint. He resumed his seat whereupon he was immediately beset by curious passengers.

His intensely black eyebrows jumped and squirmed in annoyance as he dealt with the plaintive questions of his fellow passengers.

The stewardess (recovered now) also worked the passengers, putting out a delectable lower lip as she mustered a brave front.

This busy attentiveness kept their minds off the dead man in the rear of the *Solar Speedster* and the equally-dead pilot seated forward (although the passengers had not yet grasped the latter's true condition).

Doc Savage eased his towering frame into the pilot's seat.

"I radioed ahead for an ambulance," the copilot said thickly. "Guess I should have asked for two, huh?"

"An ambulance is a mere formality now," the **Bronze Man** told him, setting the paper sacks on the floorboard.

His **golden eyes** caught a *glint* of something on the groove flooring. He plucked it up between forefinger and thumb.

The copilot stole a glance. He thought he discerned a tiny shard of glass in the **Bronze Man's** cupped palm. He could not imagine where it might have come from. It disappeared into the latter's coat.

Doc Savage seized the control which was wobbling slightly.

"I can spell you if you'd like," he said gently.

The copilot let out a gusty sigh of relief.

"Thanks," he said gratefully. "I don't mind telling you that I'm shaking like a leaf."

"Any man would under the circumstances," Doc told him.

The copilot folded his arms tightly. Only then did they stop trembling quite so much.

The *Solar Speedster* was volleying toward its destination on the California coast. Tendrils of fog swirled about her metal wings as she sliced earthward. Her radial motors thundered in unison, creating platters of shimmering metal that ingested big gulps of fog and threw them back as ragged streamers.

Soon the tri-motor was in the thick of the *vaporous* atmosphere. Visibility was zero. Not even the wing lights could be made out now.

"You're a better aviator than I am if you can set her down in this pea soup," the copilot said nervously. "I can't see the ground at all."

"We should be coming up on the beacon at any minute," Doc told him without a trace of concern in his voice.

No sooner had the last syllable been enunciated than a whirling **beam** of light showed like a ghostly finger through the wall of fog.

"There it is!" the copilot exclaimed with relief shaking his voice.

The beacon had been set on a shore promontory by a large oil concern as an aid to air and sea navigation but also by way of advertising. It was powerful. Over a million candlepower.

The copilot offered: "The airport is due north."

"I know," Doc said, booting the tri-motor around in a way that showed he was familiar with the San Francisco approach.

It was the smoothest landing the copilot had ever been privileged to witness. *In his retirement years, he would later describe it to his children and grandchildren, exaggerating only slightly.*

Using only the radio navigation beacon and the lighthouse-like beacon to guide him, Doc Savage slanted the big thundering tri-motor down onto the tarmac.

Neither the copilot nor the passengers had any inkling when the air wheels had touched ground. The fog was too thick to permit that. But somehow they kissed the tarmac so gently that only a slight jarring of the tail wheel told of contact with the ground.

The **Bronze Man** cut the engines and threw the ship around. The radials coughed and sputtered, propellers clicking to a halt one-by-one.

The copilot turned his ace to Doc Savage and mumbled a single heartfelt word: "Thanks."

Doc nodded. He flung himself from the seat and went to the deceased pilot. The man had fallen forward out-of-sight of the passengers.

He noted that the pilot's hands and visible features were still a mixture of **green** and **blue**. Oddly, they seemed less **blue** now. But corpses often underwent changes in hue, the result of chemical changes in blood gases among other things.

Beyond the deceased man out the porthole, Doc Savage noticed a short stair being rushed into place, permitting egress from the air giant.

It also permitted ingress for the throng who awaited the *Solar Speedster's* arrival, he saw to his deep chagrin.

The throng proved to be composed largely of newspaper photographers. Here-and-there a newsreel cameraman lugged his bulky equipment.

There were a few uniformed police who made half-hearted efforts to fend off the crowd. But they finally gave it up in the face of overwhelming numbers and allowed themselves to be jostled toward the tri-motor.

Obviously, the copilot's request for an ambulance had included the knowledge that the famous **Doc Savage** was aboard.

He rushed down (down because at rest, the tri-motor slanted at a steep angle) to the Exit door and flung it open.

When the magnesium flashbulbs began popping in his bronze countenance, Doc Savage hastily shut the door. He was no lover of publicity. It was a hindrance to his work (not to mention a profound nuisance) at times.

The **Bronze Man** threw himself behind the controls once again. He engaged the ignition and the starters ground to life. Still warm, the radials responded like racehorses, snorting exhaust and frightened crimson *sparks*.

He sent the tri-motor rolling and bouncing into the lee of a massive hangar with the shouting throng in hot pursuit.

Engaging the brakes, Doc advised the copilot: "I would prefer not to become entangled in any publicity."

The copilot grinned. "You got it, Mr. Savage."

"If the authorities would like to question me, inform them that I have gone to meet a Jason Baird who owns a jeweler's concern on Montgomery Street."

"I'll tell them," the copilot promised.

Doc *floated* to the door ... knocked it open ... and dropped to the tarmac, his *muscular* thews cushioning the impact of the short drop.

There was a door on this die of the hangar. He passed through it.

A few moments later, he reemerged wearing a grease-stained mechanic's coverall with the bill of a cap pulled low over his *bronzed* features.

The pelting throng swiftly surrounded the idling tri-motor shouting demands for Doc Savage to emerge. A few attempted to wrench open the passenger door but to no avail.

They lost a good 15 minutes waiting for the door to be unlocked. As they finally piled in through the opening, the grinning copilot apprised them of the **Bronze Man's** clever departure.

Their disappointment vanished when they were shown the 2 **blue** corpses. Flashbulbs popped. Newshawks demanded answers.

A woman indicated Dr. Mawson Harper who was attempting to squeeze through the knot of reporters to the Exit door.

"That man is a doctor."

The Press descended upon a sputtering red-faced Dr. Harmer who showed little patience as he parried the seemingly unending questions put to him.

Coming up soon ...



*... aristocratic Miss Vine is **HUMILIATED !***

IV -- The *Arm* from Nowhere

The first immigrants from China arrived in San Francisco aboard a brig.

There were only three -- 2 men and a woman. That was back in the halcyon days of the Gold Rush during which the seaside city began to acquire its wild boomtown reputation.

Evidently that initial trio of Oriental pioneers fell into the habit of writing letters home. Because in the decade following, proud clipper ships brought in excess of 25,000 peasants and "coolies" to do the menial work of Gold Rush days and to build the railroads that fed the boom.

The promise of fortune brought many of these. Famine impelled others to make the daunting Pacific crossing.

Less than 100 years after the first Chinese disembarked from their ship, their numbers had risen-and-fallen several times owing to various exclusionary laws enacted against their immigration; ruinous tong wars; and other social difficulties.

Currently, the Chinese community of San Francisco numbers perhaps 16,000 Sons and Daughters of Heaven.

So it was no surprise that among the taxicabs lined up in the fog near the San Francisco Municipal Airport operations building, there should be one rattletrap flivver piloted by a young Chinese individual.

This worthy was reading a newspaper printed in Chinese which he had propped up on the steering wheel when a voice instructed him from the rear seat:

"Montgomery Street, please."

The Chinese cabby started! He craned his long neck around fearfully.

The man seated in the rear was big, imposing. His face was in shadow. But the cabby caught a glimpse of compelling *golden eyes* set in a face that made him think of a *brazen* idol.

"Montgomery Stleet ... Velly good," he said, throwing his cab into gear.

With a grinding of gears, the hack whirled into the fog.

The Chinese cabby <blinked> the surprise out of his face as he chased his own headlights into the jagged terraces of the city. He had not heard his rear door open or close. The *bronze apparition* had entered the hack like a *ghost*.

So shaken was he by this that the cabby eschewed all conversation during the ride. The fare did not seem to mind. He offered no comment himself.

Passing streetlights illuminated the silent fare's face at intervals and reinforced the impression given of a *brazen* idol (but with an Occidental face).

When the driver finally turned his cab onto Montgomery Street in the business sector known as the "Wall Street of the West", he inquired: "Which addles, please?"

The fare stated a street number.

After the cabby had pulled up before a modernistic edifice (all of San Francisco's buildings were relatively new inasmuch as the city had to be completely rebuilt in the aftermath of the great earthquake of 3 decades gone by), he turned around to ask: "You want me to wait fo' you? Take you elsewhele?"

"If you do not mind," stated the **bronze**-skinned fare.

"Slow night. Not mind at all."

Doc Savage stepped out into the fog. He passed into marble lobby.

After consulting a directory of occupants, he rode the elevator to the 14th floor seemingly oblivious to the stares of the uniformed elevator boy.

At the darkened glass panel that bore the name "Jason Baird", he paused to <knock> twice.

No sound came from beyond the frosted glass.

He reached into his coat to a special vest he wore that was lined with numerous pockets. These contained articles and equipment (most which were his own invention) which came in handy during the course of his exploits. It was from this that he had produced the smelling salts that had revived the fainting stewardess aboard the *Solar Speedster*.

This time, he brought forth a simple steel probe. He inserted this into the lock. The mechanism surrendered with barely a protest.

Doc Savage entered ...

At once, the faint tang of *incense* smote his sensitive nostrils. Briefly, a strange sound saturated the dark office suite. It was a low mellow **trilling**.

Possessing a throaty *exotic* quality, it ran up-and-down the musical scale without adhering to a definite tune. It might have been the product of a wayward wind coursing through the rigging of a ship or between the spires of the San Francisco skyline.

Bur the eerie, melodious strain was neither of these. It was a sound that Doc Savage made in moments of mental excitement when he was surprised or puzzled or otherwise in the throes of some strong emotion. Often, he was unconscious of it.

This time, the **trilling** sound denoted puzzlement. It trailed off.

His acute hearing telling him that the suite was unoccupied, he <snapped> on the light switch.

The room sprang into view. It was an outer foyer to an office suite. The appointments were modern. Business-like but tasteful.

His *flaky-gold eyes* roved the reception area seeking any unusual signs.

He first spotted a discarded pair of handcuffs. They lay on the floor. He stooped and picked them up. Both circlets were unlocked.

Reaching into his equipment vest, the **Bronze Man** brought out a pencil-thin flashlight. It operated by a spring-wound generator instead of batteries. He gave the crank a wind and <thumbed> on a beam of light that looked strong enough to penetrate the fog pressing against the bank of windows on one side of the suite.

Doc raced this along the floor. The silver-dollar-sized circle of brilliance came to rest on a damp spot on the bare floor. He went to this. He knelt again touching the liquid, then bringing a moistened finger up to his nostrils.

Since the time Doc Savage's father had placed him in the hands of scientists and other experts for training, he had practiced a rigorous set of **exercises** for 2 hours each day. A portion of these was put aside for the development of his senses.

The sharpening of the **Bronze Man's** olfactory senses was accomplished in a variety of vials. Each of these contained different scents. Upon blindfolding himself, he would pass these bottles (the contents of which were changed often) under his nose and attempt to identify each by scent alone. Years of this routine had refined his ability to recognize an amazing variety of odors at a sniff.

Doc Savage's sensitive olfactory organs told him that the scent was a powerful narcotic, commonly administered by syringe.

Prowling the room, he went next to the reception desk. The drawer contents were unremarkable. But on the floor hidden behind a stout leg where it had evidently rolled was a sizable *gemstone*.

His knowledge of Geology enabled him to identify it as a diamond. He weighed it in one practiced hand, judging it to be 30 carats by jeweler's measurements. The *diamond* was worth more than a thousand dollars!

Doc Savage's keen deductive abilities swiftly gave him a fairly accurate picture of what had befallen Jason Baird, the man he was to have met only an hour before.

He knew that it was the habit of jewelers carrying valuable gems to handcuff the carrying bags to their wrists. This was a sometimes-risky practice. Determined jewel thieves have been known to saw off the hands of their victims after first knocking them unconscious.

Obviously, Jason Baird had been victimized in his office, the handcuffs removed and the jeweler himself doped. The absence of blood or a scuffle indicated that no serious injury had been inflicted during the theft.

He deduced that the fallen *diamond* had dropped from the jeweler's carrying bag when the thieves (the telltale odor of joss *incense* indicated that they were Chinese or some other species of Oriental) had spread their ill-gotten swag on the desk for examination.

Doc Savage next went to the door leading to the inner office. It proved to be unlocked and came open easily. The area beyond was intensely dark.

On the verge of stepping across the threshold, he froze. His weird *trilling* came anew ... then was quickly throttled.

Unexpectedly an *arm* lunged out of the darkness!

It was predominately *green*. The fingers were outstretched claws with long curved nails. They glowed *yellow* and pale.

Recognizing only the unexpectedness of the apparition, he faded to one side, letting the arm shoot silently past.

It seemed to waver and hesitate as if intent on following him. But Doc Savage had moved far to one side. The glowing *yellow arm* continued on trailing a ragged tail of *green* silk like a fluttering comet.

For the *arm* was attached to no visible body!

With an utter soundlessness that smacked of the supernatural, the phantom *arm* arrowed for the frosted glass door bearing the name of 'Jason Baird'.

Its grasping claws had barely touched when there came a *yellowish flare* of light. In that moment, Doc Savage shielded his *golden eyes* with a great *bronze beam* of an arm.

It was perhaps fortunate that he did so.

The *flash* was followed by a powerful **blast** of heated air. Glass jangled! An acrid *tang* blew through the room.

When he lowered his arm, all that remained of the frosted glass door were geometric shards scattered on either side of it. The wood casement was splintered and scorched.

Pausing only to ascertain that no other menace lurked within the inner room, Doc Savage went to the corridor door. His flashlight roamed the floor. He stepped out into the corridor. But all he discovered were the bits of glass litter.

Of the ghostly *yellow arm* and the silken *sleeve* which covered it, there was no sign. It was as if it had never existed.

Doc's *trilling* briefly filled the room. It trailed off on an incredulous note.

Reversing his course, the *bronze giant* ventured into the inner office. According to the papers he discovered on the desk, this was the private sanctum of Jason Baird.

It had been searched. But not in an obvious manner. Papers out-of-order and careless positioning of a jeweler's loupe so that it teetered on the verge of falling off the desk told Doc Savage that much. No self-respecting jeweler would allow such an important tool of his trade to be treated so cavalierly.

While the **Bronze Man** was considering the scene, the desk telephone jangled.

He scooped it up. Instead of answering, he paused ...

"Hello? Hello?" a gruff impatient voice said. "This is the Chief-of-Police of San Francisco speaking. I want to speak with Jason Baird or Doc Savage."

"This is Doc Savage speaking," the **Bronze Man** said instantly.

"Mr. Savage," said the Chief-of-Police in a distinctly more respectful tone. "The airport gave me this number. I understand you were aboard the Solar Speedster when the pilot and another man died mysteriously."

"I was," Doc admitted.

"A passenger named Dr. Mawson Harper has certified that both individuals were victims of heart attacks. Have you anything to add to that?"

"Dr. Harper is known for his charity work in China and the Orient," Doc told the official. "If he has stated heart failure as the cause of death in both instances, professional courtesy requires that I not contradict his judgment without clear evidence to the contrary."

"Well, it's damn strange," muttered the police official. "I myself have never heard of such a thing happening. The bodies have been taken to the morgue. But I would have preferred to have heard your version of events."

"I had urgent business with the jeweler Jason Baird," Doc explained.

The official cleared his throat uncomfortably.

"I understand. As far as I am concerned, the honorary commission you hold with the New York Police means that you have the same courtesy extended to you during your stay in San Francisco."

"Then perhaps you might assist me," Doc suggested.

"Just say the word."

"I am at Jason Baird's office at this moment," Doc related. "He was not here to meet me as we had arranged. Since our business was urgent, there is reason to suspect that foul play may have befallen him."

"Want us to put out a dragnet for him?"

"What would be a start," Doc said. "I will go next to Baird's home. Perhaps something is to be learned there. You may contact me at the Hotel Raleigh."

"The Raleigh. Got it!"

The Police Commissioner terminated the conversation.

Outside the building, Doc Savage entered the rattletrap taxi. He rapped out the address of Jason Baird which was in the fashionable Nob Hill section of town overlooking Golden Gate.

The fog was still a thing of dry, silky, clutching tendrils and frequent billows that ghosted up side-streets and across the main thoroughfares like rolling monsters from some *ectoplasmic* netherworld.

The Chinese cabby drove through these billows as if they were not there. This might be attributed more to recklessness than skill. More than once, he narrowly avoided running over stray pedestrians abroad in the night.

He also had the distressing habit of driving to the top of the steep hills and -- after releasing the gas and brake pedals both -- letting the cab careen under its own power to the foot of each slope.

This was evidently his way of economizing on gasoline. The looseness of the steering mechanism made this a risky practice.

This unsafe behavior prompted Doc Savage to ask: "Driver, what is your name?"

"Sneeze," replied the hackman.

"Is that your Chinese name?"

"No. Melican name."

"Then what is your Chinese name?"

"Ah Choo," said the driver, giving his knee a slap and rocking from side-to-side.

He tittered like a girl. Evidently, he thought himself quite the humorist.

When his **bronze**-skinned passenger did not join in the mirth, the cabby said: "So solly. True name Ho."

"Please drive with more care, Ho," Doc instructed.

The humorous cab driver subsided.

Mist-shrouded row houses built in the gothic style with swelling bay windows flashed by. Where the city reared up on one of its many hills, these snaked in upward sympathy with the rolling street.

Eventually, the cab coasted to a rest before a well-appointed home at the foot of Nob Hill.

"Wait here," Doc Savage directed, stepping from the tonneau.

The Spanish-style edifice had been built on a slope and was shaded by shivering eucalyptus trees. Steep steps were necessary to reach the front door. Doc went up with these with cat-like grace.

No one answered the bell. So the **bronze giant** slipped around the back where he was less likely to be seen.

The back door also was locked. With of all things an unpickable combination padlock.

From his vest, Doc removed a metal tube. He unscrewed the cap and -- taking care not to spill a drop -- emptied the liquid contents of the tube onto the juncture where the eye-and-hasps were secured by the padlock loop.

A *hissing* puff of smoke crawled out of the collapsing tangle of metal. Then the padlock simply dropped free.

When the acrid vapor had thinned, the **Bronze Man** put his shoulder to the ornate panel. It gave easily, the hasp dripping semi-liquid metal.

The tube had contained a corrosive acid perfectly suited to gutting stubborn locks. Racing his generator flashlight before him, Doc Savage reconnoitered the house.

It proved to be unoccupied. It had also been searched.

The searchers had been less careless about their work than they had been in Jason Baird's office. Perhaps because the house was so big and their time to conduct the ransacking (for that was what it amounted to) had been so short.

The **Bronze Man** found little of interest. On a mantel were set 2 framed portraits. One showed a rather blondish man with the fierce face of a bulldog. The other was a girl, very blonde and quite attractive in a prim studious way.

He returned to the taxi, feeling that he had accomplished nothing.

"Hotel Raleigh," he told the driver.

After the cab had entered traffic, the Chinese hackman Ho -- perhaps sensing his passenger's unhappy mood -- attempted another bit of levity.

"Did you hear about the Oriental who like Lindy so much he name his number one son after same?"

When the **Bronze Man** did not reply, Ho went ahead anyway.

"He call him One Long Hop!"

The nervous tittering resumed. The cabby threw himself into it with the result that his rattletrap machine began to swerve dangerously.

Before Doc Savage could admonish the driver, the latter emitted a lamb-like bleat of *terror* and threw the wheel sharply to the left. Wobbling precariously on 2 wheels, the cab careened down a side-street.

Doc rapped: "Driver! What is wrong?"

Whether the Celestial cabby actually heard the question or not remained unknown.

He threw the wheel about once more, clipping a shuttered news kiosk and losing a front fender in the encounter. It banged away.

His slanted eyes went to the rear-vision mirror. Sheer **horror** was mirrored in those Oriental orbs.

"Go 'way!" Ho moaned.

Doc looked over his shoulder and out the back window.

The thing that was following them was whipping and flapping like an angry **greenish** flag.

It was a clutching **arm**, hideously **yellow** of finger and trailing a chattering rag of **emerald** silk that threatened to slip off the gaunt wrist with every whirl and gyration the pursuing phantasm **arm** underwent.

The taxi could not have been traveling less than 50 mph. Yet the furious green **limb** followed madly. Its talon-like fingers with their curving nails bore down less than 3 yards behind the weaving vehicle. It was visible through the milky fog thanks to the way the skin of the clutching hand glowed.

"Go 'way!" Ho shrieked. "Go 'way, *Quon!*"

Impelled by a hard turn of the wheel, the taxi jounced over a corner curb and scooted down a dark side-street.

"Driver!" Doc urged. "Whatever you do, do not stop."

"All same to you," the cabby screeched, "I no stop ever!"

He sounded beside himself with fear.

Doc Savage watched the phenomenon of the pursuing disembodied **arm** with boiling **flake-gold** eyes.

The nature of the **apparition** defied easy explanation. Somehow, the pursuing talon of a hand was determined to overhaul the fleeing taxi. When the wildly careening machine turned left, the **arm** followed with only the most fleeting hesitation.

Once as the taxi driver trod the brake pedal to negotiate a sharp corner, the arm zoomed perilously close to the rear window. But the hack pulled away just in time.

Seeing that the mad chattering **comet** of bone and fabric could not be shaken, the **Bronze Man** reached into his equipment vest.

"Hold the wheel steady," Doc rapped.

"Steady as she blows!" the driver shrieked, mixing his aphorisms.

Doc Savage had out a padded metal vial in which tiny spheres somewhat resembling silver **cherries** reposed. These were actually miniature grenades of his own devising.

He fingered one from the vial and threw open a door. He got out on the running board keeping one arm hooked around the window post for safety's sake.

The *arm* was a wild grasping thing. *It* gyrated as if possessing invisible wings that beat insanely. Fog streamers ripped back from its bony *fingers*. The manner in which *it* knifed through the dry haze was uncanny.

Doc <flicked> a tiny lever on the grenade and pitched it.

The toss was good. It almost struck its target. Or perhaps it went through it. In the fog it was impossible to tell.

The grenade let go with a *whoom* and a nearby fireplug geysered water upward.

He reached into the seat and obtained another grenade. This time, he tried an underhand toss. The result was spectacular!

A blast of *hot air*, eye-hurting *yellow* light, and bitter *smoke* blew a hole in the fog.

It was eerie. One moment the fog was thick enough to stuff pillows with ...

... and the next, it sprouted a yellow *ball* of light. It faded, leaving a void that was nearly a sphere.

The cab turned a corner as Doc Savage watched the fog hesitate ... regather ... and slowly fill the vacuum where the disembodied *hand* had formerly existed. It was as if even the fog was fearful of touching the spot where the unearthly *thing* had been.

The *Man of Bronze* climbed back into the tonneau and clapped the door shut.

"It is all right, driver," he asked. "The *thing* is gone."

"I make tlacks good?" Ho asked anxiously.

"Yes."

"Huh. You like my tlacks, I make more."

The hackman bore down on the gas. The cab surged ahead, showing astonishingly more life under the hood than had been demonstrated so far.

The agitation with which the cabby drove told the *Bronze Man* that any attempt to persuade him to backtrack to the spot where the pursuing *arm* had been obliterated would be to no avail.

Pocketing his grenades, Doc Savage settled into the cushions. Strange *lights* played in the depths of his whirling *golden eyes*.

"Driver," he said, "you mentioned a name back there."

The driver <blinked>.

"Name? What name that?"

"Quon."

"Oh *Quon*," breathed Ho. "Honorable ancestor is *Quon*. I play to him. He obviously hear plea. We safe. *Quon* velly good.

The **Bronze Man** gave no indication whether-or-not he accepted that explanation.

He settled back into the rear cushions as the twisting byways of the fog-bound metropolis flicked past.

When the taxi pulled up before the Hotel Raleigh, the Oriental turned around in his seat and extended a sheet of paper with a serious face.

Doc accepted the sheet. To his surprise, it was a laundry ticket.

"Bill for taxi lide," Ho told him. "One come. Two goes. At 50 cents a went. 4 dollar including tip."

The Celestial beamed, his odd sense of humor restored.

The **Bronze Man** paid the man including the exorbitant tip and entered the lobby.

Once he had registered, the desk clerk informed him that there was message. It was a request to call the Chief-of-Police of San Francisco.

Doc used a lobby telephone. The Chief got directly to the point.

"We have been unable to locate Jason Baird," he said.

"Keep trying," Doc Savage urged.

"There is one thing," the Chief added hastily. *"According to the steamship pier, Jason Baird has reserved a cabin on the liner Mandarin which leaves at 10:00 tomorrow morning. Shall I station men at the docks to hold him?"*

"That will not be necessary," Doc told him. "I intend to be aboard the *Mandarin* when she leaves port."

The **Bronze Man** terminated the conversation and went to claim his room. There, he put in a call to the San Francisco morgue.

Upon identifying himself, he asked: Have you conducted autopsies on the two **blue** bodies?"

*"You mean the **green** bodies?"* the Medical Examiner corrected.

"You say they are **green**?" Doc asked.

"These two stiffs," the Medical Examiner vowed, "are as **green** as limes. Whoever pronounced them heart attack victims on account of their color must have the weirdest kind of color blindness I ever heard about."

"Have you started the autopsy procedure as yet?" Doc asked.

"No."

"Any objection to my observing it?"

"None whatsoever."

"Then expect me directly," the **Man of Bronze** imparted.

Up Next ...



... the whore Miss Vine is **RAPED** and **DEGRADED** !

V -- *Mandarin* Mystery

Day begins early along the Embarcadero. The 200 foot stretch of concrete wharves and shedded piers which constitutes San Francisco's teeming waterfront.

Tractor-like jitneys dragging flat trucks loaded with goods moved in-and-out of the yawning pier doors. Stevedores in hickory shirts hustled oversized bales with cargo hooks. Electric winches rattled and whizzed depositing boxes of freight into waiting holds.

The air was redolent of the odors of sea commerce. Oakum and copra, coffee beans and raw sugar. And of course, there was the ineffable of rotted fish, wet pilings, and salt air.

At 8:00, the Ferry Building siren gave a warning screech. The transpacific liner *Mandarin* bound for Hong Kong, China prepared to receive passengers.

The gangplank gate was opened. The First Mate -- clad in a starched white uniform and jaunty cap - stood by to greet the early arrivals. He squared his immaculate shoulders proudly.

For despite her exotic destination, the *Mandarin* was no roving tramp of the sea. Of Canadian registry, her keel had been laid in Glasgow, Scotland. She was over 80 feet wide and somewhat less than 700 feet would catch her length.

Her ebony hull was decorated by a smart *emerald* stripe running the length of her waterline. Her superstructure might have been carved from polished ivory. And the black 5-pointed star emblazoned on her *green*&white funnels proclaimed her to belong to the Black Star Line.

To seasoned ocean travelers, that meant the *Mandarin* was a luxury vessel of the highest class. Indeed, she boasted appointments as lavish as a gymnasium; a swimming pool; a bank, 2 dining salons; a spacious sea garage; and a theater that showed only first-run talkies. Those who could afford to book first-class passage on the seagoing leviathan would lack for no comfort during the long Pacific crossing.

The individuals climbing the gangplank were a mixture of first-class, cabin, and so-called "Asiatic steerage" ticket holders. Most of the latter were Chinese returning to their homeland to visit relatives or maintain business contacts.

Upon presenting his ticket to the First Mate, one early boarder went immediately to an upper deck where he could watch the file of humanity coming up the gangplank.

His almond eyes and sallow features told that he was a denizen of San Francisco's bustling Chinatown. Although he affected ordinary attire, he wore a black Mandarin's cap that failed to conceal the fact that his *yellow* moon of a skull was utterly hairless.

Evidently, this individual soon became bored with his solitary watch because he plucked 2 small paper sacks from an inner pocket of his very American suit. He set these on the polished *mahogany* rail and proceeded to fish peanuts from one of them. He shelled these by crushing the peanuts in a *yellow* fist and depositing the ruined inedible hulls in the companion bag.

His slitted eyes were unreadable as he worked his way through the filled sack. The expression on his round face might have reflected boredom or just the placidness of countenance so common throughout the Far East.

At one point, his eyes relaxes sufficiently that their color became apparent. They were a soiled gray like marbles that had laid long in the dirt.

The procession of passengers mounted the gangway for the better part of 2 hours. The *Mandarin* was not scheduled to steam from port until 10:00 sharp. So the early arrivals were desultory.

One passenger (obviously in his cups from a late night on the town) had to be helped up the gangway by 3 fellow Orientals. He wore a Chinese-style silk jacket and billowy pants which brought a rare frown to the visage of the Celestial on the upper deck. Chinese were not known to be "imbibers of the grape".

Another seemingly sick passenger came aboard not long afterwards. He was a white man although his face from the moment he gained the deck tended toward *green* along the law line. He held one hand before his mouth as he offered his ticket in the manner of a person who is stricken with seasickness.

After the man had hastened below, a deckhand told a steward: "That one is in for a rough trip if he's already seasick."

"You said it."

As events later showed, this chance comment proved prophetic.

Later, a swashbuckling individual ascended the gangway. He cut a large figure did this personage. For he wore a riotous costume of silk and worn leather and sheepskin boots that would appropriate attire in the wild mountains of the Asian interior.

His straight nose and pinched eyes bespoke of Manchu blood. They tend to be taller than most Orientals. But this particular specimen topped 7 feet in height!

He surrendered his ticket with a low grunt and pass on. Other passengers (Caucasian and otherwise) gave him a wide berth.

One deckhand could be heard to remark: "All that guy needs is a sword through his belt and bandoliers crossed over his chest to fit my idea of a Chinese bandit chief."

Nervous laughter greeted this observation.

Soon, the giant Manchu was forgotten amid the merriment and bustle of departure.

At 15 to 10:00, the ship's horn gave a warning blast signaling the imminent departure hour. A taxicab deposited 2 arrivals about that time.

One was a rather spry-looking man who walked with a cane. His face was decorated with a rather long tail of beard whose snowy whiteness matched his hair. Gallantly, he held the door open for his companion.

The woman who emerged from the taxi was a vision! This was obvious despite the fact that her face was artfully concealed by a black veil that prevented close examination of her features.

Her age was difficult to ascertain. As she stepped from the cab, she radiated youth and vigor. Her carriage was almost regal. A spray of expensive orchids encumbered her dress front, only partially-crushed by a mink stole. Her smart frock clung to her exquisitely-molded form in a way that was most pleasing to the eye.

Appreciative gazes turned in her direction as she mounted the gangplank. Perhaps it was the aura of *mystery* about her that drew every eye. For a chic turban swallowed her hair further masking her identity.

For all anyone knew, she could have been as homely as a horned toad and as bald as a hard-boiled egg. She might have been American, European, or a Fiji Islander. It was impossible to tell as she and her companion walked briskly through the covered Black Star pier.

At the top of the gangplank, the white-bearded old man presented 2 first-class tickets smartly.

"Here you are, my good man," he said self-importantly. "Please direct Miss Vine and myself to our cabins."

First Mate Bill Scott gestured to a steward who promptly hastened to comply.

After the odd-looking pair had been led away, another steward sidled up to the First Mate.

"Who," he asked wonderingly, "was that?"

"I don't know. But they must be important," the First Mate undertoned. "The ritzy dame took the Royal Suite."

The steward whistled. The Royal Suite was reserved for personages of utmost importance. Mere money could not secure it. One had to have status or "pull" with the steamship company.

"I think she's in Pictures," the steward muttered.

First Mate Scott lifted an eyebrow.

"What makes you say that?"

"The way she dressed," the other explained. "She has Hollywood written all over her."

The First Mate thought that was a reasonable enough explanation. He put the mystery out of his mind.

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But there was more to the mysterious 'Miss Vine' than met the eye. Even her white-bearded old companion did not know of her most recent unfortunate incident. And because of her feminine pride, neither he nor anyone else would ever know.

She had many hours to wait before boarding the ship. To pass the time she idly visited various small antique and gift shops that seemed to line the large port and marina.



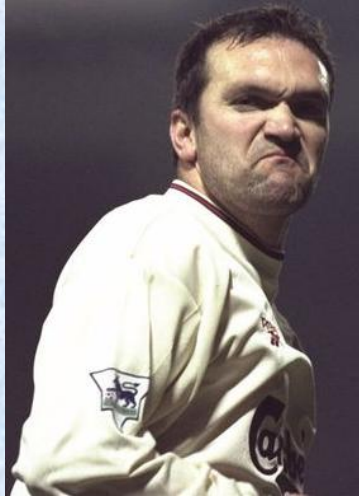
Unfortunately, her curiosity got the better of her judgment and she strayed into some of the more seedier shops in the back alleys. That was her undoing. For it was there that her beautiful form caught the attention of many *lust*-hardened deviants. Hushed coarse voices ensued.



"What d'ya think, Sloppy Joe?"

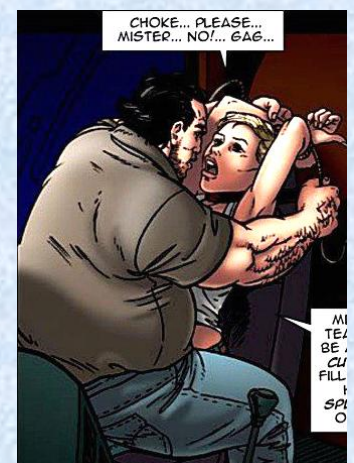
"I think we do her, Grunt," responded a beastly-looking fellow.

"Damn, it's been a long time since I had a **bitch** like that," seconded Fatty Pete.



The three of them waited for their opportunity. It came when the elegantly beautiful woman ventured into what turned out to be a vacant alley full of abandoned shops and warehouses.

Without warning, she was abruptly seized. She struggled against her 3 assailants as they muffled her cries and dragged her into a dusty building that smelled of liquor and **urine**.



"What do you want?" the beauty screamed at the crazed men.

"We're not gonna hurt you, **Bitch!**" said Sloppy Joe. "We just want a little pussy ... **Yours!**"

"Like hell you will!" she vowed and redoubled her efforts to escape.

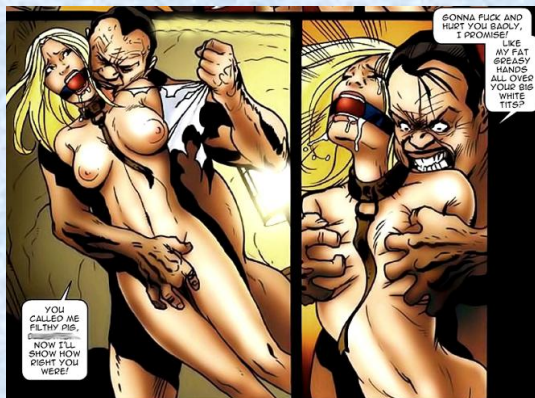
But their strength and numbers were too much for her. She cursed them as her clothing was pulled and *ripped off*.



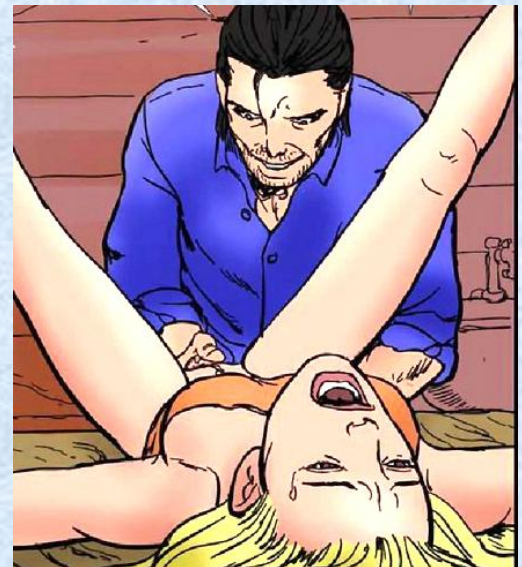
Hard mouths engulfed her full **lips**.



Strong grubby hands **pawed** and *squeezed* her magnificent **34-D** breasts.



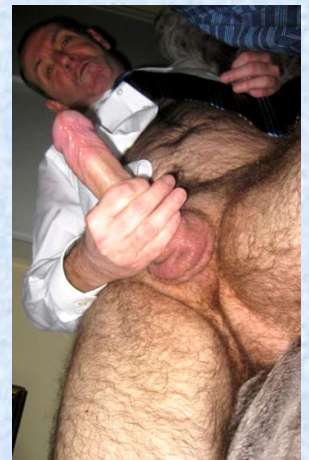
Hard fingers **probed** her most private areas.



Still, they liked the way she fought back against them. They liked that in a female that they were **raping**. (It was not their first time by far.)

She let out a short groan when they dumped her on the dusty wood floor. She could see big menacing **penises** jutting above her.

"YOU'RE GONNA
BE RAPED!"



"Spread your legs, **Whore!**" Grunt commanded. "And be quick about it. I gotta git read of all this *jizz* in my balls. I think it's getting' rotten staying up in there for so long!"



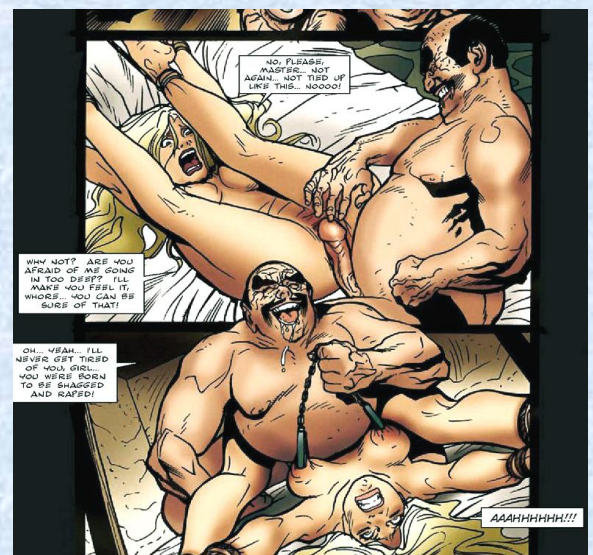
"Damn you all to ... !" she began to say when Grunt's cock suddenly speared her tender vagina. It was like a huge *electrical shock*!



"Ahhh ... the **bitch** is so fuckin' tight!" Grunt panted as he *plunged* away into the helpless female's fertile womb.



Every time she tried to utter a piercing scream, it was cut short when another **thrust** of Grunt's massive **dick** rammed up in her.



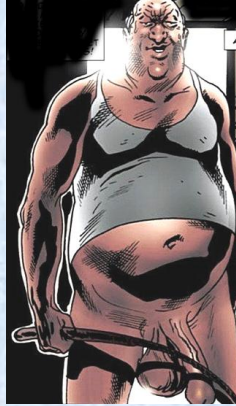
"FEEL MY BABY KICKIN' INSIDE YOU?"



That must have been what caused Grunt to climax. Both his and the beautiful woman's bodies **shuddered** as a volcano of rancid sperm gushed up into her stretched out cunt. She fought to hold back *tears* as he continued to empty smaller *spurts*.



She just looked at him with eyes that could kill!



But she had no time to rest because Fatty Pete quickly took his place.

"On your tummy, **Bitch!**" he ordered. "I'm an **ASS** man myself."

She was confused by that as they turned her over ...



Then when they put some old rags underneath her to prop her firm round buttocks up into the air, she suddenly knew what he was going to do ... **Sodomization!**

"Oh no! You wouldn't! ... *Please* ..." she began ...





Her beg was answered with a sudden plunge of a fat **penis** up into her awfully-tight rectum.

"OOOWWWW!!!! Damn you ..." she yelled.

"Got you!" Fatty Pete groaned as her anus seem to swallow of his impaling shaft.



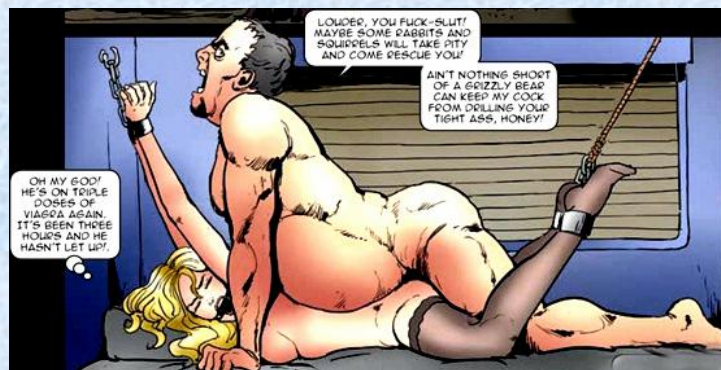
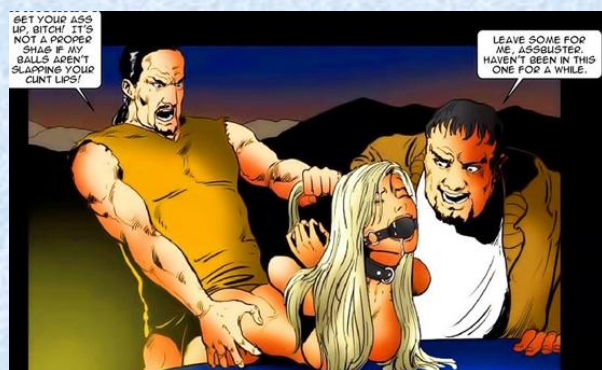
Soft whimpering *squeals* mixed with loud **moans** as she felt him plunge in-and-out of her bowels.



He panted *furiously* like he was hard at work as he felt his **semen** ready to flood her insides.

"*Yaahhhh ...*" he suddenly uttered.

Immediately she felt a *huge warm wave* filling up her anal cavity.



So tightly did his **penis** fit into her *rectum* that he had to wait for it to deflate before he could exit. He spent those moments giving his wench "sucker bites" on her smooth neck as he tried to squeeze off her full breasts.



She wasn't in as much pain as she had initially feared. Rather one of complete exhaustion when Sloppy Joe raised her to a sitting position.



"Now you'll know why they call me 'Sloppy'," he proclaimed. "Open that **whore mouth** of yours!"

She saw his smelly **dick** inches from her face. She was certainly not going to open her **mouth**. But as she started to curse him ...

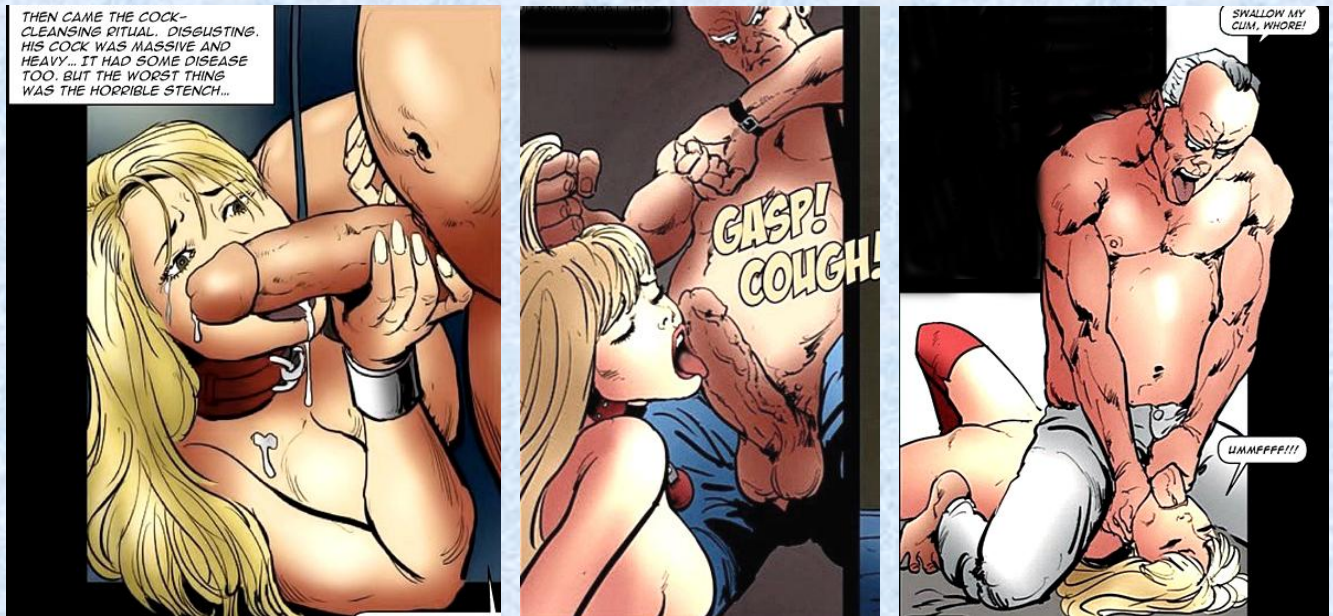


"Ahhhh!" he said contentedly. "Now milk it good, you prissy **slut**!"

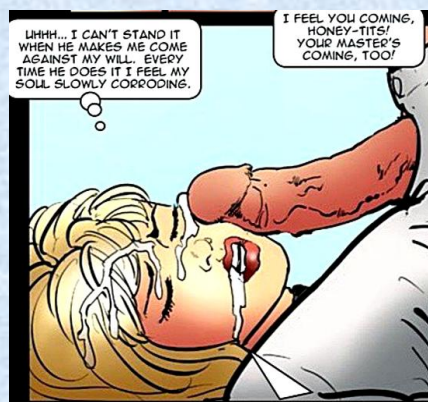
She choked and coughed as his big **penis** began thrusting in-and-out and down her throat. This time she couldn't hold back her tears that streamed down her face.



He seemed to take longer to do his evil deed than the others.



She was on the verge of passing out when she a salty-tasting *slime* filled her entire mouth. Sloppy Joe pinched her nose to force her to swallow most of it. Still, some ran out the corners of her delicate mouth, so potent was his release.



In a Parallel Universe ...



They <slapped> each other on the back as they dressed themselves. To make sure their victim wouldn't try to follow them and alert police, they found something to impale her with.



"There! That oughta hold you for a while," they laughed as they exited.





[Impregnated Whore]

The liner was due to depart soon.

The final patrons climbed aboard out-of-breath and sweating from exertion as is the way with stragglers. There are always a good number of these, it seems.

Dr. Mawson Harper was one of the stragglers. He piled out of a cab ... flung money back at the driver ... and hectored a stevedore into taking his luggage (which was considerable).

Striding up the gangway, he chanced to be struck on the nose by a falling object. He swatted at his goateed face thinking the annoyance a bothersome fly.

Seeing a broken fragment of **peanut** shell click off one white spat, he looked up angrily. Hastily, the loitering Chinese withdrew from sight.

Muttering under his breath, Dr. Harper finished the strenuous climb.

He complained to the First Mate in a loud voice and received profuse apologies in return.

Since it was so close to the departure hour and the Mandarin crew were deep in the task of preparing to put out to sea, no one bothered to act on Dr. Harper's complaint.

- - - - -

At 2 minutes to departure, a touring car screeched to a stop at the Black Star pier. Both rear doors flew open and 3 men emerged.

They walked in a tight knot down the pier, their heads swiveling nervously. In the center walked a man in a gabardine coat with a tasteful fedora pulled low over his features.

The knot of men (the curious First Mate saw that they were a grim group) paused at the foot of the gangplank.

The man in the center touched the top of his fedora. This was evidently a signal because one of the men started up the gangplank.

The man in gabardine followed after. The remaining individual fell in behind.

It was clear that the 2 men functioned as bodyguards to the man in the gabardine coat. Their faces were tight with concern and their hands fumbled at coat buttons or fluttered in such a way that weapons could be yanked from concealment at the first hint of danger.

Halfway up the gangplank, the man in gabardine abruptly clapped both hands to his face.

He made no outcry. He simply covered his visage reflexively ... teetered on his feet briefly ... and pitched forward on his face.

The canvas sides of the gangway prevented the man from rolling off and into the lapping water. One outflung arm got tangled up in the canvas stays. The man came to a rest with his face exposed to the bright morning Sun.

Hoarse shouts emerged from the throats of his would-be protectors.

"What happened to him?" one rasped worriedly.

"I dunno," said the other. "But look at his face."

The fallen man's face was a distinct **aquamarine** not unlike a tropical sea.

The loitering peanut-eating Oriental on the upper deck took one *look at the **azure** hue of the fallen man's face and plucked up his paper sacks. He disappeared from sight.*

After putting an ear to the fallen man's chest, one of the bodyguards went sick-eyed and called up to the First Mate who was clambering concernedly down the gangway.

"Fetch a doctor, will you?"

First Mate Scott hastily reversed direction.

Every passenger liner comes equipped with a ship's doctor. And the *Mandarin* was no exception.

But finding one individual on a liner of that size was a daunting task. She boasted a crew of 500 and accommodations for over 1,000 passengers.

The First Mate worked to the big liner's annunciator boards.

When that failed to produce results, he got on the ship's efficient telephone system (every first-class cabin was equipped with modernistic telephones) and spread the word for the physician to come on deck.

By the time the ship's doctor had been mustered out of the ship's bar, the stricken passenger had been carried into the Captain's private quarters amidships.

The man's necktie had been loosened and his jacket and shirt unbuttoned. A serious-faced man with a black streak in his white hair and a white streak in his black Van Dyke was seated on the berth on which the stricken one reposed. He was touching the useful end of a stethoscope to various points of the man's exposed unmoving chest and frowning.

The 2 bodyguards shifted their feet in the cramped quarters. They wore sheepish expressions. Their faces fell further when Dr. Mawson Harper popped the stethoscope earpieces from his ears and said: "I regret to say that this man is dead."

At that moment, the ship's doctor barged in followed by the First Mate.

"And who might you be?" the medico roared.

He had been taken to task by the First Mate and was determined to reassert his authority on board.

"I am Dr. Mawson Harper, a passenger on this liner," Dr. Harper said gravely, stowing his stethoscope into his black valise.

"And I just happen to be the ship's physician!" the other shot back angrily. "Which means that man is my patient!"

He rushed over to the man on the berth and yanked open his own black bag.

"It was a heart attack," Dr. Harper inserted stolidly as he gave the man room to work. "That much is obvious."

"If you do not mind," the ship's doctor snapped back, "I'll make my own determination."

At which point, the Captain put in an appearance.

Behind him hovered a hulk of a **black** gentleman in cook's whites. The big black man had his chef's hat in his hands and was kneading it nervously. His eyes were very wide, showing a great deal of startled white.

It was evident that the cook had summoned the Captain. No one had thought to do this until now.

"If no one minds," the Captain bellowed, "I would like to know what-in-Davy Jones' name is going on here!"

The Captain was a rather substantial wart of a man with a face like rubbed-raw corn. He looked wider than taller although only by the measure of a child's thumb. His voice *rasped* as if cured in brine. There was a great deal of **volume** to it, though.

"This man suffered a heart attack while boarding the ship," explained Dr. Mawson Harper, his bushy black eyebrows low over his intensely black orbs.

"Is that so?" the Captain said slowly.

"Yes," Dr. Harper replied. "I heard the commotion and thought I would offer my assistance."

He glanced at the **red-faced** ship's doctor.

"I did not realize I was poaching on another man's territory."

The ship's doctor put in angrily: "**I** sign the death certificates on this vessel!"

"Is that man dead?" the Captain demanded, his face acquiring the coloration of a **stewed** beet.

The ship's doctor hesitated ...

Finally he grumbled: "I am afraid it's true."

"Heart attack?" demanded the Captain.

The medico nodded wordlessly. Evidently pride and professional rivalry disinclined him for agreeing with his fellow practitioner. But he had no choice in the matter.

The Captain shoved through the knot of spectators and said: "Let's see who he is."

"That's Jason Baird," rasped one of the erstwhile bodyguards.

The man licked his lips worriedly.

"He hired us to protect him. Guess we're out of a job now."

The Captain sat his square body down on the berth beside the dead man and began investigating his pockets. He extracted a wallet and examined papers he found therein.

"Says here he's Jason Baird all right," the Captain muttered. "President of Gold Coast Lapidary."

"We never met him before today," the bodyguard admitted.

"Yeah," the other added thickly. "Our boss ain't gonna like it when he hears his client dropped dead on us. We're out a pile of dough."

"Maybe not," the Captain said suddenly, reading through a sheet of paper he had found in a secret pocket of the dead man's wallet. "According to this, your client experienced a premonition of danger. Or something of the sort. This is a notarized request that in the event of his untimely demise, his body is to be shipped to Honk Kong and the custodians -- I guess that means you two -- are to be reimbursed by the receiving party."

The bodyguards exchanged weak glances. They shrugged.

"I guess we're off the hook then," the first one said.

"All right," growled the Captain getting to his feet. "We'd better contact the Harbor Police about this if we're to be on our way. See to it, Mate."

The First Mate began shooing gawkers from the cabin. He lavished special attention on the big **black** cook whom he could not recall having seen aboard before.

"You!" he snapped. "Back to the galley!"

"Yassuh," said the big black man in a sheepish tone drawing his chef's hat over his woolly pate. He hastily betook himself away.

Descending a deserted companionway, he took a cross-ship passageway that brought him to 'D' deck portside. The galley was nowhere near 'D' deck, portside.

In fact, the hulking dusty-skinned cook paused before Cabin No. 67 and ducked inside.

He did not emerge again.

The Harbor Police had a small station not far from the pier where the *Mandarin* lay berthed. Ordinarily, their responsibilities were limited to policing harbor traffic and monitoring incidents of cargo poaching.

Technically, the death of a passenger aboard a berthed liner fell under the jurisdiction.

The police listened to the corn-faced *Mandarin* commander (he introduced himself as Captain Gooch) as he explained the circumstances of the death of the body identified by personal papers as Jason Baird. They consulted among themselves briefly.

When they were through, they asked only to see the body, the death certificate, and the dead man's final instructions.

They were escorted to the ship's morgue (the *Mandarin* actually had a full one owing to the Chinese tradition of shipping their dead back to their homeland for burial) where the body lay.

"You gonna perform an autopsy?" one of the officers asked the ship's doctor in a tone that suggested he would prefer a negative reply.

The doctor cast a questioning eye in the direction of Captain Gooch who shook his head in the negative.

"No," said the medico promptly.

"Good. Because we'd have to keep you here until was done," the officer explained. "Better you put it down as a heart attack -- which it obviously was anyway -- and we can all get on with our lives."

That done, the police debarked the liner. So too did the erstwhile bodyguards to the dead man after consulting with the private agency which employed them. The agency evidently trusted in being reimbursed by the deceased's next-of-kin without the formality of its 2 men crossing the Pacific unnecessarily.

Captain Gooch turned to his First Mate and growled:

"Let's cast off before an iceberg slides up to our hull."

The final all-ashore call was given and the bunting-festooned gangway hastily raised. The shore filled with waving well-wishers.

The great steamer gave a harsh *blast* and lines were cast off.

Tugs butted and nudged the big black liner away from the concrete finger of a pier and assisted it in rounding the peninsula ... through the constantly-dredged channels ... toward San Francisco Bay and the open sea.

A fog was rolling through the Golden Gate. It was very wet and clammy, somehow being remindful of a dead man's final breath. There was a fog dome over Alcatraz Island as they passed it. *It was a spectral sight.*

The 2 imposing steel towers of the new Golden Gate Bridge reared up on either side of the bay, their tops lost in the fog. Below, work barges toiled under the suspension bridge which when completed was promised to be 8 miles across. The largest such span in the World.

At this moment, she represented a jaw-dropping spectacle for the passengers lining each rail and a headache for the busy *Mandarin* crew.

Swearing harshly, Captain Gooch ordered the *Mandarin's* powerful deck fog dispersers to be brought into play. These shot streams of electrified water into the air to absorb moisture droplets. But they barely made a dent in the vaporous mist.

When the *Mandarin* had safely picked her way past the last harbor buoy and the tugs left off, Captain Gooch turned to the quartermaster at the wheel.

He said: "Your course is 256 degrees. Change over to the metal mike as soon as she's ready."

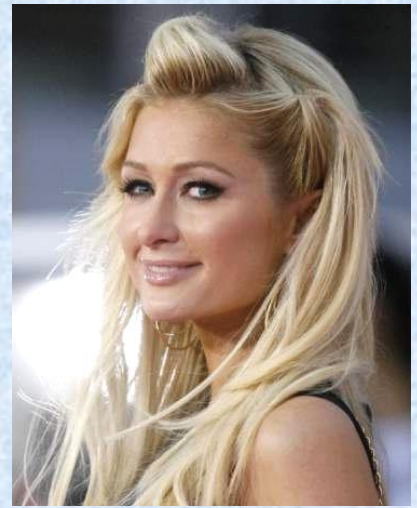
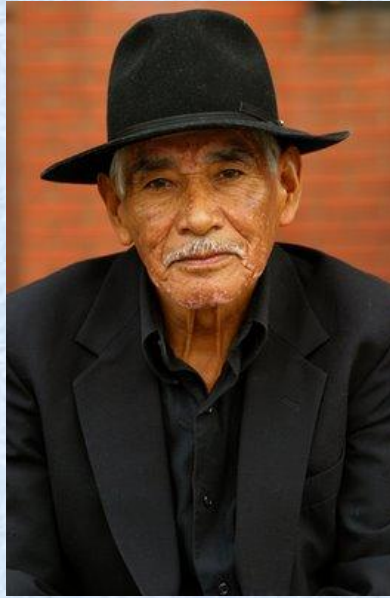
"Aye, Cap'n."

The great steam turbine engines began to pulsate. There was none of the horrific deck vibration so common in passenger liners a few years back. Two of the liner's great funnels began belching dirty white smoke. Although the *Mandarin* was a "three-stacker", one (the last) was a dummy.

From the navigation bridge, the Pacific fog was approaching like a marauding monster of white-and-gray tendrils. It slathered across the sea greyhound's bow depositing a film of moisture that made the skin crawl and itch. Nothing could be seen past the *Mandarin's* forecastle and stem.

"Going to be a damn long voyage," Captain Gooch said feelingly squaring his belligerent shoulders. "Damn long."

Coming up later ...



*... beautiful Pat Savage is **ATTACKED !***

VI -- The Elusive Manchu

13 miles out of San Francisco, the fog was still rolling ponderously toward shore. It seemed without end as it cascaded over the liner *Mandarin*.

The ship's hungry flower-mouthed ventilators sucked in great quantities of the stuff, distributing it into the engine room and cabins far below making miserable those who dwelt there.

When the *Mandarin* had set sail, her passengers had lined the rails and filled the promenade deck, making merry.

But the relentless clammy fog had cast a pall of discouragement over them and they had retreated to staterooms and smoking lounges. Only stewards and deckhands going about their nautical duties prowled the liner's slippery superstructure.

As the fog-haunted *Mandarin* steamed past the Farallones some 25 miles out, the door to Cabin No. 67 opened and a man emerged.

He bore no resemblance to the big **black** cook who earlier taken refuge in Cabin No. 67 except perhaps in his general outlines. This figure appeared less tall, although this might have open to debate since he was much rounder of girth than had been the cook.

Instead of cook's whites, he wore a flamboyant costume of gaudy silks and worn leather. The deck crew would have recognized him as the flamboyantly-garbed Manchu who had created such a fuss by the mere act of boarding the liner. His broad features were fierce even in repose. One eye drooped sleepily. The result of some past altercation involving a knife.

Outside the door, he paused to touch the scraggly mustache that adorned his upper lip. Orientals usually lack facial hair and this gesture might have been an example of Manchu vanity.

The big Manchu made his way through the private portion of the ship where only crewmen were allowed. He moved with surprising *stealth* for someone of his size. Handmade sheepskin boots might explain that.

Several times, he hesitated before coming around passage turns ... retreated in advance of approaching crewmen ... and managed to find niches and other places of concealment where he could linger undetected.

Moving in this way, he found himself outside the ship's morgue in the lowermost deck near the steerage section.

It was refrigerated. The bulkhead door was dogged shut to keep heat from the pulsating engines from hastening decomposition and releasing unpleasant odors from the cadavers housed within.

The big silent Manchu was in the act of undogging the ponderous morgue door when a deckhand happened around the corner. The latter practically skidded to a halt in surprise.

"Hey you!" he barked. "What are you ..."

The Manchu left off his furtive labors. He retreated around the next twist in the passage. The deckhand followed, his fists balled angrily.

No sooner had the sailor reached the turn in the passage than 2 monstrous saffron hands lunged out and grasped him by the neck. Fingers clamped down choking off any outcry.

The deckhand lifted frantic fingers. But the hands at his throat might just as well have been cast of tempered **steel**. Try as he might, their grip could not be budged or repealed.

The sleepy-eyed Manchu's fingers worked their way to a certain spot on the flailing deckhand's neck at the base of the spine. Remorseless fingers kneaded and manipulated.

The sailor went as rigid as a board. Eyes open wide in horror, he found himself carried bodily to a storage room and laid out on the floor. He had visions of a quick silent knife stroke across his unprotected throat.

But such a thing never came to pass.

Instead, the silent Manchu quitted the storage room leaving the deckhand to his private terror.

Outside the ship's morgue, the hulking Manchu resumed undogging the door.

It leafed open. He disappeared within.

The ship's morgue was not much different from those in large metropolitan cities everywhere. Except that it was much smaller, of course.

The bodies were kept in refrigerated drawers. 3 walls were checkerboarded with the wooden panels equipped with handles.

In this case, the body identified as that of Jason Baird lay under a sheet on the porcelain autopsy table. The *Mandarin* was nothing if not prepared for any eventuality which could possibly befall its patrons. Including untimely death.

The big Manchu moved toward this. Breath steam dribbled from his parted mouth. His fingers reached for the covering sheet ...

A sound stopped him.

"Joe!" a shrill voice said in shock. *"What happened to you?"*

The incredulous voice came from outside the morgue.

Hands dropping to his sides, the big Manchu went to the door. He put an ear to the bulkhead wall. It was thick but sounds were coming through with fair audibility. That was because they were so loud.

A boatswain's whistle blew **shrilly** summoning aid. Evidently the paralyzed deckhand had been discovered. Help was being summoned.

"*Speak to me, Joe!*" the discoverer pleaded. "*Say something!*"

The whistle *shrilled* again.

If this caused the mysterious Manchu any concern, it was not reflected in his impassive features. Steam eased from his flaring nostrils. He listened intently for some moments.

Feet drummed along the passage.

"*What-the-hell is going on here?*" an authoritarian voice demanded.

It was the ship's physician.

"*Search us,*" another voice rattled back. "*We found Joe in the storeroom. He's having some kind of spell. His eyes are open but he can't move. Never seen anything like it.*"

"*Let me see,*" ordered the medico. "*Come on, shove aside! I need room, dammit!*"

More crewmen were filling the corridor. Evidently, everyone wanted to see the seaman called Joe and the weird condition that had overtaken him.

When this had gone on for several minutes and the passageway outside the morgue continued to fill with seamen, the eavesdropping Manchu hesitated as if contemplating the wisdom of making a break for it.

It was conceivable that he could have remained in the morgue indefinitely. No one ventures into such a place when they do not have to.

Then the doctor's voice lifted over the din.

"*Some of you,*" he shouted, "*help me lug this man into the dead room.*"

That was all the Manchu needed to hear. He had no choice now.

He popped out of the morgue less than 3 yards behind a huddle of *Mandarin* crewmen.

One happened to have pulled from the group to light a cigarette. The match flame disclosed the Manchu half-in/half-out the door.

"Hey!" the seaman sputtered, dropping cigarette and match in surprise.

Everyone who could turn his head in the narrow passage.

The Manchu broke and ran, trailing a pack of determined seamen. Several of the latter clutched belaying pins and wore the expressions of men who intended to put them to good use.

The Manchu put on speed. He ascended a companionway ... cut across a deck ... and banged down another companionway to emerge on the port side of the liner.

Howling, the crewmen surged after him, jostling one another like logs bumping along a flume.

The Manchu was wily. He seemed to have a good grasp of the bowels of a modern express liner. He knew exactly which passages led to dead ends. In one case, he seemed to sense where a trap had been laid for him.

A waiting group of seamen saw him flit past their position adjacent to the noisy main galley. They pitched after him.

"There he is!" one yelled.

The seaman indicated the startled Manchu who was crouched outside a stateroom door. He seemed to be picking up something that he had dropped.

At the sight of the pursuing throng, he left off whatever he was doing and plunged up a companionway.

His pursuers reached the bottom of the companion. That was as far as they got. A few managed to place shoe leather on the lowermost companion steps.

Abruptly, they all lay down and began sleeping.

It happened without any preamble. The seamen were shouting lusty threats one moment ...

... and then they were a snoring pile of navy blue.

Most of them happened to collect on the exact spot where the Manchu had been spotted seemingly attempting to pick up a fallen object.

The Manchu was next seen lurking in the dark sea garage just aft of the forward cargo holds. He was caught in the act of attempting to secrete himself within a lashed-down sedan.

A warning shout was directed toward him and he left that activity, plunging into the cavernous spaces.

Although many tried, no one seemed able to locate the Oriental apparition. They fished lights into closed autos; checked under chassis; opened trunks and rumble seats.

"Where is he?" one sailor shouted in exasperation.

No one knew, although few let that inhibit them from venturing opinions.

Eventually they went topside where the fog still held *ghostly* away.

A voice (later no one could identify to whom it belonged) called out from the fog.

"There he goes. Heading for the fo'c's'le!"

There was a general rush in the direction of the forecandle. Owing to the fog-slicked decks, quite a few pursuers upset and had to be helped back to their feet. This only added to their fierce determination to locate the marauding Manchu.

Determination proved not to be sufficient, however.

The crew found themselves standing amid clammy wreaths of fog on the forecandle, cursing the soupy conditions vociferously.

Eventually, someone got organized enough to summon the First Mate by annunciator. Bill Scott hove into view with fire in his eye and a chip on one **gold**-braided epaulet.

"Somebody," he growled, "had better tell me a story that makes sense."

"He was 8 feet tall!" a seaman insisted, drawing up on tiptoe in an attempt to simulate what he had seen.

"Moved like a ghost!" said a steward.

"Chinese he was," added another.

The First Mate cut them all off with a sharp gesture.

"Describe this lubber," he demanded hotly.

It took some doing. But eventually the First Mate received a coherent description of the big Manchu. It tickled a gray brain cell.

First Mate Scott had remembered taking the man's ticket. The latter was a cabin passenger. Definitely not steerage. Since most Asiatic passengers aboard the liner were in steerage, this rather narrowed down the search.

Narrowed it to one individual that the First Mate found upon checking the ship's registers which was stored in the purser's office.

"The devil's name is Sat Sung," he gritted slapping the book closed.

He turned to a knot of waiting seamen.

"Let's palaver with the worthy Oriental gentleman," he added gratingly. "Cabin No. 67."

They broke into the cabin after failing to obtain a response. They were fairly confident it was unoccupied. 5 minutes of pounding with belaying pins on the door led to this conclusion.

Inside, they found little luggage. Surprisingly little for a transpacific passenger. They also found an immaculately white cook's uniform.

The First Mate took up the uniform. It looked BIG enough to swim in.

"That nosy black cook!" he snapped, another gray cell coming to life.

But a visit to the ship's galley produced no black cook large enough to fill out the oversized uniform.

"Anyone know who belongs to this?" First Mate Scott called in exasperation, waving the offending garment.

No one did. As it developed, the entire galley crew was present to listen to the First Mate's apoplectic tirade. There was no missing cook. At least, not one whose name appeared on the Black Star Steamship Company payroll.

This was considered very mysterious by all. Very mysterious indeed.

"I guess we take this to the Skipper," said the First Mate, evincing no enthusiasm for the task whatsoever.

Captain Gooch was regarding the impenetrable fog bank with one squinting optic and the gyro-compass repeater with the other when First Mate Bill Scott strode up onto the glass-enclosed bridge and executed a snappy salute.

He told his story in clipped no-nonsense sentences.

"The interloper is still at large, Cap'n," he finished, bracing himself for the wrathful reply.

"Keep searching, blast it!" the Captain bit out. "Once we steam out of this infernal fog, the passengers will want to be swarming all over deck. We can't have a damn phantom Chinaman terrorizing the vessel."

"I agree," said a resonant **voice** speaking impeccable English.

The Captain and First Mate whirled at the sound of the strange voice. Their jaws dropped a half-second apart.

For there standing in the shadow of the fathometer stood the giant Manchu listed on the passenger register as "Sat Sung"!

Pretty soon ...



*... Pat Savage will be **RAPED !***

VII -- Cryptic Message

The appearance of the swashbuckling Asiatic Sat Sung on the bridge of the *Mandarin* defied immediate comprehension.

The bridge was not unguarded. Yet the odd figure stood well within its confines as if he had been projected there by some contra-natural means.

It dawned on some of the apprentice officers that such an intrusion was not to be taken lightly. The Manchu was promptly surrounded.

By this time, Captain Gooch had found his tongue.

"Who," he growled, "in blue blazes are you?"

"**Doc Savage**," the Manchu said quietly, his voice vibrating with controlled *power*.

First Mate Bill Scott stood with his jaw distended. The point of his chin was practically resting on his uniform front, so it could not distend any farther. He closed his mouth with the dull *click* of meeting teeth.

"I know that voice!" he snapped. "You tricked us into lighting out for the fo'c's'le."

"Ventriloquism," the other explained.

"I don't believe it," the First Mate scoffed.

The Manchu who claimed to be **Doc Savage** lifted huge hands.

The bridge complement tensed. A revolver was produced. The quartermaster leveled it at the Manchu's deep chest.

"May I," the Manchu asked politely, "prove my claim?"

Captain Gooch hesitated.

"Just do it slowly," he allowed.

"Thank you."

The hands drifted up to the broad Oriental features. They came away clamping yellowish lengths of adhesive tape.

Where they had come loose over the outer corner of each eye, 2 short rectangles of *metallic bronze* showed against the surrounding saffron skin.

The bridge crew barely registered that much. They were looking at the big Manchu's black eyes now no longer slanted. It was evident that the saffron tape had been used to pull the corners of the impostor's orbs into almond shapes.

Next, obsidian-hued glass shells were removed from these eyes, revealing whirling pools of *flake-gold*. A collodion scar was lifted. The sleepy aspect of one eye vanished. The straggly mustache came loose. It had been affixed with common spirit gum.

"If someone will allow me," Doc Savage offered, "I will be happy to remove the chemical dye on my face and hands."

"Not necessary," grumbled Captain Gooch. "You're **Doc Savage** all right. But what are you doing skulking about my ship?"

The captain's tone was surly. But there was a note of respect in it. It was plain that he was not certain how to react to his unorthodox behavior on the part of the renowned *Man of Bronze*.

"I am afraid I have gone about this in the wrong way," said Doc Savage. "If we could speak alone, Captain, I would be happy to explain my actions."

Captain Gooch hesitated. His rubbed-raw corn-of-a-face worked as he considered.

"We'll go to my cabin," he said at last.

"The ship's morgue would be preferable," Doc stated.

"That's where he was discovered," the First Mate put in suspiciously.

"My unorthodox behavior will be easier to explain in the morgue," the Doc added.

That decided the commander of the *Mandarin*.

"Take over, Mate," Captain Gooch told Bill Scott.

He strode up to the **Bronze Man**, the ship's officer making way.

"I'm going to be very interested in whatever yarn you're about to spin, Savage," Captain Gooch said as he led the *bronze giant* from the bridge.

Down in the ship's morgue, the *Mandarin's* physician was enwrapped in an examination of the deckhand who had been left in a weird staring paralysis.

"This beats everything!" the doctor was muttering to himself. "I've never seen anything of its like."

"If only you could talk," he added for the benefit of the unfortunate patient whose eyes were jerking about in their sockets like frightened animals.

When Captain Gooch pushed open the bulkhead door, the medico looked up and launched into a long-winded complaint.

"Captain, this thing makes of sorcery," he sputtered. "It's not a disease ... I don't think."

Captain Gooch cut him off abruptly.

"Belay that bilge," he growled.

Then Doc Savage stepped into the room. He had to duck to avoid hitting his *bronze* hair (he had removed a coarse black wig and scrubbed his face clean of citrine dye) on the doorframe.

"My word! You're **Doc Savage!**" the physician gasped.

The *bronze giant* strode over to the wide-eyed deck hand. The latter lay on the porcelain autopsy table side-by-side with the sheeted corpse (there being no other suitable place for him). It was a position conducive to peace-of-mind. The man's face was crawling with perspiration.

"You are familiar with the principal nerve centers of the human body?" Doc Savage asked the astonished doctor, his eyes going to the man on the slab.

"Of course. But I don't see what ..."

The **Bronze Man** grasped the unfortunate seaman's neck and manipulated a spot near the spine.

Suddenly the man let out a *scream* of pure terror. His upper body jerked up, animated once more.

"I...I...I...", he blurted. "W-what happened t-to- me? M-my muscles were all l-locked up."

"You will be fine, sailor," Doc told him. "You were suffering from a temporary paralysis induced by the manipulation of a sensitive spinal nerve center."

The man pushed off the table. When his feet touched the floor, his expression indicated surprise and relief that his legs functioned.

"Permission to go, Cap'n?" the man asked, his eyes on the **Bronze Man** in gaudy Chinese raiment.

He remembered that his attacker had been so attired even if Doc Savage no longer bore any resemblance to Sat Sung the phantom Manchu.

"Hop to it, then," Captain Gooch growled, waving him off.

The sailor hastened from the morgue.

Gooch turned to Doc Savage.

"What about the members of my crew found sleeping at the bottom of a companionway?" he demanded.

"They happened to step on a number of glass globules which I set in their path," Doc explained without emotion. "When crushed by trampling feet, these release a highly volatile anesthetic gas that produces sudden unconsciousness. They will come around shortly."

"That leaves only the tiny matter of what you were doing prowling my morgue," Captain Gooch said, not quite certain whether to be mollified or not.

"My interest," Doc Savage told him, indicating the sheeted cadaver on the table, "is in this man."

"Baird!" the doctor exploded.

"The heart attack victim?" Captain Gooch chorused, his red face **reddening** further.

"This man did not die of a heart attack," Doc stated. "He was murdered."

"Nonsense!" the ship's physician burst out. "I myself examined him."

He whipped the sheet off the prostrate corpse.

"Just look at that face. As **blue** as the sky."

"Look again," Doc suggested.

Everyone looked.

The ship's doctor let out a gasp! For the body on the table was no longer the **hue** of a tropic sea. His skin was now a very definite **green**.

The medico gulped, <blinked>, and seemed to have trouble with his tongue.

"You have yet to perform an autopsy, have you not?" the **Bronze Man** inquired.

The doctor swallowed.

"Well I ... no. Not yet. We've only just sailed. But all the signs point to a massive coronary."

Growing impatient with the difference of medical opinion, Captain Gooch cut in, tight-voiced.

"Savage, just what is your interest in this man Baird?"

Doc Savage fixed the *Mandarin* skipper with his eerie **golden eyes**. They were calm, steady. Yet the optical trick of the light that imparted the illusion of constant *whirling* seemed to exert a quelling effect on the testy captain.

The skipper's blunt head had been hunkered down into his bulging shoulders. Now it seemed to rise up on his thick neck as tension was released. His beet-red fists lost their tightness, his fingers loosened.

"Jason Baird," the **Bronze Man** explained, "requested that I accompany him on this voyage to Hong Kong. He claimed that his life was in danger. I agreed and secured a cabin on this vessel under the assumed name of 'Sat Sung' in order to complete the crossing without attracting undue attention. It was my hope to draw out those who sought his life."

This seemed to mollify Captain Gooch further. He was used to having celebrity passengers traveling incognito.

"This Baird," he said indicating the form tented under the sheet with his pugnacious jaw, "must be a good friend of yours for you to go to all this trouble."

"On the contrary," Doc admitted, "I have never met the gentleman."

Captain Gooch seemed to regain his belligerence at this point.

"Then why in the name of all that's salty did you book passage to Hong Kong on the strength of a many you say you don't even know?" he roared.

"Jason Baird is a friend of my cousin, **Patricia Savage**," Doc stated, seemingly unruffled by the Captain's testy manner. "It was at her bequest that I agreed to confer with Baird. But when I reached San Francisco, he was not at our agreed-upon meeting place. I discovered clues that led me to believe that he had been abducted by Chinese kidnapers. Because of certain things that Baird had intimated to my cousin, there was reason to suspect the man might be taken aboard the *Mandarin* by his abductors."

The captain snorted!

"Well, you were wrong. This man came on board under his own steam. In fact, he had 2 bodyguards with him. They were no more Chinese than I am. They stayed behind in San Francisco."

"It is possible that Baird had escaped his captors during the night," Doc said.

Captain Gooch nodded.

"We found a note in Baird's pocket asking that his remains be transported to Hong Kong in the event that something happened to him."

He rubbed his blocky jaw thoughtfully.

"I never put much stock in premonitions. But if ever a man had one, it was this man."

"I would like to examine the body now," Doc asked.

The captain and the doctor exchanged glances.

Neither seemed to think of an objection, so Captain Gooch said: "Be my guest."

Doc Savage stripped the sheet all the way off the body on the autopsy table.

The ship's physician gasped audibly. The **Bronze Man** and the Captain looked at him curiously.

"Where...where are his clothes?" the medico blustered.

Doc eyed him sharply.

"You did not disrobe him?"

"No!"

The dead man was in fact as nude as he had been when he had come into the World. The livid **green** coloration of his face carried down to the tips of his toes which resembled deformed peppers.

The man looked sunken, emaciated to a marked degree. Bodies often get that way after several hours. So this was not deemed unusual.

After only the briefest of glances at the cadaver's features, Doc Savage went to the man's wrists turning them as much as *rigor mortis* would permit.

Next, he scrutinized the cold bottoms of the feet carefully. The soles were not quite as green as the rest of him. But they were **green** enough.

Thus, the parallel stripes of sticky white adhesive showed quite plainly against the weird discoloration.

"What the hell?" the medico grunted.

"Jason Baird informed my cousin Pat that in the event he fell victim to his enemies, instructions were to be found taped to the bottom of his left foot," Doc related thoughtfully. "Evidently whoever removed this man's clothes also took possession of the tape."

Captain Gooch turned to face the unhappy ship's physician.

"Who-the-hell could have gotten here to rifle this man's body?" he thundered, his **crimson** face working with fury.

"No one ... Any one," the medico said flustered. "I've never heard of such a thing happening. Not on any ship on which I've served."

"I hope that isn't an aspersion on my captaincy," the *Mandarin* skipper glowered.

The ship's doctor could see that he was only digging himself a deeper hole. He swallowed his words.

"Well, I intend to get to the bottom of this," Captain Gooch said forcefully. Make no mistake about it."

"An examination of the dead man's cabin might be in order," Doc Savage remarked. "I assume it is unoccupied."

"It is," Captain Gooch said. "Along with a flock of others. Passenger bookings still haven't recovered from that fool maritime strike last year."

They went to Jason Baird's cabin which was amidships on 'A' deck. It was Cabin No. 12, an outside stateroom. Which meant that it opened on the deck and afforded a nice view from its portholes.

The Captain prepared to unlock it ...

... but Doc Savage intervened. He nudged the door with his still-*yellowish* fingers.

The portal fell open at his touch.

"I'll be holystoned!" Captain Gooch muttered, his eyes squinting angrily.

Doc beat him into the stateroom.

The décor was unmistakably Asiatic in keeping with the *Mandarin's* overall theme. There was altogether too much bamboo and shimmering silks in the appointments. The aim was for a kind of *exotic* opulence. But the end result made one think of an overly ostentatious *chop suey* palace.

A cursory examination showed that the stateroom had been rifled. Luggage was strewn about. There were 3 big steamer trunks set on the Oriental rug. These had been pried open irrespective of their sturdy locks. Clothing was everywhere.

They spent some moments picking through the confusion of clothing and toiletries. Captain Gooch fumed in silence. For his part, the doctor looked bewildered. If there was an expression on Doc Savage's *metallic* countenance, it was not readable.

The Captain finally straightened up from his examination of the stateroom squaring his shoulders like a bull confronted by a *red* flag.

"I'm going to see about this!" he spat. "Burglary! On my ship!"

"Mind if I continue my search?" Doc asked.

"Be my guest," said Captain Gooch charging off.

The ship's physician looked momentarily at the sea. Mumbling excuses, he followed in the captain's wake.

This left Doc Savage to pick up the folded square of adhesive tape. He had spotted on corner of the thing peeping out from under a rifled steam trunk earlier.

He shoved the trunk aside and retrieved the tape fragment. It proved to be a rather soiled piece of tape. Such as might have been plucked from the bare sole of a man.

There was a folded square of once-white paper clinging to the tape. Doc separated the two.

He scrutinized the paper once he unfolded it. Both sides were blank. He held the sheet up before a porthole through which was coming only wan light owing to the persistent fog outside.

The weak radiance was enough to disclose the sharp edges created by the impression of a small key against the paper fibers.

Doc Savage's *scarlet*-and-*gold* Chinese silk tunic was fastened with wooden dowel-like buttons that passed through cord loops. He undid two of these and drew out a simple stick of a kitchen match.

He rasped the sulfur head into life with a flick of a thumbnail. Yellow flame wavered, tracing shadows across the *bronze giant's* impassive features.

Holding up the square of paper, Doc applied match flame.

The paper was evidently fire-resistant. It caught and browned along the lower edge. But otherwise did not truly burn.

The invisible writing which had been inscribed on the paper in simple lemon juice (he had detected the telltale *odor*) showed in whitish letters:

UNDER THE HOTEL COURMAND

The last word was an unreadable smear. Conceivably, perspiration had obliterated it. The shod foot was subject to perspiring freely.

If Doc Savage was disappointed by the unfinished nature of the secret message, he gave no sign.

Lowering the sheet of paper, his strange *flake-gold eyes* began to roam the stateroom. They came to rest on one of the big steamer trunks.

It was not the one under which he had found the paper originally but another one which stood on its side, its 2 halves separated on its hinges and spilling articles of apparel. The **Bronze Man** had given this trunk a seemingly cursory examination as he had every square inch of the stateroom.

Yet he went immediately to one side of the trunk which was plastered (in the fashion of luggage that travels often) with gummed stickers bespeaking the owner's global sojourns.

Part of Doc Savage's training included mental exercises. As a result, he possessed what was sometimes called a "photographic memory". He had only to take in a thing once and it was indelibly imprinted on his keen brain.

Without hesitation, his questing fingers went to a colorful sticker advertising that the owner had once stayed in the Hotel Gourmand in Paris.

The sticker was warped and wrinkled with age. It seemed to bulge up in the center as if the gummed back was coming loose.

Doc touched this experimentally. The bulge did not give as it should. He dug his fingers into the edge, tearing the sticker free.

A quick **bronze** hand caught the falling ivory square before it fell to the Oriental rug.

The **bronze giant** unfolded this into an ordinary sheet of stationery. The letterhead was printed with the crest of Gold Coast Lapidary -- Jason Baird's business. The message was typewritten:

Doc Savage:

If you are reading this, that means something untoward has happened to me. Possibly I am dead. If the latter is true, you should know that a Chinese devil named Wan Sop -- or one of his cutthroats -- is responsible. Wan Sop is a thief. He stole a

large shipment of diamonds from me. It was for this reason I asked your cousin Patricia to request your assistance on my behalf.

Savage, I know you do not accept pay for helping people like me. So I have made arrangements with the Regina Bank of Hong Kong for the establishment of a trust fund in the amount of \$20,000. This will be turned over to the person who recovers the stolen jewels and returns them to the bank. You may do with it as you see fit. But from what your cousin tells me, I imagine you'll turn the money over to charity.

Good Luck.

The note was signed "Jason Baird -- to be read in the event of his demise".

Grimly, Doc Savage refolded the paper and stowed it in the folds of his gaudy tunic.

*He fastened the odd wood buttons and quitted the stateroom like a ghost composed of **scarlet** silk ribbons.*

Later ...



*... beautiful Pat Savage will be **HUMILIATED !***

VIII -- The Second Peanut Muncher

On her maiden voyage, the *Mandarin* had broken the existing records for an across-the-Pacific passage. She was capable of 23 knots on the open sea.

She was only doing about 19 now due to the seemingly endless fog. Her whistle gave out intermittent **blasts** sending harsh echoes rolling and tumbling along the wave caps like scrappy canines. The rushing of water past her ebony hull was like a distant Niagara.

Captain Gooch had been industriously attempting to maneuver around the fog bank all afternoon. But the soupy stuff seemed to be crawling over the entire Pacific in a manner that brought to mind a sullen herd of driven ghosts. He paced the flying bridge like a caged beast, cursing saltily and often.

At day's end, the **Solar** orb sank into the sea seeming to take the stubborn stratus with it. Darkness clamped down on the leviathan liner as *she* ran with a bone of foam in her mouth through the black Pacific swells.

Lights strung along *her* superstructure blazed into life creating shimmering pools in the surrounding water. Overhead, the lesser lights of the tropic stars peeped down.

The stewards spread the word through the lounges and smoking rooms that the decks were no longer fog-bound. Passengers surged up companionway steps. The dinner hour had come and gone and viands had been consumed. The Mandarin patrons were in a mood for revelry.

The orchestra hastily assembled on the spacious promenade deck. As the warbling of a "*hi-de-ho*" singer wafted across the high seas, the rails began collecting loungers. Deck chairs and tables were quickly claimed by those indifferent to the eerie display of **phosphorescence** that trailed the liner's wake like a blue-green comet of the deep.

One of those who displayed no interest in the luminous phenomenon of the sea was a scrawny lemon-faced Chinese with curious gray eyes. He carried 2 small paper sacks to the promenade deck and settled himself onto the comfortable cushions of a deck chair. One he balanced on his stomach. The other was placed with easy reach on the deck floor.

Busy **crunching** sounds soon came from the lounging Oriental. He had the look of a steerage passenger. So most of those who prowled the *Mandarin's* decks paid him little heed.

The **noises** with which he went about his eating prompted the deck chairs on either side of him to go unclaimed. Most passengers were interest in rest or romance. And the noises that the Celestial created were conducive to neither pursuit.

Had anyone bothered to take the empty chairs, a casual glance would have revealed the source of the noisy munching.

He was methodically digging handfuls of peanuts from the sack perched on his lean stomach; shelling them with a firm squeeze of his yellow fist; and popping the fruit of the nut into his mouth. The empty shells were deposited a group at a time into the waiting sack at his elbow.

He seemed to be pointedly minding his own business. Leaning back in a reclining position, he seemed to give casual passers-by no more than fleeting glances. His eyes rested most often on the twinkling cold stars above as if the Asiatic were communicating with his illustrious ancestors.

On occasion, his soiled gray eyes flicked furtively toward a passing stroller as if in an effort to recognize one in particular. They never lingered long.

Few returned the Oriental's gaze. One exception was Dr. Mawson Harper who glared back as he passed by.

The physician had evidently recognized the moon-faced loungeur as the same individual who had dropped a peanut shell upon him when he had boarded the liner.

Suppressing a guilty look, the Celestial averted Dr. Harper's eyes. The latter passed on.

One passer-by did hold the placid peanut muncher's attention longer than most.

Perhaps it was the man's flashy attire. He wore a suit that was too loud. His shoes were an unlovely yellow hue. The hat that surmounted his rather large head boasted a brim wide enough to possibly tempt a wheeling seagull into alighting. It was of the variety designed to conceal the visage of the wearer.

The hat was not yanked down to conceal the man's features, however. In fact, he seemed entirely unashamed of them. Which was remarkable given the man's physiognomy.

The man's face seemed to be composed largely of outthrust jaw. It was very blue as if he were not in the habit of shaving. His hair was inclined toward the shaggy. Disordered strands of it hung low over alert sheepdog eyes.

A few paces behind the hirsute man, a similarly-dressed individual followed warily.

This man was shorter than the first by almost 2 heads and walked with the light step of a dancer. He looked like a habitu   of racetracks. Possibly a washed-up jockey who had become a tout.

In contrast to the casual manner in which the first man strolled the deck, the latter walked gingerly with his gimlet eyes darting about. They passed over the peanut-munching Chinaman without a flicker of interest.

They were not typical vacationers these two. So it was only natural that they attracted more than their share of curious glances.

One who took special interest in the flashily-dressed pair was a rather colorless young man who called himself Rex Pinks.

Pinks was no vacationer either. He claimed to be the society reporter for the San Francisco *Comet*. His presence on the Mandarin (he explained to any who would listen) was a combination of business and discretion.

Rex Pinks had written an unflattering piece on a wealthy San Francisco dowager. A woman whose husband was a big wheel in local politics. And the latter had raised hell with Pinks' editor demanding that the reporter be fired.

The society desk decided that Rex Pinks should take advantage of the next departing liner. The Black Star Steamship Company had been only too happy to oblige with a complimentary cabin. The liner business was in a slump and publicity was considered the best remedy.

Rex Pinks had been haunting the lounge and cabarets the better part of the day. The passengers had included the usual bored upper-crust specimens. None of whom Pinks (who was prone to seasickness) felt worth the trouble of a Pacific crossing.

Or so he had thought until he went topside and his eye alighted on a mysterious creature who kept her face obscured by a black veil. This vision of femininity kept company with a spry old duffer tricked out in a commodore's uniform whose sharp face was decorated with an Uncle Sam beard.

Intrigued, wan-looking Rex Pinks straightened his rather disreputable tie and sauntered up to the table where the pair seemed to be pointedly scrutinizing patrons as they passed by. This made him think of spies. He had always been an imaginative sort and had expectations of writing a novel someday.

"Excuse me, Miss," he said by way of introduction. "My card."

The spry old gent intercepted the proffered Press card.

He gave it a glance ... grimaced ... and said querulously: "Miss Vine does not desire Press attention at this time, my good man."

"See here, grandpa!" Pinks protested.

He wasn't quite certain what actually happened next.

He had endeavored to step around the older man when something tangled his legs up. He fell. It was quite a spill!

The around him turned blue with profanity and the deck became quiet. The orchestra hastily launched into another tune. Dancing resumed.

"On your way, sonny," invited the old man.

Rex Pinks ashamedly picked himself off the deck. The reporter had had ideas of asking the mysterious vision to dance.

"I happen to be with the *Comet*," Pinks said, mustering all the indignation his wounded pride would allow.

"And I happen to be Miss Vine's press agent," returned the old man examining his dark cane critically. "If she should decide to grant interviews, you will be summoned to her presence."

The way that the white-haired man said it indicated that this was about as likely as the Mandarin sprouting bat wings and flapping its harridan way to the Moon.

Rex Pinks knew an awkward situation when he was embroiled in one. He gave the mysterious Miss Vine a tip of an entirely imaginary hat as he backed away from the table.

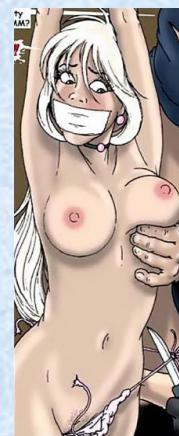
"My apologies," he said sincerely.

"Don't go too far," the mysterious Miss Vine said in a voice that made Pinks' toes curl alarmingly. "You might walk past a scoop."

"And you might not," added her press agent darkly.

XX

Miss Vine was still having flashbacks of her recent rape assault ...



The young newspaperman was so intent upon not turning his back on the veiled woman that he backed into the flashily-dressed man and his like-attired companion.

"Hey! What's the idea, mug!" the latter growled.

Rex Pinks had not always been on the society desk. He had come up the hard way. From the police beat.

The moment he heard the tough voice, his blood ran cold. He recognized that gravelly growl.

He managed to get his nerve under control as he turned around to look into the blue-jawed face of the man he had jostled.

"Good grief," he said apologetically. "I-I'm s-sorry."

"Get outta my way or you're gonna be sorrier," the blue-jawed man's diminutive companion said threateningly.

"Nix, Kitten," the blue-jawed one put in. "The guy wasn't lookin' where he was goin'. That's all. Ain't that right, guy?"

"Y-yes s-sir," Rex Pinks stammered. "I'm s-so s-sorry, Mr. Wool."

"I wouldn't go speakin' peoples' name too loud, guy," the blue-jawed one growled low-voiced.

"Got it," said Rex Pinks backing away in the opposite direction.

This naturally brought him back into the vicinity of the mysterious veiled woman Miss Vine and her graybeard of a press agent.

"You know who that was?" he blurted, the earlier altercation all but forgotten. "Delbert J. Wool."

"I fail to recognize that name," commented the white-bearded one in a supercilious tone of voice.

"Fuzzy Wool!" Rex Pinks breathed. "He's quite the tough guy."

"A gangster?" asked the woman, interest in her vibrant voice.

"Well no. Not exactly," Pinks told her. "More like an adventurer. He used to guard rum runners during Prohibition days. The little guy with him, believe it or not, is his bodyguard 'Kitten' Borzoi. Wonder what they're doing aboard this floating Chinese tea shop?"

"Probably looking for excitement," said the mysterious Miss Vine. "I know I am." *She sounded very bored.*

Rex Pinks stole a sidewise glance at her hidden profile.

The veiled woman seemed to be looking in the direction for the Chinese gentleman who was busily consuming peanuts.

Or perhaps her hidden gaze was focused on the short self-important-looking bantam of a man strolling in their direction. He was a rather striking individual owing to the black streak running through his crisp white hair and the white one bisecting his natty Van Dyke.

The *Comet* scribe recognized the latte as Dr. Mawson Harper whose charity work in the Far East had garnered him no little ink.

He was about to inquire of the girl if she knew Dr. Harper when a *commotion* drew his eyes in the direction of the starboard rail.

Someone *screamed!* A woman.

Another voice joined in. The sound was choked, inarticulate.

That person sobbed out: *"That man! He fainted!"*

Which made Rex Pinks wonders what all the fuss was about. People do not ordinarily react with horror at the sight of a fainting man.

He bolted for the starboard rail. The mysterious Miss Vine and her press agent were only a step behind.

For a graybeard, the press agent was making good time. He was actually keeping pace with the reporter, sprinting with his cane held high. It was the cane that had earlier tangled up his legs, Pinks now realized.

Miss Vine was no slouch either. Rex Pinks found himself rapidly overhauled. If nothing else, the girl was an athlete.

She also knew her mind.

A knot of passengers had gathered around the stricken passenger. Miss Vine waded into them with a will, shoving where she had to until she reached the fainting man's side.

"Who is it?" Rex Pinks demanded struggling to gain the stricken man's side.

The latter lay supine on the still-slippery deck. He had fallen face-downward. A wormlet of **blood** crawled out from his nose where it had flatted against the deck, the weight of the man's head having compressed it.

Rex Pinks swallowed his question. He did not an answer. The fallen one's flashy attire told him all he needed to know of the fainted man's identity.

"Fuzzy Wool!" he gasped in surprise.

Bending over the fallen one was the adventurer's bodyguard Kitten Borzoi.

The man was frantic. He was trying to shake his employer back into consciousness.

"Boss! Boss!" he moaned. "What eats ya? Don't be like this!"

He looked up, his features twisted with emotion.

"Somebody call a sawbones, pronto!"

Remembering Dr. Mawson Harper, Rex Pinks craned his neck in an effort to locate the physician.

"That's strange," he muttered. "He was just here a minute ago."

"Who was?" Miss Vine wanted to know, expectation now transforming her previous languid attitude.

"Dr. Harper," Pinks supplied. "He's a charity doctor."

"Oh," said Miss Vine, the interest departing her voice.

"Wasn't that who you were staring at a moment ago?" Pinks asked pointedly.

"Not really."

The aloof Miss Vine was looking down the deck. Rex Pinks saw the influx of passengers drawn by the excitement.

There was one exception.

The Chinese lounge seated not far distant. He was attempting to polish off his bag of peanuts.

His impassive gaze was directed toward the starboard rail. But he displayed no outward desire to investigate further.

"That who you were watching?" Pinks asked on a hunch.

"You're a nosy sort, aren't you?" the girl replied.

Rex Pinks grinned. "I'm a reporter, remember? Nosy is my middle name."

"Watch that it doesn't get chopped off," warned Miss Vine folding her arms. "Your nose, that is."

It was quite cool on the *Mandarin's* starboard side. She wore a light spring coat to ward off the chill.

She thrust her hands into the garment's front pockets. Although her veiled eyes were indiscernible, Rex Pinks was certain that they were trained on the nearby Oriental.

Abruptly, the Chinese lounge gathered up his paper sacks and moved down in the direction of the commotion. It was as if he sensed the scrutiny he was under.

Miss Vine looked away, Pinks noticed. He followed suit.

Still hovering over the body, frantic Kitten Borzoi was in the process of turning his employer over onto his back which disclosed the odd **bluish** tint that his sheepdog face had acquired. This brought audible gasps all around.

"He's **blue** as an iceberg," Miss Vine blurted out.

"Where's that doctor?" Kitten yelled in horror.

Puzzled by the absence of Dr. Harper, Rex Pinks detached himself from the crowd. There was no sign of the goateed physician.

Throwing his head back to examine the upper deck, Pinks noticed the Chinaman had taken up a position where he could see the excitement without having to rub elbows with the growing crowd. He had set his paper sacks on the gleaming rail and was again working through his stash of peanuts. His oddly-gray eyes looked no more alert than those of a somnambulant cat's.

Pinks raked the upper deck with his gaze. Except for the loitering Oriental, it was virtually deserted on this side. He decided to check for Dr. Harper below deck and started for a companionway.

As a result, he missed what happened next.

But he heard it. Or rather, its aftermath.

A man said hoarsely: "Get back! It's happening again!"

Pinks doubled back. The crowd was still gathering so he had his work cut out for him.

By the time he had wormed through the throng, the spry press agent was down on one knee endeavoring to roll the limp form of Kitten Borzoi off that of Fuzzy Wool.

Kitten Borzoi's face was only slight **bluer** than that of his erstwhile boss whose coloring shaded more to **aquamarine**.

"What happened?" Pinks demanded of no one in particular.

"The little guy was trying to help the other one," a man ventured. "Then he grabbed at his face all of a sudden and plopped across the first guy."

"Huh?" grunted the wan-faced society reporter looking around for the mysterious Miss Vine.

He spotted her moving her moving purposely back toward amidships.

Catching up, he said: "Looking for anyone in particular?"

"None of your business!" she snapped.

Pinks shrugged but kept pace. He noticed that the girl seemed to pay particular attention to the deck chairs as she passed them.

"If you're looking for a certain peanut-munching Oriental," he offered, "I'm the lad to ask."

Miss Vine stopped abruptly. She whirled.

"Then spill it, buster!" she said sharply.

Rex Pinks stepped out of her range of vision so she was looking past and in the direction where Fuzzy Wool and Kitten Borzoi had evidently fainted. He indicated the upper deck with a jerk of his thumb.

"There," he said smugly.

The mysterious Miss Vine tilted her head back. Pinks tried to peer past her veil. But the mesh was too dense.

"Ah-hah!" said Miss Vine, charging for the handiest companionway. "Wait here while I toss him down to you."

"Nothing doing," said Rex Pinks. "Where you go, I go."

He had cause to regret his bold statement a moment later.

There was a companion amidships. Miss Vine was making for it, her eyes on the lounging Chinaman. The latter happened to look in her direction. (Their direction, actually.)

He brought his hand up to his mouth presumably to swallow another handful of shelled peanuts. He held his hand before his mouth even after he started chewing. He might have been seasick.

"I don't like the way he's looking at me," Miss Vine muttered, ducking into the dark maw of the companion.

They had taken no more than 3 steps when the mysterious Miss Vine abruptly gasped ... faltered ... and with a frantic flurry of limbs shucked off her coat, frock, turban, and veil as she reversed direction.

They made a disordered trail to the starboard rail where Miss Vine lost no time in plunging into the wrinkled waters of the Pacific with a great splash!

The society reporter caught a fleeting glimpse of a trailing *object* following close behind. It was very long and very *green* and flapped a ragged tail behind it like a serpentine comet.

Whatever this *object* was, it executed a sharp dive just seconds behind its apparent quarry. A single *splash* came over the rush of passing water.

Rex Pinks had been a reporter long enough to have lost most of his illusions. But not (as yet) his chivalry. He started for the rail, working his tie loose. Determination was written on his pale dissolute features.

His resolute expression turned to startlement when something **Big** and *Bronze* flashed out seemingly from nowhere and bowled him over.

Rex Pinks yelled "Hey!" and sat down hard.

As he was picking himself up, he heard another *splash*. It was larger than the one that had accompanied Miss Vine's plunge into the drink.

He jumped to rail and peered down.

There was a Moon. So there was enough glitter moonglade on the dimpled inky sea to show several floating objects.

Among them was a train of blonde hair. It floated. Disembodied tendrils of hair spreading in all directions like a yellow jellyfish.

There was no sign of the body that should have been attached to the hair.

No sign of any life at all.

Coming up ...



*... aristocratic Pat Savage gets **DEGRADED !***

IX -- Tarzana

Doc Savage had grabbed a life preserver before vaulting the Mandarin's rail. He let it slip from his strong fingers as he went into his dive and it struck the water a split-second before his mighty form.

The **Bronze Man** hit the cold Pacific on a dive so shallow that his remarkable hair barely got wet. When his head bobbed up, it began shedding moisture like the proverbial duck's back. It was a peculiar quality of his *metallic* skin and hair.

Doc treaded water as his *flake-gold eyes* roved the surrounding sea. The life preserver floated at hand.

The *Mandarin* -- as tall as a 10-story house -- plowed on past. But the **Bronze Man** seemed unconcerned about that.

A voice cried: "*Man ... I mean woman overboard!*"

It was Rex Pinks' voice already sounding distant.

The liner's horn gave a hard *blast*. Her thrumming engines slowed. Still, momentum carried her deep into the night. The steaming leviathan would continue more than a mile before *she* could safely come about.

Doc Savage spotted the blonde hair bobbing nearby. He set out for it ... grabbed the thing ... and lifted it clear of the water.

The underside of the scalp was netting. A **wig**. There was even a maker's label: "**Patricia, Inc.**"

Doc flung the waterlogged thing away, his eyes stark. There was no sign of the body that had been attached to the hairpiece.

The **Bronze Man** jack-knifed into the water.

He spotted the faint yellow glow first. It was dwindling. Something intercepted it and he lost sight."

Then it reappeared like a *yellow* bone in moonlight.

Doc redoubled his efforts. Feet kicking, his *mighty* hands strained before him.

He discerned the girl's ankles only when they were a few feet in front of him. It was that **dark** under the water.

The *bronze giant* grasped one ankle. It kicked back at him.

He retained his grip, arresting the downward course of the diving girl. Pulling, he got hold of a trim wrist and levered the swimmer around.

There was a brief underwater struggle. Very brief.

Doc played the beam of his flashlight on his own grimly *metallic* features and the other became quiescent.

Neither one of them had much air in their lungs and the Pacific is very deep. The girl was forced to kick toward the surface. Doc Savage followed.

Once, he cast a hasty glance downward. The ghostly *arm* was only a dim shape now. It seemed to fold and collapse as if the corrosive action of saltwater robbed it of life.

It did not follow them back.

When Doc's head broke the surface, he found himself face-to-face with a rather attractive young girl whose hair burnished by moonlight was almost as *bronze* as his own. Her *eyes* of unusual *golden* tint narrowed at him.

"I was wondering when you'd stick your oar in," she said tartly.

"Miss Vine?" Doc said dryly.

"As in Hollywood and Vine. But you may call me Tarzana," she added. "It's a moniker that Ham hung on me."

"Ham is the one of the white beard I take it," said Doc Savage as he brought the life preserver between them for support.

"The very same."

The *bronze*-haired girl blew brine off her delectable lips. "Say, Doc! Where have you been? I've had my eye peeled for you ever since we left port. I was beginning to think you'd been left behind."

"Later," he said casting an eye in the direction of the *Mandarin* whose engines were coming to a dead stop.

Someone went to work on a lifeboat davit. All liners on the Pacific run are equipped with quadrant gravity davits which enable a single person to accomplish the tricky task of lowering a lifeboat into the water.

3 seamen were attempting it and for some reason having difficulties. It might be suspected that each had visions of heroism which he was unwilling to share.

"Care to swim for it?" Doc suggested.

"Sure," Pat said, teeth chattering.

"It will be warm aboard the ship," he said as they fell into a brisk dog paddle.

"That's not why my teeth are chattering," said Pat.

*She was actually **Patricia Savage** -- Doc's cousin and only living relative.*



(<http://www.hotlegsinlove.com/AnnaXXX.htm>)

"Did you see that *spook* of a thing that was chasing me?"

"It was identical to a pair of *apparitions* that I encountered in San Francisco."

XX

Pat could recall the very first time that her teeth chattered in the same way. It was a *horror* that she would never forget.

As a young teenager, Patricia Savage was living in the cabin of her late father in a remote section of Canada. (see "*Brand of the Werewolf*" #011*XXX*)

His cabin was in a particularly secluded part of the territory. But the locals knew of him and his beautiful daughter. Particularly some middle-aged men who were half-drunk while hunting one day ...



"Why ... hello," Patricia stammered, caught by surprise at seeing the grizzled group.

"Well hello, Baby," one of them cooed. "My, don't you like nice today. Very nice!"



"Thank ... you," she nervously said. "Can I ... help you?"

"We just want to know one thing," another said.

"What's that?" Patricia asked.

"Are you a virgin?"

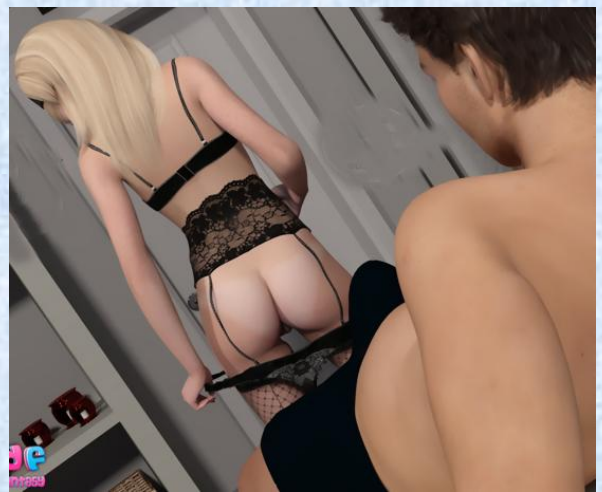
The mention of that word caused the men to shed any friendly demeanor about them. Now *scowls* replaced their smiles and hard intent filled their eyes.

Patricia was scared. "Please don't hurt me," she whimpered.

"We're not going to hurt you, little girl. We just want a little **pussy** ... Yours!"



Patricia was so stunned and frozen with fear that she hardly resisted when they laughing started stripping off her clothes.



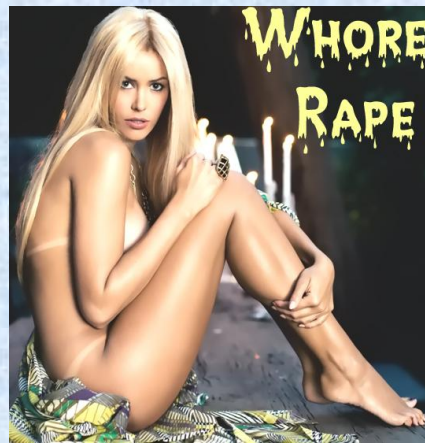
"Ooohhh ... Just look at them titties!" someone exclaimed. "Can't wait to suck the hell of them juggies!"

They all laughed and started removing their clothes. Teenage Patricia was blessed (or cursed) with a fully developed woman's body.



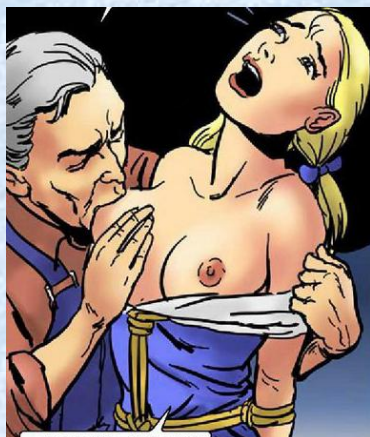
"Now show us your 'whisker-biscuit'," somebody said.

That caused the entire evil group to burst out laughing as Patricia removed the last of her clothing.



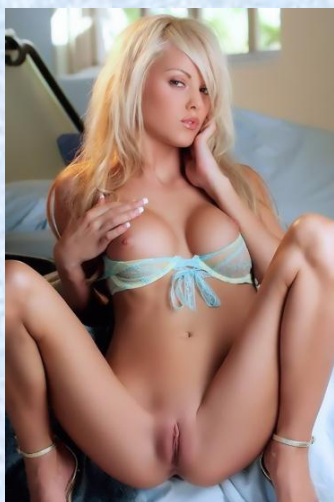
They passed her around from man-to-man. Each of them sampled her young **lips**, her amazing 34-D full breasts, and her tender cunt.





An old woman suddenly appeared in the midst of the group.

"Rape the Whore!"



"Time for you to lay down, Princess," she said.

"And spread those long legs out wide for your new daddies," another added.

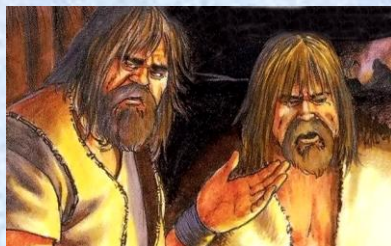
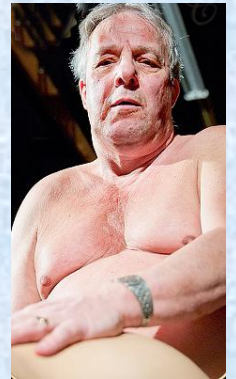
Patricia was hesitant. She of course was a virgin.

Plus she had never seen a man naked before let alone an entire group of them. Their menacing looks intimidated her into doing as they commanded.



They suddenly got *meaner*.

"Lift up your knees, you goddamn **Whore**! It's **baby-makin'** time!"





A moment of defiance then flashed through Patricia as she saw a huge ugly **penis** approaching her vulnerable vagina.

"Go to hell, you bastards!" she screamed and started to fight back.

But that only encouraged them.

"I'll stretch her out for you, Danny," the old woman said. "You're too BIG. You'll spend all day tryin' to bust her cherry."

"You're gonna get Raped now, Girlie!"



Patricia *squealed* as the old hag poked around her womb before finally gaining entry.



"I think the **slut** is ready for you now, Danny," she said proudly.

"Now it's not good if it's too easy," he said. "Fight me. Fight me hard! If you don't, you gonna get pregnant with Big Danny's brat."



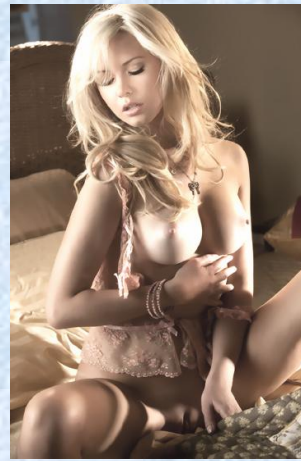
Patricia **screamed** when her vagina was pierced and torn!



And she **groaned** and *sobbed* when she felt that huge **impregnating** glob shoot up deep inside her young fertile womb.



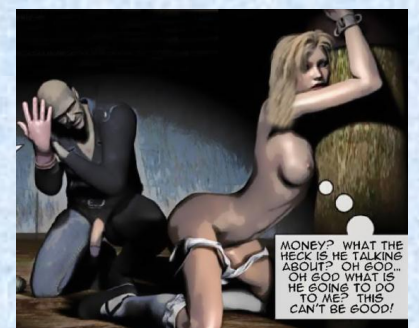
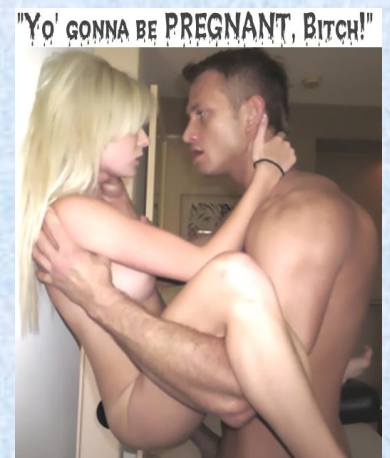
She had only a moment to catch her breath and check for damage ...



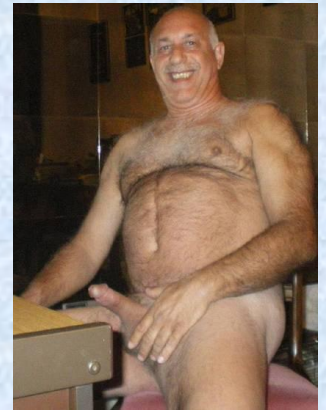
... before another pervert came to claim his turn!



Maybe it was because her teenage cunt was sore from her previous raping. Or maybe this man was just bigger than the first one. But it hurt like hell!!!

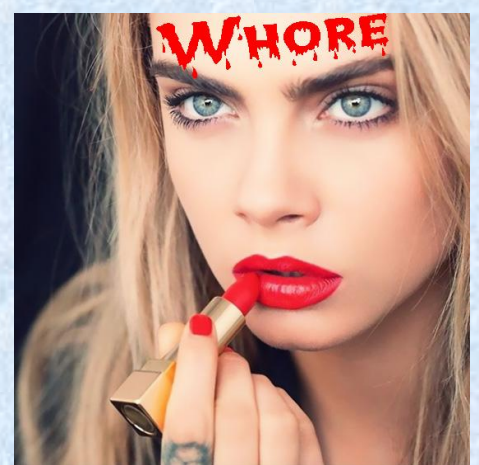


The old lady and the men laughed watching Patricia trying to recover from her 2 rapes. It made the remaining men who hadn't yet had their "turn" quite *lustful*.



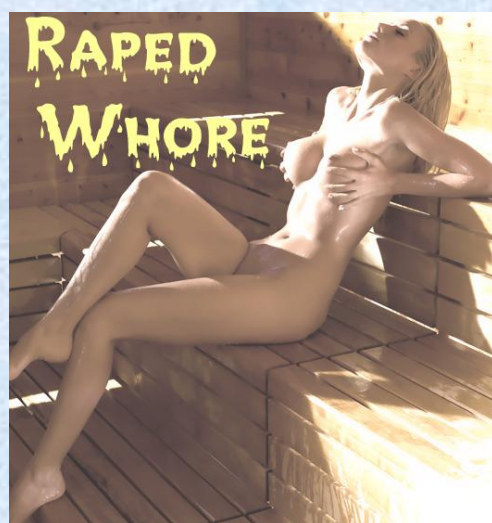
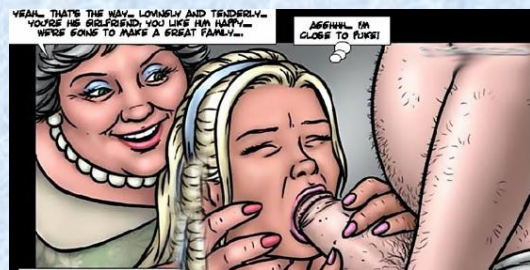
"You ain't done yet, little **Whore**," the grandma stated. "Put some **lipstick** on those cock-suckin' lips of yours."

Patricia's hand *trembled* as she daintily pressed the **color** onto her full lips.



Her eyes swelled up with tears and she gagged when a nasty **dick** inserted itself.





Some of the perverts still had not had their way with the beautiful teenager. But they wanted something a little "different".

"Roll over on your tummy, little girl," one commanded.

Patricia hesitated ...

"Roll over right now, goddamn you!" the old lady yelled.

"Fuck Her Ass!"



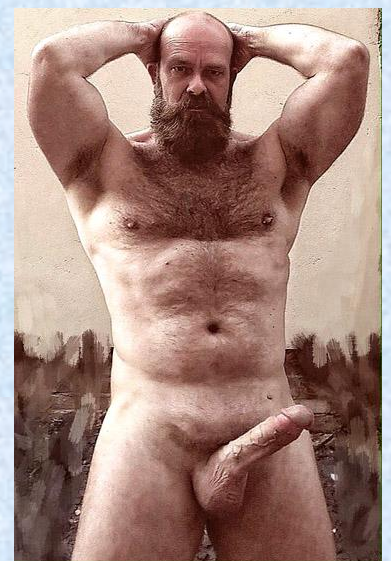
Patricia was still unsure of what they had in mind until she felt something hard and boney against her rectum. Then she knew!



Her ordeal (at least from the men) was coming to an end. But there was a brief moment when it seemed like everyone swarmed over and into the teenage **slut**.



She lay there half-sobbing/half-panting while foul-smelling *semen* oozed and dripped from all of her orifices.



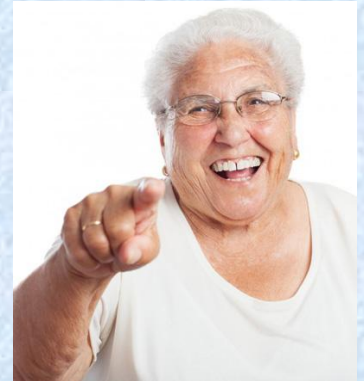
Thinking that they were finally finished with her, Patricia started to move. But the old witch said: "Not so fast, Missy. We got one other that wants to dip his stick in your filthy prissy cunt."



Patricia then heard a loud <bark>. She looked up and was horrified to see a large dog!

"Spread those legs again," Danny ordered. "You got some puppy-breeding to do!"





GANG-BANGED WHORE PATRICIA



[teenage mommy]

Between breaths, Doc Savage related his experience in Jason Baird's office and the incident in which his taxi had been pursued through the fog-bound streets of San Francisco by a tenacious glowing **arm** without any attached body.

He used few words. But the picture that they painted was so unnerving that Patricia Savage shuddered noticeably.

"Was **it** real?" Pat wondered at one point.

"Our breath might be better saved for the swim," Doc told her.

A boat got down into the water at last. It wasn't the one that the seamen were struggling over. They were still at that.

This boat had a single occupant. He let the lines run out and fell to tugging the pullcord of the motor. It came to life on the 3rd pull and the lifeboat began puttering in their direction.

Doc helped by bringing out his tiny generator flashlight once again. It was waterproof in addition to being generator-powered. He <thumbed> it on. The **beam** made a fair lighthouse in miniature.

When the motor boat came alongside, they recognized the man at the tiller. The dark cane balanced across his knees gave his identity away.

"Ham!" cried Pat Savage. "Brother, am I glad to see you!"

"Are you all right?" Ham asked anxiously.

He still wore his long white beard. And when he bent over to assist Pat into the launch, it dipped in the water and began to grow heavy with brine. The elastic holding it in place bowed downward with the strain.

Pat laughed. *It was a laugh of relief!*

"Watch your whiskers, Santa!"

Ham yanked the false whiskers free, revealing his sharp-featured but intelligent face and wide, mobile, orator's mouth. He helped Pat over the gunwales in the accepted precautionary manner. The launch did not capsize although it tipped precariously.

Doc Savage clambered aboard next. He still wore his outlandish Manchu garb although not the facial disguise.

Ham --who was in reality Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks (ret.), a member of Doc Savage's band of assistants and by reputation one of the finest lawyers that Harvard had ever matriculated -- was resplendent in his white commodore's uniform.

For her part, Pat Savage wore a water-soaked garment that left little enough to the imagination and seemed to have once kept a live tiger warm.

"My my," she remarked ruefully, glancing about the boat. "Aren't we the merry band!"

She laughed again. Musically this time.

"I assume that there is a purpose to that get-up, young lady?" Doc asked in a disapproving tone.

"Sure is! I happen to be Miss Tarzana Vine of Hollywood. On my way to the Philippines to shoot my latest picture 'Tiger Girl of the Jungle'."

"We figured if we couldn't spot you ourselves, Doc," Ham put in, "Pat was going to appear in that rather fetching garment as a kind of publicity gag.

"Assuming the stunt would draw me out, eh?" Doc offered.

"Something like that," Pat admitted cheerfully. "And it was a good thing I had it on or I'd be in an embarrassing way right about now."

Doc Savage fixed his beautiful young cousin with his intent *golden eyes*.

"I thought I told you to stay out of this, young lady."

"So what else is new?" Pat said, unconcerned. "And don't get so snooty about it, Doc. If it weren't for my passing along Jason Baird's request for help, there wouldn't be any excitement for me to horn in on. So there!"

A searchlight sprang to life along the *Mandarin's* bridge rail. It raced along the wrinkled black back of the ocean and fixed them with a **radiance** so bright that all 3 lifeboat passengers had to shield their eyes. It was at that point that Pat thought to ask a question.

"So where is Jason Baird anyway? Ham and I couldn't hunt up hide-nor-hair of him. And believe me, we prowled that ark looking!"

"Jason Baird," Doc Savage explained, "appears to be in the ship's morgue."

"Oh ..." said Patricia Savage, the enthusiasm leaking from her voice.

It was a very small voice now and she had not more questions until after they had been hauled back aboard the Mandarin.

Captain Gooch met them on deck.

Seamen put a major effort into keeping the passengers at bay. Among them was a very vocal Rex Pinks.

"This," growled the Captain, "no doubt has an explanation attached to it."

"My cousin Patricia Savage," Doc said by way of introduction. "And this is my associate Ham Brooks."

Captain Gooch talked above their polite greetings saying: "We have 2 more passengers in the morgue. Or at least they will be in the morgue once the crew gets done stowing them below. They are doing an excellent imitation of the Pacific Ocean."

"I do not catch your drift," Ham said clutching his cane.

"The two of them," Captain Gooch said, "are very **blue** and very very calm. Which is more than I can say for the rest of my passengers."

"There is an explanation for what has happened," Doc Savage started to say.

Pat jumped in.

"I'll say there is! Captain, if you want to nab the killer of those, just look for a Chinese with the smell of peanuts on his breath!"

This brought a doubtful look from the captain.

"It's not as crazy as it sounds," Pat insisted. "I'm not sure how he was doing it. But somehow he was using all that peanut munching to hide what he was really up to."

Doc said: "**He was blowing tiny glass capsules of some *poison* through a small tube concealed in his fist.** The *poison* seems to vaporize shortly after being absorbed through the pores of the victims. It was the same method of murder which claimed the life of the man identified as Jason Baird."

Captain Gooch started incredulously. He rocked back on his heels. The one side of his blunt jaw was working, he was masticating the inside of his cheek (a habit some persons lapse into when subject to strain). The captain was plainly under strain now.

"And how do you come by this information all of a sudden?" the skipper asked tight-voiced.

"Before Pat went overboard, I was down in the morgue examining the body identified as Jason Baird," Doc explained patiently. "I found clear traces of *poison* on his face. I have yet to identify it. But it seems to arrest heart action."

"Well for your information, my ship's doctor and that Dr. Harper both agree that the 2 fresh corpses got that way from heart attacks," Captain Gooch said levelly.

The **Bronze Man** shook his head.

"Induced by *poison*. I witnessed a similar murder on the plane from New York. In that case, the capsule was meant for me. But the killer's aim was poor. He felled the pilot instead. By the time I caught on to the truth, the killer was dead. A victim of his own poison which produces a **bluish** cast that lends credence to heart attack diagnoses. Probably, he committed suicide."

"Someone is trying to keep you out of Jason Baird's troubles," Pat said excitedly.

She seemed actually delighted at the prospect. Pat Savage like Trouble!

"Think he swallowed one of his own capsules by accident?" Ham wondered, his dark eyes aglow.

Doc Savage did not answer.

Instead he said: "Captain Gooch, I suggest the ship be searched for the Oriental that Pat saw."

"I got a good look at him too," Pat said energetically.

She reached under the short skirt of her tiger-skin garment and pulled out a single-action six-shooter such as might have sent Jesse James to his just reward. She pulled back the hammer (the trigger of the antique weapon had been filed off). It made a waning sound like a walnut that had been stepped on.

"So I know exactly who to aim this cannon at."

"There will be no shooting on my vessel," Captain Gooch said angrily.

He moved out his jaw and added: "And you might explain what you were doing overboard, Miss Savage."

At that moment, the First Mate came striding up.

"Cap'n, there are 3 tough guys demanding to know about the dead passengers," he said. "Claim they're friends of Wool and Borzoi."

"Let's get their story then," Captain Gooch growled.

He turned smartly on his heel and marched for the morgue adding: "Next, someone will inform me we have pirates in the bilge."

"Ranty, isn't he?" Pat murmured as she, Doc Savage, and Ham Brooks followed in the captain's wake.

"It might be better not to antagonize him," Doc cautioned. "We will need his cooperation if we are to get to the bottom of this mystery."

"You're one to walk," Pat scoffed. "I noticed you didn't volunteer anything about that spooky *hand* that tried to chase me clear down to Davy Jones' locker."

"As I recall," Doc put in, "you were chasing *it* when I caught up with you."

"I guess I shook *it* off when we hit the drink," Pat said thoughtfully. "I don't quite have it all clear in my mind. But when I found myself underwater, *it* was still following me. *It* reminded me of a *yellow* shark. I guess I discouraged *it* somehow because it decided to head for the ocean floor. Whatever *it* was *spook* or not, *it* doesn't corner very well."

"I for one," said Ham, "would like to see this phantom *arm* you claim to have seen."

" 'Claim', my sweet aunt?" Pat snorted. "*It* chased me clear over the rail!"

Down in the morgue, the ship's physician was having a hard time explaining the sudden deaths of Fuzzy Wool and Kitten Borzoi -- notorious hard-boiled adventurers.

"I tell you they suffered heart attacks!" the medico was protesting.

"Heart attacks nothing!" a reedy voice retorted hotly. "They were never sick a day in their lives. Both of 'em. They were bumped off, I'm tellin' you!"

"See here now!" Captain Gooch called out striding down the corridor. "What is the meaning of this?"

The men (there were three of them) had the ship's physician surrounded just outside the closed morgue door. The latter was very pale. The trio towered over him, their faces hard and antagonistic.

When they turned, they hastily backed away from the flustered physician. Perhaps it was the sight of the captain bedecked in his *gold* braid and brass buttons.

The imposing specter of the *bronze giant* that was **Doc Savage** might possibly have been a motivating influence as well. If not the primary. The trio showed immediate symptoms of nervousness.

"We're friends of Fuzzy and Kitten," the one with the reedy voice said. "I'm Alva Nally."

He jerked a thumb in the direction of the other two.

"This here's Joe Knopf and Shad O'Shea."

Joe Knopf was the shortest of the trio. His lean head jerked about nervously, suggesting a worried ferret.

Shad O'Shea ran more to muscle and bulk. He possessed a long cadaverous face that brought to mind a gloomy dray horse that had lost its master. *Which conceivably the big man had.*

"And this quarter of the *Mandarin* is out-of-bounds to passengers," Captain Gooch shot back.

Doc Savage stepped forward.

"What do you fellows know about a passenger named Jason Baird?"

The men froze at the sound of that name. Shad O'Shea's rough features grew longer. The others fidgeted.

"Nothin'," Joe Knopf said thickly. "Never heard of the guy."

"These men are lying!" Ham said instantly.

"Maybe they need a little old-fashioned persuasion," said Pat spinning the cylinder of her six-shooter. It made a *clicking* like a rattlesnake stirring.

A long-legged stork of a man came gliding down the passage then. He was brought up short by the sight of Doc Savage and the others. Even to the most undiscerning eye, it could be seen that he bore the same hard stamp as the trio headed by Alva Nally.

Furtively, the human stork caught the eye of Joe Knopf. He made a sign with a long-fingered hand and then withdrew.

Knopf hissed to his friends: "Chick wants us."

"I think we'd better be on our way," Alva Nally said hastily.

"Not so fast!" Captain Gooch thundered.

"Let them go," Doc Savage suggested.

"Yeah," quipped Alva Nally. "It's still a free Country, ain't it?"

Reluctantly, Captain Gooch stepped aside as the hard-bitten trio joined up with the 4th man. They made quick time to the companionway leading to the upper decks.

"Those scuts bear watching," Captain Gooch said thoughtfully after they had gone.

The skipper began turning around to confront the **Bronze Man**.

"Now Savage ..." he began to say.

Then his mouth went slack ...

... *for the **Man of Bronze** had suddenly vanished.*

Ham Brooks and Patricia Savage added their gasps of surprise. Doc Savage had been hovering behind them until just a moment ago.

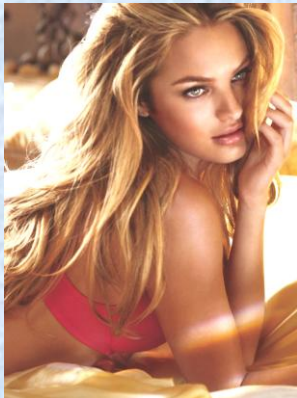
"Now where did he go?" Captain Gooch thundered.

"I would say," Ham drawled, "that Doc has decided to follow your advice."

"And what advice would that be?" the Captain roared.

"He merely has gone to watch the scuts."

Coming up soon ...



*... Pat Savage will be treated like a **WHORE !***

X -- *Thing* Without Arms

The liner *Mandarin* was finally under way once more. Her innards throbbed to the sounds of her mighty engines.

This constant sound helped Doc Savage trail his quarry unsuspected. The quartet consisting of Alva Nally, Joe Knopf, Shad O'Shea, and their unidentified stork-legged confederate had hastily fled down a cross-ship passage.

The **Bronze Man** had divined their path. The passage was the handiest egress from the area of the morgue.

He had left the others by a different direction ... whipped up a companion ... and -- through a series of rapid shortcuts -- gained the passage.

There was no sign of his quarry. He had not expected the four to linger long.

The **Bronze Man** was negotiating this cross-ship passage when **he became aware that he was being followed.**

The person doing the skulking was employing *stealth*. He hung back carefully. When the shadower stepped, he took care with the placement of his feet, walking neither on tiptoe nor the balls of his feet but pressing his shoe soles down squarely.

It was very effective. Doc Savage did not catch on immediately. He had traversed nearly half of the *Mandarin's* capacious width before his supersensitive hearing apprised him of the measured footfalls following close behind.

There was another sound mixed in with this. An odd one. It was a soft *whispery* sound. A *rustling*. It sounded like nothing that the **Bronze Man** had heard before.

He pretended ignorance of this. He continued walking as before. One fine-textured **bronze** hand drifted up to the wooden buttons of his **scarlet** Manchu tunic. Under the garment he wore his multi-pocketed vest. In addition to containing a host of useful items, it was lined with a chain mail of his own invention which combined the useful properties of being in light in weight and flexible. It was proof against anything short of military-caliber bullets.

Doc Savage carried any number of gadgets in his equipment vest. They ranged from the simple to the complicated. The contents changed from time-to-time depending on the situations the **Bronze Man** expected to encounter.

One item which he habitually carried was a collapsible optical device which by changing lenses could be converted from a tiny-but-powerful telescope to a microscope or periscope.

He brought this out now and with one hand fiddled with it until he had a tiny round mirror attached to the thin black telescoping tube.

Pretending to notice that one of his buskin laces had become undone, Doc paused and stooped to attend to this.

The footfalls halted. And with it the whispery rustling.

On one knee, Doc maneuvered the tricky optical mirror until it reflected the passage behind him.

The passage was not well lit. The wall lamps were shaded bamboo paper (for atmosphere). They shed little direct light. And what did leak out left zones of darkness between the well-spaced lamps.

A *figure* had come to a stop in one of those crepuscular zones. It stood immobile. A *weird shadowy thing*.

There were several things wrong with the *figure*, Doc discerned through the reflecting mirror.

It was rather short, almost stunted with shoulders shriveled. The main part of it was a kind of cone. There were no legs to be seen. The head was too large. Grotesquely so. And it seemed to taper upward as if the shadowy thing was being poured down from above the way that sand filters down through the narrow neck of an hourglass. The exact point where it left off and darkness began was impossible to glean. Even by Doc Savage's practiced *orbs*.

Most strange was the manner in which the nebulous *figure's* arms hung at its side. They seemed thin, shriveled, unreal. When circulating air pushed out by the ventilation system touched them, they swayed in a manner that was lifeless and *unnatural*.

Doc Savage straightened, having observed as much as good sense would permit. He continued on.

The *whispery rustling* resumed, soft footfalls trailing him like careful mice.

The **Bronze Man** quickened his pace to put as much distance between himself and the pursuing *entity*.

There was a companionway at the end of the tunnel. Doc floated up its stairs. This brought him to 'B' deck, portside. There, he paused.

The *whispery rustling* continued. His pursuer was mounting the stairs with methodical deliberateness.

Somewhere, the ship's bell *rang* 8 times. 8 bells. The end of first watch. Midnight.

The deck was dark. The Moon was on the other side of the rakishly-slanted funnels. *Shadows* pooled and clotted everywhere like crouching spiders of the night.

Stateroom doors lined the inner wall. All closed. Many (if not most) passengers had turned in for the night. One porthole hung open inviting sea breezes.

Doc Savage hastened along the rail. He found a wooden box which was locked with a padlock-and-hasps arrangement. It was a fire hose compartment. Sizable enough to conceal a human form.

There was no time to pick the padlock. He grasped the hasp and twisted. *Tendons* like hawsers rolled and bulged along his *powerful* arms. The rivets holding the hasp to the wooden lid splintered and tore free!

Doc flung up the lid ... scooped out the rubber-and-cotton hose ... and deposited it in the shadow of the box where it would not be readily discerned.

Stepping in, he pulled the lid closed after him. He waited, his *sensitive* ears alert.

Doc Savage lived a dangerous life. Peril seemed to dog his existence. It was a life that he accepted and one which he pursued with vigor.

But he had not survived the perils of his calling by being unnecessarily reckless. From the moment he became that he was being shadowed to the clever gleaning of the shadowy nature of the *entity*, the *bronze giant* had exercised caution.

His secreting himself in the fire hose box might have seemed timid -- even cowardly -- to some. But he knew that some one -- some *thing* -- entirely out of the ordinary had taken an interest in him.

He did not know what it could be. But the memory of those grasping, sickly, yellow phantom *hands* clawing for him was very vivid.

Doc listened intently as the soft footfalls came on deck, the silken *whispery rustle* sounds a menacing accompaniment.

When he judged the creature to have just passed the hose box, he prepared to spring out to ambush the *thing* ...

Came a clutter of feet and a puzzled shout.

"What the hell!" a voice called.

Doc sprang erect. The *force* of his powerful lunge broke one hinge of the box lid which fell away with a clatter. Great *bronze* hands reached out and took hold of a figure in the shadows.

"Hey!" shouted the figure. "Let me go, you!"

Doc had the figure by his upper arms. He pinioned them to the captive's side to prevent the employment of weapons.

Still holding the captive, Doc Savage frog-marched him into a shaft of moonlight peeping past a black funnel.

The leprous light delineated the features of a man. His pale frightened eyes met Doc's *flake-gold orbs* and widened with recognition.

"I know you," he breathed. "You're Doc Savage!"

"What is more to the point," Doc said levelly, "is your identity."

"I'm Rex Pinks. With the *Comet*. I was with your cousin just before she went overboard. That was Patricia Savage pretending to be a Hollywood actress, wasn't it?"

"It was," Doc admitted while scrutinizing his captive. "Now you might explain what you are doing sneaking about this deck?"

"Not that it's any of your business," wan-faced Rex Pinks said defensively, "but I was following the weird Oriental."

"Weird?" Doc inquired.

"Let me go and I'll tell you," Pinks said squirming uncomfortably. "My arms are going numb."

"No tricks," Doc warned as he released the man.

"Not from me," Rex promised.

The **Bronze Man** released the reporter.

"Look," Rex Pinks vouchsafed. "I may have been the only one who saw it clearly except for you and your cousin. But I did see that ghost *arm*!"

"And?"

"Don't kid me, Savage. There's a swell story back of this. And I'm hunting it!"

"How does that hook up with this so-called 'weird Oriental' that you claim to have seen?" Doc prompted.

"I'm coming to that."

Pinks licked his lips, his eyes squinting up-and-down the deck.

"After you and Captain Gooch went below, I got to hunting for that peanut-munching Chinese."

"I imagine half the crew is about that particular duty," Doc interposed.

"Yeah. But they're down in steerage rousting a lot of innocents. I figured that would be the last place he'd be hiding. So I've been cruising the upper decks."

Rex Pinks hesitated.

"This is going to sound screwy, Savage."

"I am listening."

"I was mousing around and turned a corner and saw this ... this *thing*," Pinks breathed. "It was weird. A man. Or kinda like a man. He was dressed in some sort of ornate Oriental costume of **gold**-and-**green** silks. He walked like an old ghost. Hunched and soundless. I caught a glimpse of his face and"

"Go on."

"Savage, his face was made out of *jade*!" Rex Pinks said breathlessly.

"*Jade*? Are you certain?"

"I'm a society reporter," Rex Pinks breathed. "Believe me, I know *jade* when I see it. And this *creature*'s face was *jade*! Its expression was blank, inhuman. On his head was some kind of crown. But like nothing you ever saw. It came to a point and midway up the spire were other *jade* faces just like the main one. They were set in a ring so each one faced a different direction. But that's not all ..."

He hesitated as if summoning his courage.

"Go on," Doc said.

"This *jade*-faced thing had no arms!"

Doc Savage said nothing. The description that the San Francisco reporter had given matched with additional details the weird shadowy *pursuer* which he had been attempting to ambush.

"No arms. Get it?" Pinks went on excitedly. "Remember that hideous yellow *arm* that we all saw? It was covered by a sleeve of *green* silk. Exactly the same green color the *thing* I followed up here was wearing!"

"If you followed it up to this deck," Doc asked in a level voice, "where is it now?"

Rex Pinks looked around.

"Beats me. I kept by distance so as not to tip it off. When I got to the top of the companionway steps back there, I waited until I thought it was safe to come out. When I did, there was nothing. I was so shocked I cried out. That's when you jumped me. Were you following it too?"

"More like the reverse," Doc stated.

He was studying the reporter's face for traces of deceit.

He said: "I jumped out of the fire hose box when I judged the armless *figure* had passed only a little distance. But only you were on deck."

Rex Pinks frowned.

"What're you saying?"

"Merely that the personage who followed me had no time to find a suitable place of concealment on this deck."

Pinks swallowed several times.

"You don't mean ... You can't think ..."

"You are the only one here," Doc Savage pointed out in an unemotional voice. "And you were the only one with my cousin Pat when the detached arm attacked her."

"I had nothing to do with that!" Rex Pinks protested. "I was only after a story!"

"Then how do you explain the absence of an **emerald**-garbed Oriental with a **jade** face and no arms on this deck?"

"Maybe ... maybe he jumped overboard," Rex Pinks suggested uncertainly.

"I would have heard a splash. As would you."

"That's right!"

Pinks looked about wildly, then <snapped> his fingers.

"He must have ducked into one of these staterooms then. That's it! He's probably inside one right now!"

The dissolute society reporter pulled away and began rattling doorknobs and banging on the superstructure walls. This brought a number of sleepy-eyed passengers to their doors. None of them had jade faces.

There ensued some argument. Which the sight of the **Man of Bronze** soon quelled.

After Doc had reassured the passengers and they had withdrawn, he pointed out an obvious fact.

"Did you notice how the doors all squeaked when they were opened just now?" he asked. "Saltwater action on the hinges. Had a door opened-or-closed, one of us would have heard it plainly."

"Maybe," Rex Pinks said vaguely.

He was raking the superstructure for clues.

"Too high to climb," he muttered. "There wouldn't have been enough time to do that anyway."

His baffled eyes alighted on the solitary open porthole. It was not many yards distant from where Doc Savage had secreted himself.

"He wriggled through that porthole!" Pinks shouted exultantly moving toward it.

When Doc Savage caught up with the reporter, the latter was endeavoring to poke his head into the open port. He craned his head around trying to examine the stateroom interior.

This activity did not go unnoticed by the stateroom occupant.

"*What is the meaning of this?*" a truculent voice shouted.

"Come out of there, you!" Pinks demanded. "The jig's up!"

This brought a prompt response.

The stateroom door opened, squeaking audibly ...

... and the glowering visage of diminutive bird-boned Dr. Mawson Harper thrust out.

His virile black eyebrows were jumping angrily and his matching Van Dyke was quilled like a porcupine. Evidently the doctor had been awoken from a sound sleep.

He took one look at the **Bronze Man** standing there and lost his glower.

"Savage!" he said in surprise.

Tying a bathrobe more tightly about himself, he stepped out asking: "Whatever are you doing aboard this ship?"

"Never mind that!" snapped Rex Pinks. "Who else is in there with you?"

Harper looked confused.

"Why, no one. And what business is it of yours, may I ask?"

"I'm a reporter," Pinks shot back. "Everything is my business."

"We trailed a marauder up to this deck," Doc Savage inserted, simplifying facts somewhat. "He apparently vanished without a trace in the vicinity of your stateroom."

Dr. Mawson Harper took this in with the expression of a man who had been stung on the nose by a bee.

"I am alone," he said promptly. "If you doubt me, just have a look."

Rex Pinks burst into the stateroom almost before the invitation had been vocalized.

He lost his eager expression once he was inside. The stateroom was a parlor/bedroom/bath suite. This was the parlor. It was no more opulent than a harem room.

There was a soft divan directly under the open porthole (the *Mandarin* boasted many soft sofas and chairs among its sumptuous accommodations) and it was unoccupied.

Rex Pinks raced through the remaining rooms. He came up with nothing tangible.

When he had rejoined Doc Savage and Dr. Harper in the parlor, he leveled an accusing finger at the porthole.

"I tell you he had to climb in through that porthole!"

"Nonsense," Dr. Harper said flatly. "Such a thing is impossible."

"Yeah? Why is that?"

"Liner portholes are designed to be too small to admit the human body," Doc Savage pointed out. "This way, no one is likely to fall overboard in rough seas."

Rex Pinks grunted and climbed up to the porthole to test this statement out for himself.

He stuck his head out through the circular aperture. It went through easily enough. But his shoulders proved too broad to allow egress. And he was not a particularly broad-shouldered individual. In fact, he was rather skinny.

Sheepishly, Pinks climbed back down.

"I don't get this," he muttered uncertainly.

"I think we will learn no more here," Doc said stating the obvious. "Thank you for your time, Dr. Harper."

As they quitted the stateroom, Dr. Mawson Harper remarked to Doc Savage: "You know, I am beginning to question my belief that those men who died on that plane were in fact victims of heart attacks.

Doc paused.

"What leads you to say that?"

"Why, the simple fact that there have been 3 more such victims on this ship," Harper imparted. "I have been puzzling it over wondering if this were some new epidemic at work. Tropical diseases are my specialty. But now that I know you are aboard the *Mandarin*, another theory has occurred to me."

"And what is that?" the **Bronze Man** wanted to know.

Dr. Mawson Harper <blinked>.

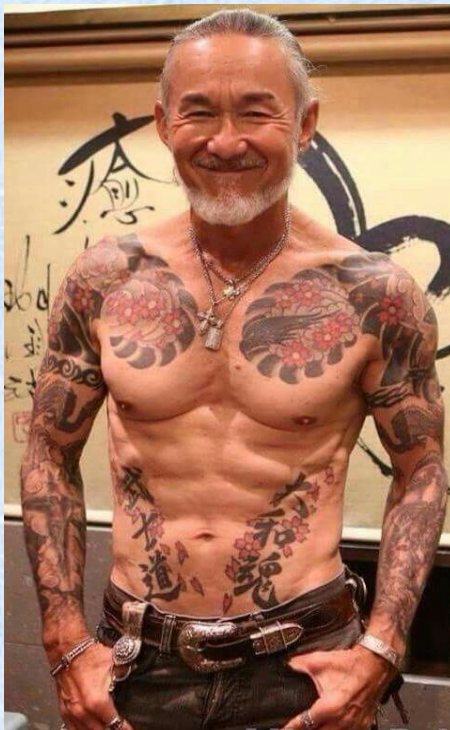
"Why, isn't it obvious? Some villain is trying to kill you by fiendish means."

"The possibility had crossed my mind," Doc said dryly.

"Indeed? Have you any idea what could be back of this?"

"That," Doc Savage told him, "remains to be determined."

Very shortly now ...



*... beautiful Pat Savage will be **ABUSED !***

XI -- Tight Lips

"I don't trust that bird!" Rex Pinks said gratingly as he and Doc Savage descended into a lower deck. "Did you notice his feet? He was wearing sandals like a damn coolie."

"Dr. Harper is known for his charity work in the East," Doc offered. "It is not unreasonable for him to wear Oriental footgear. They are quite comfortable, actually."

Pinks noticed that the **Bronze Man**'s progress was leading them deeper into the Mandarin's metallic entrails.

"Where are you going?" he asked, puzzled.

"Purser's office."

"Mind if I tag along?"

"It would make keeping an eye on you that much more convenient," Doc told him without inflection.

"If you think I'm going to be the goat in whatever is going on," Pinks said tightly, "get that idea out of your head once and for all."

Doc Savage made no reply to that vehement assertion, merely striding on purposely.

He cut a bizarre gigantic swatch in his Manchu costume like a fixture out of the era of Genghis Khan, the great Asiatic conqueror.

The purser's office was situated on 'B' Deck.

The lone purser idled in back of the wire cage behind which was the ship's safe where cash and other valuables were typically stored for the duration of the voyage. It was also where the ship's registry of passengers was held for safekeeping.

Doc strode up to the cage and asked to see the Mandarin's register.

The purser <blinked>, gulped, and mumbled apologies while he contacted Captain Gooch through an ordinary telephone of the European type with the transmitter and receiver of a single piece.

The conversation was brief.

After he had hung up, the purser retrieved the register from the big safe and pushed it through the slot in the wire cage.

He said: "The Skipper said was okay, Mr. Savage. But he didn't sound none too happy with the idea."

Doc accepted the book (it was ponderous, bound in black leather) and paged through it until he had found what he was looking for. His **golden eyes** seemed to rest only a moment on the page.

The book clapped shut, stirring pale Rex Pinks' somewhat disordered hair. He frowned, having failed to catch a glimpse of the page to which the **Bronze Man** had turned.

Returning the book, Doc thanks the purser and asked: "Has a passenger named Chick Alfred stored any valuables in the safe? Particularly gems of any kind?"

The purser consulted a ledger. He looked up.

"No valuables at all," he said.

Then he added: "But that particular passenger was here earlier asking after another passenger. I had to break the news to him."

Doc Savage's *flake-gold eyes* showed a *flicker* of interest.

"News?"

"He wanted to know which cabin belonged to Jason Baird," the purser explained. "I guess he didn't know the man was dead."

Doc Savage thanked the purser and turned away. Rex Pinks followed briskly.

"I didn't know there was a dead passenger other than Fuzzy Wool and Kitten Borzoi," he ejaculated. "What happened to this Baird?"

"Collapsed as he was boarding," Doc Savage explained. "You did not know?"

"I went to my cabin first thing," Pinks said glumly. "I get seasick easy. I find if I lay down awhile, I get used to the rocking of the boat."

They walked along. Pinks looked behind him from time-to-time as if concerned about skulkers.

"Who are we going to visit?" he inquired suddenly.

"The passenger Chick Alfred."

"That names rings a bell," Rex Pinks stated. "Say! Wasn't he palsy with Fuzzy Wool?"

"They were associates."

Doc turned a passage corner and began mounting a companion.

"This is one of the things I hate about these tubs," Pinks complained. "All this damn stair-climbing!"

Eventually, they came to 'A' Deck. Doc Savage worked his way along the starboard site.

The seas were running high. But there was surprisingly little rocking or heaving on the part of the *Mandarin*. She displaced nearly 40,000 tons. So her ebony prow knifed through the choppy water with little resistance.

Along the superstructure, only one porthole bled any illumination.

"What am I bet," Rex Pinks undertoned, "that our intended hosts have left a light on for us?"

"Too bad you have no one to take you up on that wager," Doc told him.

"What does Chick Alfred have to do with anything?" Rex asked. "Think he bumped off Fuzzy and Kitten?"

Doc Savage stopped before the stateroom door and <knocked> firmly.

The stateroom porthole (the one spilling yellowish light) popped out and disgorged an arm. At the end of it was clutched a big Army **automatic**. Its dark gullet was pointed in the **Bronze Man's** approximate direction.

A harsh voice warned: "I can't aim so good from where I stand. But at this range, it won't much matter."

Doc Savage raised his mighty arms carefully. Rex Pinks followed suit, his sickly features going slack.

"I didn't bargain for this," he muttered uneasily.

The stateroom door popped open and a stork-like man showed his sallow face. His eyes were narrow at the sight of the **Man of Bronze** and the dissolute reporter.

"I assume you are Chick Alfred," Doc said.

"I ain't sayin'," the other growled. "What are you doing here?"

"I have some questions for you," Doc stated.

"What makes you think we got any answers?" asked the man (who was obviously Chick Alfred).

"It might be," the **Bronze Man** rejoined, "that between us, we can get to the bottom of what is transpiring aboard this vessel."

Chick Alfred frowned. A cigarette slack of his lips dripping ash.

"Okay," he said. "C'mon in. But be snappy about it! We don't want what happened to Fuzzy to happen us. Get me?"

"Amen, brother!" said Rex Pinks fervently as he followed Doc Savage into the stateroom.

The door clicked shut behind them.

The stateroom parlor was crammed with nervous individuals. There were four in all including Chick Alfred and the man at the porthole who was climbing down off the divan on which he had been standing.

"Say!" Rex Pinks burst out. "I recognize these lads. Alvan Nally. Shad O'Shea. And that's Joe Knopf pulling his arm from the porthole. Where have you guys been that I hadn't notice you aboard before?"

"And who-the-hell are you?" Chick Alfred wanted to know.

The society reporter drew himself up proudly.

"Rex Pinks. With the *Comet*. I used to pound the police beat."

This seemed to impress no except Rex Pinks who lost a little of his cocksure manner.

Doc Savage said: "Let's start with your connection to Jason Baird."

"Nothin' doin'," Chick Alfred said. "That's our business."

"Tough guys!" Rex Pinks snorted.

"They come tougher," Joe Knopf allowed. "But not many."

Doc Savage pressed on.

"How is it that you did not know Baird was dead until now?" he asked. "Surely the news of the stricken passenger reached your ears."

"Sure it did," Shad O'Shea put in. "But we didn't know that was Baird. Hell, there's gotta be a couple thousand people on this oversized washtub!"

"That does not explain your interest in him," Doc pointed out.

Rex Pinks snorted. "Knowing their types, they probably had notions of lifting his wallet and dumping the body overboard."

"That ain't our style, guy," Alva Nally protested in his reedy voice.

"Yeggs who are sensitive about their reputations," Pinks laughed. "Haw! Now I've seen everything!"

At that, Shad O'Shea stepped up to the society reporter, blocked out his jaw, and lifted a case-hardened paw.

Rex Pinks threw up 2 bony fists in the manner of John L. Sullivan. His sickly features registered fright.

"I'm not afraid of you!" he insisted.

At which, Shad O'Shea hooked a foot around the inside of the reporter's right knee and upset him onto the Oriental rug.

This brought a ripple of tension-relieving laughter from the others. Which Doc Savage dispelled with a direct question.

"The deaths of Fuzzy Wool and Kitten Borzoi. Who is back of them?"

The laughter trailed off like a garden hose that had been trod upon. Feet shifted. Fingers scratched at hair, throats, and behind ears.

"Earlier this evening," Doc continued eying the uneasy quartet, "you were all interested in the bodies in the morgue."

"What of it?" grumbled Joe Knopf.

"I can arrange a viewing."

"They don't have the stomach for it," Rex Pinks inserted picking himself off the rug. "Strictly drugstore cowboys these guys."

That decided the quartet of hard cases.

They expressed acquiescence in a variety of surly voices.

A few choice words were vented in the society reporter's direction. But no violence seemed imminent.

That settled, Doc Savage escorted them down to the ship's hospital which was now under guard.

The 2 guards conferred among themselves briefly after the **Bronze Man** had stated the purpose of his visit. The sum of their exchange seemed to have mostly to do with the wisdom of disturbing Captain Gooch who had evidently retired for the evening.

They decided that the skipper would be more upset by the intrusion into his slumber than by the invasion of the ship's morgue. Or at least, they believed his wrath would be staved off until morning if they allowed Doc and other others into the morgue.

"It's fine by us if you want to see the stiff's" was the inelegant way one of the pair put it.

Doc Savage entered first.

The porcelain autopsy table was bare now. Doc showed no astonishment at this.

His steady *flaky-gold eyes* roved along the wooden morgue drawers. There were paper squares slipped into tiny metal frames just above the brass drawer handles.

He stopped when he came to one marked **D.J. Wool** in ink. Beside it was a drawer labeled **K. Borzoi**.

Doc Savage hauled these out exposing the covered upper bodies. As the others crowded around with stem coming out of their open mouths, he peeled away the covering sheets.

The revealed faces of Fuzzy Wool and Kitten Borzoi were a particularly livid **green**. Like **jade** busts.

"What done that to 'em?" Chick Alfred blurted out, his cigarette teetering off his loose lips. It struck the tiled floor like a tiny meteor sputtering to Earth.

"Poison," Doc Savage stated quietly. "A species of *poison* which creates symptoms close enough to those of a heart attack that only a careful examination would disclose the truth. The **blue** coloring seems to progress to this shade of **green** as *rigor mortis* sets in."

"Then they was murdered!" Alva Nally grunted.

The **Bronze Man** nodded grimly.

"The question is by whom?"

No one offered any reply to that.

Doc Savage slammed the drawers shut and went to another. He yanked this out to the squeaking of steel rollers. A **bronze** hand plucked off a draping sheet. He held it over the cadaver so that its face remained in shadow.

"Is this the man you know as 'Jason Baird'?" he demanded.

"Yeah, yeah," Chick Alfred said quickly. "That's the guy."

"Interesting," Doc said pulling the sheet higher. "Inasmuch as the label clearly indicates that this dead man was named 'Chen'."

Rex Pinks pushed forward. His eyes went wide at the sight of the unmistakably Asiatic face that Doc Savage had exposed to the light.

"Huh?" he grunted. "That's no white guy!"

Doc pushed the drawer closed and went to another. This time, he exposed the true face of Jason Baird to the light. The latter's face was as **green** as those of the others if not more so.

"You have never seen the face of Jason Baird have you?" Doc accused.

The 4 gunmen (for want of a better term, that was what they were) looked away sheepishly. Their attitudes were confused, tentative.

"Whoever killed Jason Baird also did for Fuzzy and Kitten," Rex Pinks said wonderingly.

"Yeah!" Shad O'Shea snapped.

He prodded his barrel chest with a big thumb.

"And whoever that bird was, he's gonna answer to us for what happened."

"What is the connection between Baird and your friends Fuzzy and Kitten?" Doc asked.

"When we find out," Chick Alfred said meaningly, "we'll let you know. Thanks for the tour, **bronze guy**. It was swell."

And with that, the 4 gunmen filed out of the morgue.

Rex Pinks gawked at Doc Savage.

"You're just going to let them go?" he blurted.

Doc said: "It was clear that they are hiding something."

"Say it again, brother!" Pinks exclaimed. "But what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing," Doc told him, starting off.

Rex Pinks exploded at that calm admission.

"Nothing?" he howled. "I always heard you were quite the fire-eater, Savage. What about figuring out who that armless **spook** was? He -- or **it** -- could be prowling the ship while we're standing here jawing!"

The society reporter was gesticulating as they walked along. He noticed that Doc Savage seemed to be bound toward a specific destination.

"I intend," Doc told him, pausing to look the flustered reporter straight in the eye, "to retire for the evening. I suggest that you do the same."

The **bronze giant** continued on, leaving Rex Pinks standing slack-jawed in amazement.

Coming up very soon ...



*... Pat Savage gets **FUCKED** and **SODOMIZED** !*

XII -- Tale of the *Ogre*

The **Solar** orb -- an angry ball that might have been kicked out of the crinkling **aquamarine** and **cobalt** that was the Pacific Ocean by an impatient Father Neptune -- heralded the start of the second day of the *Mandarin's* voyage to distant Hong Kong, China.

Captain Gooch had arisen with the Sun. He was now watching the spectacular colors of daybreak from the flying bridge in silence. The *Mandarin* skipper was partial to starting his day in the solitary cubicle that was the flying bridge.

Presently, First Mate Bill Scott ascended the narrow iron stairs and <knocked> on the partition door.

His <knock> was timid. He knew how much the Captain cherished his morning commune with Nature.

"Permission to enter, Cap'n?" the first Mate asked through the flimsy door.

"Enter, blast it!" Captain Gooch said gruffly.

Upon entering, First Mate Scott offered a snappy salute that touched the bill of his white dress uniform cap without disturbing its jaunty angle.

"No sign of that Chinese," he reported crisply. "It's like a haystack down in steerage with none of the 'hay' savvy anything. Especially the whereabouts of our 'needle'."

Captain Gooch scowled like a dried apple.

"Keep looking," he bit out. "We have 3 dead passengers to explain to the Hong Kong office. I won't have the name of my good ship plastered all over the newspapers as a jinx."

"Yes sir," the First Mate said briskly leaving the skipper to his thoughts.

The search for the Chinese passenger who seemed addicted to peanuts had been intensified during the night when prowling deckhands would not unduly alarm the passengers. But it had borne no fruit. With the coming of day, obvious searching would have to be curtailed.

Privately, Bill Scott doubted that the Chinese would be brought to light before breakfast. So he made arrangements to calm the passengers' nerves.

Most oceangoing liners issue their own daily newspaper while on the seas. The *Mandarin's* was no mimeographed sheet but a 4-pager printed on a small printing press. It was filled with the latest news gleaned from around the World via ship-to-shore shortwave radio.

Going to the radio room, the First Mate conferred with the radio operator whose responsibility it was to condense radio reports into copy for the ship's sheet.

"Sparks, I want something on page-one saying that it was heart attacks that got all three of them," he instructed.

"Got it," said Sparks who immediately got busy.

Within an hour, folded newspaper featuring this soothing item began appearing outside stateroom doors on sterling-silver breakfast trays borne by snappy-looking stewards and in the *Mandarin's* two big dining salons.

One of the first editions to roll off the press was conveyed to the Royal Suite by a steward who was noticeable for 2 reasons.

One, he was very large. He looked like he belonged down in the boiler room bare to the waist and perspiring freely.

Two, the way he carried his tray. High and close to his face. He took great care to walk with the exposed side of his face close to the walls. The tray concealed the other side. That way, although his striking **physique** drew stares his features went unrecognized.

Shifting the uplifted tray to the other hand (thereby concealing his face from the other side), the **Herculean** steward paused to <knock> on the door of the Royal Suite.

"Breakfast," he called.

"*But I don't remember ordering ...*" a feminine voice started to say.

The door fell open and Pat Savage peered out looking annoyed.

Her annoyance evaporated at the unexpected sight of her famous cousin.

"**Doc!** Where have you been? Quick, come in!"

The *Man of Bronze* slipped into the stateroom. He set the tray down on an elaborate lacquered table.

"Swell digs, huh?" Pat said exuberantly. "It set me back a few shekels. But believe me, it will be worth it once things start to pop!"

"You might recall," Doc interposed, "that last time you mixed in an adventure, you nearly had your throat cut."

"In my dictionary," Pat said tartly, "'nearly' is on the same page as 'never'."

*Pat Savage was a young woman who loved **Adventure**. Whatever was in the Savage family blood that fostered a yearning for **excitement** and **danger**, she had a strong dose of it. Too much for the **Bronze Man's** liking.*

In the past, he had gone to great lengths to steer his vivacious cousin out of the path of peril. But too often, Pat stubbornly found her way clear to horn in on one of Doc Savage's adventures.

Just as she seemingly had now.

"What do you know about Jason Baird's difficulties?" Doc inquired.

Pat lost a little of her enthusiasm at the sound of the deceased man's name.

"Not a whole lot, I freely admit," she said, suddenly subdued. "I knew him through his sister Maurine who was a client at my beauty shop.

*Patricia Savage owned a combination beauty parlor-gymnasium on Park Avenue. It catered to an exclusive clientele that had made the **bronze**-haired young woman quite well-to-do.*

Her cousin looked interested.

"Would that be the Maurine Baird known for her work on **germ cultures**?"

"That's her. She took off for China a few months back. What of it?"

Doc did not reply to that.

Instead he asked: "Baird said nothing of the nature of his troubles?"

Pat shook her head.

"Only that he needed your help right away. He was very mysterious about it."

Then she jumped.

"Say, I just remembered! He said if anything happened to him to check the sole of his left foot for instructions. Did you find anything?"

"What makes you think I looked?"

Pat Savage put her hands on her shapely hips and cocked one eye at her **big bronze cousin**.

"Don't kid me, Doc. I know you don't miss a trick. I would have barged into that ice chest of a morgue myself. But I was sopping wet and wasn't about to catch my death of cold."

"So fork it over."

With a sign of resignation, the **Man of Bronze** produced the sheet of paper that he had taken off the sole of corpse identified as 'Jason Baird'.

Pat accepted it and gave the lemon-juice-inscribed message a scan.

Her expression had lost a bit of its intensity of interest by the time she was done.

"**Diamonds**," she murmured, plainly disappointed. "Not a very big pot of gold at the end of this unhappy rainbow, is it? Did you find the sparklers?"

"Not as yet," Doc admitted.

"How about that sneaky peanut muncher?"

"He has not turned up as yet although the ship's crew are still searching."

Pat Savage's attractive face acquired a peculiar expression.

"Any clue as to that *claw* of a thing that chased me off this barge?"

Doc avoided the question by saying: "There have been no further indications of that type."

"Well what have you been doing all night then?" she said in exasperation. "Sleeping?"

"As a matter of fact -- yes."

The answer so floored Pat Savage that she took an involuntary step backward.

"Good grief! Please do not tell me that 3 *blue*-faced dead men and some missing *diamonds* aren't enough to stir your blood." she explained. "I might just up-and-have a heart attack myself!"

"We have at least one assassin on board this ship," Doc pointed out. "And there are near to 2,000 persons aboard the *Mandarin* counting passengers and crew. Finding one man will be task enough. Accomplishing this without falling victim to this insidious *poison*-capsule artifice will be a feat."

Pat jumped to her cabin telephone and scooped it up.

"I'll ring Ham in on this."

Doc said: "Monk too if he is on board."

'Monk' was Monk Mayfair, another of Doc Savage's group of Five assistants.

"He is not," Pat said.

Then: "Ham? ... Pat. Come a-running. Doc's here and he wants us to help him stir the stew!"

Ham Brooks evidently occupied an adjoining cabin because he came through the door almost before the phone receiver had been set back on its cradle.

The wasp-waisted lawyer was resplendent in fresh commodore's uniform. Since it was presumably now resting on the Pacific floor, his white beard no longer adorned his hawk-like visage.

"Don't let cranky old Captain Gooch see you dressed like that," Pat clucked good-naturedly. "He'll think you're fixing to take over his command."

Ham looked injured.

"I suppose I have you to thank for Pat's presence on this ship," Doc said dryly.

Ham Brooks looked sheepish.

"I can explain, Doc. Pat fibbed to me."

"I did not!" Pat flared.

"Well, she did not tell quite the complete truth," Ham amended. "I was told that you needed your speed plane in San Francisco. I agreed to fly Pat out there."

"Well, you might have needed it," Pat rejoined.

"When we landed," Ham continued, "Pat had me search high-and-low for this Jason Baird. The local constabulary informed us that he was missing and that you intended to book passage on the *Mandarin* regardless. So we cooked up this Hollywood actress and press agent imposture, finagling the Royal Suite for Pat."

"Just to keep an eye on matters, Doc," Pat interjected.

The **Bronze Man** regarded the dapper lawyer with his weirdly compelling *golden eyes*.

"I distinctly told Pat that she was to stay clear of this matter," he pointed out.

"It's news to me," said Ham unjointing his handsome cane.

His action revealed it to be a sword-cane. The blade work was excellent. Damascus steel.

"Where is Monk?" Doc asked. "He would hardly be left out of an affair such as this if he could help it."

Ham proceeded to fidget.

"As ... as a matter of fact, Pat did call him. But I believe he must have had the exact time of our rendezvous wrong for he failed to show up at our warehouse hangar at the appointed hour. We were forced to take off without him."

"I told Monk 7:00 sharp!" Pat insisted.

"That ape never could tell time properly," Ham said airily.

He twirled his cane elaborately ...

... which had the opposite effect that the one he had intended. The aristocratic attorney looked as guilty as sin.

"You fake!" Pat snapped. "You called him back and changed times, didn't you?"

Ham *colored*, gulped. "I ..."

Pat cast a jaundiced eye in the sophisticated lawyer's direction.

"I thought you were in a bigger rush than usual to leave," she added, her tone tart.

"I imagine that Monk will have some choice words for the two of you when this affair is over," Doc Savage said pointedly.

*Then the **Bronze Man** changed the subject.*

"It will be difficult for me to have free rein aboard this ship," he explained. "Especially in the heavily-traveled passenger areas. Care to undertake some legwork?"

"Action! Swell!" Pat said snatching up her tiger-skin costume. "Tarzana Vine at your service."

"One moment," Doc said, reaching for the scanty garment.

He plucked an object from the orange&black-striped pelt and held it up to plain view. The others leaned in to make it out.

"That's strange!" Pat said, her mouth pouting prettily.

Ham sputtered: "Is that ..."

"Yes," said Doc. "It appears to be a tiger's claw."

"How about that," said Pat. "I bought this rag at a costume shop back in Frisco. Suppose it belonged to the original tiger? The one who 'donated' the skin, I mean."

"It is," Doc said, "impossible to determine. Pat, exactly what happened when you encountered the disembodied **arm** that chased you into the sea?"

Pat frowned.

"I started up a companionway itching to get my hands on that peanut muncher. For some reason, there was no light. I remember brushing someone in passing."

"Rex Pinks," Ham suggested fiercely.

Pat shook her **bronze** head.

"I think he was behind me," she said slowly. "I'm not certain. At any rate, that was when I saw the bony **arm** coming for me. It **glowed** in the dark. It was so frightsome, I lit out for the rail. But what does the tiger's toenail have to do with what happened?"

Pocketing the claw, the **Bronze Man** said: "Perhaps nothing."

Ham Brooks asked: "What do you want us to do, Doc?"

"Determine if there was a passenger who had to be helped up the gangway back in San Francisco."

Pat brightened.

"A cinch! But who is he, Doc?"

"I do not know if there is any such person," he admitted.

Pat drew her brows into a curvaceous line.

"Then why ..."

Doc went to the door.

"Also as you travel about the ship, watch yourselves carefully. If you hear a *whispery rustle* of a sound, flee to safety. Do not attempt to fight the *thing* that is the source of it.

"What *thing*?" Ham wondered.

*But his question came too late. The **Bronze Man** had closed the door after him.*

Pat Savage said ruefully: "Looks like we do our reconnoitering in the dark. Figuratively speaking."

Although the liner Mandarin boasted 2 sumptuous dining salons abaft of the bridge, they were by no means equal to the task of seating the entire passenger list at one time.

Thus, there were 2 seatings for each salon. The first- and second- (called "cabin") class passengers were permitted to breakfast at the first seating which began promptly at 8:00.

It was nearly that hour now. And when Doc Savage emerged from the Royal Suite and his meeting with Ham and Pat, he encountered great difficulty avoiding the influx of passengers toward the dining area.

There were a small number of elevators strategically placed throughout the liner. Although they were spacious, they were not practical for moving large numbers of persons between decks. Consequently, their use was discouraged except in the case of elderly or invalid passengers.

Doc Savage sought one of these out now. It was the most private method of reaching 'C' Deck and his own cabin where he intended to change into less conspicuous garb.

He turned a corner and discovered bantam-sized Dr. Mawson Harper leaning on the elevator call button impatiently. Instead of retreating, he pushed forward.

Dr. Harper started when he became aware of the *bronze giant's* presence. So *silently* did Doc Savage move that only his rather large *shadow* intercepting light from the corridor door betrayed his presence.

"Savage!" Dr. Mawson exclaimed, turning. "I did not hear you approach."

He stroked his white-striped ebony Van Dyke thoughtfully.

"Are you by chance taking first seating for breakfast?"

"No," Doc told him.

"Unfortunate. For I have something I would like to share with you."

"Yes?"

"I got to thinking about it last night. After that incident when your rather attractive cousin went overboard. I saw that frightful *limb*. Although not very clearly due to the darkness."

"The point, please," Doc prompted.

Dr. Harper gave the call button another impatient <push>.

"As you know, my specialty is tropical diseases. I often do my research in the Orient. I have traveled extensively there."

The lift arrived. The doors parted and they stepped inside.

The elevator was of the self-service type. There was no control lever. The passenger simply depressed the button which corresponded to the deck number.

Dr. Harper <pressed> 'D' Deck. Whining, the cage sank.

"I have been all over Asia," he continued. "China, Siam, Cambodia, Burma. It was in the latter country that I heard a rather fanciful tale that makes me think of that hideous floating *arm* of an *apparition*."

The elevator was slow. It creaked as it descended.

"Go on," Doc implored.

Dr. Harper's voice sank an octave.

"Have you ever heard of the *Jade Ogre*?"

"Eh?"

"The *Jade Ogre*," Dr. Harper repeated. "His Chinese name is *Yook Kweitzu*. Which means the same thing."

"I have not."

"He is a being that the coolies and rice farmers of Cambodia hold in superstitious ways. It is said that this *Jade Ogre* was a warlord of feudal days. A very wicked man. He had many enemies. And one in particular -- the fabled Leper King of old Cambodia. This warlord sought to eradicate the Leper King. But his assassins were unequal to the task. The Leper King continually evaded the traps and snares set to claim his life.

"One day, this warlord who was to become the *Jade Ogre* in frustration beseeched the deity *Siva* -- Hinduism reached Cambodia as you may know -- for the power to smite his enemy dead. And *Siva*

answered saying to the warlord that if he cut off his arm and threw it into a brazier as a sacrifice, he would receive in return the power to reach any point on Earth and destroy his enemies.

"Being a wicked man, this warlord did just that. He offered his left arm to a henchman who lopped it off with a swift chop of his sword."

Dr. Harper kneaded one shoulder absently as if in sympathy with the act of maiming he had describing. He resumed speaking.

"When the arm was cast into the fire and the stump of his shoulder healed, the warlord had a dream. He dreamed that the *spirit* of his amputated arm had flown out into the night to take the Leper King by the throat and had throttled him to death.

"When he awakened the next morning -- or so the legend goes -- word was brought to him that the Leper King was dead. Strangled in his sleep."

"A rather fanciful tale as you say," Doc commented.

"But there is more," Dr. Harper said quickly. "With the Leper King out of the way, this warlord was free to take possession of his throne in a Cambodian city whose name is handed down as **Bankor**."

The white-haired physician paused.

"You have knowledge of archaeological antiquities, Savage. Have you ever heard of Bankor?"

"That name," Doc admitted, "is unknown to me."

The elevator finally grumbled to a stop and Doc Savage permitted Dr. Mawson Harper to step off. The **Bronze Man** followed.

Dr. Harper paused to continue his tale, evidently relishing the telling of it.

"Native to I have spoken swear that it exists deep in the rain forest. Whatever, this warlord grew in power and evil. Whenever anyone challenged his wicked reign, he had only to go into a trance and he would experience a vision of his enemy falling before his disembodied *arm*. And always upon coming out of this trance, the enemy would be reported dead, throttled."

Dr. Harper paused.

"This warlord was so taken by this hideous faculty and made so many enemies as a result of his many cruelties that he had his right arm cut off and consigned into the flames. Thus he acquired **double** the power to slay his opponents.

"It was said that one day, he whispered his secret to a dancing girl, unaware that she was a spy. This girl told others. And when it was made known that the warlord emperor could not send out his *arms* while awake, he was set upon in his very throne room. Lacking arms, he was helpless to defend himself. He was carried bodily to a blazing brazier and cast into the *flames*.

"But the deity *Siva* -- who favored this man -- saw to it that he was not consumed. His face was destroyed, however. Thereafter he wore a *jade* mask, fashioned to resemble that of Siva and fixed in place by rivets of silver. Exiled, shriveled, and helpless, he repaired to his former temple stronghold,

there to brood and in his sleep send out his unstoppable **arms** to deal with his enemies. Henceforth he was known as the **Jade Ogre** -- an armless thing with a face of imperial **jade**."

"A long time ago. If it ever happened," Doc pointed out.

"That is my point," Dr. Harper rejoined. "According to the legends, the **Jade Ogre** was given the gift of **immortality** by **Siva** in return for the promise that he would project his mighty arms out into the World, slaying at will."

Dr. Harper paused. His expression assumed an abashed look.

"Of course, I am a man of Science. I only pass this story along for its possible historical value. But you can see how what happened yesterday made me think of it. And for the life of me, I cannot explain that detached **arm** I saw. Can you?"

"Not as yet," Doc Savage told the medical man.

"Then you have an idea, I take it?" Dr. Harper asked, his Van Dyke seeming to bristle with interest.

They had been walking along a passage toward the main dining salon. It was rapidly filling with humanity -- families, businessmen, and a smattering of society bloods -- pouring down various companionways, intent upon partaking of the *Mandarin's* breakfast fare. Rich smells of cooking eggs, bacon, and ham wafted out and caressed their nostrils.

Doc Savage came to a full stop. His head lifted. His attitude was one of intense **alertness**. Weird *lights* came into his strange **flake-gold eyes**.

The **Bronze Man** quickly excused himself and plunged into the tidal wave of passengers, leaving Dr. Mawson Harper to squint after him.

The doctor's optical efforts came to naught, however.

The **bronze figure** that was Doc Savage quickly melted into the crowd.

His metallic head was visible briefly.

But somehow despite the fact the he towered over the next tallest man in the crowd, the head was soon lost to sight.

Up Next (finally!) ...



*... the whore Pat Savage is **RAPED** and **DEGRADED** !*

XIII -- A *Bolt* of Bronze

Patricia Savage was nothing if not a straightforward example of the gentle sex.

As soon as she had her cousin's blessing to mix into the mystery aboard the Mandarin, she checked the action of her big six-shooter and shoved into a handbag. The latter was altogether too large to be the ultra of fashion this year. But it was commodious enough to swallow the well-worn revolver right down to its ivory grips.

"Now Pat," dapper Ham Brooks cautioned. "Let's not get carried away. We merely desire to ascertain a few facts on Doc's behalf."

"Fact my foot!" Pat said eagerly. "I aim to hunt me up the man, ghost, or devil behind this mystery. And when we meet, I intend to trade hot lead!"

The sophisticated barrister paled visibly. He knew Doc Savage's feisty cousin. Knew also that the **Bronze Man** would hold him responsible if she sailed into harm.

He thought fast.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" he inquired coolly.

Pat examined herself in a full-length mirror. She wore a breezy summer dress that clung to her figure in such a way as would cause a grizzled old salt to pile up on a reef if he had the good fortune to cross her wake.

She looked up, her rather exquisite eyebrows puzzled.

"Your mystery-woman veil," Ham reminded.

"It doesn't exactly go with the frock, you know," Pat pointed out.

"Hmmm. Perhaps you might resort to dark glasses," he suggested.

"You're not," she asked suddenly, "trying to stall me, are you?"

"Jove, no!" protested Ham. "It's just that if it became widely known about the ship that the lovely cousin of the famous **Doc Savage** were aboard, it could lead to complications."

"I'll buy that," Pat allowed, skipping into the bedroom.

Rummaging sounds could shortly be heard from that adjoining room.

Ham Brooks made a dive for Pat's handbag which had been left on the arm of a divan. Holding his sword-cane under one arm, he dug out the six-shooter ... broke the action ... and shook the cartridges into the vent pocket of his white jacket.

Replacing the revolver, he whirled as Pat flounced back into the room with stylish smoked glasses obscuring her eyes. The sudden motion brought an audible *clicking*.

With alacrity, Ham shoved one hand into the pocket to keep the heavy cartridges from knocking together and betraying his subterfuge.

"You resemble," she said suspiciously eyeing Ham's awkward pose, "Napoleon with a bad case of fleas."

"Shall we go?" he invited, tapping his commodore's cap with the head of his cane.

Snatching up her handbag, Patricia Savage preceded the dapper lawyer out of the Royal Suite.

If she noticed that her bag was lighter by 6 shells, the *bronze*-haired beauty gave no sign of it.

They collared First Mate Bill Scott amid the funnels and ventilators and coilings of hose-and-rope that festooned the sundeck. It was all-but-deserted at this early hour. Evidently, that was the reason the First Mate was conducting his search here.

"I say," Ham Brooks hailed the officer. "We would like a word with you, my good man."

First Mate Scott scowled when he saw them. He had self-control enough to mask the grimace after a moment. But his distrust for anyone associated with **Doc Savage** -- the man who had given him such a runaround the day before -- was impossible to completely conceal.

"I know who you two are. Now," he said flatly.

"Watch me vamp this sourpuss," Pat undertoned as they drew near.

She strode up to the man and bestowed her most dazzling smile. The one was that was ivory framed in rich *bronze*.

"We'll only take a moment of your time, Captain ..."

"Actually, I'm first-mate," the other inserted.

"Was there a man brought aboard in San Francisco under difficult circumstances?" Pat asked pleasantly. "Either in a wheelchair or some other way that would indicate he was ill?"

The First Mate did not have to think about that one for very long.

"There was," he offered reluctantly. "A Chinese gentleman. 3 other Chinese helped him aboard. Why do you ask?"

"I wish I knew," Pat offered truthfully.

"**Doc Savage** asked to look into this possibility," Ham Brooks explained.

Then shifting the subject, he asked: "Have you had any luck running down that cat-eyed peanut muncher?"

"That's what I'm doing up here," First Mate Scott said glumly. "Captain's orders are to search without getting the passengers all jumpy. So here I am."

"Where do we find this queasy Oriental?" Pat wanted to know returning to the matter of the Chinese passenger who had to be helped aboard the *Mandarin*.

"I don't recall his name. But the chief steward should be able to tell you to which cabin he was taken."

"Thanks," Pat said brightly turning on her heel.

Ham Brooks hastened after her, one hand still thrust into his pocket.

Finding the chief steward proved to be an undertaking.

He was not to be found in either of the dining salons which were jammed to the ornate walls with breakfasters. Someone in the galley thought that he might be found in his cabin.

He was not in his cabin. But a passing steward thought they should look in the crew lounge.

This proved to be utterly bare of occupants.

"What say we split up?" Pat said turning to face the frustrated lawyer.

All their tramping around had caused his outfit to acquire wrinkles. Ham Brooks fancied himself a modern-day Beau Brummel and reacted to wrinkles with a horror usually reserved for flesh wounds.

"I think Doc would prefer that I keep an eye on you," he said paternally.

"Squirrel fodder!" Pat snapped back. "We can search twice as fast if we take opposite ends of this overdone hooker."

"Need I remind you that someone has already made an attempt on your life?" Ham pointed out sternly.

Pat yanked her six-gun out of her gaping handbag and waved it about in the air.

"And need I remind you, Mr. Fancy-Pants, that I can round off a fox's ears with this cannon?"

Ham Brooks paled. He opened his mouth to protest ... But Pat beat him to his words.

"You take the stern," she said. "I've got the bow. And brother! do I intend to scour the scuppers!"

With the vehement promise trailing behind her, Pat Savage quitted the crew lounge.

Ham Brooks spent a moment composing himself. He removed his cap and ran a natty white handkerchief across his perspiring brow. The dapper attorney decided that his most prudent course of action was to tail the pretty trouble-seeker.

That proved difficult inasmuch as he was dressed entirely in **white**. A color not exactly designed for skulking about in.

Almost as soon as she entered into the cross-ship passage outside the lounge, he was confronted with a dilemma.

"Starboard or port?" he muttered to himself, his head swiveling back-and-forth as he tried to see in 2 directions simultaneously.

He decided to go left. To the port side of the liner.

He had catfooted all the way to the companionway at the passage's port terminus when a storage room door *clicked* open and Pat Savage stuck her pretty **bronzed**-haired head out.

Ascertaining that the passage was now clear, she glided out and moved toward a companionway that would take her into the *Mandarin's* very bowels.

Grinning fiercely, she murmured: "Never trust a lawyer."

The matched pair of officers guarding the ship's morgue were only too eager to allow Miss Tarzana Vine to enter. They were not the same two as had given Doc Savage the same privilege the night before. That duo had required convincing.

Pat had only to smile invitingly and sign one autograph for each of these to get her way. If they harbored any resistance to the notion, she allayed that impulse with a bald-faced fabrication.

"The Captain said it would be all right," she told the pair, putting a disarming lilt into her speech.

Once the autographing chore was completed, one of the seamen undogged the door.

Pat stepped in. Immediately her teeth began chattering.

"**Brrrr**," she said watching her breath expel in a fluffy little puff of steam.

She circled the room reading the hand-inked drawer labels until one tapered finger touched a slip of paper marked **J. Baird**.

Slinging her handbag over her shoulder, Pat took hold of the drawer handle and began walking backward. The drawer squeaked and rumbled on its rollers with each step she took, gradually revealing a sheeted form like a mummy in a cocoon.

When she had exposed the upper body, Pat stepped around and carefully folded back the sheet until the corpse's head shone like a dull **emerald** under the overhead light.

Perhaps it was the weird **jade green** of the dead man's face. Or possibly it was the ugliness of expression that Death had stamped upon his dried-up features. But at first glimpse of the visage under the sheet, Pat Savage brought a tight **bronze** fist to her mouth. Her eyes went wide. She stepped backward, recoiling.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Oh!"

Exhibiting great agitation, the *bronze*-haired girl gave the morgue drawer a shove and charged out of the door, practically bowling over the 2 guardian seamen who had heard her exclamation of horror. Or so they assumed it to have been.

"Are you okay, Miss Vine?" one asked solicitously.

"Hardly!" said the supposed actress sweeping past them like a blustery *bronze* wind.

"How do you like that!" one seaman said to the other. "She gets her way and now she can't give us the time of day!"

Her chiseled features tight with some contained emotion, Patricia Savage roamed the liner *Mandarin* searching.

"Doc will want to know about this!" she muttered, her voice strained.

Pat prowled the outer decks on both sides of the vessel. She barged her way into both dining salons ... rubbernecked for several fruitless minutes ... and went topside once more.

"That cousin of mine could be disguised as a ventilator for all I know," she complained when no one was within hearing.

Unnoticed by her, an eavesdropper did lurk in the vicinity.

A pock-featured Chinese man was padding along several yards behind the young woman. He wore a black mandarin's cap over his very round head. Which made him look rather benign.

Pat stopped ... <snapped> her fingers ... and cried: "The Skipper! I'll bet that shriveled old salt knows where Doc's hiding."

Abruptly, she reversed herself, just missing the Oriental who ducked behind a horn-like ventilator.

He lay in wait, his dirty gray eyes knife slits in his skull-like face.

Pat Savage seemed unaware of the lurking Celestial as she cruised past the open mouth of the ventilator.

Soft cat feet slipped up behind her and 2 yellow claws stretched a *red* silk cord over her head. The cord descended ...

Possibly she would have sensed the attacker had she not been so intent upon her quest. It is a truism that the more one concentrates upon the contents of one's mind, the less sensitive the 5 senses are to external stimuli.

Pat possessed excellent hearing. It was just that she was not listening to the slight sounds her eardrums were receiving.

The cord whipped across her smooth **bronze** throat digging in. Pat emitted a squeak of surprise. It was barely even that. A mouse would have raised more of an outcry.

She saw stars. Bright varicolored ones.

XX

Her attacker seemed to have a momentary change of plans. True, he would end up killing her. But the semi-conscious beauty did provide for a moment-or-two of lustful fun.

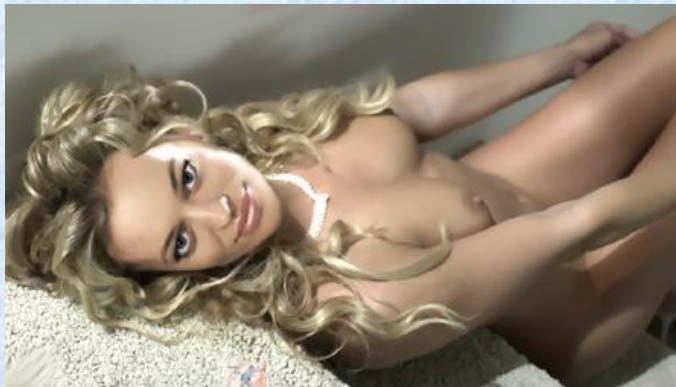


“And now you will get what you deserve,” he sneered at her, “you filthy **American WHORE!**”

He started ripping her clothes in a maddened *frenzy!* She was still too dazed to resist much.



"YOU YANKEE WHORE!"



She got nauseated when his lips sought her luscious mouth. Her trademark **neon-pink lipstick** was being smeared all over both their faces.



He also quickly found how full and firm his athletic captive's **34-D** breasts were.



Pat could only groan as gross *sucking* sounds accompanied his sloppy mouth enclosing over them



He <slapped> her hard a couple of times.

"Spread your legs for your Master, **whore!**" he ordered.



Her strength still hadn't returned to the point where she could have stopped his efforts.

GETTING READY TO IMPREGNATE



He was naked now. His wrinkled **penis** looked very *vile* to Pat.

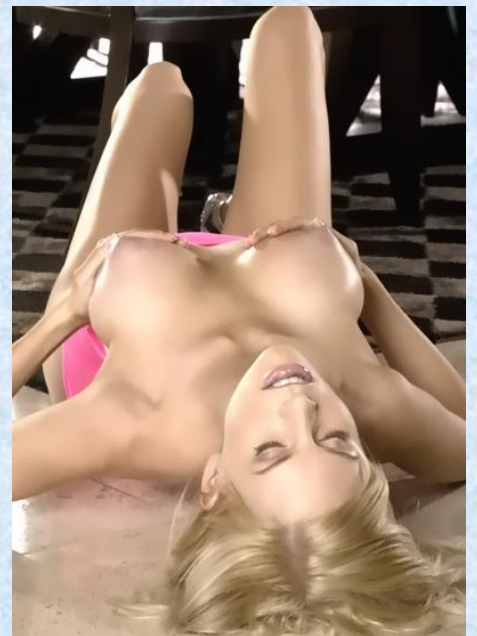
It didn't take him long to **RAM** it hard into her tight vagina!!!







It took a mighty effort for him not to ejaculate into her tight womb. He was s-o-o-o-o close!!



Pat lost her breath momentarily as he yanked it out just in time.

What he really wanted now was her pretty defiant mouth ...



This time he couldn't wait. He shot *gob* after *disgusting gob* of sticky semen down her throat!!



In a Parallel Universe ...



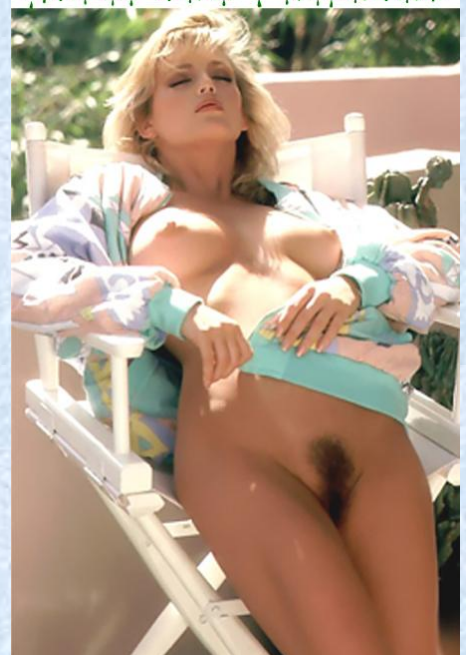
His lust was spent. But not his *anger*.

He grabbed anything he could and promptly poked it into Pat's sore violated orifices. She *squealed* like a stuck **pig-slut!**



She *gasped* and *panted* while extracting all those invading insertions.

RAPED AND PREGNANT







"You know too much, missy!" a rattly voice hissed in her ear.

Par found herself yanked backward. A sandaled foot kicked in a cabin door. It was not locked. She was flung inside, the cord around her neck serving as an effective fulcrum.

The cord released. Pat went sprawling!

She did not wait to see who her assailant was. Even as the **bronze**-haired girl went tumbling and skidding along the Oriental rug accumulating painful friction burns on elbows and knees, she snaked a hand into her capacious handbag.

The cabin door slammed close and the rattly voice cackled: "Now you cannot get out."

"Fine with me, buster," Pat said showing the Oriental the business end of her six-shooter. "As they say out West, grab a fistful of sky."

The Chinese stood rooted. His face -- rather than showing consternation or some other appropriate expression -- went as placid as an amber pond with 2 dirty lily pads for eyes.

"I could say it twice," Pat warned, picking herself up. "Or I could just drill you here-and-there for effect."

"The Celestial hissed: "It would seem that I have no choice."

His dangling hands shook as if with agitation.

Then ... with deliberate slowness ... he brought his hands up to his shoulders.

"Hold that pose," Pat warned stepping forward. Her silken hose showed rents here-and-there. But she could navigate.

"You're the lad with the peanut habit," Pat stated.

"I am known as Wan Sop, chief limb of the *Jade Ogre*."

"Never heard of you. Or it," Pat shot back.

She was looking about the room out of the corners of her eyes in case there was another assailant lurking in the cabin.

A *shadow* crossed the porthole facing the starboard rail. Pat's bright *eyes* flicked to it, the muzzle of her six-shooter following.

And in that instant, Wan Sop lifted one claw to his mouth. Pat shifted her gun back. She brought the side of her free hand spanking down on the hammer to which was welded a spur and began fanning the thing wild-West style.

For all her speed, Pat was rewarded with a series of ineffectual *clickings*. Her pretty features registered *shock* ... *horror* ... *amazement* ... *Fear* in order.

She took an involuntary step backward, stricken momentarily speechless.

"You die!" hissed Wan Sop.

And then the cabin door exploded inward!

A *Bolt of Bronze* struck Wan Sop with no less force than forked lighting! The latter was yanked half around.

A *metallic fist* came up and connected with a dry crunching *sound!*

The Oriental's pocked moon-of-a-head rocked back like a pineapple jerked on its stem.

He collapsed to the rug with one hand outflung and the other under him. The black mandarin's cap fell off disclosing an utterly hairless yellow face which as his lips drew back in a grimace took on the aspect of a Death's hand.

He did not get up again.

Doc Savage reached Pat's side demanding; "Are you all right?"

"No!" Pat bit out furiously, breaking the action of her pistol. "But when I get my hands on that Ham Brooks, I'm going to feel a whole lot better let me tell you. Look at this! That sneak snuck all the shells out of my gun. I could have been killed!"

Her eyes suddenly went to the prostrate form of Wan Sop.

"Doc!" she breathed. Look!"

Doc Savage turned, his *golden eyes* alert.

Wan Sop had fallen on his face, the force of the **Bronze Man's** powerful *uppercut* having corkscrewed him around before he went down. After falling, he must have contorted and twisted somewhat because now his unlovely orb of a visage was half-turned to the porthole light.

The face of Wan Sop no longer looked like that of a benign skull that had been sheathed with the skin of a lemon.

It still retained the pock-marked aspect that was remindful of old lemon peel. But now the color of his features was a deep *blue* like a ripening plum. It made his staring eyes look like pebbles and his mouth resembled that part of a plum that had been burst under squeezing fingers. His betelnut-stained teeth had something of the aspect of a line of plum pits.

"Ugh," said Pat turning away.

Doc Savage went to the body. Carefully, he turned it over.

One *bluish* fist was clenched tight. Doc pried the fingers loose disclosing a simple object.

He brought it up to the light. Pat <blinked> at it.

"Macaroni," she said regarding the slim cream-colored tube.

"Long enough to function as a blowgun," Doc explained. "Which could then be chewed and swallowed, thereby consuming the evidence."

"And would sound like he was eating peanuts!" Pat gasped.

She went a little green around the line of her jaw.

"I heard a crunching noise before he went down. I guess he swallowed the capsule meant for me."

"It would seem so," Doc said.

Pat found her composure and said: "I call that the 'nick of time'."

Doc explained. "I have been trailing this 'Wan Sop' -- if that is his true name -- since I spotted him in the breakfast crowd earlier. I had hoped that he would lead me to any confederates which he might have placed aboard ship. Instead, he picked up your trail."

"How long ago?"

Doc stood up.

"Since before you visited the ship's morgue. He lingered nearby until you reemerged and followed you topside."

"The morgue!" Pat exclaimed suddenly. "Doc, do you know that the **man who was killed while climbing the gangway isn't Jason Baird after all?**"

"I was," the **Bronze Man** admitted, "practically sure of it."

XIV -- Discoveries

"You mean you knew it all along!" Pat exploded.

Doc Savage had fallen to searching the cabin.

"All along -- no," he answered. "I did not personally witness the man thought to have been Jason Baird succumb to the *poison* gas capsule. Otherwise I would have interrogated the pair of bodyguard who escorted him aboard before they left the ship.

"But I did contact the San Francisco authorities by radio-landline telephone and learned that their questioning of the duo showed that they were detectives in the employ of an agency known for its good reputation. They had never met Jason Baird before sailing. The imposter had made arrangements by telephone for the operatives to travel with him and merely showed up at the agency office the morning the *Mandarin* sailed."

Pat's pretty brows puckered. "I don't get it."

The **Bronze Man** was going through dresser drawers and examining such items as he found therein.

"I myself had never met Baird so I could not identify the man," he continued. "The only others on the ship who could were you and -- according to their friends -- Fuzzy Wool and Kitten Borzoi."

"That why they were murdered!" Pat shouted.

Doc nodded.

"And that is why there was an attempt on your life, Pat. To prevent anyone from discovering that the man in the morgue was not the true Jason Baird."

"So who is the dead one?" Pat wondered.

Doc left off his search of the drawers. He moved about the cabin, his *golden eyes* active.

"At a guess," he ventured, "a dupe. Possibly a confederate of this Wan Sop and whoever else may be mixed up in this mystery."

"That's pretty cold-blooded," Pat stated. "Murdering one of their own to cover their tracks."

Doc said: "No doubt they had their reasons for disposing of him. Do not forget that the dead man is a white man. And so far, all the others have been Asiatic including the one who attempted to murder me on the San Francisco plane."

Pat shivered prettily. "Don't remind me."

He straightened from his searching.

"Anything interesting?" she asked, curious.

"All indications are that this cabin belongs to a Chinese named Wan Sop," Doc said.

"The question remains. Is 'Wan Sop' this man's name?"

Doc Savage went to body and knelt down. He began going through the dead Celestial's pockets. They were in strange places about the native costume which the man wore.

"Be careful, Doc," Pat pleaded, her eyes on the cadaver's **blue**-turning-**aquamarine** visage.

"The **poison** has no doubt lost its potency by now," he stated calmly. "It seems to evaporate rather quickly."

He pulled out a simple billfold from a hip pocket and stood up.

Identity papers indicated the dead man was indeed named Wan Sop. Among the papers was a receipt for a valise deposited in the ship's safe.

"A visit to the purser is in order," Doc said.

"Anything that puts distance between me and this **blue**-faced cadaver," Pat said fervently, "has my vote."

They encountered Ham Brooks on the way to the purser.

"Doc!" he called as he pounded down a companionway with his natty cane held high. "I located the stateroom where the sick passenger was taken!"

"I forgot to tell you," Pat injected. "There really was a sick passenger who got on at San Francisco. How'd you know that anyway?"

"Conjecture," the **Bronze Man** said.

Ham puffed up and fell in cadence with them.

He jingled when he walked. Which reminded Pat Savage of another thing that had slipped her mind.

"All that 'loose change'," she told Ham archly, "is going to ruin the swanky hang of your coat."

Ham colored. His face actually turned **scarlet**. Which when contrasted to his snowy hair and equally white attire made him resemble a mortified snowman.

"Deuced nuisance -- change," he said, flustered.

"You don't say," Pat said, **abruptly snatching at the dapper lawyer's sword-cane.**

"Why you ..." Ham began reaching out ...

Pat switched the cane between her hands, frustrating him.

"This," returned Pat fiercely, "is my property until I say otherwise."

Ham looked as if a leg had been amputated. He was seldom without his cane.

"I protest!" he complained.

"I came near to being killed because I was shooting dead air at a Chinaman," Pat explained.

The sophisticated attorney subsided.

Doc Savage filled in Ham regarding the events of the morning.

The latter said: "I investigated the cabin where the sick man was taken, Doc. He wasn't actually sick according to the chief steward. Just well into his cups."

"And?"

"There is a Chinaman -- a rather well-dressed one -- ensconced on a steamer chair outside the cabin. He is happily eating his way through a bag of peanuts."

"A guard," Doc said.

Pat shuddered.

"Another peanut muncher!"

They came at last to the purser's office. Doc presented the receipt and requested a look at the valise.

This time, Captain Gooch had to come down in person.

Upon hearing of a 4th blue-faced corpse on his ship, he threatened to put them all in irons and lock them in the ship's brig.

"Do liners have bribes?" Pat asked, puzzled.

"They do not," Ham put in. "This man is merely trying to buffalo us."

He drew himself up before the Mandarin skipper. He himself towered over the man,

"Captain Gooch," the dapper lawyer said pointedly, "I must warn you. These heavy-handed tactics do not impress us."

In a voice so calm that everyone immediately lost their ire, Doc Savage said: "It might be a good thing if we all had a look inside that valise."

Then looking at Captain Gooch, he added: "Starting of course with you."

Captain Gooch saw the logic in that. Not that it particularly appealed to him. Tersely, he order the valise brought out.

After it was shoved through the cage slot, they saw that it was a simple black valise.

"Locked," Captain Gooch muttered tugging at the clasp.

The **Bronze Man** produced a *silver* key, saying: "Try this."

While Captain Gooch frowningly did as he was bade, Pat asked: "Where did that come from?"

"Wan Sop's wallet," Doc explained.

"Oh."

The valise *clicked* open and everyone went very quiet. Captain Gooch's chafed features visibly paled as he peered inside. Everyone else crowded closer.

"Diamonds!" Ham exploded.

"The missing jewels," Pat added.

Doc said: "That key matches the outline which I discovered on the message from Jason Baird's stateroom.

Captain Gooch looked up.

"Message? What message?"

"I neglected to bring you up-to-date on the most recent results of my progress," Doc told him.

"Do tell," Captain Gooch said thinly.

"After you had left," Doc continued, "I discovered a message -- signed 'Jason Baird' -- concealed in a steamer trunk. It told of a theft of *diamonds* such as these by a thief identified as 'Wan Sop'. Pressed into the paper was an outline of a key identical to the one you hold."

"You still have that message?" Gooch demanded.

Doc produced the thing.

The Skipper read it over, then removed the key from the valise lock and pressed it against the impression. No one present doubted but that it was a perfect fit.

"This seems to prove that those *diamonds* belong to Jason Baird," Doc pointed out.

"Now all we have to do is find him," Pat put in.

Captain Gooch looked prepared to chew nails!

"Unless the dead have learned to walk," he sputtered. "He's down in the morgue, isn't he?"

No one seemed to answer that.

So the Captain roared the question a second time.

"Well, isn't he?"

"He is not," Doc related and then explained the complicated series of discoveries that had led them to the inescapable conclusions that the man in the morgue was not, in truth, Jason Baird.

"Let me see if I have this straight," Captain Gooch ground out through too-tight teeth. "This 'Wan Sop' steals these *diamonds* from Jason Baird who is a jeweler by trade. He brings them aboard and *poisons* everyone who can recognize that the man who he framed as being Baird isn't really him?"

"That is the rough shape of it so far," Doc allowed.

"I think," Captain Gooch said while clapping the valise shut and thrusting it back to the purser, "that I had better contact the steamship company."

He charged off.

Ham Brooks looked at Doc Savage.

"I guess that leaves us clear to investigate the supposed sick passenger."

"It does," Doc said, starting for the nearest companionway.

The others followed.

Ham spoke to Pat out of the side of his mouth as they hurried along.

"Looks like we're going to have some excitement," he offered.

"I already had my share for the day thank you," Pat said frostily. "I have been chased by a floating arm. Disarmed behind my back. Nearly poisoned by a Chinaman. And I've been at sea less than 24 hours!"

Ham smiled. "This isn't getting your pretty goat is it, Pat?"

"You leave my goat out of this!" she snapped.

Then "I don't know," she admitted in a more subdued tone. "As far as enjoying being murdered twice in a row, I think I have a glass jaw or something."

*Which coming from the **Action**-loving Patricia Savage was quite an admission indeed.*

Ham took advantage of this momentary lack of nerve to make an offer.

"Trade you 6 perfectly dry six-gun shells for a sword-cane," he said.

Pat asked suspiciously: "You didn't unscrew the tops and pour out the powder by any chance?"

"You have my word of honor," Ham replied gallantly.

"Considering your profession," she retorted, "that's not the kind of guarantee I would take to the bank. But right now, I'm feeling desperate. It's a deal."

They swapped items before they reached 'B' Deck starboard where the cabin that Ham had found lay.

From this point on, their attitudes were ones of *stealth*. They crept along the deck ducking when they passed portholes so as not to be seen.

Pausing behind a handy ventilator, Doc and Ham were peering along the starboard rail to where the Chinaman was contentedly munching peanuts while Pat hastily stuffed shells into her six-shooter. She <clicked> the action together and said:

"Now that I'm loaded for bear, wolf, or skunk, nobody had better give me any guff!"

"The cabin is supposedly registered to a 'Mr. Lee'," Ham inserted. "Probably a fictitious name chosen not to sound necessarily Oriental."

Doc undertoned: "Wait here."

The **big Bronze Man** withdrew and set his throat muscles. The others could see that these were pulsing strangely.

From some indefinite point nearby, a sing-song voice seemed to call out: "**Hing Dai!**"

At the sound of that voice, Pat Savage felt her blood run cold.

Seeing her expression, Ham formed a question mark symbol with a crooked finger.

"Wan Sop!" Pat breathed, one hand going to her throat.

"**Hing Dai!**" the voice that sounded like the dead Wan Sop came again. "**Gou Meng! Gou Meng!**"

The Oriental on the steamer chair came bolt upright. His narrow eyes switched back-and-forth anxiously like those of a cornered animal.

Again came the disembodied voice: "**Gou Meng!**"

This time, the formerly seated Celestial came running in their direction crying: "**Ching gow!**"

Pat pulled back the hammer of her six-shooter, ready to let it fall with explosive results ...

But there was no need for gunfire as things turned out.

The Asian man hove into view as **Doc Savage** **snagged him by the neck**. The former for some reason was still clutching his sack of peanuts. This fell from nerveless fingers, precipitating nuts about the deck.

"*Aeii!*" he shrieked.

The Oriental's sandaled feet made funning motions. These availed him nothing despite their frantic quality for Doc Savage was holding the man's feet off the deck. The Asiatic was attempting to run on thin air. He presented a comical picture.

Doc squeezed. The Celestial gave a sign and went limp.

The **bronze giant** laid him out on the deck behind the ventilator. He waved for the others to follow.

"That was you!" Pat hissed suddenly.

"Ventriloquism," Doc said. "I had only heard Wan Sop speak once. And then only briefly. But I thought my voice imitation was sufficient. I merely called for help and the lookout responded.

Ham Brooks (who knew enough Chinese to know that the language was difficult enough to learn to speak never mind imitate and "throw" simultaneously) said: "Whew! It worked!"

They eased up on the unguarded stateroom door. Doc employed his tiny periscope device to peer into the porthole. He angled this about some.

"Spot anything, Doc?" Ham wanted to know.

The **Bronze Man** shook his head and collapsed the device.

Next, he reached into his gadget vest and removed a tiny whitish button which he inserted into the lock aperture.

Recognizing what Doc Savage was about to do, Ham unlimbered an amazingly compact machine-pistol from a padded holster under one armpit. It resembled an oversized automatic fitted with a tiny drum magazine.

This was a supermachine pistol -- another product of Doc Savage's inventive mind. It fired so called "mercy bullets" which were filled with a quick-acting anesthetic. The **Man of Bronze** did not believe in killing if it could be avoided.

The dapper lawyer set himself as Doc applied another button to the aperture and faded back a safe distance.

Almost at once, the lock began spilling a bright sparkle and a sizzling sound like back frying. Hot metal dropped and ran!

When the terrific heat of the **thermite** (for that was the compound which the **Bronze Man** had brought to bear) finally subsided, Doc Savage moved swiftly.

He reared back and kicked at the door. It slammed in!

He jumped through the aperture. The others piled in, Pat coming last.

The parlor was empty. Doc motioned for them to hang back as he moved to the bedroom.

The door was ajar. He flashed to it using one bronze hand to ease it open, ready to jump back and fling a glassy object he had plucked from his vest (one of his tiny thin-walled anesthetic grenades) if the need arose.

The door fell open all the way. The **Bronze Man's** eyes were molten.

No sound came from the next room.

Doc plunged in. Ham and Pat followed.

"Jove!" Ha exploded.

Doc Savage was bent over a bamboo chair to which was lashed the pale-faced society reporter Rex Pinks.

Ham unsheathed his sword-cane and employed it to sever the **red** silk gag that had been tied around the newshawk's mouth. It fell loosely.

Pinks opened his mouth to speak but only a *muffled* sound emerged. They all saw that the inside of his mouth was a **scarlet** wound as if his tongue had been cut off at the root.

"Good grief!" Ham said.

"Horrible!" added Pat.

Doc tore the lashings free by brute **strength**. The bonds snapped with dry twangs.

Rex Pinks reached up with his hands and dug them into his raw-looking mouth. It took some squirming. But in the end, he got the wet **red sponge** out past his teeth.

"Pah!" he spat. "The damned thing soaked up saliva and swelled up 3 times its size. I thought it would pop my jaw out-of-hinge for sure."

"These bonds are rather loose," Doc pointed out as the reporter found his feet.

"I had almost worked free," he explained.

Ever the suspicious one, Ham demanded: "What are you doing here, Pinks?"

"I was searching for that peanut muncher," Rex Pinks shot back. "I trailed him to this cabin. But there was a guard posted nearby. He jumped me. I got dragged in here and tied up for my pains."

"Was the man you trailed the same one who was lurking about when my cousin Pat went over the rail last night?" Doc asked.

"The very same. He had a pocked death's head face and no more hair than a cue ball."

"Well, he's joined the ranks of the blue-featured departed," Pat put in without sympathy.

"What about the guard outside?" Pinks wanted to know. "They set one outside to guard the cabin."

"He has been taken care of," Doc told him. "We are searching for another individual whom we believe may be held in this cabin."

"You must mean the man under the bed," Rex Pinks said to the astonishment of everyone present.

They all fell to looking under the bed.

All except Ham who kept his intricate supermachine pistol trained on Rex Pinks.

"Not very trusting are you?" Pinks put in sourly.

"Your turning up here is rather surprising," pointed out the dapper Attorney with one eye on Doc and Pat as they hauled a trussed form from under the cabin bed.

The form was swathed in canvas which had been tied with stout cord at various useful places such as the waits, upper arms, knees, and ankles. Thus was the captive completely immobilized.

There was a yellow silk hood over his head. But no holes for sight.

Doc removed this, exposing short blond hair surmounting a muscular face remindful of a pugnacious bulldog.

Pat gasped involuntarily.

"Jason Baird!" she exclaimed.

Coming up later ...



*... Pat Savage is not out of **TROUBLE** yet !*

XV -- Plot Fantastic

The silence which followed Pat Savage's surprise exclamation was not long. Perhaps less than 30 seconds.

When it ended, it popped like a cork from a bottle!

"What do you mean this man is Jason Baird?" Rex Pinks burst out. "Baird's extinct!"

Doc Savage removed the **red** silk gag from the human bulldog's mouth. He plucked out a **red sponge** identical to the one that had tortured Pinks and tossed it aside.

"Savage," Jason Baird said thickly. "You found me!"

"I helped, don't forget," Pat chimed in.

Ham Brooks employed his sword-cane to saw through Jason Baird's bonds, taking care to avoid puncturing the canvas with the tip which was coated with a sticky **brown** substance (an anesthetic compound).

Once free, Jason Baird tried to climb out of the canvas. He managed to sit up ... but only briefly. He wore native Oriental garb which fit him loosely.

"My arms and legs feel dead," he said weakly.

Loss of circulation," the **Bronze Man** told him.

Doc went to work, flexing the man's right arm and kneading muscles to stimulate blood flow. As he did this, he rapped out quick orders.

"Ham, station yourself outside the cabin door. It will be some minutes before we can move out. We do not want interference."

"Right-o," said Ham skipping away.

"Pat, watch Pinks."

Acquiring a bloodthirsty expression, Pat Savage directed her six-shooter in Rex Pinks' direction.

"Do I get a trial by jury? Or are you just going to do me in on general suspicion?" the reporter asked in an injured voice.

"We'll let you know," Pat retorted.

Doc Savage indicated Rex Pinks to Jason Baird.

"Do you know this man?"

"Yeah," the jeweler said without enthusiasm. "I've seen him around. He's a pencil pusher with the *Comet*. Has a moocher reputation as I hear it."

"I resent that" said Rex Pinks who otherwise offered no defense of his character.

"While we're stuck here," Doc said, "let's have your story, Baird. Beginning with why you asked for my assistance."

"We already know that ... don't we?" Pat asked. "It's over the stolen **diamonds**."

"No," said Jason Baird as feeling began to return to his right arm.

Doc switched to the left one. He worked briskly as if time were of the essence.

"Maybe Pat has told you about my sister Maurine," Jason Baird said.

"She is well-known for her experiments in **germ cultures**," Doc said.

Baird nodded. "Maurine went to China about 3 months ago. She was on the trail of a species of tropical plant that she thought would be a boon to the World. At first, her letters came every week-or-two. Then they stopped.

"Without explanation, I made inquiries of the Chinese authorities. They reported that she had seemingly vanished. Since she was working deep in the south of China far from civilization, I was not unduly alarmed at first."

His left arm began showing life, starting with the fingers which wiggle like pale worms slowly suffusing with pink.

"Then a Shanghai jewel importer -- an acquaintance of mine -- brought me word that Maurine was no longer in China but in Cambodia. Deep in the interior. He learned this from natives. They claimed that she was insane and a prisoner of a weird individual called **Quon**."

Doc said: "**Quon**?"

"That is the name they gave. I could learn nothing further except that this **Quon** whoever he is holds forth in a ruin in the heart of Cambodia. Which is also for some reason known as **Quon**."

Rex Pinks tittered mirth at that.

"A loony yarn if I ever heard one!"

He was ignored.

Scowling, Jason Baird went on.

"I made inquiries with the government of Cambodia. They were evasive at first. When I pressed them, they cut off all communication with me."

Doc Savage left off the arm and went to work on Jason Baird's legs. The jeweler was able to sit up now. His face was very pale. His words tumbled out like stones down a hillside.

"It was shortly after that when I received a visit from a devil of a Chinese who called himself 'Wan Sop'," Bair continued. "He showed up in my office one day just about 2 weeks ago in the company of a pack of half-castes -- Cambodians, I think they were -- and threatened me."

"What sort of threats?" Doc Savage asked.

"He said that I was to stop searching for my sister. That a terrible fate would befall me if I continued along my lines of inquiry. He said there was nothing I could do for Maurine. He hinted that she was ... she was dead. But he didn't come right out and say this."

Jason Baird then paused. His bulldog face was perspiring freely as restored circulation brought stinging pain to his extremities.

"This only made me more anxious to do something," he related. "I booked passage on the *Mandarin* and contacted you through Pat. Somehow, Wan Sop and his cutthroats found out. I think they may have tapped my telephone. I was shadowed everywhere I went. I managed to stay one step ahead of them.

"But the night before the Mandarin was to sail -- the night I was to meet you, Savage -- there were several attempts to get me. At my home and office. I decided my safest bet was to walk the streets. I was carrying the valise with the **diamonds** which I was going to donate to charity on your behalf if you agreed to come to my aid."

"The **diamonds** have been recovered," Doc inserted.

"They're yours now," Jason Baird sincerely.

Then going on with his story, "Wan Sop caught up with me," he admitted grudgingly. "He's a devil! He drugged me and got me aboard the Mandarin. This is the *Mandarin*, isn't it?"

"It is," Doc confirmed.

Jason Baird made motions indicating that he was prepared to stand up. But he couldn't quite make it and had to be helped into a chair.

"I guess the rest you know," he finished weakly.

"Wan Sop has perished," Doc said.

"His own **poison** got him," Pat interjected.

Baird nodded. "I can't think of a more fitting fate for that skull-faced devil."

Doc asked: "How many other Chinese have you seen about the ship who are in his employ?"

"Only one. There was a white man called 'Seed'. I overheard them talking about him. Whatever is behind all of this, Seed was getting cold feet. Wan Sop decided to get rid of him. I heard him boasting of it to the other one saying that he would be buried in my place and no one would ever know."

Pat Savage looked away from Rex Pinks long enough to exclaim: "He must be the dead one in the morgue we thought was Jason."

"Have you any idea why Wan Sop wished to keep you alive, Baird?" Doc wondered.

"None whatsoever."

"This tale gets taller and taller," mocked Rex Pinks.

Pat prodded the colorless reporter with the black end of her pistol.

"Ixnay, ibscray!"

When Pinks looked confused, she translated: "That's 'Nix, scribe' to you!"

Pinks subsided.

"Are you up to travel?" Doc asked Baird.

"I can manage."

Jason Baird found his feet ... teetered ... and almost fell.

The **Bronze Man** had to help him limp from the cabin.

Outside, the rail was conveniently scanty in the way of passengers. Breakfast had seen to that.

Ham met them. He had sheathed his sword-cane. But his machine-pistol waved excitedly in the air.

"Where to now, Doc?" he asked, low-voiced.

"Royal Suite. It is the more remote and secure."

They moved past the ventilator where they had left the insensate Chinese sentry intending to collect the erstwhile lookout.

Empty shadow pooled in the spot where he had been. He was no longer there.

Ham looked as if he was about to explode with rage.

"He's gone!" he wailed.

"Didn't you check him?" Pat demanded hotly.

"No," Ham said in a harried voice. "I was too busy watching the door. He must have been spirited away before I left the cabin."

"Maybe he threw himself overboard," Rex Pinks offered. "To save face over his failure."

"Not likely," Ham said contrarily.

"A fine turn of events!" Pat huffed.

"Let's finish the recriminations in private," Doc suggested.

They used an elevator. All of them managed to squeeze aboard.

By the time the lift put them off on 'A' Deck, Jason Baird was able to move under his own power. He walked like a man whose feet had been pressed to hot coals.

As they walked along, Ham asked: "Doc, what about that secret message you found in the fake Baird's cabin? The one that claimed this matter was over **diamonds**."

"A ruse," Doc explained. "To throw us off the trail."

"I heard them laughing about that too," Baird added. "The idea was to make it easy for you to locate the **diamonds** on the ship so that you'd think you solved the mystery. They were going to plan the **diamonds** somewhere where you'd be sure to stumble across them."

"A very expensive ruse don't you think?" Pat put in archly. "Those rocks are worth a few dollars."

"Not as much as the thing that this **Quon** is cooking up," Baird rejoined. "Whatever it is, it had Wan Sop seeing dollar signs and frightened that Seed fellow half to death."

"Sounds rather big," Ham mused.

"Sounds ridiculous," Rex Pinks scoffed.

"It is big," Baird said. "BIG and horrible! And somehow, my sister Maurine is in the middle of it. Savage, you must help me find her!"

XX

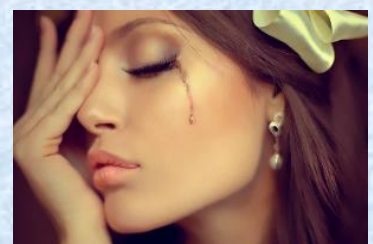
Jason Baird would have been even more anxious if he knew what was happening to his pretty sister right now ...



"Get the clothes off that goddamn *whore!*"



'C'mon, baby. Give me some luvins!'"



"Hit the ground, **Bitch**, and spread eagle for your daddies!"



"Fight me, **Slut!** Fight me! You don't want to get pregnant, do you?!"



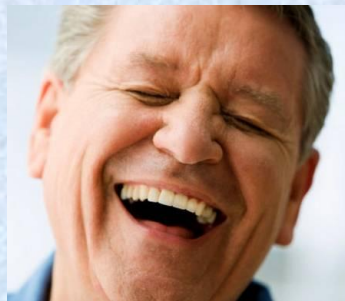


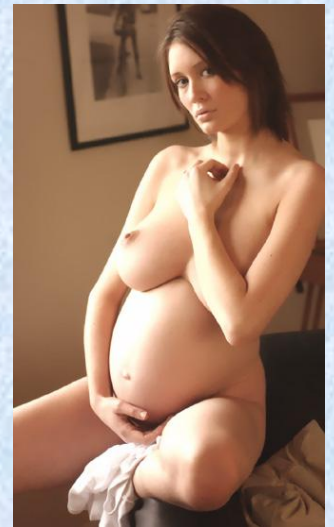
"Now get busy and clean our dicks off with your tongue!"





"Now to really make you scream!"





[Impregnated Whore]

They had come to the Royal Suite. Pat unlocked the door. They slipped in.

Jason Baird was assisted to a comfortable chair and given water. It seemed to refresh him and he was better able to enunciate his words after he had gulped down half a glassful.

"Baird," Doc inquired, "had you hired detectives to accompany you on the voyage?"

"Not detectives exactly," Baird told him. "More on the order of adventurers."

"I see."

Doc Savage went to the stateroom telephone and got the ship's operator. He asked to be put through to a certain party and then spoke briefly in a low voice.

When he returned, Ham asked: "I suppose you have fetched Captain Gooch?"

"That will come late," Doc said.

"You know," Rex Pinks piped, "none of what this Baird has told us explains that glowing *arm* of a thing."

Jason Baird glowered. "*Arm*?"

"On several occasions throughout this affair," Doc told him in a level voice, "there have appeared disembodied luminous *arms* of a distinctly Asiatic character which have pursued either Pat or myself. The first one I encountered in your San Francisco office. The second pursued me as I left."

"It's true, goofy as it sounds," Pat added. "And mine near drowned me!"

Jason Baird's blocky pugnacious face assumed an expression of utter disbelief. He examined the faces about the room as if reluctantly concluding that he had fallen into the company of lunatics.

He said: "Are we talking about Oriental demons?"

"That has yet to be determined," Ham said precisely. "But if Doc Savage says such a thing chased Pat, you may safely wager all you own upon the truthfulness of it."

"Rubbish!" Jason Baird said harshly.

Rex Pinks shoved his rather dissolute face into Jason Baird's own.

"Interesting that this ghost *arm* should first appear near your office, Baird," the reporter said slowly. "About the time you claim you were captured, too."

"Go peddle your papers," Jason Baird spat back.

The <knock> on the stateroom door interrupted the exchange before it could grow more heated.

Doc crossed to the door and opened it.

Cautiously, their hard eyes sweeping the cabin for signs of danger, 4 men filed in. Alva Nally, Joe Knopf, Shad O'Shea, and stork-like Chick Alfred.

"You called us," growled Chick Alfred, the apparent straw boss of the erstwhile Fuzzy Wool crowd. "We're here."

"Yesterday, you gentlemen showed great interest in the apparent demise of Jason Baird," the **Bronze Man** stated.

"What of it?" said Shad O'Shea looking mournful.

"Yeah," grumbled Alva Nally. "We've been through this third degree before. You don't cut any ice with us. So maybe we'd better blow."

They started back out the door ...

Doc Savage stopped them with a command.

"Not so fast," he clipped.

The men hesitated.

"I would like to introduce you to Jason Baird" he added, gesturing with a **bronze** arm to the real Jason Baird.

"You tryin' to fun us?" Joe Knopf spat. "Baird's dead. They got him set up in his own private ice chest with his name on the front door."

"On the contrary," Doc said.

"That's right," said Baird coming to his feet. "I'm Jason Baird."

Momentary silence attended this declaration.

"Prove it!" snarled Chick Alfred.

Jason Baird held up his left wrist. There were indentations made by his too-frequent wearing of a manacle bracelet.

"If you four are who I think you are, you'll know what this means," he challenged.

They gathered around the real Jason Baird examining his offered wrist.

Chick Alfred said: "How much did you offer Fuzzy to tag along for this voyage? If you're Baird, you'll know that."

Jason Baird said: "A thousand dollars a man."

"You're Baird all right," Alfred decided. "But I don't get it. Who's the other bird? The dead mug?"

"A hoodlum named 'Seed'," Doc told them.

He then addressed Jason Baird.

"Am I correct in assuming that Fuzzy Wool and his friends were the bodyguards that you actually hired for the voyage?"

Baird nodded.

"Yeah. In case you turned me down, I wanted to be ready. Also, I knew I'd need a small army to fight **Quon** if I could reach the ruin where he hands out. You boys are Fuzzy's men?"

"We were," Shad O'Shea said gloomily. "Fuzzy went west along with our pal Kitten. And we still have our peepers peeled for the guy what done for him."

"That individual is called 'Wan Sop'," Doc Savage offered. "And I am afraid you are too late on that score."

"What d'ya mean?" Chick Alfred growled.

"He was killed this morning."

"You kill him?" Joe Knopf wanted to know.

"He succumbed to the same **poison** that was used on your boss," Doc explained.

Chick Alfred grunted.

"Can't say I'm not disappointed. I had plans for that damn chink."

"Since it now appears that we are all working toward the same goal," Doc stated, "it might be wise for you to throw in with us."

Chick Alfred looked to Jason Baird. "You're the boss as far as I'm concerned. What you say goes. How do you want it?"

"If you will work with Doc Savage," Jason Baird said flatly, "I will pay the agreed-upon fee for your efforts."

"Sounds jake to me."

Alfred turned to his confederates.

"What d'ya say, boys? We may still get a chance to pay somebody back for what happened to Fuzzy and Kitten."

The other three (Nally, Knopf, and O'Shea) did not take long in offering to go along.

Alfred turned.

"Okay. What are we up against?"

Doc Savage answered that.

"As yet, we do not know. There is an individual calling himself **Quon** who may be holding Baird's sister Maurine in the Cambodian interior. Our main task is to rescue her. At the same time, this **Quon** may have other agents aboard. In fact, he may be aboard himself."

"What makes you say that, Savage?" Baird asked suddenly.

"He's probably the **spook** without any arms," Rex Pinks suggested. "I saw him even if nobody else did."

The quartet of adventurers seemed to take notice of Pinks for the first time.

"Ain't you that snoop?" wondered reedy-voiced Alva Nally. "The one that attends all those sissified posh parties?"

"I used to be a police reporter," Pinks said in an injured tone.

"Retirement must be swell," Knopf said emitting a jangling laugh.

Raucous guffaws came from the others.

The **Bronze Man** interrupted.

"There is a **being** aboard ship who appears to lack arms," he said. "He dresses in Asiatic fashion. It would be well for everyone to avoid this **entity** at all costs. He may be dangerous. There is much that we still do not know."

"Any description?" Chick Alfred asked, interested.

"Look for the guy with the **jade** face," said Rex Pinks sourly. "You can't miss him."

This time, it was the society reporter who was the recipient of disbelieving stares.

Jason Baird (his voice strange) croaked: "There is something I forgot to mention."

Doc looked at him. "Yes?"

"Wan Sop had another name for this **Quon**," Baird said thinly. "I thought at the time it was just Orient hocus-pocus that was meant to scare me."

"Spill it," Rex Pinks said impatiently.

"The other name of **Quon** was the **Jade Ogre**. They referred to him as the armless one who will breathe death on the Universe."

"Rubbish!" snapped Ham Brooks.

"Armless guys ... flyin' arms ... I don't like this," muttered Shad O'Shea in a morose tone.

At this point, Doc Savage said: "We know that one Chinese agent of this *Quon* is loose on the *Mandarin*. We captured him no an hour ago. But he vanished subsequently. Locating this man and questioning him may lead to some answers."

"What's he look like?" demanded Shad.

*The **Bronze Man** launched into the description of the missing Chinese detailing his ratty features and general appearance. He did a fair job. Good enough that anyone who paid attention to his words would have been able to pick the worthy out of a police lineup of his close relatives.*

"Boys," enthused Chick Alfred, "let's hunt!"

Doc Savage then turned to his cousin who was reaching into her handbag for her ivory-handled pistol.

"Pat, you will stay here with Jason Baird," he directed.

"See here, Doc ..."

"That is an order, young lady! Doc said sternly. "You have had 2 brushes with Death already. Isn't that enough?"

"That second time doesn't count!" Pat reminded eyeing Ham Brooks. "I was practically toothless."

Leaving the **bronze**-haired girl to mutter dire things, they vacated the Royal Suite.

Outside, Doc Savage rapped out brisk orders, dividing the party into pairs and assigning each duo to certain quarters of the ship for search purposes.

"Ham, Pinks - you will come with me," he finished.

The 3 groups of men set off in 3 different directions.

"We should talk to that Captain Gooch," Ham suggested as they slipped down an after companionway. "He'll want to know what's happened."

"We will," Doc assured him.

They were pushing their way through the hotel-style revolving doors which gave access to the indoor foyer from the promenade deck when a single **gunshot** smote their startled ears.

"The bow!" Ham rapped.

Instantly they reversed direction. The dapper lawyer became tangled in the revolving door due to concern for his sword cane. He fought free.

Pounding back toward the bow, they raced around a corner and came upon a sight.

Chick Alfred, Joe Knopf, Alva Nally, and Shad O'Shea were standing in a semicircle about a twitching form.

Doc Savage sank to his knees beside the Chinese man. The latter lay on his back, his eyes jerking wildly in his head, a spread pond of **gore** widening about his back.

The **Bronze Man** lifted the mortally wounded man's head and began rapping out quick questions in perfect Cantonese. The Oriental seemed to hear despite his obvious distress.

He shrieked: "*Quon! Quon!*"

Then he expired. Every twitching limb settled down at once. The body lost all animation.

With hot light of **anger** in his *flake-gold eyes*, Doc Savage lowered the man's head. He noticed a flat silver automatic lying on the rubber-tiled deck. A twist of gray smoke lifted from the muzzle. It was expensive; the workmanship exquisite.

He scooped it up in one big *bronze* hand and came to his feet.

"Which one of you pulled the trigger?" he asked in a *metallic* tone.

*For the **Man of Bronze** never condoned killing. Even of the wicked. He had a policy of avoiding bloodshed whenever possible.*

"Not me," said Joe Knopf.

"Wasn't me," added Alva Nally.

Shad O'Shea gazed skyward as if anticipating rain.

Doc turned his active *orbs* on Chick Alfred who immediately began looking uncomfortable.

"Don't look at me, Savage," protested the gunman. "I only just got here myself."

Alfred indicated the now-still Celestial.

"He was lying just like that when I found him."

Doc Savage said sternly: "Getting to the bottom of this is more important than exacting revenge for the murder of your friends."

"May it was *Quon* that done it," said Shad O'Shea looking down from his aerial examination.

He began to whistle a popular tune. His mournful face tried to look innocent. He managed only a species of benign bemusement.

Doc tossed the automatic over the rail, scrutinizing the faces of the quartet as the distant *splash* came.

None of them betrayed by their expression any pang of loss over the expensive death weapon.

"Now might be the proper time to bring Captain Gooch into this matter," the *bronze giant* said without inflection.

This brought glum expressions all around. Even to Ham Brooks.

No one was looking forward to the *Mandarin* skipper's reaction to these latest events.

Coming up shortly ...



... sophisticated Pat Savage will have Many "HUSBANDS" !

XVI -- *Quon Warns*

The revelation that Jason Baird was in fact not to be numbered among the deceased passengers of the liner *Mandarin* -- and the further revelation that there were 2 more candidates for the ship's morgue - was more than harried Captain Gooch could stand.

"You're all under ship's arrest," he thundered with the glowing First Mate hovering at his side.

"I never heard of such a thing transpiring on a passenger ship!" Ham Brooks protested vehemently.

"Once we get to Hong Kong," Captain Gooch shot back, "you can look it up in the maritime lawbooks. But for the rest of the voyage, you'll all take your meals in your cabins and like it!"

To everyone's surprise, Doc Savage calmly said: "That will be satisfactory, Captain Gooch."

They were gathered in the captain's quarters. Pat Savage and Jason Baird had been summoned hither. It was quite a crowded scene.

Pat began to protest.

"But Doc!"

"The less we are exposed," the **Bronze Man** stated, "the safer we will be. Our goal now is to reach Hong Kong unmolested."

His strangely compliant attitude seemed to take the wind out of wrathful Captain Gooch's sails. But the latter did, however, order stewards to see that the passengers complied with his commands. And he personally escorted Doc Savage to which Doc had secured as the fictitious Manchu Sat Sung.

"The British authorities in Hong Kong will probably arrest you when we berth," Gooch warned. "I don't think the 'pull' which you have back in the States is going to amount to much."

"You might," Doc suggested, "alert Scotland Yard to the situation."

"Good grief! Do you want to land in a British hoosegow?" Gooch spluttered.

"What I would like," Doc told the Captain, "is safe passage to Hong Kong for myself and my friends. You might arrange for the Royal Suite -- where my cousin Pat is quartered -- as well as Jason Baird's cabin to be guarded 24 hours-a-day. They are the 2 most likely marked for murder."

This made perfect sense to Captain Gooch.

"I'll see to it," the *Mandarin* skipper promised, stomping off to give the orders.

*He was shaking his white-capped head as he departed. Never in his years on the high seas had he encountered such turmoil as seemed to swirl around the enigmatic **Man of Bronze!***

The next several days were relatively uneventful.

Doc Savage maintained contact with the others via the *Mandarin's* telephonic system.

"I for one will be ecstatic when this voyage is concluded," Ham fumed on one occasion.

Pat Savage put it another way.

"Walking the plank looks mighty enticing from where I sit. And I do mean sit!"

"You will survive," Doc said dryly.

"What's keeping me from going bughorse is the thought of the excitement I'm going to see in Cambodia!" she added cheerfully.

The **Bronze Man** sighed.

"I was hoping that you would see the wisdom of remaining in Honk Kong if not returning to the States," he said.

"Nothing doing! I've always wanted to see Cambodia. This may be my only opportunity the way you keep pouring cold nasty water on my excitement-chasing."

"We will settle this later," Doc promised.

As for Jason Baird's hired adventurers Chick Alfred, Alva Nally, Joe Knopf, and Shad O'Shea, Alfred succinctly expressed the collective opinion of his hard-bitten crowd.

"We're goin' stir-crazy in these cabins!"

"There is a popular expression which you might want to keep in mind," Doc Savage told him.

"Yeah? Which is that?"

"Talking until one is 'blue in the face'. In this instance, not complaining might keep your face from turned blue."

That reminder seemed all that the Chick Alfred crowd required. No further complain emanated from that quarter.

Everyone settled down by the 3rd day out of San Francisco.

Inasmuch as the Mandarin was an express liner, there were no port calls en route. Honolulu was bypassed. The **cobalt** Pacific stretched wide in all directions about them. No other vessels were sighted along the route they were traversing.

The **Bronze Man** did not actually take his own advice about remaining indoors, however. On several occasions -- always in the dark period after first watch -- he eased from his cabin to prowls the big black luxury liner.

Each time, he did so in disguise. Usually as a black cook or steward. Once he even resorted to assuming the identity of the nonexistent Manchu Sat Sung for the purpose of going to the lowermost deck and mingling with the so-called Asiatic steerage passengers.

"Steerage" is not exactly luxury accommodations. It is more on the order of a military barracks featuring large compartments crammed with rows of closed-packed cots. Rank *odor* from the nearby bilge lent a certain atmosphere. The proximity to the engine room set the beds to vibrating.

Doc Savage went among these cots, his tiny generator flashlight lens squeezed down until it emitted a beam of intense light seemingly no wider than a strand of brilliant silk. With this, he examined the features of sleeping passengers looking for the telltale facial contours that would mark the native Cambodian. He was familiar with the peoples of the Orient and knew that the natives of China differed in certain particulars from the inhabitants of bordering Indo-China and Cambodia.

He picked out several half-castes whose light-brown skin tones and flattish physiognomy betrayed Cambodian heritage. He memorized their features in turn and moved on.

A light-sleeping Chinese happened to come awake while Doc Savage was making rounds. The former discerned the wayward beam of light and jumped to a reasonable (under the circumstances) conclusion.

"*Chock lou!*" he shrilled.

Then: "*Gong Gwong!*"

In the ill-smelling murk, the sleepy-eyed Chinese could be forgiven for thinking that the compartment was inhabited by several robbers and crooks.

Doc doused the light and moved for the exit door as the sleepers came awake hollering and reaching for their valuables (most of which were hidden under pillows and mattresses).

Here-and-there matches *flared* and *hissed*, disclosing goggle-eyed Oriental faces. More cries came. Several languages were represented. But Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese predominated. Fortunately, Doc Savage happened to be fluent in them all.

The reason that this was fortunate was that such fluency enabled him to evade the sharp implements that were being drawn from nightclothes with the intention of ending his life. Voices called out warnings to duck.

The **Bronze Man** did likewise.

A Malay *creese* sizzed past an ear to clang off a sturdy bulkhead. Feet sought his ankles attempting to topple him. Men were crawling in his direction, the better to avoid presenting easy targets themselves.

The *bronze giant* shook off the grasping hands, stepping around scuttling ambushers. He reached the door and felt the weight of a crouching Asiatic inhibiting the portal from opening.

Reaching down, he lifted the man bodily. The worthy squawled and shrieked maledictions. Hissing figures closed in.

Doc used the shrieking one to bowl over the others. He got the door open and plunged through while pursuers tangled up with the thrown individual.

A meaty *thunk!* told of hatchet blade imbedding itself into the inner side of the panel. The force of the impact caused the door to slam closed. The ugly sound evidently persuaded any would-be pursuers to hang back lest they intercept further aerial blades.

Doc Savage made it out into the passage and up a companionway to the shadow-enwrapped promenade deck without further incident.

He did not tarry in the vicinity but picked his way back to his own cabin by a series of devious routes, moving with the *stealth* that he had learned from observing the masters of the art (the great cats of the jungle).

He finally reached his cabin and turned in for the evening.

The next day, there were no queries regarding the steerage incident. By this time, Doc took it that his intrusion was not reported to the Captain.

This was expected. Orientals as a rule prefer to settle their differences amongst themselves.

*After that, the **Bronze Man** avoided the steerage deck when he went about in the night.*

During his nocturnal forays, Doc Savage also kept up his daily 2-hour regimen of **exercises**. The sun deck was invariably deserted in the post-midwatch hours and he took them there.

These exercises -- lasting a full 2 hours of breakneck activity -- were largely responsible for the remarkable state of near-perfection that the *Man of Bronze* had attained in life.

There were sweat-producing physical routines that would have prostrated most men during their most elementary stages. Doc Savage's mighty **bronze muscles** (he conducted these exercises in a black silk bathing suit) worked against one another until he was covered in a thin film of *perspiration*.

And he did not neglect the mental part of his regimen. He performed prodigious mathematic calculations -- multiplying, dividing, extracting square and cube roots of large figures entirely in his head -- simultaneously with his physical ritual.

Then he moved to the portion of his regimen in which his senses were keened. These involved pitting his aural organs against a device that generated sound waves in frequencies both above and below the range of normal hearing. The glass vials and their varied *scents* sharpened his sense of smell. His sense of touch was kept honed by use of Braille writing (the series of upraised dots that enable the blind to "read").

Fully 2 hours transpired during this ordeal. And all of it was undertaken at a pace that would have laid a lesser man low.

It was while exercising on the 5th day out of San Francisco that Doc Savage received the warning.

It was a moonless night. There was no wind. The sun deck was very still. No ships were visible on the horizon. There was only the constant rushing of water along the sides of the hull and the astringent *scent* of open ocean. Smoke from the 2 working funnels passed overhead liking boiling rags.

He was working up a sweat when the ship's bell rang out 3 pair and one single bell. Half past 3:00 in the morning.

No sooner had the tiny echoes of the single bell faded than another sound intruded. Deep, resonant, foreboding.

Bong ... bong ... bong!

Doc Savage froze at the unfamiliar clangor. It was reminiscent of nothing so much as the sound made by a great brass gong as it is struck.

His acute hearing told him that it came from amidships. He turned to trace the source of the sound (he had been looking out toward the stern) when he saw the hideous *arm*.

It simply hung motionless in the shadow of the rearmost funnel that loomed over the aft section of the sun deck. *It* glowed with a soft lambent light. 3 bony fingers and a ghostly *yellow* thumb were curled back so that the forefinger was pointing its elongated at the **Bronze Man**.

For a moment, Doc's melodious *trilling* roved the scale, tuneless and curious ...

Then came a voice as disembodied as the motionless floating *arm* of an *apparition*.

" 'Tis stated in the classic: True gold fears no fire!"

Doc Savage's *golden eyes* were focused on the spectral *arm*. Because of its luminous quality, it was difficult to discern in detail. The tube of *green* silk that draped the thing from bony wrist to trail in tatters beyond the point where the stump should be did not glow.

Carefully, Doc shifted to the left.

To his surprise, the thing shifted with him so that the accusing fingers remained pointing in his general direction.

In the interim, he saw enough of the other end of the thing to see that the *green*-hued silk draped the unseen stump. The *arm* did not melt into invisibility. Neither did it appear attached to any being or form, seen or unseen.

The sourceless voice spoke anew.

*"Oh **Bronze Man** who knows no fear, know **Fear now!** For I am **Quon**, Lord of Quon, Blessed by Siva, known as the **Jade Ogre**. Venture not into Cambodia, the domain of the Jade Ogre. For your face is known and the limbs of **Quon** are everywhere."*

The weirdness in which the discorporate thing floated as if disconnected from all Reality was unnerving.

*"Death awaits you, Oh **Bronze One**," the hollow voice went on. "This is the last warning of **Quon**, the **Jade Ogre**."*

Doc Savage lunged for the thing then!

Bong ... bong ... bong!

The suddenness of the phantom gonging caused him to veer to the left cautiously. The sound seemed to emanate from the murk beyond a yawning ventilator.

The **arm** of **Quon** began to move then. It had been as stationary as if fixed in amber. But now it was issuing toward the stern.

Doc faded farther to the left. He could see a dark wet spot on the pointing finger. It was vaguely **greenish**. Something about the coloration convinced him to avoid contact with the outstretched digit at all costs.

The **Bronze Man** swept around and behind the thing. **It** was moving more swiftly now. He realized why as he glided up from behind it.

The forward progress of the *Mandarin* was leaving the **arm** behind! It was not moving at all.

He again lunged for it. He did not use his hands but pulled a tiny grapnel and line from his vest. It took a moment to pay out the silken cord, preparatory to employing the device.

But a moment was all it took for the **arm** to be left behind.

It passed silently over the stern rail of the sun deck and continued along high above the promenade deck below.

From the rail, Doc attempted a toss. The first missed by a mere foot. The second fell short.

By the time he had hauled back the grappling hook for a 3rd attempt, the **arm** was a speck of yellow radiance many yards to the broad side of the liner. It was over water now.

Doc Savage watched **it** intently for several moments, his eyes troubled by vague eddies.

Then he turned to investigate the vicinity of the sun deck. He found only one thing out of the ordinary.

There was a tiger's claw caught in the rim of a small window set in the false funnel. The latter was used for storage of extra deck chairs and other useful items.

Doc removed this ... examined it briefly ... and stored in his equipment vest.

He made a circuit of the funnel and discovered a padlocked door on the other side. He put his ear to it. Detecting no sounds, he completed his circuit.

There was only the single open window. It was too small to admit his great form (or that of an ordinary matter for the matter). So he settled for spearing the ray of his tiny flashlight within.

The questing fan of light disclosed crates, boxes, and several deck chairs in need of repair. But one object in particular stood out.

A chest. Fantastically ornate, it smacked of some Asiatic Pandora's box for each side boasted a carved face, cold-eyed and grim of mein. It was too small to conceal any being larger than a small child, however.

Hearing the footfalls of a seaman making his rounds on the deck below, Doc Savage was forced to abandon his investigation of the dummy stack.

Collecting his exercise equipment, he quitted the sun deck. His *bronze* features inscrutable.

Very soon ...



XVII -- The Missing

The liner *Mandarin* steamed through crowded Sulphur Channel between Stonecutter's Island and Honk Kong in the middle of the 11th day out of San Francisco.

It was not a record crossing. But good time was still made. And it was not an hour too soon for Doc Savage.

They took the liberty of emerging from their cabins as the tugs came alongside to help guide the oangoing greyhound through Victoria Harbor.

"That Hong Kong?" grumbled horse-faced Shad O'Shea.

He was squinting in the direction of a broad island whose shores were crammed with what looked like statternly derelict ships (mostly water-logged junks). Upon closer inspection, these proved to be inhabited because ragged natives passed between them.

"It is," Jason Baird remarked. "The name means Fragrant Harbor even though it doesn't exactly smell that way. They sometimes call it the 'Pearl of the Orient'."

Chick Alfred grinned. "Looks kinda like Frisco to me."

Indeed, the island that was Hong Kong bore more than a passing resemblance to the city they had left behind. Particularly in its steep hills and close-packed office buildings. Its terrain tended toward verticals more than horizontals. There was no enveloping fog, though.

There was also, they quickly learned, no pier massive enough for the *Mandarin* to berth at. The hard-working tugs were nudging the line to the port of Kowloon on the other side of the bump island.

Kowloon was attached to the Chinese mainland and was the major transshipping point to the rest of Asia. The nearby Canton River was too narrow for freighter traffic.

The harbor was a choke of junks, sampans, and the curious double-ended ferries that shuttled between Kowloon and Hong Kong. Except for the numerous junks and sampans, their brown matting sails like the soiled broken winds of cast-down butterflies, it was also remindful of San Francisco Bay.

At sight of the big liner entering the harbor, sampans began making for the great ship. They fell in behind its turbulent wake as it was brought up to a long concrete finger of a pier.

Lines were made fast. The immense steam turbines many decks below fell silent. A trunk line designed to allow telephonic communication between ship and shore was affixed to the *Mandarin's* connector port.

Watching the approaching sampans, Pat Savage asked a question.

"Do they still have pirates in these waters?"

"They do," Do told her.

His eyes were not on the harbor but on the passengers milling about. The fact the Pacific crossing had been largely uneventful (once they had been confined to their accommodations) had not lulled the **Bronze Man**'s concerns one iota.

"Well prepare to be boarded, me hearties!" exclaimed Pat pointing to the converging sampans.

All eyes fell in the direction that the lovely girl indicated.

The sampans were propelled by conical-hatted coolies employing ironwood poles. Other Asiatics crowded their tire-fendered scuppers, hoisting jointed bamboo poles to which were affixed tiny sack-like nets.

There were lifted to the rails of the lowermost deck. Excited gobblings came from the sampans.

"Anyone understand their lingo?" Pat asked worriedly.

"They are merely begging for coins" put in a smooth voice from behind them.

Pat turned at the sound of the unfamiliar voice.

Up minced diminutive Dr. Mawson Harper, striking in his striped white hair and black beard. The physician paused and executed a courtly bow in Pat Savage's direction.

"Dr. Mawson Harper at your service," he said gallantly. "I do not believe we have had the pleasure of meeting, Miss Savage."

Pat had abandoned her "Tarzana Vine" guise and the brisk ocean breezes were toying with her extraordinary wealth of **bronze** hair. She had been collecting admiring gazes. And a similar one had alighted on the doctor's Van Dyke-decorated face.

She allowed her hand to be taken.

"I am quite fluent in Cantonese," he explained, "being a frequent visitor to these parts. I take it this is your first time in the Orient?"

"I almost didn't get to come at all," Pat said eying the **Bronze Man** pointedly.

Doc Savage said: "Dr. Harper is known for his charity work through Asia."

"Tropical diseases are my field," Dr. Harper elaborated.

Then he added modesty: "Of course, I am not the pioneer that your famous cousin is."

"Doc is trying to inoculate me against my present malady," Pat remarked airily.

Dr. Harper <blinked>. "Which is?"

"**Excitement**-chasing. You'd think he'd understand, having caught a dose of it himself. But no soap. He's trying to send me back to the States while plunges headlong into Cambodia."

"Cambodia is a fascinating place," Dr. Harper said as he dug a dollar coin from a pocket and tossed it over the rail.

The toss was careless. But a dangling net on the end of a bamboo coin expertly snagged the coin. Other passengers caught on to the idea and began tossing coins in like fashion. The excited volley of Cantonese rose to a swell.

"Looks like I'm going to have to settle for Hong Kong," Pat grumbled, adding a coin of her own to the silvery rain.

Miraculously, few coins plunked into the water. Nearly every one plopped into a waving net which would then be hastily hauled down, emptied, and lifted anew.

Pale Rex Pinks sauntered up at this point.

He peered over the gleaming rail and pointedly declined to contribute to the proceedings, pronouncing it "cheap blackmail".

He and Ham Brooks exchanged bilious looks after which the dapper attorney produced a silver dollar and made a show of tossing it down.

He managed to precipitate the coin into the drink.

Preparations to allow passengers to go ashore continued. The gangway was set in place.

At the end of the pier, an official-looking vehicle awaited. 2 British police in khaki shorts and matching blouses stood about. Both were impatient in demeanor.

"Should we make a dash for it, Doc?" Ham wondered.

"Not necessary," the **Bronze Man** said.

The sophisticated barrister looked worried but said nothing.

Then Captain Gooch trailed by his First Mate bowled up the promenade deck.

"Savage," he said gruffly, "I am afraid I will have to remand you into the custody of the British authorities."

"Understandable," Doc told him.

*There was no trace of resentment on his calm **metallic** visage.*

This seeming compliance seemed to make Captain Gooch uncomfortable. The irritable skipper shuffled his clumsy feet and added:

"I've asked them not to go hard on you and offered to speak on your behalf."

"Thank you," Doc said quietly.

There seemed to be nothing more to say.

The gangway gate was opened. At a signal, the Hong Kong bobbies came pounding up the incline. They were escorted to Captain Gooch's side.

"I am officially turning over Doc Savage and his accomplices to you," Captain Gooch said in an important tone once the official niceties had been dispensed with.

"Jolly good," one of the bobbies said in crisp British tones.

He turned to the **Bronze Man**, touched his white sun helmet in salute, and added: "We are to escort you to Government House, Mr. Savage. I am under instructions to afford you and your party every courtesy. If there is anything His Majesty's government may do for you, please be good enough to let us know."

Before Doc Savage could respond to this flowery outpouring of cooperation, Captain Gooch shoved between them. He stuck his jaw out and tried to push his belligerent face into that of the first bobby's. He was too short to accomplish that. But his voice **volume** more than made up for his lack of physical stature.

"Damn you! I collected a morgueful of bodies because of this man!" he roared. "Savage should be in irons! Why are you treating him like the grand poobah?"

"Mr. Savage has rendered certain services to His Majesty's government in the past," the first bobby explained with studied formality.

Captain Gooch's eyes bugged out. He sputtered some moments ... then turned on his heel to vent his wrath upon the passively waiting **bronze giant**.

"Is this why you suggested I contact Scotland Yard?" he demanded, his face **reddening**.

"It was," Doc admitted.

Captain Gooch drew himself up on the toes of his polished boots. He looked like a runty human volcano about to blow its tops. Words seemed to fail him, however. His **face** had crimsoned to its utmost, it seemed. His voice had achieved its **maximum** register.

Silently, he lowered himself to his flat heels. They <clicked>. His eyes retreated into their sockets, narrowing.

"First Mate Scott," he said slowly, his words grinding together like flinty stones.

"Cap'n?"

"Get these ... these blasted trouble-hounds off my good ship!"

This was done with alacrity. In fact, Doc Savage and his party were allowed to be the first to disembark the liner.

The British authorities had not been prepared for a party so large. So Doc, Ham, Pat, and Jason Baird were bundled into the waiting official car while Chick Alfred and his men along with Rex Pinks sought a taxi.

An argument immediately broke out. The native cabby insisted his conveyance could accommodate but 4 individuals. So the colorless society reporter was forced to secure a cab for himself.

The price evidently gave him pause. So he settled for engaging a *ricksha*. The various parties were whisked away then with the *ricksha* taking up the rear.

They went only as far as the ferry pier where they transferred to a double-ended ferryboat and made the short-but-colorful passage to Hong Kong itself.

A more formal delegation met them on the other side. Official vehicles conveyed them to the Government House in the shadow of Victoria Peak. The latter was the highest prominence on the busy island. This time, Rex Pinks did not have to spring for his fare.

There, polite noises were made and promises exchanged. The upshot came down to the fact that Doc and his party had their liberty. The past services that the *Man of Bronze* had rendered to "John Null" were evidently sufficient to cut through all manner of official red tape entanglement.

The British governor who was in charge of this wound up his speech-making and asked Doc Savage:

"How long do you intend to remain in our Victoria City?"

Victoria City was the seldom-used official name of Hong Kong.

"Not long," Doc told him. "We plan to travel on to Cambodia once we have secured a suitable plane."

"Has this anything to do with the unfortunate deaths aboard the *Mandarin*?" the Governor inquired.

"I believe so," Doc stated.

When the *Bronze Man* did not volunteer any further information, the Governor stood up and began shaking hands all around.

"Very good. Good luck to you, chaps."

And that was that. They were free to go.

Outside Government House, Rex Pinks looked bewildered.

"That's it?" he wondered. "I thought we'd at least spend one night in the local pokey."

"When one travels with Doc Savage," Ham Brooks put in a trifle superciliously, "one is accustomed to being accorded a certain respect."

"Unless one just happens to be his only living relative," Pat Savage inserted archly.

*If this dig had any effect upon the **Bronze Man**, he gave no sign.*

They collected sufficient of the stubby taxis that struggled through the maze that was Honk Kong traffic to accommodate the entire party and wended their way to one of the better British hotels on the island, gaping at the similarity that the city bore to San Francisco (at least to the Chinatown sector). Streetcars, they found, were plentiful except that they were called "trams" after the British fashion.

After the long confinement, they agreed that they would stand remaining in the city 1 day before embarking upon the journey to the Cambodian interior.

"A night on the town sounds swell," Pat enthused.

She sobered when she noticed the forlorn expression her comment brought to Jason Baird's face. The jeweler's attitude reflected concern over the fate of his missing sister Maurine.

"Oh buck up, Jason," Pat said soothingly. "Well find Maurine. Doc's never failed yet."

"We will meet here in the lobby in 2 hours," Doc Savage told the assembled group.

"Not me," protested Rex Pinks. "I'm going to see as much of this burg as I can before we shove off."

"What makes you believe you are coming with us, Pinks?" Ham asked disdainfully.

No one answered that directly ...

... so Doc Savage said: "You are welcome to accompany us."

This remark was greeted with facial expressions ranging from studied indifference to sour annoyance.

"I can see I'm 'popular' with this crowd!" Pinks snapped.

At that, the colorless society reporter turned on his heel and stormed out of the hotel lobby into the raucous bustle and din of Hong Kong.

"I don't like that guy," muttered Shad O'Shea.

Wearily, they repaired to their rooms.

At the appointed hour, the tiny band began to collect in the hotel's sumptuous lobby.

Chick Alfred and his crowd showed up first. They huddled in one corner near the shoeshine concession and conferred in low voices. Their manner was furtive, suspicious. It was plain that they did not relish being so far from their usual haunts.

They left off their discussion when dapper Ham Brooks put in an appearance. The eminent lawyer had changed clothes, wearing a natty white linen suit such as is commonly worn in the Tropics. It was well past noon and Hong Kong was **sweltering**.

"Where's your chief?" Chick Alfred asked.

"Doc will not be long," Ham imparted.

Joe Knopf grumbled: "Me, I'm for leaving this burg behind. And fast!"

Ham was about to make some comment when Rex Pinks sauntered into the lobby. A sullen silence fell over the group at that juncture. Ham fell to brushing an imaginary speck of dust off his faultless attire.

If Pinks was upset by being ignored so elaborately, he gave no indication about it.

Doc Savage materialized next. His strange *golden eyes* swept the lobby.

"Where is Pat?" he asked Ham.

"I imagine she will be down in a minute," the sophisticated attorney offered. "You know how women like to be late."

*Momentary concern flickered across the **Bronze Man's** regular features. It was a rare display of emotion. Doc Savage had schooled himself never to betray his inmost thoughts by outward expression.*

He had started for the lobby desk when his missing cousin stepped off the elevator.

"Jove!" Ham exclaimed.

It was not Pat's breathtaking beauty that inspired the startled exclamation (although -- truth to tell -- she was quite a vision in a canary-yellow gown that would have been the rage of Paris if only Pat were now in Paris instead of China).

What made Ham clutch the ornate knob of his cane until his knuckles whitened was the sight of her escort -- Dr. **Mawson Harper**. The bantam-like medico more than ever resembled a strutting midget rooster. He carried his shoulders with inordinate pride.

Spotting the others, Pat disengaged her arm from the doctor's own and with a word left him at the elevator. She strode up to Doc Savage, her smile mischievous.

"Guess who I found, Doc?" she teased.

"I see you are enjoying yourself. As usual," the *Man of Bronze* said without approval.

"Actually, our goat-skinned friend is a bit of a bore," Pat admitted cheerfully. "But he's offered to show me the Thieves' Quarter of the city. Can't very well pass that up now, can I?"

"It would be better if you remained with us."

"Okay," Pat said instantly.

*This quick acquiescence caught the **Bronze Man** flatfooted. He was rendered momentarily speechless.*

"That is, if I get to go to Cambodia with you fellows," Pat added quickly, her eyes twinkling.

"That," Doc told her, "is impossible."

"Suit yourself," Pat said lightly. "See you in the funny papers."

She breezed back to the elevator where Dr. Harper gathered up her offered arm.

With a tip of his hat in the **Bronze Man**'s direction, he escorted the vivacious Pat out the hotel's rear exit.

Ham Brooks sidled up to Doc Savage and said: "I don't like this. That bird is easily twice Pat's age. And look how he's making calf eyes at her."

"We will have to make arrangements to ship Pat back to America," Doc said firmly.

"How?"

"That, we will have to work out later."

Doc Savage strode over to Chick Alfred and his entourage.

"I will need two of you to shadow my cousin to see that she encounters no difficulty," he stated.

"We work for Baird. Not you," Joe Knopf retorted. Gratitude was evidently not in the runty gunman's nature.

"And we are all in this together," the **Bronze Man** pointed out. "If you cannot cooperate here, there is no point in traveling on together."

"You got a point there," Chick Alfred said reluctantly.

He turned to the others.

"Joe, Shad -- you got the detail. Hop to it."

"One moment," Doc said.

He went to a lobby writing desk and scooped up a sheaf of envelopes deposited there for the convenience of guests. They bore the hostelry's address and ostentatious crest. He divided these into 2 equal bunches and passed one to each member of Chick Alfred's crowd.

"Every half-hour," he instructed, "give one of these to a messenger and have him return to the front desk along with word of your whereabouts."

"What for?" demanded Shad O'Shea, idly fanning his pack of envelopes with a big paw.

"It is the surest method of ascertaining your safety," Doc explained. "If you fail to report in, we will undertake an exhaustive search for you using the last-known location as a starting point.

Chick Alfred grinned.

"Slick," he said approvingly. "You got brains, Savage."

Clutching their envelopes, Joe Knopf and Shad O'Shea headed out the back exit.

"If that were my cousin," Rex Pinks said pointedly to no one in particular, "I wouldn't let her sail off with that fussy little guy."

"If Pat were related to you," Ham Brooks sniffed, "you would soon come to understand that the young lady has a mind of her own."

"What's keepin' that Baird?" growled reedy-voiced Alva Nally who had thus far been silent.

Doc went to the front desk and inquired about the absent jewel merchant.

The desk man rang Baird's room. Obtaining no answer after several rings, he reported this to the *bronze giant*.

"He must have gone out, Sir," the desk man stated in clipped British tones.

Doc thanked the functionary and got the others together. He explained the situation in brisk, economical sentences.

"We had best investigate this," he finished tightly.

There was a grim push in the direction of the elevators.

Coming up shortly ...



*... the whore Pat Savage is **RAPED** and **DEGRADED** !*

XVIII -- The Unexpected Dead

Upon stepping off the surprisingly up-to-date elevator, they discovered that the door to Jason Baird's hotel room gaped ajar.

There was no sign of life. A hallway runner was up off its tacks, indicating a recent struggle.

Doc Savage took instant command of the situation.

"There will be no shooting," he admonished, glancing at the assortment of pistols and other weapons which Chick Alfred and Alva Nally had produced from their garments.

Alfred rammed a sharp direction in the direction of Ham Brooks who stood handy, his sword-cane exposed in one hand and one of Doc's compact supermachine pistols in the other.

"What about that?" he growled.

"Mercy bullets," Doc explained. "They do not kill."

The lethal weapons were returned to their places of concealment with ill-disguised reluctance.

Doc Savage laid **bronze** knuckles on the rich panel ... rapped twice ... and called Jason Bair's name. He put an ear to the panel and listened for some moments.

When it was apparent that there would be no reply, the **bronze giant** grasped the knob and pushed inward. The panel fell out of its jamb.

"I do not like this!" Ham hissed.

His fingers going into his coat front, Doc Savage brought out one of his anesthetic glass balls which vaporized instantly producing swift unconsciousness.

He pegged one in through the door and drew it shut.

"Retreat," he called.

When the others hesitated, he lifted great **bronze arms** and kept them before him like an irresistible human bulldozer.

"What's the idea, guy?" Alva Nally muttered after they had turned a corner.

"Gas," Doc explained tersely.

"Fat lotta good that'll do us! How're we gonna check the joint out if it's all gassed up?"

"The mixture renders itself harmless after a few moments' exposure to oxygen," Doc related, glancing at his wristwatch.

When he decided enough time had elapsed to make entry safe, he eased down the corridor and threw the portal open. The others followed him in.

"Hells bells!" snarled Chick Alfred once he got a look at the room.

It had been ransacked. Or at least, furniture had been upset during the course of a terrific struggle.

There was blood on the carpet, a *scarlet* sprinkling of it. The spatters led back to a closet door where they stopped abruptly.

"They musta bundled Baird up or something," Alva Nally theorized.

"Yeah," said Chick. "It covered for the fact that they were takin' him away and he was leakin'."

"Maybe," Rex Pinks mused. "Unless he just stopped bleeding all of a sudden."

Ham started.

"Doc, you don't suppose Baird is dead?"

"Unlikely," Doc Savage interposed. "Those minions of the so-called *Jade Ogre* kept Baird alive during our crossing of the Pacific. They are not apt to dispose of him at this late date."

His *eyes* scoured the suite.

The others were milling about, their expressions grim and frustrated, hands dangling uselessly. After all that had happened, the loss of Jason Baird was getting them down.

The *Bronze Man* spotted the tiny strand of *silk* that had been anchored to an upended chair legs just before Ham Brooks walked into it.

"Ham!" he rapped. "Stop!"

Doc Savage's assistants were well-trained. Ham Brooks stood stock still. His dark eyes darted rapidly.

"Do not move!" Doc said swiftly. "Any of you!"

This brought instant obedience.

Doc came up on the immobile attorney and examined the strand of *silk*. It was very fine. It stretched from the vertical chair leg to the closet doorknob about which it was looped and fastened by a tiny knot no bigger than a pinhead.

"Trip wire," Doc decided. "Back away from it, everyone."

Ham blew out a breath of relief only after he had put a good yard between him and the *nearly-invisible line*.

"Think it's a bomb rig?" gulped Rex Pinks, paling.

"We will have to find out."

Taking up a heavy lamp, the **Bronze Man** faded back in the direction of the door. The others retreated with him.

"What if there's somebody hiding inside?" Alva Nally wondered.

Doc Savage did not answer the question directly.

"Ham, have your supermachine pistol ready."

"Right-o, Doc," said Ham, thumbing off the safety of the rapid-firer.

The compact weapons were equipped with several safety devices. Ham had merely disengaged the last of these. He set himself now for come-what-may ...

Surreptitiously, Alva Neely produced a long-barreled revolver.

Doc reared back with the lamp and let it fly. It arced true. The lamp struck the cord in its approximate center and then crashed to the floor. The weight of it was not sufficient to tip the chair. But it did cause the closet door to swing open slightly.

There was no explosion. No sound at all.

Chick Alfred started forward. But Doc Savage stopped him with a blocking arm.

"Could be a timer mechanism engaged," he said low-voiced.

They waited several minutes. A ticking clock could be heard from inside the room marking the inexorable march toward Eternity.

Evidently, the waiting was more than Alva Nally could bear ...

... because with a muttered oath, he plunged into the room yelling: "I'll bet there's a rat in that closet! And I'm gonna flush it out!"

Doc's voice was a crash.

"Nally! Wait!!"

Holding his revolver before him, Alva Nally grasped the closet doorknob and gave it a hard yank. Simultaneously, he fired twice into the gloomy closet interior. Gun thunder **crashed!**

Since the others still crowded out into the corridor, not all of them got a good look at what next transpired.

Alva Nally let out a shriek. He took a half step backward recoiling from a sight that only he could see.

"h-hu...huh!" he sputtered.

Then a gaunt yellow *arm* lunged for this throat!

It seemed to exist for only a flash moment. A dully-glowing talon, *it* reached out for Alva Nally's bobbing Adam's apple.

His efforts to raise his arms to beat *it* off were too tardy to succeed. Possibly, the gunman had been paralyzed by fear. Then again, the *thing* that sought his throat moved like a viper uncoiling.

The questing bony *fingers* brushed the retreating gunman. That and no more.

Then it erupted in a yellow *flash* that seared its imprint on every eye that beheld the uncanny sight.

The illusion that the *arm* still hovered in the place where they had last beheld it was brief. However, Alva Nally crumpled to the carpet, his final outcry choked off as if by phantom fingers.

"Nally!"

It was Chick Alfred's voice, anguished and rattled.

"Wait!" Doc cautioned.

"Wait hell! That's my pard in there."

Chick Alfred attempted to push the **Bronze Man**'s restraining arm aside. He received a surprise.

Doc had grasped the opposite jamb of the door creating a blockage that might just as well have been a metal bar for all the head gunman's ability to budge it.

Sweat popped up on Alfred's forehead as he tried. He grunted ... first with exertion and finally in defeat.

"Okay, **bronze guy**," the stork-like gunman said thickly. "You win."

"Doc knows what he's doing, fellow," Ham supplied.

Doc Savage entered the room. The others -- Ham Brooks, Chick Alfred, and Rex Pinks -- hung back watching intently.

Alva Nally had fallen backward, his head striking the chair leg where the *silk* strand had been anchored. His pate had struck with such force that it left a smear of **crimson** with a little hair and scalp mixed in on the projecting leg.

As a consequence, the **Bronze Man** could not see anything of Alva Nally's features until he rounded the upset chair.

Then he did so.

*For a moment, his weird **trilling** came. It roved the scale, sounding as exotic as their location.*

"What is it, Doc?" Ham asked anxiously.

"Nally is dead," Doc announced. "You might as well see for yourself."

The trio entered.

Rex Pinks gaped. Strain and incredulity made his sickly features drawn and ashen.

"Jove!" Ham exclaimed. "His face is ... **blue**!"

"That damn **Jade Ogre**!" Chick Alfred gritted.

He looked close to tears. Evidently, the two adventurers had been friends of long standing.

"But how could an **arm** just fly out from a closet like that?" Ham wanted to know.

Doc Savage was investigating that very question. He had the closet door fully open now and was shining his spring-generator flashlight about the interior.

The closet contained no clothes. Baird's trunks had not yet been sent from the *Mandarin*. There were a few coat-hangers of the wooden variety present. The enclosure was otherwise bare.

Ham poked his sharp profile inside.

"Empty!" he pronounced.

Doc was checking the closet walls with the flat of his hand. The surfaces appeared solid. There were no trapdoors or secret panels. The walls were plaster. Not a good material with which to contrive such artifices.

He came out and regarded the outer doorknob briefly.

Noticing this, Ham asked: "It's just a brass knob isn't it?"

Before Doc could reply, Chick Alfred blurted: "Hey! Where'd that *silk* wire go to? The one which 'Fancy Pants' almost tripped."

Ham got it then.

The *silk* line was gone. There was no sign of it either anchored to the brass knob or looped to the chair leg. He fell to one knee to examine the carpet. It was not thick. He felt around the nap.

Of the silken trip wire, there was no sign.

"It's like it was never even there!" Rex Pinks blurted.

"Confounding," Ham murmured.

He came to his feet just as Doc was digging into the lock. The latter brought out a shiny white curl of a thing and held it up. The others goggled.

"A cat's claw?" Ham ventured.

Doc shook his head.

"Tiger."

A bewildered expression crossed the dapper lawyer's features.

He said: "It looks like the one that was hooked into Pat's tiger-skin bathing suit. It can't be a coincidence."

Doc Savage extracted two identical claws from his utility vest. The three reposed in his *metallic* palm for all to see.

Ham's dumbfounded expression indicated that the **Bronze Man** had neglected to apprise the dapper attorney of his spectral encounter with the phantom arm of *Quon* -- the so-called *Jade Ogre* -- on the sun deck of the liner Mandarin. An encounter which had led to the discovery of the second claw.

Neither did Doc enlighten him now. Instead, the former pocketed the claws after a silent examination of all three.

"What d'we do now?" Chick Alfred asked nervously. "The British law ain't gonna be too understanding to us if we present them with another **blue** stiff."

"We will deal with that soon enough," Doc rapped as he quit the room. "Jason Baird must be located."

On the way down to the lobby, Rex Pinks ventured a comment.

"You know," he said, "just before Brooks nearly bumped into that trap, I was walking through the same area."

"So?" Ham Brooks and Chick Alfred said in unison.

"So it proves I'm not hooked in with this *Jade Ogre* creature!" Pinks snapped. "I could have fallen victim to that weird **arm** as easily as Nally."

"The fact that you avoided the trap speaks more to your suspiciousness than not," Ham sniffed.

Chick Alfred took hold of the reporter's coat front ... made a fist ... and drew his nose down to that of Rex Pinks.

"Any guy I find out is in cahoots with whatever's making those damn **arms** chase people," he said fiercely, "had better have a nice pine box picked out for himself. Get me?"

"Y-you d-don't s-s-scare m-me," Rex Pinks stuttered.

"Stick around," Alfred retorted. "I'm ain't got goin' yet."

The elevator let them out into the lobby. Rex Pinks was the last to emerge. He had to feel his way along the wall due to the rubbery quality his knees had acquired.

Ham undertoned: "Doc, you don't think Pinks is really responsible for some of the things that have happened, do you?"

*The **Bronze Man** did not reply.*

Instead, he went immediately to the front desk and to everyone's surprise asked for messages.

The desk clerk pushed an envelope across the polished counter. It bore the crest of the hostelry they were standing in.

Doc thanked the man and unsealed the envelope flap. The note was brief.

Savage:

We trailed Harper and your cousin to Ice House Lane. Looks like Harper met up with a friend. A native. They all just went into No. 44 Ice House Lane. We're going in after them.

It was signed (casually enough): **Shad**

A metallic *grimness* settled over Doc Savage's normally inexpressive countenance. It was infinitesimal this change in cast. But Ham Brooks -- having been long associated with the *Man of Bronze* -- picked up on the subtle alteration immediately.

"Doc! What's wrong?"

"According to this note, Dr. Harper has entered a building on Ice House Lane with Pat."

"Yeah? What of it?" Chick Alfred demanded.

"Ice House Lane is nowhere near the Thieves' Quarter where Pat said they were going," Doc supplied.

"Pat wouldn't fib about something like that," Ham said. "Something is up!"

No. 44 Ice House Lane was a ramshackle thing of colorless planking that looked to have been there since pre-Colonial days. Its roof was in the process of falling in. Its sides were weather-beaten and without paint.

Whether it was a dwelling or a commercial building of some sort was difficult to determine. There were no signs evident in any language. In fact, they had to determine the address through elimination because the slovenly place lacked a posted house number.

Ham was all for storming the edifice. But Doc Savage -- once more showing the caution that had sustained his existence through many a bloody adventure -- forbore doing so.

"We will reconnoiter first," he advised.

They did so, splitting up. Ham made a special point of keeping the vapid Rex Pinks within eye-and-earshot.

There were no signs of habitation, skulkers, or trouble hovering about the vicinity of No.44 Ice House Lane, a cautious investigation proved.

Doc got the other three together and collected their reports. When this was done, he said:

"The direct approach might be best. Ham, you and Pinks will stand watch. Alfred, you and I will enter together.

Ham started to protest. But Doc silenced him with a glance. The dapper lawyer detested being excluded from pending *Excitement*. And such impended now.

"Come on, Pinks," Ham said sourly.

They faded to places of concealment.

Crouching in the shadow of the overhanging pagoda-style roof, Doc asked Alfred: "Can you climb?"

The gunman was staring up at the rear wall which was blank.

"Climb what? I don't see no windows?"

The **Bronze Man** answered this by taking out his tiny collapsible grappling hook-and-line. The cord was thin, of stout silk.

Only one possessed of the Doc Savage's immense *muscular* strength could possibly employ it for ascent. So he took a few moments to twist loops and handholds at various points along the line.

When this was done, he stepped out into the alley and swung the grapple in tight circles like a boy with a bull-roarer.

Doc let fly. The hook flew high ... caught a fluted projection and stayed there. No sound attended this. The flukes of the grapnel were silenced by rubber tubing.

"You first," Doc suggested.

Chick Alfred was wiry. He went up the line with enthusiasm.

Halfway up, he was forced to pause ...

Then he resumed his climb. The *bronze giant* started up then.

On the roof, they hunted about for a hatch. Alfred was a surprised one. A round hole of a thing covered over with a chicken-wire grille.

Doc collected his grapple and reeled in the line. He lifted the hatch and after spiking light down from his generator flash dug the grapple into the rim of the hole. It was a kind of skylight, they decided.

The line went down. This time, Doc descended first.

He disappeared down the hatch with the eerie *silence* of *bronze smoke* going down a flue.

Licking his lips nervously, Chick Alfred rattled down after him.

When his shoe soles *clicked* on the floor below, Chick Alfred found himself crouching in the utter and unrelieved darkness.

"Savage!" he hissed. "Where are you?"

Doc replied by capping a fist over the lens and <winking> his flash once in Alfred's direction creating a faint *bronze* lantern of skin and bone.

The wiry gunman sidled in the glow's direction. His heels *clicked* with what were under the circumstances unnerving loudness.

Doc seized him by one shoulder and guided him to a wall.

"We are at a door. Are you game?" he asked.

"Game as I'll ever be," Alfred breathed.

The door came open. Doc was a brief shape passing through the opening gained. Chick Alfred followed with his big revolver out.

There were no noises inside the big barn of a place. There were *odors*, though. Copra predominated. The place seemed to be some sort of warehouse or storage building. Hong Kong was the major warehouse center for the Far East.

There was another *odor* that came to their nostrils as they moved about the place. Doc employed his flashlight sparingly. He twisted the lens until the ray which was put forth was less than the thickness of a pencil but still exceedingly bright.

"I know that *stink*," Chick Alfred muttered. "And it don't mean nothin' good."

Doc vouchsafed no comment.

The light roved and picked out another door. The place was a maze. The **Bronze Man** paused to listen.

Hearing no sound more alarming than a rat scuttling somewhere, he passed through. The light almost immediately fell upon the source of the ugly *odor*.

It was Joe Knopf. He was kneeling over a big rattan basket that had been set in the center of a bare floor. His hands were tied behind his back.

His posture was not unlike that of a man ducking for apples ...

... except that instead of floating fruit, the big rattan basket contained Joe Knopf's expertly severed head!

Very soon now (no kidding) ...



*... elegant Pat Savage will be **GANG-IMPREGNATED !***

XIX -- Terror's Jaws

The sight of the beheaded figure of Joe Knopf held stork-like Chick Alfred spellbound.

He gaped at the raw round patch of meat that was the terminus of the deceased gunman's neck as if unable to comprehend the reality of the fate that had befallen his erstwhile cohort.

Chick Alfred was no weak sister. He had seen things in the course on his rough career. And had done a few things, too.

But beheadings were alien to him. He was having trouble with his composure.

But not so Doc Savage.

The *mighty Bronze giant* took in the fate of Joe Knopf with but a momentary flicker of his *gold-flaked eyes* and then surged to the nearest door.

He plunged through into the adjoining room, each hand clutching an anesthetic glass ball capable of rendering any foe insensate.

There was a grim purpose in his movements. And a hint of recklessness, too. He was moving swiftly from room-to-room, seldom pausing. His *golden eyes* were molten.

A person who knew him might have guessed that fear for his cousin **Patricia** was motivating him to shed his usual caution. Only when he came to a section of the house that was substantially different from the rest in regards to décor did he begin exercising care once more.

Here, the walls were lacquered and trimmed in teak, sandalwood, and other fine Oriental woods. Joss sticks smoldered in copper urns resting on low *taborets* of ebony. The air was sickly sweet.

All 4 walls were a-crawl with the riotous coils of Chinese dragons. Doc saw that there was in fact but a single dragon. The tail of the lacquered phantasmagoria happened to terminate in the first room which he had penetrated. There was no head. The coilings simply looped -- *scarlet*, *gold*, and *jade* in hue -- about the room.

At a corner facing the point where the dragon's tail twisted was a simple door. Doc went to this. He passed through.

Beyond was another dragon-enwrapped room. A continuation of the first as regards to décor. It was empty. There was no head here either. But there was another door.

Doc Savage passed through several doors and an equal number of reptilian rooms before he found the dragon's head. It terminated in the far wall of the final (and largest) chamber of all.

This was not empty as the others had been. It was in the nature of a throne room.

From the point where the **Bronze Man** entered, the coils spread out from either side of the door to join behind an *ebony-and-jade* throne set against the opposite wall.

The throne itself was no simple thing but ornate, barbaric, and designed to resemble the open jaws of the dragon's head. The latter emerged from the walls in such a way that it was remindful of a saurian beast emerging from another dimension.

The manner in which the dragon throne was constructed made a seat of the dragon's lower jaw. A *scarlet* cushion served as a kind of bloated tongue. The upper portion (or head proper) formed a kind of canopy from which wicked ivory fangs hung down. Round black *orbs* gleamed evilly in the bestial face.

There was a man caught in the jaw of the thing, Doc saw. Not seated. He lay across the *scarlet* silk cushion on his stomach with his arms and legs hanging off each end like a human morsel about to be consumed.

The top portion of the head gave a mechanical shudder and dropped several inches, lowering the sharp ivory teeth closer to the victim. Hidden mechanism toiled beyond the far wall. Jaws were preparing to fall anew ...

Doc Savage pitched forward!

The man in the dragon's head was not bound. But he was as trapped as if he had been trussed like a Christmas goose. The side teeth -- blunt but powerful in their massiveness -- were pressing down on the man's shoulders and the small of his back. Escape was impossible.

Doc saw no button or lever or other controlling feature on the dragon-head throne itself. His *eyes* scraped the environs and alighted on a row of *jade designs* that were set in the floor before the throne. At a spot where they would be reachable only if the one seated on the throne bent himself double to <depress> them.

The buttons were undistinguishable from one another. There was no way to determine which might if <pressed> halt the crushing device or cause it to fall at once.

From his equipment vest, Doc Savage produced a vial of smelling salts. He uncorked it. Then he lifted the chin of the trapped man.

The hirsute features of Dr. Mawson Harper came to light.

If this was unexpected, the **Bronze Man's** hard lineaments betrayed nothing of surprise.

He passed the vial under the man's narrow nostrils.

Dr. Harper came to with a start!

He shook his stark-colored head. His eyes quickly came into focus.

"Wh-where am I?"

"In a trap," Doc said.

"I remember now ... Yes!" Harper bit out. "They forced me into this hideous thing."

"They?"

"Cambodians. There were several of them."

The mechanism seemed to complete a cycle.

The upper jaw once more began to lift slowly. Then it sank. Evidently a gear-and-ratchet arrangement governed the diabolical device.

Doc said: "There is a row of **jade designs** along the floor. One of them may halt the mechanism."

"One will. They were laughing about it, the devils!"

Dr. Mawson Harper gasped. Exertion made his features **crimson**.

"They told me if I <pressed> the wrong one," he added, "I would die instantly. I ... I guess I waited too long to decide. The damned thing knocked the breath out of me. I blacked out, Savage."

"There is not much time," Doc rapped.

He tested one ivory forefang with a hard hand. The fang only seemed to be ivory, he discovered. It was metallic to the touch. Steel. Painted.

Doc exerted **pressure** as the toiling mechanism continued its inexorable cycle. *Sweat* popped up on the **Bronze Man**'s high forehead. The tooth of a thing began to twist in its socket. In a moment, it turned a complete revolution.

But it remained fixed in place like a stubborn molar defying the dentist's pliers.

Doc Savage's mind raced. His gadget vest contained a number of devices including acids, chemicals, thermite. All were too dangerous to employ here for they would do more harm than good to the man they were intended to free.

The mechanism jerked downward again, producing an audible groan from Dr. Mawson Harper.

"Savage!" he gasped. "Do ... something!"

His arms were flailing now.

Doc Savage stepped around to the front of the thing. The better to scrutinize the row of oddly-placed floor devices.

At that moment, Dr. Harper's flailing hands flopped on the end **design** in the row. There came a *click*.

A **bang!** of a sound came next.

Doc felt the floor fall under his feet. His lightning reflexes came instantly into play. Strong **bronze** hands reached out ... grasped the paired fangs ... and held on.

His feet -- now dangling over empty air -- found the narrow strip of flooring between the large square opening left by the dropping trapdoor and the dragon throne and came to rest.

"What happened?" Dr. Mawson Harper cried, his head twisting wildly in an effort to see around the dragon head.

His tone was frantic, terrified.

"Savage, are you all right?"

"Trap," Doc said.

No emotion registered in his controlled voice.

"My stars!"

"Time is short, Harper," Doc said grimly. "I must select a button. Have you any ideas?"

"Try the one on the end. The far one."

The **Bronze Man** immediately complied. He stamped on the **jade device** which was raised off the floor slightly, button-fashion.

The toiling sounds in the wall beyond seemed to pause ... then reverse at a higher pitch. The sound lengthened to a doglike **whine**.

As rapidly like a drawbridge lifting, the dragon's upper skull lifted free.

Dr. Mawson Harper eeled off the would-be death machine.

Doc slipped along the strip of floor -- careful to avoid the yawning pit below -- and joined him. He extended a hand to help the shaken medico to his feet.

"Good guess," he said flatly.

"It occurred to me," puffed Dr. Harper gathering air into his starved lungs, "that the devils would naturally taunt me with a button that was farthest from my reach."

The doctor seemed to be none-the-worse for wear after his grim experience. Doc Savage addressed a terse question:

"Harper, where is my cousin Pat?"

Dr. Harper stroked his neat Van Dyke.

"I honestly do not know. We chanced to encounter an acquaintance of mine. A local merchant who promised to show us some bargains in Oriental bric-a-brac. I am quite a fancier of Orientalia, you know. He brought us to this rather slovenly hovel."

He paused to get a grip on his breathing.

"We had no sooner entered than were set upon by skulkers and overpowered," Harper continued. "I suspect they were Cambodians. They took Pat ... er, Miss Savage away."

Dr. Mawson Harper then did a thing that seemed uncharacteristic of him given his unruffled demeanor.

He wrung his hands together.

"This is awful," he moaned. "She had just accepted my proposal."

"Proposal?"

"**Of marriage,**" said Dr. Harper. "I...I confess I am quite smitten by your lovely cousin. And I was pleased to learn that she reciprocated by affections."

*Doc Savage said nothing for a protracted moment in time. His **eyes** were steady -- almost still -- as he regarded the distressed doctor.*

"We must find her, Savage," Harper continued miserably. "There is no telling what those devils are up to. I am convinced that this entire encounter was a trap of some sort. And those Cambodians are in league with this **Quon** entity."

"Come on!" Doc rapped.

They continued into the labyrinthine dwelling.

Beyond the dragon throne chamber lay rooms shrouded in gloom. Each cubicle boasted only one door, forcing them to follow a path created for them.

After passing through 3 more rooms, Doc Savage began to understand that he was moving in a circle. Possibly through an outer ring of rooms. There were no discernible windows. But traffic sounds came distinctly through the wood.

He employed his flashlight, pausing often to give the generator crank a brisk wind. The light seldom dimmed.

Eventually, they found themselves in the room where Joe Knopf still knelt in the position of supplication that had attending his beheading.

Doc's flashlight passed over the grisly sight but a moment. It was long enough to evoke a choked response from Mawson Harper.

"That ... that...." -- he could barely force the words out --- "isn't her? I mean, Miss Savage?"

"No," the **Bronze Man** told him. "He is Joe Knopf. One of Chick Alfred's crowd."

"Thank goodness!" Dr. Harper said with evident relief.

Doc let the quarter-sized beam of light come to rest at a point on the floor by one wall. The floor was of some light wood. Thus, the dark *streak* that seemed to disappear under the floorboard was quite apparent.

"I do not ..."Dr. Harper began.

Doc cut him off with a curt gesture.

"We have been making a circuit of what would seem to be the outer rooms," he explained. "Yet there were no windows anywhere."

"So?"

"Windows were apparent on 3 outer walls of this structure," Doc elaborated.

"Secret panels?" Dr. Harper guessed.

Doc nodded.

"Chick Alfred should have caught up with me while I was attempting to free you from the dragon's jaws. He may have fallen victim to hidden skulkers."

He went to the far wall. It was covered with fish-like dragon scales. He felt of these.

Whether he would have discovered a secret spring or other cunning artifice was never to be known ...

... for a section of wall simply mumped inward disgorging yelling brown warriors!

Doc Savage met the first attacker with a *bronze fist* that brought the man's teeth together with a loud click and his sandals up off the floor! He fell into a loose-limbed heap which impeded those who sought to exit the secret room.

Others slashed them aside. There were bright blades visible in the thin flashlight wash. Some of them made busy *clickings*.

Doc recognized the sound -- Malay *parangs*. Ingenious sissorlike daggers which when operated revealed an inner stabbing blade like a vicious tooth. They could gut a man in an instant.

The *Bronze Man* retreated from the onslaught and began pegging gas grenades. They broke with mushy sounds. Men quickly ceased their yellings, sighed, and found resting places on the floor. A brown pile soon formed.

The *bronze giant* urged Dr. Harper from the room. He slammed the door and paused, his muscles tensing.

"What is it?" Harper panted.

Doc silenced the man with a hard squeeze. He was holding his breath. Harper followed suit.

Moments later, he returned to the room. The Cambodians continued their peaceful snoring.

Doc Savage ventured into the murk beyond ...

Chick Alfred was there. He squatted on the floor, endeavoring to hop. The fact that his wrists were wired to his ankles made this somewhat difficult.

The *streak* on the flooring that Doc had spied in the other room continued into this one. It terminated near Chick Alfred's shoes and was identical in coloring to the gunman's shoe leather.

Doc removed a *red* silk gag and extracted the equally *crimson* sponge from between Chick Alfred's jaws.

"The heathens ambushed me!" he spat. "I dragged my feet so I'd leave a *trail*. Slick, huh?"

Doc demanded: "My cousin -- have you seen her?"

"No."

Doc worked at the wire. But it was too stout even for his prodigious finger strength.

He went away ... harvested a *parang* from one of the fallen Cambodians ... and went to work. The blades rasped and whined. The tight wire popped free a strand at-a-time.

Chick Alfred stood up rubbing his wrists and turning the surround gloom azure with lavish profanity!

The room was decorated with a single window. It was curtained off in black crepe, producing darkness.

Doc Savage swept the crepe aside and pushed the window open. It was of the type that swiveled outward.

The *Bronze Man* shoved his head out and saw Ham Brooks. The dapper lawyer's chiseled features had lifted expectantly to the sound of the pane rasping open.

Doc called: "Ham! Any sign of Pat?"

"No!"

"Where is Pinks?"

"Around the other side watching the rear."

"Bring him inside. And be careful."

"Right-o, Doc."

The **Bronze Man** returned to Chick Alfred. Dr. Harper had crept warily into the room, gingerly stepping over the fallen Cambodians.

Doc Savage went among the fallen. He selected a likely subject and hauled him to a wall where he set the man in a sitting position. The Cambodian (his features made his lineage certain) lolled his head and snored sonorously.

From his vest, Doc produced a counteractant to the anesthetic gas that had felled the man and injected it into one naked brown arm.

The man at first acted as if a fly were bothering him. He swatted at his nose, making snorting and grunting sounds. Then he started awake.

Doc was holding his flashlight under his own chin. He <clicked> it 'on', producing weird upward-straining shadows along his *metallic* countenance.

At the sight of the grim **bronze mask** of a visage before him, the Cambodian began blubbing in his native tongue (which was not Chinese but an offshoot). Doc Savage had made a thorough study of languages and could speak the Cambodian's own dialect with serviceable facility. He began putting questions to the frightened fellow.

"Quon! No! Quon kill!" the man blubbered.

He was using English. Evidently it had not quite registered that the *big bronze apparition* was attempting to converse in the Cambodian's own tongue.

"Why do you fear this Quon?" asked Doc, reverting to English.

"Quon number one devil! *Quon* come alongside Yook Fatszu -- **Jade Fever.**"

"Jade Fever?"

The other nodded frantically.

"Many die. First turn **blue**. Like heart stop. Then **green** like jade."

"Did you hear that, Savage?" Dr. Harper demanded excitedly. "This mysterious affliction is the product of some criminal mind!"

At that moment, Ham Brooks charged into the room, his supermachine pistol sweeping the confines.

"Fat lotta good you done us, Fancy Dan," Chick Alfred growled.

Ham purpled but said nothing.

Rex Pinks stepped in next. He looked about the room and swallowed whatever tart comment seemed to be on the tip of his tongue.

"We passed a body," Ham explained. "It looked like Knopf."

Doc nodded. "There is not sign of Pat, Jason Baird, or Shad O'Shea. We are endeavoring to locate them now. This fellow may supply some answers."

"Allow me," Ham offered grimly.

The aristocratic attorney stepped up to the frightened Cambodian. He returned his supermachine pistol to its padded armpit holster, then gave his dark cane a twist.

The sheath came off and he described flamboyant circles in the air with its gleaming blade before letting the tip come to rest before the worthy's button nose. The man went cross-eyed as his dark orbs took in the sticky *brownish* substance that dripped sluggishly from the fine point.

"Savvy poison?" Ham taunted.

The Cambodian savvied. He swallowed a loud gulp and his limbs began to shake.

"Where white girl?" Ham demanded. "Allasame talk or taste poison!"

Ham looked his fiercest. But in fact, the *syrupy* substance was merely a chemical concoction incapable of producing lasting harm never mind death.

But the Cambodian did not know this. The threat looked to loosen his tongue.

While he hesitated, Dr. Harper surged up to him.

"Damn you! Talk! Where is Pat Savage and the others?"

Something about the harsh voice seemed to cause the frightened man to snap.

Instead of answering, he leaped to his feet, one arm swatting the long sword to one side. A streak of *crimson* opened up along his forearm. Ham Brooks -- taken aback -- was slow to respond.

The Cambodian had no available exit. Chick Alfred stood before him and the only door.

His eyes sought the open window. Wildly, he lunged for it!

The window was small. The brown-skinned native might have effected a clumsy escape had he had time to dash the panel loose from the frame. But he had no time.

The Cambodian stuck his head into the open slot and screamed once inarticulately. It might have been words or terror that the man bleated. No one ever knew.

Because he took a violent step backward that was the result of his head coming apart in all directions. The report of the **gunshot** came a split-second later.

"Sniper!" Doc rapped.

They hit the floor, the Cambodian last.

Moments passed. No further shots came. Dr. Harper raised a frantic face.

Doc tossed a *parang* so that it intercepted light from the window. It was not fired upon, so he crawled along one wall to the window and employed his hand periscope gadget.

After some moments of Doc manipulating this, Ham hissed: "See anything?"

"No," the **Bronze Man** said with disgust in his tone. "Whoever the sniper was, he evidently has fled."

Then came the caterwaul of a police machine. Doc Savage leaped to his feet.

"We had best make our own escape," he said.

"What about these prisoners?" Ham wondered.

"No time. We may be able to grill them through the authorities later."

They picked their way out of the weird dwelling and by a process of skulking and evasion quit the vicinity one step ahead of the British authorities.

A few blocks north, Doc Savage paused in a disreputable alley whose *odor* partook equally of a display of fresh squid in a nearby shop window and buckets of a local delicacy (shark fin) wafting from another.

There was a "newsboy" quietly standing at a forlorn corner. In Hong Kong, the newsboy were invariably elderly women who stood mute holding long scrolls of what passed for headlines in the Orient. There was no loud hawking or frenzied waving of wares.

Leaving the others a moment, Doc approached the woman ... offered a silver dollar for a penny paper ... and put rapid questions to the aged one in her native tongue.

Upon receiving murmured answers, the **Bronze Man** returned to the others.

"The old woman tells me she saw a number of foreign Asiatics pile into a taxi near this spot. With them was a white woman who answers to Pat's description."

"She's alive!" Ham exulted.

"Any word of Shad or Baird?" Chick Alfred wanted to know.

"None," Doc replied. "But the woman overheard the leader direct the cab to a waterfront destination. We will go there at once."

"Savage, I am no fighter," Dr. Mawson Harper said uncomfortably.

"There's a name for that particularly malady," Rex Pinks said acidly. "And it ain't yellow fever."

"I resent that insinuation!" Dr. Harper fumed.

Doc Savage said: "Harper, it would be best if you return to the hotel. Pinks, go with him."

Rex Pinks started to protest.

"I'm not afraid to ..."

"We intend to wade into considerable violence," Doc clipped grimly. "Numbers will not matter so much as stealth and skill. If you do not hear from us by daybreak, contact the authorities and tell them everything."

Rex Pinks seemed on the verge of offering further protest. But Chick Alfred quelled that impulse with a glare.

"All right. You win," the cowed society reporter muttered.

He threw a contemptuous glance in the direction of Dr. Harper saying: "C'mon, you old goat."

They found taxis. Or rather, the rickshaw conveyances that outnumbered motor cabs on the island.

Doc Savage, Ham Brooks, and Chick Alfred squeezed into one. Doc Mawson Harper and Rex Pinks got into another.

They departed in opposite directions.

Up Next ...



XX -- The Weird Box

Patricia Savage was a young lady of opinions. She had a reputation of being quite free with them too.

Currently, she had a number of choice ones bottle up inside her which she yearned to uncork.

"Uncork" was an entirely appropriate word under the present circumstances.

The feisty Pat lay under the gunwales of a motor launch. Her wrists were tied behind her back. Her ankles were similarly bound.

The taste of the **red sponge** in her mouth was unpleasant. But not as much as being unable to express her opinion of her predicament.

The **bronze**-haired trouble-seeker had been in this fix since first entering the weird house in Hong Kong with her escort Dr. Mawson Harper. The ambushing had been an expert thing as executed.

No sooner had they entered the premises than they were directed to a door. It opened and they were pushed through.

An ingenious partition bisected the door opening, not unlike a cattle run. Pat found herself in a tiny cubicle. Dr. Harper had presumably been forced into a similar cul-de-sac on the other side of the flimsy partition. She had heard him shouting as he was seized. But his outcries had been quickly stifled and the struggling sounds had abated.

Pat's seizure contained more violence. A wall pivoted and brown men were all about her. She had unlimbered her six-shooter at the first realization of danger but had a bit of bad luck.

The big fanning spur had gotten tangled in an undetected rent in the lining of her handbag. While Pat was struggling to wrench it free, she was set upon and subdued with myriad strangling cords. Consciousness was squeezed from her by various methods.

When she woke up, she was in a dark alcove seated on a chair, bound-and-gagged expertly.

A single thread of light came in through a hole in the wall. By twisting, she managed to work her stool over to the light's source. It proved to be a peephole displaying a chamber like a barbaric throne room that was dominated by a throne fashioned to resemble a glaring dragon's head.

Through this aperture, Pat had witnessed Doc Savage's rescue of Dr. Mawson Harper in its entirety. But she had been helpless to make any sound or otherwise indicate her situation. Although she did manage a vigorous nasal *humming* when Dr. Harper had informed the **Bronze Man** of his successful proposal of marriage.

Some time later, she found herself being bundled into a taxicab which bore her and her captors to the waterfront and thence to this selfsame motor launch, not much ahead of converging police sirens.

The motor launch was cutting through choppy water now. It had previously been smooth.

By this, Pat assumed the launch was rounding the island of Hong Kong and heading out to open water. The motor stuttered and hammered, making a considerable racket.

The *cackling* of her captors constituted another racket entirely. Pat could not understand Chinese or whatever language they were speaking. But they sounded excited.

The engines were throttled up. The hammering of the prow against the waves grew uncomfortable. Cold spray sheeted up and sloshed malodorously along the open cockpit.

Somewhere toward the stern, a gun *whacked!* An automatic rifle. Pat recognized the distinctive *report* even over the pounding of the prow.

Return fire crackled. Pat twisted to see better. But a foot stepped into her field of vision. She doubled up and using both feet kicked out at the foot.

Came a profane-sounding gobble and an Asian fell to the deck. He bounced to his feet and reached in hauling Pat out by her wealth of **bronze** hair.

It hurt like the dickens. But it produced exactly the result that she wanted. Pat could see over the stern now.

The pursuing craft was a speedboat. It boasted nice lines which the complement of her own cruiser was industriously attempting to shoot to pieces.

Glass jumped out of the pursuing windscreen. A rifle barrel poked out through the hole. It spat a puff of smoke and some yellow flame! And the man who had Pat by the hair suddenly discovered that his left elbow had the ability to hinge the opposite way from that which Nature had designed it to.

He screeched and attempted to call attention to this phenomenon. A *scarlet* stain spread out from his elbow like a virulent flower. But his compatriots were too intent upon discouraging the pursuing speedboat to take much notice.

With her hair released from the Asiatic's grip, Pat allowed herself to fall onto her spine. She employed her feet again.

"Try this on!" she muttered.

The Asiatic went over the side. *He was not missed.*

The gunfire picked up tempo. Splinters walked along the hull as if a great invisible feline were at work.

Finally the pursuing speedboat sheered off. The person at the wheel remained hunched and out-of-sight where lead could not find him.

The Orientals fell to making speed. They seemed oblivious to Pat's new position near a seat so great was their desire to escape. Fear rode hard on every brown face.

Working cautiously, Pat levered herself up on a seat. She had to balance carefully. Without free hands, she knew that she could easily find herself in the bay. Death by drowning would be a certainty if that mishap befell her.

Up ahead, a seaplane wallowed in the clear blue of Junk Bay north of Hong Kong. Its dual engines kicked up. Stacks began lipping blue flame. Props commenced to revolve.

The motor launch throttled down and came toward the stuttering plane in a sweeping arc. A hatch popped in the side of the wallowing seaplane. Lines were thrown.

Pat <blinked>. The men who were throwing the lines were Oriental. Their various skin colorations told her that. Most were brown, a few yellow. Some were the white-brown of old ivory. They wore little clothing in the fashion of certain outlying provinces. She had the impression that they were Cambodians.

Her engine silent now, the motor launch was drawn up alongside the big seaplane float and made fast. Orientals began scrambling aboard.

Pat was lifted off her seat by two of the wiry fellows and hoisted into the open hatch where she was received by a pair of the half-naked Asiatics.

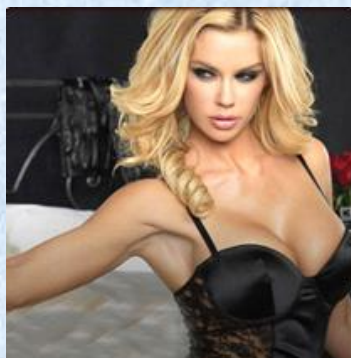
That accomplished, lines were cast off. The motor launch was cut loose to drift away.

XX

The Orientals looked hard at the beautiful white woman. Pat shuddered. She had seen that look many times in her past and knew what it meant.



She wouldn't have long to wait ...





Angry *lust-crazed* penises of all sizes quickly came into view.



Pat was horrified! They looked so dirty and possibly disease-ridden. She fought to keep them from “spreading her eagle” ...

... but to no avail ...

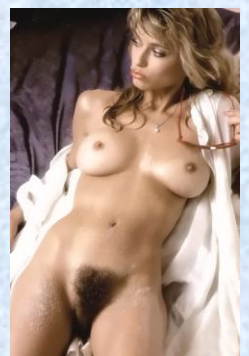


They were cackling and fighting among themselves to see who would be first in line. The winner promptly proceeded to split the **bronze-haired** beauty in two!





After he had finished erupting into her **fertile womb**, another rapist quickly took his place.



But first, he rolled the pretty Pat over on her **tummy** ...





She could have sworn she was being impaled when at long last the bastard finally *climaxed!*





The rest couldn't decide upon her **mouth** or **butt**. So they used BOTH!!!







In a Parallel Universe ...



After a while, all that she was concerned about was becoming pregnant!



PAT SAVAGE RAPED!





The great seaplane engines began to make impatient noises. The engines were warm now. The big bus was preparing to vault from the wrinkled azure water.

Pat was carried into the middle cabin. The sound of the hatch closing told her that the seaplane was about to take off.

It was followed by a heart-stopping noise. A sudden *pop* like that of a rivet gun. It could only mean that a bullet had pierced the hull at some near point.

The Cambodians scrambled to the cabin windows along the starboard side of the plane. Pat caught a glimpse of the source of their excited shrillings.

The unknown pilot of the pursuing speedboat had gotten himself organized. He was bearing down on the seaplane.

A ragged hole appeared near one seat. Another bullet arrived entering at a slanted angle. It pierced the cabin roof, this time creating a smooth hole. Steel-jacketed lead, Pat imagined.

The Cambodians cackled excitedly among themselves as the seaplane warmed up. The one gesticulated in Pat's direction. Her heart sank even though she could not understand their lingo.

She found herself being dragged to one of the windows. She fought as best she could using mostly her feet. But she was in no position to put up sustained resistance.

She found her face jammed up against the glass. They held her there.

Pat closed her eyes, fearful of a bullet.

When nothing seemed to happen, she peeked through one very round eye.

The speedboat was still there. But it was running parallel to the seaplane. It looped back around as if the owner was wary.

She could not make out the person's features. He was hunkered down for protection against return lead.

After a few careful passes, the speedboat dug in her stern ... churned foam ... and raced back the way she had come.

Only then did they cease to press Pat's face against the glass. She was yanked away and cast into a seat.

Her spirits were now low. She had begun to believe that Doc Savage had been in the pursuing speedboat.

Suddenly, she was not so sure of that. Her cousin would not have given up so easily, she felt.

The seaplane began to move. Engines drumming, the big ship began bouncing along the wave tops.

This went on for some time.

Pat's pretty brows began to pucker. It was taking entirely too long for the ship to get "on step". She wondered if a bullet had crippled an engine or effected some similar disabling problem.

Abruptly, the engines throttled down and her heart gave a little leap of hope.

The seaplane was unable to take off!

She put her face to a window. The **bronze**-haired girl saw land. A darkened cove. The seaplane was gliding into this with a silence that was eerie.

A sampan overweighted with dark forms was being poled close to the giant aircraft.

Interested, Pat watched as a box of some sort was carried out from the matting shelter prominent in the center of the sampan and brought aboard. It was carried into the cabin where she was and set down in the center of the floor.

A hatch banged shut! One of the Cambodians put an ear to the box. It was ornate, evidently carved by hand by some industrious artisan. Prominent on each side was a carven face of distinctly Asian cast.

The Cambodian listened a moment ... then retreated from the box with a scuttling alacrity.

All over the Cabin, Cambodians fell to their hands and knees kowtowing. They pressed their brown foreheads to the cabin floor and kept them there. Their attitudes were rapt, fearful.

They were like votaries before a pagan idol. Except that there was no idol. Only a teak box that might have been a *taboret* for it showed curved dragon's claw feet at each of its 4 corners.

A moment passed. Two ...

Pat Savage (to whom the ways of the Orient were unknown) watched with a growing dread. The Cambodians were entirely too expectant in their worshipfulness.

Then one of the carved wood faces began to turn like a great flat screw head. It popped off to reveal a dark cavity. It reminded her of a snake's den.

As she watched with eyes growing wider by the moment, something began to emerge from the dark hole.

At first, the emerging thing seemed mechanical. A brass drill, perhaps. Except no drill could be so ornate.

From a needle-like point, it grew to a bizarre series of circles and fanciful sections. One of the latter was of **jade** -- a quartet of tiny bland faces forming a ring.

The brass base of the thing soon filled the round hole. It seemed endless.

Then it became apparent that the brass device was being impelled by some power behind it. This emerged next revealing coarse black hair such as would cover a boar or other beast of the wild.

Suddenly, the emerging thing tilted upward causing the brass spire to erect itself like a fantastic Christmas tree.

Pat would have screamed in horror had she possessed the power of speech then. But it was impossible to expel words past the **sponge** crammed in her gagged mouth.

For the horrible *thing* with black hair proved to be a head. A head with a face of cut **jade!**

The face was placid, human-like but without expression. The eyes were mere slits. And the conical brass thing surmounting this head proved to be a crown of some exotic type.

Midway up the fanciful spire, 4 tiny **jade** faces (mirrors of the one that masked the thing's true features) faced the points of the compass.

The head lifted turtle-fashion and turned slowly as if stirring from a long slumber. The eyes behind the slits regarded the prostrate Cambodians and then flicked over Pat Savage briefly. Then the head began to extrude itself from the box.

If what had transpired before her eyes thus far was **horror**, what next occurred constituted raw **terror**.

Like a turtle emerging from its shell, the **jade**-faced **creature** strained from the confines of its box. It made helpless pig-like grunting -- inarticulate and inhuman -- as it struggled to squeeze forth.

After much straining, deformed shoulders that were many times too narrow to be human oozed from the round hole in the box's side.

The **thing** was clad in **green** silken garments trimmed in **gold**. There were 2 curled devices decorating the shoulders like clipped wings that popped up after the shoulders had emerged.

Slowly, excruciatingly, the silken torso emerged from teak box. First one ... then another ... *green* silk sleeve flopped, wrinkled and empty, to the cabin floor.

For the weird *thing* possessed no arms. Only the flat empty sleeves of the maimed!

Pat looked away then. And so she missed the twisted creature's final struggles. The legs emerged. Sandal-shod feet (quite small after the Oriental fashion) squirmed and twisted free.

As if not possessing the power of upright gait, the thing gathered its legs under it and squatted there, empty sleeves swaying horribly.

A raspy voice intoned words.

"I am *Quon*. The *Jade Ogre*!" it proclaimed.

At that juncture, Pat Savage opened her eyes. She saw the misshapen *thing* in its full awful glory.

This time, she did not look away. She could not. The weird *creature* held her gaze like a serpent transfixing a rabbit.

"You have done well, Limbs of *Quon*. The great plan is nearer to fruition because of you."

The words were in English. The suppliant Cambodians did not react to them. They kept their foreheads dutifully pressed to the cabin floor.

The *creature's* words might have been for the benefit of Pat Savage alone. His face (it was identical to the faces cut into the box from which *Quon* had emerged) swiveled in her direction. The quartet of faces set in the brass spire turned in sympathy as if taking turns examining their surroundings.

"Know, *bronze*-haired woman, that no power can release from the thrall of *Quon* who was old when your great-great-great-ancestors were but germs of possibility."

The *thing* paused. Behind the slits of his *jade* mask (it was a mask; of that Pat was certain) dark eyes gleamed like evil black buttons.

"As long as *Quon* possesses you, the *bronze* white man will not interfere with my plans. And as long as you are *Quon's* vassal, I will add you to my seraglio."

With that, the bent thing that was the *Jade Ogre* lapsed into the *cackling* tongue of Cambodia.

Instantly, the brown men shook themselves off the floor and padded from the cabin.

The engines started up. This time, they reached their full throaty potential.

In a matter of minutes, the seaplane was thundering across open water. It got smartly "on step" and vaulted into the night sky.

Pat Savage moaned inwardly for there was no doubt in her racing mind where the big bus was bound ...

Cambodia -- domain of the *Jade Ogre!*

XXI -- Air Dragon

It is a peculiarity of human beings the world over that they will adapt to living in any climate or condition that suits them. The human tribe can be found happily eking out an existence amid **Arctic** wastes, in oppressive **Tropical** jungles, or on the most parched of **deserts**.

By virtue of its lively commerce, Hong Kong has attracted more than its share of peoples. They cram into tenements and mill about the streets until they are nigh to impassable. Even at this late hour (sometimes called "the dead of night"), Hong Kong's byways were difficult to negotiate.

Doc Savage urged on the driver of the rickshaw in which he, Ham Brooks, and stork-like Chick Alfred were traveling. They often had to detour past the step-like cross-streets that link the hilly environs of the heart of Victoria City, causing much delay.

By the time they reached the waterfront sector to which the Chinese "newsboy" had directed them, they had lost much time.

"This cannot be the place," Ham grumbled when they were let off.

The entire coastline as far in both directions as the eye could see was a jam of high-pooped junks and sampans and other disreputable seagoing craft of the East. They were crammed together as if piled up by a monstrous typhoon until it was possible to step from rail-to-rail without fear of being precipitated into the ill-smelling water. Many no longer looked seaworthy. Others hung so low in the water that they seemed in imminent danger of sinking.

All were decorated with pennants of devil-chasing **red** which fluttered and flapped in the wind, the better to ward off evil spirits (for such was their purpose).

It might have been a cove of derelicts. *But this was not the case.*

Dark forms moved along shadowy decks. A chicken perched on a gunwale, its head jerking this way and that. A tether could be seen leading from one of its splayed feet to a point somewhere on the deck.

Doc Savage explained.

"People -- even entire families -- live on these vessels."

Chick Alfred grunted. "If you call that livin'."

They were working their way along the docks now. Here-and-there, modern craft were berthed.

"They do quite well," Doc elaborated. "Small children and animals are often tethered to a substantial stanchion in order to prevent accidental drowning."

Out on the bay, they heard a continuous pooping of a boat engine. The **Bronze Man** seemed to detect it first judging by the alert way he inclined his head out to sea.

"Somebody's comin'," Chick Alfred muttered. "And mighty fast too."

Ham unlimbered his machine-pistol.

There was an empty slip. The only one it seemed. From the engine sound cannonading across the bay, it seemed that the motor boat was headed for it.

The sound was awakening the inhabitants of the bloating village of junks and sampans. A baby let out a bawl. Vituperative lingo ascended. It could only be profanity from the sound of it. The chicken on the rail clucked and hopped back out of sight.

Doc urged the others to seek shelter.

Engine cut, the boat ran in hard. It bumped the dock. A line snagged a cleat. The occupant jumped out with no particular care. He almost landed in the drink.

Doc Savage let him walk about 20 feet from boat before he fell upon the man. The struggle (what there was of it) was brief.

The man attempted to employ *jujitsu*. He hooked a leg around one of the **Bronze Man's** and exerted tripping pressure.

But he might as well have been attempting to fell a banyan tree.

Doc applied a counteracting maneuver. The man went up in the air ... seemed to hang there momentarily ... and came down on the flat of his back. Gusty air blew out of his lungs accompanied by an *oofing* sound.

A flashlight beam picked out contorted features. The beam was wielded by Doc Savage.

The others raced up to see what manner of person the *bronze giant* had snared. Chick Alfred identified the man first.

"Shad!" he exclaimed.

"O'Shea?" Ham Brooks questioned.

It was indeed big Shad O'Shea. The horse-faced gunman was attempting to lever himself from a prone position while shaking his mournful head as if to coax his dazed brain back to clarity.

Doc Savage helped the big fellow to his feet. Shad's lungs were making noises like bellows. Breath whistled through pain-set teeth.

His hands on hips, Chick Alfred growled a question:

"What-the-hell happened to you?"

"No time," Shad O'Shea puffed.

He addressed the **Bronze Man**.

"They just poured that cousin of yours into a big seaplane. I tried to stop them with rifle fire. But they jammed her face to a port and I had to give it up."

"You saw Pat?" Ham ejaculated.

"Where is this seaplane now?" Doc demanded.

"It started to take off. Then I guess it changed its mind," Shad O'Shea supplied. "It was hammering toward Kowloon last I saw of it."

"Show us," Doc rapped.

They got into the waiting speedboat. O'Shea took the wheel.

Doc gave the engine cord a hard yank. Most such engines are balky by nature. But this one fired up on the first pull.

The speedboat backed up, turned, and dug in her busy stern.

As they rounded the looming shadow that was the island of Hong Kong, big Shad O'Shea -- his dray-horse visage more long and drawn than usual -- bit out a story.

The trend of it was that he and Joe Knopf had entered the mystery house on Ice House Lane after trailing Dr. Mawson Harper and Pat Savage to the place. He explained how they had upon penetrating the building stepped through a darkened doorway and been promptly separated by a partition that had not been visible before.

"I saw what was gonna happen to me," O'Shea continued. "I busted the door down and shot my way clear. I sent you that message and then went and bought a rifle from a native. You can buy anything here if you flash enough 'lettuce'. But I couldn't get back inside for the life of me! I got up on a roof and tried to see into the windows. By that time, you guys had showed up."

"Someone shot a Cambodian to death as he attempted escape," Doc pointed out.

"That was me," Shad admitted casually. "I figured he had to be up to no good. I was fixin' to climb down and join up with you all. Then I spotted them spillin' up from a trap in an alley."

"Then?"

"Chinks. A whole flock of them. They had your cousin Pat with them, Savage. I knew there wouldn't be time to get you. So I trailed 'em to this dock. They piled into a fast boat."

The big gunman jerked a wide hand as if to encompass the surrounding boat.

"I glommed this one. The rest you know."

Shad O'Shea seemed to realize something then.

"Where's Joe?"

The silence was ominous. Gazes were averted.

"I guess I'm better off not knowin' then," Shad said sadly.

"Don't you worry," Chick Alfred grated. "We're going to give the birds that done it what for!"

They were doing 40 knots toward Junk Bay. Kowloon reared up like a dinosaur slumbering in sepia. Spray lashed their faces. It was cold, salty. It left crusty residue on their exposed skin.

Doc Savage had the wheel now. His hands might have been actual **bronze**. They held the speedboat dead on course with none of the slipping and sliding that normally accompanies high-speed water navigation.

"Should be up ahead somewhere," Shad O'Shea muttered, craning his neck.

The big gunman proved to be more right than any of them suspected.

Out of the night came a **cannonading** of mighty engines. Over the popping of the speedboat motor, Doc Savage recognized the fast-approaching sound.

Abruptly, he sheered off. Just in time.

The seaplane lunged out of the blackness running without lights and vaulted over their ducking heads.

Their startled eyes followed the Brobdingnagian black shape as it hurtled by, shedding cold droplets of brine over them.

Chick Alfred -- one eye on Ham Brooks' supermachine pistol -- howled: "Why-in-hell don't you use that thing?"

"Mercy bullets won't penetrate," Ham said dully.

"Hell!" Alfred snarled. "I'll bring it down myself!"

He lunged for the rifle which Shad O'Shea had left in the boat. He brought this to his shoulder ... took aim ...

... and felt his fingers go numb. There came a **splash** off to starboard.

Chick Alfred realized then that something had plucked the rifle from his strong fingers and precipitated it into the dark bay.

"Why the hell'd you do that for?" he roared.

"My cousin -- and possibly Jason Baird -- are aboard that seaplane," said Doc Savage. "Injuring them will accomplish nothing."

Ham had the wheel. Doc now reclaimed it, gunning the engine and setting prow on course for night-enshadowed Kowloon.

"Now where are you takin' us?" Alfred demanded.

"Airport."

"We don't have a plane."

"I took the liberty of securing one by telephone earlier today," Doc explained quietly.

"Yeah? What kinda plane?" wondered Chick Alfred.

*As it turned out -- once they beached the boat and commandeered a night-prowling taxi to the Kowloon airport -- a **burning** one.*

As they rolled in through the gate, they were greeted by the sight of fire trucks hosing down an immense hangar at the south end of the field.

"Who want to bet that's out bus?" Shad O'Shea said gloomily.

A quick exchange with a scurrying mechanic verified the big gunman's pessimistic theory.

"What happened?" Doc asked.

"Dunno mate," the mechanic huffed in a pronounced cockney accent. "Some bloke poured petrol on a plane and threw a match. H'I don't want to be around when the chap who chartered h'it finds out. Understand 'e's no less than **Doc Savage** 'imself."

It was dark at this end of the field. The mechanic could be forgiven for not realizing the identity of the personage with whom he was conversing.

Doc followed him into the white scald of light that funneled from a floodlamp atop a nearby hangar. The mechanic caught a glimpse of the distinctive **metallic bronze** skin.

"Blimey!" he gulped. "You're im!" H'in the blink' flesh!"

"Is there a plane I might borrow?" Doc asked. "A fast one?"

The mechanic eyed the surrounding field. A group of men were pushing a stubby racing monoplane from the hangar adjacent to the one that was now a roaring bundle of conflagration. It was painted *silver*.

He pointed. "That one. She's a sweet job. Do 300 h'if you run 'er flat out."

He lifted his voice.

"Hey! Warm that racer h'up!"

Doc Savage turned to the others.

"Ham, wait here."

"But Doc ..."

The **Bronze Man** sprinted for the waiting plane. The floodlight painted his shadow across the tarmac like a grotesque jumping jack.

The 425-horsepower radial motor was idling, making the tiny ship with its fat *silver* fuselage and incredibly stubby wings dance softly in the streamlined pants over the landing wheels.

Doc Savage boosted himself onto one wing ... swung a foot into the cockpit, then followed it with the other ... and eased his **Herculean** physique straight down. It was a tight fit.

He signaled.

The mechanics jumped out of the way. One tossed up a leather helmet and flying goggles. Doc yanked these on. (It was an open-cockpit job, this tiny ship.)

Then he batted the throttle with his palm. The engine cans swallowed the sudden flood of gas without gagging. Bawling, the beetle of a crate stuck its tail in the air and ripped across the field, twin streamers of dust whipping back from the wheels.

Doc picked it off the tarmac and banked, giving little heed to the possibility of stalling the overpowered craft. He knew airplanes. This one if managed properly would do almost everything but walk straight up!

The tiny plane flung into the wall of sepia outside of the zone of floodlights. It scooted over black ruts that were low buildings, bucking and squawling as it splashed through air bumps.

Doc Savage pointed the baying snout at the Moon and slid up into the night sky as if on a greased string. He headed in a general easterly direction. It was the same direction in which the seaplane had been seen traveling although he understood that it was unlikely that despite all its size and range, that craft was bound on a Pacific crossing.

Out over the ocean, the tiny beetle crate came out from under a cotton bat of a cloud like a trout from beneath a lily pad. The moonlight turned her underslung wings into double-edged blades of polished *silver*.

The **giant Bronze Man** snaked binoculars from the cockpit pocket. He clamped them to his *flaky-golden eyes* and swung them in a circle.

They did not reveal the seaplane. Nor had he expected them to. The seaplane had a 15-minute start. Hardly less than the distance of 20 miles.

He had reasoned that the seaplane was bound for Cambodia. That country lay to the southwest over a thinly-populated mountain district of inland China. The mountains were dangerous by day and potential Death by night. They held few emergency-landing fields.

The Pacific would be the pilot's best bet. The seaplane was large and staunch enough to drop into the open sea should it be forced down. There would be naught but an occasional ship below to report its course. And these could be easily avoided.

Doc Savage angled his tiny ship due south. He poured on speed.

The tiny ship responded like a race horse. It became a *silvery-blue* bullet with wings!

The **Bronze Man** flew close to the shore. This part of the World was not exactly awash in modern navigational aids. A pilot would ordinarily have to fly by "dead reckoning" using the old trick of following the coastline or roads and railroad tracks.

An hour later and more than 100 miles south of the China coast, Doc Savage overhauled the seaplane.

He had not caught sight of it earlier because the craft had lost itself in layers of *cumulus* clouds. But his deduction that it would follow the coast was correct.

He drew alongside the thundering seaplane and wagged his wings in the internationally-accepted attention-getting fashion.

The pilot stared wildly ... then threw an arm across the lower part of his face. With the other hand, he clawed at the switch panel dousing the cabin light.

Doc secured only a fleeting glimpse of the fellow's features before the latter concealed them. He banked and swung the tiny ship back at the slow-moving seaplane.

He dropped a **bronze** beam of an arm over the cockpit rim and stabbed it downward. The other pilot saw. But he gave no sign of complying with the signal.

The tiny crate that Doc had commandeered was unarmed. His options were not profuse.

*Still, the **Bronze Man** was not without resources.*

Doc Savage drove directly at the seaplane. He brought the stick back into his stomach at the last possible moment.

The beetle crate hopped the spidery framework which supported the empennage of the other ship. It hung by the nose, propellers guzzling air and squirting it back past the tail assembly in a *screaming* hurricane.

The air blast hit the seaplane and kicked it over. The big craft flopped into a spin. And as the other ship corkscrewed, a pugnacious face appeared in one window near the tail.

Jason Baird's unmistakable features!

They were soon lost to sight. There was no sign of Pat Savage or any other passenger.

Grimly, Doc dropped his ship on a wing ... straightened ... and howled back alongside the seaplane. The other pilot was fighting the controls. He got his craft level ... only to be sent tumbling into another spin. Doc followed him down.

If the other man had a gun, he made no effort to use it. He was behaving in a strangely spiritless manner.

There was a system in that. For the seaplane dropped to within a hundred feet of the sea and roared southward. Doc followed, concern tightening his *metallic* features. For if he slapped the plane with his slipstream, it would plow into the sea. His opinion of the other pilot increased.

A half-hour later, it went up a great deal more.

They had veered in toward the rugged Chinese shoreline. The seaplane turned into one of the innumerable inlets along the shaggy coast and abruptly dropped to the surface.

Soon, a second seaplane left the shadow of beetling cliffs and scudded across the inlet. It was a biplane, wings stubby, fuselage pump, and a speed cowl that made the giant radial motor look the head of a grasshopper. It drew a sudsy line down the inlet.

The line ended abruptly as the ship blasted itself off.

The biplane was smaller than even Doc Savage's borrowed crate. The pontoons were nearly as long as the fuselage.

It came upstairs like a scared spider on a thread. Doc's *golden eyes* whirled. The seaplane might not be as fast as his bus. But it lacked precious little.

The **Bronze Man** sent his own crate into a sweeping circle, prepared for whatever was about to transpire. *His suspense was short-lived.*

2 red eyes set atop the cowl of the seaplane sprang into being and seemed to coyly flutter lids at him. Machine-guns synchronized through the propeller!

2 more **blood-red** orbs appeared, each halfway out on the lower wings. **The craft was firing 4 machine-guns!**

Doc rocked his helmeted head back, his weird *eyes* lifting. The sky overhead was a cloud of **scarlet** sparks. They seemed to materialize in front of him and climb upward with incredible speed. Tracer bullets.

He rolled his little bus, slapping it away from the rain of **red** death. The seaplane flashed past, the bawl of its motor penetrating over the exhaust din of the beetle crate.

The pilot of the other ship twisted, swinging a 5th machine-gun mounted on a ring in the cockpit. He let loose with a short burst, then banked and fell off in a slip.

Moonlight glittered off his craft. It was painted in a weird design. The fuselage was a **yellow-and-green** monster with **scarlet** blood drooling from distended jaws. The pontoons were uncannily like huge talons open to pounce. And the wings were great scaly fins.

The whole effect was dragon-like. Remindful of some slaving **blood**-ravenous creature out of an odious nightmare.

The **Bronze Man** spotted something else, too. The wings of the plane seemed to be hinged. Fitted so that they could be folded back in order that the ship might be stored in a small space.

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Doc booted the **silver** beetle crate under the seaplane. Hot lead rattled on the spars and knocked feathers of fabric off the wings. So he booted out again. There was a 6th machine-gun mounted in the cockpit of the seaplane so that it could fire through the bottom of the fuselage.

The sky dragon was a flying machine-gun nest!

Then the seaplane pounced.

Doc rolled his shuddering steed and let the other pass. And when it had gone, he could look right through his right wing fabric at the **yellow-and-green** dragon as it tumbled in the sky and came back snorting fire and lead through 6 bloody nostrils.

There came a ferocious **knock-knock** against the floorboards. The insistent tattoo of lead trying to get in.

It did get in and splinters flew up into the **bronze giant's** face. The instrument panel fell to pieces and the eddy of air in the cockpit whirled the pieces about like straw in a Kansas whirlwind.

Doc screwed the beetle ship up toward the chill **silver** dollar of the Moon. He was momentarily astonished that its controls still worked.

Each time the sky above-or-ahead acquired a flock of bright new **red stars**, he stirred the control stick and booted the rudder.

Below, the wings of the big seaplane reflected moonbeams like convex mirrors as the craft wallowed with the swell in the inlet. The pilot had crawled atop the upper wing and was watching the one-sided air fracas.

Doc Savage was a consummate pilot. There was little about the art of aerial combat that he had not mastered. Still, flying skill alone is not sufficient when one is embroiled in an air tangle with a heavily-armed opponent.

Death hammered insistently at the welded fuselage of his borrowed crate. The Bronze Man skidded away. The maneuver cost him speed.

The ugly claws painted on the seaplane floats slashed so close to his head that he instinctively ducked. The ship had hurdled him. It was ahead now.

A **black worm** crawled out of the fuselage of the drag ship. It spread and grew into a giant funnel. It was smoke from a smudge pot.

Doc nosed down. But not quickly enough.

His propeller sucked in a tendril of the stuff and blew it into his face. It was **smoke** mixed with gas.

He held his breath, trying to empty his lungs of the stuff. Hornets seemed to travel down his nose and throat to swarm in his chest. Despite his goggles, his eyes began to tear. He recognized the symptoms of common **tear gas**.

Blinded, the mighty *Man of Bronze* smashed the stick into the mangled wreck of the instrument panel. The beetle crate bayed like an unleashed hound and rushed for the earth below.

Doc Savage tore off goggles and helmet. The *typhoon* rush of air washed tears out of his eyes and cleared them. He squinted and peered down through a shower of tracer *sparks* at the earth.

He was a couple of miles north of the inlet where the big seaplane had landed. There was a beach below. A narrow strip of it, probably rough.

He slipped the plane sideways. The dragon ship followed spewing lead.

Doc brought the beetle crate down to the beach fast ... fishtailed it violently ... and set down. With the first bounce, he cut the motor and lifted himself out of the cockpit.

The plane slowed to 40 mph ... 30 ... At 20 he jumped, flinging himself clear of the tail assembly.

He cartwheeled head-over-heels twice ... hit on his feet ... and ran!

Lead hammered pocks in the sand about his running feet. He pitched his bulk flat and rolled into the shelter of a seaweed-covered boulder. The seaplane dived and zoomed so swiftly that the motor **roar** sounded like a single thunder crash.

The beetle wagon was still rolling fast. Doc lifted his head and watched it grimly.

The wheels hit a slab of stone. The streamlined pants caved in. The plane roared and stood on its nose ...

... then the tail flopped back to earth. The propeller -- the motor crankshaft to which it was affixed snapped by the crash -- dropped and rang like a bell on the stone.

The dragon seaplane moaned downward again, the 4 machine-gun orchestration giving the craft the sound of a squadron. The beetle ship did a shuddery lead-spanked dance.

The surface of the hard rock upon which it had stopped seemed to boil with liquid *fire*. But the gasoline did not ignite.

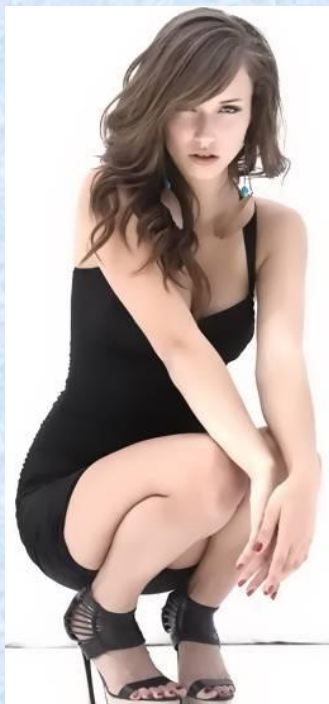
The clamor of guns ceased. The dragon ship came out of its dive and glanced upward into the night sky. *It did not come back.*

1 ... 2 minutes ... and the throaty howl of *the motor trailed away* ...

Made faint by distance, another motor roar came into being. The big seaplane -- presumably bearing Pat Savage as well as Jason Baird -- scudded into view lifting off the sea. It banked and followed the other plane to the southwest.

Only then did Doc Savage emerge from the shadow of the boulder. He watched the departing planes, his *gold orbs* bleak and unusually still.

Coming up later ...



*... Maurine Baird and Pat Savage are used as **SEX SLAVES !***

XXII -- Chinese Skies

The **Bronze Man** waited until the motor drone had entirely faded before he went over to look at his borrowed crate.

The aircraft -- gnashed and mauled by lead -- still hung together. But the snapped-off propeller destroyed any hopes of getting it into the air again.

There was no radio. Contacting Hong Kong -- or any other Chinese city for that matter -- was impossible.

Doc Savage looked up-and-down the beach. One direction seemed as good as the other. He chose north and began walking, looking for any sign of human habitation.

He followed the beach for 2 hours finding not even a fishing shack. China is reputed to be a populous nation. But this section of its coastline proved to be a notable exception.

The moonlight which seemed so brilliant in the air was tricky stuff. He nearly stumbled over innumerable boulders and rock fangs. Once when climbing atop a ridge of stone and leaping down to the other side, he landed in water that swallowed him up to his *corded* neck.

Doc paused to shed his water-logged garments. Then he milked them partially free of water before donning them and resuming his solitary trek.

When another hour had passed and there was no sign of life to be seen, he gave it up and retraced his path.

Approaching **dawn** tinted the sea with a variegation of heliotrope and cobalt and salmon. Doc shivered freely in his wet garments, knowing that this would help keep his body warm. It was the morning hour when the chill was most intense.

Along the way, he dipped into his gadget vest where he kept a supply of concentrated food in pill form which would provide the nutrients that would sustain his body for some time. They were designed to be taken with water. But the only supply he encountered along the way happened to be the briny variety. So he was forced to swallow them dry. It was not pleasant. But then the concentrated food was not intended to appeal to the palate.

The **Bronze Man** dove into sight of the spot where he had left the tangled wreck of the *silver* beetle crate. It was still there.

Had there been any observer at hand, he would have been puzzled by Doc Savage's next actions.

He stationed himself in the lengthening shadow of the crate on the sandy beach and launched into a shortened version of his **exercises**.

Shortened only because he lacked his sense-heightening equipment. He stuck with the physical and mental gymnastics portions of his daily routine. These not only helped ward off the *chill* of the Chinese night but assisted him in killing time **until the bronze-colored amphibian arrived**.

The engines (there were three of them) were so well silenced and the craft so streamlined that had Doc Savage not possessed unusual keenness of hearing, he would never have detected the craft's passing.

At sound of the unnaturally quiet engines, the **Bronze Man** was galvanized into activity. He clambered upon a tumulus of rock, shielded his eyes from the climbing Sun, and made out the craft.

It was big. The streamlined fuselage was designed for water landings with air wheels that cranked up into the boat-like hull. The amphibious job was flying low and somewhat slowly as if searching.

Doc pitched back to his damaged plane. He unscrewed the gasoline intake and made a king of twisted wick of one torn shirtsleeve. He shoved this into the intake deep enough that it made contact with the reservoir of gasoline within.

Then rasping into **flame** a common kitchen match from a waterproof oilskin pack taken from his vest, he got the sleeve burning.

He hastened for the shelter of a pile of rock many yards distant. *He almost did not make it.*

Doc Savage was in the act of vaulting the rock pile when the air became a **hot fist** that propelled sand and shreds of burning fabric and metal against his broad back!

He threw himself flat. The **concussion** hurt his ears. Sand, duralumin, and other debris rained all around him.

By the time the sound and heat had subsided, the beetle of a crate was merrily **ablaze**. **Smoke** crawled along the beach like a vaporous black serpent. It made quite a sight.

It also attracted the attention of the pilot of the big **bronze** amphibian. Just as Doc hoped it would.

The amphibian banked inland and made a low pass over the smoking smoldering wreck of a plane. Doc Savage stood in plain view. He lifted his muscular arms and crossed-and-uncrossed them several times.

The plane continued inland for a quarter-mile or so and began to retrace its path. It *hissed* over Doc's head and spanked down on the smooth waters of the Pacific.

The landing was good. The pilot was an expert. He cut the throttle, simultaneously angling the ungainly craft so that momentum would carry it to shore.

Doc did not wait for the big bus to beach itself. He plunged into the water and began swimming toward the amphibian with *powerful* strokes.

A hatch came open. From the nose, an electric winch dropped a sea anchor. The amphibian continued on until the chain came taut. Then it began to turn on her pontoon-like hull. The anchor had caught a rock or some similar sea-bottom protuberance.

Doc swam to the open hatch ... paused ... and treated water.

He lifted his voice: "Ham?"

A squeaking child-like voice emerged from deep within the craft returning his greeting.

"That shyster won't come out," said the voice in an amiable fashion. "He somehow ripped the seat of his pants and don't have a spare."

"**Monk!**" Doc said.

A face poked from the open hatchway. It was remarkable in its wide-mouthed homeliness. The eyes were small like stars twinkling in pits of gristle under a forehead that seemed hardly high enough to conceal a normal-sized brain.

The unlovely visage belonged to a grotesque figure of a man being no more than 5'5" tall and seemingly that same span wide. His furry arms dangled at his sides, giving the distinct impression that the man could lace his shoes without having to stoop much.

He weighed no less than 250 pounds did this anthropoidal fellow. The hair on his head and arms was the color of **rusty** finishing nails.

One of these burly arms reached down to assist Doc Savage into the plane. The too-wide mouth grinned with comical pleasure, threatening the man's ears. The **Bronze Man** allowed himself to be hoisted aboard.

"I see you made good time, Monk," Doc said quietly.

"Sure," said Monk (who was in reality Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair (ret) -- one for the World's leading industrial chemists and a member of Doc Savage's tiny band). "As soon as I got your radio-landline telephone call, I piled into this buss and took off. I made fair time, too. And when I put down in Kowloon, what do you think greeted me eyes?

"Tell me," Doc prompted.

"My good pal Ham Brooks havin' a fit because you had left him behind. And him without a plane."

"Someone sabotaged the bus I chartered in case we had to move before your arrival," Doc stated.

As they strode into the **bronze**-colored amphibian, Doc asked: "Are Johnny, Long Tom, and Renny with you?"

"Heck no. Johnny's in Europe. Long's still tied up with that hydroelectric project down in Argentina. And Renny's helpin' him out with it."

The 3 individuals mentioned constituted the remainder of Doc Savage's organization.

'Johnny' was the eminent archaeologist-geologist William Harper Littlejohn. 'Long Tom' was better known as Major Thomas J. Roberts (ret), the electrical wizard. 'Renny' was an engineer of renown and went by the more dignified title of Colonel John Renwick (ret).

"Any trouble with the crossing?" Doc inquired.

"Not much," gorilla-like Monk said casually. "Some weather here and there. I set down in Los Angeles and Honolulu to take on extra gas. But I made it."

An insistent **pounding** came from the rear of the plane.

Doc asked: "What is that?"

The answer came in the form of a strident voice demanding to be let out. **Ham Brooks'** sharp tones.

"I understood you to say that Ham was hiding," Doc remarked dryly.

Monk shrugged his shoulder up around his nubbin of a head.

"You might say I encouraged the notion a little."

The **Bronze Man** went aft to the spacious cabin. The amphibian could accommodate 16 persons (although not very comfortably). He located the source of the **pounding** as a lazaret door and wrenched this open.

Ham Brooks -- taken by surprise -- fell out. Doc assisted him to his feet.

Ham shook an enraged fist (his ever-present sword-cane was nowhere to be seen) in the direction of hairy Monk Mayfair.

"That...that...bug-faced gossoon locked me up!" he raged.

Monk sneered. "Maybe that'll teach you to not to leave a pal behind."

"I told you when we were leaving our warehouse hangar!" Ham protested, mustering his injured dignity.

"And you weren't there when I showed. You lit out on me!"

"More likely you got mixed up, ape."

The **commotion** brought the others. Chick Alfred and hulking Shad O'Shea.

"Are we gonna just set here and lay eggs or do we have places to go?" grumbled Alfred.

"We do," Doc told him striding toward the cockpit.

The others trailed behind. The last to go were Monk and Ham who hesitated as if each was unwilling to allow the other to go ahead for fear of receiving a remonstrating kick in what is commonly known as the "slats".

Reluctantly, the dapper lawyer went first.

"I'll settle with you later, ambulance-chaser," Monk gritted.

"Pick the time and place," Ham sniffed, "and I for one will be there."

Doc eased behind the controls, saying: "The seaplane carrying Pat and Jason Baird seemed to be heading toward Cambodia. They have a good 4-hour start."

Chick Alfred blurted: "Baird was on that bus?"

Doc nodded. "I spied his face through a cabin window."

"A prisoner?"

"Possibly. But I could not tell."

The import of Doc Savage's words produced momentary silence.

Its 3 motors turning over so slowly that the propellers exerted no pull, the huge **bronze** amphibian twisted at the end of its anchor chain.

Doc opened the throttles. The amphibian stirred sluggishly and came to life. Exhaust stacks whooped and spewed clouds of red **sparks**. He <thumbed> a dash button. The anchor began to winch upward, returning to its hawsehole.

Blooming the motors to throw gushes of air against the empennage for taxiing control, he ruddered the big bus so that its wallowing nose pointed out to sea. The props began clawing air, picking up speed.

The amphibian sailed over a few swells and then began jumping hollows, smashing from ridge-to-ridge. It passed off the choppy water. *Spray* geysered upward and made bawling sounds against the propellers.

Doc pulled back on the control wheel and the plane sailed up into the morning sky.

Soon they were on a southerly course, silenced motors hissing.

It was quite peaceful in the heated cabin. Soundproofing the engine design had accomplished this. Both were the handiwork of the **Man of Bronze**.

As they droned along, Doc Savage filled them in on his encounter with the dragon plane.

This caused Monk Mayfair to remark: "This **Jade Ogre** must be quite a guy to have covered his trail like that. A guy burned your plane and another plane chase you off the trail of his amphibian. Sounds like he has an organization. Wonder what he's really up to?"

"Doc, do you think the **Jade Ogre** himself was on that plane?" Ham asked.

"I could not say."

"Well," Ham offered, "at least we're rid of that pesky Rex Pinks and Dr. Harper."

Doc Savage vouchsafed no opinion on that score. So they settled down to the business of nursing the big amphibian on its southward flight.

The Sun rose. They flew close to the Chinese coast.

Roving the radio bands, Doc got in contact with such ground stations as this part of the Orient boasted. He picked up occasional reports of the *Jade Ogre* seaplane.

Once, the dragon crate had been spotted. The reports suggested a Cambodian trend.

At one point, Monk Mayfair retreated to the rear of the amphibian and returned toting a remarkable animal by one sail-like ear.

The creature was a runt **pig** of some species. It possessed long legs that would have befitted a dog; an inquisitive snout; and eyes that held an intelligent gleam.

Monk quietly released the shoat beside the seat where Ham Brooks was pouring over a navigation chart plotting the course of the *Jade Ogre* planes.

The pig ambled up to the lawyer's leg and found a dangling thread. It took this in its teeth and started walking backward.

Intent upon his chart, Ham at first did not notice this operation.

Then he felt a tiny tug. Absently he swatted at his leg, no doubt mistaking the tugging sensation for a tropical mosquito.

The tugging continued. This time, his fingers brushed familiar bristles.

He shot bolt upright and whirled.

"That hog!" he howled, sweeping out an angry foot. "He's at it again!"

The ungainly porker dodged the shod foot with the expertise of long practice.

Monk's homely visage acquired an innocent look.

"Who? Habeas Corpus?" he asked.

Ham accused: "You trained him to pull on any threads in my clothing he could find! That's why the back seam of my trousers is splitting!"

"I thought your trousers were splitting because you're too vain to buy them in your right size," Monk said innocent-voiced.

"A lie!" Ham screamed.

"That," Chick Alfred interjected wearily, "has been going on since we left Kowloon."

"Does it ever stop?" wondered Shad O'Shea.

"Never for very long," Doc told them with a trace of resignation in his remarkable **voice**.

He made no attempt to interfere as Monk and Ham with the pig Habeas Corpus underfoot began circling one another as if on the threshold of mortal combat.

In truth, although they would have been the last to admit it, Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks were the best of friends and each would have willingly laid his life down for the other if circumstances called for it.

The supposed enmity went back to the Great War [read "[Escape from Loki \(#183\)](#)"] during which Ham had taught Monk some choice French phrases designed (or so he told Monk) to flatter a French general. Monk had promptly landed in the guardhouse.

Not long after Monk's release, Ham had been brought up on charges of stealing a ham from the company mess. Although he had been acquitted, he long believed that Monk Mayfair had engineered the frame-up but could never prove this. This rankled his lawyerly soul perhaps more than the unsavory nickname of "Ham" which he had long since given up all hope of shedding.

As if to prove that their combativeness was all an act, the squabbling pair settled down. Ham went back to his chart and Monk resumed scratching his pet pig behind an ear. The animal was something that the hairy chemist had picked up in the course of an Arabian adventure [read "[The Phantom City \(#010\)](#)"]. Habeas Corpus had not grown an inch since that time and looked never to do so.

Monk now piped up.

"Say Doc! This business has me kinda dizzy."

"You were born dizzy," Ham said unkindly.

"How about helpin' me catch up?" Monk continued. "There was this bird Jason Baird who needed help. Is that how this all got started?"

"It was," said Doc Savage.

*He then went into an extended (for him) accounting of everything that happened since he had nearly been assassinated on the New York-to-San Francisco Solar Speedster ... through the quest for Jason Baird ... the tumultuous voyage on the liner Mandarin ... and the fast-moving events in Hong Kong in which they had lost Pat Savage and Jason Baird (apparently) to the **Jade Ogre's** minions.*

"Whatever is back of all this has to do with Baird's missing sister Maurine," Doc concluded.

"This is a lot of fuss over one dame," remarked Monk, his homely visage screwing up in thought.

"Jason Baird's sister is not a mere dame," Ham corrected. "She happens to be an Internationally-famous expert on germs and their properties."

"This **Jade Ogre's** gone to a lotta trouble to keep folks from chasing into Cambodia after this Maurine," Monk pointed out. "Why do you suppose that is?"

Doc Savage made no reply. Which was characteristic of him.

"If they're keeping Baird alive, it's a cinch they're taking him -- Savage's cousin too -- to wherever this **Quon** bird holes up," Chick Alfred said flatly.

"According to the yarn that Dr. Harper spun for Doc," Ham inserted, "this **Quon** hold forth in a temple also called **Quon**."

"Funny that he'd name his hideout after himself," Shad O'Shea said superstitiously.

"Maybe it's the other way around," Chick Alfred offered.

"Doc, how are we going to find this place called **Quon** by air?" Ham wanted to know. "Cambodia is a large place, is it not?"

"Large enough," Doc admitted but offered no answer more concrete than that.

They settled down into the long flight. The day wore on.

The afternoon Sun put a glittering sheen of nickelplate on the wings of the big tri-motored amphibian. It made the **screaming** propellers resemble scintillating plates of steel.

Below on the Gulf of Tonkin, it turned into specks of jewel fire against a crinkling carpet of ultra-marine. Irridated by the Sun, the coastline of French Indo-China was a low mosaic dais of **jade** and **apricot**, rugose and forbidding.

They were barreling inland across the wide bulge of land below China proper. The **cool** air of the coast gave way to the **humid** damp of the jungle. *Steam* rose from the verdancy below making ghostly shapes as it hung unmoving miles below.

Ham Brooks looked up from his chart.

"We should be about 30 miles from the Cambodian border," he reported.

Monk Mayfair -- who had his fist-flattened nose pressed to a cabin window -- muttered: "I don't see many places where we could set down if we had to."

"Let us hope we do not have to," Doc Savage said without feeling.

A little while later, Ham went off in search of his sword-cane which Monk had hidden somewhere about the cabin, steadfastly refusing to divulge its whereabouts.

There were many compartments throughout the big amphibian. Some within and some without. Ham was rooting through the former now.

He found the cane at last. It was tucked into a long narrow chart case.

It lay next to an unfamiliar object.

Ham's dark eyes alighted on what he at first mistook for a tube such as would hold a rolled-up chart. But this particular tube was too wide and ornate beyond all reason.

Tucking his cane under one arm, Ham brought this object into the light, frowning. It was of Oriental workmanship. That much was plain. Predominant were serpents which seemed to possess an excess of heads.

The dapper lawyer examined both ends critically. He saw that one boasted a cunning hinge and attempted to work the cap off.

The cap proved stubborn. There was no obvious catch. He fingered various designs in growing frustration with no result.

It just happened that Habeas Corpus ambled into the cabin at that juncture in anticipation of curling up in a coil of utility rope and napping.

Hearing the happy *click* of porcine hooves, the aristocratic Attorney whirled and instinctively shagged the tube at the ungainly shoat.

"Take that, pest!"

The pig managed to evade the tube which bounced off a bulkhead whereupon the stubborn cap simply fell off.

Something *yellow* and glowing began to wriggle out from the open end.

Its hackles rising, Habeas Corpus vented a piggish squeal and lit out for the forward portion of the plane.

It managed to reach Monk's side a half-second behind Ham Brooks' cry of *Fear* and horror.

Shortly ...



XXIII -- Stowaway

A bulkhead separated the pilot's compartment from the cabin of the big tri-motored amphibian. The door between the 2 compartments happened to have fallen closed.

Still, the arresting *scream* emanating from the throat of Ham Brooks penetrated. Long hours spent practicing courtroom oratory had imbued the dapper barrister with a voice that possessed the clear ringing tones of a church bell.

The plane's robot pilot happened to be operating at the moment. The control wheel was moving of its accord.

Thus at the first outcry, Doc Savage pitched from his seat without a second thought. He was the first into the cabin. He paused in the bulkhead doorway, his *flake-gold eyes* animated.

Crowding close, Monk Mayfair and the others craned to see past his **giant** form.

"Blazes!" Monk howled.

The others appeared to have been struck speechless.

Ham stood poised with his sword-cane out. He was holding it in a defensive position. It was pointed at an angle. A downward angle, they all saw.

The tip of the blade was directed toward an ornate cylinder of some lacquered wood that had come open at one end. Something was attempting to work its way out of the tube. Ham was threatening it with his cane.

Doc Savage's plane was streamlined to the ultimate degree of aeronautical perfection. But that did not mean that it was still not subject to the usual turbulences that buffet aircraft the world over. When it encountered downdrafts or air pockets, it responded accordingly.

The amphibian was rolling now. The motion was slight. The automatic robotic pilot compensated for the motion which caused the ornate cylinder to roll around the metal floor somewhat.

With each roll, the *thing* inside seemed to creep outward another inch-or-so.

It glowed faintly. A pallid *yellow* sort of a glow akin to moonlight on old teeth. The tips of the emerging thing were pointed like an array of dagger blades. As *it* crept forward, these remained level even as the tube shook and rolled.

In a moment, they recognized the thing for what it was. One of the evilly-glowing *arms* of *Quon*, the legendary *Jade Ogre*!

"Blazes!" Monk gulped again. "What-the-heck is it?"

"Don't just stand there, you hairy mistake!" Ham wailed. "Get something to catch it! You haven't encountered one before. These things are deadly."

Doc Savage started forward ...

At that moment, the amphibian encountered a steeper-than-usual downdraft. The craft dropped sickeningly throwing the **Bronze Man** off his stride. The ornate hollow tube of a thing went skittering along the length of the floor.

That was sufficient, it seemed, for the disembodied *Quon arm* to liberate itself.

It bobbed out (that was the only word for it) and -- trailing the ragged tail of its silken *green* sleeve - - ascended. *Its* extended digits yawed left-and-right as if undecided as to its preferred victim.

It seemed to be zeroing-in on the worried lawyer. Doc spoke up.

"Ham. Back away from it." *His voice was brittle.*

Ham Brooks executed an experimental slashing of the air before and around the rising *specter* of a limb.

The glowing *arm* actually shook and retreated slightly under the onslaught as if possessed of dim intelligence.

Monk ducked under one of Doc's arms then. The **Bronze Man** had been holding on to the bulkhead opening in order to keep the others back from the deadly *thing*.

Roaring inarticulate defiance like a bull ape, the hairy chemist launched himself at the eerie tableau before them.

"Monk!" Doc clipped.

It was clear to all that Monk Mayfair was intent upon getting between the glowing *limb* and its apparent target. His sacrifice was for naught ...

... for no sooner had the *thing* floated up to the level of the dapper attorney's chest than his sword blade licked out.

It seemed a futile gesture in the face of the grisly menace. *But in that assumption, everyone in the cabin compartment received a surprise.*

No sooner had the sword blade encountered the grasping nails of the *Quon arm* than the latter simply disappeared.

It was not a fading or a winking-out such as might attend a manifestation of the *supernatural*. The *arm* flared up and erupted into an *eye-searing blob* of yellowish light. A spiteful hiss accompanied this transformation. It left them <blinking> away the after-images from their optics.

"Yee-o-w!" Monk squawled.

Taken by surprise, the apish chemist skidded on his heels and ended up in a tangle with the dapper lawyer. The sword-cane fell clanging.

"You hairy mistake!" Ham gritted.

"Ambulance-chaser!" Monk returned.

Furiously, the quarrelsome pair untangled their limbs from one another and fell to examining their persons.

Ham gave out a groan when he saw that his pants seat (the one from which Habeas Corpus had been industriously plucking threads) had completely split revealing silken shorts.

"My tropical habit is ruined," he complained.

He examined fresh linen trousers that were as dazzling a white as that of his erstwhile commodore outfit.

"Serves you right for wearing white," Monk retorted, not entirely sensibly.

Ham Brooks drew himself up and said: "I happen to be a thorough believer that a man's clothes should match his hair. A black-haired man should wear black. A brown-haired man should affect brown attire. Et cetera."

Eying Ham's shock of white hair, Monk wondered: "Suppose a guy is bald?"

Ham purpled.

For lack of a better retort, he sputtered: "Oh, go tuck in your shirt tail!"

"Can't. Won't stay. 'It's my work shirt.'"

Ham looked momentarily 'blank'.

"Work shirt?"

"Sure," grinned Monk. "It keeps workin' over the back of my trousers."

The gag wasn't particularly funny. But it had the tension-relieving effect of causing Chick Alfred and Shad O'Shea to lose their strained expressions.

During the argument, Doc Savage had gone over to the wooden tube which was still rattling about the floor. He picked this up and began examining it. The others crowded around him.

"What is it?" Ham queried, sheathing his sword-cane with a <click>.

"A simple hollow of wood carved with the design known as a *naga*," Doc said.

"*Naga*?"

"A 7-headed serpent," Doc explained. "It is an East Indian phantasm."

"What's Hinduism got to do with Cambodia?" Monk demanded, <blinking> owlshly at the horrid design.

Doc said: "Hinduism is common through Indo-China and has penetrated even into China itself. Recall that the legend of the *Jade Ogre* had much to do with the Hindu deity known as *Siva*."

"Shouldn't somebody be flying the plane?" Shad O'Shea muttered worriedly. "You know, in case we pile into a mountain or somethin'."

Carrying the ornate hollow, Doc Savage strode back to the control wheel and disengaged the robot pilot. The great amphibious sky-wagon shuddered momentarily. Then he brought it higher to about 2,000 feet. The downdrafts were fierce!

In a moment, they encountered weather. It was the rainy season. Like anvils of sea foam, great nodular *cumulo-nimbus* clouds appeared before the windscreen which was becoming smeared with tiny rain drops. *Patterings* like mice walking on a tin roof filled the control cabin.

Pulling the control wheel to his chest, the *Bronze Man* cleared the clouds. The mice *sounds* faded. Soon, they had passed beyond the rainstorm.

The ground below was bearded with growth. Rivers meandered and unsavory brown tributaries like dead fallen thunderbolts. Bullock-drawn carts drew faint serpents of dust along open trails.

When they had resumed a normal course, Doc spoke.

"Monk, was there any opportunity for a saboteur to plant that hollow object on the plane?"

Monk scratched his bristly bullet head.

"Guess so," he said slowly. "In Kowloon, probably. But Doc, what was that witch's claw of a thing? It was dang uncanny!"

"Now you know," Ham sniffed in a superior tone.

"It might be advisable to give the entire ship a thorough searching," Doc suggested.

They needed no more prompting than that.

The other passengers began to go through the great amphibian combing lockers, cubby-holes, and compartments.

They found Habeas Corpus in one of the latter. The ingenious shoat had managed to open it with its teeth and put it shut again. Monk Mayfair had expended many hours training the porker to perform such useful tricks.

Monk ambled back into the pilot's compartment with the pig happily swinging by one rabbit-like ear.

"She's clean as a river-bottom rock," the homely chemist pronounced.

"Check every cranny?" Doc asked.

"Didn't miss a thin," Monk said confidently.

Doc nodded, saying: "That leaves only the nose hatch."

Monk lost his proud expression then.

Forward of the pilot's compartment in the nose of the plane (it was really more along the line of the bow, given the amphibian's boat-like hull) was a utility compartment. Among other items were collapsible boats tucked in the generator space.

The only way to reach the compartment was from a topside hatch. It could not be accessed from the cabin interior. And not at all while the amphibian was thundering through the air.

Monk <blinked> through the rain-smeared windscreen.

"You don't thing some bird's actually in that thing?" he said doubtfully.

Doc allowed: "It is a possibility."

"What say we find out?" muttered Chick Alfred.

He had a heavy wrench in hand which he had gotten from a locker, the idea apparently being to brain any stowaway encountered. He slid one of the wide windows open and stuck out his stork-like upper body.

"Hey! Nix!" Monk began.

"Let him be," Doc said quietly.

Chick Alfred wriggled around in the open window ... reared back ... and gave a toss.

The distance was not great and the wrench was heavy. Otherwise it would never have made headway against the fierce slipstream.

The wrench bounced off the nose with a bang! Chick Alfred pulled back and joined the others at the windscreen.

Nothing happened for a long moment.

Then just about the time they had nothing would, **the hatch unexpectedly reared up.**

A man shoved up from the space. He wore a parachute pack.

Casting a frightened look in the direction of the pilot's compartment and the great triple row of propellers, he prepared to jump.

Doc rapped: "Ham! Your machine-pistol. Now!"

Ham Brooks was nearest to the open window. He unlimbered his weapon and set the thing on single-shot.

Aiming carefully, he pulled the trigger. The *report* (it was hardly more than a tongue click) was lost in the blade **scream**.

But the stowaway suddenly grabbed at his shoulder. His slant eyes went wide. They rolled up in his head.

Like a jack-in-the-box returning to its place, the stowaway folded slowly. The hatch (which his hand had been holding open) fell atop him like an oddly-shaped coffin lid slamming shut.

"Fancy shootin'," Chick Alfred told Ham Brooks admiringly.

Casting a supercilious eye in Monk Mayfair's direction, the dapper Lawyer blew an eddy of powder smoke from the pistol barrel and returned it to its padded underarm holster. Ham gave every indication of being a man whose injured pride had been restored.

"Wonder who the guy is," Shad O'Shea muttered.

"His name," Doc Savage said to the astonishment of all, "is Ho."

"Blazes!" Monk howled. "How'd you get wise to that, Doc?"

"Because," the **Bronze Man** imparted, "he was the taxi driver whose machine was pursued by an *arm* of *Quon* back in San Francisco."

"San Francisco? Then what's he doin' way out here?" Monk squawled.

"There will be time enough to interrogate him after we put down."

"Well, at least we know who stashed that hollow gimmick," Chick Alfred said. "Even if we don't know what the *thing* was that was in it."

*The recollection o the ghostly *arm* of *Quon* brought a hush to the soundproofed compartment that lasted quite some time.*

They were still engrossed in their thoughts and in a close surveying of the leafy terrain **when the dragon biplane reappeared**.

The ceiling hung at 2,000 feet and the clouds that formed it were thick. They were flying under it in order to examine the terrain. By Ham's calculations, they had crossed into Cambodia (an opinion that Monk Mayfair disputed loudly).

There was no appreciable difference in terrain. Rice fields tended by stooped natives were less common, however.

1,000 feet overhead, the tiny dragon plane looked little larger than some poisonous germ. But it came downward like a hawk!

Thunder suddenly rattled and boomed and crashed in the sky. A thunder of **machine-gun fire!**

The amphibian bucked like a prodded bull as lead stung it.

Doc booted left rudder. The amphibian whisked out from the intense storm of lead.

"What-the-hell's that?" Shad O'Shea yowled, straining to see in all directions (including straight up through the solid cabin roof).

Red tracer *sparks* then fell past the starboard wing producing an answer than no one questioned.

Chick Alfred called over to Doc Savage.

"This chariot armed?"

"No," Doc rapped. *He was concentrating on his flying.*

"Then we're sitting ducks!" Alfred howled.

"Get wise to yourself," Monk snorted. "This bus is bulletproof."

"That won't get that ... that thing off our tail, will it now?"

Monk was shoving open a cabin window with his supermachine pistol out. He changed drums, replacing the one that was charged with effective (but nonlethal) mercy bullets with another type entirely.

Ham took up a position on the other side. Their heads strained and swiveled furiously.

Monk waited until Doc Savage had brought the amphibian level. The dragon plane was sweeping about, her pontoons hanging like blunt talons intent upon their destruction.

When it came howling toward them, Monk stuck his arm out the window. The machine-pistol **moaned**.

The dragon plane opened up with all 6 components of her armament. Smoking brass cartridges poured from as many points on the weird craft. They sprinkled down like corn being stripped off a cob.

Yelling, Monk ducked. Everyone else got down on the floor as well.

Death rapped insistent knuckles along the air surfaces. A sputter of lead came in through the open window mangling a seat cushion to rags.

"You hairy goon!" Ham yelled as he picked himself off the well-tracked cabin floor. "Why didn't you shut the window?"

His immaculate white suit was not as mottled as a toad's hide.

"No time!" Monk shouted as the dragon biplane hurtled over their wing screaming its futile rage.

Scrambling to his feet, the burly chemist surged to the opposite side and the window there. This time, he emptied his machine-pistol. It shuttled and smoked. The **sound** brought to mind the deep bass note of a titanic bull-fiddle. Brass empties spilled all over the cabin floor and commenced to slipping and rolling.

These sounds were soon swallowed by the great tumult of the dragon plane coming apart.

It was slanting down, one wing dipping slightly from the backwash of the passing amphibian. A few gray threads (tracers from Monk's pistol) arced toward it.

At first, it did not seem that any of Monk's slugs struck their target.

Then the dragon's spidery tail assembly came apart. Rudders and fins flew every which way.

There came a brief flurry of *sparks* which quickly came and went. That was just the start of it, however.

The **emerald** fuselage erupted like a string of Fourth-of-July firecrackers. The wings folded back ... hung flapping for a breath ... and then were abruptly snatched away.

The pontoons simply dropped like stones. The **crushed** and *fiery* body of the dragon crate (it seemed a true crate now -- one that had been run over by a truck) followed them downward.

The *flaming tangle* dropped through the mist overhanging the jungle below, illuminating it briefly.

That was the last they saw of the harridan bird of prey. If any noise of flash of fire attended its impact with the ground, no echo of either reached their senses.

"Mighty nice shootin'," Chick Alfred said approvingly.

The hairy chemist lifted his still-smoking machine-pistol to his wide mouth. He pursed gigantic lips and blew smoke in nearby Ham Brooks' finely-chiseled face.

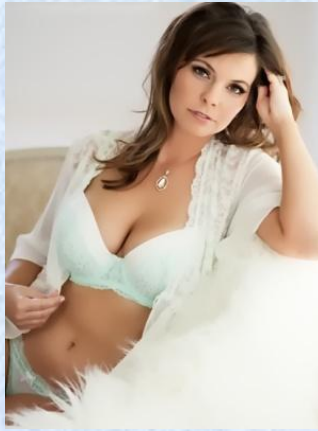
"Explosive slugs," he said over the dapper lawyer's brief coughing spasm.

A battle royale would have broken out then ...

... except that Doc Savage shattered their concentration with a simple -- yet startling -- statement.

"We are very near our destination," he said.

Very soon ...



*... Maurine Baird and Pat Savage will be **RAPED** !*

XXIV -- The Awful Dark

"Since when?"

This was from Chick Alfred. A dumbfounded expression overspread the long-legged gunman's narrow features.

Doc Savage said: "The pilot of the dragon plane could not have known to expect us. Also, he had several hours' head start. Therefore he must have been lurking somewhere on the ground in order to thwart interlopers into the *Jade Ogre's* domain."

Monk Mayfair smacked a **rust**-furred fist into the opposite palm.

"Like he did that first time when he shot you down, huh Doc?"

"Exactly."

The **Bronze Man** was studying the ground below, his *flake-gold eyes* very alert.

"It stands to reason that the dragon plane was stationed somewhere near to the *Quon* stronghold."

They all got busy scanning the terrain. Binoculars passed from hand to hand.

Ham Brooks worked over charts and maps. The amphibian was well stocked with these. Doc Savage believed in being prepared for any eventuality. Good maps of Cambodia and environs were at hand.

"According to this Sumner line I plotted," Ham called out, "We're in a sector of Cambodia not very well explored."

Doc asked: "Precisely where?"

"About 50 miles east of the Mekong River and something like 75 miles north of Cochin China."

Doc nodded. He did not ask to look at the chart to which Ham referred. His remarkable memory coupled with a deep knowledge of Geography had already placed the spot in his mind.

He threw the amphibian in wide circles. It was growing dusky now. They had been flying all day. Fortunately, Monk had taken on a full load of fuel at the Kowloon airport. Extra cans were racked in hatches for refueling in out-of-the-way landing spots.

The jungle below was becoming a shapeless expanse of shadows and low-hanging mist. On successive passes, Doc dropped the amphibian lower-and-lower, dipping one wing or the other so they could line the cabin compartment windows and employ binoculars. This produced result in the form of a twitchy *cloud* that rose up from the furred jungle floor.

Monk spied this first. He <blinked>. The phenomenon resembled black *ashes* rising from a banked fire. Yet each individual "ash" moved in a convulsive manner.

"Bless me!" he squeaked. "**Bats!**"

They were indeed the flying mammals. A veritable cloud of them. The amphibian's thunder sent them squeaking and scattering in all directions.

"Spy where they rose up from, Monk?" asked Doc.

"That hilly bump yonder," said Monk inclining his nubbin head to port.

The "hilly bump" happened to be bisected by a river. It was a sluggish and serpentine thing the color of mud. It seemed to vanish into the hill and come out on the other side to resume its ophidian course.

"No place to set down," Monk said glumly.

"The river might serve," Doc returned.

"That stream?" Chick Alfred pointed out. "Looks hardly big enough to land a balsa toy on!"

"Doc knows his stuff," Monk said proudly. "Right, shyster?"

Seated on a fold-down seat in the rear, Ham Brooks declined to answer.

For one thing, he had a darning needle in his mouth. The rent seat of his white trousers lay across his knees.

For another, despite his unwavering policy of never agreeing with the apish Chemist, Ham's admiration for his **bronze Leader** effectively inhibited disagreement in this instance.

"Stow any loose stuff, Monk," Doc directed. "This could be bumpy."

They got to work collecting and storing loose items. The map and charts went into compartments. Habeas Corpus was roused from his nap and found himself sleepy of eye placed on Monk's lap.

Everyone found a seat and hung on to it. Ham drew on his hastily-repaired trousers.

Flying low, Doc Savage "dragged" the river first. There was a stretch where it did not quite meander so much. It looked reasonably deep. No sign of projecting stones (which did not necessarily mean that there were not submerged ones).

On the second pass, the **Bronze Man** lined up with the straight portion of the river. He cracked flaps and cut the engines.

"No turning back now," Monk said unnecessarily.

The jungle raced under the wingtips. The craft was wider than the river. Not a good thing. Fortunately, no trees grew close to the shores. It was unnatural as if they shunned the ugly tributary.

The amphibian alighted like a graceful bronze swan. It touched ... rose ... then touched again. Rushing, the hull settled. River water sheeted up along the side windows.

Monk had left one open. Muddy water came in and doused a sputtering Ham Brooks!

Recriminations had to wait, however. The momentum was carrying the amphibian toward a chocolate-hued bend in the river.

Doc threw a lever deploying scoops along the hull. These ingested water creating a braking effect.

"Not enough," Monk muttered worriedly.

Undoubtedly, the most balky of seagoing craft to maneuver is the "flying boat". Doc Savage's bus was equipped with a water rudder. It was the most advanced design achievable. Which made it only a little better than a canoe paddle insofar as steering on the water was concerned.

"Brace yourselves!" Ham called out.

The bend rushed toward them. Everyone got set for a spectacular crash ...

... except Doc Savage. He was busy cranking down the struts that dropped the air wheels from the boat-like hull.

The riverbank looked very soft and muddy. Still, the bow of the hull glided up to it making a protracting *squishing* sound that was hideous to the ears.

Shock absorbers rattling, the air wheels climbed the banks. The amphibian rolled up-and-over the ground several dozen yards ... then slid to a stop. It left a trail of crushed grass like that of a pot-bellied dinosaur.

"We made it!" Ham exulted.

Then by way of celebration, he picked a mud dollop off one bespattered shoulder and dashed it in Monk Mayfair's pleasantly-homely visage.

- - - - -

After they had climbed out, Doc Savage examined the hull for damage.

He found none and judged that getting the amphibian back onto the river was a matter of releasing the brakes and applying a modicum of "elbow grease". He got everyone organized.

Supermachine pistols were checked and pockets filled with extra ammo drums. Chick Alfred and Shad O'Shea made a show of checking their own pistols.

"Let's see to the stowaway," the **Bronze Man** suggested.

They surrounded the amphibian bow.

When one of Shad O'Shea's heels clicked on stone for the 3rd consecutive step, he swore and said: "This place is sure rocky."

"We are beached on a **landing stage** of some sort," Doc offered.

Showing monkey-like curiosity, Monk Mayfair paused and started to scrape mud off the ground under his feet. He exposed great loose-fitting sandstone blocks that were much worn by time and exposure.

"I'll be jiggered," he breathed. "No wonder we made it. The mud protected the hull and the stone supported our wheels."

The hairy chemist looked up.

"Doc, did you spot this from the air?"

"I could not be certain that it would be solid enough to bear the amphibian's weight," the **Bronze Man** said modestly.

"Now what would a landing stage be doing way out in the middle of nowhere?" Ham pondered softly.

Doc Savage hoisted up the bow hatch exposing the still-insensate stowaway curled amid a pocket of collapsible rubber boats. The man sported a rip in one shoulder and a slight amount of **crimson** (now brown and dry) where Ham's mercy bullet had winged him. Those shells were hollow and broke upon contact with the skin to release their liquid anesthetic contents.

Chick Alfred and Shad O'Shea gathered about the man.

"What say we beat him awake?" Alfred said fiercely.

"That will not be necessary," Doc said after a brief examination. "He will awaken within the hour."

Then the **Bronze Man** closed the hatch.

Monk asked: "Why don't we just bring him out of it? I brought my portable chemical laboratory along. We can mix up a batch of counteractant."

"Awake, he will be an impediment to exploration," Doc said. "He can keep."

Craning his long head around, Shad O'Shea wondered.

"What's to explore? All I see is creepers and that hill up there."

"We will explore the hill then," Doc announced.

And so they set off.

Butterflies fanned lazy wings at their approach. Nervous yellow lizards slunk and leaped from their path.

They were walking along the river bank. Cracked stones wobbled and *clicked* under their feet. The stones were smeared with mud making progress treacherous.

Ham seemed to be having particular trouble inasmuch as he was still wearing dress shoes.

"Watch out that you don't fall into the river and ruin that pretty suit," Monk jeered at one point.

The dapper lawyer scowled darkly but nevertheless took the jibe as a warning. He got on the other side of the hairy Monk so as not to tempt him into a sudden riverward push.

On either side, the forest (it was more forest than jungle but had attributes of both) was a welter of *banyan* trees, towering *rattan* palms, and the bone-boled *fromager* trees. *Creepers* laced everything, lending the only true jungle-like touch to the place.

The **heat** was oppressive. Soon their clothing was soaked. Doc Savage, Monk Mayfair, and Ham Brooks were used to such hardships. But the oppression and near-constant devilment of biting insects brought complaints from Chick Alfred and Shad O'Shea.

"Pipe down!" Monk told them at one point. "Since I'm on board, you aspiring jailbirds are just excess baggage."

Shad O'Shea threw out his chest and poked it with a thumb that was like a horny corncob.

"See here, you ape!" he barked. "We hired on to this thing long before you stuck your busted kisser into it. Jason Baird is our boss. Get that?"

"I hope you red-hots got paid in advance then," Monk said pointedly.

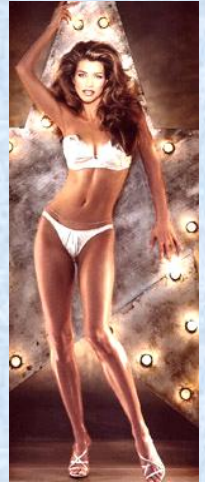
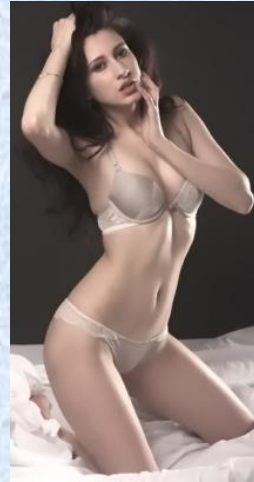
That reminded the pair of the **diamonds** promised for the recovery of the missing Maurine Baird.

XX

The beautiful brunette woman was at the moment suffering indignities that were almost beyond belief.

"Why are you wearing clothes, you stupid Bitch?!"





"Time to make babies, you worthless piece of shit!"



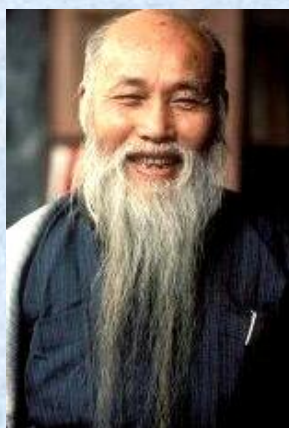


*"I want you ASS, **Bitch**. Gimme your goddamn Ass right now!"*

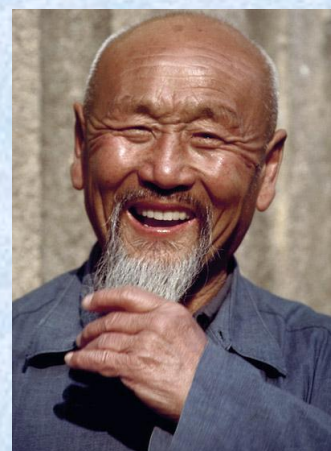
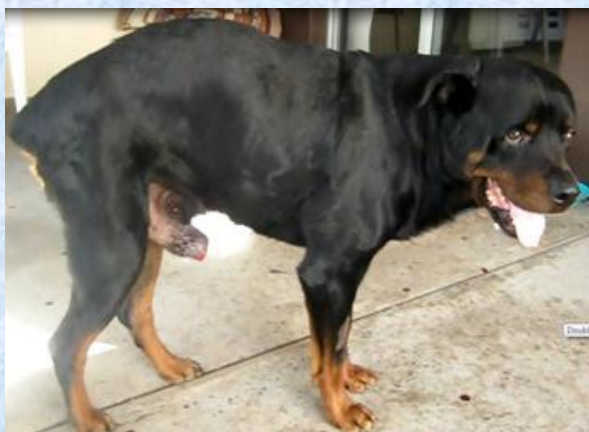


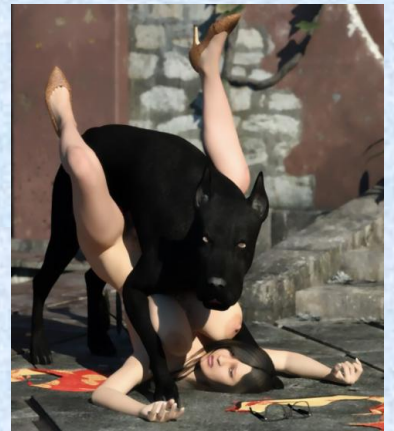
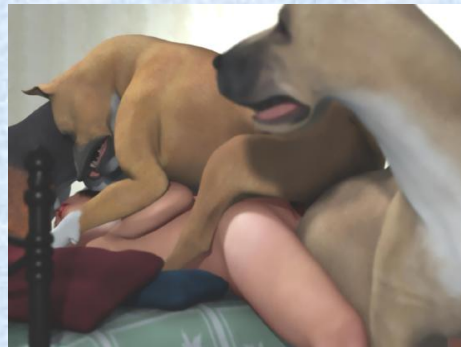
Moaning and whimpering after her gang-raping ...





*"Look what we got here, **Whore**. A big puppy dog that's as horny as a toad!"*







[knocked-up Slut]

His stilt-like legs working like busy shears, Chick Alfred caught up with Doc Savage

"Savage," he puffed, "what happens if we find Baird's sister but not him?"

"If you are referring to the **diamonds**," Doc said, "I imagine that they will be equally divided as agreed."

That seemed to satisfy the gun-boss. He wiped *perspiration* off his forehead. A moment later, it was as drenched as before!

"One thing I don't get," he resumed.

Doc's eyes were on the looming hillock.

"Yes?"

"What do you get out of all this chasin'? Publicity?"

Monk Mayfair's *guffaw* was loud enough to startle a cornflower-blue parakeet into taking wing.

"You lads don't know much about Doc, do you?" he chortled.

"You always throw your weight around like this, ape-face?" growled Shad O'Shea.

"There's a lot to throw," the burly chemist said airily.

"For your information my good man," Ham Brooks inserted, "we enjoy this sort of thing."

"Fightin'?" Shad asked, genuinely perplexed.

Excitement, Monk supplied.

"Well," Chick Alfred said unhappily, "so far you got your share. Me, I just want those *sparklers* and my feet planted on the other side of the Pacific Ocean thank you."

The hill was looming closer now. Twilight had fallen. The *silence* that clamps down upon the jungle at night was all around them suddenly.

Somewhere a lone **bat** *whirred* up and beat frantic wings away. Habeas Corpus -- who had been frolicking out of sight -- now trotted close to his apish master.

"Wish I'd thought to bring a pith helmet," Shad O'Shea muttered bringing his hands to the top of his head protectively. "Don't bats like to tangle up in a guy's hair?"

"Not all of 'em," Monk told him.

"No?"

The home chemist beamed.

"Sure. Bats come in all kinds. You take the vampire variety. They could care less for hair. They go for the jugular vein on account that's where all the good drinkin' is."

Shad O'Shea brought his hands quickly down. But only as far as his neck. He looked for all-the-world like a man groping to strangle himself.

"Hah!" Monk snorted. "Some tough egg you turned out to be. Afraid of bats!"

The river ahead made gurgling sounds.

"Sounds a lot like a jugular to me," Monk added. "Sometimes they gurgle just like that."

The source of the liquid sound proved to be the river entering the shadowy hump of the hillock. A net of vines and creepers seemed to hang its face. It twisted and waved slightly as it was impelled by the slow-moving stream passing under it.

"I never saw creepers hang down like that," Ham murmured. "They look like a bally curtain."

Doc Savage was still in the lead. He now picked up speed.

There was no Moon yet. So the others had to strain to trace the **Bronze Man's** passage. There was a strange quality which he possessed -- a combination of graceful movement *and utter soundlessness* -- that made his **giant form** repel the eye.

All at once ... he vanished!

It was more of a melting. The *bronze giant* had been walking toward the dark flank of the hill ...

... then he was lost to sight. The vines did not appear to shake after he was gone. But in the tricky light, no one could be entirely certain.

"Doc!" Monk squeaked.

He loped forward. The others hotfooted it after the simian fellow.

Monk flung into the fall of vineage. To everyone's astonishment, *the hairy chemist likewise evaporated.*

Chick Alfred skidded to a stop. He slipped on a slick of mud and fell. Shad O'Shea hesitated, his sorrowful eyes narrowing fearfully.

Clutching his sword-cane, Ham Brooks plunged in. The blade came out. Furiously, he began slashing at the curtain of creepers and lianas. They were thick. Tough ropy things.

But the dapper attorney had made a fetish of keeping the fine blade razor-sharp. It whisked along the hanging vines.

A clump of vines dropped splashing milk-chocolate water. Beyond was an intensely **black void**, Stygian and terrible.

Ham poked his head into the gloom. His voice -- forlorn and worried -- bounced back as if from a cavern.

"Doc! Where are you?"

Out of the blackness boomed unearthly ghoulish *laughter*. The horrible hollow sound froze the blood of everyone who heard it.

"Yiii!" shrieked Shad O'Shea.

Sudden arms reached out from the tangle of creepers and laid bestial hands on the dapper lawyer's shoulders. They dragged him in as if drawing a poor sinner into the pits of Tartarus.

He was gone in an instant.

There remained only the sinister ***gurgling*** of the river and the ugly sounds of beating bat wings stirring the Cambodian night.

Pretty soon now (hang in there) ...



*... Pat Savage and Maurine Baird are **WHORE-TRAINED !***

XXV -- The *Mystic* Metropolis

Ham Brooks was a practical man.

During the Great War (WWI), he had commanded a brigade. His quick thinking had saved entire regiments from extinction. As a member of the legal Bar, he was renowned for his quick grasp of the facts in the courtroom.

He did not believe in demons, devils, imps, ogres, hobgoblins, or other *supernatural* fiends. So when the 2 great paws had seized him, he had been caught by surprise.

Surprise will sometimes paralyze a man. Even a brave one.

The sophisticated barrister felt his feet leave the muddy stone river embankment. He attempted to bring his sword-cane to play.

But the unseen being that had him in its powerful grasp simply spun him about with irresistible strength. The sword left his hand and brought a *splash* to the unrelieved darkness.

The booming **laughter** descending into the lower end of the register sent peelings of mockery bouncing off unseen stone walls.

Then a new voice dispelled the bouncing echoes.

"Monk," it said. "*Stop clowning around.*"

The voice belonged to **Doc Savage**.

In the blackness, Ham Brooks <blinked> several times. Comprehension then seized him.

"Monk" he asked, his voice shocked.

"Fooled ya, didn't I?" mocked the hairy chemist's childlike voice.

"You did not!" shot back Ham, his voice gathering dignity about like a cloak. "And furthermore, you are a dishfaced baboon!"

"Hah!" said Monk setting Ham on his feet. "You thought your ambulance-chasing had caught up with you and 'Old Nick' had finally got around to claimin' your soul."

"Rubbish!" Ham snapped.

He fished out his spring-generator flashlight and <thumbed> it on.

Light sprang in the cavern. It brought glimmerings from the chocolate stream and made the most anthracite-hued walls of the cavern shine vilely.

He swept the beam around. It made homely Monk Mayfair cover his eyes to avoid being blinded.

Ham kept it there long than was necessary and swept out with the toe of one shoe connecting with one of Monk's kneecaps.

"*Ye-e-oww!*" the apish chemist squawled, hopping.

"Serves you right, you tree ape," Ham snarled.

The light found Doc Savage. He was examining a rusty chain that was stapled to the worn embankment. Here, the bank was not as obliterated by the thick mud. And the excellent fitting of the stones was discernible.

The cavern (it was more unto a tunnel, Ham realized) was composed of like stones. Sandstone from the look of them. These specimens had been sheltered from the elements and their workmanship had survived more-or-less intact except for loose mortar and pressure cracks.

Ignoring the howling chemist, Ham joined Doc Savage.

"Modern chain," Ham remarked.

"Mooring," Doc said, standing up.

He had a flash in his hand. But it had been squeezed down to deliver only faint light.

"For what?"

"The dragon seaplane," Doc offered.

Ham washed the narrow confines of the ancient tunnel with his light.

"Would it fit in here?"

"The winds were of the folding type. Similar to the kind that are often catapulted from submarine decks," Doc explained.

Ham looked about.

"So this is where the beggar lurked. He must have taxied down the river and taken off."

The **Bronze Man** nodded.

"The seaplane being smaller than our bus, it would have been possible to build up sufficient take-off speed on that stretch where we landed.

Recalling that their own amphibian was much larger than the now-destroyed dragon biplane, Ham wondered: "But Doc! How are we going to get our crate into the air?"

"Later," said Doc.

He pushed deeper into the tunnel.

Ham cast a wary eye back toward the tunnel mouth where hairy Monk Mayfair had been. The simian chemist was stealthily sneaking back toward the creeper curtain, evidently with the intent of bedeviling Chick Alfred and Shad O'Shea who were lurking outside calling Doc Savage's name in shrill voices.

Ham spotted the head of his sword-cane sticking up from the chocolate water and yanked it free. He found the sheath and made the sword whole with a hard jerk.

Then he crept up behind Monk and inserted the stick between the apish chemist's bandy legs. With the result that Monk fell out past the creepers.

"Haw haw!" Ham laughed. "That should teach you not to pull the same stale stunt more than once."

He raised his voice.

"It's all right, you two!" he called to Alfred and O'Shea. "I skewered the big bad water buffalo. Or whatever this unclassifiable beast is."

Monk bounced to his feet roaring. He clenched his furry arms as if about to commit murder.

Coolly, Ham stood his ground.

Monk subsided ... then fell to examining his pet pig who splashed into view.

Chick Alfred and Shad O'Shea plunged in. Their faces were not amused. They took one look at Monk and their expressions grew more unhappy.

"Well well," Chick Alfred said bitterly. "Look who pulled a funny."

"You'd think one of **Doc Savage**'s men would not be such a clown," Shad O'Shea grunted.

In the act of dusting himself off, Monk grumbled: "Don't tell me you two red-hots weren't scared."

"Maybe," Shad said. "And maybe not."

Ham said: "We'd better hurry if we're to keep up with Doc."

*Their argument put aside for the moment, the quartet pounded after the **Man of Bronze**.*

The going was better in the stone-block tunnel. It reminded Ham Brooks a little of the catacombs of Rome but with a flow of water down the middle.

Tiny *splashings* drew their beams. These proved to be **emerald**-colored frogs cavorting.

Presently, they overhauled Doc Savage. He had come to a section of tunnel wall that lacked a number of bricks on one side.

"Uh-oh," Shad muttered, blinking at the ceiling warily. "I hope this hole ain't fixin' to cave in on our heads."

"Observe the pattern of the missing bricks," Doc said.

The others stared. Nothing came to them. If there was a pattern to the absent bricks, it was not readily apparent.

"I fail to understand, Doc," Ham complained.

Then by way of demonstration, the **Bronze Man** stepped up to the wall. He lifted his arms and inserted metallic fingers into two of the empty spaces at a point about even with the top of his head. Then he placed a foot on the lowermost niche.

He began to climb upward.

"A ladder!" Monk yelled.

He stood about impatiently windmilling his strong arms until Doc Savage had started to disappear into a hole in the tunnel roof.

Then he scrambled up after the *bronze giant* with Habeas Corpus under one arm.

The others followed with ever-reluctant Shad O'Shea being last.

When all 5 men had assembled above, they found themselves in a stone box. There was no light other than that provided by the handy spring-generator flashlights.

These revealed 4 walls composed of sandstone blocks but intricately carved. Their state of preservation was good. But age had caused much splitting and cracking of the blocks themselves.

They recognized the 7-headed *naga* serpent; a pair of 3-headed elephants; and other godlets and demons out of the mythology of the Hindus.

"This place gives me the jimjams," Shad O'Shea said gloomily. "Let's go back the way we came."

"Good idea," Chick Alfred muttered uneasily. "Looks like a dead-end, anyways."

Doc Savage proved that the much-carved cubicle was not a dead-end by employing another set of missing blocks to gain the roof which although old was not by any means ancient.

The roof was composed of tough *nipa* thatch laid on a bamboo lashing for support. Doc set one **muscular** shoulder to a sturdy brace and resumed climbing. The entire roof lifted as if hinged.

He gave a *mighty* heave and the thing was flung away.

They clambered up and dropped to the other side of the north wall landing in jungle overgrowth from which chameleon-like *sumpah-sumpah* lizards scuttled away of nervous limbs.

Shad O'Shea had the misfortune to alight on a slumbering viper. Its *hissing* warned him of peril.

He cried out ... leaped to one side ... and upon sighting the sinuous thing moving through the lianas brought a big foot down on its wedge-shaped head.

The snake boasted but one head so it expired without further ado. At that point, they decided to look around before proceeding further.

From the air, the prominence on which they now stood had resembled an overgrown mound exactly the kind of tangle of decaying *greenage* found in jungle areas.

But thanks to the brilliant beams of their flashlights, they saw now that this was no rude hill but a city of modest size which the jungle had long ago claimed.

There were houses. Small things to be sure. But as ornate in the external adornments as the largest building which appeared to be some sort of many-towered palace.

The towers lay in ruins like blunt fangs that had been broken off in mortal combat. Some of them lay cracked and shattered where they had fallen untold generations ago.

They moved among the ruins. The pathways of the former city sprouted *banyans* and other jungle growth. *Creepers* had worked through walls (there had been apparently a surrounding wall at one time which stood now only in spots) cracking the carvings thereon.

There were carvings everywhere, done in rows. Every workable surface was bedight with sculptures and bas-reliefs attesting to energetic artisans.

Now, however, it seemed to be a kingdom where only bats ruled. With almost every step they squirted from hanging places of concealment and writhed away emitting rat-like *squeals*.

"Say! Wouldn't Johnny go for a place like this," Monk breathed in awe.

Johnny Littlejohn -- the archeologist of the group -- would no doubt throw fits upon learning of what he had missed. He found the ruins of humankind's past more fetching than a well-turned feminine ankle.

"Reminds me of the place where that the Thousand-Headed Man hung out," Ham Brooks said clutching his sword cane more tightly [*read "The Thousand-Headed Man (#017)"*].

"The architecture is not quite the same," Doc Savage pointed out. "This is more along the lines of Angkor Wat discovered in the last century."

"Anchor which?" Shad O'Shea demanded.

"A Cambodian ruin. Deserted for centuries," Doc explained running *bronze* fingers along a bas-relief. "A French explorer found it more than 60 years ago. It was believed built by a race called the Khmers who worshiped Hindu deities and who later abandoned the place."

"Yeah? What happened to them?"

"That is still unknown. This place appears to be of about the same vintage. Evidently, this is the ruin that Dr. Mawson Harper referred to as 'Bankor'."

"Hey Doc!" Monk cried suddenly. **"Come a-runnin'!"**

The others converged on the homely chemist's position. He was near the entrance to the ruin of many fallen towers. Its outer walls were riotous with sculpture, some having near to 3 dimensions.

On one wall was a figure wearing a tall conical item of headgear and a costume that consisted of a tunic and leggings.

Most startling, however, was the fact that this man-figure lacked normal arms.

There were only a pair of quarter-moon shapes like curled epaulets perched on the stumps of its shoulders. The costume lacked sleeves (no great inconvenience inasmuch as there were no limbs to fill them).

The visage that looked out at them was placid and mask-like, its eyes wicked slits.

"Quon!" Ham breathed.

Doc nodded grimly. "The **Jade Ogre**."

As if summoned by the cabalistic name, a brassy **sound** reverberated through the darkness-drenched ruin of Bankor.

Bong ... Bong ... Bong!

"Sounds like a gong!" Monk yelled.

Doc Savage worked toward the direction of the hollow sepulchral sound.

Then they saw him. *Or it.*

The gnarled **apparition** was standing in the doorway of a small temple or similar structure. It wore **green** silken habiliments not unlike those on the armless carving beside them. The conical thing on its head gleamed of polished brass. It jutted up, adding over a foot to the creature's actual height.

Because of its stunted stature, the apparition still topped but 6 feet. But what it lacked in stature it more than made up for in *eeriness*.

Midway up the conical "crown", a small **jade** face stared out. On either side were the profiles of 2 identical carved faces.

And beneath the trio of **green** visages glared the true face of **Quon**. It was cut of a single flawless piece of **jade**. Their lights picked that fact out. Oddly, the **thing** did not recoil from their questing rays although they splashed light directly in its eye slits.

But that was not the fantastic thing. The thing that held them momentarily spellbound.

For the long sleeves of the *apparition* hung slack and empty. Then as they stood rooted, one *arm* (the right) seemed to swell and rise. From somewhere came a long drawn-out *hissing* as of a viper venting sibilant wrath.

The effect was like watching a serpent stir to life within its own shed *green* skin. The empty sleeve lifted to about shoulder level. It pointed its long drooping maw at them.

Slowly, bony *yellow* fingers began to emerge. They possessed long nails which glowed *green*. They groped forward like the many-headed *naga* serpent, each fingernail mimicking a narrow serpent head.

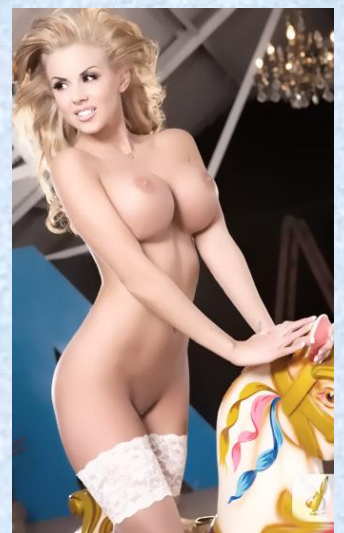
Crouching behind Doc Savage, Habeas Corpus raised its hackles and emitted a warning squeal.

"Watch out!" Monk howled going for his supermachine pistols. "He's growin' one of them dang spook *arms*!"

At the sound of the hairy chemist's yell, the spectral figure scuttled back into the doorway.

Almost at once, a green silk-covered arm shot from the blackness arrowing directly at them!

Very soon ...



*... Maurine Baird and Pat Savage be **FUCKED** and **SODOMIZED** !*

XXVI -- *Quon*, the Phantom

The bony disembodied arm of *Quon* -- the *Jade Ogre* -- launched itself like an *ethereal* arrow. Its swift passing produced no sound. Neither did it hesitate or deviate from its path.

A path which brought it toward the crouching figure of Chick Alfred. The long-limbed gunman was attempting to duck.

Both Mon and Ham had their supermachine pistols out. In unison, they depressed the firing levers. The familiar bull-fiddle **moan** filled the jungle ruin.

In the darkness, 2 **red-hot** rods appeared and crossed. The flapping *green* comet shot past the scarlet letter **X** of lead just under the point where they crossed.

It whizzed by unscathed. The drums ran empty.

"Dang it!" Monk groaned.

There was no time for Monk and Ham to reload.

A cyclonic *Nemesis*, Doc Savage drifted a mighty **bronze arm** out and grasped fear-frozen Chick Alfred by his collar. Prodigious *muscles* bunched up.

For all his leanness, Alfred was not light. Yet the *bronze giant* plucked him from the path of danger as if he were no more than a collection of broomsticks wired together to form a scarecrow.

The *phantom arm* just missed the man's outflung arm. A flapping *comet*, it continued on.

It happened to enter another doorway (what seemed to be the main entry into the crumbling palace) and was lost to sight.

Nothing happened. Their anxious eyes passed from the doorway into which *Quon* had retreated to the one opposite where the *arm* -- apparently -- had entered.

Doc Savage's voice came then. What he said was unintelligible to Chick Alfred and Shad O'Shea. But Monk and Ham moved with alacrity in response. They stationed themselves on either side of the palace doorway.

The **Bronze Man** faded back to the sandstone hovel where *Quon* (the so-called *Jade Ogre*) had last been seen.

He pressed his broad back against the carven wall. He plucked out one of the thin-walled anesthetic balls that had so often proved useful.

He shagged this in. Then waited for the volatile gas to vaporize ... mix with the oxygen and nitrogen in the air ... and be finally rendered harmless.

The *bronze giant* rapped out new orders. Monk replied in kind producing sounds that were more akin to *clucks* and *gobbles* than human speech.

"What kinda lingo is that?" demanded Shad O'Shea, hunkered down near Ham Brooks.

"*Mayan*," Ham replied, his sharp eyes switching back-and-forth in the fantastic **gloom**.

"Huh?"

"We use it when we don't want to be understood by enemies," the dapper Lawyer added distractedly.

"Crafty I calls it," grunted the horse-faced Shad who seemed satisfied by the thin explanation.

*In fact, Doc Savage and his aides alone in the Modern World spoke the strange tongue of the *Maya*. They had picked it up in the course of a Central American adventure. The one in which the *Man of Bronze* had acquired the great wealth that would finance his unusual work [read "*The Man of Bronze* (#001)"].*

*It was not generally known to the World, but Doc Savage had at his command one of the most fabulous treasure troves in existence. A vast cavern wherein was stored the wealth of the ancient *Mayan* nation.*

*This was located in a lost canyon -- the Valley of the Vanished -- in the remote recesses of the Republic of Hidalgo. Survivors of the lost *Mayan* civilization isolated from the World kept Doc supplied with mule trains of *gold* whenever his bank accounts required replenishing.*

*This was a legacy of his father (now deceased) who set the *Bronze Man* on the path of adventure and saw to it that his son would have the wherewithal to carry on the Savage family work of aiding the downtrodden.*

Judging it safe to enter, Doc pitched into the dark space that had birthed the discorporate *arm*. He drove the beam of his flash ahead of him.

For a moment, his *eerie trilling* came into being.

It might have been a sound from the past of Bankor. Perhaps the pipings of long-dead palace musicians. A stark note of puzzlement seemed to underlie its tuneless roving of the scale.

The questing light of exceeding brilliance showed only riotous carvings ...

... and a square hole in the center of the floor.

Doc Savage went to this. He was cautious in his approach.

He worked around the square hole which had all the earmarks of a primitive charcoal pit where coals were burned for warmth or cooking purposes. His light failed to disclose any danger.

To be certain, he extracted from his vest an object like a chopped-off candle. He got it going and tossed it into the square hole.

It burned and sputtered yellow-orange light. It was a small flare. Wavering shadows rippled along the processions of carvings making them momentarily lifelike.

Nothing -- neither sound nor danger -- emerged from the square pit.

Not that Doc Savage expected anything to do so. The hole was but 2 feet square. Too small to admit the human form (or at least the adult variety).

By the light of the sputtering flare, he examined the inner walls. His *golden eyes* roved. Fingertips brushed at loose carvings and felt for cracks and joinings.

But there were no secret panels or walls that might be hung on pivots so as to revolve at a touch. The floor betrayed no telltale scrapings.

Doc emerged into the courtyard. A cloud passed from the Moon's face and the area became effulgent with light.

He crossed to the palace taking care not to walk in a direct line with the opposite doorway into which the spectral *arm* had fled.

He joined the others.

"Nothin' came out, Doc," Monk muttered, his tiny eyes on the far door. "What'd you find?"

"Nothing."

Monk put out a lower lip.

"Secret door?"

"No."

The burly chemist <blinked>.

Then Doc said: "Care to venture inside?"

"Okay by me."

They went in ...

There was a kind of antechamber beyond the door. And beyond that was a rectangular stone room. There were no furnishings or other detritus of human habitation in evidence.

And no disembodied *arm* draped in *green* silk.

But they did find a square hole in the floor of the larger room. Like the one that Doc Savage had found in the other building, it was barely a foot-and-a-half wide and long.

"Could that dang *arm* have ducked down here?" Monk muttered standing over the long-cold pit.

"If it did," Doc responded, somewhat hollow of voice, "there is no sign of it now."

"Would be it pulled one of those disappearin' acts. I gotta admit after seeing that *arm* grow out of an empty sleeve like that, I'm about ready to believe anything."

Frustrated by the lack of any sign of the arm of the phantom Quon, Monk angled the muzzle of his supermachine pistol into the square hole and let the weapon **moan** and *shuttle* briefly ...

... without any effect other than to bring Ham Brooks running in. His handsome face was a picture of concern.

"Next time yell a warning!" he panted.

"How about 'oink-oink'?" Monk suggested amiably.

Ham -- who detested all references to pork in any form -- set his polished teeth.

Getting down on hands-and-knees, the hairy chemist tried to peer into the hole. Ham's flash came into play.

"It's just a hole," Monk muttered thickly. "Deep. But a hole."

He found his feet.

"I don't get it, Doc."

The **Bronze Man** was finishing his reconnoitering of the various walls. The ceiling too seemed solid.

It was an imponderable mystery -- this evanishment!

A dejected trio, they emerged into the moonlight where Chick Alfred and Shad O'Shea were nervously standing guard.

When all was explained to them, Alfred grumbled: "This don't make sense."

"Say it again, brother," Monk said fervently.

"I don't believe in *ghosts*," insisted Ham Brooks earnestly.

"Whistle a new tune," grumbled Shad O'Shea. "Because where *spooks* are concerned, I just got religion."

"Be your age," Chick Alfred said sourly.

"Be yours! You saw that **Quon** go in and not come out again."

"Aw, Savage just missed something, that's all. C'mon! I'll show you."

They started for the sandstone hovel. Their heels crushed rank weeds striving up from the shattered masonry of the courtyard with *mushy* sounds. Their hard faces were grim and purposeful.

They had hardly taken a dozen steps when their jaws dropped and their eyes started from their heads.

Out of the gloom of the sandstone arch came a phosphorescent comet of bony *yellow* digits and *green* silk.

Chick Alfred threw himself to the ground. *It was an act that possibly saved his life.*

Shad O'Shea, however, stood as if transfixed. Perhaps it was the chill that superstitious fear laid over his muscles. Other than to goggle, he seemed unable to respond to the danger that confront him.

Their mercy pistols raised up, Monk and Ham strove for clean shots. But to no avail. Fear-frozen Shad O'Shea blocked them.

Moving like a *bronze* beam of moonlight, Doc Savage found a loose block of sandstone. Without seeming to take careful aim, he threw it!

The block flew true. It intercepted the severed *limb* just as it was about to impact with Shad O'Shea's agape face.

Came a sizzling *flash*, yellow and hideous.

This time, they shielded their eyes. All but Shad.

When the flare of ugly light had died away, he was stumbling around in circles crying: "It got my eyes! I can't see! I can't see!"

Which as it turned out was an exaggeration.

"Light blindness," Doc said as he guided the man off to one side and safety.

He instructed the blubbering Shad: "Keep <blinking> your eyes."

Once they were clear, Monk immediately emptied his machine-pistol into the gloomy interior of the hovel. His drum ran empty. The prodigious rate-of-fire consumed shells with distressing rapidity.

Ham stepped up and repeated the action emptying his pistol.

Fishing out fresh drums, they <clicked> these into place. They advanced on the hovel.

Curiously, Doc Savage did not join them. He stationed himself in the center of the courtyard and was slowly turning in place, his *eyes* scouring the surroundings as if expecting attack from another quarter entirely. He held heavy shards of sandstone in each *metallic* hand.

Seeing this, Shad O'Shea and Chick Alfred copied his actions. Shad seemed able to see now although his optics still <blinked> furiously.

Then it came!

From the palace door, a **green** silken sleeve was lifting with an eerie hissing. **Fingers** strained to emerge from the empty cloth maw.

"Look out!" Shad shouted. "Another one!"

Monk and Ham whirled, dropping into protective crouches.

The palace door seemed to spit another **Quon** limb. The twisted figure of the **Jade Ogre** dimly visible withdrew into the gloom with *soundless calm*.

Doc flung a block then. He aimed carefully this time.

The brick struck the **arm** back of the wrist where the silken sleeve hung down in the wide-mouthed fashion of the Orient.

Struck, the **arm** turned in place as if dodging a hair-second too late. Knocked off course, **it** turned with its phosphorescent **yellow** fingers seemingly clawing the still air for purchase. **It** remained a stubborn 5 feet off the ground through all these gyrations.

Doc then released the other block. It struck the **thing** on its curved **fingers**. As the others averted their eyes, they felt momentary **heat** on their faces.

When it was safe to look again, there was nothing to see.

Monk ambled up to the spot.

"This is startin' to get me down," he muttered.

"Me too," said Ham in a rare moment of agreement.

Doc Savage said: "Ham, you guard the smaller building. Monk and the rest of you, follow me."

They followed the **bronze giant** into the palace chamber. Doc picked up a pair of broken blocks (the same one which he had used to excellent effect) and stepped boldly into the place. He wasted no time looking for secret panels. By the light of Ham Brooks' flash, he went directly to the square hole of a charcoal pit.

*The action nearly cost the **Man of Bronze** his life.*

The hole appeared as before. A flame-blackened aperture in the foot-worn masonry of the floor.

Like a faint firebrand made in the shape of a ghoulish gnarled arm, the **limb** of **Quon** shot up from the pit.

Doc's lightning-quick reflexes saved him. He yanked back his head.

The *thing* ascended to the smoke-discolored ceiling ... touched ... and gave up its existence in a brief paroxysm of lemony *luminance*.

He did not pause to witness the now-familiar phenomenon, though. He heaved both bricks into the pit. First one and then the other.

The pit gave back *hollow* sounds of impact. Indicating the shaft was at least a dozen feet deep.

"He couldn't have escaped down there!" Ham said in exasperation. "A child couldn't wriggle down there!"

"Maybe...maybe it ain't a person," Shad muttered eying a 7-headed serpent carving warily. "Maybe it's part snake."

"Bosh!" Ham snorted.

Shad turned on the dapper lawyer yelling: "You heard it hiss! Like a snake. Explain that, will ya?"

Twisting his sword-cane between frustrated hands, Ham Brooks admitted: "I cannot."

None of them could.

Doc said: "Alfred, guard this hole."

"A pleasure," said Chick Alfred training a revolver at the hole.

*The others followed the grim **Bronze Man** out into the leprous moonlight.*

Monk called over: "Dang quiet if you ask me."

Doc Savage lifted his eyes and scanned the surrounding buildings.

A few bats were returning to their nocturnal haunts. They fell like black hail and seemed to become part of the tumbled battlements which were their home.

Doc strode past the hairy chemist. He removed from his many-pocketed vest one of the cherry-sized explosive grenades that were so powerful. He set a tiny timer and tossed it into the charcoal pit.

Everyone retreated to safety without urging. The look on the **Bronze Man**'s face was hard.

The sound was long in coming. Thinking the grenade was a rare dud, Monk started to his feet. A **huge bronze hand** pushed him down again.

When it finally came, the sound was distant. A mushy *boom*. Immediately, dust, grit, and few chips of flinty sandstone blew out of the doorway.

The sandstone hovel did not exactly collapse. It was quite stout. But the floor had evidently given way, causing the bricks of the supporting walls to bulge outward and crack. A few fell out clattering and broken. In a few places near the entrance, puffs of rock dust squirted up from fissures in the courtyard masonry.

When the dust settled, Doc Savage began picking up broken blocks.

"Gather as much as you can carry," he directed the others.

They followed him into the palace, their arms heavily laden.

Doc made a pile like a tiny cairn at one edge of the charcoal pit. They arranged several of these so that if anything attempted to emerge from the aperture, it would cause the makeshift piles to rattle and clatter in warning.

Back out in the courtyard, the **Bronze Man** took up a position. He scanned his surroundings.

The others milled about as men will do when uncertain of safety. Fingers caressed triggers nervously. The only noises abroad in the night were the leathery flappings and squeakings of bats. Habeas Corpus crowded close to his master's bandy legs.

"Deuced eerie," Ham said under his breath.

The **Bronze Man** signaled for silence. His ears were hunting sounds.

No one heard anything. Not even Doc Savage. The oppressive air was slowly cooling. The hush of the jungle night was upon them. No birds called. No sounds at all disturbed the ruin of a city unless it was their own careful breathing.

A black string of bats wound up from the south. Their cries worried the nerves and sent flesh to crawling.

A voice cried out.

"Help! Help me!"

It was strained to the point of breaking, that voice.

It came again.

"I can't outrun it! Somebody, anybody help me!"

"Who-the-heck is that?" Monk muttered.

But Doc Savage was already plunging in the direction from which the tangled voice was emanating.

The way was difficult. They soon found themselves climbing a shattered wall and picking through a profusion of **green** bamboo.

Monk Mayfair -- directly behind the **Bronze Man** -- shot out long arms and separated the **green** stuff with such force that the strong jointed shoots splintered and collapsed. The others had it easier as a result.

The way led to a kind of terraced area that formed one of the sides of the hillock. The city, rather, for there was no hillock as such except what was created by the destructive action of centuries of unchecked growth in the stonework battlements of ancient Bankor.

Stumbling down the cracked uncertain steps was a man. A white man! His arms were out flapping like the wings of a pelican trying to gain flight.

Trailing directly behind him and matching his every weaving step was a tatterdemalion thing of **green** silk and glowing dead flesh.

A **limb** of the **Jade Ogre!**

The man was running for his life. He turned to look back once showing pale features strained by **Fear** and **Horror**. Their glimpse of his face was brief. But in the moonlight, it was enough for recognition.

Shad O'Shea was the first to give voice to the man's identity.

"Cripes! **Rex Pinks!**"

Very shortly ...



XXVII -- Likely Story

At the shrill sound of his own name, pallid society reporter Rex Pinks tucked his elbows into his ribs ... threw his head back ... and mustered all the speed of which his gangling body was capable.

As if toying with the man, the trailing detached *limb* scooted after him matching his pace.

Pinks stumbled then. The *arm* dipped lunging like a shark closing in on wounded prey.

Rex Pinks was oblivious to the nearness of doom. Frantic, he flung out an arm to grasp the nearest support. It happened to be a stunted *rattan* palm.

Hooking one arm around the bole, Pinks let his headlong momentum fling him around the tree. The *arm* followed.

For the first time, it showed itself to be not unerring in its intelligence. The disembodied *limb* of *Quon* blindly bumped the palm bole and *hissed* it last.

When the fading *flare* had gone, there remained only a *scorch* mark visible on the palm bole as proof the limb had ever existed.

Doc Savage gained Rex Pinks' side. The colorless reporter was sprawled on a cracked terrace step panting like a fice dog after a hard run.

"Wha-what happened?" he gulped.

"You nearly lost your life," Doc related. No trace of surprise showed in his steady tone.

Pinks' head jerked this way and that.

"Where is it?"

"Gone," the *Bronze Man* told him.

"Gone?"

Doc Savage turned his attention to the *scorch* mark. It was fresh. A tracing finger picked up soot. The stuff felt *warm* to the touch.

Ham Brooks towered over the reporter.

"Just what are you doing here, Pinks?" he demanded in a suspicious voice.

"Give me ... a moment to ... catch my ... breath," Pinks jerked out.

His eyes looked like marbles too long in the sun. Glassy and dull.

"A moment hell!" Chick Alfred complained. "Fancy meeting you here. Just happened to be in the neighborhood?"

"Yeah," Shad put in. "Funny that you should show up just when the *Jade Ogre* took a run-out powder. Funny ... except I don't see no one laughin'."

Monk Mayfair made a succession of faces at the winded reporter.

"So that's Rex Pinks, huh? He don't look like much to me."

The simian chemist reached down and drew the reporter to his feet as if he were an alley cat.

"Didn't you get left behind in Hong Kong?" he growled.

"I...I can explain!" Pinks wheezed.

Doc Savage said: "Start with Hong Kong, Pinks. What happened after you and Dr. Harper left out company?"

"We ordered the cab back to the hotel as you requested," Pinks gasped out. "We were halfway there when Harper changed his mind. He said he couldn't bear to leave your cousin Pat behind. He felt like a coward. He told the driver to turn around. He spoke Chinese, so I didn't know any different."

The pallid reporter seemed to have his wind back. His words tumbled out in a rush.

"We arrived at a place ... I don't know what it was. Some natives met Harper there. They seemed to know him. Or of him."

"Continue," Doc prompted.

"No sooner had they led us inside than we were taken prisoner. I was bound and gagged. The usual stuff -- red **sponges** and lengths of *silk*. Then they clubbed me good."

The reporter felt of his head. He <winced> painfully. *There was no blood visible in his pale hair.*

"When I woke up," he resumed, "I was on a plane. They had me stuffed in a trunk. I heard voices. One of them belonged to Jason Baird. I started kicking the trunk and got clubbed again."

"Later, I woke up in a cell. I didn't know where I was. Brown natives seemed to run the place. Once, a horrible face showed through cell bars. Savage, you gotta believe me! It was the same face I saw that time on the Mandarin! The *Jade Ogre*'s face. It looked at me like a serpent with a carved **jade** head."

Doc asked: "What happened to Dr. Harper?"

"A prisoner, too. He was in the cell beside me."

Doc looked his interest.

"How do you know this?"

"He and I were able to communicate through the wall of the cells. They were thick, but very old. Sound carried through cracks. He said they had taken him too. And get this: **Your cousin Pat was there.**"

Concern *flickered* in the **Bronze Man's** *golden eyes*.

"You saw Pat?"

Rex Pinks shook his head.

"No. I only heard her voice. Once. She was putting up a fuss. I think they were dragging her from her cell."

He hesitated ...

"I... I don't know how to tell you this."

"Go on," Doc urged.

Rex Pinks licked colorless lips with a too-pink tongue.

"They never brought her back.

Moans greeted this. Ham turned ashen. Monk made-and-unmade hairy fists and bared fierce teeth.

Doc Savage stood immobile, a statue of too-calm metal. Only his *eyes* showed life. Tiny angry gales seemed to kick up in their *aureate* depths.

Rex Pinks went on.

"Harper took it hard. He was sure she was killed. He said I was going to be next. He knew these natives. And sure enough, they came for me. But I wasn't killed. They dumped me in a war canoe of some kind and we set out for this place wherever it is. Are we still in China?"

Monk snorted derision.

"Cambodia," Doc supplied.

The expression on Rex Pinks' pale face was resigned.

"Figures," he said. "I didn't tell you one thing."

"Just one?" Chick Alfred jeered.

Pinks ignored this.

"In the lead canoe was the *Jade Ogre*. He sat hunched in the prow like an evil Buddha with his empty sleeves hanging down. They brought us to a point near hear. *Quon* went on ahead. After a while, he came back and forced me to accompany him.

Doc asked: "Forced you? How?"

"I can't describe it. He had no arms to push with. But I could not resist. I was blindfolded at that point."

"This tale is getting' taller," Monk warned.

"I could hear you men talking. And fighting. *Quon* left me. Then he came back and untied my gag and blindfold."

"Untied?"

This from the lawyer Ham Brooks.

"I know how it sounds," Rex Pinks said desperately. "He was behind me all the time. He had no fingers, of course. But the gag fell away and then the blindfold. I found myself in darkness. Something pushed me. Hard. I stumbled forward."

Rex Pinks paused to gulp a deep breath ... then continued hoarsely.

"Naturally, I turned to look. That was when I saw ... *it*."

Doc asked: "It?"

"The *arm*," Pinks breathed, queasy of eye. "*It* was coming straight for me. I turned and ran and kept running. No matter what I did, *it* seemed to follow me, never quite catching up. But I couldn't shake it either. Then I remembered hearing your voice. That's when I yelled. The rest ... the rest you saw."

Rex Pinks buried his haggard face in his hands. His shoulders slumped. His entire attitude was that of a man shrunken by ordeal.

No one spoke for a protracted moment.

Then Chick Alfred snorted: "A likely story!"

Ham Brooks turned to Doc Savage.

"You don't suppose any part of what this wastrel is saying could be true?"

"It's all true," Rex Pinks sobbed.

"I don't believe it," Monk insisted. "Not the part about Pat, anyways. She's a canny egg. No two-bit Asiatic spook could get the better of her!"

*Not surprisingly, Doc added nothing to the growing controversy. His *flake gold eyes* -- chill as diamond points -- bored the night in all directions around them.*

"What now, Doc?" Monk wondered.

"The amphibian. It is time we got back and interrogated the stowaway."

"Stowaway?" Rex Pinks questioned.

"Yeah," said Chick Alfred. "A China boy. Maybe you know him. Or more likely, maybe he knows you."

They began their trek back to the plane. They circled the ruin of Bankor.

Since they were on the western side, they caught a glimpse of the place where the other end of the muddy river emerged from the ruin. It was a grotto of a thing, obscured by hanging vines that wavered like harp strips impelled by the slowly moving river.

"Musta built the place of the river for convenience," Monk ventured.

"If Pinks' story is true," Doc said, "the war canoes slipped up the western portion of the river undetected."

"That means their hideout is somewhere west, too."

Doc turned to Rex Pinks.

"How far would you judge?"

"That's the thing. I couldn't. They stopped every so often. I don't know how to judge distance."

"He's holding out," Chick Alfred grumbled. "I'll bet my share of them **diamonds** that he's in cahoots with this *Quon*."

Sensing easy money, Monk said: "I'll take that bet."

"Aw, I'm just blowin' off steam," muttered Alfred.

"Piker."

They reached the beached amphibian in good time.

Sounds came from the thing. *Movement. Scampering* of feet.

They sank to places of cover.

Capping a flashlight with one **bronze** palm, Doc Savage turned it 'on'. He drew back and sent it arcing toward the ship.

The light pinwheeled ... seemed to appear in mid-air ... then bounced off the windscreen and rolled to dry ground.

Before it hit, *chatterings* and *scamperings* filled the night.

"Sounds like dozens of 'em'," Shad roared.

"Dozens of what?" asked a worried Chick Alfred.

Ham Brooks had an answer for that.

"Monkeys!" he exclaimed. "They're just monkeys."

Doc lifted from behind a boulder and started forward.

From the shadowy hump that was the amphibian, long-tailed monkeys leaped and skittered away. They sought refuge in nearby *jati* trees where they crouched and regarded the humans with wise, winking eyes.

"Too bad," Ham said when they reached their plane. "If we had a net, we might have been able to catch Monk a wife."

"Very funny, shyster," growled Monk who was toting a frightened Habeas Corpus.

The pig's reaction to the sight of what it must have mistaken for a cloud of miniature Monk Mayfairs was to tremble like a dog cast adrift in a rowboat.

"Or do monkeys mate for life?" Ham drawled.

Doc Savage wasted no time in excavating the stowaway from the bow hatch of the plane.

The Chinese Ho had awakened by this time. He looked thoroughly frightened. Despite this, he cracked a weak smile at the sight of the **big bronze man**.

"I feel like gloat Chinese sage," he said.

"Eh?"

"Confuse-ious all over."

When no one laughed at the lame crack, Ho sobered.

"Some straight answers might help your present position. Which is bad," Doc suggested sternly.

"This insignificant one cannot oblige. So solly."

"Try cuttin' out the postcard Chinaman act," Monk said harshly. "Doc told us you drove a hack back in Frisco. So come clean!"

Shad O'Shea suddenly grabbed Rex Pinks by the scruff of his neck and thrust him forward.

"Start with this guy. He look familiar to you?"

"No. Never saw that man before this," inserted the bewildered Ho (apparently finding his r's).

"Hah! One liar covering up for another."

Monk sidled up to Ham and began whispering.

"You were part of this long before I was, shyster. What do you make of all these shenanigans?"

The dapper lawyer was destined never to reply to that question ...

... for something struck the amphibian's windscreen with a muffled *pop!*

So keyed up were their nerves that the sound was at first mistaken for a bullet striking. The windscreen was bulletproof so the fact that it did not shatter surprised no one.

Also, often the sound of a rifle shot comes a fractional second after the note of impact registers upon the ears. But no such sound came this time.

"Down!" Doc Savage rapped.

He yanked Ho off the amphibian and bore him away. The others -- like startled birds -- fanned out in all directions finding shelter.

"What is it, Doc?" Monk asked, his tiny eyes concerned.

The **Bronze Man** indicated the windscreen. In the moonlight, a faintly *greenish* exhalation was rising in the night.

"Poison pellet," he said. "Probably from a blowgun."

Ham hissed: "Anyone see who shot it?"

Rex Pinks jumped up from behind a bush.

"There!" he screeched. "*Quon!*"

Immediately, supermachine pistols began stuttering in the direction of the pallid reporter's pointing finger. Chick Alfred and Shad O'Shea unloosed hot lead from their revolvers.

Leaves were sickled off trees. Foliage was chopped into spinach. Loitering monkeys howled and fled to distant parts.

Emboldened, Monk leaped for the clump of foliage that had been riddled by lead.

He paused ... whirled ... and threw up ungainly arms.

"Nothin' here."

"*He* was right there," Pinks insisted, "staring with that cold *jade* mask of his. There was something sticking out of his mouth too. Like a reed."

"Blowgun?" Doc inquired eying the flustered reporter steadily.

"Yeah. Could be ... Sure!"

"He just piles it on, doesn't he?" Chick Alfred grimaced. "I didn't see nothin'."

As it turned out, none of them saw anything.

"What do you expect?" Monk said after he had ambled back. "That **Quon** is part *spook*, ain't he?"

"I don't believe in *spooks*," Chick Alfred said harshly.

Doc Savage turned to the Chinese humorist Ho.

"That pellet was meant for you," he said. "Care to enlighten us why?"

Ho seemed to shiver as if from a fever.

"He... He-Who-Will-Breathe-Death-Upon-The-Universe fears that I will betray the location of the temple of **Quon**."

"Haw! What a yarn!"

"Temple?" Doc prompted.

"I have never been there," Ho said meekly. "But I am told it is a magnificent place of **jade** fashioned in the form of the head of **Quon** with 4 faces. Each looking out toward one of the 4 compass direction so that **Quon** can behold all his enemies at once, the better to send out his **Limbs of Retribution**."

Despite the flowery absurdity of the man's words, he sounded quite sincere.

"Where is this temple of **Quon**?" Doc asked.

"I do not know."

"Do better than that, guy," Monk warned.

"I do know that it rests in the center of a *mystic* body of water known as *Yook Hoy*," Ho said reluctantly. "**Jade Lake**."

"Jade Lake?"

"**Jade Lake**."

Almost there ...



*... when Maurine Baird and Patricia Savage will be **GANG-IMPREGNATED !***

XXVIII -- *Green Breath* of Death

Before they could set out in search of **Jade Lake**, Doc Savage announced that they would have to get the amphibian into the air. This had been in back of their minds all along. The problem of lifting off the meandering stream.

Ham Brooks took the control after Ho and the pig Habeas Corpus were bundled aboard.

Being the weakest from the standpoint of sheer physical strength, stork-like Chick Alfred was given a supermachine pistol and the task of standing watch.

The **Bronze Man** stationed the others (Monk Mayfair, Rex Pinks, and Shad O'Shea) at useful points around the big amphibian, saying: "When I give the word, put your backs into it."

Doc took the bow. The others had the wing bracing struts. He signaled Ham to release the wheel brakes.

"Push!"

Like Trojans, they gave it their all.

Its wheels free to turn, the amphibian began backing up. Sloshing, the tail slid onto the water, then the streamlined hull.

When the craft had settled onto the river, it looked like a **bronze** duck floating in a stream of milk chocolate. Quite a fantastic sight here in the oppressive silence of the Cambodian night.

They waded out to the open hatch on the port side and clambered aboard. Doc strode to the controls.

The river was sluggish. But there was a current. The manner in which they had shoved off left the "flying boat" wallowing with its bow pointed toward land.

Gradually the current seized it. The craft commended a lazy pirouette.

Doc Savage maneuvered the water rudder getting the blunt nose pointed downstream. The air rudder proved useful in this also.

Soon the craft was bumping and sliding down the chocolate-hued river at a desultory pace.

It was not relaxed in the pilot's compartment, however. The waters may have been sluggish. But the threat of piling up on the stone-bound banks was ever-present. Doc struggled with the rudders, narrowly averting trouble at several junctures.

Where bank-growing trees threatened each wing, Monk and Ham stationed atop each wingtip used hastily-harvested bamboo poles to lever the great ship out of danger.

Once, a quick-thinking Ham Brooks spotted an unavoidable *jati* tree rushing toward them. He brought it down with a saw-like stream of lead from his machine-pistol. The splintery *crash* as it fell reverberated through the Cambodian night.

At one point, they were rounding a particularly treacherous bend in the river nearly a mile downstream of forgotten Bankor. Disaster looked imminent.

Caught off balance, the amphibian began sliding sideways toward the bank where the port air wheel (Doc had left these down as a precaution) was certain to be knocked off by the weed-grown bank. If that happened, they knew that the entire hull could be dashed open.

The **Bronze Man** banged the engines to life. Props clawed air. Booting rudder, he fed gas to the starboard can. It screamed in response but nevertheless began dragging the ship nose-on with the bank.

Avoiding an unwanted beaching was impossible, Doc Savage realized. He sent the craft surging ahead.

The amphibian climbed the bank under its own power as it had before. Doc cut the engines. The ship jerked to a halt.

Silence returned. So did respiration.

"Here we go again," grumbled Monk, the first to leap out on the bank.

They pushed off. This time was trickier. But soon they were floating downriver once again.

Time passed. It was difficult to gauge how much distance was being traversed because the river viper so much.

Monk called down from one wing.

"That Quon has had time to get back to his hideout by now, I'll betcha."

No one took him up on it. They were all thinking the same thing.

Then through the windscreen came into view a particularly long stretch of river. Where before, each bend snaked into view only after they were on top of it, this section for a quarter of a mile in plain sight. It was by no means ruler-straight. But it could be run.

Monk and Ham needed no instruction. They scrambled back into the tri-motor through wing inspection ports.

Doc brought the engines back full tilt. The amphibian lunged forward gathering speed. They held on.

She got on step. The nose lifted. The wings grabbed passing air under them.

Shad O'Shea covered his eyes with huge paws and exclaimed: "Oh mother!"

With less than a rod to spare, they cleared a particularly dense thicket of foliage at the next bend. Dripping muddy water, the hull bottom scraped treetops, giving them a memorable scare.

Doc banked the ship and brought her level. They began to work the tightness from their faces after that.

"Guess I missed spotting that straight stretch before," Monk said to no one in particular.

Ham Brooks took this admission as an opportunity to get in a dig.

"Ape! You should have know that Doc would never set down like that without figuring a way to get up in the air again.

But Monk was too pleased with events to bother returning the insult.

Considering the time they had expended negotiating the sluggish river, the flight back to Bankor was astonishingly brief. The upsurge of bats told them that they had passed over the forlorn place.

"I won't miss that joint," Monk observed, scratching his pet pig thoughtfully. "Right, Habeas?"

The shoat looked up and actually appeared to say: *"Next time, leave the ambulance-chaser behind to chase the bats."*

"Sure thing," said Monk.

Chick Alfred, Shad O'Shea, Rex Pinks, and Ho each bestowed upon the pig a variety of astounded looks.

Ham punctured their incredulity with a single word:

"Ventriloquism."

"Prove it," Monk said good-naturedly.

In fact, the gas was the product of ventriloquism. Monk had practiced a series of touch and hand signals that prompted the pig to assume a believable attitude whenever the apish chemist threw his squeaky voice.

Jade Lake proved to be 3 miles west of Bankor and well-named.

Even by moonlight, it resembled a mirror of highly-polished **jade**. The mirror reflected in gigantic terms a quartet of faces as **green** as the lake itself.

When they first saw it, the effect was as if 4 huge **Quon** faces peered up from a window to Hades set in the very earth itself. This sight brought gasps from Rex Pinks, Shad O'Shea, and even Ho who quailed from the window at the sight of the **emerald** apparition.

"No! No!" Ho shrieked. *"Quon sees me! He knows I have betrayed him!"*

"Cut it out," Chick Alfred said unkindly. "You're gonna give everyone the willies."

As they flew nearer, they spied the temple which squatted in the exact center of the lake of **green** moonlight.

The thing was old and hideously ornate. But each side was dominated by an identical mask made of blocks cut and shaped to create the image of the so-called **Jade Ogre**. These grim countenances were what were reflected heavenward.

"Now we know why it's called **Quon**," Ham interposed.

Doc banked and circled the temple (for it seemed to be just that) and discerned no sign of life.

There was a float moored to a stone jetty that projected from the eastern face of the hideous temple. It obviously served as a seaplane mooring because the plane that had carried Jason Baird, Rex Pinks, and presumably Pat Savage floated beside it like a dragonfly at rest.

"Musta been where that dragon crate tied up when it wasn't layin' for stray planes," Monk opined.

Doc Savage flew over the lake of jade. Its placid surface was dotted with what seemed to be platters of **jade** of a slightly darker hue. None of the group could make out what these were. But they seemed to bloat stationery on the lake's unrippled surface.

"Snares?" Ham wondered.

"Hard to say."

A second pass failed to produce any response from the **Quon** temple which continued to brood in the center of the **green lake**.

"Maybe nobody's home," Monk muttered.

"We might have beat that devil **Quon** back after all," Rex Pinks suggested.

But this optimistic notion was not met with any encouragement.

After a 3rd pass, Doc Savage decided to set down. Preparations were made.

The amphibian came around heeling and drew a line across the lake, breaking the eastern reflection into a thousand shimmering miniatures.

The strange-looking plates proved to have a common-place origin. This came out as they wobbled, impelled by the wake ripples.

"Lily pads," Monk breathed. "I can see tiny **green** frogs jumpin' off 'em. How 'bout that?"

Doc cut the 3 great engines. The air giant settled into a ponderous glide.

Since it was convenient, they made for the big square float. The eastern face of **Quon** regarded them with stony composure.

"Brrr," Monk breathed. "He looks like he ain't afraid of nothin'."

The visage was chiseled from many blocks of some verdigrised stone (not **jade** as Ho had claimed). The eyes were wise slits; the nose a broken snub of rock; and the mouth seemed to form a kind of long door or portal.

Abruptly, this opened, shedding a fan of dim light.

Then as if a giant were exhaling, gushing billows of **green smoke** rolled out of this. They enveloped the finger of a jetty and its float, then crawled ponderously across the water in their direction.

Doc Savage immediately re-engaged the 3 big motors. He threw them into reverse. The amphibian began to back away from the looming **cloud**.

The **cloud**'s forward edge recoiled and was beaten back momentarily. But the **thing** only spread wider, continuing its inexorable progress in their direction.

"That stuff looks to be the same **color** as the gas that almost got our Chink stowaway," Chick Alfred pointed out.

"No doubt it is," Doc bit out.

"It is the **breath** of *Quon*!" Ho shrilled. "We will catch **Jade Fever**!"

"We may not live that long," inserted Ham. "Look!"

His pointing cane indicated the wan portal from which native men (some brown, some yellow) were emerging toting very modern weapons of the military type.

A machine-gun was set on a tripod mount. A brown man squatted behind it. The muzzle began spitting **red** fireflies. The weapon ingested twitching loops of cartridge belt spewing brass empties every which way.

"Is this thing proof against machine-guns?" Rex Pinks demanded.

"Yes" he was told.

"How about gas?" muttered Shad O'Shea.

"No," the **Bronze Man** admitted.

"Then boys," clucked Chick Alfred, "we're finished."

*Like a fog from the Netherworld, the green poison **gas** swept around their helpless craft seeking to envelop it completely.*

Up Next ...



WHORE RAPE



XXIX -- Cupid's Skeleton

At the moment the nodular billows of green *vapor* rolled across the placid expanse of *Jade Lake*, Patricia Savage had her pretty nose jammed to a tiny grilled port that was set in the wall of her cell.

"Oh!" she gasped. "**Doc!**"

She turned her face away from the verdigris-encrusted grille. The honey coloring of her face paled visibly. Her eyes fluttered shut.

They snapped open when the bar of her cell door clattered under fumbling hands. Pat -- still attired in the fetching canary-yellow dress that showed off her sinewy athletic curves to perfection -- shook off her horror.

She moved to the door and prepared herself.

It opened. An old brass lantern came in first suspended by a lean brown hand.

It was the hand which Pat seized. She took hold of the wrist ... lifted ... whirled and brought the arm across her shoulder.

The effort expended was small. But the results were spectacular.

The lean brown Cambodian dropped the lantern on his way to the floor.

The *jujitsu* throw that Pat had inflicted upon the native would have upended a giant. The Cambodian landed on his back and made a very universal *whoof!* sound as air exploded out of his lungs. He writhed feebly.

She snatched up the lantern and turned toward the open door ...

... then discovered looking down the bore of her own six-shooter. Behind it was another Cambodian. And beyond him were 2 more.

Pat quickly calculated her chances of wresting the antique weapon away and promptly discarded the opportunity.

"You allasame come," the Cambodian who had Pat's pistol cracked.

Her command of pidgin English was not good.

"Say again?"

"You come alongside *Quon* chop-chop! Savvy?"

"Allasame to you," said Pat. "But no thank you."

The Cambodian barked a low order.

The others entered and seized her by her bare arms. They escorted her from the cell by force. They left their insensate confederate where Pat had laid him low.

The cells (they were rather like monks' quarters in a monastery) occupied the crown of the hump of a ruin that was the temple of *Quon*.

One way led out of this. The cells were arrayed in a circle around a central area. There was a circular hole in the stone floor. A leaning ladder of lashed bamboo poked up from this.

Pat was invited to descend this ladder in an unmistakable way. The lead Cambodian prodded her back with the six-shooter's muzzle and grunted something coarse.

"Hold your horses," she said maneuvering around the ladder.

A voice called out from one of the surrounding cells.

"Miss Savage!"

"I know that voice!" Pat said. Her tone was not friendly.

"It is I -- *Dr. Harper*."

Pat stepped off the ladder.

"So you're here, too. It serves you right!"

"Whatever do you mean?" asked Dr. Mawson Harper through the heavy ironwood door of his cell.

"I overheard that yarn that you fed my cousin Doc."

"Yarn?"

"The one about our sudden betrothal," Pat said acid-voiced.

"I... I can explain, Miss Savage."

Whether-or-not Dr. Mawson Harper could satisfactorily explain himself, Patricia Savage was destined never to learn.

Behind her erupted an explosion of angry Cambodian mixed with impatient pidgin English. She was given a hard shove!

"All right! I'm going!" she snapped.

Pat made haste to descend the ladder. She jumped the last 4 feet. The Cambodians -- not well organized -- scrambled down after her.

Outside the crumbling walls, the *crackle* of machine-gun fire came again. It reminded the *bronze*-haired girl of the plight of Doc Savage.

"Doc needs me," she muttered under her breath.

Wearing a determined expression on her lovely face, she grabbed the bamboo poles that formed the ladder support and gave a hard yank.

It was a stoutly-built affair. It groaned under the combined weight of 2 Cambodians but held its shape.

The weight of her captors kept her from upsetting the ladder. And the bullet that whistled past her head to *whang* off the stone floor and bury itself in a far wall discouraged any further effort.

Pat stepped back from the ladder. The 2 Cambodians leaped off and seized her by her bare arms.

The third took his time coming down. That was because he did not wish to discharge the six-shooter whose hammer he was holding back with his thumb. The lack of a trigger evidently did not faze the man in the slightest.

XX

The Orientals were almost military-like in their next actions as if they were under orders (which they were as Pat would later learn). No words or threats were spoken as she was quickly stripped naked.





Her eyes were hard as she watched the men almost without emotion unzip their pants. Their organs were not even erect at this point in contrast to her previous two rapes. The men did not seem excited. Rather they were performing an ordered task. They started masturbating in order to get their **penises** ready to go to work ...



There was no passion, no foreplay, nothing “preliminary”. Just methodical **brute force raping** with no “holes” barred!!! That meant even her rectum and mouth were

targets along with her **cunt**. Her prissy **5" high-heels** flailed and screamed in the air with each painful plunge!



"Now spread your legs, you goddamn **Whore**, and let your Master in!"



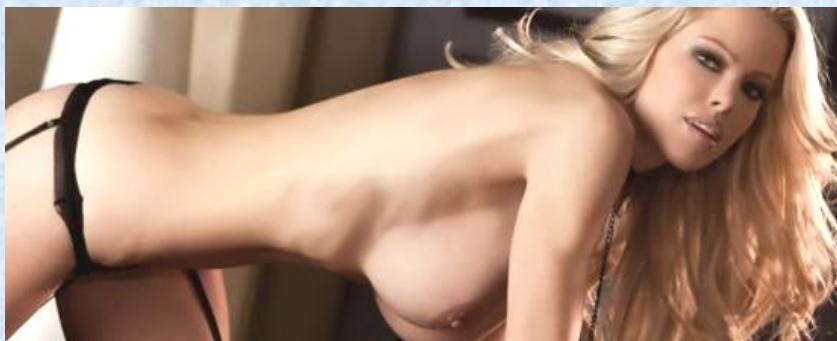


"RIDE ME, WHORE! RIDE ME!"



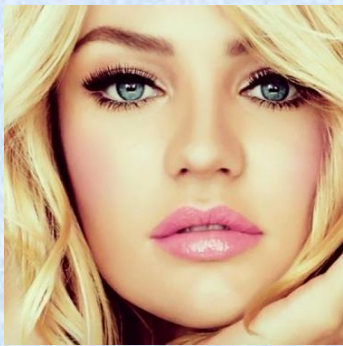
"I want ASS! God do I want Yankee Ass! Give me your ASS, Bitch!"





"Suck this, American Slut!"

"MAKE LOVE TO THIS,
AMERICAN WHORE!"







In a Parallel Universe ...



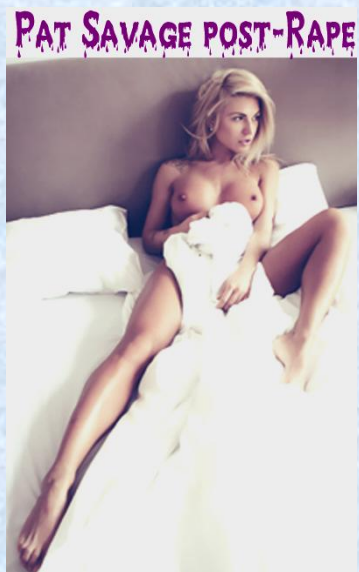
But they weren't quite finished. Some post-rape self-humiliation was ordered. The former **bronze goddess** would soon look like a ***used whore*** ...

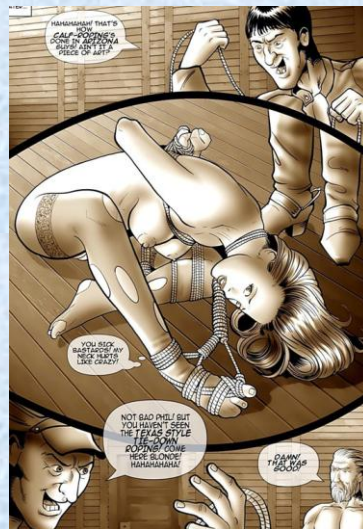
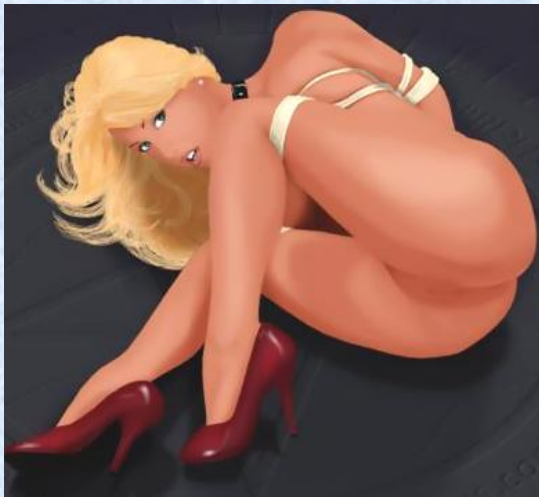
RESTING AFTER HIS
RAPE AND IMPREGNATION





They were finally done with her. The ravishing beauty looked just that. ***Ravished!!!***







[who is the daddy ?!]

But Pat Savage would recover from her sexual abuse. She had an unexplainable remarkable ability to somehow heal herself. Maybe it was the Savage bloodline. It would only be a matter of weeks for her stretched-out vagina and rectum to return to their original firmness. She would be virgin-tight again! But could she escape future rapes and gang-bangs????

Pat allowed herself to be escorted to an ornate door.

This was opened for her. Darkness lay within. She was urged to enter.

No sooner had she stepped within than a **green** light blazed into life at a point along the high ceiling. This shot a **jade** ray toward a spot on the far wall.

The green spotlight disclosed a raised dais of sandstone blocks. Another spotlight (this was **yellow**) came to life at another point.

A **throne** was illuminated. Unlike the dragon affair that had been discovered in the Hong Kong warehouse, this was a rude affair of wood. It was more a great plate. Like a second dais set perhaps 2 feet atop the one on the floor. It was considerably smaller and yet was still quite wide. She judged it to be no less than 5 feet in circumference.

There were silken cushions set in the center of the wood dais. But no one sat on it.

On either side squatted glaring brass lions such as populate Chinese mythology. Between them, **jade dragons** were set in the floor in a row. They gleamed like tiny neon letters under the weird light.

Another light added to the garish display. This one threw **blue** luminance on a curtain back of the raised dais. Dragons squirmed in-and-out along its folds.

Her eyes squinted against the harsh unpleasant light. Pat braced herself for the figure that she assumed was about to emerge from behind the dragon curtain.

A long moment passed during which the only sound in the room was the shallow-but-rapid breathing of her captors. The machine-gun rattle had died.

The lack of commotion made her shiver.

"Oh Doc," she sobbed.

Then another presence began to enter the chamber of a throne room.

The first sounds were a dry *rattling* like small stones falling.

Pat tried to see into the rays of light. But they crossed weirdly making patterns of **blue** and **green** and **yellow**. At one point, the **blue** and **yellow** rays crossed to create a bright slice of **green**.

The lights were being manipulated. They converged on the spot where the silken cushions were piled in the center of the ironwood dais. **Blue**, **green**, and **yellow** fans were merging to become an ultra-**green** that hurt the optic nerves.

Pat looked away. Then the *rattly* sound came again.

All around her, her Cambodian captors sank to hands and knees and bumped their foreheads against the cold stone flags.

They began to chant: "*Quon ... Quon ... Quon ...*"

And from somewhere came a reverberant clangor of a gong.

Bong ... bong ... bong!

Pat would ordinarily have made a move then. In another second, she might well have.

But just then, 2 slippered feet appeared within the **jade** confluence of light.

They did not appear where she expected. Nothing stepped through the curtain.

But at the topmost point where the lights merged, there was a zone of black. It was down from this that the slippers came.

There were ornate, almost feminine. They seemed to dance in mid-air as if the light were providing support.

Leggings came into view. The calves were lean. They worked spasmodically as they lowered themselves into view.

A fall of some shimmery fabric appeared covering the jerking leggings with sudden modesty. It was **green** (or appeared such in the lambent **jade** light).

Straining to see above the cone of illumination, Pat made out the ceiling then. And the place from which the figure was issuing.

There was a small hole in the ceiling. Too small to allow the passage of a grown human being, even of the diminutive Cambodian variety.

The **thing** that was oozing out of this aperture, however, appeared to be a full-sized human being. Still, it extruded down as if no bones supported its thin frame.

She watched in horror as the gaunt silk-covered chest worked downward. A sleeve -- empty and wrinkled -- dropped free. Then another.

Then the entire being abruptly fell.

Pat recoiled then.

The **thing** plopped into the nest of cushions like a **green** squid that had been hauled up on the deck of a ship.

"**Quon!**" a voice breathed.

"**Yook Kweitzu!**" another said, addressing the maimed creature by its other name.

Pat had no choice but to look. Even though she had encountered the armless ogre of a **thing** before, she was not prepared for the sight of it.

It squatted with legs tucked under amid the profusion of silken cushions. **Its** sleeves dangled like withered limbs, wide-mouthed cuffs lost in the cushions.

The face that stared at her was smooth and polished. A visage of **jade** with unwinking slit eyes. Atop the **thing's** head towered the brass crown not unlike some fantastic drill bit.

Midway up this impossibly ornate shaft, the tiny jade faces that stared out in 4 directions mimicking the 4-featured temple of **Quon** gleamed in the night a coloring so **green** it seemed impossible.

The slit eyes of both forward-facing countenances swiveled in Pat Savage's direction. Their gaze was stern, inhuman. The effect was that of a being who possessed the power to see in all directions.

"Greeting, *Chingtun Mao*," hissed the *Jade Ogre*. "In my language, *Chingtung Mao* means '**Bronze Hair**'."

Perhaps because she had not gotten hold of her nerve, Pat said nothing to this. Her small fists clenched at her side.

"I had thought that possessing you would deter the one called 'Doc Savage' from following me to my temple."

Pat found her tongue then.

"A lot you know about Doc, you...you human turtle!"

"Still your tongue!" the *Jade Ogre* shrielled. "I was old when your ancestors wore the skins of animals for warmth."

"According to you."

"It is true. In the Chinese tongue, I am what is called *fei lu fei ma*. Neither horse nor donkey. Once I was an ordinary man. Like other men."

The twisted *creature* shrugged its stumps which were decorated by crescent moon epaulets.

"Through misfortune, I have become what you see now. My true face is too terrible for human sight. But in my heart, I am a man. And the man that I was now looks upon you with favor."

Pat made a face. *The evident revulsion she felt at hearing those words said more than any sounds she might have made.*

"What have you done with Maurine Baird, you... you stone-faced gargoyle?" she demanded.

"She lives. But she no more interests me. I look favor upon you now."

Pat lifted her firm chin.

"Then let her go."

The *Jade Ogre* did not reply to that demand.

Instead, he said: "Previously, I had my servants take you from your cell and put you in a place of comfort. But you refused the hospitality of the *Jade Ogre*."

"I refused to wear that... that dancing-girl dress if that's what you mean," Pat retorted.

"It would have become you. It belonged to a dancing girl whose beauty was unrivaled. Even if her heart held treachery."

The tones of the *Jade Ogre's* voice mingled sadness and bitterness. His head bowed as if in unhappy reflection. Some trick of the ultra-**green** light produced a downcast effect in the set **jade** features that looked out in all directions.

Abruptly the head lifted, the tall brass crown coming level again.

"I like the dress I'm wearing thank you very much," Pat bit out.

The stumps rolled again in resignation.

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"I fail to understand your reluctance," the *Jade Ogre* responded. "Do you not remember what some of my servants did to you just recently? How you were used as a **common whore** such as would be found in the back alleys of the Orient? That was to strip away any last remnants of womanly dignity you had so that you would be a proper companion for me."

"And how do you define 'proper companion'?" asked Pat angrily.

"It is quite simple," the *Jade Ogre* answered. "Someone who will do my bidding without reserve or hesitation. For example, if myself or anyone I choose were to come into a room with you there and he-or-they were to **unzip their pants**, I would expect you to **immediately go down on your knees while removing your bra**. No words need to be exchanged. Their actions alone would be your cue."

Pat sneered: "Fat chance of that happening, Mr. Pervert! I'm too good for you or anyone else!"

The *Ogre* nodded his head sadly. "I was afraid you'd say that. It is obvious that my men somewhat failed in their assignment to turn you into – if you'll pardon the term – a most willing **Slut**. But perhaps I can succeed where they did not."

He watched her flinch and narrow her eyes.



“I attempted to transform the Baird woman into a **whore** for all who serve the *Jade Ogre*. She was like you and resisted my efforts quite vigorously. But it took a toll on her and unfortunately she no longer is appealing to me. That’s why I selected you.”

“Spare me the 'honor',” Pat said sarcastically.

“Let me disclose what happened to her and perhaps you might be reasonable and reconsider ...”



The *Jade Ogre* said: “I wanted Maurine Baird to be completely **defiled**. Completely **degraded** so that she would be the perfect **Slut-Wife** for me.”





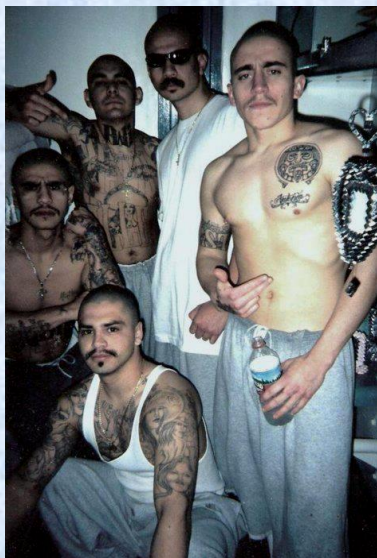
"My servants went to extreme lengths," he continued, "to see that this transformation would occur. They are good men. I handpicked them personally. Each one has been incarcerated many times for **raping** everything from schoolgirls to grandmothers."

He added with a cruel smirk: "But I can assure you that the Baird **bitch** did not appreciate all their hard work."



"My devoted servants spared no effort and showed no mercy," the *Jade Ogre* went on, "to accomplish this task."

"You are such a bastard!" Pat glowered.





"Yes, in a matter of mere days," the *Jade Ogre* continued, "the Baird woman was transformed from a would-be prim&proper starlet to a quivering sex-slave **Whore**. Oh how she moaned when each new **penis** would enter her."



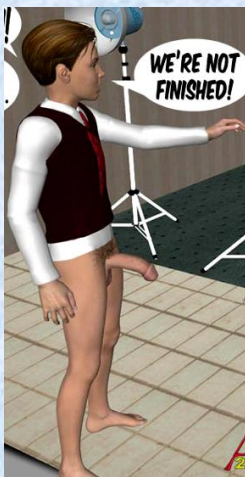


The *Jade Ogre* said: "I spared no effort to break her feminine will. Some **young teenage boys** also had their way with her body."





"She was quite the most willing **slut**," the **Jade Ogre** bragged.

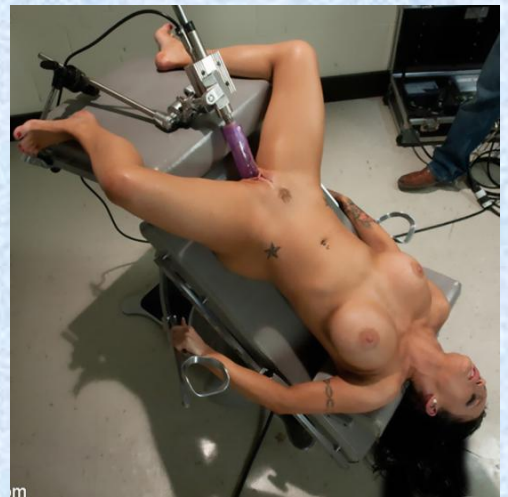
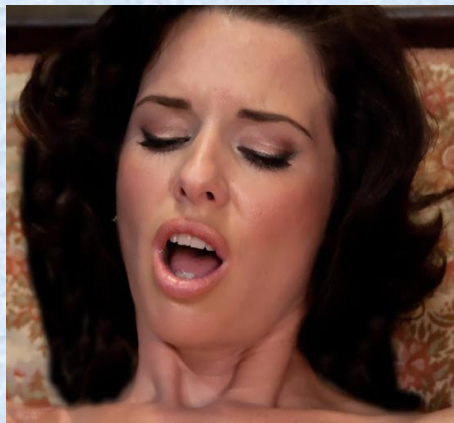




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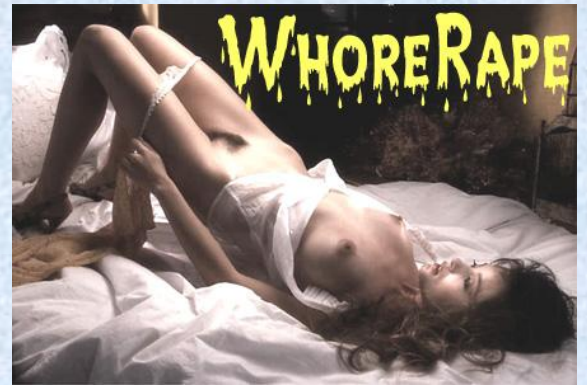


The *Jade Ogre* added: "And we also used artificial devices to break the Baird-whore's will."





“Unfortunately,” the *Jade Ogre* continued, “she did not withstand her ordeal that well and ... Just say that I was just not attracted to her afterwards. She looked too 'used'. Plus the stupid **bitch** got pregnant and **fat**.”





Pat seemed between extreme **anger** and agonized **sympathy**. She didn't know which emotion would prevail. But the decision was reached when the **Jade Ogre** said:

"But I feel certain that **You** are a better physical specimen and would be more capable of serving me and my followers. As you know, my men can be very horny at times."

"Don't touch me, you **green** Bastard!" Pat warned. "Those perverted assholes of yours have done enough to me already!"

"They may have, American **Bitch-Whore**," the **Jade Ogre** said with an evil smirk. "But I have not."

Pat felt something prick her neck. Almost immediately she started getting *woozy*.

."

"*Damn you ...*" she started to say when she realized it was a small dart containing a drug.

The **Jade Ogre** licked his lips crazily as he watched the **bronze**-haired goddess being quickly stripped.

"The sedative will make you incapable of resisting," he lectured. "But rest assured, my feisty **Slut**, you will feel everything."

He paused for a few seconds ... then added \:

"Plus I think I will take some photographs to commemorate this moment. But try not to orgasm. We don't want you to like it."

He let out a *raspy* laugh that chilled Pat to the bone.



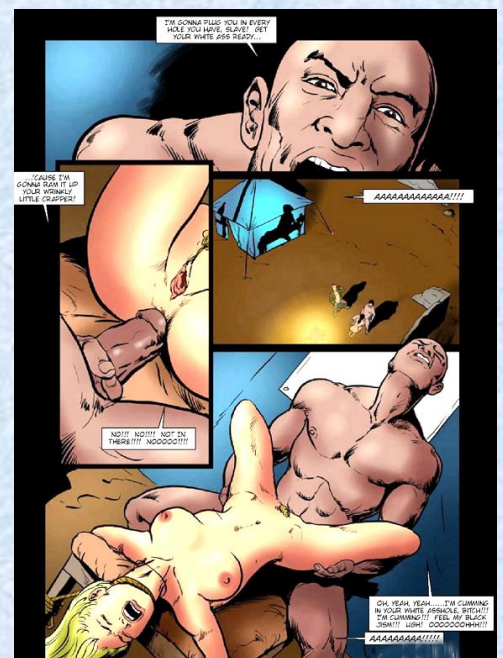
Pat was groggily semi-conscious when she heard the *Jade Ogre* command: "Bring in some of those machines. Perhaps they will teach this Yankee **slut** some manners when she speaks to her future **Master**."

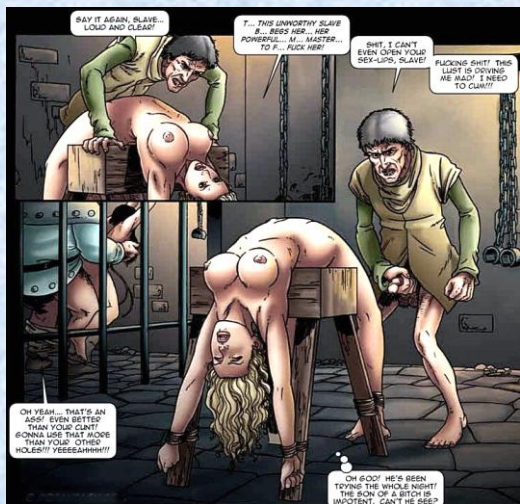
Pat uttered a low *groan* of protest. She saw movies of what those machines did to poor Maurine. Her eyes were flashing wildly as they put into position and mated her to the unfeeling mechanical '**Rape-All**' devils.





Perhaps they had done this before. The **Jade Ogre** uttered no vocal commands. But after the evil machines had thoroughly reamed out their **bronze** beauty, some of the men removed her and proceeded to have their way with her. They were indeed **VERY horny** after watching all the mechanical *rapings*.







The *Jade Ogre* saw that Pat was regaining full consciousness. He cackled "Maybe that will teach you to respect your **Masters**. Now clean yourself up. You look and smell like a **filthy Whore**."

Pat radiated *anger* as her limbs began moving of their own accord again. If **HATE** could somehow be a force of Nature, all of them in that evil room would be dead!



"But wait! I almost forgot something, the *Jade Ogre* said. "Something that I'm sure your American pussy will thoroughly enjoy. Now where is that puppy?"



Pat groaned loudly as she felt the dog suddenly stiffen ... and then shoot glob-after-glob of *puppy-making sperm* up into her fertile womb.



"Wonderful! Truly marvelous," the *Jade Ogre* congratulated Pat. "You are quite the **whore**, aren't you? I think you would fuck anything."





[another **Whore** gets **knocked-up**]

The **Jade Ogre** continued his lecture as if Pat's degradation over the last 2 hours had not occurred at all. He was very nonchalant as he began speaking ...

"It is a lean dog that shames its master. But no matter. There will be time for you to discover the goodness that still resides in this crippled old form. Now that the one you call '**Doc Savage**' is no more."

"Doc dead? I don't believe it! Not for a minute! Doc followed me this far. I don't know how but he did. And bet your boots he has plans for you!"

"He is dead. I have **breathed** on him and all who travel with him. Those who fill their lungs with the **breath** of **Quon** breathe no more afterward."

"Bunk!"

The **Jade Ogre** shook his unwieldy head.

"Their bodies lie at the bottom of **Jade Lake** along with the bones of a thousand before them. All who ever attempted to breach the temple of **Quon**, Ruler of **Quon**, Blessed of **Siva**, The-One-Destined-To-Exhale-Death-Upon-the-Universe."

There was a quality to the voice emanating from the jade face that was convincing. It made Pat Savage shrink inside her skin.

"I don't...I don't believe it!" she gasped, her breathing ragged.

"It is true."

Pat Savage had taken an involuntary step backward. This brought her to a position between two of the kowtowing servants of **Quon**, the **Jade Ogre**. The backwash of light from the **jade** spotlights glinted off the **six-shooter** clenched in the hand of one of them.

She saw it. She made her move then.

Diving for the weapon, she simultaneously thrust a knee into the jaw of the Cambodian who had possession of the pistol.

The **crunch** that the jaw made was loud. The man upset. His hands flew out and with them the six-shooter.

Pat snagged it ... rocked back on the hammer ... and came up aiming.

To her astonishment, the **Jade Ogre** had found his feet. He stood before the upraised *dais* tall, proud, unafraid. His empty silk sleeves swayed as if stirred by air currents.

"Fool! I am immortal! Unkillable!"

"I aim," Pat said fiercely, "to bark you good."

She let the hammer fall.

The **report** bounced off the high ceiling. It was the only sound for a long moment. There was no other. No thud of impact with flesh. No ricochet sound bouncing off stone wall.

Pat switched hands and began fanning the hammer. She had the muzzle leveled low at a disabling spot -- the creature's skirted knees.

The Cambodians found their wits at that point. But they were too late.

While they were getting organized, Pat emptied all 5 remaining chambers into the unflinching figure of *Quon*.

And from the set lips of the polished jade face burst forth low-toned mocking laughter.

XXX -- Contagion

Out on the mirror-like disk that was **Jade Lake** the green monster of **vapor** flinched and roiled, spread out questing tentacles of bilious hue as the tri-motor's props fought to dispel the deadly stuff.

Doc Savage, his aides Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks as well as Chick Alfred, Shad O'Shea, Rex Pinks, and the stowaway Ho were crowded into the amphibian's control cabin.

They all saw that the cloudy green mass could not be held at bay forever. Not the way it was insinuating itself around the blast of prop-driven air.

"Gas masks!" Monk howled.

"Are there enough to go around?" Ham wondered.

"No," Said Doc. "And gas masks would not help."

"What do you mean?" Rex Pinks said dumbfounded. "It's a gas isn't it? If we don't breath it, it can't hurt us."

"Doc said: "No."

The **Bronze Man** gunned the ship around endeavoring to position the great plane as far from the gaseous **exhalation** as he could.

"Break out boats!" he rapped.

Monk leaped back into the cabin and popped a ceiling hatch that gave access to the high wing. Then recklessly (given the presence of the 3 big propellers), he scrambled to the nose hatch where the collapsible boats were stowed.

The apish chemist got one of these out. He unfolded it, set the locking struts, and threw it into the water. It made a *splash* which instantly drew shots from the temple of Quon.

The **vapor** was opaque enough to inhibit careful shooting. Still, bullets whupped all about the amphibian. The engine noise was evidently being used as a marksman's guide too.

Doc chopped power. He whipped from his seat. The look in his **eyes** was liked hardened gold. All gave back before him.

"Take weapons," he rapped.

The **bronze giant** accosted Ho roughly.

"Your life is at stake. Will you throw in with us?"

Ho bobbed his head in a very Oriental fashion.

"Y-yes."

"Hers," said Shad O'Shea producing a revolver. "Take this."

Ho accepted the weapon gratefully.

They went out a side hatch and cropped into the weirdly *green* water. Disturbed, the tiny *emerald* frogs scampered along lily pads in fright.

It was then that they saw the "frogs" were not frogs at all.

"What the hell?" Chick Alfred said, poised at the hatch. "Those things look like hands! Walkin' hands!"

"No time!" Doc said and gave the stork-like gunman a hard shove.

The others followed them into the water. Ham went last after first pausing to scoop up the frightened porker Habeas Corpus.

"Daggonit!" Monk called from the nose. "Snap it up! That *pea soup* is almost here!"

Another boat splashed into the water hurled by powerful simian arms.

They struck out for the boats. Monk leaped from the amphibian's nose, making a gargantuan splash that startled "frogs" from lily pads all over Jade Lake. These did not enter the water but scuttled from pad-to-pad for the dark shore.

Chug-chug-chug-chug!

The sound of lead hitting the lake surface was like an evil rain. Spray lanced high in the air. With frenzied strokes, they finally reached the boats.

"What good will these do?" panted Shad O'Shea.

His eyes grew wide at the boiling *wall of green* that was almost upon them.

"We can't outrun that stuff!"

Grimly, Doc Savage laid hands on the outboard motor of a boat. He gave the pull cord a hard yank. It produced a sputter, then died.

He whipped it out again. This time, it caught.

Then the *Man of Bronze* did a strange thing.

He gave the boat a 2-handed push sending it into the *green cloud*, its screw idling.

"What'd you do that for?" Chick Alfred screamed.

Without answering, Doc upended the remaining boat.

"Under," he clipped.

Rex Pinks stared blankly. "Huh?"

"I get it!" Monk exclaimed.

There was no time to explain the **Bronze Man**'s stratagem. He, Monk, and Ham took control of the situation.

They began shoving heads under water. They were not exactly cooperated. Ho in particular fought back.

Doc simply dived in place and got hold of the Chinese stowaway's ankles. Ho's head vanished beneath the lake water.

When the sputtering Celestial could breathe again, he found himself treading water in darkness.

"We are," Doc explained to those who required explanation, "under the boat."

"What good will that do?" Rex Pinks howled.

"It is bulletproof in addition to watertight. The **vapor** -- which is fatal on contact with the skin -- cannot reach us here."

There was silence while this morsel of information settled into their agitated brains.

A bullet striking the metal shell made a metallic snapping that induced the ears to ringing.

When the sound abated, Chick Alfred growled: "We ain't exactly long on oxygen what with 6 of us under this cockleshell."

Doc explained: "Judging from past experience, the **vapor** neutralizes itself quite rapidly."

"What is it anyway?" Rex Pinks demanded. "You said it isn't gas."

"It is **Jade Fever**," Ho said hollowly.

"You said that before," Doc stated. "What do you mean?"

"Yeah," Shad O'Shea rasped. "Spill it, guy!"

"A disease," said Ho. "**Quon** controls it. For many weeks now, he has been terrorizing certain areas of Cambodia and China, infecting rich men with **Jade Fever**."

"Why would **Quon** do that?" Ham asked.

"The first to die were examples to others. Then **Quon** inflicted **Jade Fever** on certain persons who had been secretly inoculated before. **Quon** do this by bribing servants of these rich men. They would turn **green** like others but not die. **Quon** would tell these men that their lives were in **his** hands."

Doc said: "Ransom, eh?"

In the gloom, Ho nodded.

"They would pay to receive cure. A second dose was needed. The first only slowed the *Jade Fever*."

Ham demanded: "Where do you fit into this, fellow?"

There was a long pause. Then Ho cleared his throat noisily.

"I was the one who *Quon* enslaved through Jade Fever. One day, I turn *green*. *Quon* appear before me and demand that I do certain things or I would die. I am ashamed to say that I did these things. One of them was to stow away on your plane and place tube that contained death."

"You have been given the second cure?" Doc asked.

"No," Ho croaked. "And now that I have betrayed *Quon*, I have no hope. I will die soon. I do not wish to die. Not that way."

There was something in the man's tone toward the last. A despair that communicated itself to everyone under the upturned metal boat.

The *click* of the hammer being <cocked> was so loud that possibly only Doc Savage understood its significance.

The tiny space *exploded* with noise, violence, and the stink of cordite fumes.

"Doc!" This from Monk.

"What happened?" Ham shrilled.

It was doubtful that any of them heard the shouted question. Their ears were stopped up by concussion.

Only Doc Savage reacted. And he was too late.

Reaching out in the darkness, he grasped Ho's shirt front. The Celestial was already sinking.

The *Bronze Man* felt the heavy wetness crawling down Ho's head onto his bare arms. He knew that there was too much *blood* and other matter that was not blood for the unfortunate Chinese to be numbered among the living.

Reluctantly, Doc released the limp form.

It sank without ceremony.

Another bullet struck the boat. It brought winces all around.

There was surprisingly little bullet threat. Evidently, the empty motorboat that Doc had sent in the direction of the snipers had drawn the lion's share of their wrath.

Doc Savage produced his generator flash and <thumbed> it 'on'. Chick Alfred cursed the sudden glare.

The **Bronze Man** waited until his ears cleared and addressed the others.

"Our air is running low," he said.

"We're sittin' ducks if we try swimming' for it," Chick Alfred said.

"The firing has ceased," Doc told him. "No doubt the *Jade Fever* contagion is dissipating as well."

"Can we count on that?" Rex Pinks muttered.

"No. We must reach shore before our air runs out."

"Which is any second now," Shad O'Shea grumbled.

The flash <winked> out.

"Stay with the boat," Doc ordered just before he submerged.

A moment later, Monk -- who had the stern to himself -- was bumped on the head.

"Hey! We're movin'!"

"You dope!" Ham said impatiently. "Doc grabbed the painter."

Treading water, they moved with the boat which was being impelled by the **Bronze Man**. It was tricky work. But they managed to stay with the upended turtle of metal.

"Hey! Are we going toward the shore or the temple?" Rex Pinks asked suddenly.

Ham considered.

"I judge toward the temple." "Isn't that going from the frying pan into the fire?"

"Do not forget. Our task is to rescue Pat, Jason Baird, and his sister Maurine if she is here," the dapper lawyer (who was hardly "dapper" now) pointed out.

"Not me! I'm out to save my own skin!"

At that point, Rex Pinks submerged himself.

Monk -- who was closest -- made a wild grab for the colorless society reporter. He managed a prodigious amount of splashing given the fact that one arm was encumbered by his pet pig. But he was forced to give it up.

"He got away," Monk muttered.

"Good riddance I say," said Chick Alfred.

"Yeah," added Shad O'Shea. "More air for us."

"Maybe we should drown that infernal pig next," Ham suggested.

The boat bumped something. Everyone held their breath.

"What was that?" Chick Alfred demanded.

"Float," ventured Ham.

Shad O'Shea muttered nervously: "Do we make a break for it or what?"

"Wait for Doc," Monk admonished.

They waited. They did not wait long.

A light blossomed into a radiant flower under their kicking feet.

A **bronze** head shedding water more quickly than seemed normal popped into view. The light disclosed Doc Savage's grim features.

He showed no strain from his long exertion. The **Bronze Man** was capable of holding his breath for extended periods of time. It was a skill he had learned from the pearl divers of the South Seas.

"Where is Pinks?" he demanded.

"Lit out," Monk said.

*A rare frown warped the **bronze giant's** lips.*

"Follow me," he said.

They dived.

The lake bottom -- very silty -- was not many feet below. They wriggled through the **greenish** water (some species of alga seemed to impart a tint that moonlight made a quicksilver **green**) after the **Bronze Man**.

They waded out of the water onto the northern face of the temple of **Quon** ("face" having a double meaning in this case).

The first thing they noticed were the bodies. Cambodians and other Oriental riffraff.

"You bump 'em?" Chick Alfred asked low-voiced.

"Anesthetic gas," Doc explained.

"Yeah," Alfred said harshly. "I see 'em breathin' now that you mention it."

He yanked a long-barreled revolver from his trousers.

"Watch me finish off these heathens."

Shad O'Shea raised a big paw and swatted the gun out of his chief's hand.

"What's eatin' you?" Alfred demanded hotly.

"He has the right idea," Doc said quietly.

Alfred grunted. "No killin'? Soft, I calls it."

"A shot would alert those inside," Doc pointed out.

They were hunkered at the edge of the lapping water. The temple was built on a kind of sandstone-block plate. The blocks appeared to be of as ancient workmanship as those that had composed the ruin that was Bankor. Weeds grew in cracks. The outermost stones were moist with lake water. Moss made soft *squishing* protestations under their weight.

Monk peered up at the great brooding face that loomed above them ... paused ... and squinted his piglike eyes. Simultaneously, Habeas Corpus squirmed in his arms as if about to emit a piggy squeal.

The apish chemist grasped the shoat's snout, squeezing off any outcry. Then he emitted one of his own.

"Hey! I see things movin' over the brow of that face yonder."

" 'Things'?" Ham asked.

Monk gulped. "They ... look like ... hands!"

This brought a widening of eyes all around. They scanned the crumbling *green* (it was the result of drippings from moss shoved into the chinks and cracks to hold the blocks in place) for signs of animation.

They saw three of the things that had filled Monk Mayfair with such frog-mouthed disbelief.

They indeed resembled hands. Disembodied hands that managed a kind of nervous locomotion by frantic employment of their digital extremities. They scuttled up the face of *Quon* and sought cracks where they retreated and hid.

"I don't believe it," Ham burst out.

"There were hands I tell you!" Monk hissed. "Crawling and with nothin' attached to 'em. Looked like they had a million fingers, too."

"Eight," Doc said.

"Hugh?"

"You saw 8 limbs."

At that point, Chick Alfred's nerve wore thin.

"I had enough of this!" he growled. "I'm for bustin' into this spooky joint."

Suiting action to words, he started forward.

Had Doc Savage been stationed closer to the stork-like gunman, it was conceivable that he might have saved him.

Alfred lifted off the moist stones and waded into the weeds that grew close to the lapping waters.

He had taken no more than 4 steps (possibly only 3) when he threw out his arms in the fashion of a man who realizes he is about to lose his footing.

Came a *sizzling* sound. The pungent odor of burning hair.

Chick Alfred flung himself across the weeds. He jumped and twitched on his stomach as if endeavoring to get up.

"Chick!"

Doc blocked horse-faced Shad O'Shea.

"One side, guy," O'Shea growled. "Chick's my partner."

The big adventurer started to work around the **Bronze Man**.

Doc shifted, getting in his way.

"Last time you caught me by surprise," Shad warned. "It won't be that way again."

Doc Savage showed that 'surprise' had nothing to do with his earlier vanquishing of big Shad O'Shea by taking hold of the man's thick wrists. **Bronze** fingers *squeezed* inexorably.

Sweat popping up on his forehead, O'Shea attempted to move his arms. To his astonishment he could not. All he managed was to flap his elbows like a turkey. His wrists might as well have been sunk into stone. Or concrete.

There was no trace of strain or exertion on the *bronze giant's* *metallic* features etched by Cambodian moonlight.

After a moment, Shad O'Shea simply sat down in place. Doc Savage allowed this. By this time, Chick Alfred had stopped twitching.

"Wait," Doc said.

He melted away ...

... then came back carrying a dry stick which he used to prod the weeds. All eyes were on him.

In the moonlight, they saw the **copper wire**. It was set in a series of tiny posts of nonconducting ceramic material that presumably surround the tiny stone isle that supported the temple of Quon.

"**Electrified** wire," Monk breathed.

"Alfred didn't have a chance," Ham added. "Looks like Doc saved your life, O'Shea."

Shad O'Shea buried his long dray horse of a face in his paws. He said and did nothing for many moments. Unless one counted the agitation that nerves brought to his limbs.

When his hands came away, his eyes were dry. He looked up at the **Bronze Man** with new-found respect in his mournful eyes.

"You saved my life, Savage. I ain't forgettin' that."

"It is time to move," Doc said firmly.

They stepped over the wire. It was low enough to be concealed from the unwary by the weeds but sufficiently high to catch toes and ankles. The latter was the fate that had befallen Chick Alfred. Once its existence was known, it ceased to be a threat.

"Some temple!" Monk muttered to no one in particular. "It's got electricity, seaplanes ... you name it!"

With their gazes on the stone face of **Quon** for signs of the disembodied hands that haunted its crevices, they worked their way to a point under the stern-chiseled mouth from which the deadly green vapor bearing **Jade Fever** had been exhaled.

There were no windows apparent on the lower portion of the stone temple. Higher, the 4 sets of eyes stared out at the 4 quarters. They fancied that these shadowed orbs doubled as windows. It was not possible to be certain of this, however.

With Doc Savage leading, they crept around to the eastern face from which the **Quon** minions had poured forth. Their weapons lay about here-and-there. The big military machine-gun sat on its splayed tripod with a snoring Cambodian prostrated behind the trips.

Shad O'Shea fell upon this. He hefted the weapon out of its mount and turned, grinning.

"Brother, let me open the way for you," he said broadly.

"Leave it," Doc admonished.

Losing his grin, O'Shea meekly eased the big weapon to the stonework.

"Looks like that lug learned who his betters are," Monk muttered.

The door that formed a mouth lay open. It also lay in *shadow*. It was not very inviting.

Doc Savage started in. The others followed gingerly.

They crept along a kind of stone gullet with supermachine pistols sweeping before them.

Doc's hands were empty. He did not believe in carrying firearms. He felt that too much reliance on such weapons made a man all-the-more helpless when relieved of them.

"I'm reminded of Jonah," Monk muttered while feeling the stonework with curious fingers.

At the other end of narrow neck of stone, a stout door hung open. Something scuttled out of their way.

"Another of them **walkin' hands**," Monk breathed.

"It did look like a hand!" an astonished Ham Brooks sputtered.

The hand or whatever it was had melted into a chink in a shattered floor brick.

They passed the crack warily and slipped up to the door.

An open lay before them. Not much light spilled. So the gunshot **report** seemed all the louder in the confined murk.

"A shot!" Shad O'Shea exclaimed.

"Pat!" Doc rapped. "That sounds like her cannon."

The **sound** came again. 5 times.

And Doc Savage bolted into the murk of the temple of *Quon*, his bronze mask of a face like something that been cast of cold terrible metal.

XX



XXXI -- Throne Room Fight

Doc Savage -- mighty *Man of Bronze* -- drove toward the echoes of the flurry of gunshots. He was a *specter of metal*.

There was a door. Stout, of ironwood, unbelievably ornate.

It was not barred. Nevertheless, Doc plowed through it with a *cabled* shoulder knocking it off its top hinge pin.

The scrape-bang of the door jumping open drew all eyes toward the fabulous figure of the *bronze giant*.

Poised amid a tangle of Cambodians, Pat Savage looked up. Her eyes were wide, her mouth open.

She pointed toward the weird *jade* light which was bathing the wood dais on which the misshapen figure of *Quon* -- the legendary *Jade Ogre* -- stood with thin sleeves jittering.

"Doc!" she cried. "Bullets...bullets don't hurt it!"

Then the Cambodians fell upon the *bronze*-haired girl.

Still moving, Doc Savage veered toward the human entanglement. He began pulling half-naked brown natives off his cousin.

Pat employed the empty six-shooter to brain a man who had leeches about her waist in an effort to drag her down. The Cambodian squawked and released his hold, then collapsed.

The others charged in then. Their eyes went to the weird *green* figure before the dais.

"**There he is!**" Monk howled lustily.

The homely chemist loved to give vent to his leathery lungs when in action.

"Get him!"

All at once, gunshots made a pandemonium of **thunder** in the *green*-lit throne room.

Supermachine pistols emitted their extended bullfiddle **moan**. A big revolver in Shad O'Shea's paw jumped and blew out saffron spikes of fire.

And standing in his *jade* lambency as if protected by unholy light stood the *Jade Ogre*. Unhurt. Unflinching. Taunting.

He was still standing there when their weapons ran empty.

Monk and Ham fell to unsnapping ammo drums and clipping new ones in place. O'Shea dug into pockets for fresh shells.

Then, one limp green limp *sleeve* began to stir. There was no hissing accompaniment this time. No sound at all.

"Hop to it!" Monk yelled. "It's about to fling another of them dang witch *claws*!"

They got organized and raised their own weapons. A murderous *racket* ensued. Brass empties rained about their feet which threatened footing.

They saw the wide sleeve come up to shoulder level. Out poked bony questing fingers, hideously *green* under the harsh *jade* light.

Monk yelled: "Forget the *spook*! Get the arm! We know they can be hurt!"

They focused their fire on the emerging talon. Unbelievably, *Quon* withstood the withering storm without effect. Even his empty sleeves -- which should have been twitching and snapping as lead gnashed them -- hung unmoving.

"We ain't hurtin' it," Shad O'Shea moaned in distress.

Rolling up his sleeves, Monk announced; "Let's see what a bust in the snoot will produce."

Then the *Jade Ogre* stamped his foot once. They all saw it. No sound did his slippered foot make. It might have been a stamp of futile anger.

But the unholy *jade* cones of light winked out in obedience.

"Duck!" Ham shrilled. "That *arm* could be anywhere."

A grim voice lifted above the din. Doc Savage's *voice*. It rapped out *inarticulate* words.

Instantly, Monk and Ham hit the floor.

Shad O'Shea found himself tripped to a prone position. Monk's voice was in his ear, saying: "Stay down, you!"

And in the darkness, Ham Brooks lifted and pulled back on the lever of his mercy pistol. He spun in a tight circle. Mercy bullets splashed their colorless contents on the surrounding walls.

Bodies fell. There were moans, cries in Cambodian and related tongues.

Doc Savage <thumbed> on his generator flash. He was on his feet now. He gave the lens a twist, widening the fan and disclosing Pat Savage -- shaken but game -- levering herself into a standing position amid a group of prone Asiatics.

"What happened?" she was saying.

Doc said: "I instructed Ham in *Mayan* to spray the room with mercy bullets."

Nearly tripping over the fallen Cambodian native, Pat said: "Oh! Remind me, somebody, to take lessons. Say! That was a hard shove you gave me, Doc."

"It was necessary," the **Bronze Man** told her.

He was moving toward the throne on the dais.

"I don't see that hocus-pocus **arm**," Monk muttered peering about. "Where-the-heck did it get to?"

"It cannot reach us on this side of the throne," Doc said.

He stopped before the glaring brass lions and reached up with metal hard but sensitive fingers.

Monk, Ham, Pat, and Shad O'Shea crept carefully up on the **Bronze Man**. Their faces were puzzled.

"Gone!" Ham breathed. His sharp eyes were dull with shock.

For the light had shown that the **Jade Ogre** was no longer standing before his rude throne.

"Musta slipped through them ugly curtains," Monk ventured indicating the dragon hangings.

"Not if **he** went out the way **he** dropped in," Pat said tightly.

"Dropped?" This from Doc Savage.

Pat pointed to the ceiling.

"**He** came down through that square hole. Like a rattlesnake out of a knot in a tree."

"That hole's too small for a normal person," Ham protested.

"The **Jade Ogre** is not exactly normal," Pat insisted. "Once **he** squirmed out of a box that wouldn't hold a little boy. And I do mean squirmed."

She marched toward the throne and received a surprise.

Her pretty nose bent and she made a startled sound as she bounced back as if rebuffed by an invisible hand.

Doc Savage -- somehow prepared -- caught her.

"What on earth?!" Pat said, finding her feet.

"Bulletproof shield," Doc explained.

They all came forward to prove this to themselves.

It was a sheet of glass, they found, so polished as to be invisible in the weird green light. Doc's flashlight questing about revealed it only because the transparent pane was moist with the chemical anesthetic deposited by the rain of mercy bullets.

"Huh!" grunted Monk. "Just like the rig we got back in our **Reception** room."

*That room of their New York **Headquarters** was protected by a similar contrivance. One which had innumerable times saved the lives of Doc Savage and his men from would-be assassins.*

The **Bronze Man** was feeling along the sheet. There were no stars or spiderweb cracks as are commonly created when lead strikes ordinary bulletproof glass. This was modern high-quality sheeting.

It extended from wall-to-wall and had dropped from a narrow decorative lip that ran the width of the stone ceiling. The irregular stonework cleverly concealed the existence of the lip.

There was a similar lip along the floor no doubt lined with rubber to absorb the sound of the glass plate's fall.

"Won't budge," Monk said after pounding on it noisily for several moments with **rusty** knuckles.

"Controlled by one of those **jade** buttons," added Doc, pointing to the strip of designs on the floor opposite the glass.

Monk <blinked>. "Howja know that?"

"I encountered a similar arrangement in the dragon throne room in Hong Kong," Doc said. "It is the logical method of control for a man who lacks arms. No doubt another button actuates the lights."

"Well, that human is gone now," Pat said huffily.

"Back, please," Doc ordered.

They retreated. Ham went to cover the door -- the only apparent way in-and-out.

Doc Savage removed a button from his shirt and another from his sleeve. He pressed these together, then faded back.

The buttons -- one impregnated with aluminum powder and the other with iron oxide -- combined as the incendiary **thermite**.

A hole was swiftly **melted** in the shield of glass.

It was large enough for Doc Savage -- after he wrapped his shirt around his bare arm for added protection against spitting droplets of molten glass -- to put his hand through.

He stabbed at a jade design on the floor. He got the weird **greenish** light first.

He <pressed> the button beside that one. Then the invisible glass started up.

Doc extracted his arm with haste.

The shield lifted with complete *soundlessness*. With the green **jade** light again punishing their eyes, it was possible to track the upward progress of the glass only because of the melted opening.

The glass withdrew from sight. Doc Savage stepped over the threshold.

He found the weighty brass crown of *Quon* behind one lion where it had fallen.

"Our **jade** pal must been in a hurry, I betcha," Monk said happily.

Doc went to the dragon curtain. He swatted the folds, looking for a part. He found none.

Monk bent and lifted the heavy fabric searching for a hidden door. If one existed, the heavy sandstone blocks did not give up its whereabouts.

Monk straightened and began worrying his bristly nubbin of a head in bafflement.

"I don't get it. **He** had to go this way."

"A trick throne," Ham suggested.

They fell to pulling apart silken cushions. The wood beneath was old, worn, blank.

"This disappearin' stuff is startin' to get me down again," Monk muttered.

<Snapping> his anthropoidal fingers, the hairy chemist took up a pillow and placed it under Habeas Corpus' long snout.

"Here, Habeas. Find!"

Taking up the scent, the pig backed away and started snuffling about like a deformed bloodhound. It circled the raised ironwood throne ... reversed itself ... and circled again.

Then it jumped atop the throne and raised its hackles as if not understanding the problem it faced.

"Blazes!" Monk squeaked. "Habeas has never done that before."

"I always said that hog was overrated," Ham called from the door.

At this juncture, their eyes wee irresistibly drawn upward in the direction of the square ceiling aperture.

"That floppy-armed **spook** musta floated up through that ceiling hole just like **he** done back in that jungle city," Monk ventured.

"I told you so!" Pat said snappily.

She grabbed Doc Savage on one of his *cabled* arms.

"Say, Doc. I don't mean to sound ungrateful for the swell rescue and all. But don't you think we should liberate the others?"

Doc asked: "Where are they?"

"Come on. I'll show you."

With Pat leading, they swept out into the central chamber. She pointed toward the lashed bamboo ladder that leaned against the hole in the stone ceiling above.

"They're all upstairs," Pat related. "Along with goodness-knows what else. And if noone minds, I don't plan to go first."

"I'd like that privilege," Monk Mayfair said fiercely, literally leaping for the ladder.

Like a monkey, he started climbing ...

... and changed his mind less than halfway up the groaning ladder.

The *thing* that changed the simian chemist's mind was **green** and appeared at the lip of the flagged hole above his head.

It scuttled to the edge and flopped down trailing a tail of garish **green** silk that could only be a sleeve. *It* roosted on a crosspiece not less than a foot before his pleasantly homely visage.

"Yiii!" Monk howled.

Ham yelled: "Jump back!"

For once in his life, Monk Mayfair appeared transfixed. His clutching knuckles were white with tension. His ludicrously-wide mouth gaped like a cloth sack.

The *thing* extended silent **greenish** talons toward him.

Shad O'Shea drew a bead on the **phantasm** and fired once. The bullet struck the end of the sleeve where the **green** finger-like extensions were squirming.

The sleeve jumped up and fluttered downward. Where the bullet had struck, a bamboo crosspiece hung brokenly. Each splintered end was smeared with **gore** and other unidentifiable matter.

"It was real," Ham muttered. "And it **bleeds**."

"Come on!" Doc rapped.

The **Bronze Man** got under the burly chemist and boosted him up. Shaking off his momentarily paralysis, Monk demonstrated simian agility in his climbing.

They quickly assembled on the second level of the fantastic temple.

Pat pointed a slim finger toward one of the circle of bared hardwood doors that surround them. The cloister-like cells.

"Jason's in that one," she hissed.

They converged on the indicated door.

XX

She didn't say how she knew that he was in that particular cell.

That is because she had been suffering torments in the one right next to it.



"You bastards! I hope you rot in Hell for Eternity!"



"Don't cum in me! Don't you dare cu... Damn You! Damn all of you!!!"



"Keep that filthy thing away from my face! Don't even think about ... !!!!"





"You have a nice-lookin' **butt**, Yankee **slut**. We want it!"

"Oh no! No! NO!!! Please ,,"

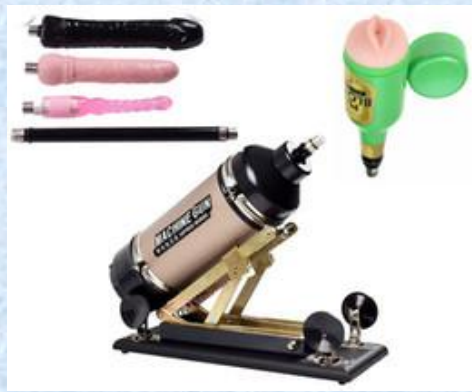
"Turn over now, **Slave**."



"Stop It!! You're Killing Me!!!"



*"Now you will really scream, filthy **Whore-Slut!**"*





"Baird!" Doc called.

The bulldog face of Jason Baird appeared in the grillwork. It took on a relived cast.

"Savage! Thank God! I was down on the floor figuring a bullet would come through the door at any moment."

Doc lifted the heavy iron bar out of its catches and set it down with no apparent effort.

Jason Baird emerged from his cell. His blondish hair was dirty and his clothing decorated with rents-and-tears from past struggles.

"Has anyone seen Maurine?" were his first words.

"No," Doc told him.

The bulldog facial lines grooved unhappily.

Then Jason Baird squared his thick shoulders and said: "Anybody have a gun to spare?"

Shad O'Shea -- who seemed to be a human arsenal -- offered a snub-nosed revolver.

"It'll do," Baird said grimly.

"Do not forget me" a voice called out.

Monk grunted: "Hey! Ain't that ..."

"None other," Pat said tartly.

They surged to the door adjacent to Baird's former cell. This time, Monk levered the bar free.

Out stumbled diminutive Dr. Mawson Harper. His neat black Van Dyke beard looked like the hindmost portion of a frightened skunk. His white hair was a fright as if he had slept on straw.

"Thank you," he said shakily wringing his hands.

"Don't mention it," Pat inserted dryly. "But if it were up to me, I would leave you to rot you...you goat-chinned prevaricator."

If you will allow me to explain ..." he spluttered.

Commotion from below cut off all conversation.

The whisper and pad of naked feet on stone was the predominant sound. Mixed in with it was the cackle of Asiatic tongues.

"You can't do this to me" complained a voice that they all knew.

"Pinks!" Ham hissed.

"Another one who can rot for all I care," Shad O'Shea muttered darkly.

"Stay," Doc said quietly.

He drifted up to the circular hole winding a key on one end of an object like a miniature soup can. He pitched this down.

It had no sooner left his hand that the **Bronze Man's** voice lifted. Sharp, attention-getting.

"Pinks! Up here!"

Something let go *mushily* triggering a frantic gobble of fright and complaint. Rex Pinks came up the ladder one step ahead of a boil of **black smoke** generated by Doc Savage's pitched smoke grenade.

"I almost got away," the colorless society reporter said excitedly as he emerged from the **pall**. "But they captured me. The jungle seems too full of them and they're converging on this place. I guess it made no difference what I ..."

The **Bronze Man** took the man and yanked him along. The **smoke** -- black as octopus ink -- made an evil mushroom over the hole. It sought the ceiling, spreading outward in rolling waves of soot.

Monk met them.

"I checked all the other rooms. No way out, Doc."

Dr. Harper put in: "But there is a way. A secret door. I saw it in use when they moved me at one point. The devil **Quon** uses it because he obviously cannot negotiate the ladder."

"Why did they move you?" Ham asked sharply.

"**Quon** attempted to enlist me in his cause," Dr. Harper admitted. "He told me that my experience could be of use to his plans. He declined to explain further. Of course, I refused to have anything to do with his scheme whatever it may be."

"Show us this secret door," Doc said.

"This way."

Dr. Mawson Harper led them to one of the empty cells. It was bare except for a stone grille in the floor, evidently for drainage.

"Through there," he said, indicating a wall. "False wall. It pivots out."

"I don't trust this fibber," Pat put in.

"We have little time to waste," Doc said. "Reinforcements have come from the jungle."

They started for the wall clustered in a tight knot. Ham had the rear. His superfirer was prepared to unleash a withering storm on any ambusher.

It was an usually large trapdoor as those devices go. And it managed to catch them all by surprise when it let go.

They had the sensation of running on solid flooring ...

... and then the floor dropped out from under their feet.

There was no warning. No time to react. No possibility of grabbing for the edge of the trap. Not even for Doc Savage whose reflexes were normally like chained lightning.

No one so much as emitted a cry of surprise or fright.

Thus Doc, Pat, Monk, Ham, Shad O'Shea, Jason Baird, Rex Pinks, Dr. Mawson Harper, and Habeas Corpus were deposited into a yawning abyss of unknown depth.

XXXII -- *Electric Hell*

It was not a straight drop although it was long.

They fell farther than expected considering the height of the 4-faced temple of Quon. Easily past the lower floor level and into what had to be a cellar (if temples have cellars).

Such a fall should have broken numerous outthrust limbs. But they were precipitated along a slide. It was hewn of some rough wood so that before they began collecting in a human pile, their worst injuries were inflicted by nothing worse than long dry splinters.

The first to hit, Doc Savage absorbed the shock of impact with his *powerful* leg muscles and rolled out of the way of the others.

Ham was not so lucky. He had the air forced out of his lungs twice. Once by the fall (he hit on his stomach). And the second time when monk Mayfair landed atop him.

"You hairy mistake of Nature!" Ham howled.

Then in succession came Pat, Rex Pinks, Jason Baird, Shad O'Shea, and Dr. Mawson Harper.

Looking around, Monk wanted to know: "Where-the-heck are we?"

Doc answered: "Blind pit."

They picked themselves up. As a first order of business, they attacked the vicious splinters that had lanced arms and legs and other portions of their anatomies.

The room was illuminated. They lights (they were hardly surprised to find) were **green**. The place into which they had fallen was a long rectangle of dressed stone. The walls were very high and the only way out was to scramble back up the slide.

This latter fact was unfortunate because the trapdoor quickly spanked upward and the rough slide detached itself and fell with a clattering *bang!* to the polished metal floor, almost knocking Rex Pinks flat.

This in turn disclosed a steel wall studded with hideous spikes at the opposite end.

"Uh-oh," Monk Mayfair muttered in the act of freeing a stubborn splinter from one meaty thumb. "I don't like the look of them spikes."

With a rumble, **the wall of spikes began to advance in their direction** scraping the sides of the long rock chamber.

"For once," Ham Brooks said fervently, "I must agree with this ape."

Pat Savage -- not exactly accustomed to situations as dire as this one -- turned to her **bronze cousin** and said: "If you can't yank a mighty fancy miracle out of that trick vest of yours, Doc, we face a very thorny end."

"Not me," growled Shad O'Shea. "There's gotta be a way to stop that thing."

He started forward. But Doc intercepted him.

"Look at your feet, O'Shea," he suggested.

The big gunman looked down. Between his monster brogans lay an insulated track running the length of the polished floor.

Shad looked up. The wall of spikes was walking this.

"Insulated to prevent the steel of the wall from touching the metal floor," Doc explained. "No doubt the spikes are [electrified](#)."

Shad O'Shea lost his composure. His jaw came to rest on his chest. He wavered on his feet as if his knees had turned to water.

"That's another one I owe you. That is, if we get out of this fix," he gulped. "Which don't look likely."

The steel wall of spikes inched along. There was detritus on the floor. Bits of stone and rock dust that no doubt had been chopped off the rock chamber's sides during the construction of the clever death trap.

As the block rolled over these, it produced unpleasant grinding and scraping noises that made them think of their bones when the spikes got to them. Somehow, this was more unnerving to contemplate than the [electrical shock](#) that was certain to snuff out their lives long before they could be crushed.

Doc Savage herded them to the far end of the room.

Not that anyone required much urging. The advancing walls had already caught up the dropped chute like a menacing cowcatcher and was bumping it along the floor.

"Station yourselves on the rubber track," Doc directed.

"What for?" Dr. Mawson Harper demanded.

"Do as Doc says!" Ham said testily, placing his feet on the insulated track.

The latter sat about 2 inches off the floor and was wide enough to accommodate their feet if they planted them with care.

"Wait!" said Dr. Harper. "Look! Here is a vent of some kind."

The goateed medico straddled a grilled ventilator. It was not unlike a forced-air register in an apartment house. He got down on hands-and-knees and clawed at the edges in an effort to lift the metal grille.

"It may be an escape tunnel," he said hopefully.

"Too small," Doc pointed out.

Dr. Harper looked up, haggard of feature.

"Then what could be its purpose if not escape?"

"Drainage," said Doc.

There was a moment in which everyone present contemplated what would soon be draining down the vent if they could not find a way out of their predicament. Hastily they took places along the rubber-sheathed track.

Doc Savage turned to Ham Brooks and held out one hand.

"Your machine-pistol."

With one eye on the advancing monster of fanged steel, the dapper lawyer surrendered his intricate weapon.

The **Bronze Man** removed the drum and ejected a shell from the chamber. Then he advanced toward the moving wall, straddling the insulated track.

He bent low like a man about to pitch horseshoes. He was taking careful aim. Perhaps showing more caution than any of his men had ever before seen.

Once, he was forced to retreat. The chute was skittering toward him. He slid the superfirer into his belt and heaved the chute to one side where it resumed its clattery progress.

Doc set himself once more with his feet on the insulated track. No expression was mirrored on his **bronze mask** of a face. But there was a forged quality about it that denoted intense concentration.

Then with an underhand toss, he flung the supermachine pistol.

It struck and bounced. He swept in to retrieve it.

Backing away, he tried again. Fully a third of the chamber space had been eaten by the remorseless wall. Time was fast running out.

This time, the **Man of Bronze** did not hesitate. He drew back his hand and let go.

The supermachine pistol's trigger guard hooked one of the lowermost spikes and settled. A perfect "ringer".

The superfirer muzzle clanked to the metal floor.

The next thing they saw was a tremendous flash of hissing **blue flame**. Then **darkness** in which the blue **flash** lived on, a ghost of electrical discharge.

Monk said it first.

"Doc blew the fuse!"

It was true. They could no longer see. But neither was the spiked steel wall grinding remorselessly on. It was a trade-off for which they were more than happy to accept.

Ham Brooks snapped a jeweled lighter to flame. He did not smoke (none of Doc's men imbibed of tobacco) but the lighter had many other uses.

The wavering yellow flame threw fantastic shadows across their faces. It showed for a fact that the spike-mawed wall was inert and no longer a threat.

Stepping off the rubber track, Doc rejoined them. All looked to him for their next move, wondering what that would be.

But none of them were prepared for Doc Savage's quiet -- but startling -- question.

"Where is **Harper**?" he asked.

"With me," Rex Pinks said turning around.

But behind him was nothing but naked stone.

Pinks gasped. "Holy smokes! He was right behind me just before the short circuit happened."

Doc's flash came into play. Monk extracted one of his own. Soon, twin rays were scooting along floor and walls.

It was so unexpected, they could find no words.

Dr. Mawson Harper -- facing death with them scant moments before -- had evaporated like so much steam.

"This is goofy!" Shad O'Shea offered.

"Uncanny, I would call it," Ham murmured.

Pat Savage marched around the available area. Her canary-yellow dress was holding up remarkably well for all that the **bronze**-haired girl had been through.

"This has me beat," she fumed at last, her eyes flinty.

Monk -- his expression plaintive -- eyed his **bronze** Chief.

"What about it, Doc?"

Doc Savage's reply was lost in a sound that was now familiar to those trapped in the blind pit.

Bong...bong...bong!

They looked up. It was a natural thing to do. The gonging sound seemed to reverberate over their heads from somewhere high in the gloomy ceiling.

*"Know, interlopers," came a weird hollow voice, "that the **Jade Ogre** has decreed that you will all die."*

"Baloney!" Shad O'Shea said, taking a pot shot at the murk over their heads.

The bullet ricocheted twice, snapping a spark off one of the inert steel spikes, changing its shape.

"Nix!" Monk said. "You wanna wing us with a ricochet?"

Shad subsided.

The hollow voice of **Quon** came again.

*"It is the will of Quon, Blessed of Siva, that the girl known as Chingtung Mao -- **Bronze Hair** -- be spared."*

"Thanks just the same," Pat said bravely. "But I'm staying with Doc."

"Then you will all die. For there is no escape. But I offer life for one of you if she will only accept this boon. This is your choice. Death for all or Life for one."

This sunk in.

*"If the **Bronze Devil** does not wish Chingtung Mao to accompany him to the Afterworld," continued the voice of **Quon**, "he will make her step to the north corner from which she will be transported to safety. Just as was the doctor whose will I intend to bend to my own."*

"What's Harper to you anyway?" Rex Pinks demanded.

*"His skills are of use to me now that I am prepared to visit my **Jade Fever** upon the civilized world. For I am He-Who-Is-Destined-To-Breathe-Death-Upon-the-Universe."*

Jason Baird spoke up then.

"Where is my sister, you fiend?"

*"Dead. You are too late. Jason Baird, had you heeded the words of Wan Sop, First limb of the **Jade Ogre**, you could have saved yourself untold misery. Not to mention your life."*

"I don't believe it," Jason Baird said defiantly.

"Soon you will join her."

The hollow voice sank.

"Now the girl must decide."

"Nothing doing," Pat said gamely.

Monk piped up then.

"Doc! We can't let Pat die."

"Observe the ceiling over our heads," the **Bronze Man** said low-toned.

"Huh?"

Monk looked up again, his flash ray darting about.

"Notice the construction? Blocks."

Monk grimaced. "Yeah. So?"

"They are larger and fitted differently than others we have seen through this edifice," Doc related. "The corner where Quon wants Pat to stand lacks this feature. It is smooth."

"I get it! Once Pat gets out of the way, that *Quon* bird plans to drop some of them blocks on us."

"Exactly."

The **green** light came on at that point. And the frozen wall jerked and started moving along the track sending the wood chute rattling along.

Ham groaned. "Here we go again!"

Doc Savage got the others together. He herded them to the north corner and went to collect the wood chute.

He brought this back and set it down for the others to stand on. It was very dry and thus would conduct electricity.

"Watch carefully," he instructed. "If a block begins to dislodge itself, call out."

The **bronze giant** started to the oncoming forest of steel fangs, each carrying its brutal **electrical** charge. He carried Ham's supermachine pistol which he had earlier recovered.

This time, his task was doubly tricky. He had to aim with care, trusting to his aides to warn him of peril.

"**Doc! Left! Go left!**"

It was Pat.

The **Bronze Man** rolled to one side. The falling stone was no wider than a butcher's block. But it weighed in excess of an eighth of a ton.

It shot down like a plummet cracking into 3 big sections and spitting brick splinters that broke the skin at points along his face and arms. It had missed him by less than 4 feet.

Doc worked around it looking for opportunity.

The sepulchral voice of *Quon* intoned.

"You must think of the girl. No resistance can save her otherwise."

Doc set himself ... crouched ... and released the pistol.

It hung up on the same spike as before and rattled precariously. Even Doc Savage thought it would slide off.

The flare of *blue* hissed and spit and filled the chamber a split-second before blackness clamped down upon him.

The ugly *sound* of falling stone came again. It shook the floor and brought a scream of pure fright from Pat Savage.

"Doc! Are you all right? Answer me!"

"Fine."

Doc Savage's voice was calm as metal.

"Stay at the safe end. And no lights."

The others listened eagerly. No sounds rewarded their efforts.

Half-a-minute dragged past. Then a full minute.

After a while, Monk whispered: "Doc?"

He received no reply.

Then it dawned on them.

"Doc's gone!" Ham breathed. "Somehow."

A chill settled in their bones. This new development was as mystifying as the disappearance of Dr. Mawson Harper.

"Goodness," Pat said, horror squeezing her voice tight. "Which one of us is next?"

XXXIII -- *Legerdemain*

Doc Savage's dramatic disappearance was easily explained.

The dropping blocks had created openings in the ceiling.

Unfolding his grappling hook with attached silken line, the **Bronze Man** had sent this snaking upward. He had some luck. The flukes snagged the first time.

With ligaments standing out on his *cabled* arms, Doc went up the thin line with all the silent ease of a spider.

There was no light to guide him. But the dank smell -- markedly different from the musty odor of the death chamber -- told him that an opening yawned above.

Doc gained this. His sensitive nostrils detected human *perspiration* odor when he lifted his head clear.

In the murk, a hand grabbed hold of his hair. Another hand brought a sharp-edged *creese* to his throat. A jabber of Cambodian warned him that his next move could be his last.

Another voice a bit removed spat out a rippling command in *singsong* Cantonese.

"*Sha!* Kill!"

Doc did not wait for the caress of the keen blade.

His strong fingers had the silk line. There was no time to release it in order to fend off the coming throat-cutting slice.

The *bronze giant* took the knife wielder's wrist and sank strong white teeth into the lean flesh.

The unexpected maneuver brought a bleat of *pain!* His hair was promptly released.

Doc topped the wall. Another dark form came up behind him. A fist was brought down on his back.

A dull gleam winked briefly and something scraped (literally) along the **Bronze Man's** spine. A stabbing knife of some sort, its tip turned by the chain-mail lining of his vest.

Whirling, Doc knocked the steel throng of a blade from the attacker's grasp with a blow to the stomach. Then he turned his attention back to the first Cambodian. The man was hopping and spitting like a cat as he tried to stem the flow of **blood** from his bitten wrist.

Doc settled him by the simple expedient of kneading certain spinal nerves. The man was lowered to the flags where he stared into the dark, helpless.

Something *rustled* in the near-dark. Padding *footsteps* retreated. Doc Savage moved toward the sounds.

A door slammed!

Doc found it in the dark. It was one of the cell doors. It was unbarred, yet it resisted the **Bronze Man**'s efforts to open it. Plainly, it had been locked from the other side.

He gave it up and returned to the pit.

Cupping his hands over his mouth, he called: "Monk! Ham!"

Echoes bounced up from below. There was no reply.

He tried again.

"Monk! Ham!"

Hastily, the **Bronze Man** took hold of the silken cord. He slid down this.

At the bottom, his grim *metallic* features jumped into view in the backwash of his flash ray. The beam made an efficient circuit of the death chamber.

It showed without any shred of doubt the fact that the space was entirely unoccupied!

He went to the wall of steel fangs and noted a line of rock fragments that had been pushed ahead of the advancing wall. The latte seemed to have retreated in his absence. Not much -- less than an inch.

The faint *trilling* that signaled a discovery on his part filled the chamber.

It held a knowing note.

Doc Savage quit the chamber in great haste. He seemed to no sooner lay hands on the silken line than he was carried up to the second floor of the *Quon* temple.

There, he paused. Sound came to his alert ears. The creak of bamboo. Ragged breathing. The stealthy pad of naked catlike feet.

The minions of the *Jade Ogre* were pouring up the bamboo ladder!

Doc Savage made a quick inventory of his equipment vest. The furious action of the last hour-or-so had depleted much of the store of gadgets with which he was armed. If her were to rescue his friends he realized grimly, he would have to conserve his stores.

The **Bronze Man** slipped out of the room. It was one of the many cells that ringed the upper story of the ugly *Quon* temple.

It was dark. The residue of the smoke bomb might account for that. But the fuse which he had twice short-circuited more probably explained the unrelieved darkness.

Doc sensed cautious approaching figures. He let them pass. Then fell in with them, undetected.

They were executing a careful search of the upper floor, showing no light.

He halted. A trailing skulker caught up and bumped him.

"*Fan Tung!*" the other hissed "Rice Bag! Watch where you go!"

"*Wamba Dan!*" Doc replied in guttural Cantonese, evidently the common language of the *Jade Ogre's* tools. "Turtle's Egg! I have found the **bronze devil**."

"Where?"

"Foolishly, he has returned to the pit of spikes," Doc said, not exactly lying. "And fell."

"*Ssu la!* Dead?"

"No," Doc replied. "*Hui tau chyla*. He has broken back."

"*Hao!*" said one. "Good! We will inform He-Who-Will-Rule-Eternity of this good fortune."

"*Tsoahh!*" Doc spat back. "Pig! I have found the body. And I claim the right to bring these good tidings to the Blessed of Siva."

There was grumbling about this. But after some consultation in darkness (no one seemed to have any light), it was agreed that he could take this glad tiding to the *Jade Ogre* himself.

Doc Savage started off to do just this. He took hold of the ladder and started down.

Fate is a fickle wench at times. In another moment, he would have disappeared down the shaft to the ground floor of the temple.

The lights were restored while his **bronze** hair was showing. It was unmistakable in the sudden blaze of illumination.

"*Aiiee!*" a Cambodian shrilled. "*Ha me yda taw!* He is not killed yet!"

There was a general rush in which Doc had retreated.

He dropped to the ground floor and snatched the bamboo ladder away. Angry mean-eyed faces clustered in the hole above him.

A pistol was snaked down. It began discharging. Shouts were bringing others from outside.

Doc whipped to the handiest door. It was shut. Locked as it turned out.

He tried the next one. It too was unmovable.

The **Bronze Man** was digging into his vest for a pocket grenade when Cambodians began dropping down from above. Others surged from opening doors.

A bullet dug into the wood over his shoulder. Another struck him square in the chest, driving him back. The vest turned it.

He had one smoke grenade. Monk Mayfair called them "blackies". He proceeded to demonstrate the appropriateness of the name.

He set it on the floor at his feet where it began uncoiling a long worm of **smoke**.

Under its spreading cover, Doc dropped flat. Creeping on his stomach like an Indian, he crawled toward advancing feet.

As soon as his fingertips encountered bare feet, he began to yank squawling men off them. His hard **bronze fist** began to last out. It cracked jaws and stunned temples.

In the confusion, no one dared shoot. Knives waved in the air. They brought oaths from those who had been sliced by the enthusiasm of their fellows.

Coming up, Doc had hold of a man by wrist and ankle. He employed this insensate unfortunate as a battering ram. A path was cleared. He flung another for effect, drawing howls and directing attention elsewhere.

The **Bronze Man** found a wall and felt along it. Each door he came to, he tried. The 4th one opened.

He slipped in and shut the door quickly. There was a bolt affixed to the inner side. He threw this.

There was no light. But neither had the smoke insinuated itself into the room. Popping his flash on, he prowled the space.

It appeared to be a bedchamber, rather sumptuous in the Oriental fashion. The bed was a 4-poster. An incongruous thing in the wilds of the Cambodian interior.

Doc ignored the appointments and searched the walls for an exit or secret panel. He found none.

He next directed his attention to the floor. It seemed to be of bare stone. Smooth except for the aperture in the center of the room.

It was too narrow for human passage. Nevertheless, he knelt before it. The edge consisted of laid flagstones. The mortar was not old but had set.

Doc inserted a hand and found purchase. The flag made a gritty sound of protest. Under the relentless pressure, it came loose in his hand.

He went to another. This gave more easily.

Soon the hole was wide enough to drop through.

Doc Savage used his flash to scrutinize the hole thus excavated. The light was dim. He cranked the generator and it brightened noticeably.

There was a pile of silken cushions at the bottom. Whether the **Bronze Man** intended to explore further was a decision made for him by the abrupt **pounding** on the locked door to the bedchamber.

Doc levered himself down ... then let go.

He landed amid the cushions. The light showed dripping walls wet with lake seepage. The smell was not pleasant.

The space which he found himself in was narrow. Less than 2 feet wide. It was impossible to walk freely along it. He was forced to angle his broad shoulders and squeeze along the passage.

Something rustled ...

Doc swung the light down. Creeping toward him was a **thing** dragging a sleeve of **green silk**.

The **thing** progressed with a crab-like lifting and dropping of its limbs. Like a hand using its fingers to walk along.

The narrowness of the passage prevented him from stooping to grab it. He stepped over it and turned his head around.

The **thing** continued its creeping progress. Doc placed a heel on the trailing tail of **silk**.

The **thing** at the other end struggled and eventually worked free of the sleeve.

It continued creeping along. In the back-glow of Doc's flash, it bore an unmistakable resemblance to a hand that had been severed from its wrist but -- like a beheaded chicken -- had not yet lost animation.

Doc moved on.

The other end of the passage was stoppered by a door. He made for this.

Doc Savage was rarely caught as flat-footed in his career as he was now.

Something prodded the bare skin of his arm like a cold fang.

Doc froze. He did not have to look down. He was a physician. He knew the biting touch of a **hypodermic needle** when he felt one.

A twisted voice said: ***"If you so much as move, I will discharge every drop of this vile stuff into your veins."***

XX



XXXIV -- Extortion

The *bronze giant* did not wait for the question he knew would come.

"I am Doc Savage," he volunteered in a deliberately calm tone.

The other voice lost its brittle fear-twisted quality and became unmistakably feminine.

"Pat Savage's cousin?"

"Yes. I am here with my friends. And Jason Baird."

"Jason! Here?"

Doc nodded. "A prisoner of *Quon*."

"That devil!"

The **Bronze Man** stole a look. The hand holding the hypo projected from a narrow crack in the moist irregular wall surface. It trembled.

"If they are to be rescued," he pointed out, "there is little time to waste. And if you are who I suspect, you will appreciate that fact.

The needle withdrew.

"The door will be opened," the voice said.

Doc finished his traversing of the too-narrow passage.

The door fell open to disclose a fairly cramped cubicle that was crammed with chemical equipment of various sorts.

The **girl** who greeted him looked as if she had spent a great deal of time in the dimly-lit space. Her hair was blonde. And she wore studious glasses that did not take away from her natural beauty.

She bore no resemblance to Jason Baird. Still, Doc ventured: "You are Maurine Baird, of course."

"How did you know?"

"Your picture on the mantel of Jason Baird's San Francisco," he related.

Suddenly, the blonde girl sat down on a hard stool. Her thin frame was swathed in a laboratory smock that was much discolored by chemicals and grime.

"You have come just in time," she said wearily. "*Quon* is about to embark on his mad scheme to terrorize the World."

Interest flicked in the Doc Savage's active *orbs*.

"Terrorize?"

Maurine Baird looked at him. Fatigue had etched her pallid features into tight lines.

"I am a disease specialist, Mr. Savage. My field is germs as they relate to contagious diseases. While in China, I heard of a plant that I understood had germ-fighting properties. Searching for this, I was abducted by natives and brought here to be a slave to this *Quon*. He is a horrible creature, hardly human. If he ever was. I have never seen his face."

Doc looked around the room. He saw *petri* dishes and other receptacles for growing germ cultures. He examined these.

"The *Jade Fever* is manufactured here?" he asked.

Maurine Baird nodded.

"Yes. *Quon* discovered the beastly stuff. But he could not devise a cure without which *Jade Fever* cannot be controlled.

"But you did?"

Maurine Baird's shoulders shuddered. She took hold of her elbows to steady them.

"I had no choice," she sobbed. "You must believe me. Quon threatened to kill me if I did not assist him. I thought he was some local warlord bent on extorting natives. But recently he let slip his insane scheme."

"You mentioned terror," Doc prompted.

"*Quon intends to release his Jade Fever on the city of New York,*" explained Maurine Baird. "I am unclear on the details. But it could be accomplished. The bacterium is able to survive in a liquid solution and can also be borne through the air suspended in vapor droplets. Contact with either form is invariably fatal unless one is first inoculated against *Jade Fever*. The initial symptoms mimic an ordinary heart attack."

"How does *Quon* plan to profit from infecting New York City?" Doc asked.

"He will promise a cure in return for tremendous sums of money."

Doc said: "Extortion."

"Yes. Quon boasted that he could force virtually every city in the World to pay him. Or else suffer horrendous loss of life. He recently visited New York City to set up his scheme. I gather he has a network of followers in cities from Hong Kong to Manhattan. All of whom are frightened to death of him. As am I."

A frantic *scuttling* came from a draped box of some kind on a workbench.

Doc Savage lifted one corner of the concealing cloth. Something retreated from the weak light. It resembled a **many-legged hand** shrinking from the ax that had lopped it off.

He asked: "What have these creatures to do with your work?"

Maurine said: "The germs exist as parasites on the skin of these horrid... *things*. The jungle is crawling with them."

"You have samples of the *Jade Fever* cure here?" Doc demanded.

"Yes."

Maurine Baird produced a rack of test tubes in which a clear liquid *sloshed*. They were stoppered by tight-fitting corks.

"One swallow will enable a person to survive contact with the Jade Fever contagion," she explained. "He will turn *green* but not die. A second dose is necessary to effect a permanent cure. This is how *Quon* will insure that he receives his ransom. The source of this antidote is the Chinese plant that I mentioned to you."

Doc removed the tubes, stowing them about his person. He uncorked one and imbibed half of its contents. Then he carefully restoppered it.

"You have swallowed some of this?" Doc asked Maurine.

"Of course. Otherwise I could not have survived working with the *Jade Fever* germ."

"Are you game to rescue your brother?" Doc asked.

Maurine Baird stiffened. Her fingers made-and-unmade tiny fists.

She took a deep breath and said: "Yes."

Distinctly came a splintery crash! It floated along the narrow passage. It seemed to emanate from the bedchamber through which the Bronze Man had come to this weird laboratory.

He turned to Maurine Baird.

"Is there another way to the ground floor of this place?"

Maurine shook her blonde head.

"No. After I was brought here, the hold was repaved so that only *Quon* could enter and leave at will. This temple is honeycombed with tunnels and passages which a normal being cannot negotiate. We are trapped here."

The sound of approaching skulkers grew more sinister.

"What... what can we do?" Maurine Baird said fearfully.

A grim expression overspread the *Bronze Man*'s features.

Then a tall cabinet of chemicals began inching forward from its position against a far wall. Maurine whirled, one hand going to her shocked mouth.

The cabinet gave a final lurch and out from behind it wriggled a Cambodian carrying a modern rifle. He brought this to his brown shoulder and took aim.

Maurine Baird screamed then. Doc Savage whipped into the line-of-fire.

Strangely, no shot came.

Instead, a sinister figure stepped out from behind the chemical cabinet. It *rustled* as it emerged. The *rustling* was the sound of limp sleeves brushing silk.

For the crippled figure was the *Jade Ogre!*

The **jade** face lifted in the weak light. From set lips emerged a harsh command.

Behind him, the Cambodians who had been slipping along the passage entered the laboratory brandishing an assortment of weapons.

"Trapped," Maurine Baird choked.

Then **Quon** spoke.

"It is time you joined your friends, **Bronze Man**," he hissed.

He had recovered his brass crown which sat atop his head like a minaret set with the faces of **jade** godlets.

Maurine Baird turned to Doc Savage. Her eyes imploring, she whispered:

"My work is done. We will be killed."

"We will do as he bids us," Doc said quietly.

The rifle motioned for him to step aside. And he did. Quickly the **bronze giant** was surrounded and made to surrender his outer clothes. His equipment vest and all its gadgets were taken.

When they were done, Doc stood in a pair of black silk bathing trunks. His **Herculean** muscular caused the Cambodians to shrink from him in awe. Their eyes were impressed. Their lips fell apart in surprise.

Then **Quon** issued orders.

Doc Savage and Maurine Baird were forced to step through the concealed passage behind the cabinet.

On the other side, there was a square chamber of rock. Light came from a single unshaded light bulb hanging from an electrical cord.

The room was dominated by a sphere of iron held together by thick rivets. Various pipes led in-and-out of this object. Pressure gauges and other simple controls studded its black skin. There was additional mechanism between the spherical portion and the stone wall. It suggested a pumping function.

Seated on the floor before the contraption and bound to it with chain were Monk Mayfair, Ham Brooks, Shad O'Shea, Rex Pinks, and Jason Baird. Habeas Corpus was not fettered. But the ungainly porker huddled close to hairy Monk.

Of Patricia Savage and Dr. Mawson Harper, there was not sign.

"Doc!" Monk cried.

His voice mixed pleasure and disappointment. Clearly, the simian chemist had looked to the **Bronze Man** for rescue.

Jason Baird's eyes fell upon the wan figure of his sister.

"Sis!"

"Jason!"

Maurine Baird struggled free of her captor and rushed to her brother. She threw her arms around his neck.

"I never believed for a minute that you were dead," Jason Baird choked out.

Cambodians seized Maurine Baird and chained her to the iron sphere.

Doc Savage was forced to stick out his big hands. A Cambodian approached with a pair of manacles. One was clapped about a **thick bronze wrist**.

Then Doc was led to the iron pressure tank (for that was plainly what it was) and the other manacle was clamped to a stout pipe. He was made to sit with the others.

Ham whispered: "We don't know what happened to Pat."

A Cambodian hissed at them for silence.

The **Jade Ogre** spoke.

"You have caused me much trouble, **bronze one**. But here you die."

"Says you," Shad O'Shea spat.

A brown hand <slapped> the gunman across the face.

"Do that again and I might take it personally," O'Shea growled.

"Behind you," went on *Quon*, "is the fruit of many months of toil. Within that iron caldron swims the germ culture that I call *Jade Fever*. Soon, it will bring terror to the outer World just as the meekest squirt of it sent you all scurrying like rats out of your metal-winged bird from the land of mortals.

"You can cut the act," Doc Savage interposed.

"What words are these ..."

"I said," the *Bronze Man* repeated, "you can stop as if you are the Jade Ogre, a creature from legend. I know who you are."

"I am *Quon*."

"I've known it for some time," Doc continued.

His *flake gold eyes* were steady, unperturbed. The sound of his impassive voice brought calm to the other prisoners. Their attention was focused on the mighty *Man of Bronze*.

The misshapen figure that was the *Jade Ogre* teetered on his slippered heels. His empty sleeves rustled with the movement.

Then like a viper stirring, one sleeve began to lift.

They had seen it before. Still, it held them mesmerized.

The sleeve (it was the right) swelled as it lifted. The Cambodians retreated from the immediate vicinity of their armless Master's presence.

One who was clutching Doc Savage's clothes backed toward the captives.

The *Bronze Man*'s foot got in the way. He tripped and fell. Picking himself up, the Asiatic gathered together what clothing he could. His eyes darted fearfully to that inexorable lifting sleeve.

The yellow *fingers* seemed like a skeletal talon emerging from a fresh grave.

"I have but to will it," intoned *Quon*, "and my *Limb of Retribution* will smite you dead."

"A trick," Doc said flatly.

"Those who are touched by *Quon* always die."

"Unless they know the trick," Doc countered.

His pronouncement seemed to give the macabre creature who called himself the *Jade Ogre* pause. He hesitated, his gaunt fingers pointing.

"If you are *supernatural*," Doc prodded, "then you can send that arm you are pretending to grow directly at us."

"What're you ... Tryin' to get us killed?" Shad O'Shea gulped.

The *Jade Ogre* stood immobile for a time.

"Such a quick death would be a mercy," *Quon* said at last. "I go now to the Outer World. You will die the excruciating death of slow starvation."

Then with a swirl of his empty sleeves, the *Jade Ogre* turned around and disappeared the way he had come. His uplifted arm stayed rigid. *Oddly, he did not employ it in any way.*

His Cambodian minions followed. The cabinet rasped back into place.

Once they were alone, everyone began speaking at once.

"What do you mean you know who he is?" Jason Baird demanded.

Monk inserted; "Yeah, Doc. What's going on?"

But Doc Savage cut through their questions.

"Pinks!"

"Yeah?"

"Slide as close to me as you can."

"Why?"

"Just do it."

Shrugging, Rex Pinks pushed himself toward Doc Savage. Monk scooted aside to allow this. The chains were short and movement was restricted.

The **Bronze Man** was gifted with remarkably **long toes** that possessed the prehensile ability sometimes found in circus performers who tie knots with their feet and perform similar feats of dexterity.

Doc lifted **bronze** toes to the back of Rex Pinks' shirt. They plucked at the fabric. They were at this for some moments.

When they came away, something white and curved rested between the first and second toes.

Squinting, Ham blurted: "Another **tiger claw**?"

Doc drew the claw to his lap.

"Did you plant that on him, Doc?" Monk asked.

"No" was the **Bronze Man**'s only reply.

"Then how ..."

Doc reached down and took the claw. He lifted it to his manacle and inserted the sharp point into the lock aperture.

"A lock pick!" Monk grunted.

"Will it work?" Ham worried.

"If it does not break," Doc Savage said.

They all held their breaths.

The claw made scraping sounds. It seemed a frail thing with which to attack a mechanism of iron.

After a time, the manacles snapped free. Doc shook off the chain and came to his feet.

Elation wreathed the faces of others ...

... but it died when a voice from somewhere (they realized it must be coming from a hidden loophole) screamed:

"Fools! You have squandered your final hours of life!"

Then accompanied by a frightful *hissing*, a valve in the great iron pressure cooker let go.

A jet of green vapor charged out carrying the *Jade Fever* germ.

"Blazes!" Monk squawled. "We're goners!"

XX



XXXV -- Collapse

Doc Savage made a dive away from the iron boiler of a pressure chamber.

Rex Pinks misunderstanding shrieked: "Don't leave us!"

The **Bronze Man** skidded ... scooped up a fallen article of clothing ... and pitched back to the others.

He came back carrying his trousers which had been dropped by the Cambodian that he had earlier tripped.

Doc went through the pockets and extracted several **stoppered flasks**. He uncorked these and then distributed them.

"Everyone drink half," he cautioned. "No more, no less. There is enough for all."

As the **green vapor** started to fill the room, the captives drank down the fluid. Doc forced a small quantity down Habeas Corpus' throat.

Quickly, the contents of 3 flasks were consumed.

The green germ-carrying **vapor** continued to fill the room.

Methodically, Doc Savage attacked their bindings. They were not as stout as his own had been. He simply grasped linkage and applied pressure. Weak links separated.

Monk helped by stepping on his chains, exerting himself, and popping his bonds free.

"I ... I feel mighty strange," Rex Pinks said getting up.

"No wonder," Shad O'Shea grunted. "You look kinda **green** around the gills."

It developed that all were turning green.

They stood about, not knowing quite how to react to the disconcerting phenomenon.

Some of them turned a kind of **aquamarine**. Others ran more to a **jade** hue. For some reason, Monk Mayfair turned the exact color of an unripe apple. The pig Habeas took on the aspect of a movie-cartoon porker.

"Are we... are we going to die?" Jason Baird blurted out.

"No," explained Doc Savage.

He resembled a **bronze statue** patinated by exposure to the elements.

"Jason," Maurine Baird said reassuringly, "Mr. Savage has given us the antidote to **Jade Fever**."

"They why are we turnin' **green**?" Monk wanted to know.

"The antidote must be taken in 2 doses," Maurine replied. "If you do not get the second dose within 2 days, you will succumb to the disease germs. The first dose merely slows the death process."

Monk grunted: "Looks like we die unless we bust outta here might soon."

Doc Savage was at that problem. He began examining the closed exit door which was still blocked by the back of the chemical cabinet to which it was attached.

While he was about this, a <click> sounded.

Out of a loophole set in another wall tumbled a *thing* of green seeking fingers. It plopped to the floor dragging a ragged trail of rustling *green* silk. It moved uncertainly toward them.

"Yeow!" squawled Monk who had encountered on the crawling *things* before.

Calmly, Doc Savage stepped up to the creature and planted a bare foot on the trailing silken rag.

The *creature* strained to continue its advance. Something popped and the walking *entity* stepped clear of the sleeve mouth, dragging a tiny thread (which had obviously served to anchor the silk sleeve) behind it.

In the light, they saw the crawling *creature* clearly for the first time.

It marched on methodical legs -- 8 in number. They were a bilious *green*. An equal number of tiny eyes gleamed evilly in the light.

His eyes popping, Shad O'Shea exclaimed: "A *spider*! It's a *spider*!"

Howling with *rage*, Monk snatched up Doc's discarded manacles (the heaviest item he could lay hands on) and flew at the scuttling horror.

"Take that, you faker!" he howled.

He dashed the thing apart. Much to relief of everyone except Maurine Baird.

She said: "The spiders are not harmful in and of themselves. Although *Quon* uses them to keep his followers in line."

Doc called Monk to his side.

"This door might give under sufficient pressure," he suggested.

"Let's see if it does," Monk said boisterously.

They put their shoulders to it. The cabinet had not looked very solid. But the door (it was actually a section of wall) was heavy sandstone. Even their combined efforts only made it shudder and bang in stubborn protest.

Hitching up his pants, Shad O'Shea said: "Count me in."

"And me," said Jason Baird.

They set themselves and then piled on.

It took 3 attempts ...

... but the solid panel gave a little with each lunge until it simply surrendered, falling inward cabinet-and-all.

They pushed into the laboratory.

Sleeves jittering, the *Jade Ogre* ducked through the door opposite, slamming it after him.

"Man oh man!" Monk howled. "Let's mop up this place!"

"Wait!" Doc said.

The Bronze Man was gathering up racked flasks.

"These are the second dosages," he added.

"We drink them now?" Ham asked.

"Yes," replied Maurine Baird.

"Then we are safe from that *green* stuff?"

"Yes."

They drank down another dose, Doc Savage included.

"Well," said Shad O'Shea throwing his flask to the floor. "That's that!"

Doc pocketed one flask and said: "Let us find Pat."

Ham noticed that they were short by one person.

"Where did Monk go?"

A moment later, the hairy chemist -- a vision in *green* -- emerged from the other room.

"Thought I'd turn off that *goblin gas*," he said amiably.

He was swinging the manacles with which he had dispatched the green *spider*.

"Might bring me luck," he grinned.

"Let's go!" Jason Baird said impatiently.

Doc Savage led the way. They squeezed along the narrow passage.

The green **vapor** followed them out. That, if anything, explained the absence of enemies blocking their escape route.

Where the silken cushions lay scattered (obviously for the comfort of the Jade Ogre), Doc and Monk formed a human pyramid.

The others climbed the pyramid. Habeas Corpus was handed up last.

On top, Monk was lifted off Doc's shoulders. He got down on his stomach and reached down with a furry beam of an arm.

Doc crouched ... leaped ... and took his aide's offered hand in his. Only Monk Mayfair's long limbs could have accomplished this.

Straining, the apish chemist assisted Doc Savage to the ragged lip.

They joined the others.

The bedchamber door lay open. The room had been evacuated.

His **muscles** gleaming like piano wire that had been lacquered with verdigrised **bronze** paint, Doc crept toward the door.

"Coast is clear," Ham hissed peering out.

His hands flexed nervously. He lacked his ever-present sword-cane which had been left behind in the plane.

Doc motioned for the others to follow him out.

They stepped out when a voice caught their attention.

"Doc! Be careful!"

"Pat!" Ham breathed.

Doc nodded. "Coming from upstairs."

"How we gonna up there?" Jason Baird pointed out. "The ladder's gone."

"Betcha that **Quon**'s upstairs too," Monk growled.

The **Bronze Man** went to the hole leading to the upper level.

He flashed back. *It was well that he did.*

For a harridan disembodied **limb** of **yellow** fingers and **green** silk darted down after him.

It bobbed ... righted itself ... then seemed to hesitate in mid-air.

Eyes popping, Monk exploded: "Blazes!"

Then Doc Savage did something that made their hair stand on end.

Moving cautiously, he began to circle the hesitating *limb*. Perhaps *it* was confused by the abundance of potential victims presented. But the discorporate *arm* wavered toward the others. When Doc moved, *it* yawned in his direction.

Doc was swifter, however. He came up behind the thing and to the astonishment of all clapped the gaunt apparition between 2 *bronze* hands.

The *thing* trembled but did not resist the *bronze giant's* sudden seizure.

Carefully, he brought *it* over, slipping the ragged green sleeve off the *thing's* bony length.

"Is...is it real?" Rex Pinks gulped.

Near by, a door banged open!

An Asiatic face peered out. A pistol showed. **Death impended.**

Doc Savage turned and propelled the ghostly *limb* in the direction of the startled brown face. The *limb* literally floated in a straight unerring line.

The door clapped shut. The questing bony fingers did not pause, however. They hit the door and blazed up *yellow* and hot.

There was no sign of the naked yellow *arm* when the hurt went out of everyone's eyes.

"Hells bells!" Shad O'Shea blurted, obviously dumfounded.

"Come on," Doc urged.

Everyone followed the fast-moving *bronze giant*. To their surprise, he raced in the direction of the throne room. The door hung askew on its remaining hinge.

There was no one on the other side. Doc motioned for silence.

He strode up to the dragon throne and mounted one of the goggle-eyed brass lions.

The thing was high enough that he was able to brush the aperture in the ceiling with the tips of his fingers.

Doc called up: "Pat."

A pretty face appeared in the aperture.

"Doc! You found me!"

"Where is *Quon*?"

"On the other side of the glass shield that's up here," Pat reported. "The Cambodians are guarding the way into the cell. And do you know whose cell this is?"

"Reach down," Doc rapped.

Pat's athletic arm came down and took from Doc Savage a flask containing *Jade Fever* antidote.

"Drink half," Doc instructed.

The hand went away.

"How does it taste?" Pat called down. "I'm a particular kind of gal, you know."

"Never mind that now," Doc said flatly.

Just then, the throne room entrance became a choke of shouting spitting Asiatics.

"Doc!" Ham called wildly. "Trouble!"

The **Bronze Man** leaped from the brass lion.

He landed on his feet as the minions of *Quon* charged for the *dais* <cocking> pistols and waving *creeses*, *parangs*, and other exotic blades.

"And us without rods," Shad muttered.

"We can take 'em!" Monk said fiercely windmilling his **rusty** arms.

Seemingly oblivious to the threat, Doc Savage calmly stood where he had landed.

Spreading like a surging cataract, the charging Asiatics were almost upon them ...

Then unnoticed by any in the great room, the **Bronze Man** placed a metallic toe on the outermost of the row of **jade** buttons at his feet.

With a suddenness that was breathtaking, the sheet of bullet-turning glass dropped from the ceiling.

It slid into its rubber lip with almost no sound. Everyone's hair was stirred by a breath of air. That was all.

In their headlong fury, the Cambodians did not see the glass or notice the telltale hole that Doc Savage had earlier created with **thermite**.

They piled into the invisible barrier and bounced back. It was comical the way they picked themselves up and attempted to breach the barrier, only to encounter an invisible wall. It seemed that they nothing of the true nature of the pane.

One found the circular hole. He pointed it out to his fellows jabbering excitedly.

They tried to crawl through. But their wiry bodies were too thick around to manage that feat. So they settled for thrusting revolvers and blades into the gap.

Monk Mayfair, Shad O'Shea, and Doc Savage were ready.

They fell upon the waving brown arms. Twisting wrists and breaking fingers, they collected a handsome assortment of weapons.

Getting down on one knee, Monk took aim. Asiatics scrambled to get out of the way.

Still, the burly chemist managed to clip one in the knee. That worthy fell and was promptly hauled away by his comrades.

No one dared approach the gap after that.

From upstairs, Pat Savage gave out a scream.

*"Doc! That **ogre**! He's grown an arm. And it's got me!!"*

Below their feet, something ***rumbled***.

The rumble stretched out and became a grinding and tumbling of stone that was joined by other brittle sounds. A ***rushing*** of water followed.

The transparent sheet of glass acquired a silvery lightning boat and groaned.

The *dais* split. The dragon hangings shook. The stone blocks at their feet seemed to knock together and writhe.

Ham looked at his feet with an incredulous expression.

"Good grief! What now?"

"Explosion," Doc rapped.

Stone rained from above. Not whole, fortunately. Merely segments. But they were undeniably dangerous.

Up from the chinks in the floor hissed tendrils of **green** vapor. The ***Jade Fever***.

"The boiler musta blew!" Shad O'Shea blurted.

"Impossible!" Maurine Baird wailed. "The pressure was carefully regulated."

Ham Brooks looked at Monk Mayfair and said: "Didn't Monk go back in that room after we had left?"

The homely Chemist -- still holding the Cambodians at bay -- swallowed and said nothing.

Doc rapped: "Monk!"

"I thought I'd shut the thing off but couldn't find the right valve," he mumbled. "So I threw them all. I guess I musta gummed up the works or somethin'."

Beyond the shattered bulletproof shield, *Jade Ogre* minions saw green *gases* rising up around their feet. Evidently most had not partaken of the antidote. But they understood the significance of the terrible green exhalations because they made a mad scramble for the exit.

Some of them made it ...

... but others dropped, turning weird shades of *blue*, *green*, and *aquamarine*.

"Monk," Doc said again.

"Blazes!" Monk gulped. "Blazes!"

A block dropped then.

They looked up. It had fallen from the aperture, widening it significantly.

Struggling in the grip of the *Jade Ogre*, Pat Savage became visible.

The *Jade Ogre* was now possessed of a left hand. It was firmly on her wrist. The *bronze*-haired girl was using her free hand to fight back.

The *Jade Ogre* was getting the worst of it. His brass crown fell off and Pat began pulling at his hair.

Doc Savage leaped for the ceiling rim and levered himself up. He was quickly lost to sight.

Monk Mayfair and Shad O'Shea horsed a brass lion atop the wood dais, creating a platform for climbing purposes. The lion wobbled warningly, telling of the uncertainty of the floor beneath.

They all started up.

Maurine Baird had to be assisted. Ham Brooks assumed this duty with a courtly (if brisk, given the circumstances) bow.

They found up in the 2nd floor cell a veritable pandemonium.

Pat Savage had the *Jade Ogre* backed into a corner. Both her hands were now unfettered free and made fists which she was using freely. *Quon* was attempting to beat her back with his single arm. It seemed weak as if unused to life.

"Good ol' Pat!" Ham said approvingly.

At the door where danger was most immediate, Doc Savage had his hands full.

He was laying out the bodyguards of **Quon** with expert scientific blows. His hard fists landed, rocking back heads and changing jaw shapes forever. Asiatics fell like sickled corn and others piled over the fallen.

The **Bronze Man** seized two by the hair and brought his hands together. The 2 heads colliding made a *bonk!* of a noise. Then 2 more brown bodies joined the fallen.

"Save some for me!" Monk howled, pitching in.

"Me too!" Jason Baird gritted.

Coming to the *bronze giant's* side, they swiftly beat back the minions and forced them out of the cell.

Ham rushed to Pat's assistance.

But he was not needed.

The **bronze**-haired girl maneuvered herself behind her foe, taking his oddly-ineffective arm with her. She twisted it up behind his back painfully while simultaneously tripping the **jade**-faced being to the floor.

Whetting he hands together, she crowed: "His mistake was growing that handy arm. I couldn't use my *jujitsu* before."

The room settled down.

Doc shouldered the door closed. There was a latch. It held when engaged.

The **Bronze Man** strode over to the corner where Pat Savage stood over the prostrate form of the **Jade Ogre**.

The others surrounded the weirdly incomplete *creature*.

"Who wants to do the honors?" Pat said jauntily, rapping the creature's **jade** face with a toe.

Quon recoiled like a wounded serpent that had been kicked in the snout.

"He's mine," Jason Baird said fiercely.

"Nothin' doin'," Shad O'Shea insisted. "I owe him for what he done to my pards."

"And I have a score to settle over my sister's abduction!" Baird retorted hotly.

The question went unsettled as it turned out.

The *rumble* returned. Lower, throatier than before.

Water sounds came below. A Gargantuan **sloshing!**

"What-on-earth was that?" Ham bleated.

"The lake is pouring into the temple cellar," Doc said with unsettling calmness.

Pouring in was the least of it as it turned out.

The entire temple of *Quon* was ancient despite its modern electrification. The rush of water that they had been hearing doubtless came from a hole in the cellar walls excavated by the boiler explosion. Action of incoming water was undermining the foundation walls.

They saw proof of this in the walls of the cell in which they had barricaded themselves. Chinks of **red** light (Dawn was breaking outside) glared at them as the walls sagged and buckled.

Out of the nooks emerged scuttling green *spiders* that had so uncannily resembled animated hands.

"Ugh," said Pat.

Doc Savage warned: "We must clear out! This place is about to collapse!"

He moved to an outside wall where a carved disk of wood was set like a bizarre shutter. He yanked this open, uncovering a grille of woven bamboo strips. It was not old.

Doc made short work of it by driving a **bronze fist** through the center, then yanking back. The grille came loose.

"Not big enough," Jason Baird pointed out.

"Another of this devil's secret escapes," Monk gritted, giving the prostrate *Quon* a kick in the ribs.

The walls were groaning now. Doc Savage went to work on the stone rim. The mortar (moss and crumbling cement) offered relatively little resistance. Monk joined in.

They quickly had an opening that would accommodate the largest of their party.

Doc organized everyone. A rope was improvised out of blankets found on a bed of straw. This was let out the ragged hole. Maurine Baird and Patricia Savage were sent down first. Rex Pinks and Jason Baird went next.

"We're runnin' outta time," Monk warned.

It was an unnecessary comment.

The rush of water was abating somewhat. But the damage had been done. Outside they could actually see turmoil on the lake created by the sudden inrush of *greenish* water.

When the first to leave had reached the ground, Ham started down carrying the ludicrously-**green** pig Habeas Corpus.

"I'll go next," Shad offered.

Monk jerked a thumb in the direction of the beaten figure of *Quon*. *It* looked pitiable and helpless where he had fallen.

"What about him?" the homely chemist asked.

"I will carry him down," Doc said.

The improvised rope ceased to tremble with weight. Monk took hold of the line and swung himself out. He started down.

Doc went to gather up the misshapen *Jade Ogre*. He reached down to touch the figure ...

.... and it exploded!

Actually, it only seemed that way. The *report* was loud and some green *silk* tatters flew about.

Moving swiftly, the *Bronze Man* had avoided the bullet that had emerged from the breast of *Quon*, leaving a smoking hole.

It struck the ceiling, knocking a loose stone free.

Madly, the weird figure of the *Jade Ogre* flung himself for the broken hole in the center of the cell floor.

The walls started going then.

Some freak of destruction caused the bulletproof pane of glass to toil upward. Evidently the generator that furnished power to the temple remained above the waterline.

The glass -- cracked and under stress -- broke into jagged fangs as it lifted into view.

Seeing escape about to be cut off, Doc Savage vaulted the rising row of transparent teeth and gained the other side.

He paused at the opening.

In attempting to reach the floor escape route, the *Jade Ogre* had become tangled up in the rising glass pane. One sharp tooth of it had snagged his long silk *robe*. It was lifting him off his feet.

A voice called from below.

"Doc! What's keepin' you?"

It was Monk Mayfair. His voice was twisted, fearful, frantic.

Wearing a face of concern, the *bronze giant* called over to the one-armed *ogre*.

"You must come with me if you want to survive," he warned. "You will not be able to climb down on your own."

Struggling one-handedly, the *Jade Ogre* croaked out a single word:

"Never!"

Doc stated back.

Another hole jumped from *Quon's* *green* chest, spewing tatters. This time, the **bullet** went wide.

The **Bronze Man** wavered. He knew the *jade*-masked one was a being of *Evil*. That the blood of many lay upon his hands (such as they were). Still, he was averse to leaving the man to his doom.

It was clear that Doc Savage would have swept in to gather up the *Jade Ogre* despite the danger to himself.

But the opportunity became lost forever.

The temple began to shake itself to pieces. The glass wall lost sections. One was the portion that had snagged the *Jade Ogre*.

Instead of releasing him, this caused *Quon* to fall across a valley of sharp glass onto his back.

A clear shard streaked with *crimson* emerged from the silken folds over his stomach. The *jade*-faced fiend threw back his head and from his set lips came a torrent of *crimson*. *There was quite a lot of this.*

His face grim, Doc Savage whipped out. He took the tail of bedding and rode it down to the ground.

His last sight of the being called *Quon* was of a squirming emerald figure. One arm was flopping helplessly as it attempted to worm itself free while being lifted to the trembling ceiling on a shard of impaling glass.

The ripping *scream* that came when the jagged teeth met the crumbling temple roof was one that none who heard it would ever forget. *Mercifully, it was very short.*

XX



XXXVI -- The Disembodied

Doc Savage released the rope before he was halfway to the ground.

He flung himself off and away. The others were already retreating from the imminent peril of collapsing stonework.

Together, they reached the edge of the stone jetty that jutted tongue-like from the temple of Quon and plunged into the warm waters of **Jade Lake**.

The waded in ... got chest-deep ... and looked back. An incredible sight met their eyes.

The eastern face of the temple of **Quon** -- fashioned to resemble the **Jade Ogre's** countenance -- caved in as if a might fist had dealt it a great blow.

The nose fell in first, taking with the eyes (one of which was the circular window that had provided them with escape).

Water poured into the mouth as if in its death throes, the 4-faced stone head was greedily drinking the lake that had nurtured it.

Out of the cracks all along the crumbling stone face crawled the green **spiders** seeking frantic escape.

The crown lacking support caved in. That was the *coupe de grace*. The weight of falling stone smashed through floors and supports creating a terrific **uproar**.

A long **rumble** followed like nearby thunder. Up came an exhalation of brick dust and smoke. The green vapor that was the **Jade Fever** showed as weak tendrils. Clearly, the great crush of stone had sealed the largest part of it in airtight pockets.

Silence followed. It had been quick the destruction of the ancient sinister temple.

Their eyes were fixed on the devastation wrought. Jaws hung slack. Maurine Baird buried her face into the thick shoulder of her brother Jason.

"The nightmare is over. At last!" she sobbed.

No one had anything to add to that particular statement.

It was hours before they felt up to searching the broken thing that was the symbol of the **Jade Ogre's** ability to see to the 4 quarters and send out his preternatural vengeance.

Doc Savage, Monk Mayfair, and Ham Brooks picked at the rubble. They were grimly silent. Especially Monk who would have normally rejoiced in the bloody punishment visited upon **Quon** and his servants.

They found many Asiatic bodies. Most were a very livid **green**. Some were merely crushed. **But all were dead.**

The **Bronze Man** was speaking.

"The man who pretended to be Quon -- the legendary **Jade Ogre** -- was as clever a fiend as we have come up against."

No one disputed that assertion.

"But nonetheless," Doc continued, " he gave himself away t certain points. He was with us on the *Mandarin* mingling with the passengers. It was he who signaled Wan Sop to murder Fuzzy Wool and Kitten Borzoi to prevent them from revealing that the body in the ship's morgue was not the true Jason Baird."

Ham -- who had recovered his sword-cane from the amphibian -- was thrusting the blade into breaks in the tumbled stone. Sometimes the blade came out **red**. Much to the fastidious barrister's visible distaste.

"It was this mastermind who caused the death of the pilot on the San Francisco-bound flight," Doc went on. "I was actually the target then. Obviously, he had finished scouting New York in preparation for his extortion scheme. The pilot died in my place, his killer taking poison to 'save face'."

*Sadness underlay the **Bronze Man**'s quiet tones.*

"I did not begin to suspect him until we were at sea, however. He lied at several points. Once, when he claimed to have seen Pat attacked by one of the phantom **limbs**. I had been keeping a close on her and he was not present on deck when the attack came. Unless it was he who had set the **limb** upon her."

Looking ludicrous in **green**, Monk Mayfair was digging at a spot which he thought promising. He made a methodical pile of sandstone.

In time, he uncovered fragments of thick glass. He redoubled his efforts.

Ham Brooks pitched in. Together, they uncovered a **head**. It stared upward, the eyes fixed slits, the **jade** of the face layered with rock dust and streaked with **scarlet**.

The mask had not changed. Yet now it looked somehow dead and devoid of spirit even though it had never been anything other than mere lifeless stone.

Monk reach down and found an exposed arm. It felt solid enough. So he pulled on it.

The upper body of the **Jade Ogre** was thus brought to light. The **green** silk gown tailed off in the vicinity of the body's waist. *There was no more to it than that.*

Doc Savage resumed speaking.

"This man gave himself away again when he life and claimed that Pat had accepted his proposal. And again in the Hong Kong dragon throne trap from which I rescued him. He deliberately <pressed> a **jade** button that caused a trapdoor to open under my feet. That attempt on my life was particularly ingenious. And it might have succeeded had I not already had cause to suspect him."

Doc Savage fell to one knee. Carefully, he removed the **jade** face of *Quon* which came away dragging a coarse wig of glossy black hair.

Exposed to the rays of the climbing Sun **were the twisted features of Dr. Mawson Harper**. His black-streaked white hair was discolored by **gore**. His ebony Van Dyke was a frightened dab on his chin. His features (like everyone else's) were a livid **green**.

No one expressed any surprise at this revelation. They had come to the realization of the Jade Ogre's identity in the aftermath of all that had happened.

Doc closed the eyes which even now mirrored the horror of the man's going.

Maurine Baird offered in an unsteady voice:

"I... I knew him. That is, I had encountered him in my Chinese travels. He... he showed great interest in my work."

"It does explain how *Quon* came to learn of you and your research," Doc said. "Obviously, his own work enabled him to exploit the legend of the Jade Ogre to bring the natives under his control and build up his organization. Which is now smashed forever."

"What I would like to know," inserted Ham Brooks, twirling his cane, "is how this creature was able to accomplish some of his feats of *spookery*."

By way of answer, the **Bronze Man** took hold of the silken robes of *Quon* and tore them open.

Exposed was a perfectly normal left arm. The right, however, was folded close to the man's chest like a broken bird wing. It was held in place with a thin leather harness, very tightly-bound. Another identical harness hung slack beside it.

The bound hand clutched a small flat automatic. It was the hidden weapon that twice had discharged when Doc Savage had attempted to seize the **Jade Ogre** only minutes before.

"Dr. Mawson Harper was a clever contortionist," Doc explained. "He was double-jointed and had the ability to compress his body into extremely small confines. Further, he had mastered the escape artist's trick of unhinging the collar bone -- which provides structure to the shoulder -- and folding the shoulders inward."

Doc indicated Dr. Harper's right shoulder which was weirdly deformed. He unbound the arm, freed it, reset the shoulder. There was an audible **pop!** that made everyone queasy.

"With both arms bound under his concealing gown," Doc added, "and his shoulders hunched forward, Harper was able to squeeze through places where a normal person could not. Through a porthole of his stateroom on the *Mandarin*. Again in the Bankor ruins. And all through his tunnel-honeycombed temple stronghold."

"Sounds thin," Rex Pinks sniffed.

"Do not forget that he was a small-boned individual and the widest part of him was his shoulder breadth."

"That doesn't explain how he escaped the death chamber when the wall of spikes was coming at us," Jason Baird put in. "We got out only because after the lights went out, the Cambodians hauled back the steel wall by hand, exposing a niche in one side of the chamber through which were marched at gunpoint. Harper could not have escaped that way. We would have seen it."

"You have forgotten the drainage vent in the floor," Doc pointed out. "He lifted this up, unhinged his collar bone, squeezed down and replaced the vent. Houdini is reputed to have employed the same trick under just such difficult time constraints."

"Do you mean," Ham asked, "that Harper deliberately led us into that death trap?"

Doc nodded.

"He was as determined to preserve his secret as he was to eliminate any obstacle to his mad scheme."

"I figured it out when they separated me from the others and threw me in that cell," Pat interposed. "I saw the bulletproof shield and recalled that that was the cell where Dr. Harper had been held prisoner. It was directly over the throne room so he could come-and-go unsuspected just by wriggling through the floor drain."

"Obviously, Dr. Harper wished you to believe he was an innocent," Doc said. "His infatuation was another item that gave him away. It explained *Quon's* determination that you not perish with the rest of us."

"Bally strange," Ham remarked.

"But Doc," Monk squeaked. "There's still a lot I don't figure. I know them walkin' hands were spiders. But the ghost *arms*. What were they?"

"The answer to that," stated the **Bronze Man**, "is not very complicated."

Doc maneuvered the half-corpse until he found what he had sought. A tiny canister affixed to some mechanism concealed in one of the empty sleeves. It was at the shoulder seam where a folded hand could reach it.

He touched a tiny knurled knob. Instantly, a *hissing* was heard.

And from one side of the body of the late Dr. Mawson Harper, a yellow bony **protuberance** began to swell and unfold. It gained shape, length until it became a *Quon arm*. Gaunt and sinister to behold.

Frowning, Ham poked it with his cane. The *thing* popped and collapsed!

"An inflatable arm," Doc said. "Helium in the cylinder gave it shape and lift so that it would appear that the *Jade Ogre* could grow arms at will. And a tug on a valve could collapse it also at will."

"That was no phony hand that grabbed me, let me tell you," Pat said grimly.

Doc said: "He was forced to unlimber his left arm when things got tough. Lack of circulation made it less than effective."

"But that don't explain the ones that chased us everywhere," Monk pointed out.

"Those were another matter entirely," the **Bronze Man** related. "Recall that the *Jade Ogre* never released the so-called '**Limbs of Retribution**' in our presence. He invariably retreated from sight and the truly dangerous arms were released unseen."

"So what were they?" Monk exploded, impatience stamped on his pleasantly homely features.

"Balloons," stated Doc. "Filled with flammable hydrogen; coated with *Radium* paint to create a ghostly glowing effect; and the fingers tipped with *Jade Fever*. They were counterweighted at either end to create neutral buoyancy so that they would float at a constant height. No doubt there was an igniter device. Probably a flint and tiny mousetrap-like arrangement set in one finger so that upon contact with a solid object -- whether a wall or victim -- the hydrogen would ignite destroying all traces of their true construction. The covering sleeves with their ragged tails added a chattering effect that further concealed the artificial nature of the things."

"That doesn't explain the *arm* that chased me," Pat said. "Balloons just don't up-and-chase folks."

Doc stood up. *His flake gold eyes were unusually quiescent as if he were looking into the past.*

"In several instances," he said quietly, "in Jason Baird's office, on the liner, and elsewhere, the *arms* were hooked to the clothing of their victims -- unsuspected -- so that when they became aware of the things, they would naturally flee, pulling the contrivance after them. The illusion of being pursued by a disembodied *supernatural limb* was convincing."

"That **tiger claw** I found in my outfit!" Pat said brightly. "That explains it! It was dark in that companionway when I saw the glowing *arm*. Harper could have been lurking there all right and hooked me."

"And that explains the claw you pulled from my clothes," Rex Pinks chimed in.

Doc nodded. "It was the only physical manifestation that did not burn up when the *arms* destroyed themselves. Yet when discovered, they were as unnerving as the *arms* themselves."

"*Quon* -- I mean Harper -- musta used a thin silk thread that couldn't be seen and was coated with black powder so that it would burn up too," muttered Monk.

"And the *bonging* sound we heard was easily produced," Ham offered. "Merely a portable gong."

"It does explain a lot," Shad O'Shea admitted.

"The illusion of life was given when the things floated," the **Bronze Man** continued. "Air current created by passing bodies would disturb them enough to make it seem that they were selecting victims. In reality, they were simply reacting to quite ordinary drafts and eddies."

"When you explain it like that," Monk said, "I feel kinda foolish getting' so worked up about them spook *arms*."

"Make no mistake, they were **death**-dealing devices," Doc said gravely. "Although they were early on planted to intimidate rather than kill. No doubt the one that chased Ho's taxicab was tied to the machine's bumper by Ho himself at the instruction of Dr. Harper. Others were affixed to closed doors so that when opened, they would be propelled outward."

"It's ironic," Pat inserted. "Had Harper not bound one of his hands, he might have escaped a grisly end."

Doc Savage studied Monk Mayfair and remarked: "A number of mistakes were made today."

Monk stuffed his hands into his pockets and looked at his feet. Doc was not given to lecturing. This was the Bronze Man's way of scolding his aide. For it was Doc Savage's inflexible rule to avoid bloodshed at all costs. Even that of deserving-of-death malefactors such as Dr. Mawson Harper.

The homely Chemist had broken that rule. And it was not the first time, either.

They set about readying themselves to depart.

The *Quon* seaplane had survived the cataclysm. They set about draining its tanks of gasoline and transferring the fuel to the Doc Savage amphibian, which was low.

It was decided to return the visible remains of Dr. Mawson Harper to the tomb that the temple of *Quon* had become. This was accomplished in somber silence. No words were spoken.

At the end, Doc Savage simply paced the *Jade Ogre* mask atop the cairn they had built.

Some time later as they were finishing preparations for the long homeward trek, Monk ambled up to Doc Savage and muttered: "Doc. I want to say ... What I mean ... Aw heck!"

The **Bronze Man** nodded.

"We will speak no more of it."

Monk brightened.

"I been talkin' to that Shad O'Shea."

"Yes?"

"He's all broke up over this. His friends bein' killed and all. I was tellin' him about our place upstate."

"Shad would like to start a new life."

"He says he ain't lived a bad life especially. But he was no angel, either."

"Then we will send Shad to *college*," Doc said.

Monk grinned. The idea seemed to lift a burden from his apish shoulders as if the good deed might atone for his earlier mistake.

*For the "*College*" was a mysterious institution hidden in the mountains of upstate New York. There, Shad O'Shea -- as had many criminals who had come alive into the *Bronze Man's* toils -- would undergo treatment which would turn him into an honest upright citizen.*

This would begin with a delicate brain operation which wiped out all knowledge of the subject's past. Then the man would be taught honesty, good citizenship, and a trade. Returned to society, he would assume new identity and forever hate crookedness.

*So effective was this treatment that no graduate of Doc's "*College*" ever returned to a life of Crime.*

They finished transferring gasoline from the seaplane. Rex Pinks was grinning despite the labor involved.

"What's with the grins?" Monk demanded suspiciously.

"Oh, I was just thinking of the swell story I'm going to write when I hit Frisco again."

"Oh yeah? Well, Doc don't like publicity."

"He'll like what I write," the society reporter said confidently.

"You may write whatever you wish," Doc Savage informed Rex Pinks some minutes later. "But your editor will refuse to print it."

"Why's that?"

"Because," Doc explained, "I own a controlling interest in his newspaper."

Rex Pinks lost his grin and his enthusiasm for work at the same time. He sat down on the temple rubble ... set his elbows on his knees, his chin on his fists ... and took on a look of dejection.

As a final act, Pat Savage dosed herself with the remaining *Jade Fever* antidote. Habeas Corpus also was forced to partake.

"How long until this green *tint* fades?" Pat asked Maurine Baird.

"A day, now that you've had the complete treatment."

"That's a relief," Ham Brooks said, examining his once-white outfit which now was a soiled and torn ruin. "For I have nothing that goes with this hideous shade of *aquamarine*."

The *laughter* that greeted the dapper lawyer's disconsolate remark caused him to blush a deep royal *blue*.

The amphibian was idling when the last of the tiny band began clambering aboard.

Jason Baird made a speech.

"I can't thank you all enough for what you have done for my sister and me," he said simply. "Without you, Maurine would still be a ... a ..."

There was a trace of moisture in the gruff jewelry proprietor's flinty eyes.

Maurine Baird put in mildly: "What my brother means to say is that we are forever in your debt."

"Sucks, it was nothing," Pat said cheerfully. "Look at all the hair-raising excitement we got out of it."

"I had rather hoped," Doc put in dryly, "that this particular outing would have cured you of your excitement-chasing mania, Pat."

"Not I!" the **bronze**-haired girl said enthusiastically. "All this tearing around only gives me a hankering for more."

"I was afraid of that," Doc said.

Jason Baird cleared his throat.

"What I said earlier about the \$20,000 in **diamonds** still goes," he added. "Half to the charity Doc Savages names. And the other half to Shad O'Shea who is the only survivor of Fuzzy Wool's old crowd."

Big Shad O'Shea grimaced and growled: "You can ship my share to wherever Savage says. Where I'm goin', I won't be needin' it."

Doc Savage said: "A portion will be set aside so that Shad will have a good start when he embarks upon his new life."

That seemed to satisfy everyone. They took seats.

The big **bronze** amphibian roared to life. It went skimming across the troubled expanse of **Jade Lake** sending the green **spiders** of *Quon* leaping along their lily pad nests in fright.

Once in the air, they settled down to watch the steaming jungle unroll under their wings. Now that their long ordeal was over, fatigue began to settle over the cabin.

"I cannot recall," opined Ham Brooks, "when we last experienced such a bloody adventure. I guess this could only happen in the Orient where life is cheap."

"This?" Monk snorted. "It was nothin'! Last time I was in China, I saw a woman bein' hanged from a tree."

Ham looked started.

"Shanghai?"

Monk grinned broadly.

"Oh, about 6 feet."

XX



(<http://www.hotlegsinlove.com/AnnaXXX.htm>)



The next episode in **"The Perils of Patricia Savage"** is
PS189XXX.pdf ("The Whistling Wraith")

[http://www.hotlegsinlove.com/PSXXX/PS189XXX_The_Whistling_Wraith.zip]

(the previous adventure was **PS174XXX_I_Died_Yesterday.pdf**)

The images here plus video GIFs are stored online at <http://www.hotlegsinlove.com/PSXXX.htm>

Mega Porn Sites (from which the images above were taken):

<http://luxbabes.com> ; <http://www.tiava.com> , <http://www.extremeapril.com>

Rebecca's HAP (Housewives At Play) - <http://www.rebeccahap.com>

Role-Playing Costumes – Forplaycatalog.com LoversLane.com

T-Girl/Tranny Call-Girls at <http://www.hotlegsinlove.com/AnnaXXX.htm>, <http://barbie-boy.com> ,
<http://www.cute-shemales.com> , <http://www.trannyhardpics.com>

Fantasy "Forced-Sex" sites at <http://www.forcefantasies.com> , <http://www.dofantasy.com> ,
<https://www.8muses.com/> , <http://www.superheroinecentral.com/~wizard/> ,
<http://www.savageartwork.com> , <http://www.boundandgagged.net/>

"Forced-Sex" RolePlaying Forums – <http://savage-violation.com> , <http://ravishu.com> ,
<http://www.collarspace.com/>

an online Escort/Call-Girl site => <http://www.erostranssexuals.com/>

(Fake) Nude Hollywood Celebrities at <http://www.cfake.com/> , <http://www.sinfuldrawing.com> ,
<http://www.topcelebrityfakes.com> , <http://www.celebritiesmix.com>

"Monster/Alien/Dog" sex at <http://monsterfuckgirls.com> , <http://3dcreaturesex.com/> ,
<https://beastartforum.com> , <http://3dmonster.xxx/> , <https://www.pichunter.com/tags/Monsters>

To contribute ideas for future stories (or possibly even participate in role-playing), email ...



email: kelli@hotlegsinlove.com

<http://www.hotlegsinlove.com/StartXXX.htm>