

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

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Chapter 1. CELEBRITY

THERE WERE several reasons why the first of the two shots did not attract attention. One explanation was due to the number of newspaper photographers on hand taking flash light pictures of the crowd. These London journalists were using the old-style flash light powder which made white smoke and noise, as well as flash.

Over in a hangar, a balky motor ran irregularly, backfiring often another reason why the shot was not heard.

"I say, a jolly mean bug!" remarked one scribe, peering upward. Without knowing it, this man had heard the whiz of the glancing bullet.

It was dark, and only the landing lights marking the edge of Croydon Flying Field cut through the usual fog.

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Later, when the plane every one awaited was heard, flood lamps would be switched on.

Somewhat of a throng was on hand to greet the plane.

The man who had been shot at lay flat on the ground near the field edge, and pawed at his face. The bullet had knocked dirt into his eyes. It had been fired from some distance.

"Sen Gat!" the man groaned.

There was no one else near. Gloom, the wet swirl of fog, enwrapped the vicinity.

"Sen Gat!" the man repeated, snarling this time.

The man was thin of body, long of arms and legs. He made a grotesque shape lying on the ground, a black raincoat flung over himself. He had hoped the dark raincoat, coupled with the darkness, would conceal him. It had failed.

Getting the bullet driven dirt out of his eyes, he scuttled to one side, dragging the raincoat, then got to his feet and ran.

"Damn Sen Gat!" he gritted.

He came close to a border light and it shone on a jaw that was pointed, a nose hooked and somehow remindful of a parrot beak. His skin looked like muslin which had been much in the weather, and there was almost no flesh between the skin and the bones it covered. One of his bony hands was darkly purple in hue. He veered away from the light, and when a hangar loomed ahead he hesitated, then ran to it and crept inside. Thrusting his head out again, he listened for a long time for signs of pursuit, but none came to his ears. Next, he tried to catch some sound of a plane overhead. There was none.

Nervously, he prowled the hangar. In the rear, he found a pair of greasy coveralls draped over a workbench. Fingering these, he began to chuckle. The coveralls fitted fairly well when he tried them on, and he did not remove them.

The man pulled up his sleeve. Held tightly to his upper arm by rubber bands was a small packet. The packet was half an inch thick, possibly four inches long, and wrapped in oiled paper. The rubbers, cutting off circulation, had made his hand purple.

He stripped the bands off and kneaded his arm slowly to restore blood flow.

"Deuced nasty feeling," he muttered. As an afterthought, he added, "Blast Sen Gat!"

He ended up by putting the slender packet in a coverall pocket, instead of fastening it back to his arm with the rubbers.

Then he left the hangar and mingled with the crowd, passing unnoticed among a score or so of mechanics garbed like himself. Anyway, all eyes were watching the southern sky expectantly.

THE BONY man drifted about and finally stopped beside a journalist.

"I say, why all the bloomin' watchful waitin'?" he queried.

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The scribe looked shocked. "Jove! Don't you read the sheets?"

"The newspapers? Naw."

The scribbler eyed the other as if observing a freak. The reporter failed to realize that he was being cleverly pumped for information.

"Did you ever hear of the Yankee they call the Man of Mystery?"

"Nope."

"No? He is a giant of a chap, a tremendous fellow. They say no living man has greater muscular strength."

"Never heard of 'im."

"They call him the Man of Bronze! That help your memory?"

"Nope."

The journalist took a full breath and began to spread enlightenment.

"Listen, old chap, this bronze man is known as one of the greatest surgeons. As a chemist, he has made discoveries that your children will some day read about. The bronze man is rated a wizard in the field of electricity. Furthermore, he – "

The thin man in the coveralls put a bony finger against the scribe's chest. "How many blokes are you tellin' me about?"

"One."

"You know what?"

"What?"

"I think you're joshin'."

Disgustedly, the scribe stuffed hands in the pockets of his Landon wrap.

"A few weeks ago," he said, "there was a revolution in the Balkan kingdom of Calbia. This Yankee put a stop to it. He's now on his way back to America. We expect his plane any minute."

The pseudo mechanic's eyes roved over the surrounding crowd. The fellow was a good actor. No twitch of his features betrayed that he had been shot at a few moments before, or that he was now in fear of another bullet.

"What's this bronze man's business?" he asked.

The journalist shrugged. "He's a remarkable character. Goes about the world aiding chaps who need help."

"Charges plenty for that, eh?"

"On the contrary, he does not accept fees. The bronze chap is deuced wealthy, according to reports."

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The fake mechanic grew suddenly earnest. "I say—if I was in a jam, and went to the bronze man—he'd help me? That it?"

"Righto. Doc Savage would do just that."

"That's the bronze man's name – Savage?"

"Doc Savage, righto."

DOWN THE field a man yelled. "The Savage plane! She's comin'!"

Excitement swept the throng. Photographers who had been snapping the assemblage hastily charged cameras with new plates and sprinkled flash light powder in gun troughs. The field flood lamps were switched on, and "bobbies" cleared the landing runways of spectators.

Croydon was agog.

The foggy night sky spawned a plane. Engines barely kicking over, air awhistle around struts and wing surfaces, the ship skidded from side to side as the pilot fishtailed away surplus speed. It was an all-metal, tri-motored amphibian, and it settled on the field with the delicacy of a bird.

"Deuced good hand on those controls," a pilot spectator remarked.

The plane's engines blooped, kicking the ship around. Obviously the occupants were seeking to avoid the crowd.

The throng surged forward, however, and in a moment had surrounded the plane. Motors were switched off, so that the propellers would not damage overenthusiastic individuals.

The thin man who had been shot at went with the rest. He kept a sharp lookout as he ran, hence was not among the first to reach the amphibian. Growling, he tugged and elbowed to get through. Others were doing the same thing. He did not make much headway.

"Doc Savage!" the crowd yelled.

The photographers demanded pictures, the reporters interviews. Autograph hounds waved little books.

Bobbies jostled and shouted to bring order. They were ignored. Quieting the uproar seemed beyond human power.

But the crowd suddenly became silent.

The bronze man had appeared, standing in the cabin door.

It was remarkable. So striking was the man that quiet fell. He was a giant – the comparative proportions of the cabin door showed that. Under the bronze skin of his neck and his hands, great tendons reposed. The thews were like bundles of piano wires. They indicated fabulous strength.

Probably the thing which did most to arrest the crowd's attention was the bronze man's eyes. They were weirdly impressive eyes. Their hue was of flake-gold. They caught and reflected tiny lights from the field floodlamps.

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"Doc Savage!" some one breathed. "By Jove! He's the first celebrity I ever saw who looked as big as his reputation,"

A photographer boomed a flash light gun. That broke the tension.

Something of a riot ensued. The journalists wanted their pictures and stories. The autograph fans desired Doc Savage's signature. Others wanted merely to look. Doc Savage seemed to wish only to get away from the crowd.

"No interviews," the bronze man told the newspaper representatives. "Our outfit doesn't go in for publicity."

His words did not have the sound of a shout, yet the crowd heard them over the noise; there was power, timbre, in the bronze man's remarkable voice.

Doc Savage stepped out of the plane.

Five men alighted after him. The five made a striking group, although the throng did not get much chance to observe them.

One of the five could almost have passed as a hairy gorilla. This individual had a pig, evidently a pet, tucked under one arm. The shoat had enormous ears and long legs, and was as homely an example of the porker species as his master was of the human race.

Another was a big fellow with fists of unearthly hugeness, while a third was extremely tall and gaunt. Of the remaining pair, one was pale, unhealthy-looking; and the other a nattily clad man carrying a black cane.

"Doc Savage's five aides," somebody offered.

"I say – thought he worked alone!" exclaimed another.

"No. Those five men help 'im. Each of them is a bloomin' famous scientist."

Doc Savage and his five men formed a compact wedge; then they drove through the crowd.

The bony man who had been shot at struggled to reach Doc Savage, but the bronze man's party chanced to take the opposite direction. The thin man cast about frantically; his gaze lighted upon a tractor which was used to move planes in and out of hangars. He hesitated, as if fearful of exposing himself above the crowd, then sprang atop the tractor.

"Doc Savage!" he yelled. But scores of other voices were also shouting, and the bronze man paid no attention.

Diving a fist into his coveralls, the bony man extracted the packet wrapped in oiled paper, then calculated carefully and threw the packet. The flung object hit Doc Savage.

COLLIDING WITH the bronze man's shoulder, the packet bounced. But the bronze man drove a hand up and caught it before it was out of reach – a catch that was executed with such blinding speed that those who saw it blinked unbelievably, and quite a few failed to even glimpse it.

Doc Savage half wheeled and his strange golden eyes located the thin man. The fellow who had thrown the packet made violent gestures, indicating that Doc should pocket the object.

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"Keep it!" he screamed. "Please! I'll come to your hotel and explain!"

It was to be doubted that Doc Savage distinguished the words. Lip movement told him what was said, however, the bronze man being a proficient lip reader. He pocketed the packet, and his flying wedge of men went on, himself in their midst.

The bony man looked after the bronze giant. He seemed happy, since a broad grin was on his wasted face.

The grin suddenly convulsed to a blank, hideous grimace. A shrill squeak; a sound like a hand slap and the cadaverous man, throwing his arms in the air, fell backward off the tractor. His collision with the ground was violent.

Some one helped him to his feet. Both hands clamped tightly to his left shoulder, the man stumbled away.

Red liquid began crawling out through his fingers and trickling down his wrist into his sleeve. He had taken a bullet through the shoulder. Like that other shot some minutes ago, this one had gone unnoticed in the uproar.

The wounded man reached the edge of Croydon Field.

"Damn Sen Gat!" he grated.

The fog and the darkness gobbled him up.

Chapter 2. THE BLACK STICK

SOME TIME later a taxicab stopped in a shabby, gloom-stuffed side street in the Shoreditch section of London. The bony man alighted and paid the fare. The cab rolled on and disappeared.

The man had stripped off the greasy coveralls and had donned his black raincoat. A bulge at the shoulder indicated a bandage over the bullet wound.

The injury evidently was not serious, for the fellow's step was springy, alert, as he moved forward along the grimy street. The shadows harbored him most of the time – care on his part saw to that.

This sector of London was the abode of many foreigners. Orientals had segregated themselves in the immediate locality. Shuffling figures with hands tucked in oversize blouse sleeves, and the occasional tang of incense, made the place seem as remote to London as a street in Hong Kong.

The gaunt man scuttled into an alley which was paved with round cobbles. Crouching, he felt with his hands until he found a loose stone, then worked it free. The rock was as large as his two fists.

The blackness of a rear doorway sheltered him a moment later. He knocked, and after the briefest of pauses there was a stir, and a slant-eyed celestial opened the door.

"Sen Gat," said the thin man.

The oriental was blandly expressionless.

"Velly solly," he singsonged. "No catchee such man this place."

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The visitor scowled. "You tell Sen Gat I'm here or you all same catchee hell."

The yellow man grasped the door as if to shut it. "You all same come alongside big mistake. No Sen Gat – "

The bony man struck with his rock. The stone hit the oriental squarely on top of the head, dropping him senseless.

A brief examination brought conviction that the slant-eyed one would be out of commission for some time. The attacker advanced quietly.

Luxurious rugs came under foot; perfumes and incense saturated the air. In one of the rooms lights were on. Tapestries blanketed the walls, rich things replete with flame spouting dragons and grotesque oriental characters, decorations which would appeal only to an oriental's eye.

Cushions were on the floors, images perched atop pedestals, and a tabouret supported a tray which held a tea set and containers of sweetmeats and melon seeds. On either side of the door of this particular room stood a suit of Chinese armor, complete with daggers and short swords.

The man prowled the room, cat-footed. He pulled tapestries aside and looked behind them until he located what he sought.

Behind one of the tapestries was the door of a wall safe. The fellow spun the dial of this several times but had no click.

Going back to the armor he secured a short sword, then stood beside the door and waited.

Deep silence held the aromatic interior of the house, but not for long.

The front door lock clicked as some one came in, then clicked again in shutting. Footsteps shuffled one man. The fellow approached slowly, and eventually came into the room.

The thin man stepped forward, put the tip of his sword against the newcomer's stomach, and invited, "Stand still, Sen Gat!"

SEN GAT was a rangy black crow of a man, with the features of an Asiatic and a skin that was Nubian in its swarthinness. His hands were fantastic, jeweled rings ornamenting nearly every finger. The great thing, though, was his finger nails; possibly six inches long, they were carefully curled inside gold protectors which slipped, thimble-fashion, upon the ends of the fingers.

Sen Gat lifted his grotesque hands as the sword point bit at his midriff.

"Sezaniat datang," he said wryly.

"Speak English!" gritted the thin man.

"Welcome," said Sen Gat ironically.

"Sure!" The sword point, jabbing suggestively, went through coat cloth and sank a quarter of an inch deep into flesh. "Stand still!"

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Sen Gat stood, and the other searched him. A pocket yielded flat automatic; a sheath gave up a serpentine laded reese; and a length of silk cord, excellent for strangling purposes, was disgorged by a secret compartment in the coat lining.

Sen Gat said nothing throughout the inspection. The gold finger nail protectors lent his hands a weird touch, an aspect of inhumanity.

"Open the wall safe," his captor ordered.

Sen Gat stared at his visitor, and the expression he saw on the bony features evidently was not reassuring. There was violent determination – and hate.

After scowling very blackly for a brief time, Sen Gat shrugged slightly. "Very well."

He went over to the safe, the man with the sword following him.

"You know what I want. Don't waste time opening the safe if it's not there." The blade jabbed carelessly.

Sen Gat said nothing but squirmed away from the sharp steel.

"In fact," said the other, "if you open the safe and it is not there, I shall probably kill you,"

"It is there."

The dark oriental swept the drapery aside from the wall safe, moving slowly so as not to excite the other.

As Sen Gat began opening the safe, it was manifest that he did not use his fingers a great deal. In fact, the long nails made the fingers clumsy to the point of uselessness. Maneuvering the dial, he employed the sides of his hand.

The safe came open. Holding his hands so the swordsman could see them, Sen Gat reached into the safe and secured a packet

The object was perhaps half an inch thick, four inches long, and was wrapped in oil paper. It was an almost exact duplicate of the package which the bony man had thrown to Doc Savage.

Sen Gat extended the article.

"Here you are, Maples," he gritted.

THE PALE, exotic lighting in the room made Maples's hand seem more skeleton-like than ever as he took the packet. His bony fingers were agile despite their lack of flesh. Using only one hand, he unrolled the oiled paper and got at the contents.

The paper had been wrapped around a black stick.

The black stick was round, but roughly so, as if it had been molded by rolling between palms. The indentations of finger tips were even discernible in the sepia substance. The compound itself was vaguely like hard rubber, yet obviously not rubber. There was a greasy shine to it.

"This is one of them," Maples said softly, and replaced the oiled covering.

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"One of the keys," Sen Gat said, stepping back slightly. "Three black keys to the secret of the Man With a Thousand Heads."

Maples glared. "Indigo told you that, eh?"

Sen Gat moved another pace. The rug under foot bore a grotesque oriental figure the likeness of some deity or ogre.

"Indigo told me everything," Sen Gat said. "Indigo is quite faithful."

Maples snarled. He wrenched open his shirt at the chest. The skin had a stretched, taut look over his ribs and breastbone. There were long welts, red and inflamed, crisscrossing each other, marks freshly made. They were marks such as might have been left by the touch of a red-hot iron.

"Indigo is all devil," Maples grated. "He tortured me after he heard me talk in my sleep."

Sen Gat laughed. "I'll wager that Indigo learned all you knew."

Moving again, Sen Gat stepped on one ear of the ogre design woven into the carpet.

"Indigo got it all," Maples growled. "Calvin Copeland, his wife, the others – what happened to them – I had to tell it all."

"A pitiful story." Sen Gat sneered as he spoke, and casually stepped on the other ear of the ogre.

"Damn you!" Maples grated. "You don't care what happens to Copeland, his wife, and the others. You want to get to The Thousand-headed Man – with these three keys."

He juggled the packet which held the black stick.

Sen Gat smirked. "You misjudge me."

He said no more, for Maples lunged suddenly and struck him in the face. Sen Gat toppled backward. Fear of snapping off his amazing finger nails seemed to keep him from using his hands to break his descent. He fell heavily.

Maples wrenched up the rug. Under the two ears of the ogre were tiny push buttons; with his feet, Sen Gat could have operated them.

"Called help, eh," Maples rapped.

He leaped upon Sen Gat, grabbed the swarthy oriental by the throat, and they fought. Sen Gat was the stronger by I far, but he did not use his hands and that handicapped him.

Maples, suddenly realizing his foe was possessed with an awful fear of breaking his long finger nails, grabbed the gold nail protectors and twisted.

Sen Gat shrieked, and to prevent breakage of the nails allowed himself to be led toward the door.

Suddenly, men came through the door.

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THE FOREMOST of the newcomers was broad and powerful. His features were handsome in a hard way, but two things combined to make them repulsive: the man's skin was unnaturally pale, and his beard coarse, blue-black.

"Indigo! Help!" screeched Sen Gat.

The blue-bearded Indigo lunged forward. From his right hind dangled a unique weapon – a heavy steel machine tap tied to the end of a leather thong almost a yard in length. He swung the tap on the thong, underhanded, and let it go.

Indigo was deft in the use of his unique missile. Traveling with uncanny accuracy, it caught Maples on the temple and dropped him quivering, stunned.

More men crowded into the room. These were all orientals. None of them had a face pleasant to look upon.

Sen Gat minced backward, peering fearfully at his protected finger nails. His face mirrored an immense relief when he found none of them broken. They were a love he valued next to his life, those nails.

Maples had dropped the black stick. Indigo picked it up and handed it to Sen Gat. The latter, taking it, gave his blue-whiskered henchman a scowl.

"You had orders to follow Maples and seize him."

"All same savvy that," muttered Indigo. He indicated Maples. "When we tackle him, we come alongside smooth fella. Him b'long too damn much gray stuff in head. Two times at fly field we take the shot at him. Too much slick. Bullets plentee miss."

Despite his white skin and his Caucasian lineaments, the man spoke the dialect common to natives of the southern orient and the South Seas.

"Search him!" directed Sen Gat. "He should have the other black stick. That will give us two of the keys. The other one the girl has."

"Yes. Stick three, him b'long Missy Lucille Copeland. Not so good."

He bent over the half-conscious Maples and searched. Pockets were turned inside out. Maples's shirt was torn off, disclosing the torture scar and the fresh bullet wound in the fellow's shoulder.

"Fly field bullet come 'longside this fella after all," Indigo chuckled.

But no other black stick came to light although they searched again. The discovery – or lack of discovery – caused consternation. The orientals cackled in their native dialects; the Malayan tongue was predominant. Evidently all had been with Indigo at the airport.

Sen Gat, listening to their talk, seized upon a morsel of information.

"You say Maples stood on a tractor and threw something," he demanded.

"Me come along that idea, mebbe so," Indigo admitted.

"Make him talk." Sen Gat gestured at Maples. "Find what he did with that other black key."

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INDIGO, LEERING, departed to another room and returned carrying a deep brass brazier in which charcoal burned. He added more charcoal and fanned the flame, and when he had sufficient heat, inserted the point of the sword which Maples had used.

Maples revived and watched the preparations. Four men pinioned his arms and legs. Maples's eyes grew unnaturally wide. He writhed as if the brand marks on his chest had become suddenly painful. Numerous times he ran a tongue over his thin lips.

"It ain't gonna do you no good," he snarled desperately.

Indigo withdrew the sword from the brazier, observed that its tip barely glowed red, and returned it for more heating.

"Mebbe so you fella tongue come loose," he suggested. Maples clenched his lower lip between his teeth, held it a while, and when he released it the lip bore a row of semicircular tooth marks from which scarlet drops crept.

"I can't stand burning again," he groaned. "listen; you fellows are out of luck. Torture won't help."

Sen Gat stroked his finger nails tenderly. "Yes?"

"Doc Savage has the black stick I was carrying."

Maples's words did not bring joy. The orientals chattered; Indigo rubbed his dark jaw; and Sen Gat glared.

"You threw your key to Doc Savage?" Sen Gat questioned.

Maples eyed the encircling faces, and shivered. "Yes," he said.

"Why?"

"Hell, you can guess. I wanted Doc Savage's help. If any man in the world can save Copeland, his wife and the others, Savage can. I went to the airport to see him. I couldn't get close, so I threw the stick to him and yelled that I'd meet him later at his hotel."

"You fella make straight talk?" Indigo rasped.

"He's telling the truth." Sen Gat fumbled uneasily with his finger nails. "He's too afraid of being branded to lie."

"Us fella come alongside damn mess," growled Indigo.

With a gesturing hand, Sen Gat separated five of the orientals from the others.

"You men go get that black stick from Doc Savage," he directed.

"Where find this fella Savage?" asked one.

"Wait," said Sen Gat, and left the room.

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An ominous change came over some of the orientals when their chief had departed. They exchanged looks, slyly whispered words.

"We fella do all job," breathed one. "Sen Gat glab off glavy. No likee."

"All same no need boss," stated another. "Whole damn t'ing velly easy. We just get thlee black key, and go to Man with Thousand Heads. Velly simple."

"No need boss for this job," agreed the first.

Indigo listened with growing rage.

"You damn dumb fella!" he snarled suddenly. "You come alongside such talk again, I tell Sen Gat."

Profound silence fell.

Sen Gat returned, nursing his finger nails, and said, "I telephoned a newspaper and learned at what hotel Doc Savage is staying. It's the Piccadilly House. Go there and get the black stick."

The orientals filed out, their faces expressionless, but their demeanor grimly purposeful. The outer night received them soundlessly.

Indigo eyed the celestials who remained, among whom were the two who had muttered their discontent. Noting Indigo's stare, the pair shifted uncomfortably, wondering if Sen Gat was to learn of their words. But Indigo repeated nothing of their conversation.

"Any job b'long us fella?" he queried of Sen Gat.

"The rest of you will get the third key, which the girl has," Sen Gat advised. "Maples probably knows where she lives. Make him tell you."

Indigo picked the sword from the brazier; the tip was nearly white hot.

Maples, glimpsing the heat glare, tried to scream, but one of the celestials stuffed a rag into his mouth.

Chapter 3. THE SECOND BLACK STICK

THE PICCADILLY House was in a state of siege, figuratively. Since the management was refusing to allow newspaper reporters and photographers to penetrate even as far as the lobby, the journalists had gathered in front of the door and were voicing some pointed opinions of hotel management in general and a Yankee man of mystery in particular.

"Jolly preposterous!" declared a scribe. "Who ever heard of an American who was not a publicity chaser?"

Sen Gat's followers arrived and looked over the scene. They singsonged softly among themselves, then tried to walk into the hotel. They were repulsed, being informed that only guests at the hostelry were being admitted.

They went into a huddle, and one broached an acceptable idea. Shuffling down the street, they came to a second-hand luggage shop, where each purchased a well-worn suitcase plentifully plastered with old

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steamship labels. A foray into an alley ballasted the luggage with sufficient cobblestones to give a reasonable weight. Returning to the hotel, they asked for rooms and were passed inside; they were so obviously not journalists that only perfunctory questions were put to them.

Playing the parts of frugal gentlemen, they asked for and received small rear rooms, but they did not stay in them a great while. They waited only long enough to examine businesslike revolvers and to loosen wavy-bladed creeses in sheaths, then crept into the corridor.

They were in the hallway when a dilemma presented itself. Despite their elaborate scheming, they had neglected to learn on what floor Doc Savage had ensconced himself. But another conference solved this.

They went down to the desk and asked for a change of rooms. There was some haggling about floors.

"I am extremely sorry, but you cannot have the top floor," the clerk informed them. "Doc Savage has taken that floor."

The clerk made the statement because he was proud that his hostelry had been chosen by the man of mystery, and wanted to brag a little. His words gave the celestials the information they desired.

They changed to another floor and five minutes later were mounting the stairs which led up to the top story. They came up boldly.

One of Doc Savage's five aides occupied a chair in the corridor. He was the man with the incredibly huge fists. His knotted hands were resting on his knees, and they seemed almost as large as his head, which was not small. His face itself was unusual, being long and covered with an expression of unutterable gloom. The man looked as if he had just lost a very dear relative.

So interesting was the man in the chair that the orientals failed to notice two metal boxes which stood, one on either side of the stairway.

They would have been highly interested in what happened inside the suite of rooms as they passed the boxes.

AT THE moment, Doc Savage was standing in front of a writing table. On the table was another metal case, open. Wires so small as to be hardly noticeable led from the box and ran under the carpet, where they had been hurriedly placed, and into the corridor. They had been tucked under the corridor runner and extended to the two boxes on either side of the stairs.

The hotel elevator operators had orders to bring no one to this floor, the entire space being occupied by Doc Savage and his men. Therefore, any visitors must pass between the two boxes at the top of the staircase.

Protruding from the top of the metal case on the writing table, was an electric bulb. The bulb glowed red at the instant the orientals passed the boxes outside.

Doc Savage straightened swiftly when he saw the red light. "Who's coming? You look, Monk."

"Monk" – Andrew Blodgett Mayfair – was the furry gorilla of a giant who owned the homely pig. The pig was dozing at his feet. Monk lumbered erect and made for the door

Monk's coarse, reddish hair started growing almost at his eyebrows, giving the impression of no forehead at all. This lent him an unutterably dumb appearance. Monk's look had deceived many people. He was a chemist, and he ranked among the greatest in that intricate science.

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Reaching the door, he looked out

"Five slanteyed guys," he advised Doc. "Chinese or Malay."

Doc Savage said nothing, but held out both hands and opened and closed them rapidly. The tendons writhing and flowing in the hands were enormous.

MONK CAUGHT the meaning of the pantomime. "They ain't carryin' nothing'," he said.

Doc made pulling gestures in front of his lips, shrugged, shook his head, then shoved both hands out in front of him with a fierce expression.

Monk grinned. He was to pull what information he could out of the newcomers, and if they failed to talk, he was to frighten them away.

Doc Savage swung to the window. It was open, and he eased through. The wall was of brick, the single ornamental ledge less than half an inch wide. But the giant man of bronze grasped this and swung to one side of the aperture. He clung there with an effortless ease which indicated that the fabulous strength portrayed by his hand tendons was very real. He could hear what went on inside the room.

The byplay had transpired with great speed. Doc was out of sight before the orientals reached the big-fisted man seated on the chair in the corridor.

"You fella Doc Savage?" one asked.

"Naw," said the big-fisted man. "I'm Renny – Colonel John Renwick."

His voice was a great roaring, and nothing about his careless English indicated he ranked among the top half dozen of the world's greatest engineers.

"We likee spliekee Doc Savage," stated the spokesman

The homely Monk appeared in the door and offered, "Doc just left."

If Renny was surprised, he did not show it, although he was aware Doc Savage could not depart in conventional fashion without passing his chair.

"Doc Savage, him come back soon, mebbe?" singsonged an oriental.

"Maybe," Monk admitted. "Whatcha want with him?"

The celestials now demonstrated that they were excellent liars.

"Doc Savage got black stick," one declared. "Him velly much vallable. We come help watchee stick."

MONK BACKED away to let the orientals inside. As they entered, the slanteyed fellows kept hands near their pockets – and the pockets bulged as if they might hold weapon.

Understanding dawned on Monk. The two metal boxes in the corridor were part of a device created by Doc Savage. One box produced a magnetic field, the other held a supersensitive galvanometerlike apparatus. Metal introduced into the magnetic field caused a change which this galvanometer picked up and registered,

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closing a contact that lighted the red lamp on the writing table.

This complicated contrivance was merely to warn Doc Savage if any visitors arrived carrying guns or knives. And it had worked, for the concealed arms of the orientals had been detected by Doc's device.

The visitors perched gingerly on chairs.

Monk went into an adjoining room in which the other three members of Doc's group of five aides lounged.

One of the trio – the snappily dressed man with the black cane – stared sourly at Monk. His expression was that of a man viewing an especially undesirable form of insect.

"Nature's awful mistake," he sneered.

Monk grinned cheerfully at the insult. The speaker was "Ham" – Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks – great light of the American legal profession.

One of the remaining pair was extremely tall, and skinnier than it seemed possible any man could be and still live. A monocle – actually a powerful magnifying glass – angled from his lapel by a ribbon. This was "Johnny" – William Harper Littlejohn – renowned geologist and archaeologist.

"Long Tom" Roberts was the third man. Electrical wizard extraordinary was Long Tom, a man who had already earned a place among the famous.

"Somethin's up!" Monk whispered.

"The black stick wrapped in oiled paper that was tossed to Doc at the airport?" Ham breathed. "I had a hunch that meant trouble."

"Sh–h–h!" admonished Monk. "Just wanted to let you know there may be fireworks. These slanteyes are armed."

Monk returned to the room where the orientals were sitting, and asked them, "You say you've come here to help us guard a black stick?"

"You catchem idea," he was told.

"But what's this all about?"

"Black stick, him velly much want by some fella."

"By whom?"

The slanteyed one shrugged sloping shoulders. "Velly solly – no can tell. Boss man, he come this place byebye. Mebbe so him talkee you. Savvy?"

"Humph!" Monk eyed the unnaturally huge ears of his pet pig.

"Doc Savage b'long black stick?" asked a visitor.

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"You mean – has he got it?" Monk blinked tiny eyes. "Before I say anything, you guys have got to tell a story that means something. Who is supposed to have given this stick to Doc Savage?"

The celestial thought fast on that one. "Boss man," he answered.

"What's his name?"

"No can tell."

"What is the black stick, then?"

The visitors thought that over, exchanging glances, then shrugged in concert. "Velly solly, no can tell."

Monk scratched his head, then got up from the chair and roamed the room. His elaborately aimless wanderings took him to an adjacent chamber crossing hurriedly to a window, he thrust out his head and saw Doc Savage, only a few feet from him.

"I ain't gittin' nothing' out of 'em, Doc," Monk breathed. "Shall I go ahead and scare 'em away?"

"Do that," Doc directed.

The word exchange was so low that the orientals could not have heard.

MONK AMBLED back. He scratched his head and aggravated the pig with a toe.

The slant-eyed men looked on, faces bland. It might have been that they carefully concealed some amusement; Monk's very homeliness was comical – more than one individual had laughed outright at his appearance. But Monk was an amiable soul who didn't mind.

Monk went to a pile of metal boxes which stood in a corner. These were Doc Savage's equipment containers. Bending over one, he opened it and fingered through the contents. Then he palmed a tiny cylindrical object of metal.

The orientals failed to observe this move.

When Monk returned from the heaped-up boxes, he was placing a cigar between his lips and lighting it. Had the visitors been well-posted, the fact that Monk was smoking might have warned them of something amiss. Ordinarily, none of Doc's men smoked.

Monk returned to his chair, and for some seconds nothing happened.

"Doc Savage b'long this place chopchop?" asked a man impatiently.

Monk shrugged. "Never can tell when Doc'll get back." The pleasantly homely chemist was drawing prodigious quantities of smoke from his cigar and blowing it down over his hands, which were folded on his vest. He nudged the pig with a toe, and the shoat sat up. With the toe, Monk indicated the slanteyed men.

The pig had been Monk's mascot for a long time. Literally thousands of hours had been spent in training him. As a result, Habeas Corpus – that was the cognomen Monk had appended to him – possessed no small intelligence. The pointing toe was enough to start him eyeing the yellow men.

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The stare was returned. The orientals seemed fascinated.

Monk drew in smoke and sent it scooting in a billowing plume over his hands. There sounded two faint clicks, low enough that no one but Monk heard them.

Two celestials started slightly. Both scratched themselves; a leg, the other his chest. Both abruptly turned pale and looked quite ill.

Monk puffed more smoke, and there were two more clicks, after which two more men assumed expressions of great discomfort. During all this, Habeas Corpus was still staring.

"Funny thing about that pig," Monk remarked around his cigar. "Got him in Arabia. He's a mighty special kind of hog. Once I heard a guy say Habeas had the evil eye, that awful things happened to some birds when he looked at 'em. Course there ain't nothing' to that."

Sen Gat's followers thought this over, and the more they considered the greater was their discomfort. They were of a race addicted to believe in spells and evil charms; moreover, they could plainly see that something strange was happening to a part of their group. Suddenly, it got the best of them.

"Us fella come back 'notha time," one groaned, and sprang to his feet. The others followed him out of the room into the corridor, and down the stairs. Those who had been stricken could hardly walk.

A grin seamed Monk's simian features from ear to ear. He opened a hand and eyed the cylindrical metal object he had taken from the boxes in the corner. This was a tiny compressed-air repeating blowgun, one of countless strange devices which Doc Savage had perfected.

The slugs it fired were half an inch long and little thicker than needles. There was a supply of them in the case, coated with drugs which produced a variety of effects, from instant unconsciousness to hilarious intoxication. Monk had used the type which inflicted great physical discomfort. The tobacco smoke had concealed Monk's operations.

Monk went to the window and looked out. Doc Savage was descending the side of the hotel.

Chapter 4. SWEET WINE

MONK WATCHED Doc Savage's feat with interest, but failed to register the slack-jawed amazement a stranger might have exhibited. The gorillalike chemist had been associated with Doc Savage long enough to comprehend the fabulous nature of the bronze man's physical strength. Monk had seen Doc do more dangerous climbing.

A few feet to the side, a series of projecting bricks formed an ornamental procession down the wall. Supported by cabled fingers, Doc was lowering himself from one of these to another. The fact that a slip would have brought death or serious injury seemed not to concern him.

Glancing up, the bronze man caught Monk's vehement nod, which conveyed the fact that the orientals had departed. Then he continued downward.

Doc landed on the roof of a one-story neighboring building, glided to the rear, and dropped into a courtyard with a lithe ease. The courtyard held banana crates, tea cartons and other refuse from a shop.

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Opening a door, Doc walked into a store. The proprietor and two clerks stared at him dumbfounded, as he walked through to the street. Their surprise was due to the bronze man's size and obvious strength, rather than to wonder from where he had come.

The reporters and photographers still loitered in front of the hotel, so Doc crossed the street to take up a position behind a parked car. That he was not entirely infallible was demonstrated when he made a typically American mistake.

Preoccupied, he neglected the fact that London motorists drive on the left hand side of the street. It was by an agile leap that he avoided being run over.

From behind the parked car Doc watched the hotel. His fingers drifted into a pocket and brought out the object which the thin man had thrown at the airport. Unwrapping the oiled paper, Doc scrutinized the black stick, noting its oiliness. The pressure of his finger nails made a small indentation upon the dark material.

Doc gave particular attention to the evidence that the stick had originally been molded by hand.

The orientals now left the hotel, elbowing through the cluster of journalists. A scribe, buttonholing one of the yellow men in hopes of learning something of Doc Savage's movements, was cursed thoroughly in Malayan for his trouble.

Four of Sen Gat's men reeled as they walked. They flagged down two taxis and got aboard.

The driver of a third passing hack received a shock. Hearing the door of his machine bang, he turned his head and discovered he had a passenger – a giant bronze man whose appearance was most striking.

SEN GAT received the returning expedition in the incense drenched vestibule of the house in Shoreditch.

"Back so soon?" He rubbed his palms together, careful of his protected finger nails. "Give me the black key."

There was a general trading of uneasy looks – and silence. Those stricken by Monk's darts had recovered somewhat from their illness.

"Let me have it!" Sen Gat snapped.

"Velly sully," a man mumbled.

"A pa fasal," rapped Sen Gat. "What is the matter?"

"Us fella come alongside evil eye."

Tightlipped with rage, Sen Gat led the way into the room where Maples had been overpowered. Maples was not there now. Neither was Indigo nor the other among whom was the pair who had muttered rebellion against Sen Gat. The sole occupant was the unfortunate whom Maples had struck down at the back door with a cobble. Around his head wag an enormous bandage.

Sen Gat glared, then said fiercely, "I have seen among my men some who seem to think they can do better without me. Maybe you give me – the American cinema calls it the 'doublecross'? That is not conducive to health."

"Pig fella b'long damn evil eye," insisted a man.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

The story then came out in great detail while Sen Gat listened, first skeptically, then with surprise, and finally much concerned. He muttered under his breath and tapped his finger nail protectors together.

"You say there was first a tingling? Where?"

The victims pointed out the spots. Their leader stripped open their clothing and found at each point a place where a pin might have jabbed. He seized a knife, and heedless of painful squawls, dug out one of the darts.

"Hell!" he swore explosively in English.

"Evil eye b'long pig..."

"Evil eye nothing!" Sen Gat threw the knife down, stamped across the rug and back again. "That man who you say looked like a gorilla, tricked you! He shot those darts into you and made you sick. But why?"

"No b'long savvy," some one offered.

"I have heard of this Doc Savage, heard that his methods are incredible," Sen Gat snapped. "It is plain you fellows were tricked."

Sen Gat considered – and reached a wrong conclusion. "Doc Savage's men must have thought they could get rid of us by frightening you away. They were mistaken. We need all three of those black keys. All three may be necessary when we reach the Thousand-headed Man. We will get them."

The victims of Monk's darts were holding their heads; they registered anything but optimism.

"A little wine will cheer you up." Sen Gat eyed the man whom Maples had struck with the paving rock. "Get the wine – the bottle we just opened in the rear room."

The flunkey shuffled out, was gone for perhaps a minute, and brought back a wicker-wrapped bottle and glasses. He poured a round and distributed the filled goblets.

"To our securing the three black keys!" said Sen Gat, and they all drank, including the one who had brought the sweet wine.

The effects were almost instantaneous. The men reeled, made foolish gibberish noises, then sank to the floor. Their eyes remained open. They did not lose consciousness, but babbled, mumbled and squirmed about. There was something idiotic in their behavior.

There was movement in the doorway, but no eyes were drawn to the aperture; none seemed to realize that the giant man of bronze whom they had been discussing now stood in the opening. Doc Savage held a flat padded container in which reposed numerous small phials. He was returning an empty bottle to the container, which he in turn pocketed.

As Doc moved forward, there was a silent ease in his tread which indicated how he had managed to shift about in the house without any one knowing of his presence. The lock on the front door had offered little obstruction, for he had studied locks intensively in the past and this chanced to be one of the simplest types.

His retreat to the rear room to drug the sweet wine after he had overheard the flunkey being ordered to get it had required fast footwork, however.

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Doc now grasped Sen Gat and dragged him aside. The unusual finger nails held his attention for a moment. He knew their meaning. Orientals considered such finger nails the mark of a gentleman, they being visual proof that the owner had done no work for a long time.

A search of Sen Gat brought to light the black stick which Maples had tried unsuccessfully to get. Doc placed it in a pocket with the one Maples had tossed to him at the

"I overheard some of the talk," Doc now said. There was quiet power in the bronze man's voice. "These black sticks are keys. Keys to what?" What followed would have chagrined Sen Gat mightily had he been in a normal condition, for he made a truthful reply, slow and stumbling, it was true, but nevertheless an answer denuded of fabrication.

"They are the keys to the mystery of The Thousand-headed Man," he said.

"What is this Thousand-headed Man?" Doc asked.

"It is a legend of my country." Sen Gat shut his eyes and seemed entirely at peace, soothed by the powerful tones of the bronze man.

Doc kept his voice calm. "Tell me of this legend."

The drug which Doc Savage had put into the sweet wine was the bronze man's own special concoction of the chemical mixture known to the American police as "truth serum."

This brew was not perfect, and Sen Gat would have to be handled carefully or his drugged mind would go off on a tangent, so that the only information obtained would be a senseless conglomeration of unrelated facts.

"Several hundred years ago there was a city deep in the jungles of Indo-China," Sen Gat said in his queer, stupefied voice. "It was a large city. It was occupied by a prosperous, happy people. The people were very learned."

His voice trailed off, and came to a stop.

"Go on," Doc urged

"One day something walked into the city, something so terrible that the populace – every man, woman and child – at once fled and never returned."

"Was the city abandoned?"

"It stands there in the jungle – no one knows where – just as it was on the day the inhabitants left. There is, the legend says, only one inhabitant."

"One man in the city?"

"Yes – the Thousand-headed Man!"

DOC SAVAGE did not stir about or speak with undue loudness, for to do so might excite the strangely drugged man and nullify the effects of the truth serum.

"How does it happen that three black sticks are called 'keys' to this legendary city?" the bronze man asked.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

"For centuries, all who have gone near The Thousand headed Man have died. These keys may be the charm; if they are, they are worth the lives of countless men. The three keys – my men get the – third – "

"Who has the third key?" Doc asked.

"Indigo – and my men – by now." Sen Gat stumbled over the words.

"What do you mean 'by now'?"

"Indigo – my men – they go to – Lucile Copeland." The words tangled somewhat with Sen Gat's tongue. "Girl – got – another key. She give it – to Maples if – he ask. That is why – Indigo took Maples – along."

This totally new information brought no noticeable change to Doc Savage's metallic features. He rarely showed emotion.

"Could I help the girl if I went to her house now?" he asked.

Sen Gat mumbled and Doc distinguished the word, "Maybe."

"What is her address?"

"Her house – No. 90 Wallabout Street."

Doc Savage employed strips torn from the silken draperies to bind Sen Gat and the others securely, then gag them. He dragged all to a windowless closet of a room, locked them in, made sure there was a crack at the bottom of the door which would admit air, then departed from the house.

Fascinating as was the tale of an abandoned jungle city populated only by a thousand-headed man, Doc had decided to delay hearing the rest of the story in favor of investigating Lucile Copeland's danger.

Chapter 5. A WOMAN'S VOICE

THE HOUSE at 90 Wallabout Street proved to be a shabby genteel dwelling on a modest residential street some distance from Regent's Park. Each house occupied an individual yard. Shrubbery was profuse and grew rank.

In approaching the house Doc Savage haunted the flower beds and bushes of back yards. The fog had thickened since his landing at the airport, and if the intensity of the darkness was any criterion, the sky was cloud-massed.

Doc counted the gloomy lumps which the houses made. The street lights outlined them but faintly. He made out No. 90 – it should be No.90, the way the numbers ran. A long rose bed barred his path and he vaulted over, springing sidewise, after calculating the height. He remained frozen where he landed.

Once each day since childhood, Doc Savage had expended two hours in intensive scientific exercise. This accounted for his power. One part of the routine consisted of a ritual – the testing and identifying of different odors – which was intended to develop his sense of smell. This had been effective to a surprising degree.

Just now, Doc's nostrils were filled with the aroma of roses – and something else. The other was flower scent, but it was of no bloom native to England.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

Perfume!

A swish came out of the murk to one side. It warned Doc. His great thighs convulsed, propelling him sidewise.

Some kind of long club smacked down in the spot he had quitted. Then feet pounded madly, running through the darkness toward No. 90 Wallabout Street. The club wielder was in sight

Doc lunged in pursuit. Crossing the spot where the club had been flung, he stooped and explored with his hands to ascertain if the weapon had been dropped. It had. A round, hardwood pole, possibly a support for a clothes line, lay in the fog-moistened grass. The implement was not heavy; had it landed, it would have done hardly more than knock him senseless.

Doc slid a flashlight out of a pocket. It threw a threadlike white glitter, and this alighted upon the runner.

It was a tall, long-legged girl. She ran with the lithe agility of a man, instead of the slight stride usual to the feminine sex. Her hair was dark and wavy, tousled by her rapid movements. She wore gray tweed.

She turned, an arm held in front of her to keep the flashlight glare from her face. Her other hand brought up a nicked revolver. Its muzzle filled with flame, and sound of the shot slammed like something solid against adjacent houses.

THE BULLET, striking bushes to one side of Doc Savage, made a noise not unlike a violent kiss. The bronze man doused his light, swinging it to the left an instant before he did so to give the impression that he had jumped in that direction. Instead, he sprang to the right.

There was another shot, flame from the girl's gun, spraying pale red through the fog. That bullet went into the ground somewhere; then the girl ran for the house.

Doc Savage, pursuing, had to circle shrubbery. That delayed him slightly.

All over the neighborhood lights were showing in windows. Householders yelled faintly, and windows came up. The shot had aroused the vicinity.

Doc Savage reached the rear door of No. 90, tried the knob, and found the panel unlocked. In opening it, he stood far to one side to be out of the line of lead. Hinges complained, mouselike, as he propelled the door open.

The interior of the house was dark; faint cooking odors permeated the air. Doc detected no trace of the perfume the girl was using. That scent had been oriental in nature probably sandalwood. He listened intently. From somewhere in the front of the house came the shuffle of footsteps.

Doc entered the house; a kitchen linoleum came underfoot. The pilot light in a gas stove cast a fitful aura. His drifting hands located another door, and a rug muffled his steps. The odor of soap, and a faucet which leaked slow drops, indicated a bathroom on the left.

The front door opened and closed and feet rattled.

The bronze man put on speed, battered a living-room chair out of his path – and stumbled over something on the floor. The stark nature of the object jerked him to a halt light jumped from his flash.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

He had stumbled over a dead man. The fellow had slant eyes, high cheeks, and his skin was somewhat the color of an egg yolk. He had been stabbed three times in the chest and once in the throat.

The ragged nature of the wounds indicated use of a creese. Doc went on to the front door and through it into the fog.

Down the street, a starter gear gnashed flywheel teeth and a motor car exhaust muttered then moaned. Car doors slammed with a noise remindful of two tin cans dashed together. Headlights came on, hurling a blinding sheen under big trees which lined the thoroughfare.

The machine chanced to be headed in slightly at the curb so that its headlights bathed the front of the house. For a brief instant, Doc Savage was disclosed plainly. He flattened behind the ornamental wall which encircled the roofless stoop.

Gears clanked, whined, and the automobile moved. It hurled past the front of the house, jarring into second gear, gathering speed.

Doc Savage lunged down the walk, saw he would never reach the machine because of its speed, halted, and yanked a diminutive gas grenade from a pocket. A tiny knob on the side of this regulated the interval before it exploded.

Doc twisted the knob, flung the grenade, throwing it violently so that it would land in front of the car. The trees made the throw difficult, and he barely got it under the branches.

But the grenade failed in its purpose. It opened a little tardily. And as the car windows were up – it was a sedan – the gas, a vapor producing unconsciousness, failed to penetrate the interior.

The machine rocketed on and around the corner.

The bronze man stood there a moment. He had secured the license number of the car and repeated it under his breath a number of times to fix it in his memory. The number might or might not be useful.

He had not been able to see who occupied the sedan.

GOING BACK into the house, Doc found two more dead men – three altogether. The other pair, both orientals, reposed in a room adjacent to the one in which the first cadaver lay.

Both were victims of a creese.

Doc postponed searching their clothing and went back to the rear door. He used his flashlight on the kitchen floor.

The linoleum was marked with wet footprints, but they were only Doc's own. The fog dew on the grass outside had dampened his shoes. Undoubtedly it had moistened the girl's footgear, too.

Doc switched off his light, and there came into existence a tiny, fantastic sound. It was a trilling note with an exotic quality which defied description. Pitched very low, it might have been the product of a wayward breeze, except that there was no breeze. It permeated all of the room. Ranging the musical scale, it possessed no definite tune.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

This trilling sound was a characteristic exclusive to Doc Savage – a weird note which he unconsciously made in moments of mental excitement. It came when he had made some discovery of importance; sometimes it precoursed a plan of action. It could mean many things.

Just now, the trilling signified disgust. The absence of the girl's foot prints from the kitchen linoleum showed she had not even entered the house, but had merely opened the door, then slammed it to give the impression that she had gone inside.

Moving outdoors, Doc Savage stood for some time in the darkness, listening, noting that commotion in the neighborhood had subsided, householders possibly having dismissed the shot as a backfire. Then he moved about, using his ears, olfactory organs, and occasionally the flashlight. But he turned up no sign of the girl, Lucile Copeland, if the tall young woman who ran so swiftly was she.

Re-entering the house, Doc searched the crease victims, but their pockets yielded nothing to identify them. However, Doc knew they were Sen Gat's men, since to the clothing the three slain ones clung a tang of that incense which had saturated Sen Gat's house. Of the death knife there was no trace.

The rooms of the house, Doc's roving flashbeam disclosed, were decorated in unusual fashion. The study floor bore a scattering of tiger, lion, polar bear and other animal skins, while mounted heads of ovis poli, bighorn sheep, wapiti – trophies from numerous climes – were arrayed on the walls, together with heavy spears from the Congo, blowguns from the Amazon headwaters, and elaborately carved swords from China.

A particularly unique touch was given by the samples of hand-weaving in the form of wall hangings, curtains, table runners, and other articles of ornamentation. These bits were woven from materials that ranged from yak tails to split thongs cut from the hide of a boa constrictor.

The master of the house evidently made a hobby of handweaving.

Display cases held preserved insects, wood samples, and mineral specimens. Bookcases were laden with scientific tomes.

Doc examined these, and came upon a scrapbook. Scores of newspaper clippings were within, and he ran through them rapidly, ascertaining that all of the items concerned an explorer, Calvin Copeland by name.

Copeland, perusal of the clippings revealed, had adventured in many climes. His wife, Fayne, and his daughter, Lucile, usually accompanied him. There was a picture of all three.

Calvin Copeland was tall, sharpfaced, carrying little surplus flesh. The wife, Fayne, was as tall as her husband, which made her of unusual height. She had a mannish appearance, but that might have come from the masculine outdoor attire she wore in the picture.

Lucile was the girl Doc had encountered outside. The picture gave a better idea of her appearance; she looked very competent, very pretty.

The latest clipping was dated nearly a year previous. It stated simply that Calvin Copeland and his wife and daughter were sailing for Indo-China. The explorer had refused to reveal the purpose of his expedition.

OUTSIDE IN the street, a car stopped.

With a finger, Doc moved a window curtain aside. Fog made the machine in the street a vague elongation. Headlights were dimmed. Between them, an accessory red light glowed.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

The red light was significant – a police car.

Feet pounded the walk; the policemen appeared, nebulous and ghostly figures in the fog. Doc flashed into the front room. His fingers found the door lock and turned it silently.

The door had a frosted-glass insert panel, and against this the helmeted heads of the bobbies appeared, outlined in shadow, like a motion picture badly out of focus.

Knuckles beat a summons on the panel. It was not especially loud. These London bobbies were not the blustering kind. Coming up the walk, not one had even carried a revolver in his hand.

Doc Savage worked through the rear of the house, opened the back door and went out.

"Stand still, gov'nor," directed a voice of authority.

With the words, a flashlight came on. But it was too slow. Doc had snapped back into the house.

"Love!" gasped the man with the flash. "Some chap opened that door."

"Must've blown open," hazarded another voice.

Backglow from the light glinted on polished buttons and shields of the London police. Inside, Doc considered the situation. Some neighbor might have summoned the officers; but if such were the case, they should have arrived earlier. His being found in the house with three murdered men meant he would have to answer questions. Even the influence of a Doc Savage would not impress these London police.

Doc went to a telephone he had noticed it in his search and called the Piccadilly House. The voice of Monk, surprisingly mild for such an apish giant, answered.

"Want some exercise?" Doc demanded.

"We might stand some," Monk answered.

Doc gave the address of Sen Gat's house in Shoreditch. "A man named Sen Gat and some of his gang are tied up there. Probably they're just recovering from a shot of truth serum. Watch them."

"On our way."

"Wait. Throw some more truth serum into them and see what you can learn."

"Okay."

"Ask them about a thousand-headed man."

"Huh?"

"A thousand-headed man, and three black keys."

"Three black keys!"

"I have two of them," Doc told him. "The keys are black sticks, one of which was thrown to us at Croydon."

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

Monk snorted. "This is sure a nutty business."

"Bloody, too – three men have been knifed so far," Doc agreed. "Watch out for the followers of this Sen Gat. They may return. They may even beat you to Sen Gat's house."

"They'll have to go some!" Monk barked, and hung up.

DOC MOVED back to the front door. The bobbies had stopped beating on the panel. They stood near the door, talking in easy voices which they did not keep low.

"We have the place surrounded," said one officer. "No one can escape, we're jolly sure. Of course, this may all be a mistake."

Doc appreciated that. These English hobbies worked with respect for the upright citizen's feelings, which might be one reason the English like their bobbies.

Knuckles pounded the door again.

Doc let the bobbies hammer away. He wanted to know what had brought them here, and expected they would reveal that information. They did.

"A woman's voice telephoned the bally report," said an officer.

"Righto," agreed another. "She said a Yankee named Doc Savage had knifed three men to death inside."

Doc did not start; his breathing continued evenly. That did not mean he was unconcerned. The bobbies would hold him, certainly, if they caught him here. These English cops were thorough.

A woman's voice had telephoned the fabrication! And Doc had encountered Leslie Copeland here.

"We'd better break in," said an officer. "Some of you enter by the rear."

They began to put force on the door.

Doc glided into the study, went to a case which held guns, and selected a fowling piece. Shells reposed in a niche beside it. He loaded the weapon, walked back and aimed it at the door, well over the heads of the bobbies.

The fowling piece made an ear-splitting roar when he fired.

The bobbies scuttled back.

"The beggar intends to make a battle of it!" growled one officer. "Send for the machine gun, gas and bomb squads."

Feet clattered away to fulfill the order.

"Come out peaceable, old man!" Doc was ordered. The bronze man ignored the command. Reloading the fowling piece, he went into the study and gathered up four other rifles and shotguns.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

Then he entered a bedroom. There was a dressing table, and on it a bottle of sandalwood perfume. That indicated it was Leslie Copeland's boudoir. Doc found some silk stockings and used them to tie all of his guns into a bundle.

The second floor was now his objective. A survey from a window showed that hand searchlights had been turned on the surrounding the house. Ordinarily, these would have cast luminance over the roof, but the fog was thick, and the roof – even this second floor window – lay in gloom.

Doc worked with the window and got it open without much noise. A siren was caterwauling in the distance. The riot squad. The sound helped him.

Clambering out of the window noiselessly, he stood upon the sill, supporting himself with one hand inside, and grasped the roof eave. An instant later he swung free, sustained by the tremendous strength in one hand.

His feet came up, and he hung head downward. It was intricate business, for he still carried the heavy bundle of guns. Very slowly, he hauled himself up onto the roof.

The roof was not so steep but that it could be walked upon. But the tiles gritted underfoot, despite all his care.

"I say, what's that grinding?" shouted a bobby.

DOC CAME erect and ran forward. He sprinted, reached the edge of the roof and launched into space.

In mid-air, he managed to clamp the bundle of guns between his legs, leaving his arms free.

The trees walling the street had huge branches. None, however, touched the house, or even came within several feet. The bronze man's mighty leap carried him to them.

Heavily muscled arms out before him took the first shock of small branches. He could see nothing except the hulk of the trees in general. He grasped a limb, and when it broke he clamped another, held it swung to a lower bough.

Below, voices howled; but there was no wild shooting. Flashlights spilled white funnels of light upward.

"He's in the bally tree!"

"Use the lights! Quick, you blokes!"

Doc dropped his bundle of guns. It thumped down and landed beside a bobby, who sprang wildly backward.

"Wot's this!" exploded the officer. "Bally guns!"

"Watch the house – the roof!" shrilled another. "He's tryin' some bloomin' trick! He threw the guns Into the tree to draw our attention!"

Which was exactly what Doc wanted them to think. They gave all their light and interest to the house. Discovery of no one on the roof puzzled them.

Siren screaming, the police car pulled up, erupting many uniformed men.

These newcomers were men who made rough stuff their business. They lobbed tear gas bombs into the house, then donned masks and entered. The opening bombs made a good deal of racket. The general babble of voices made more.

Under cover of all the sound, Doc Savage shifted to an adjacent tree, then to another, branch by branch. He slid to the ground and faded into the fog.

The night swallowed him.

Chapter 6. THE BOBBY TRICK

SEN GAT'S house in Shoreditch was dark. No orientals trod the streets in front, for the hour was getting late.

At the corner – a block distant – a stooped, wrinkled celestial crouched beside a tray which held sweetmeats and nuts. Buyers for the miserly wares could hardly be expected at this hour, but the wrinkled one sat patiently, head bowed, as if hoping ancestral spirits would take pity on him and send a customer along.

His eyes were sharp under his faded, flopping hat. They watched the door of Sen Gat's house, and seldom wavered.

A taxi rolled up before Sen Gat's abode, halted, and three £men got out. One was tall and unbelievably thin, the second a giant with vast fists, and the third a lumbering ape of a fellow at whose heels a homely pig trotted.

Johnny, Renny and Monk stamped noisily up the steps and into Sen Gat's house. Their hands were inside their coats however, resting upon weapons which resembled oversize automatics, but which were actually supermachine capable of discharging bullets faster than a military machine gun.

The supermachine pistols were an invention of Doc Savage; their cartridges were not conventional lead slugs, but mercy bullets which inflicted a sudden unconsciousness instead of fatality.

"Watch it!" Monk said in his small voice.

Ham and Long Tom, the other two of Doc's five aides, were at the rear door.

Monk and the two with him neglected to pay the old celestial peddler on the corner the attention he deserved.

The street hawker abruptly gathered up his wares and scuttled away.

"Where'd Doc say Sen Gat and the others were?" rumbled big-fisted Renny.

"Didn't say." Monk produced a flashlight "Doc seemed kinda rushed. Wonder if he was in a jam?"

"He'll get out of it if he was," Renny surmised. They began to search, and came soon to the windowless cubicle in which Doc had left Sen Gat and the others. It was untenanted now. The tyings which Doc had applied to the truth-serum-dazed captives reposed on the floor. Monk examined them.

"Been cut!"

"Then somebody beat us here!" Renny boomed.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

"Circumstantial evidence substantiates that assertion," agreed the bony Johnny, who had a horror of small words when he could think of big ones.

Ham, with Long Tom, came in from the rear. Immediately he and Monk fell to scowling at each other.

"You should not drag that infernal pig around with you," Ham offered.

"Yeah?" Monk leered. "He comes in handy sometimes."

"Pipe down," Renny grumbled. "I don't like this. Let's look the dump over and see what dirt we can turn up on this thing."

They scattered and gave Sen Gat's establishment a searching which a Scotland Yard investigator would have envied. Then they assembled to exchange notes.

"Papers in a desk show this Sen Gat is an importer," offered Long Tom. "Trades in merchandise from Indochina."

"Keeps quite a gang around here, from the looks of sleeping accommodations," added Renny.

"Warlike personalities, if the profusion of firearms and ammunition is a substantial basis for conjecture," said bigworded Johnny.

"But nothing about any thousand-headed man, or three black sticks which are keys," complained Ham.

"Say, you guys, lookit!" Monk exhibited a newspaper clipping which he had unearthed.

They gathered around and read:

EXPLORING PARTY LOST

Some anxiety is being felt over the safety of Calvin Copeland, who, with his wife and daughter, departed some months ago on an expedition into the interior jungles of Indochina.

The only white man accompanying the Copelands was Rex Maples, an Englishman familiar with the Indo-China jungle.

The fact that the Copelands gave no information about their destination, keeping it a mystery, is a fact which makes a search for them almost hopeless.

THE ITEM bore a date four months old, and had been clipped from a London paper.

"What's this all a – " Monk swallowed the rest as he looked toward the door.

Several men came stamping in from the street. The newcomers wore the uniforms of London policemen. They were burly men with jaws out-thrust. One fellow, evidently the one in command, strode in front.

This latter individual was extremely large. His arms were crooked beams, his head a hammered-down lump, with no appreciable length of neck below it. Gnarled fists, misshapen ears, a flat nose, indicated an earlier career not devoid of physical combat.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

The homely giant bore a surprising general resemblance to Monk, except in one particular: he did not have Monk's coat of fur. He was fully as large and possibly as strong as Monk.

"Doc Savage's men?" asked the homely cop.

"Yeah," Monk admitted.

"Name's Sergeant Evall." The apish officer thumbed his own chest. "Doc Savage told us we'd find you here."

Monk blinked. "Doc sentcha?"

"Righto," said Evall. "The big bronze fellow is in trouble."

"Trouble?"

"Girl by name O' Leslie Copeland accuses him o' knifin' three blokes in her house. We arrested the bronze one. 'E says as how you five chappies can give 'im an alibi, tellin' where 'e was durin' the time O' the murder."

Monk scratched the stubble atop his nubbin of a head.

"When'd the knifin' take place?" he queried.

Evall shrugged. "Sorry gov'nor. You'd better go to the station house with us and explain at what hours tonight you've been wit' the bronze bloke. If you accounts for the time O' the killin's, fine and dandy, and we'll let 'im go. If not, we'll bloomin' well have to hold Doc Savage."

"Sure," Monk said eagerly. "We'll go."

Doc's other four men nodded agreement and prepared to accompany the uniformed men.

"You've got Doc now?" Renny

"Oh, yes," said Evall. "He surrendered quite peaceably at the scene of the killing."

The party now left Sen Gat's house. The uniformed men distributed themselves, one alongside each of Doc's five aides. It was very much as if they were under a polite form of arrest. The street outside was infested with gloom and Shoreditch smells. A breeze had sprung up. Fog tendrils swept in front of the street lamps like marching phalanxes of transparent ghosts.

The street hawker, with his miserable tray of nuts and sweetmeats, was missing from the corner.

THE FOG had moistened the cobbles of the pavement, soaking the street filth and making a slime.

Johnny, the gaunt geologist, eyed the corner where the street peddler had been. He absently fingered the monocle magnifier which dangled from his lapel.

"Wait," he said, and stopped suddenly.

"Well?" demanded Evall.

"We didn't lock the doors," Johnny stated. "I'm goin' back and do that."

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

Signs of tension came upon the faces of Doc's other four men. Johnny had made a simple statement – but he had forgotten to use his usual big words. The skeleton-thin geologist never did that unless he was excited.

Johnny started back.

"I'll go along, bloke," muttered a uniformed man. He legged after Johnny.

The geologist entered Sen Gat's house, said, "I'd better secure the rear door and windows," and walked toward the back. A hand drifted inside his coat. Doc's men had not been relieved of their supermachine pistols. Johnny's fingers closed over the grip of his weapon.

Johnny was no mental sluggard. He had abruptly remembered the presence of the street hawker who was now gone. The detail, slight as it was, had made Johnny suspicious. He had been in trouble often enough not to overlook points like this.

Angling sidewise, Johnny picked up a telephone. His thin forefinger jiggled the hook until the operator was aroused.

"Police!" Johnny said.

The uniformed fellow who had accompanied the geologist shied from foot to foot. His fists knotted, unknotted, his expression was that of a man in a dilemma. He began, "Hey, bloke, what

"At what police station are they holding Doc Savage," queried Johnny, keeping a clutch on his machine pistol.

"He's – " the uniformed one floundered.

Johnny knew then that his suspicions were justified. He wrenched the superfirer from under his coat.

Simultaneously, the fake bobby went for a gun. He got his weapon out – not a service revolver, but a big blue automatic of American manufacture. The ugly twist of his lip showed that he intended to shoot.

Johnny's superfirer made a weird, deafening moan. It was as if the bass string of a gigantic bull-fiddle had been stroked briefly. Empty cartridges spurted in a brassy procession from the ejector mechanism.

The false officer shuddered violently. Some of the mercy bullets had hit his legs. His arms extended rigidly; his knees buckled. He folded down on the floor, already unconscious.

An uproar came from the street outside. Revolvers banged, superfirer pistols hooted; men shrieked. Curses volleyed Malayan.

Renny and Monk thundered demands for a surrender.

Johnny sprinted through the rooms, dived out of the front door and saw the fray was over. It had been surprisingly brief. Two of the spurious bobbies were down, overcome by the mercy slugs. The others had dropped their weapons an elevated hands.

The bobby trick had failed.

MONK GRINNED widely at the gangling Johnny as the latter approached.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

"Daggone!" he chuckled. "What put you wise?"

The celestial purveyor of dubious delectables had migrated," Johnny imparted, returning to his large words.

"You think the slanteyed peddler was a spy?" Monk questioned.

"A not unwarranted conjecture."

"Blazes!" Renny thumped. "Then these mugs must be some of Sen Gat's gang."

"A scheme to grab us," Long Tom surmised.

The fight had been anything but silent. No curious person had appeared in the street, however, and no windows had lighted up. The orientals who dwelled here in Shoreditch evidently were no different from those in other parts of the globe. An inscrutable race, they believed in keeping clear of the other man's trouble.

Monk collared the fake officer who bore a vague likeness to himself. "You workin' for Sen Gat?"

The other glowered. "Take your dukes off my bloke, o' I'll bust your face in!"

Monk flexed his arms. Some of the muscles which bulged up might conceivably have served as footballs, if detached. "Whenever you're ready, cull!" he growled.

"Cut it out!" Renny rumbled.

"Let 'em fight," Ham suggested hopefully. "Monk might get his block knocked off. It would teach him a lesson."

"Nix!" Renny insisted. "We'll take 'em back to Sen Gat's house. We want to know what became of Sen Gat"

"And there's the little question of a thousand-headed man and three black keys," Long Tom added.

"To say nothing of explorers named Copeland and a man called Maples," furthered Renny.

They started back for Sen Gat's habitation; but there was an interruption. Feet pounded the fog-smeared cobbles. A running figure plunged out of the mist, a grotesque shape in the nebulous void of vapor. It was a man in the uniform of a bobby.

"He heard the shots," Monk hazarded.

The newcomer tilted his helmet back on his head. "I say, what's goin' on here?" he asked.

"A surprise party," Renny boomed. "It goes like this – they surprise us, then we surprise them."

The late arrival peered intently at the prisoners. His mouth came open and round. His eyes flew wide.

"Jove!" he exploded. "These chappies are bad 'uns! Scotland Yard has been wantin' to see 'em for some time. I'll call help."

He clamped the whistle between his lips and blew shrilly. That move completely allayed the suspicions of Doc's men. They thought the newcomer was summoning other bobbies.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

The next instant the fellow had snaked a revolver from inside his uniform coat and was menacing them.

"Up high!" he grated.

THERE WAS shocked silence for a second. Then Monk and the others slowly elevated their arms. They were not fools. Only one gun threatened them, but it held five cartridges; and to resist meant that some one would get shot.

The clatter of feet came from the near-by darkness. Men appeared, running, weapons in hand.

Sen Gat, nursing his protected finger nails, led the group. Indigo, blue-jowled, ferocious, was at his side. The others were Sen Gat's men – all of oriental extraction.

Sen Gat and those of his satellites who had been victims had recovered fully from the effects of Doc's truth serum.

"Excellent work!" Sen Gat told the last fake bobby.

Cars now rolled down the street, large, closed machines. Doc's five men were forced to enter; then all of the captor gang loaded aboard.

The machines lost no time leaving the vicinity.

Chapter 7. CORDON

IT WAS not long before Doc Savage arrived at Sen Gat's house in Shoreditch – slightly more than ten minutes after his men met with bad luck. The bronze man alighted from a taxi some blocks away and walked the rest of the distance. Nearing Sen Gat's abode, he kept to shadows. His eyes were alert, missing little.

The wrinkled, oriental hawker with his tray of nuts and tasties was back at the corner. Doc Savage studied the fellow, then gave more attention to Sen Gat's house. No sound came from the latter.

Doc moved toward the peddler.

A patrol car, occupied by uniformed bobbies, rounded a corner. Their manner indicated that they were hunting for something, as the police braked to a stop near the sidewalk merchant

"I say, where were the shots?" called an officer.

Doc Savage, not many yards distant, heard the words distinctly.

"Me thinkee bang-bang noise no b'long gun," singsonged the peddler.

"We didn't ask you what you thought," declared a bobby. "Where was the uproar?"

The hawker pointed. "Noise 'longside that dilection. Mebbe' so thlee blocks. Mebbeso six block. Velly solly, no can tell."

The officers consulted in whispers. "You saw no excitement around here, my man?" one of them asked.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

"Velly solly," said the wrinkled one. "Mebbeso you buy nuts, sweetmeats? Velly good."

The bobbies declined; their car rolled on. Sen Gat's spy had taken them in.

Doc Savage crept forward, making no noise, and a moment later was sure that the wizened one was watching Sen Gat's house. The intensity of the fellow's gaze aided Doc in advancing silently until he stood in the glow of a street lamp less than six feet distant.

"Business good?" he asked.

The hawker started violently. He whirled, saw the bronze man, and registered a stark horror which proved conclusively that he feared Doc, and hence must be one of Sen Gat's henchmen.

"Wrinkles put on with plastic makeup," Doc decided aloud, studying him intently. "Not a bad job. What's the idea?"

The answer was a snatch which the other made at one of his voluminous sleeves, a snatch which brought out a long knife with a crooked blade and a carved handle – a creese.

The peddler was squatting on the walk. Jutting the blade out in front of him with both hands, he leaped forward and upward, and had the bronze man stood still he would have been sliced wide open.

But he did not remain stationary. A twist, half a spin, got him clear.

Missing, the attacker sprawled froglike in mid-air, until Doc slammed both hands against his back and drove him down flat on the cobbles, so forcibly that air blew from the man's mouth and nostrils and he lost his knife.

Doc gathered him up and bundled him under one arm, exerting such pressure that the fellow could not cry out. Then Doc picked up the creese, dropped it on the tray of wares and carried the tray as he moved toward Sen Gat's house.

Inside the door, he deposited the tray. Then, with the prisoner helpless in his clutch, he conducted a rapid search.

DOC SAVAGE saw the evidence in the shape of knife-sliced tyings that told him Sen Gat and the other truth serum victims had been liberated. The empty cartridges from Johnny's superfirer proved that Doc's men had been here and had engaged in a fight.

"What happened?" Doc demanded of his prize.

"Kurang periksa," the fellow snarled in Malayan.

"Don't know, eh? You'll change that tune!"

Doc bound the fellow, employing more strips ripped from the silken hangings of Sen Gat's house. Then he picked up the bottle of sweet wine, watching the prisoner as he did so.

Frightened lights in the fellow's eyes indicated that he knew what had happened to Sen Gat and the others after they had imbibed from this bottle.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

For effect, Doc Savage held the bottle before the man's eyes, saying, "You know what happened to Sen Gat and the others after they drank from this."

The other said a beady-eyed nothing, but it was obvious that he did know.

Doc moved the bottle slightly. "You have a choice – Either talk now, or I'll feed you some of this."

The prisoner thought it over at great length, rolling his eyes and making angry faces. The bottle, swaying in front of him, was a great, impelling force, and soon he muttered reluctantly, "What do you want to know?"

"What is behind this business of The Thousand-headed Man?" Doc demanded.

"Me not know."

"Better think it over," Doc advised him.

"Calvin Copeland all same find Thousand-headed Man one time, me thinker," the prisoner imparted unwillingly. "Copeland fella in plane. Two othel fella with him, allee same pilot and mechanic. Something damn bad, him happen. Only Copeland fella get away."

"How do you know all this?"

"Sen Gat, him tell."

"Where did Sen Gat learn it?"

"Flom Indigo, who is make Maples tell."

Doc Savage was silent, aligning the information mentally. So Calvin Copeland had once visited The Thousand-headed Man by air, and had lost his pilot and mechanic. Doc digested this; then:

"Where do the black sticks come in?" he asked.

"Copeland make stick to use as key when he go back to Thousand-headed Man's city."

"Key? That doesn't make sense."

"Thousand-headed Man have something Copeland want bad. Sen Gat him also want. Velly valuable, this t'ing."

"How do you know it's valuable? What is it?"

"Not know what t'ing is. Sen Gat, him one time all same live in Indo-China jungle. Him listen much talk about Thousand-headed Man. Him talk to native who been to place. Sen Gat, him all same damn well know what Thousand-headed Man got. Him not tell us what she is."

Doc, watching the man intently, concluded the fellow was telling the truth.

"Where is Calvin Copeland now?" Doc asked.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

"Him go hunt Thousand-headed Man in Indo-China. All same not come back. Copeland wife b'long lose, too. Missy Lucile Copeland fella, Maples fella – them two get out of jungle. Savvy?"

Doc took this sketchy phraseology to mean that the Copeland expedition had met disaster in the search for the city of The Thousand-headed Man in the Indo-china jungles, only Lucile Copeland and Maples escaping.

"How did Sen Gat get in touch with Maples and the girl?" the giant of bronze asked.

"Lucile Copeland fella and Maples fella tly get somebody go hunt fella who lost in jungle. They talk Indigo. He talk Sen Gat Savvy?"

Doc understood. Lucile Copeland must have reason to believe her father and mother still alive. Much of this story was still unclear, but further elucidation would have to wait until later, for it was sure that the vastly more important question of what had happened to Doc's five men superseded everything else.

"Where did Sen Gat take my five men?" Doc asked.

The man refused to answer. He feared to actually put Doc on Sen Gat's trail.

Doc left him to think it over, went out into the street and scooted a flash beam over the cobbles. Moisture and filth on the paving stones received his particular attention, for these held tracks which told him what had happened.

The treads of the cars which had picked up his men might not be of great help, but he fixed them in his memory, anyway, then traced the wheel marks to the corner, to ascertain which direction the machines had taken.

Following the tracks accounted for his being some distance from Sen Gat's house when two police cars rocketed into the street Not forgetting that a woman's voice had telephoned the police in accusing him of murder, Doc drifted into black shadows.

The cars skidded to a stop in front of Sen Gat's house, Officers piled out.

"No delays this time," a bobby shouted.

"Righto! That woman telephoned a second tip, saying we'd get Doc Savage here if we moved fast"

The officers – there was no question about them being genuine – charged into Sen Gat's house, guns in hand. Their excited shouts indicated that they had found the peddler. Some one ordered the fellow cut free.

Doc Savage worked back to the corner, taking care to make no noise. He tried various doors, found one was unlocked, and entered.

The building was one which had been long given over to orientals of the poorer class. Unlighted stairs led upward.

Doc's exploring fingers found patches where plaster was gone from laths. The carpet was worn away in spots. Elsewhere it was napless, like canvas.

There was another flight of steps, then a third, and a trapdoor which gave out on a roof. There was a little space between the houses, but the bronze man leaped the crevasses without difficulty.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

In the street, bobbies with flashlights were running about

DOC SAVAGE gained the roof of Sen Gat's house, after discovering a stout plank which spanned from the adjacent housetop – evidently a minor get-away precaution on Sen Gat's part

The roof hatch was not fastened, and he lifted it and went down. Soon he could hear the pseudo-peddler talking excitedly.

"Damn blonze fella go b'long stleet," insisted the monger. "You fella plentee catchee."

"Jove! We're tryin'!" snapped an officer. "You say Doc Savage tied you up?"

"Ee–yes!"

"Why?"

"Velly solly, not know. Blonze fella mebbeso come alongside think–box full of black fly things without feathels."

"Got bats in his jolly belfry, eh? You think Doc Savage is crazy?"

"All same mebbeso. No savvy why else him glab me." Doc descended farther. The street salesman was putting up a glib story. He was clever, and probably knew where Doc's five men might be found.

Doc intended to carry him off, to snatch him from under the noses of the bobbies.

Reaching a door, Doc glanced through. There were two officers with the huckster. One of them stood in front of the door, his broad back not a yard from Doc.

The bronze man lunged forward. His hands came against the officer's back. The push he gave the fellow was terrific. The bobby hurtled across the floor, collided with the second policeman, and they both went down.

The peddler screamed an instant before Doc grabbed him. With a continuation of his rush Doc circled back to the door through which he had entered. He was carrying the huckster.

Getting through the door, he slammed it at his back and shot the bolt. Then he hauled his squealing prize up the stairs.

The oriental shrieked, kicked, and struck with his fists. Doc held him a little tighter and the fellow ceased struggling, partially paralyzed by the unearthly strength in the bronze arms. Squeakings and moanings were the only sounds he could manage.

Black fog pushed moistly against Doc's metallic features as he came out on the roof. He started to go back the way he had come but did not get far.

Some of the policemen had been foresighted enough to come up to the roof. Probably they had followed Doc's own route. The noises the oriental was making attracted their attention. They turned on flashlights. The beams picked up the bronze man.

A gun exploded; another. Both bullets went wide discharged by way of wanting, it appeared.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

Doc sank flat on the roof. With one hand, he sought to close the hatch.

The oriental took advantage of Doc's preoccupation. Squirming around, he managed to kick the bronze man in the face. That got him loose.

With frenzied haste, the peddler leaped across the roof.

Doc would have recaptured him easily, except for another circumstance. One of the bobbies with flashlights sprang atop a chimney, and from that high vantage point managed to sight the bronze man. He aimed deliberately and fired. His bullet tore cloth, and scooped a shallow gully across Doc's shoulder.

The bronze man let the oriental go and rolled to cover. It was the only thing to do. These policemen could shoot.

The oriental took a wild chance. On his feet and running, he saw the space between the two buildings and it must have looked narrow, or perhaps the flashlight glare created an optical illusion which made it seem less wide than it was. The fellow tried to jump it.

His feet barely made the opposite coping. Momentum failed to carry him over. His arms gyrated; he doubled, trying to grasp the edge, but failed. Head first, he sank down into the black space between the buildings.

He screamed throughout the fall, and the shriek ended in a crunch not unlike that which might be made by the dropping of a package which contained a full bottle of some liquid.

Doc Savage lay perfectly motionless. The wall behind which he had taken shelter had a height of little more than a foot, and extended the length of the house – it was a continuation of the walls. The roof sloped downward, and there was no projection along the back.

The bobbies on the other roof top were not advancing. They were taking no chances, thinking Doc might have a gun. As a matter of fact, the bronze man carried no firearm, not even one of his supermachine pistols.

He did, however, wear a well-padded vest fashioned with many pockets, and worn under his outer clothing so that its presence was hardly noticeable. He delved into the concealed pockets, and from one came what at first glance might have been mistaken for a toy rubber balloon, bronze-colored.

When inflated, however, the rubber object proved an article of careful workmanship, and some good painting. It was a respectable likeness of Doc's head and features.

Removing his coat behind the low wall was a tortuous process. When he had it off he tied it securely to the lower part of the balloon by a string already attached to the rubber for that purpose.

An inch at a time, he pushed both balloon and coat away from the wall. He listened carefully.

"Jove!" gasped one of the bobbies.

Doc ceased shoving. Would they fire, or wait for reinforcements?

There were whispers. They were evidently going to wait, mistaking the balloon for Doc and had him spotted.

Doc crawled toward the rear, not showing himself.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

"The blighter's dead! The fall killed him!"

That shout, coming from between the buildings where some one had examined the luckless oriental, meant that the vendor had eliminated himself as a source of information. It was a bad break.

Gaining the rear edge of the roof, Doc Savage swung over. Cracks between the bricks, then window sills, furnished finger tip purchase as he descended.

Flashlights, waving brilliant plumes in the alley, showed that the bobbies had a cordon across either end and were moving forward. Word had evidently been spread that the bronze man was still on the roof.

"Tear-gas guns on the way up!" an officer called.

Doc Savage reached the cobbles, then produced a flashlight, extended it high over his head, and turned a beam on the rear of the roof.

"Keep the back lighted, you idiots!" he called.

His voice, almost an exact imitation of the man who had shouted word that the oriental was dead, deceived the two bobbies, leading them to believe their brother officer had come from between the building. Flashlights sought the roof and held it.

While the attention of the officers was thus fixed, Doc experienced little difficulty in slipping past them and away into the night.

Chapter 8. THE CLOCK

THE PICCADILLY House was still besieged by reporters and cameramen. They had encamped in front of the hostelry. There was no undue excitement – an indication that Doc Savage's troubles had not reached their ears. The London police have a way of working without newspaper interference.

Mingling with the journalists, however, were several quietly dressed, determined-looking gentlemen who asked a few questions but gave no information concerning themselves. Earlier, they had flashed badges and had been admitted to the hotel, conducting a brief examination of Doc Savage's suite and belongings.

They were Scotland Yard men quietly endeavoring to locate Doc Savage or his five aides. They watched both rear and front entrances, hoping the bronze man would appear.

Even the hotel officials did not know Doc Savage was wanted. This was in accordance with the police policy of looking out for the feeling of others. If Doc Savage was apprehended and proved himself innocent, none other than the police would know of the affair.

No one was watching the side of the hotel which had no fire escape, but which did have a line of ornamental brick projections that served as a ladder to one who was sufficiently agile. Hence, no one saw Doc Savage scaling the wall to reach his suite.

On the face of it, the bronze man's return might have seemed an idiotic risk, but the hotel rooms held Monk's portable chemical laboratory.

This little lab was remarkable. Hardly larger than a suitcase, it contained the ingredients for a great many

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chemical mixtures as well as an electrospectroscopic analysis contrivance.

The device was Monk's pride; with it, in a few seconds the ingredients of any chemical mixture could be ascertained. This was what Doc sought.

The bronze man still had the two strange, black sticks in his possession, and he intended to learn of what they were made.

He entered through a window, glided across the chamber and glanced into the sitting room. Two individuals were there on chairs, their attitude one of expectant waiting.

One was Lucile Copeland – the tall girl Doc Savage had encountered in the fog. The other was the incredibly thin man with skin like weathered cloth – the fellow who had tossed the black stick to Doc at the airport.

Listening, Doc Savage ascertained that only the two were present; then he walked into the room.

"Waiting for something?" he asked.

THE GIRL gasped and whipped erect. She wrenched at her handbag and got out a gun.

"Wait!" The wasted man pitched in front of her. "This is Doc Savage!"

"Oh!" The girl lowered her weapon slowly as she stared at Doc. "Then I made –"

"A mistake, possibly," Doc admitted. "That is, if you're talking about shooting at me in the shrubbery near your house."

Crossing the room, Doc Savage looked up and down the corridor. There was no one present, and he came back.

"I'm in the dark about everything," he said quietly. "This is Lucile Copeland," offered the unnaturally thin man. "I am Maples – Rex Maples."

The girl began, "Mr. Savage, my father and mother – I want your help in finding –"

"Let's clear the other up first," Doc told her, not ungently. "What happened at your house?"

Maples began the explanation. "Part of Sen Gat's gang, headed by a man named Indigo, took me to Miss Copeland's house. They wanted her black stick. They made me get them into Miss Copeland's house, made me act as if they were my friends."

Maples shuddered and twisted his emaciated hands. "They had me terrified, threatened to burn me with red-hot irons if I refused. They did that once before – Indigo did, that is, and I couldn't stand – I hope – there was nothing else –"

The man was getting incoherent. He looked as if he had suffered terribly in the past and had been pushed to near the breaking point.

Doc gazed at Lucile Copeland. The newspaper pictures had not done her justice. She had the competent sort of beauty that cameras do not catch – an attractiveness which came from fine skin texture and strength of feature.

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"Suppose you tell it," he suggested.

"I thought they were Mr. Maples's friends when they came," she explained. "I gave them the black stick. Then they fought among themselves. Two tried to seize the stick."

"Two of Sen Gat's thugs had decided to doublecross was their chief," Maples muttered.

The girl nodded, and said, "There was a fight. The man with the blue bearded Indigo killed both the dissenters, but not before the pair of them had knifed one of the other men."

"That accounts for the three creese victims in your house," Doc said.

"Yes. There was a lot of excitement during the fight. Maples and I managed to break loose. We slipped out of the back door and went in different directions. Then I met you, failed to recognize you, and tricked you into running into the house. Then I fled. Maples and I had agreed to meet here at your hotel. We did that."

"And have been waiting for you," Maples added.

Doc considered the story, noting that it was involved to a degree, but aware also that they had told it firmly and with no halting, altogether in a manner that indicated the truth.

"Then Sen Gat has the third black key?" Doc queried.

"Oh, no! I snatched it during the fight and carried it off." The girl dropped a hand into her purse and extracted a slender packet done up in oiled paper.

The phone rang.

Doc Savage moved swiftly to the instrument, took down the receiver and said, "Yes?"

"Sen Gat speaking," said smug, careful tones.

"Yes." Doc's voice remained quiet.

"I have words of wisdom."

"So have I," Doc interposed abruptly. "Here's some advice."

"I do not need advice. But the London police might welcome some – for instance, a tip that you are in your hotel!"

"The advice," Doc said grimly, "is to turn my five aides loose."

"I wanted to discuss that."

Doc did not answer immediately. The telephone was sensitive, and over the line was coming a faint donging note, repeated at regular intervals.

"Yes?" Doc said.

"I hope we can make a trade," suggested Sen Gat.

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Doc paused again. He was counting the donging sounds.

"What trade?"

"Your five men for three black sticks – the three black keys, if you will.."

The donging stopped.

"How would the exchange be made?"

"You accept?"

"I'll think it over."

Sen Gat cursed. "You fool! The odds are hopelessly against you. Your five men are helpless in my hands, and the police seek you for murder."

"The last was a nice bit of work, Sen Gat."

Sen Gat laughed fiercely. "It was! A woman called them – Lucile Copeland."

"Of course," Doc replied, and the tone of his words inferred the other to be a liar.

"So you know it wasn't Lucile Copeland," Sen Gat grated. "You've seen her, then. Where did you see her? Did you see Maples?"

"Call me in two hours," Doc directed. "I'll give you an answer on the trade then."

Sen Gat cursed again. "You can not fight me successfully, Savage. My abilities are equal to your own. You wonder about the woman's voice which called the police? – listen!"

Out of the receiver came shrill words, in a tone which might have been mistaken for that of a woman. It was Sen Gat; he seemed to be an excellent voice-change artist. Sen Gat began laughing.

Doc Savage hung up on the sinister mirth. He did not put the instrument down, but merely held the hook depressed for a moment to break the connection, then let it click up, and when the exchange operator answered, requested, "Scotland Yard."

Scotland Yard answered after a moment, and Doc asked for and received connection with the individual in general charge at the moment.

"SX7382 speaking," Doc said.

The man at the other end seemed surprised. His "Righto!" was a gulp.

"I want information," Doc told him. The bronze man consulted a watch. "Somewhere in London there is a gong clock, which is striking one hour behind time. This clock must be a large one, and is probably located on the front of some building. I want to know its whereabouts."

"We will put out a general call for information," said the Scotland Yard official. "Fifteen or twenty minutes should do the job."

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"Remember – a gong clock, striking an hour behind the actual time."

"Righto. Where shall we call you to deliver the information?"

"I'll call you."

Doc hung up. Observing Lucile Copeland and Maples staring at him in astonishment, the bronze man explained:

"Some years ago, I did something which chanced to be of great service to the British Secret Police – the Secret Service, if you will. They made me an honorary member, something rather unusual for an American. The number I gave over the phone was my identification."

"But Scotland Yard can look up that number and learn it was you who called!" gasped Lucile Copeland.

Doc's bronze head shook a negative. "No. The names are in secret files, available to only a few high officials."

"I don't get that business about a bally clock striking," Maples exclaimed.

Doc Savage, seeming not to hear the words, eyed his two visitors, then asked, "These three black sticks are keys, aren't they?"

Lucile Copeland nodded. "Yes. You see, in the Indochinese jungle, so legend says, there is a city in which lives a thousand-headed man."

"I have heard about that," Doc told her. "Your father's found the city, lost his aviator and mechanic, escaped himself, then went back. What I want to know is this: why did he want to go back?"

"He said he believed his pilot and mechanic were still alive."

"Was that the only reason?"

Lucile Copeland hesitated, then said, "My father claimed that to be his only reason. But I think there was some other – attraction. It was something, Mr. Savage – tremendous. It had a weird effect on my father. He talked – thought of nothing but reaching The Thousand-headed Man."

"Sen Gat must know what the city of The Thousand-headed Man really holds," Doc said thoughtfully. "Otherwise he would not be so anxious to get the keys."

Down in the street the late night traffic rumbled and blared, and on a near-by corner a bobby, directing traffic, tweetled his whistle at regular intervals.

Doc went to a window and saw the journalists and Scotland Yard men still below. Consulting his watch, Doc learned that only a portion of the fifteen minutes was gone – the quarter of an hour which the Scotland Yard official had said he would need to locate the clock which was striking an hour behind time.

The search would not be difficult for the efficient Yard – merely a matter of having all policemen queried on the subject. A clock striking off time was something they would remember.

"How did your father act when he returned from this city of The Thousand-headed Man?" Doc asked.

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Lucile Copeland tangled and untangled the long fingers of her hands. "He was suffering from fever. At times he was seized with paroxysms, and his mind was – well, not sound. He would not talk. For instance, he would not tell us what was in the small bag he brought back from Indochina."

"Bag?"

"Smaller than a suitcase. I do not know what was in it. I do know that he experimented with the contents in some fashion, shutting himself up in our home here in London. But he kept his actions secret."

"When did the three black sticks first enter this?" Doc asked.

"Not until later, when we were in Indo-China. Mr. Maples, here, and some natives were engaged for the jungle expedition."

"Why didn't you take planes?" Doc asked.

"Frankly, we did not have the necessary money."

"I see."

"I'll skip the details of the jungle trip. It was long and hard. I could tell from my father's manner when we were getting near our destination. He grew excited. Then, one evening he distributed the black sticks, one to each member of the party."

"Did he explain what they were?"

"Not then. He only said they were keys with which one could enter the presence of The Thousand-headed Man and survive. He said he would show us how to use them when daylight came. It was dark when he distributed them."

"One of the keys must be sufficient," Doc offered.

"Jove! I think so!" put in Maples. "You see, Sen Gat had the wrong idea. He thought all three of the black things were necessary!"

"Finish the story," Doc directed.

"The most horrible part comes now," the girl said, locking her fingers together. "Father said he would explain how to use the keys the next day. But that night – something happened."

"What do you mean?"

"We heard a weird sizzling sound, and a fluttering among the leaves. Father awakened everybody. He started to yell something about the black sticks, then – I became suddenly ill. My head swam. I couldn't think straight. I remember running. Then there was a long period of which I can recall nothing."

Maples nodded his fieshless head vehemently and put in, "Exactly the same thing happened to me."

"I don't know how long I wandered." The young woman shuddered. "It must have been a long time. When I came to myself I encountered Maples here, and another man. They had both been affected more terribly than myself."

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"Affected by what?" Doc interjected.

"By whatever – came in the night."

"You have no idea what it was?" Doc asked, "Not the slightest." "Strange!"

"And horrible! I took care of Maples as best I could. I tried to save the other man, but he – lied."

"That accounts for the three sticks," offered Maples. "Miss Copeland had one, I carried one, and the poor fellow who died possessed the third. We took his."

"We tried to find my father and the others, but couldn't," the girl continued. "Nor could we find The Thousand-headed Man or his city. Eventually, we made our way to the coast. We tried to tell our story, but they thought us crazy. We attempted to interest men in sending an expedition, and failed."

"So we came to England," said Maples.

"And tried again to interest men in sending an expedition," Lucile Copeland went on.

"And that's how I ran up against Indigo," Maples said grimly. "The devil! I asked him if he knew any one who would be interested. He led me on, got a hint of the story, then seized me. He tortured me with red-hot irons. It was horrible!"

"Indigo made you give up one of the black sticks?" Doc said.

"Yes. He must have turned it over to Sen Gat. Indigo is one of Sen Gat's gang, of course."

"Sen Gat has since been trying to get the remaining stick, eh?"

"Exactly." The girl nodded vehemently.

"When we heard you were coming, Mr. Savage, we were quite well delighted," declared Maples. "I went to the airport to meet you. Sen Gat's men must have trailed me. You know the rest."

Doc Savage placed the three black sticks side by side in a palm and studied them.

"A weird tale!" His expressive voice was thoughtful. "You think your father and mother and the others are still alive, Miss Copeland?"

"I – I hope so. We have no – proof. My hope is based on the fact that my father obviously believed his pilot and mechanic still to be alive."

"And you have no idea what is in thin city of The Thousand-headed Man?"

"Not the slightest."

Doc handed her the three sticks. "Keep them."

"But I – "

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"They'll be safer with you," Doc assured her. "I'm going to mix it with Sen Gat. There's always the chance that he may seize me and get the sticks."

Doc now went to the telephone and called the Scotland Yard official.

"This is 5X73182," he said.

"We have your information," said the Scotland Yard man. "So far as we can ascertain, there is only one clock striking an hour behind time – a street clock, that is."

"Where is it?"

"At No.13 Old Crossing Lane."

"Thank you," Doc said, and hung up.

"You two stay here," Doc told Lucile Copeland and Maples. "If the police come, tell them nothing. Merely say you are acquaintances, waiting for me."

Both nodded.

Doc Savage went into the bedroom, eased through the window, and, after a careful scrutiny of the neighborhood, clambered downward into a fog blacker than ever, and a night more dense. Darkness concealed him from Lucile Copeland and Maples before he reached the bottom.

Chapter 9. THE FAKE MONK

LUCILE COPELAND and Maples settled themselves for a wait. As a matter of precaution, they shifted chairs into the corridor. The girl kept her purse unlatched on her lap, where her gun could be gotten at quickly.

Down in the street, traffic rumbled with less volume. The bobby no longer tweetled his whistle on the corner, vehicles evidently now being few enough that they could find their own way across the intersection.

Maples's chair creaked as he squirmed, and said, "You know, Miss Copeland, Savage jolly well neglected to say whether he would help us or not."

The girl did not look concerned.

"He's already helping us," she pointed out. "Isn't that answer enough?"

She fingered the three black sticks thoughtfully. Her eyes held speculation. "I wish we knew what – these really are."

Maples eyed the bony lines of his own hands. "This city of The Thousand-headed Man – I wonder what is actually there."

"Weird death that came through the jungle." Lucile Copeland restored the sticks nervously to her hand bag. "My father and mother are there, I hope."

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"And something else, by Jove! Something your father wanted. I wonder what – "

"Sh-h-h!" interposed the girl.

Steps were mounting the stairs. They were heavy steps, rapid.

The girl put a hand in her purse, touched her gun.

A man came up the stairs, a fellow whose height was but a little over five feet, and whose shoulder breadth was tremendous. His forehead was narrow. Huge hands dangled below his knees.

The newcomer grinned expansively. "Where's Doc?"

Under one arm, the apish one carried a pig. The shoat was Habeas Corpus, with a slender chain fastened to a collar around his neck.

"I say, who are you?" Maples demanded suspiciously.

"Why, I'm Monk," said the apish man. "Don't you remember seein' me at the airport?"

Lucile Copeland and Maples exchanged glances.

"You saw Doc Savage and his men at the airport," the young woman asked of Maples. "Is this Monk?"

Maples eyed the homely man with the pig. The light had been none too good at the airport, but the gorillalike proportions of the thin man were distinctive.

"He looks like Monk," Maples decided.

The anthropoid man grinned. "Sure, I'm Monk." Lucile Copeland exclaimed sharply, "But I thought Sen Gat was holding you with the other four prisoners.

"We got away," Monk chuckled. "Say, where's Doc?"

"He went to rescue you."

"Yeah? Where'd he go?"

Again, Lucile Copeland and Maples swapped glances.

"He neglected to tell us," Maples advised.

Just then the phone jangled.

THE HUGE simian man swung into the room and answered the phone.

"Hello, Doc!" he said loudly. "Where you at?"

He listened for several seconds, the receiver clamped tightly to his ear.

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"Great, Doc!" he chuckled. "So you found Renny and the other three. Now, what am I to do?... Repeat it, will you?"

He listened again.

"I'm to take Lucile Copeland and Maples and hop off in a plane, eh?" he said, as if repeating the instructions. "We're to fly to Indo-China, to the city of The Thousand-headed Man. Ain't you goin' along?"

The speaker at the other end of the wire talked for a time. "I see," said the anthropoid man. "You're gonna follow in another plane, keeping out of sight. That's to prevent Sen Gat from interferin' with us, eh? Good idea."

Once more he listened.

"O. K.," he finished. "We'll take off right away, pronto."

Hanging up, he turned to Lucile Copeland and Maples. "Doc wants us three to go by plane to the city of The Thousand-headed Man in Indochina. He's gonna trail us and kinda watch out for things."

"Then we're to leave at once?" Lucile Copeland asked eagerly.

"Right off."

The homely man had lowered the grotesque-looking pig to the floor. The porker now made a determined endeavor to bite the fellow, but was prevented by the leash.

"Cut it out, Habeas! Save that stuff for Sen Gat!" The three now prepared to depart from the hotel. The gorillalike man eyed the boxes which constituted Doc Savage's luggage.

"We'd better leave this stuff," he decided. "The police are down in front. They might not let us get out with it."

"What is Doc Savage going to do about the police?" Lucile Copeland asked anxiously.

"Don't you worry about that, Miss. Doc'll take care of it. What we want to do is get to the airport. Doc has arranged for a plane to be ready."

They left the hotel.

A TAXI carried them through the city. They directed the machine past Lucile Copeland's house; but observing policemen about the place, they did not enter or even alight.

"But what will we do for supplies, clothing and such?" the girl pondered.

"Have to pick it up en route," said the man with the pig. "Doc is gonna load some equipment in the plane."

They directed the taxi toward an airport – not Croydon, but a smaller and more obscure flying field. There was not much traffic, due to the lateness of the hour, and they soon reached the field.

"Aren't we going to see Doc Savage before we leave?" Lucile Copeland asked.

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"Nope. Doc thinks Sen Gat may be watchin' him, and if we get together, that'll put Sen Gat on our trail."

There was a plane waiting, an all-metal, low-wing job powered with three motors. The ship seemed to be completely new. In the rear of the cabin were rifles, cases of ammunition, and tropical clothing.

Lucile Copeland was delighted when she found boots, breeches, blouses and a tropical helmet which were almost her exact size.

"Doc thinks of everything," the pleasantly ugly man informed them. "Let's get goin'."

They occupied their places in the plane.

"You got the three black sticks?" asked the apish one. Lucile Copeland hesitated, then nodded. "Yes."

"O. K. We're off!"

The plane moaned across the field and mounted into the air.

Chapter 11. THE TALKER

DOC SAVAGE was reconnoitering No.13 Old Crossing Lane. The Lane was a thoroughfare of decadent business houses and rambling warehouses which, during the day, teemed with activity, but which were quiet at thin hour, with virtually no one afoot

As for No.13 itself, that proved to be a clock repair shop. On the front of which a large timepiece was mounted as an advertisement. The hands of thin clock registered the correct time, but the striking arrangement was not correct

The clock was striking an hour behind time. While Sen Gat was telephoning to Doc Savage, a clock had struck; and the bronze man, after counting the strokes, had enlisted the aid of Scotland Yard in locating a clock which was an hour tardy.

Sen Gat, he was fairly certain, had phoned from the neighborhood; but there was the chance, of course, that the fellow had merely stopped off in the vicinity to make his call.

Doc did not show himself as he scrutinized near-by windows, seeking one which was open. In the distance, Big Ben struck the hour, its depthroated reverberations tumbling hollowly across the sleeping city. An instant later the timepiece on the clock store began to gong. It fell one stroke Short of the correct time.

Most of the windows in the neighborhood – grime smeared panes – were closed, but here and there one was partially raised, and Doc studied these intently. Light glowed behind only one.

The bronze man moved to the door of that building, listened for only a short time, and became convinced – due to small sound – that there was a man on the other side – a lookout.

He knocked on the door. There was no answer.

Doc Savage spoke numerous languages with the fluency Of a native. He used the Malayan tongue now.

"A message, thou dog!" he said, low-voiced. "Open up!" There ensued a long pause. Then, from the other

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side of the door: "A message for whom?"

"For Sen Gat."

"Sen Gat is not here," imparted the guard.

"Open the door, offspring of a worm! I was told to come here."

The fact that Doc spoke flawless Malayan probably did more than anything else to allay the suspicions of the watchman. The door opened. The lookout had a gun in his hand, but never got the chance to use it.

A noiseless storm of bronze seemed to drift through the opening. The gun was grasped, a metallic thumb preventing the fall of the hammer, and the weapon was twisted away. Doc's fingers found the lookout's neck and exerted pressure.

The man was a thin, hatchet-faced fellow. He subsided soundlessly. Doc, with his extensive knowledge of human anatomy, had found and squeezed certain nerve centers, producing quick unconsciousness.

Lowering the gun, Doc mounted the stairs.

THE WOODEN steps were bare of covering. They squeaked despite all Doc could do. He carried the guard's gun in a hand, gripped by the barrel.

A door above opened and a head shoved out. It was the bluejowled Indigo.

"You, fella – what b'long that noise!" he demanded.

Doc threw the gun. It struck Indigo on the jaw. He was knocked back through the door and made a loud sound falling to the floor.

Doc Savage hurtled upstairs. Gaining the top, he veered into the room. Two orientals were present.

Doc's five men were also there – bound and gagged.

A slanteyed man lifted a gun, aimed. Monk and Ham, flouncing simultaneously, kicked the fellow's shins. That disturbed his aim. He stumbled, did not shoot but tried to correct his aim. The next instant, he collapsed under Doc's malleting fist.

The bronze man moved with incredible speed. He lunged for the second yellow man. This one held a crooked creese.

The creese stabbed, sliced and gouged. But it only found thin air. The wielder cackled maledictions in his native tongue, appalled at the way his slashes were evaded by the bronze giant.

Doc, diving in, let the blade pass over a shoulder – the same shoulder which had been grooved by a bullet earlier in the night. He grasped the man's ankles, yanked. The fellow laid himself down heavily on the floor.

Doc knocked the creese aside, grasped a wrist and twisted. The creese hipped across the floor. A blow quieted the knifeman.

Seeing the creese, Doc slashed his men free, noting that they had been tied with painful tightness.

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The homely, apelike Monk was the first liberated. He got to his feet waving arms and stamping feet to restore circulation; and the others followed his example.

Doc glanced at the open window. A telephone occupied a stand beside it, and directly across the narrow street was the clock shop. Making use of the telephone, Doc got the Piccadilly House and asked for his own suite.

The operator rang several times, then reported, "No answer."

"That's strange," Doc said thoughtfully. "Lucile Copeland and Maples were to wait there."

"Sen Gat!" Monk grunted.

"What about him?"

"If you ask me, he was up to somethin' when he left here."

"How soon did he leave after he phoned me?"

"Right away."

Doc went down to the doorman, carried him upstairs easily under an arm, dumped him beside the one who had wielded the creese, then made it a threesome by adding Indigo.

The phone rang.

Doc went to the instrument, lifted the receiver, debated a moment, then spoke, using a voice which was a fairly exact imitation of Indigo's Kanaka dialect.

"Fe-yess."

"The trade is no longer necessary," said Sen Gat's voice. "Do you understand what that means?"

"Mebbeso. You fella mean five piecee Doc Savage fliend we all same no need. Lightee?"

"Exactly. Get rid of them. Knives first, then the Thames. Understand?"

Doc returned to his normal voice. "You want all five murdered, eh?"

Shocked silence came over the wire, then Sen Gat breathed, "Doc Savage!"

The receiver at the other end clicked up. Sen Gat had probably received a number of surprises in his checkered career, but it was likely that this one would rank among the outstanding.

TURNING FROM the instrument, Doc advised his five aides, "Sen Gat just ordered your death."

Renny opened and shut his enormous fists. "That means the guy has pulled some kind of a fast one."

Doc nodded slowly. "I wonder what he has done."

"He made off with my pig, Habeas Corpus," Monk growled. "Maybe that's got somethin' to do with it."

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Long Tom, the electrical wizard, pointed a pallid finger at Indigo. "Suppose we put the pump on these babies."

"An idea," Doc agreed.

With various expert strokings of experienced finger's, Doc. brought the blue-jowled Indigo back to consciousness. The thrown gun had loosened a few of the man's teeth. He was in great pain.

Huge fists hopefully ready, Renny sank to a knee in front of Indigo. "How about bangin' him around a little, Doc?"

Indigo looked at the fists, then rolled his eyes. "You fella lemme go. Savvy!"

"Sure!" Monk leered. "We're likely to do that!"

The obtaining of information from unwilling subjects Doc Savage had long ago found to be vitally important, and he had, accordingly, mastered numerous ways of doing it – employing truth serums, hypnotism, and other systems. He knew much of the psychology of fear and how it could be applied to a man's brain to bring out facts, like a fire set to a jungle covert to frighten forth the game within.

Doc Savage performed upon Indigo's joints and nerve centers, bringing excruciating but harmless pain. The others stood around and talked, their manner, their words, indicating that Indigo's prospects of remaining among the living were slender.

By its very nature, the human mentality is flexible, capable of adapting itself to changed circumstances, so it was not long before Indigo had a strong conviction that he actually was near death. Terror seized him. He groped for methods of avoiding his fate, and before long he was talking.

"What you fella likee know?" he groaned. "Mebbeso me talk-talk – if you no kill."

"What has Sen Gat got up his sleeve?" Doc demanded.

"Sen Gat fella send Missy Lucile Copeland an' Maples alongside fly ship 'long Indo-China."

"Holy cow!" exploded Renny. "Sent Lucile Copeland and Maples to Indo-China by plane! How'd he do it?"

Indigo answered that. "Fake bobby fella take pig. All same say him fella b'long name Monk."

"Blazes!" Monk grated. "One of Sen Gat's gang is pretendin' to be me! That's why they made off with Habeas corpus."

Indigo was questioned further, and the whole story came cut. Sen Gat's scheme was simple, but highly efficient if it worked. Lucile Copeland and Maples would innocently conduct Sen Gat's men to Indo-China to the city of The Thousand-headed Man.

DOC SAVAGE hurriedly set his men to checking, by telephone, airports adjacent to London. Of each flying field they inquired if an apish-looking individual and persons answering the description of Lucile Copeland and Maples had taken off in a plane.

Within a few minutes they learned that the tri-motored low-wing ship had departed with their quarry. It was Monk who elicited the information, and he made inquiries about the speed of the plane.

"Blazes!" he groaned, hanging up. "Their bus is mighty fast."

"How fast?"

"Cruises at well over two hundred miles an hour!"

Doc was silent a moment. "That makes their plane just about as fast as the one we have. We're going to have trouble catching them, men."

The bronze man now put more questions to Indigo. "You killed the three men at Lucile Copeland's house, didn't you?"

Indigo naturally denied that. "No, no! You fellas b'long bad idea!"

"Then who killed them? The job was done with your creese."

Indigo did some desperate thinking, and with some hazy idea of passing the buck indicated his companion. "This fella, him glab my knife to stick 'em."

"Velly big lie!" howled the oriental.

The prisoners burst out in a fierce exchange of accusations.

Indigo, finding himself outnumbered, became more terrified and tried to make it up by more vehemently asserting his partners were the real murderers.

When Doc Savage turned them over to the police they were still swapping accusations. That alone was sufficient to clear Doc of the murder charge cunningly lodged by Sen Gat. Doc was, however, forced to confer with the police officials for some hours before things were satisfactorily explained.

The London police spread a net for Sen Gat, but Doc Savage credited it with scant chance of apprehending the master schemer, since Sen Gat could be expected to take great precautions now that some of his own schemes had been unbalanced and were collapsing about his ears.

As it developed, the London officers found no trace of Sen Gat. In some respects, the oriental section of the city was like an inscrutable mask; Sen Gat betook himself behind it" and no sign of him could be found.

Doc Savage and his five men lost no time in shifting to the airport Croydon Field where they had left their plane. They loaded equipment aboard, attended to fuel and oil, and took the air.

They were nearly ten hours behind the fake Monk, Lucile Copeland and Maples, as they took off for Indo-China.

Chapter 11. MENACE DOMAIN

THEY TOOK off shortly before noon in a plane that could maintain a speed of two hundred miles an hour. They crossed the English Channel, passed the tip of Holland, Germany and Poland, and were over Russia when night came.

Doc Savage's plane was radio equipped, and he kept in sporadic communication with ground stations –

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usually stations far in advance of their position. His purpose was to locate, if possible, the fake Monk and his two companions and have them apprehended.

For several hours there was no sign of those they followed.

"Do you reckon that Indigo sent us on a wild-goose chase?" Renny pondered.

"Not likely," Doc told him. "Anyway, a plane did take off with Lucile Copeland and Maples aboard, and also a man who resembles Monk. The airport officials told us that."

"Blast that egg!" Monk groaned. "I hope he's takin' care of Habeas Corpus."

They made an early night landing in a town in southern Russia, where the plane was refueled. In order to save time, Doc had radioed that the fuel be ready.

The local Soviet commissar was on hand with some information. This gentleman could speak excellent English.

"Three planes landed in a town to the west of here some three hours ago," he explained. "As you know, foreign ships are not allowed to fly over Soviet territory without a permit."

Doc nodded. He had a permit secured by cable from Moscow before they left London.

"These three planes wanted fuel and they refused to show permits," continued the commissar. "There was a fight, in which two Soviet officers were shot. Then the three planes refueled and went on."

"Any description of the occupants?"

"Yes. The information came here by telegraph."

The commissar proceeded to describe several orientals and white men, who vaguely resembled members of Sen Gat's gang. Then he finished, "The leader of the crew was remarkable for one thing. He wore rather bulky fixtures of gold on the ends of his fingers – possibly finger nail protectors."

"Sen Gat!" exploded Monk, who had been listening.

Sen Gat obviously had secured planes and taken to the air ahead of them, following his gorillalike henchman who had tricked Lucile Copeland and Maples into showing the way to the city of The Thousand-headed Man in the Indo-China jungle.

Doc went on immediately. He flew very high to pass over the mountains, and kept the throttles nearly wide open.

Renny, who was serving as navigator, pondered over charts. The cabin of the plane was not especially quiet; at this high speed they found it necessary to shout in order to make each other hear.

"Doc, any idea where this city of The Thousand-headed Man can be located?" Renny bellowed.

"Nothing except the legend."

"That any good?"

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"Hardly. If it was, this lost city would have been found long ago."

"You really think there is a city?"

Doc was slow with his reply. "We know only what Lucile Copeland told us."

The plane spanned a portion of Abyssinia during the night and swept on over the jungles of India Dawn found them very high skipping through cottonlike clouds.

Employing binoculars on the earth below, the men could make out Hindu villages with their ornate temples. It was hot. The poorer villagers wore next to nothing, while voluminous robes swathed the more prosperous; every head had its turban.

Doc Savage watched the fuel gauge uneasily, as it crept toward the low mark. He used the radio, contacting Delhi, Calcutta, and other nearer army stations. There was only one town in this vicinity where aviation gasoline could be purchased. Doc landed there.

While taking on gasoline, they made a discovery. Other planes had preceded them. The first, a solitary sky wayfarer, had landed seven hours ago. The occupants were a tall girl, a man who was little more than skin and bones, and a great anthropoid fellow.

"We're hot on the trail," Long Tom said grimly.

Some hours behind the first ship, three other planes had landed. Again, description of Sen Gat's remarkable finger nails was the means of identification. All craft had taken on fuel.

Ham fingered his sword cane; he had recovered it from Sen Gat's establishment in London. He decided, "We are gaining slightly."

The supply of aviation gasoline in the village was contained in a metal tank mounted on supports at the edge of a level field which served as an airdrome of sorts. The stock lacked a few gallons of filling Doc's plane, but there was sufficient to carry them to the next stop.

They took off, moaning above the jungle.

"We can conceivably apprehend the nefarious Sen Gat before he attains his destination," concluded big-worded Johnny, polishing his monocle magnifier thoughtfully.

Monk began, "Yeah," and fell silent.

All three motors had started coughing, sputtering. Then, in quick succession, they stopped.

"It's that new gas!" Monk shouted. "Dang Sen Gat! He must have doped it!"

Renny tore open a window and peered at the jungle below, then groaned. "Holy cow!"

From their height, the terrain beneath resembled a gigantic green sponge. A great distance off to the right, however, there were cultivated fields.

"Can we make it?" Monk shouted.

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Doc did not answer. He tilted the plane into a glide.

The craft was heavily laden, and had been built for speed rather than for gliding ability. The clouds, like suds snapped from a gigantic shaving brush, seemed to lift above them. The earth swelled; the jungle took on detail.

"We ain't gonna make it," Monk decided.

But they did make it, although the undercarriage tore leaves and small limbs off the tops of trees which bordered a rice field. The rice patch, fortunately, was not under water, but was extremely soggy.

A span of water buffalo, terrified out of their usual lethargy by sight of the plane, stampeded, pursued by a swearing and scarcely less terrified Hindu farmer.

Doc drew some of the gasoline from the tanks and made use of Monk's analysis apparatus.

"Sen Gat evidently knows we're following him," he decided aloud. "Probably he has a receiving set and has heard us using our radio."

"What did he do, Doc?" asked Monk.

"Doped the gasoline with a chemical."

"Blazes! Gettin' fresh fuel will set us back a day at least!"

Long Tom groaned loudly and plunged into the cabin.

"I'll try to raise somebody by radio and have a plane bring us fresh fuel," he said.

"Wait!" Doc told him.

The bronze man now mixed various ingredients from the bottles and phials racked in Monk's chemical lab outfit. He poured these into the fuel tank. With himself and two of his men at one end of the wing and the other three of the party at the opposite wing tip, they proceeded to rock the ship violently, and for some minutes.

Then Doc opened a petcock in the bottom of the fuel tanks and let a small portion of the contents run out.

"I don't get this, Doc," said Renny.

"The chemical mixture I poured into the tank nullifies and forms a precipitate with the stuff Sen Gat introduced to render the gasoline useless," Doc advised him. "By draining off the precipitate, we'll leave the gas almost as good as ever – I hope."

His expectations were justified. After some coaxing, the three motors banged to life and began firing regularly.

The boggy condition of the rice field gave them some trouble in taking off. They were forced to cut bamboo shoots from the surrounding jungle and fashion a short runway. Eventually the plane was up.

"Sen Gat only set us back about an hour," Monk grinned.

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India furnished them with no more difficulties, unless the monotony of a long flight could be judged such.

Doc Savage took his exercises religiously, two hours out of each twenty-four. For this purpose, he cleared a space in the rear of the cabin.

His five men watched curiously as the bronze giant went through the muscle-strengthening part of his routine, which, in some respects, did not differ greatly from the usual physical-culture system. The exercises were, however, calculated to develop every muscle to an equal degree. He kept at it until a fine film of perspiration covered his tremendous frame.

The other exercises came next: the device which created sound waves above and below the frequencies audible to a normal ear, and which attuned Doc's sense of hearing; the score or so of scents which keened his nostrils; pages of Braille – the system of upraised dots which constitute the writing for the blind – that attuned his sense of touch, and the other contrivances which sharpened his remaining senses.

There was a series of complex mental gymnastics to develop concentration.

"Whe-e-ew!" Monk muttered. "It always makes me sweat to watch that."

"Yeah," Renny agreed. About the only exercise Renny took was to knock an occasional panel out of a wooden door with his enormous fists. His boast was that no door had a panel strong enough to defy him.

They stopped again for fuel. Another night passed. Then the jungles of Indo-China were below them – a limitless green expanse, spotted here and there with the brilliance of tropical flowers, or the shifting color of bird flocks. It was a sinister, unhealthy expanse of vegetation, overlaid by a faint haze of steam.

Clouds were plentiful; rain squalls frequent. Lightning forked jagged tongues among the clouds, superheated streaks that sprang without warning.

"They say lightning can hit a plane without doin' any harm," Ham remarked.

"Probably depends on the lightning," said Long Tom, the electrical wizard. "The stuff is always likely to make a spark that will ignite the fuel tanks. The bonding – the thoroughness of electrical connection between the different parts of the plane – has a bearing also."

"I wonder how Habeas is gettin' along?" Monk put in, interrupting the discussion.

"Your double has probably kicked him out of the other plane before now," Ham offered.

"Unlikely," Doc pointed out. "That would arouse the suspicions of the girl and Maples."

They flew high to avoid the menace of the jungle Storms.

THEY HAD penetrated well into the almost unexplored inner fastnesses of Indo-China before the next development came.

Doc leveled a bronze arm. "Look!" he cried.

Binoculars were hastily clutched and focused ahead. The lenses enlarged what, to their unaided eyes, had seemed a metallic insect, hardly distinguishable. A plane! It was a low-wing job, tri-motored.

"Answers the description of the fake Monk's bus," thumped Renny.

Doc advanced the throttles and dived down into the clouds. Concealed by the tumbled vapor, they slammed ahead. Once lightning spurted past, so close that it blinded, the boom of its thunder plainly audible over the chorus of motors.

"Doc, what course do you contemplate?" asked Johnny.

"We will follow them," Doc said. "The idea is to let them lead us to this mysterious city of The Thousand-headed Man."

"Do you think we're near the place?"

"Possibly. This particular region below us is marked 'unexplored' on our charts."

They plunged into a rain cloud – it seemed to slam at them like a Gargantuan gray fist, and the propellers set up a shrill squall as they encountered raindrops. Inside the plane it was suddenly quite dark. This lasted for some moments – the rain cloud was large – then they were out, and the sun poured its scalding light through the cabin windows.

"Look!" Monk barked.

The plane ahead had circled the cloud. As a result, they had gained; the other ship was no more than three-quarters of a mile ahead.

Doc bore a violent foot on the rudder. Their plane spun about, literally stood on a wing tip in the air, and dived for the concealing vapor; but they did not make it.

Down over the top of the cloud behind them, as if coasting on a gray snowbank, came two planes. A third droned in from the side.

"Sen Gat's wagons!" Renny thundered.

Chapter 12. TEMPLE SINISTER

THE THREE new skyriders lost no time in making their intentions evident. Rudders waggled, aligning ships toward Doc's craft, and suddenly Doc's plane was enwrapped in nebulous threads of gray. These swayed, seeking Doc's ship with a hideous veracity.

The gray threads were lines of smoke laid down by the smouldering chemical in tracer bullets. The guns on Sen Gat's ship were not synchronized to shoot through the propellers, but were mounted out on the wings, and were cable controlled.

Doc jacked the throttles back and muscled the control wheel. His big ship pointed up into the sky, gaining altitude. The motors labored and panted, vibrating the fuselage.

Back in the cabin, Monk was distributing parachutes and Renny was opening ammo cases which held the cartridge drums of their little supermachine pistols.

Sen Gat's tracer bullets found their right wing. There was the sound as of cats fighting on a tin roof – tracers

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spattering chemical sparks. The wing acquired a ragged hole.

Doc tilted the stick, came down heavy on left rudder, and they slanted clear. Bullets stitched across the rear of the fuselage, then Monk and Ham opened with their superfirers. The bawl of these nearly split their eardrums.

"Use inflammable bullets!" Doc yelled. "Try to get their gas tanks! No doubt they've got parachutes."

Other ammo drums were slipped into the machine pistols.

Doc yanked the nose up into a near stall, side-slipped, leveled, and all but made a right-angle turn directly into the path of an enemy ship.

The other pilot pulled up, evidently with the idea of doing an Immelmann to conserve what altitude he had.

Renny turned loose with his gun. The bullets scalded the wing of the other plane like liquid fire, splashing chemical so hot that it actually melted ribs and metal skin fabric.

These inflammable slugs, like other things about the superfirer pistols, had been developed by Doc. In their noses they carried a thermite compound which, once it was ignited, would melt through almost all known metals – and it ignited on impact with a target.

Chill fingers of terror clamped the other flyer as he saw great holes melt in his wings. Instead of completing his maneuver, he booted over and plunged into the concealing clouds.

A few seconds of that fire and his ship would have been incapable of flying.

Doc looped the heavy bus, flew upside down for a time while equipment boxes bounced about the cabin like pebbles in a tin can, then came down in a screaming dive upon another plane.

This one held Sen Gat. The tall oriental was not flying the plane himself, but occupied a cabin seat. Both his arms, their hands made grotesque by their capped finger nails, leveled at Doc Savage. His face convulsed as he yelled something.

Doc's five men had opened cabin windows and leaned out, superfirers ready. They shot, and where their bullets hit the metal skin of Sen Gat's ship, it was as if hot sparks had dropped on paper.

One burst of these incendiary bullets upon a house was sufficient to set it fire in a hundred places. Sen Gat's metal ship would not burn, but the fuel in the tanks would.

Sen Gat evidently realized this. He lost his nerve. Again his arms pointed, his face contorted, and it was evident that he was ordering retreat.

Both of Sen Gat's planes abruptly sought the concealment of the clouds.

Doc plunged his craft into the vapor after them, hunting.

THE BIRD battlers had not noticed it, but the other plane – the one piloted by the fake Monk – had stopped to spiral in the sky and watch the fight.

The fake Monk was having his troubles. These were due to a story, true in no detail, which he had told to Lucile Copeland and Maples.

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The fake Monk was the burly leader of the spurious group of bobbies who had attempted to deceive Doc Savage's men in London, giving his name as Evall. It happened that this was actually his name.

This was not the first time Sen Gat's three planes had been sighted. They had, in fact, followed Evall's ship over most of Afghanistan and all of India, keeping to the side and a few miles in the rear.

"Doc Savage and the rest of his gang are in them three sky wagons," Evall had declared, playing the part of Monk.

Maples had believed the story; it sounded reasonable. Lucile Copeland had taken it as the truth, also. Her thoughts were mostly for the jungles of Indo-China and what it might hold her father and mother, if they were alive. Ordinarily, she would not have been one easily deceived.

Now, as she watched the sky brawl behind them, several things were combining to make her suspicious.

"You say that lone ship is Sen Gat?" she demanded.

"Yeah – the bum!" snarled the imitation Monk.

"Why don't you go back and help?" snapped the young woman. "That one ship is getting the best of the other three!"

"Doc's orders were to stay out of any fights," insisted Evall. "He don't want you and Maples hurt."

"Go back, anyway!" Lucile Copeland commanded.

"Nix."

The young woman narrowed her eyes. She was recalling another suspicious circumstance. The plane was equipped with a radio. Their escort had pretended to use this to keep in touch with Doc, but he had only employed it when his two passengers were asleep.

Evall kept one eye on the young woman and he could read the signs. She was becoming suspicious.

When Lucile Copeland suddenly wrenched a gun out of her breeches pocket, Evall was not surprised.

"Land this plane!" the girl snapped.

Evall laughed. "Behave, sister! I got your gun last night and took the powder out of the cartridges."

Lucile Copeland made a grim mouth. "I know that."

"You what?" Evall's jaw sagged.

"So I loaded the gun with fresh cartridges."

The girl pulled the trigger unexpectedly. Hot powder fumes dashed into Evall's face. A bullet snapped past his ear, and opened a round hole in the plane window.

"You – "

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"Land!" Lucile Copeland meant business.

Evall, snarling, began to turn pale.

In the rear of the plane, Habeas Corpus awakened abruptly and scrambled forward, big ears distended.

"You will land this plane!" Lucile Copeland stated grimly. "Otherwise, the next bullet won't miss.

Evall began desperately, "Listen, I'm Monk – "

"Down!" The girl cocked her gun.

Evall shoved the stick forward.

Lucile Copeland retreated from the spurious Monk a few paces and had Maples disarm the fellow, then threw occasional glances through the cabin windows.

The four distant planes, having disappeared into the clouds, did not show themselves again.

"I'm worried!" she gasped.

"None of them have been shot down, or we'd see 'em fall below the cloud," Maples pointed out. "That cloud bank is big – spreads over several miles. Maybe they're fighting above the jolly thing."

Evall showed scant interest in the other planes, his concern being the jungle below. The verdance was uninviting, creepers entwined and draped like green serpent.

"Ain't nowhere we can land," Evall yelled.

"Find a place," Lucile Copeland ordered.

There was no sign of the other planes above.

They flew over a small stream, overhung by bamboo, where water birds fled; and they frequently saw buayas, the monster crocodiles native to these jungles.

One of the buayas, nearly thirty feet in length, basked on a sandbank and did not stir, while vultures and insects made a hovering cloud over some prey which the cayman had half devoured.

"Over there!" the girl cried suddenly, and pointed. She had sighted the top of a small pagoda.

Evall obediently changed the plane's course, and details of the pagoda became more distinguishable. It was of a bilious yellow stone, possessing little of the color and brilliance which usually characterizes such structures. Indeed, the pagoda seemed to be in a state of partial ruin.

"Could this be the city of The Thousand-headed Man?" Maples demanded eagerly.

"No!" Lucile Copeland shook a vehement negative. "The city is deeper in the jungle."

The pagoda, it developed, stood in a clearing which was itself of weird nature. Nowhere did grass or bushes grow. The ground was bare, bleak as an expanse of bone.

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The fake Monk turned his head. "Ain't room enough there for me to make a landin'!" he grunted.

Lucile Copeland handed her gun to Maples. "Watch him."

The young woman went forward, displaced Evall at the controls, and proceeded to demonstrate that she was an excellent flyer. Booting the plane about in the sky, nursing it down, skidding away speed, she made a perfect three-pointed landing. The ship stopped rolling with a full hundred yards to spare.

The girl turned her head swiftly to make sure that Maples was keeping Evall in check. He was.

They alighted from the plane. The young woman stood on tiptoe and stared, head upturned, saw the sky held no sign of the four planes, then glanced about

"Maples!" she said sharply. "Did you ever before see a pagoda made like that one?"

MAPLES SQUINTED at the pagoda. He wrinkled his brows, but he was careful not to remove the menace of the revolver from Evall.

"It's deuced unusual, at that," he admitted.

"You've traveled a great deal in India, Indo-China, and Siam, haven't you?" questioned the young woman.

"You are familiar with religious architecture."

"Righto. But I never saw carvings such as these."

The thing about the pagoda which had aroused discussion was the manner in which it was ornamented – the sculpture work. The carvings on pagodas are usually elaborate, and this was no exception. The usual style is to ornament the edifices with grotesque likenesses of the deity in various postures. To the European eye these figures are often striking because of their extreme ugliness.

But this pagoda was ornamented with only one thing – hands. There were big hands, little hands – all done in stone. Some clutched, some pointed, others were entwined together; many, judging from the way the tendons stood out, the fingers distended, represented hands in agony.

The pagoda roof itself was four great hands.

"The Pagoda of the Hands," Maples said thoughtfully.

"What do you mean?" Lucile Copeland was startled. "Have you heard of this place?"

"Vaguely." Maples's nod was slow. "But I can't recall in what connection."

The girl surveyed the sky again. The surrounding jungle thrust up to a surprising height, cutting off the view.

"Let us go up on the pagoda steps," she suggested. "We can see more. I am anxious about those planes."

"I don't like this dump," mumbled the apish Evall.

The girl frowned at him. "Do you know something about it?"

Evall shrugged. "Nope." His voice was not firm.

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"I think you're lying," the girl told him. "Sen Gat must know what is in the city of The Thousand-headed Man. Otherwise, why should he be so mad to reach the place? Did he tell you what is there?"

"No, blast it!" snarled Evall

They climbed the steps. These were pocked and worn as if thousands of feet had trod them. The pagoda seemed to increase in size, and it became evident that the structure was larger than they had thought. A sinister silence overlay the place. There was an odor, vague, hardly definable, which might have been the muck smell of the surrounding jungle.

"Look!" Lucile Copeland shuddered and pointed.

THE STONE steps which they were treading had once been carved with literally hundreds of hands – hands knobbed into fists, splayed as if in agony, some merely palm uppermost. Long use had worn many of these away.

The steps mounted to a sort of dais, upon which the main structure of the pagoda stood. They reached the top of this, stopped.

Maples, standing on tiptoe, barely managed to reach the full height of one of the carved hands.

"Jove!" he ejaculated.

"What is it?" Evall as well as the girl seemed startled.

"I just recalled how I came to hear about this Pagoda of the Hands," Maples explained. "It's supposed to be a very sinister place. As far as I know, only two explorers have found it and returned to tell about it."

The girl shivered. "What happened to the others?"

"Jungle mystery – one of many in this country," Maples shrugged. "Nobody seems to know."

THE GIRL had brought a pair of binoculars from the plane. She began to sweep the sky, and when she could discern nothing, an expression of anxiety grew in her face.

"Here's a steam over the jungle," she murmured. "The planes could be flying low, but I believe we could hear them before we would see them, due to that foglike steam."

"Then we'll listen – " Maples began, and abruptly fell silent "Listen!"

The girl palm upped her ears in the direction of the jungle. "No!" Maples told her. "Behind us – in the pagoda! A rustling sound."

The girl listened. Then she screamed. Her voice had a splintering horror that knifed through the sinister silence about them.

"That sound – it's like we heard in my father's camp – Run – run!"

She leaped away, but she had been a long time in the plane and her muscles were slightly stiff. Perhaps, in her mad haste, she miscalculated slightly. She slipped, flailed her arms furiously, failed to recover, and pitched headlong down the steps.

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Her slender form bounced, struck, rebounded again. She shrieked, and the sound ended suddenly, like something broken off. She toppled the full length of the steep steps and sprawled, a pitiful heap, at the bottom.

Maples stared, horrified. Evall's eyes were also fixed, but not on the falling girl. He was calculating his chances of getting Maples's gun. They looked good. He leaped.

Maples swore. He fired one shot. The two men wrestled, kicking and gouging, sledging blows. Evall was infinitely the stronger. He managed to wrest the weapon free and leap back.

In the excitement, both had forgotten that sinister rustling sound behind them. But now something happened. It was eerie, uncanny.

Evall suddenly shrieked and began to strike blindly with his hands. He fired his gun madly at the interior of the pagoda. His knees buckled and let him down. His mad struggles became weaker. Eventually, he became motionless.

Maples's collapse was less spectacular. He went down with scarcely a gesture or a sound.

Silence enwrapped the weird Pagoda of the Hands, but it was soon broken by a faint, undulating roar which crept up from the distance, grew louder and resolved itself into the moan of a plane.

Chapter 13. BONES

THE PLANE was Doc Savage's ship and it flew at reduced speed, the motors throttled. It was a vague, noisy monster in the jungle steam.

Some few particularly pugnacious birds of the lang and rajawali variety sailed up and followed the craft angrily, as if resenting the encroachment of an aerial figure greater than themselves.

Doc flew the plane while his five men kept watch through the windows with binoculars. They were not feeling particularly elated.

"No sign of the three chariots," said Monk, after scrutinizing the sky.

"Dang these clouds," Renny rumbled.

Doc and his men had lost Sen Gat's three planes in the vapor bank above. Where the aerial trio had gone, they had no idea. Searching for them in the massed clouds had developed into a hopeless task.

"The girl's plane landed somewhere ahead, I think," said Long Tom.

"My assumption corroborates that," said big-worded Johnny.

Soon they sighted the Pagoda of the Hands. Their binoculars distinguished the strange nature of its carvings.

Doc circled the plane.

"There's the girl's plane," Ham pointed out. "But where are she and Maples?"

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"Yeah, and that cookie who pretended to be me," Monk growled. "That lad'll be ready for a nice hospital when I get done with 'im!"

Doc continued to circle the clearing, partially to reconnoiter, but also to keep an eye on the heavens, lest Sen Gat's ships should drop down upon them after they landed and their own plane be put out of commission.

But there was no trace of Sen Gat's trio.

Focusing screws were carefully turned as binocular lenses raked the pagoda. The profusion of carved hands came in for comment, as did the worn condition of the steps. The fact that the pagoda vicinity did not look as if it had been cleared by human hands impressed them. Most surprising of all, however, was the absence of life.

Doc Savage, with his superior sharpness of vision, gave particular notice to one side of the steps. He pointed out the soot.

"Take a look."

The others did so; and Ham exploded, "Bloodstains, Doc! They look fresh, too."

The bronze man landed immediately, executing a perfect three-point, and taxied the ship to a stop near the other plane. He gave the fog-ridden sky another close scrutiny before he cut the motors.

Then they alighted.

"Ee-e-yow!" Monk howled. "Lookit!"

Habeas Corpus, the pet pig, had been crouching under the other plane, out of sight

"Come here, Habeas," Monk called.

Habeas did not move. They could see that the shoat's beady eyes were fixed; his big ears, instead of being erect as usual, were hanging loosely. The porker's attitude bespoke terror.

"He's scared of you, ape!" jeered Ham.

"Not of me!" Monk flicked a hairy hand at the strange pagoda. "He's scared of that thing."

Monk went over and picked Habeas up. The pig evinced some signs of delight at the reunion, but his major attention remained fixed on the weird structure with the countless carved hands. When Monk started toward the pagoda, Habeas emitted a terrified squeal.

"Blazes!" rumbled Renny. "Somethin's happened here. That pig's got more sense than lots of humans. He's scared of somethin' in that funny-lookin' buildin'."

"There is," Doc said, "something queer here."

THE BRONZE man watched the sky for a time, detected no trace of Sen Gat's three planes, and approached the pagoda. He went directly to the spot where, from the air, he had discerned the bloodstains. Reaching them, he stood there motionless.

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"Made less than five minutes ago," he decided. "Possibly not that long. Look! The puddle on that step is still dripping to the step below."

The others studied the scene. They all possessed powers of observation beyond those of ordinary men. Each saw the imprints where a small hand had struck. Too, several strands of fine hair were clinging to the edge of a step.

"It was the girl," Ham said, and grimly unsheathed his sword cane.

"We'll go up," Doc decided.

They did not mount the steps of the pagoda base in a group, but separated. Doc took one side. His men went up on each of the other three sides. Their advance was slow. Eyes darted, searching, and ears strained to the utmost.

Doc Savage, moving a bit more rapidly than the others, was first to gain the top. He stood for a moment, exploring with all senses.

Detecting nothing, he stepped forward. The arched entrance of the pagoda was narrow, towering, and carved with a multitude of hands, these differing from the others in that they were fashioned in one form – clutching, as if seeking to grasp any who might enter.

A few feet inside the passage turned sharply to the left, and outer sunlight was shut off. The interior became surprisingly dark.

Producing a flashlight, the bronze man snapped on its beam. He jerked to a stop instantly after the light came on.

The very air inside the pagoda seemed to spawn a sound a low, fantastic, mellow note that played up and down the musical scale, exotic as the song of some strange jungle bird. So low as to seem intangible, it nevertheless penetrated far into the strange clearing.

Those outside heard. Excitement gripped them. They knew this note. It was the sound of Doc Savage, the subconscious thing which he did in moments of mental stress.

The five men charged forward and came piling inside. The pig, Habeas Corpus, emitted a squeal, a shrill, terrified note as if he felt he were being carried into the jaws of some mysterious death.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled, and stared at what the pagoda held.

SOMEWHERE OUTSIDE, a tropical bird cried out raucously, as if it had taken fright at some sinister presence, and Habeas Corpus squealed again, but subsided when Monk grabbed him by one over-sized ear. The breathing of Doc's five men was an audible chorus of sound.

Johnny, the gaunt geologist, had a pet ejaculation which he used whenever deeply moved. He employed it now.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" he mumbled.

The room was a great, arched cavern of stone. On it the hands were carved – hands with the forefingers pointing at a spot of central focus in the middle of the floor. The mysterious artisans who had done the work

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centuries ago, judging from the looks of the place, had been masters of hair-raising technique.

The floor sloped toward that central focus point. It was of smooth stone, with here and there a groove, a sort of gulley which might have been intended to carry any liquid toward the center.

Doc's men, staring fixedly, counted the objects piled in the middle.

"Must be sixty or seventy of 'em," Monk muttered.

Once, the objects had been human beings. Clothing and flesh had long ago decomposed, leaving the yellow skeletons, with here and there a clinging mat of hair or a bit of parchmentlike tissue. The bodies had been stacked carelessly and as a result had fallen apart, the bones intermingling.

Around the edge of the pile, like a wall intended to hem it in, were weapon knives and spears for the most part with a few guns, revolvers, and even a light machine gun, rusted beyond any further usefulness. Mingled with the weapons were pieces of equipment – knapsacks, tents, blanket rolls, and food supplies. Of the latter, only goods enclosed in glass were intact.

"Stay back, you fellows," Doc directed; then he advanced. He circled warily, studying each bit of the floor before he stepped upon it. But, gaining a point where he could see the other side of the pile, he sprang forward suddenly. The heap of bones was high enough to hide him from his companions.

"Doc!" Monk yelled. "What is it?"

Heedless of the admonition to stay back, they started forward; but the bronze man reappeared. He held up for their inspection the object which he had found. It was Lucile Copeland's gun.

"The same weapon the girl had in London," he explained.

"Listen, Doc," Renny boomed. "What d'you make of this joint? I never saw anything like it before."

Instead of answering directly, Doc Savage suggested, "Let's search the vicinity."

They went outside and conducted a thorough scrutiny. They found no sign of the girl, Maples, or the fake Monk, and the hunt eventually progressed to the adjacent stream.

In the water and along the bank were half a dozen buayas, the smallest of which was twenty feet long.

"A boat might have landed here," Doc offered.

His five men looked at the enormous buayas, and said nothing. The crocodiles were incredibly hideous monsters.

Doc Savage studied the river closely on their way back, seeking to ascertain if there had been a boat on the stream recently, using as his guide whether or not tropical birds had been frightened away; but there were not enough birds nearby to tell. Feathered creatures seemed to shun the place. The ground, hard-packed, bore no tracks.

Back at the pagoda, they proceeded to look for hidden recesses, getting hammers from a tool kit in the plane and beating the rock walls, hoping to sound out hollow space.

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They found nothing.

It was Doc, at Lucile Copeland's plane, who unearthed the next discovery.

The bronze man was searching the plane, Seeking anything in the nature of a clue. The equipment carried along by the fake Monk had been surprisingly complete, including even a small case holding dynamite. Opening this, Doc passed several sticks out to his men, after fusing and capping them.

They inserted the sticks in various cracks of the Pagoda of the Hands and set them off. Stone was shaken down; foundations were split. The result proved beyond a doubt that there were no secret passages or chambers in the weird pagoda, for no cavities were revealed.

The blasting had another result One of the dynamite sticks failed to explode. Examining this, Doc made a discovery. The nitro compound had been hollowed out and replaced with a paste of face powder and water.

Inside the stick, cleverly hidden, was a slender black object enwrapped in oiled paper. It was one of the black keys.

Doc Savage went back to the case of explosive in the plane and made a further examination. He found the other two black sticks.

"Lucile Copeland was suspicious of the fake Monk," he surmised. "She hid the black keys."

Observing that one stick was enclosed with more than oiled paper, he hurriedly unfolded the covering. This proved to be a fragment clipped from a chart of interior Indo-China. There was a cross mark and some words inscribed in red – probably with a lipstick. The words read:

Thousand-headed Man City

"What a break for us!" Monk grinned. "How far away is it, Doc?"

The bronze man consulted the chart. "Not far. But our immediate concern is locating Lucile Copeland rather than finding the city."

"What do you reckon happened to her, Doc?"

"She was seized, it would appear, and carried off."

"What gets me is the way Habeas Corpus acted," Monk muttered uneasily. "Somethin' terrified the pig. I'd have sworn Habeas couldn't be scared by anything that walks or flies. But you guys saw how he was actin'. Somethin' got his goat"

The gaunt Johnny had been using his monocle magnifier on various of the pagoda carvings. His conclusions were interesting, judging by his expression. He spun the monocle on its ribbon and eyed Doc.

"This was built seven or eight thousand years ago, unless my conclusions are amiss," he stated. "It is manifestly a product of a prehistoric civilization. Its general architecture is not especially unique, but the configuration of the carvings is most unusual. Use of only one design – the human hand – is difficult of explanation."

Monk eyed the place, shivered, and muttered, "You can have my part of the dump. What are we gonna do, Doc?"

"Take off in the plane," Doc decided. "We'll fly up and down this river. We may be able to find some trace of the girl."

Chapter 14. MAGIC FIRE

CLAMBERING INTO their ship, Doc started the three motors. The others also tumbled into the cabin, Monk carrying Habeas Corpus. Doc taxied to the far side of the clearing.

Before taking off, he pointed out another eerie circumstance. This had to do with the clearing itself, its lack of vegetation.

"We've been taking it for granted that this clearing is the work of human hands," he pointed out. "We may be mistaken. Do you see any stumps where brush has been cut off?"

"That's right," Monk agreed thoughtfully. "It just looks like nothin' grows close to this thing."

Doc starved the throttles until the plane stopped rolling; then said, "Monk, suppose you hop out and scoop up some samples of that earth. We'll analyze the stuff later."

Monk complied. A small sample jar from his chemical laboratory he filled with soil.

"Do you think there may be somethin' in the ground that kills vegetation, Doc?" he queried.

"There is some reason for the jungle not encroaching on the pagoda," Doc replied.

The bronze man held the plane back with locked wheel brakes until the motors were revving at top Speed. When the brakes were released, the ship lunged ahead. There was little room to spare. Collision with the wall of jungle seemed imminent an instant before Doc backed sharply on the control stick. They skidded up into the air.

"You're gonna leave the girl's plane where we found it?" Renny asked.

"The young woman might escape from her captors and return," Doc replied. "Without the plane, she would be marooned."

They flew along above the stream. Its bamboo-flanked banks rapidly became narrower and soon reached a point where jungle monkeys could be observed swinging completely across the rivulet.

Doc and his men, watching closely, had seen nothing but buayas and, in the pools close to the surface, an occasional large fish of the pa-beuk variety.

"Nothing here," Doc concluded. "We'll try downstream." He banked around. Going back, they kept above the foglike layer of jungle steam and studied the heavens. Nowhere could they discern Sen Gat's three ships.

"Say," Monk grunted unexpectedly, "could them sky-wagons of Sen Gat's have landed and picked up the girl and Maples?"

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"Not a chance," Renny rumbled. "Do you think so, Doc?"

"Hardly possible," Doc agreed.

The steam over the jungle shut out vision to a surprising degree; they did not sight the Pagoda of the Hands until they were within three-quarters of a mile of the structure, and it s

howed, a sinister, yellowish knob, above the jungle. They winged close, following the stream.

Monk, who had been watching the rear, muttered, "That's funny."

"What is?" Ham grunted.

"Three or four lang birds were following us," Monk explained. "Now that we're gettin' close to that pagoda, they've turned back. Kinda uncanny."

"Holy cow!" Renny yelled suddenly. "Lookit!"

Lucile Copeland's plane still stood in the clearing beside the pagoda. But it was now strangely awry. The undercarriage had collapsed. Both wings had been wrenched partially free of the fuselage. The tail control surfaces were crushed. It was as if a monster foot had stepped upon the ship except that the cabin was intact.

Doc landed hastily. They ran to the plane.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" exploded Johnny. "What mashed the wings down?"

"There's no tracks," Monk declared, small eyes protruding. "The ground in the clearing is remarkably hard," Doc pointed out. "It would not show the prints of bare feet. A large number of men standing on the wings of the plane could have crushed it in this fashion."

They stared a second search of the pagoda vicinity, and soon Long Tom's shout drew them toward the river. They ran to where he stood.

"Look!" he pointed.

The big caymans were still in the water, resting against the bank. But now they were weirdly motionless.

"Dead!" Long Tom muttered. "All three dead, and not a mark on 'em!"

DOC AND his men stood in silence; of the six, only the bronze man maintained an inscrutable mien.

The appearance of the strange pagoda alone was conducive to a creepy feeling. Discovery of the scores of skeletons inside had not helped. They had been gone only a few minutes, but in that interval Lucile Copeland's plane had been mysteriously crushed and these giant reptiles inexplicably slain.

"We better post a guard over our plane," Doc said quietly. They turned back. Monk suddenly yelled; his tone was shrill, unnaturally so.

"Lookit!"

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Each of them saw it – a flame, a bundle of flames, rather. It was some six inches thick and a yard in length. The fire was in the air above the plane. It seemed to drop straight downward. They could hear the hiss and crackle of the flames, then the straight, elongated plume of fire struck the plane amidships.

RAVENOUS, LEAPING scarlet enveloped the plane in the space of a finger snap. Smoke crawled. A fuel tank let go with a roar.

"Fire – out of thin air!" Monk squawked unbelievably.

They raced toward the now burning ship, hopeful of saving some equipment. But it was too late. The exploding fuel tank had splashed gasoline through the cabin and the fuselage interior was a roaring furnace. They could only stand by and watch.

Ham peered upward. His features were usually ruddy. Monk had on occasion accused him of using rouge – but now they were quite pale.

"I saw it with my own eyes," he said hoarsely. "Flame out of the sky! It wasn't a thrown torch or a firebrand – just a flame!"

"And what made the plane catch on fire like that?" Monk grumbled. "It was an all-metal ship."

Renny knotted and unknotted his huge fists. "I've heard a lot about the mysticism of the East. Always figured a lot of it was hooley. But – I dunno. This gets me."

DOC SAVAGE, saying nothing, moved toward the jungle. The wall of leafage took him in silently. The underbrush was not as thick as he had expected. He listened. Flame roar from the burning plane was sufficient to cover any other sound. He heard nothing.

The bronze man glanced upward. The dark mass of cloud was lower; it seemed to have thickened, darkened. A sudden jungle rainstorm was brewing.

The downpour came swiftly, even before Doc Savage could continue his search. Streaks of lightning appeared in wriggling, crisscrossing tongues. Thunder cackled. Very big raindrops came first, shattering on the jungle foliage; they grew smaller, fell more rapidly, and seemed to turn into a solid sheet. Lightning struck a small palm tree, showering down coconuts and palm fronds.

Within a few seconds Doc was standing in water more than ankle deep. He ran for Lucile Copeland's plane.

The other ship, still burning furiously, sizzled and threw up clouds of steam. Doc's five aides were already in the cabin of the girl's ship.

"Blast the rain!" Renny rumbled. "If there were any tracks in the jungle, the storm'll wipe 'em out."

Ham peered out moodily at the storm. Only by shouting did his voice raise above the roar of water on the fuselage. "I can't stop thinkin' about it!" he yelled out.

"About what?" Monk demanded.

"That flame – the way it dropped out of thin air. I tell you it wasn't – natural."

The rain stopped suddenly after about five minutes of heavy downfall.

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EXAMINING supplies in the girl's plane, they found certain equipment which might prove useful – tents, insect nets, preserved foods. They made packs of this stuff.

"Our searching seems to have turned up no sign of the girl," Doc announced. "The thing we had better do is go on in an effort to find the city of The Thousand-headed Man."

The small river was now a roaring torrent, a lead-colored rope of water which writhed along in its bamboo-walled groove.

The men sought higher ground and moved in a westerly direction. Shortly after they left the strange pagoda behind, the jungle became thicker, almost impenetrable.

Tropical birds appeared, gaudy dapplings of color; some scolding hoarsely, but more fleeing at sight of the human invaders. Their cries made a weird conglomeration of sound.

Monk was letting Habeas Corpus walk, and the pig soon came scampering back in agony, having made unwise contact with a Voracious type of ant. The men themselves found it necessary to keep a continual watch for these insects.

"Some ants!" Monk grumbled. "They bite like lions!"

Flies, species of jungle nyamoks, made going miserable. There were kutus – bugs which evidenced a liking for human diet. Chameleonlike sumpah-sumpahs clung to bamboo boles – tiny, picturesque lizards which fled with the speed of light. There were kumbangs, beetlelike insects larger than mice.

"I have encountered jungles of diversified varieties," offered verbose Johnny. "Comparatively speaking, the others were city lawns."

After an hour of superhuman exertion, they had progressed appreciably less than a mile. Doc called a halt to consult the map.

"The chart does not show the river," he pointed out. "This is unexplored territory, but the river seems to run in the direction we wish to take. We'll make better time with a raft."

They changed their course and soon reached the river banks. Several tree boles, lashed together with suitable crosspieces, gave them a raft of sorts. They got aboard and used long bamboo poles to shove their craft along.

The river had already subsided to a degree. By keeping close to the shore, where they could shove against the bottom with their poles, they made fair progress. They were traveling with the current, anyway.

The river twisted frequently. They were rounding one of these bends when Doc, steering, abruptly sent the raft shoreward. He pointed, and the others followed his arm.

"Holy cow!" boomed Renny

A MAN lay on the bank of the river, near the water. He was a short man, almost as wide as tall, with very long, thick arms. He seemed far gone, for he was using both arms to prop himself in a sitting position.

A few yards from the man two huge reptiles had pulled themselves up out of the water. They were of the buaya species, man-eating crocodiles. Each had a length of more than a score of feet. The reptiles were dividing their attention between the man and each other.

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Monk, eyeing the man, growled, "Boy, oh boy, I've been wantin' to get my hands on this cookie!"

It was Evall – the fake Monk, on the river bank.

Doc grounded the raft a few yards from Evall.

"Stay perfectly quiet," he called to the fellow.

The anthropoid man was too terrified to take advice. He reared upon his feet and staggered toward the raft. Too weak to hold himself erect, he sagged to all fours and crawled madly.

The two buayas promptly started for him.

Evall, observing the charge of the crocodiles, screeched in mortal terror. It seemed a certainty that he would be taken.

Doc Savage, stooping swiftly, wrenched at two short sticks which were a part of the raft's structure.

Monk and Renny opened fire with their machine pistols, but on the armored coating of the buayas the bullets had no appreciable effect.

"A high-powered rifle wouldn't stop them in time!" Doc yelled, and got his two sticks loose. He sprang off the raft, sank ankle-deep in sand and mud, and ran.

Evall, in his mad terror of death, tried to grab Doc Savage, probably for the same reason that a drowning man will clutch at a bit of flotsam, be it as small as a straw. The bronze man evaded him.

One of the charging crocodiles led the other slightly. Their speed was terrific. Their jaws were distended, the afternoon sunlight aglint on rows of hideous teeth.

Doc Savage's movements seemed to become somewhat unreal, so quickly were they executed. He held one stick upright, lunged, and shoved it into the jaws of a buaya. The reptile bit down, with the result that the stick was jammed upright between its jaws.

An instant later, the second crocodile also had a stick wedged in its hideous mouth.

The monsters sought to rid themselves of the sticks in traditional fashion. They spun over and over on the sand, for all of their huge size, their whirling almost too fast for the eye to follow.

Doc scooped Evall up and flung him onto the raft.

"Quick!" he rasped. "The sticks weren't sharpened. The crocks will get rid of them in a minute. Push off!"

Lusty pole shoves propelled the raft out into the river, and the current caught them and swept them on around the bend. Looking back, they saw first one crocodile expel the wedging stick, then the other.

Chapter 15. MYSTIC JUNGLE

THE APISH Evall, now that he was out of danger, had collapsed on the raft and was showing little interest in proceedings. His breathing was irregular; his skin almost matched in color the river waters about them.

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Doc Savage examined the fellow.

"His condition is lethargic," the bronze man offered. "He's in a stupor."

"From what cause?" Long Tom demanded.

"Difficult to say," Doc told him. "There's no mark on his body – no wounds."

Doc produced a tiny and extremely compact first-aid kit, which he rarely allowed out of his possession, and treated Evall with a strong stimulant.

Responding to this, the man revived until he could carry on a mumbling, disconnected conversation.

"Where are Lucile Copeland and Maples?" Doc asked.

Evall shook his head heavily. "Dunno."

"Where did you last see them?"

"At that damned pagoda," Evall muttered. "What happened there?"

"I'd been pretending to be Monk," Evall explained. "The girl got wise to me and landed the plane at the pagoda. We went up on the steps to see if we could sight your ship. We heard some kind of a rustlin' noise.

The man paused and shivered. He wet his lips. His attitude was one of abject fear.

"That's the best I can describe it," he went on. "Just – a rustlin'. The girl yelled somethin' about havin' heard such a sound at her father's camp. She started to run, slipped and fell down the steps."

"That explains the bloodstains we found," Renny declared. "I – well, I tried to grab the gun Maples was holdin'," Evall went on. "Then somethin' happened. I just kinda passed out' When I woke up I was floatin' in the river."

"You what?"

"I was floatin' in the river."

"Before the rain, or after?"

Evall looked bewildered. "It must've been after. I don't remember no rain."

"Granted he was carried away from the pagoda in a boat, he might've been lost overboard in the flood," said Monk. "The river was rough."

"I managed to crawl out on the bank," Evall finished. "I laid there, and then them crocodiles came."

Renny stood up, great fists distended. "Listen, guy, you're lyin'. Where is Lucile Copeland?"

"Yeah!" Monk bounced on Renny's side. He leveled an arm at a nearby mudbank, on which an armor-plated buaya dozed. "Blast you! Tell the truth, or we'll feed you to that baby."

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With the steering pole, Doc Savage propelled the raft toward the crocodile.

Evall did not know these men too well, and his only conception of their intentions came from a scrutiny of their faces. The six countenances were a grim array. Evall began to blubber. Big tears spilled over his eyelids and washed clean, snaky tracks through the smear of mud that begrimed his cheeks.

"I dunno where she is," he moaned. "So help me, I don't! I'm tellin' you, something strange happened at that pagoda."

Over and over, he reiterated his lack of knowledge.

"The man is telling the truth," Doc decided aloud, and swerved the raft away from the bank and the reptile.

EVALL WAS a slack, weakened bundle on the raft for a time, still not knowing that the threat to feed him to the buaya had been a bluff.

"What do you make of this, Doc?" Monk asked.

"Some agency obviously transported Evall some miles down the river," Doc said thoughtfully. "Beyond that, the thing is a mystery."

With a pair of binoculars, Renny scrutinized the river surface, the banks, then the sky above. Clouds were now thinner, white and tufted, hanging very high.

"Wonder what became of Sen Gat's three planes," he pondered.

This was not the first time since they had launched the raft that Renny had voiced puzzlement on this point, but he got his answer. The river was wide here, with stagnant water on the sides and a current in the middle. To make speed, they were following the current.

Doc Savage suddenly turned the raft toward shore.

"Something up, Doc?" Renny demanded.

"Wait a minute," Doc directed. "You'll hear it shortly."

A few seconds later the others detected what the bronze man's supersensitive ears had been first to register. The note might have been the droning of a swarm of metallic bees in the distance. It loudened.

Planes! They were coming down the river.

The raft was clumsy. It happened that at this point their bamboo poles did not reach bottom. They drifted, moving swiftly but making little headway toward shore.

"Three planes!" Monk growled, after listening.

The trio of ships came into sight, flying low, frightening up clouds of birds. The pilots must have sighted the raft almost at once, for the planes slanted into a dive.

"Sen Gat's wagons!" Long Tom snapped.

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The raft had now reached the point where their poles touched bottom. They shoved mightily, urging the unwieldy conveyance shoreward.

The river surface began to foam off to the right, the phenomenon accompanied by a loud chopping and gurgling. The foaming patch approached the raft.

"Machine gun bullets," Doc clipped, and his bamboo pole bent under his shove.

More slugs began hitting the river, but the planes were still too far away to shoot accurately.

The raft got into shallow water, and Doc's five men plunged ashore. Doc stooped to help Evall.

"I can make it," the apish man mumbled, and slid off into the shallow water.

The planes swooped. Bullets knocked up foam and spray. Lead chopped at the jungle foliage.

Evall accompanied his captors for a few paces, then abruptly whirled and charged toward the raft.

"Damn that guy!" Monk yelled.

Doc raced to recapture Evall, but one of the planes – Sen Gat's private ship, launched an accurate stream of slugs. With a loud popping and upheaval of water, they marched toward Doc, cutting him off from the fleeing Evall.

The bronze man had only one choice. He took it – allowed Evall to go.

With tremendous leaps and a great splashing, he reached the shore and plunged into the tangle of leafage and lianas.

Evall, gaining the raft, tumbled aboard and shoved off. The current whirled him downstream.

"Work into the jungle," Doc called. "Quick!"

The crashing of bushes, the flutter of leafage, told him his men were complying with the order. Doc himself entered a thicket of bamboo, penetrated a few yards and found Renny. The big-fisted engineer had drawn his supermachine pistol.

Through the foliage overhead, Renny glimpsed one of the planes. He fired briefly. His gun was charged with the thermite incendiary bullets which burned hot, red spots on the aide of the plane. The craft hastily banked away.

Sen Gat's ship dived only once more, machine guns shuttling. Their lead made a tremendous sound in the jungle. Bark flew in clouds. Leaves cascaded.

Doc's men replied with their superfirers. The bull-fiddle moans of those guns echoed and reechoed across the jungle. The terrific heat of the incendiary bullets and the fabulous Speed with which they were discharged proved too much for Sen Gat's three planes; they spun away in vertical banks and cannoned off downstream.

"They're gonna pick up that monkey Evall," Monk decided. "That ugly lug! I hope a crock gets him."

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

"You should call the man homely," Ham jeered. "If he had a few rusty shingle nails stuck in him to imitate that hair of yours, he'd look just like you."

"Yeah?" Monk grinned.

The excitement of the encounter had dispelled the aura of sinister mystery which had enwrapped the men. Monk and Ham were back to normal, quarreling.

Doc now assembled his group. They worked downstream. This proved to be an incredibly tedious task, for the jungle was almost impenetrable, presenting a mat of vines, gnarled branches and thorny shrubs.

They heard sounds which indicated beyond a doubt that Sen Gat's three planes had landed, probably to pick up Evall.

"Wonder if Sen Gat could have Lucile Copeland and Maples," Renny rumbled, striking at a thorn bush with a club in an endeavor to break a way through.

Possibly Renny expected Doc to make answer, for when none came he looked around and saw Doc was gone. The bigfisted engineer failed to show concern, knowing what had happened: Doc had pushed on ahead.

The bronze man had adopted a mode of traveling which was possible only to one of his fabulous strength and agility. Twenty, thirty, and even forty feet above the ground his way lay. He ran to the end of a limb and launched outward into apace, caught the bough of an adjacent tree, and went on.

Several times, stout creepers spanning from one tree to another supplied him with a bridge. More often the shift was managed by a dizzy swing through space.

Recalling the speed with which the river current had moved, and the time which had elapsed between Evall's shaving off on the raft and the landing of the plane, Doc decided the three craft were at least half a mile distant. Had he tried to force his way through the jungle, it would have taken all of an hour to cover that distance. As it was, the journey required only a few minutes.

He ran out on the branch of a tremendous jut tree and stood there, balancing expertly to the slow sway of the limb.

THE JUTI tree was the outpost of a finger of jungle which thrust into a clearing at the river edge. This open space was smooth, covered by high grass and dotted with puddles of water, residue of the recent rain.

Sen Gat's three planes had landed in the clearing and now stood, engines turning over slowly, exhaust stacks spilling an occasional puff of oil smoke. One engine evidently needed overhauling, since the plane which it powered vibrated slightly. The tall grass swayed under the slipstream and puddles of water behind the planes were ruffled.

Evall's raft was lodged against the shore, some fifty yards from the planes. It bobbed slightly with the current. The rush of the water had forced one end down so that the float was partially submerged.

Nowhere in the clearing was there a sign of a man.

Doc Savage waited. The limb on which he stood stopped its swaying eventually and there was only the faint mutter of the plane motors, interrupted occasionally, as the carburetor failed to feed the proper mixture.

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A brilliantly colored nuri sailed over the clearing, caught tight of the planes and fled, its frightened squawks audible above the motor chorus.

The bronze man did not enter the clearing immediately. He circled rather slowly, keeping to the aerial lanes, and swung almost completely around the open space.

There was no sign of Sen Gat, his men, or Evall.

Dropping out of the tree, Doc approached the three planes and looked inside to see if the cabins concealed any one. They did not

He studied the grass. It was trampled by many feet – by boots, the signs plainly enough read.

Sen Gat and his men had scrambled out immediately upon landing and had rushed toward the river, no doubt intending to meet the apelike Evall.

Doc followed the trail.

Near the river there had been more tramping around, and in several places grass crushed flat indicated where men might possibly have fallen.

Doc examined the water's edge. If a boat had landed and carried away the missing men, it had left no mark. There was nothing at all to show what had become of Sen Gat.

Doc's five men soon reached the spot. Arriving, they were comparatively cheerful, but as they took in the scene, uneasiness came. Monk spoke first.

"But Doc, maybe Sen Gat's outfit walked into the jungle."

"They could not do that without leaving tracks," Doc replied. "No, they did not go into the jungle."

"Then what became of them?"

Ham fingered his sword cane absently. "Yes, what did? And what became of Lucile Copeland and Maples? Where did that fire that set our plane ablaze come from?"

No one vouchsafed an answer. It was a mystery, a weird enigma befitting the orient.

Chapter 16. THE WALL OF THE FEET

DOC SAVAGE and his men made a second search of the clearing and the vicinity to corroborate their earlier conclusions, and found nothing to change their minds or to shed light on the almost supernatural disappearance of Sen Gat and his men. They were sure that no human feet had trod that part of the jungle recently. In view of the rain not long before, tracks would certainly have been left.

There were none.

The tufted tops of tall palms in the west had received and concealed the sun before they finished their search. Quick twilight came.

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Tropical birds squawked, seeking roosting places – those of the feathered tribe which became quiet at night. The river turned the red of blood with the last rays of the vanishing sun.

"No use trying to get a look at the country with the planes, now," Doc pointed out. "It would be dark before we could get in the air."

There ensued some debate about where they should camp for the night, whether here with the planes, or elsewhere.

"Blast it, I don't like this place," Monk grumbled. "That hocus-pocus of them guys disappearin' gets in my hair."

"You hairy dope," Ham told him, "we'd he suckers to leave."

"Yeah?" Monk scowled. "How d'you figure that?"

"These three planes are the only ones left in the jungle, ape!" Ham retorted.

"The shyster is right," Monk admitted grudgingly. "These sky-wagons are our tickets home."

"We will camp here," Doc decided.

They shifted the three planes to the center of the clearing and shut off the motors, then drove stakes in the soft earth and lashed the craft down, in case there should be a windstorm during the night. As they had observed, violent weather was prevalent over this jungle.

Examination of the plane tanks indicated there was sufficient fuel to carry each of the craft to civilization, amply sufficient, since the tanks of one ship could be drained and added to those of the others.

They pitched the tents – two in number – which they had brought from Lucile Copeland's plane. These were tropical shelters, well equipped with insect netting. The latter was not amiss, since darkness and a horde of insects arrived simultaneously.

"I thought there was a few bugs around durin' the day, big-fisted Renny complained, seeking shelter. "But there's really some bugs now. Danged if you can breathe without inhalin' 'em."

Physical necessity required that the party withdraw to their tents. A lookout was kept by the sense of hearing alone.

"Nobody could move through that jungle without makin' a noise, anyway," Monk vouchsafed.

Doc Savage spent a little time with a flashlight and Lucile Copeland's map. According to the chart, they were now within a few miles of the mysterious city of The Thousand-headed Man. He turned his attention to the three black sticks.

"Too bad we didn't get to analyze these," he said. "We still don't know what they're made of."

Only Monk chanced to be near by at the moment, and he made reply. "I dunno how we're gonna find out, either. The portable lab was burned up in the plane."

Doc Savage gave the sticks to Monk. "Keep these," he instructed.

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Monk blinked. "But, Doc – "

"Keep those sticks, Monk," Doc repeated.

The insect netting door of the tent operated on a zipper fastener and the bronze man stripped this open, then stepped outside

"What are you up to, Doc?" Renny demanded.

"Going to look around a little," the bronze man replied. I may be gone a few hours. You fellows watch these planes – they're important."

He stepped outside, and after that his footsteps were not heard' so silently did he move. It was as if he had merged with the night.

DOC SAVAGE went to the edge of the river, removed his garments and tied them into a compact bundle. He held this above his head as he entered the water, and swam a short distance downstream, landing on the opposite side.

He donned nothing but stout khaki trousers; the other clothing he tied on his back, drawing the knots tight. Then he advanced into the jungle, pausing often to listen.

The labyrinth of trees, vines, and flowering plants had seemed noisy during the day, but it was even more alive now with a different sound. The daytime clamor had been the cheerful squawking of birds and the chatter of monkeys; now the peaceful dwellers of the verdant tangle were quiet, and the hunters were astalk – the carnivorous creatures, seeking prey.

The grisly cries of creatures meeting death under fang or claw were unpleasantly frequently.

As the bronze man progressed, his senses grew more attuned to his surroundings. He became as the jungle hunters about him – wary, moving only in darkness, pausing to listen often. He had covered perhaps a quarter of a mile when he became aware that some creature was stalking him.

HE WAITED, sensitive nostrils dilating, until he caught the scent of the creature. Then, without an instant's delay, he took to a tree. The odor was unmistakable – a tiger.

Doc's sharp eyes detected the great, tawny striped body as it moved through a patch of moonlight. The beast sniffed about the base of the tree. There was a rasping sound as it tried its claws on the trunk.

Doc Savage climbed higher. In the lower reaches where the moonlight did not penetrate, his movements were slow, cautious, but among the upper boughs he moved more rapidly. Balancing easily, he reached the end of a branch, swung the bough up and down a few times, then hurtled through space to the next tree.

It was a feat that required fabulous strength, and it was followed by others of a like nature as Doc traveled through the upper lanes.

The huge striped cat stalked him for a time, then gave up and slunk off in search of less agile prey.

Lucile Copeland's map, as nearly as Doc could judge, showed the mysterious metropolis of The Thousand-headed Man to be on this side of the river. At least, it lay in this direction, for the river itself was not shown on the map. Just how distant the place might be there was no way of ascertaining, except by going

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there. Too, Lucile Copeland's calculations in marking the map must have been inaccurate.

The bronze man, not feeling particularly in need of sleep, intended to conduct a nocturnal investigation.

A cloud blackened the face of the moon, and he perched in the top of a great tree, well over a hundred feet above the ground, until it had passed.

During the interval of darkness he employed his eyes, searching for a light; but he discerned none. It was early. If there were human dwellers in this jungle, however savage, it was reasonable to suppose they would have cooking fires.

When the jungle again lay under a shimmer of moonlight, Doc continued. Once he skirted a tiny clearing in which a herd of elephants were at rest. The beasts resembled great slate-colored rocks strewn over the open amphitheater. It was an eerie scene, one only to be found in a domain primeval.

Doc traveled for three hours – then came suddenly upon a lofty stone wall.

THE WALL was very high, some three-score feet. There were no tall trees near which could be climbed to afford inspection of what lay beyond the barrier.

Doc Savage moved along the wall, not approaching nearer than a hundred feet. He could distinguish that it was covered with some form of carving, but the distance was too great to ascertain the exact nature of the sculpturing.

The barrier turned sharply, then turned again. It was a square enclosure, each side hundreds of feet long. Nowhere was there the sign of a door or other means of entrance. Whatever the interior held was still a profound mystery.

Doc Savage advanced. The undergrowth ceased some distance from the wall, and except for a few scrubby plants, the ground was bare, just as the terrain surrounding the strange Pagoda of the Hands had been nude of vegetation.

Within a few yards of the wall, Doc stopped. His eyes roved. His lips did not move; but his weird trilling note permeated the surrounding moonlight softly and melodiously. Fantastic, unreal, the sound might have been the work of some exotic night insect – except that, mysteriously enough, there was now hardly an insect in the air. It was as if this towering wall, or whatever enigma lay within, radiated something that kept the insects away.

But the thing which had riveted Doc's attention and called forth his peculiar trilling, was the carvings upon the wall. These varied greatly in size, yet they might all have been chiseled from the same model.

Only human feet ornamented the wall. They were in countless numbers, some with toes distended, others as if in the act of stepping; a few with the soles outermost. Just as the pagoda had borne only hands, so this wall carried only reproductions of human feet

The bronze man advanced. The carvings furnished excellent purchase for hands and toes. He mounted cautiously.

His climb was almost soundless. Once a bit of mortar dislodged and rattled faintly on the hard ground far below. After that he waited, listening, but his ears registered no untoward noise.

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Doc gained the top and thrust a hand over. The crest was carved with more human feet. He grasped grotesque, bloated toes in stone, and pulled himself up.

There was a rustling sound in front of him – such a sound as might have been made by not too crisp paper being wadded into a ball.

A strange, ghastly expression swept over the bronze man's face. His hands slipped from their grip; he tried to recover, but seemed to lack the strength. He slipped backward.

Chapter 17. THE NIGHT CRY

BACK AT the camp in the clearing where the three planes stood, Doc Savage's men were not sleeping, although they felt physically tired enough to welcome slumber.

The fact that Doc Savage was abroad in the undoubtedly dangerous jungle did not worry them greatly, since the bronze man was well capable of taking care of himself. Just what was keeping them awake they would have had difficulty telling.

Four of the party had congregated in one tent, largely because the food supply was there.

Monk, the homely chemist, had segregated himself in the other tent and was examining the three black sticks. These fascinated him, possibly because he was a chemist and therefore interested in any mysterious compound.

He scratched particles from one of the sticks with a finger nail, debated for a long time, then gingerly tasted the stuff. He made a terrific face, for the sepia material was very bitter.

Monk carried a cigar lighter – for its fire-making utility only, since he did not smoke. He drew this out, thumbed it alight and applied the heat of the tiny flame to the black material which promptly melted, becoming a liquid virtually as thin as water.

With acids secured from certain tropical fruits, and by other makeshift methods, Monk made a few experiments in the nature of analytical tests, learning little however.

Ordinarily, Monk was not addicted to the habit of talking to himself, but now he did some vocal ruminating.

"We ain't out of this thing yet, by a lot," he told himself thoughtfully. "If we get held up, or that danged mystery thing overcomes us, somebody is liable to find these sticks."

He thought in silence along these lines for some moments, enormous mouth puckered, bushy brows contorted, absently fingering an ear lobe. Suddenly he banged a palm on a knee.

"Monk, you got a brain!" he informed himself.

After this, he carefully extinguished the flashlight with which he had been examining the three black sticks, went outside, circled the tent to see that no one was near. Then he reentered the shelter, and engaged himself for some time amid great silence and with only a minimum of illumination.

Some fifteen minutes later, Monk joined the others. They eyed him curiously. Monk vouchsafed no information, however, but said instead, "Why don't you guys go to sleep?"

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"It's the blasted bugs," Renny rumbled. "They sound like airplanes."

"Why not pipe down?" Ham grumbled peevishly.

At this juncture, Habeas Corpus grunted rapidly.

"That hog is a nuisance," Ham growled. "He's been grunting like that for the last ten minutes. Dang me, I'm in favor of turning him into breakfast bacon."

"Did you ever eat a human ear?" Monk demanded.

"What's that got – "

"Just wondered how you like 'em," Monk growled. "You're gonna be eatin' your own if you don't lay off that hog. I'll pull 'em off and feed 'em to you."

"It looks like we're set for a night of that," Renny's rumble offered from a corner. "When you two hyenas start a quarrel it's good for twelve hours at least."

Habeas Corpus emitted another series of rapid grunts. "Say!" Monk exploded. "That pig hears or smells somethin'!"

A brittle silence followed. The manner of its breaking was abrupt, hair-raising.

A shriek wracked through the jungle. It came from down the river some distance, but the tone was recognizable, the words understandable.

It was Lucile Copeland's voice.

"Heads!" she screamed. "Heads! A Thousand heads!"

Insect netting ripped as the men plunged out of tents without stopping to undo fastenings.

"Heads!" the girl's screech broke on a high note, like a file hitting the point of a highly tempered knife.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled, and Johnny's "I'll be superamalgamated!" echoed.

They ran for the sound, supermachine pistols in their hands. Habeas bounded after them, reluctant to be left behind.

They hit the jungle, fought it, and penetrated slowly.

"The raft!" Ham snapped. "That's quicker."

They wheeled back and boarded the craft of bamboo poles. Silent now, grim, they shoved out into the current. It caught them, spun the raft and tossed it. They straightened out the unwieldy craft with the poles and it rushed ahead.

Shortly, Renny breathed, "It was along here somewhere."

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THE MEN punted their clumsy vessel inshore, but did not alight immediately upon its touching the bank. Instead, they listened.

There was no sound.

"Could that have been a night bird?" Ham pondered.

"Don't be a dope," Monk grunted. "It was the girl, and if I ever heard mortal terror in a voice, hers had it"

They continued to strain their ears. An uncanny circumstance came to their notice. The odious night sounds of the jungle had ceased as if stilled by the cry. Then, from down the river they all heard it

"Heads! Heads!"

There was nothing more – just the two words. The tones were shrill, yet more hollow than the other cry.

"Sounds different," Ham barked.

"Yeah – as if she had somethin' over her face," Monk agreed.

There was no discussion about what to do. They pushed the raft on, poled into the swiftness of the current and made all the headway they could downstream. The raft bumped over ripples at a bend; they poled furiously to keep it from being sucked into backwater, and went on.

"Blazes!" Renny shivered. "That first yell – I never heard anything quite as bad!"

Around another curve the raft careened. Then they heard the cry again. "Heads!"

It was in the jungle, to the left. The bamboo poles bent in a howl as they shoved. The raft spun around. An instant later it lodged against the bank.

The bank at this point was a long sandbar, a bilious yellow hue in the moonlight.

Downstream, two pairs of darksome clots, not unlike black human fists held a foot apart, protruded from the water.

The men leaped off the float, Renny leading. They raced for the jungle, digging in pockets to get at flashlights.

Habeas Corpus had followed them off the raft. He suddenly emitted a shrill squeal, whirled and ran upstream.

The action of the pig caused the men to halt. They had been in contact with the ungainly looking shoat enough to know that his actions usually had a potent meaning.

Then they heard the rustling. It was low, dull, a sound that might have been stiff silk being bundled together by hasty hands. The next development was rapid.

The faces of the men contorted. They wheeled away from the jungle, seeming to entertain hopes of reaching the raft

Renny, who had been nearest the jungle, went down first, twisting and squirming. The others toppled almost immediately. Their movements, violent at first, rapidly weakened, until all five lay without visible sign of life.

The two pairs of black knobs downstream lifted abruptly amid a boiling of water, and became the protuberant eyes of two gigantic buayas. The crocodiles waddled toward the five unmoving men. They advanced slowly, as if sure of their prey.

Chapter 18. THE HEADS

DOC SAVAGE, giant man of bronze, lay wedged in the crotch of a tree limb fifteen feet above the surrounding jungle. He was doing a strange thing – methodically slapping himself in the face. He alternated this occasionally with violent rubbing of his temples.

After a time, he was motionless, eyes closed. He was trying to remember what had happened: the top of the wail which was carved with human feet – the rustling – then he had fallen.

Or had he? Probably not. That sixty foot drop would have produced some serious sprain or broken bones, and he had neither.

He decided he must have managed to grasp the projecting sculptured feet and climb down. That was the only thing which explained his descent. Then he must have fled into the jungle.

His brain, usually imbued with a clarity that came from a lifetime of scientific training, was now hairy. He was having difficulty in recalling exactly what had occurred.

What he had seen beyond the wall, if anything, he could not recall.

He dislodged himself from the tree crotch. Nausea and dizziness seized him. It was unlike any other feeling he had ever experienced. Descending to the ground, he went through a number of exercises, until a prowling carnivore drove him into the tree again.

Fully an hour elapsed before the bronze man felt equal to moving about with any degree of safety. Tackling this jungle in the darkness required perfect coordination of nerve and muscle.

Slowly at first, he made his way back toward the strange wall. The edge of the jungle held him until a cloud blanketed the face of the moon; then, noiseless as a cloud shadow itself, he scuttled forward. He intended to have another try at whatever secret the wall harbored.

Following along the base of the edifice, his sensitive fingers traced the contour of each stone, seeking a hidden door. But, after he had gone completely around, he felt certain there was no such obscure entrance.

The cloud was large and still mantled the moon. Looking upward, Doc calculated how long the darkness would last. Very careful to make no noise this time, he climbed.

When near the crest, he did not reach over as before, for it was possible his clutching hand had actuated some trigger. His flashlight was in the bundle on his back and he worked it out.

Rearing up suddenly, he fanned the brilliant white beam over the wall. It roved rapidly, searching, seeking out all that lay within.

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Nothing happened this time.

Doc climbed to the top of the wall and crouched there. For a brief moment his peculiar trilling sound might have been audible, or again it might have been the product of a breeze working through the carved feet which ornamented the wall. The clouds above drifted away from the moon and allowed a cold brilliance to spill down.

The wall enclosed a pagoda, a pagoda sculptured everywhere with likenesses of human feet.

IN DESIGN, the Pagoda of the Feet did not differ greatly from the Pagoda of the Hands. Possibly there were fewer steps leading from the ground up to it; the thing might have been broader, less high.

Doc Savage stood erect upon the wall. Its width here at the apex was nearly a yard. The chiseled feet made a difficult surface upon which to walk, especially since he went slowly and played his flashbeam along the wall crest in search of possible poisoned thorns or knives. He made a complete circle of the pagoda.

No sign of life could he distinguish.

The interior of the pagoda walls were likewise crowded with stone feet. Using the hand holds they offered, Doc Savage clambered down. His crossing to the pagoda was executed with infinite slowness, each one of his fabulously keen senses alert.

He circled again and eventually entered the place, and found, inside the solid confines of the pagoda, a room. It was a large, domed chamber; walls and ceiling bore countless feet, each of which had been chiseled as if in the act of stepping on something in the middle of the floor.

That something on the floor was another mound of human bones. A dyke of equipment and weapons encircled the grisly pile.

WITH HIS flashlight, Doc Savage went over some of the equipment. Something that particularly interested him was an aviator's helmet and goggles. Fabric and some leather parts of these had disintegrated.

Doc turned his attention to a duffel box on which the helmet had reposed. Once opened, this disgorged papers which came apart in his hands; a corroded safety razor, the blades of which were flakes of rust; and other personal belongings.

Among other things there was a target pistol, an expensive weapon, with an inscription engraved on the grip. This read:

PRESENTED TO AVIATOR JIM FEARCY BY CALVIN COPELAND

The evidence was complete enough to allow some conclusions. This duffel must have belonged to a flier associated with Lucile Copeland's father.

Doc Savage studied the pile of bones. Were some of those grisly relics all that remained of one or both of the two fliers who had been with Calvin Copeland when he first found the city of The Thousand-headed Man?

DOC CONTINUED his scrutiny of the Pagoda of the Feet, but unearthed nothing more of calculable value. He found no one. For all the signs, this place might have lain abandoned through the ages – except for the relics inside.

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There was nothing to indicate what had caused the mysterious rustling or what had produced the uncanny spell which had enwrapped Doc for a time. There was one thing of possible significance: the attack did not repeat itself.

Doc Savage quitted the pagoda finally, convinced that it would yield nothing of further value in the line of information. He was reasonably sure the place harbored no secret room.

Most of the bronze man's usual vitality and energy had returned. Nevertheless, he decided to go back to camp. Searching could be done more effectively by daylight; an hour in the plane would accomplish as much as a week of prowling through the treetops, and it was advisable to get some sleep.

The journey back to the bivouac in the glade beside the river was accomplished through the medium of the interlacing treetops for the most part. A well-worn game trail, evidently leading toward the river, helped.

But much of the night had elapsed before Doc arrived at the rivets' edge opposite the camp.

A glance showed him that the raft of bamboo poles was gone. He watched; listened. Half a minute convinced him that something was amiss.

"Renny!" he called sharply.

There was no answer but the gobbling of echoes and the cries of a frightened jungle bird.

Plunging into the river, Doc swam across. He ran to the tents, found them empty, then used his flashlight to scrutinize the ground for tracks.

"Mr. Savage!" gasped a small feminine voice. Doc whirled. Lucile Copeland was in one of the planes, thrusting her head from a cabin door.

"I wasn't sure who it was," she explained in somewhat strained tones. "But when you used the flash, I saw your face."

"What became of my men?" Doc demanded.

The tall young woman shook her head. "I have no idea."

THE GIRL was obviously in a nervous, frightened condition, and quite weak. She looked as if she had been through an ordeal, anything but pleasant.

"Tell me exactly what happened to you," Doc directed. The young woman related what had occurred at the Pagoda of the Hands. Her statements were a trifle disconnected at times, but her general story adhered to the lines of the one which the apish Evall had told.

"After the rustling at the pagoda, I just – passed out," the girl said. "I don't know how long I was unconscious. It must have been for some time."

She parted her hair to show an unpleasant but hardly serious scalp wound.

"This cut was probably made when I fell down the pagoda steps. Possibly that accounts for my being out so long. Or maybe it was that other – thing."

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"Thing!"

"Whatever it was that overcame us."

"When and where did you revive?" Doc asked.

"Some time ago, and only a short distance from this camp." She clenched her hands tightly. "It was ghastly, frightful! All those heads!"

"Heads!" Doc eyed her intently. "Snap out of it! What do you mean?"

"When I came to – there was the most unearthly thing,"

The girl bit her lip. "There was a man beside me. He had – " She shuddered.

"Yes?"

"He had a thousand heads!"

"Talk sense," Doc told her. "You were suffering some kind Of an illusion."

"I wasn't. The heads were all over him. They spouted from his arms, his chest"

"What makes you so sure about this?"

Lucile Copeland leaned weakly against the plane.

"You must think I'm crazy," she said. "But I tell you I saw The Thousand-headed Man! There was a tiny open space in the jungle. He stood there in the moonlight. He was a big man – almost as big as you, and he was covered with heads."

Doc was silent a moment "How large were these head?" he asked.

"About the size of – lemons." The girl was almost sobbing in her horror. "You understand that this man had one big head, like a normal being. But the other heads, the small ones, grew out of the big head, as well as out of the rest of his body."

Doc Savage, saying nothing, watched the girl. He played the flashbeam on her steadily. He was searching for signs Of dementia, wondering if her mind could be unbalanced. Except for the terror, she seemed perfectly rational.

"These heads," he asked, "were they alive? Did they show any expression – a laugh or snarl?"

Lucile Copeland put her hands over her eyes.

"I didn't wait to see," she choked. "I think I screamed something about heads. Then I fled into the jungle."

"Did The Thousand-headed Man follow you?"

She nodded violently. "Yes, for a short distance," a faint smile covered her face. "I outran him. I was so scared that I don't think even you could have caught me."

"What happened then?"

"I heard someone shout from the direction of this camp. It must have been one of your men. But I was too far away to make out his words."

"Your cry aroused my men," Doc suggested.

"Possibly. I don't know. I – well – I was dazed, and scared almost to the point of madness. A lime or two I seemed to hear the echo of my own scream about the heads."

"Echo?"

"Yes. It came from down the river, I thought."

"Hm–m–m." Doc moved toward the river. "I'd better look around a bit."

Chapter 19. WEIRD METROPOLIS

WITH MANY sweepings of his flashlight, Doc Savage scrutinized the ground, noting where grass blades were crushed. He followed the trail of his men into the jungle, read from the signs that they had been baffled by the impenetrability of the growth and had turned back and pushed off in the raft

Before leaving the clearing to search for his men, Doc took one precaution. He removed an essential operating parts from each plane motor, wrapped the mechanisms in a bit of canvas, then concealing himself from possible watching eyes inside the tent, he buried the bundle a few inches underground.

He replaced the earth carefully, making sure there remained no evidence of its having been disturbed.

Doc made a bundle of the soil which had been displaced by the motor parts and carried this with him when he left the vicinity. Watchers, if there were any – and he could detect no signs of such – would think he still carried the pieces he had detached from the engine.

The girl accompanied him. Most of her strength had returned so that she could maintain his pace.

"First, I want to see the spot where you regained consciousness," Doc told her.

"You mean where –"

"Where you saw The Thousand-headed Man, yes."

They swam the river, the bronze man keeping an alert watch for buayas. No crocodiles menaced them, however.

In making their way through the jungle on the other side of the river, Doc conserved time by taking to the treetops.

High up among the branches, Lucile Copeland was almost helpless; she clung to boughs with a sort of rigid terror.

Doc, planting her finally on his back, advised her to hang on. Seemingly hampered not at all by her weight,

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he plunged forward.

Several times Lucile Copeland gasped in horror as the giant bronze man launched across dizzy space. Once she screamed.

After that, she shut her eyes tightly and did not look, except when Doc asked directions.

They came to the tiny glade where she had recovered consciousness. It was only a few paces from the river. The girl pointed.

"There!" she gulped. "The Thousand-headed Man's footprints."

Doc examined the impressions. They were queer feet, very large. Doc stepped beside them, and by comparing his own footprints with the others calculated the weight of The Thousand-headed Man.

The fellow had been much heavier than Doc.

The tracks had come from the water's edge. They showed where the mysterious creature had pursued the young woman a short distance. Then a procession of tracks led back to the water.

"Probably landed from some kind of a boat," Doc decided.

Lucile Copeland seemed to be thinking deeply.

"I believe my head was bandaged when I first revived," she murmured. "Running away, I lost the bandage."

"Was the bandage made from some part of your clothing?"

She shook her head. "I think not."

"Then it might be something in the nature of a clue. I'll look."

The bronze man followed the girl's trail. It was only a short distance before he found the bandage, clinging to a thorn bush where it had been yanked free in the girl's flight. Doc detached it.

The bandage was of a peculiar weave, being intricately hand-woven from the long-shredded fiber of a jungle plant.

Carrying the thing back, Doc showed it to the girl. Her eyes fled wide.

"My father!" she cried.

"What do you mean?"

"Dad! He had a hobby – unusual forms of hand weaving. He spent his spare time at that sort of thing. That's a sample of his handiwork."

Doc Savage nodded slowly, remembering the profusion of strange intricately woven tapestries in the Copeland house. Calvin Copeland must have made those tapestries.

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Doc examined the unique fabric closely. His experienced eye could tell, with a certain degree of accuracy, how long ago the fibers had been stripped from their native plants. They were not chemically treated, and, with age, a certain amount of stiffness and brittleness would come.

"Made only a few weeks ago," he decided.

The girl's face was visible in the glow of the firelight by which they were inspecting the cloth. A remarkable change overspread her features. Fear and horror departed, and were replaced by an infinite gladness.

"Then my father may be alive!" she gasped. "This weaving, if it was done only a few weeks ago, proves he was alive then."

"It does," Doc admitted.

They worked downstream, through the jungle.

The bronze man managed to locate two dry, intact bamboo poles nearly a foot in diameter and some thirty feet in length. With these he used tough vines and smaller crosspieces and fashioned a crude catamaran. With this, they launched out upon the stream, discovering they could move a good deal faster by water.

A few minutes later they came upon the sandbank where Doc's five men had landed; the crude raft was still aground there.

Alighting, Doc inspected the sandy surface. What he found was not pleasant. There were tracks, but most of them had been obliterated by great, clawlike grooves made by buayas.

"Looks like my men started for the jungle, and keeled over," Doc decided. "Just what happened then is a mystery. Later, the sandbank was overrun by crocodiles."

"Maybe the reptiles – " The girl did not finish.

"Maybe might have dragged my men into the water," Doc admitted. "However, there are no blood stains."

"Renny!" Doc called loudly.

He had scant hopes of securing an answer. The shout, however, brought results, although not exactly as he had anticipated.

There was a fluttering in the jungle, grunts and squeak, and Habeas Corpus scampered out. The shoat was terrified, just as he had been when they found him back at the Pagoda of the Hands.

Doc Savage watched the antics of the animal closely, but they gave him no inkling of what had occurred here on the sandbar.

"Too bad Habeas can't talk," Lucile Copeland murmured.

DOC SAVAGE completed his scrutiny of the vicinity, but the results were nil, for there was no sign of his men or the three black sticks which he had entrusted to Monk.

He returned to the river's edge, Habeas Corpus trailing him.

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"We'll continue downstream for a while," he decided. "We may turn up something."

Since the catamaran was lighter and could be handled with more flexibility than the larger raft, they launched themselves upon the smaller craft. Instead of keeping to the center of the river, Doc poled into the shadows of overhanging bamboos where the darkness was intense. The pig, Habeas, was silent.

The jungle sounds were rapidly losing their sinister nature. Death cries of bird and beast had about ceased, signaling the approach of dawn. The carulvora, appetites satisfied, retired as the eastern sky assumed a faint red flush. Somewhere a monkey broke out in shrill chatter.

To Doc Savage's surprise, the river swung sharply to the right and gave every indication of continuing in that direction.

The crimson flush in the east slowly became a glare. Flocks of small, gaudy nuri flew overhead, screeching. Numerous tuntongs, or river turtles, appeared on driftwood logs.

Once several badaks, a particularly ugly rhinoceros of the two-horned variety, eyed them from the shore.

"Mean lookers," the girl said, watching the rhinos. "The natives make medicine out of their horns."

Doc said nothing; he was watching the river shore. The stream had widened, had become very peaceful, and judging from the flatness of the jungle expanse on either side, they were now traveling along the floor of a valley of no small size.

"Look over there!" The bronze man pointed abruptly.

On the river bank, blocks of stone reposed. They had been quarried by human hands, unmistakably; but probably centuries ago. Once put together by mortar, they had long since fallen apart.

"Looks like a prehistoric boat landing," Doc hazarded

He poled the craft in, alighted, mounted the bank and made an inspection. There was, as he had surmised, the floor of a broad valley on either side of the river. This was overgrown by jungle, but certain vague signs had not been eliminated by the passing of ages.

"This valley was once cultivated," Doc concluded. "Many thousands of acres were in fields. Apparently it was irrigated, and seems to have been the work of a fairly advanced race."

Lucile Copeland nodded. "Yes. I recall that my father said they observed fields which had once been under cultivation. That was when he found the place by plane."

"We'll push on down the river. It seems to flow in the direction we want to go."

It was necessary to pole the catamaran steadily, so sluggish had the river become. They traversed a mile; another. The river swung in a wide bend. They rounded this.

"There we are," Doc said quietly. "The city!"

THE OUTWORK of the metropolis was a line of square, boxlike structures of stone. These were stationed in a great circle, perhaps fifty yards apart, each having dimensions somewhat greater than a score of feet. The masonry appeared to be in a remarkable state of repair. Slits – loopholes unmistakably – perforated the sides

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of these square boxes.

"A row of outer fortifications," Doc Savage concluded aloud. "They may be connected by underground passages to the city proper behind the walls."

Beyond the array of square structures there was a high wall, and above this towers and minarets of gleaming stone projected, a sight that was astounding and inspiring. The river ran close to the walls, but Doc maneuvered the catamaran inshore and landed.

"We'll go on foot," he decided. "Safer to come up unnoticed."

The jungle was less dense they found, and they made rapid headway, so that soon they were close enough to scrutinize one of the square forts from a distance of only a few rods.

Around about them there was no sound, no movement, not even the flutter and squawk of tropical birds. This latter was significant, since the jungle creatures had stayed away from the region of the Pagoda of the Hands and the other one carved with human feet.

"This quiet!" Lucile Copeland's face was drawn. "It's horrible!"

"Unusual, to say the least," Doc admitted. "If you'll notice the stonework on those buildings, its state of repair. Those structures are centuries old, undoubtedly, yet there is no sign of vandalism. They have never been torn down"

"There seems to be no one about."

"Yes." Doc prepared to advance. "Keep your eyes open, and if things start happening stay close to me.

The young woman grasped his arm. "Wait! The three black sticks!"

Doc stopped. "What about them?"

"My father said that they were keys, that only with them could one enter this strange city in safety."

"But you do not know how to use them," Doc pointed out "I know. But it is possible we may understand, their use may become clear when necessity arises."

"True," Doc admitted; "but you see, I no longer have the three sticks."

"You no longer have – " Her voice trailed, her eyes widened, and she seemed stunned.

"I gave them to Monk," Doc told her.

"Oh! Then we haven't – got – them."

"Are you game to go in without the sticks?" Doc asked her quietly.

The young woman looked at the strange metropolis. Then she nodded vehemently.

"My father may be there," she said. "Yes, I will go."

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TOGETHER THEY went forward, passing close to one of the citadels in order to inspect the stone at close range, thereby noting that the masonry, which at first had appeared smooth, was actually roughened with small carvings, tiny and irregular in shape.

"Those marks seem to be intended to represent fish scales of some kind," the girl offered, small-voiced.

Doc studied the designs, then corrected her. "They're human teeth."

"What?"

"Teeth! One pagoda was covered with hands, and one with feet. These little fortresses are decorated with teeth."

"That seems – fitting," Lucile Copeland said slowly.

Observing no sign of life, Doc and his companion went on, reached the wall of the metropolis proper and found this also carved. The designs were not alike, except that all were depictions of articles of clothing of the type possibly worn by the ancients who had constructed this city.

There were kain rats, elaborate and shawl-like; clumsy looking kasuts for the feet, and numerous other garment. This sculpturing had been done with exquisite care.

Doc Savage and Lucile Copeland moved to the right, studying the top of the wall, which soon turned. They now observed at some distance, facing the river, an elaborate gate. It was high, narrow.

Doc shifted his attention to the wall. The artisans who had sculptured the ornamentation had used cunning; despite all of the roughness of surface, not a single handhold offered.

"We'll tackle the gate," Doc decided.

They found the gate to be of peculiar construction, being closed by a gigantic slab of stone, which pivoted in the middle so that it could be closed, but was now half turned, inviting entrance.

Doc glanced at Lucile Copeland. "Really want to chance it?"

"Yes," she nodded vehemently. "My father – he may be in there."

They walked through the gate into the mystic city of The Thousand-headed Man. The pig, Habeas Corpus, trailed them.

Chapter 20. POWER UNSEEN

ONCE INSIDE the gate, it was as if they stood in a narrow canyon of stone. Sheer walls arose on either side of them, unbroken by loophole or other aperture. These walls sloped inward, so that the space across the top was much narrower than that at the bottom where they stood. This strange slash was at least a hundred yards long.

"A method of defense," Doc explained quietly. "Besiegers, managing to break down the gate, would have had to pass along this gash. The defenders could discharge arrows or roll Stones down from above."

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The giant bronze man, attired only in trousers, made a figure as striking as the fantastic surroundings. Lucile Copeland kept very close to him, trembling a little as they advanced. Doc listened steadily, and wheeled frequently to eye the gate.

But there was no sound, no breath of movement. It was hot in the crack of stone, for the sun was now high, a superheated, flamboyant orb. Heat waves played strange tricks with the air.

Doc's bare feet made no noise, but the girl's boots, scuffing, caused echoes which came back from the high walls in clickings like billiard balls colliding.

Brilliant sunlight splashed upon them when they stepped Girt of the crack, dazzling them for a moment and causing the vista before their eyes to seem unnatural, like some scene lifted from an unearthly Gehenna. With their hands they shaded their eyes.

Scintillating splendor lay before them. Its vastness, its stupendous proportions and startling richness, held them unmoving for the space of seconds as they stared at the stone ramparts of some of the fantastic structures around them.

They were oriental in architecture, these edifices, leaning toward minarets and towers and fanciful eaves. Colors were profuse, brilliant, their presence indicating not paint, but inlays of tinted stone. The effects were gorgeous. The colors did not clash, but blended so that the whole of their surroundings merged into a mosaic that was a symphony in color tones.

"So beautiful that it is unnatural," said Lucile Copeland in a small voice.

Doc Savage said nothing, but kept his eyes roving alertly, for there was something menacing, appalling, about the uncanny silence which gripped this weird, fabulous metropolis.

"The quiet!" Lucile Copeland shivered, and moved closer to the giant man of bronze.

Streets opened off to the sides, water-filled canals running down their middle. The water was evidently diverted into some buried tunnel up the river and conducted to these aquatic avenues.

On either side of the canals were wide paths, pitted deeply rather than rutted, indicating the tread of men, of elephants, but not the passing of wheeled conveyances.

The pig, Habeas, kept at their heels, panting a little, for the heat was terrific. He seemed not greatly interested in their fantastic environment.

It became evident that the streets were like spokes radiating from some central focus, and it was toward this that Doc Savage naturally tended to move. Since the avenues were not straight, it was impossible to see what might lay at the central point, the place where all of the streets apparently converged.

"Look!" Lucile Copeland gasped, and pointed.

She was indicating the carvings on the buildings around them, which were even more unusual than the designs on the far, outlying pagodas and on the block-shaped forts skirting the walls.

These sculpturings were in the likeness of portions of the human body – arms and legs and torsos. They numbered into the hundreds.

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"The workmanship is excellent," Doc said thoughtfully. "The ancient civilization which –"

He stopped. Something had affected the pig, Habeas Corpus.

The shoat had become stiff-legged; the hair on the nape of his neck was upended like a dog, and his tremendous ears were flared as if to catch any sound.

"He sees, or feels, something," Lucile Copeland breathed. Doc dropped a hand into a pocket and drew out a small metal case which had reposed in his clothing throughout his recent meanderings. Opening this, he extracted several tiny, metallic globules which might have been ball bearings of steel.

The girl eyed them curiously when he passed them to her. "Notice the lever on each, which you can shift with a finger nail?" Doc asked.

The young woman examined them, nodded, "Yes."

"Those are grenades filled with one of the most powerful explosives on earth," Doc told her quietly. "If you have to use them, throw them as far away as you can. If one should land close to you, the results would be disastrous. Move the little lever just before you hurl them."

"You think –"

"I don't know. The pig is acting as he did around those pagodas."

"Do you suppose –" Lucile Copeland paused to shudder, "that he senses the presence of The Thousand-headed Man?"

Doc Savage observed that the young woman was retaining her nerve somewhat better than was to be expected, so he decided not to put a sugar coating on the facts.

"There is unquestionably something sinister and terrible behind this," he said. "I am not referring to Sen Gat and Evall, either. Even they seem to have fallen a victim to The Thousand-headed Man."

Lucile Copeland looked about, as if the hot, bright sunlight and the gorgeously beautiful buildings comprised the most horrible sight she had ever seen.

"No human being could have a thousand heads!" she gasped. "The one glimpse I had of him was ghastly."

"You think he is the material product of some of these oriental beliefs in such ogres?" Doc asked.

The girl shuddered. "I saw him, I tell you."

"And I will admit that some recent events smack of the mysticism and magic of the orient," Doc told her, then gave his attention to Habeas Corpus, saying quietly, "Go get whatever is bothering you, Habeas!"

The pig, however, seemed possessed of no definite idea other than that there was awful terror about somewhere, for he turned aimlessly, trotting away a few paces in first one direction then another, as if to indicate the source of the menace was a mystery.

"I wonder if Habeas could be going temperamental on us," Doc pondered thoughtfully.

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Continuing onward, they trod stone cobbles which had a whiteness of fine pearls. Delicate fineness characterized the carvings on the buildings about them, an exquisite perfection of detail which lifted the sculpturings to the category of masterpieces.

Signs of ancientness and of the abandonment of the city came occasionally to their attention, however, in the shape of trees – great gnarled jalis and gethas – which grew from cracks in the stone, in places having forced the masonry apart remorselessly, upheaving the blocks.

They came to a narrow avenue, low doorways on either side framing a black gloom. Doc's gaze probed these apertures.

Sun shadow was remarkably dark, almost as if ink had been spilled across the white cobbles.

With electrifying unexpectedness, the pig, Habeas Corpus, began to squeal behind them.

THE SQUEALS were shrill, with a tearing undertone of terror. So loud were the ominous sounds that they set up a strident orchestration of weird echoes, a piping and squeaking which seemed to come from every yawning doorway, minaret, parapet.

"Quick!" Doc rapped.

The bronze man spun and dived back. He sought the cause of the pig's squeals. The multitudinous echoes made it difficult.

He sloped around the angle in the street which they had just traversed. Habeas must have loitered behind. The shoat's squealing, and the echoes, made a gruesome symphony in the street.

Doc located the spot from which they emanated – a low doorway! He veered toward it.

"Wait in the street!" he directed the girl.

Lucile Copeland, some yards behind, gasped, "But you –"

"If anything turns up, yell and I'll come back!" Doc told her.

Doubling, Doc hurtled through a low door into a stone, boxlike room. The walls of this were perfectly smooth, devoid of any ornamentation. Opposite was a door. Habeas seemed beyond that opening.

Under Doc's feet the floor was glassy, here and there cracked by age. The door through which he slammed headlong was little more than a narrow slit which perforated a wall of masonry three feet or so in thickness.

The pig's squealing abruptly ceased

The bronze man now found himself in gloom, and since he had come from brilliant sunlight the murk had a double blackness. His hand slapped to a pocket and came away with the compact flashlight. His thumb rode the button, and the white beam, spurting, made a brilliant platter of luster on the opposite wall.

The disc of radiance leaped like a white ghost, as it searched for the homely Monk's porker pet.

Habeas Corpus reposed on the floor, slightly to one side of the room center. He was motionless. Eyes were wide and staring, but there was nothing to show that they saw anything,

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Doc did not advance immediately but stood where he was, just inside the door, and roamed the flash beam. The light traced around the room.

As he surveyed the stone chamber a cold, shocked amazement moved the giant bronze man, stirred him until the small, fantastic trilling sound that was his peculiar property became audible. The weird note traced a vague solo, so low-pitched that it could not possibly have been heard in the remote corners of the cubicle.

The room held no other door. In one wall, midway between floor and ceiling, was a grill which might have been for ventilation purposes. This was made of a stone block, painstakingly drilled with round holes.

No hole in the grill was more than an inch across. The walls looked solid; so smooth that they could not possibly conceal doorways. Yet something in here had overcome the shoat.

Doc went forward, picked Habeas up and made an examination. The pig was not dead, but seemed rather to be in the grip of an inexplicable stupor.

Outside in the street, Lucile Copeland began to cry out in a fear-stricken voice.

"The Thousand-headed Man!" she shrieked.

Her voice ended as if she were in a soundproof box, the lid of which had been closed suddenly.

DOC SAVAGE dived for the outer sunlight. He carried the pig with him. But, having taken two or three long leaps, he knew something unearthly had happened to himself. A lethargy seemed to have gripped his gigantic muscles, a sluggishness which had come without warning.

His knees buckled and he sagged, so that only the jamming of his knuckles against the floor kept Doc from collapsing. He fought to get up. Globules of perspiration stood out on his metallic skin. His breath labored.

There was a quality of ghostly horror in the spell which had seized upon him. Without a warning to any of the senses, it had come. He had seen nothing, heard nothing.

Or was there a sound? There was! Doc caught it now, vaguely – a shuffling and rustling. It was the same sound which he had heard at the Pagoda of the Feet; too, the girl had described such a note as having preceded her seizure at the Pagoda of the Hands.

With motions that had become innately slow, the man of bronze fought for the outer air. There was no pain; he did not feel sleepy. His senses did not seem impaired. There was just that ghostly languor, as if slow, strange death were settling upon him.

After what seemed an age that he knew could not have been more than a minute, Doc came into the heat of the tropical sunlight.

The girl was gone!

Doc moved to the middle of the street, eyes seeking to the right, then left. Nowhere was there a trace of Lucile Copeland; no outcry, no movement gave a hint of where she had gone – or been carried.

The bronze man began to run as swiftly as he possibly could. A small boy could easily have kept pace with him, so sluggish were his muscles.

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He breathed deeply, rapidly, and the perspiration soaked such few garments as he wore. The sun on his remarkably regular features and metallic skin was hot. He threw back his head and the solar glare was like a flaming, invisible hand clasping his features.

After he had run for a time, the ghostly spell slipped away from his sinews, and he traveled more lightly. His tremendous physique had fought off the unseen power, whatever the hideous thing was.

Looking back, Doc saw that he was leaving wet tracks on the white cobbles, so profusely had he perspired.

He went on. Soon a small open space appeared, a spot where streets intersected. In the center was a round pool filled with remarkable clear, yet slightly blue water.

Doc stopped beside the pool, cupped a palm and was on the point of ladling up some of the water as a relief from the terrific heat and his own exertion; but he did not touch the liquid.

Instead, he tore a cuff from one trouser leg and dangled it in the water, then placed the saturated cloth on the little parapet around the pool, being careful that the moisture did not come in contact with his skin.

After a while, the cloth began to turn a dark, hideous blue. When he moved it, the fabric fell apart.

Doc needed nothing more to tell him that this was a pool of death. With haste, he quitted the vicinity.

THE PIG, Habeas, was still alive, but no nearer consciousness than before. With strips ripped from his own garments, the bronze man rigged a sling for the shoat, carrying him over a shoulder.

Down the street was a building ornamented with fantastic, intricate carvings which, from a distance, appeared to be some unusual type of serpent, but upon close inspection proved to be excellent delineations of the muscles of a human arm.

Doc gave these only a cursory glance, then grasped them and climbed.

He intended henceforth to travel by the rooftops, an avenue which had been closed to him while Lucile Copeland was along. She lacked the strength and agility to negotiate the spaces between the structures.

Once atop the roof, Doc looked about, for the fabulous metropolis was spread below. It was toward the center that his gaze went. But he was disappointed; buildings were higher, and cut off the view.

His course led back toward the spot where Lucile Copeland had vanished. Now that the strange spell was gone; he intended to hunt for her.

A gash of a street barred progress. Doc drew back, then leaped a prodigious distance through space, to land lightly on the other side. The power and agility displayed in the leap might have amazed an onlooker, but the bronze giant was not satisfied, for some of his usual strength was lacking.

Pausing for a time, he exercised furiously with bendings and strainings of the muscles, so that perspiration again flowed and all but turned into steam, so terrific was the heat of the sun.

His purpose was simple; the heat and the exertion combined to secure the effect of a Turkish bath, an excellent medium for expelling poison from the human system.

Doc continued. When he came to the vicinity of Lucile Copeland's misfortune he traveled warily, with frequent pauses to listen, to use his nostrils searching for unknown scents.

A voice came to him with hair-lifting unexpectedness. "Doc Savage!" it called. "Over this way!"

Chapter 21. SEN GAT'S OFFER

HEARING THAT call, Doc Savage knew for sure that his senses had been dulled by the uncanny spell, for he should have seen the other before the words came.

Sen Gat had called. The lanky black crow of an oriental crouched on a near-by roof. Crestfallen, bedraggled, scratched and bruised, he was a woebegone rogue. Remarkably enough, however, his linger nails in their exotic protectors were still intact.

Behind Sen Gat huddled the apish one, Evall. He, also, had suffered rough handling, as indicated by torn garments and broken and purple skin. If possible, his aspect was more simian than ever.

Doc moved toward them, drawn by curiosity. Neither of the two held a weapon, and there was no one else in sight. When nearing them, Doc made note of two things:

First, Sen Gat's coat pocket bulged immoderately. Second, both men were obviously in the grip of an awful fear, as denoted by nervous movements, protuberant eyes, and sporadic breathing.

Doc stopped, a narrow, canyonlike alley separating him from the pair.

"Calling to me was not a wise idea," he said grimly. "I have a long score to settle with you fellows."

Sen Gat shuddered; his grotesque linger nails waved. "Now, listen," he started.

"Where is Lucile Copeland?" Doc demanded.

"Bukan bagitu!" In his perturbation, Sen Gat cried out in his native tongue. "Oh, no! We have not touched her!"

"Have you seen her in this city?"

The other shook his head vehemently. "We have not! By all of my ancestors, it is true!"

"Why did you call to me?" Doc questioned.

JUST HOW great was the terror which gripped Sen Gat was now evident, for he sank to his knees and made in Doc's direction the meek gesture of taubat, of repentance. The shaking of his limbs was quite visible.

"Oh bronze man, may the Malik-ul-maut, the angel of death, take me if I do not speak the truth. Great is my terror, bronze man, for death is close upon us, and the only thing that will save us is that which you carry."

"What is that?"

"The black sticks!"

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Doc heard the last in silence, but in a vague way it gave him an unpleasant shock, for it showed that these two did not know he had turned the sticks over to Monk, hence they had not been in contact with the homely chemist.

Monk, then, had not seen Sen Gat; the hideous tracks on the river bank were the only indication of his fate.

"Give us two of them," Sen Gat pleaded. "One for myself, the other for Evall – so that we may all live."

"Yeah," Evall put in. "Sen Gat's givin' it to you straight, Savage. Them sticks will save us."

"I have no reason to worry about you," Doc said dryly.

"The sticks will not save you," whined Sen Gat.

Doc eyed the space separating himself from the other two; it could be spanned with a long leap.

"Won't save me, eh?" he queried. "Why not?"

"Because you do not know how to use them!" There was triumph in Sen Gat's cry.

The bronze man did not change expression. "But you know how to make them serve?"

"We know," said Sen Gat

Doc Savage lifted on tiptoe, stared, and discovered there was a square hole in the roof upon which Sen Gat and Evall stood. This aperture was beside the pair, and Doc could distinguish only the farthest portion of it, the part near the feet of the two being cut off by a low parapet

The presence of the opening accounted for the abrupt appearance of the pair. No doubt they had climbed through it.

DOC KEPT his voice emotionless. "Before we discuss the black sticks further, I must know what has happened to you two."

Sen Gat and Evall swapped looks. Then, as if by mutual agreement, they shivered.

"It was incredible," moaned Sen Gat. "Myself and my men landed in our planes. We heard a strange, fluttering sound, then something – inexplicable – happened to us. I became senseless, and knew nothing until I revived some little time ago in a stone room. Only Evall was with me. Where my men are I do not know."

Doc transferred his gaze to Evall. "And you?"

The apish man swabbed a tongue over thick lips. "Well, you know how I gave you the slip on the raft when Sen Gats planes came over. I poled downstream and landed in that clearing. Sen Gat and the others came down in the planes to pick me up.

"I was with them when this thing – whatever it was – got everybody. That's all I know, until I woke up with Sen Gat."

Doc saw the pig, Habeas Corpus, stirring on his back, an indication that the shoat had thrown off the mysterious spell and was reviving.

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"You're leaving something out," Doc told the two men, across the narrow street.

Sen Gat registered innocence. "I swear by many illustrious and honorable ancestors – "

"The black sticks," Doc interjected. "Where did you learn of their use?"

The two men squirmed, showed discomfort, but maintained a stubborn silence.

"Give us two of the black keys and we will tell you," mumbled Sen Gat

Acting as if he had not heard that, Doc asked, "What became of my five friends?"

Sen Gat hesitated, eyeing his own overlong finger nails. "How could we possibly know?" he said.

"You should know," Doc retorted shortly. "You seem to be a clairvoyant."

Sen Gat spread his elaborate finger nails. "I do not understand."

"You know I have the three black sticks. How did you find that out?"

Sen Gat slitted his slant eyes, and it was obvious that he thought swiftly.

"We did not know," he called. "We merely tricked you into admitting it"

The bronze man was not deceived, for he knew voice tones, and if any one had ever spoken with assurance and certainty, Sen Gat had done so.

"Two liars," he said. "Just about half of what you have told me is the truth."

SEN GAT wrung his hands in his perturbation, and his nail protectors made castanetlike clinkings as they tapped together.

Evall said something in a tone so low that Doc did not catch it, and this moved Sen Gat to dip a hand in the coat pocket which bulged.

Doc stared at what the fellow brought into view. Jewels! They were uncut stones of moderate size – diamonds and rubies for the most part, with a large sprinkling of pearls.

"A handful of these for two of the sticks!" Sen Gat offered eagerly. "They are genuine – worth a fortune!"

Doc was thoughtful for a moment. "Where did they come from?"

Sen Gat hesitated. "That is my secret."

"So this place holds such loot as that?" Doc queried.

"Obviously. But will you trade two of – "

"And you knew there was such loot here before you left London," Doc continued. "You must have known it, since nothing else explains your mad eagerness to reach the city. How did you secure the information? Maples did not know it – "

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

Sen Gat squirmed. "I am a native of Indo-China. For years I was a trader in these jungles."

"And you had heard of this city?"

"Exactly. Many times I had heard of it. I once met a man who had been close enough to see the – the spot where these jewels came from. I knew he did not lie. I knew the jewels were here."

"How much else do you know?"

"Nothing," Sen Gat said promptly.

"Another lie!"

Crouching slightly, Doc leaped upward, his object being to see all of the roof hole beside which Sen Gat and Evall stood.

He accomplished his purpose. What he saw handed him a surprise.

A stout sutera rope was tied to Sen Gat's ankle, another to that of Evall. The lines extended into the roof hatch.

TARDILY, SEN Gat and Evall endeavored to move so as to hide the cords from the bronze man's view.

"Who is holding you prisoner?" Doc demanded.

"Karut!" Sen Gat shouted desperately. "Nonsense! The cords were tied to our ankles when we awakened, and we could not free them. The tight knots –"

That was a lie, of course, and Doc Savage was already backing a few paces to get room for a running leap. Crouching, he set himself for the sprint.

On the other rooftop, Sen Gat and Evall threw up their hands. The cords tied to their legs were being jerked forcibly, throwing them off balance, hauling them down into the hole. Sprawling wildly, both vanished from sight.

Doc made a terrific leap. His landing on the other roof was light, cat-easy. He crouched, listening.

On Doc's back, Habeas grunted; the pig was conscious. The bronze man's golden eyes were riveted to the aperture. In the the roof. Sunlight slanted into the room below, disclosing a smooth floor, sleek walls, and a door. Steep steps led down from the roof to the room.

Of Sen Gat and Evall there was no sign, their mysterious captor apparently having dragged them out of the chamber.

Descending the steps, Doc made no more noise than rolling smoke. He ran to the room door and found a passage; this he traversed.

Darkness pushed in blackly around him. Faint sound – the clatter of feet – came from ahead. Doc put on speed.

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

This building – it was not far from where Lucile Copeland had been seized – appeared to be of vast proportions. The passage angled sharply, then descended. Doc's feet advised him of worn steps. The sound of movement ahead was a siren decoy.

Unexpectedly, he came out in a long hall.

At the opposite end of the cavernous corridor a ray of sunlight spilled through a roof hole. This might have been the beam of a theater spotlight.

In the light stood The Thousand-headed Man!

DOC SAVAGE wrenched to a stop. His career had been long, perilous, its course dotted with many things foreign to the experience of an ordinary individual – things hideous, unusual, eerie, even smacking of the supernatural. Yet nothing equaled this.

The Thousand-headed Man was a vision utterly grotesque. Doc Savage himself was a giant in size, yet this monstrosity before him was even larger – very much as Lucile Copeland had described him.

He had one large head, the same as a human being; but there were other heads; scores, hundreds. Some were the size of oranges; others ranged down to the proportions of walnuts. Three protruded from his forehead above his brows; others from his cheeks, his arms, the sides of his body. They were like awful warts.

The sole garment of The Thousand-headed Man was a loin cloth, and this flashed with scintillating splendor in the slab of sunlight, for it was composed of jewels – sapphires, rubies and pearls for the most part – interwoven with a mesh of yellow metal which was unmistakably gold.

All of this Doc Savage saw in one quick glance, for The Thousand-headed Man sprang abruptly backward and was lost in the darkness of the room.

Doc dived forward. The pig, Habeas Corpus, fought free of the lashing and slipped off Doc's back; but instead of fleeing, trailed the bronze giant. He squealed at every jump – the same fear-ridden sound which he had emitted before. It was as if Habeas had glimpsed The Thousand-headed Man previously.

Dipping a hand into his clothing, Doc brought out one of the tiny metal globules of high explosive. He flicked the firing lever, threw it. Skidding to a stop, he flattened, shoved Habeas down with a hand and covered his own features with an arm.

There was a flash; and thunder rocked the floor. Stone blocks moaned and ground together. A part of the ceiling came down. Rock dust and explosive fumes gushed a blinding cloud.

Doc reared up and ran forward. There was plenty of light now; fully a third of the ceiling was down. He vaulted the fallen blocks, eyes seeking some sign of The Thousand-headed Man.

Doc had purposely thrown the explosive slightly short, hoping to stun rather than kill his fantastic quarry; but the other had escaped. A slit of a door showed by what route.

Putting on speed Doc set out in pursuit. Passages beyond the aperture were long and gloomy. Running sounds came from ahead. The bronze man quickly overhauled these.

He turned into a chamber which was less dark than the others by reason of slits in the roof, cracks probably opened by the weather. The luminance in the room was about equal to that of very poor moonlight

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Doc stopped sharply.

About six feet from him, upright against a wall, was a figure. It had the outlines of a human being, except that in addition to one large head there were other heads, sprouting from almost all portions of the body.

SUBCONSCIOUS IMPULSES account for a certain number of physical movements; a man will duck instinctively when he sees something thrown at him, or will ward an unexpected blow, before his regular thought processes could possibly guide his actions. It was such an instinct which sent Doc hurtling forward, hands outstretched.

In mid-air he made a discovery. It was too late to check his leap entirely, but he made no effort to seize the figure. He was unable to avoid jarring it with a shoulder, however, and the grotesque thing upset. Striking the floor it broke into several pieces, and these rolled noisily on the cobbles.

The figure was but a stone image of The Thousand-headed Man.

There were other such likenesses, skillfully sculptured, Doc saw as he moved down the wide passage. The bronze man scrutinized the statues closely, lest one of them be the living figure which he sought, but distinguished no breath of life in any of them.

He was halfway down the long chamber when he heard the sinister rustling sound which was significant of the mysterious spell of this fabulous metropolis.

Doc wrenched to a stop. A small, metallic globe of explosive came from his pocket. He threw it.

The blast spurted flame and deafening concussion through the passages and rooms of the stone building. Several of the sculptured likenesses of The Thousand-headed Man upset, some breaking, others remaining intact

The dust set Habeas Corpus to sneezing.

The echoes of the blast subsided after a moment.

The rustling had not been stilled by the blast. If anything, it was louder than before.

Doc began to retreat. His flashlight came out and prodded brilliance, but rock dust stirred up by the explosion hampered his vision and concealed whatever was making the grisly noises.

Doc made his backward pace more rapid, only to pull up when the behavior of Habeas gave him warning. The pig had stiffened as if scenting something behind them.

Doc tossed his flashlight beam; it distinguished nothing. The passage was empty, and beyond that the room where he had first used his tiny grenade could be discerned, the floor littered with stone blocks, sunlight spilling from the ceiling holes.

The bronze man started to go on and he seemed to stagger. He tried to catch himself and all but fell.

A glumness overspread his bronze features, usually so expressionless. He was again caught in the spell of the fantastic jungle metropolis. He roved his flashlight, more slowly this time, although he tried to make the gesture swift

The rustling seemed to get louder. Doc found his ideas of where it came from getting hazy. It drifted from above, from the sides, the front, everywhere, and it grew louder and louder until its note was as the rush of a waterfall.

Habeas Corpus lay on the floor and became very still.

After a while Doc Savage also sank to the floor, moved about a little, and then ceased to stir.

Chapter 22. PRISONER

THE BRONZE man's awakening was slow, merely an ebbing of the phantom unconsciousness which had gripped him. There was some discomfort, a faint nausea, and a vague dullness of mind.

Strangely enough, this stupor departed, and his mind was quite clear before his muscles would respond to nerve impulses, so that, as he lay there, he was able to think for some time, to ponder the mystery, to turn its angles over in his mind.

Thought, however, brought no explanation of the riddle. The whole thing was uncanny, and in the light of sober thought, smacked of the impossible.

Doc Savage was able to arise after a time and examine his surroundings. A sable blackness enclosed him; he seemed imbedded in the darkness. His exploration was limited to the sense of touch, and he went over his own person first.

He had, his sensitive fingers told him, been searched thoroughly. His garments, excepting only stout duck trousers, had been taken away. A slight rawness under his finger nails and the nails indicated they had been scraped, to remove any chemicals which might have been harbored there.

Hurriedly inserting a finger in his mouth, Doc explored. In the rear of his jaw he ordinarily wore an extra tooth, cleverly fitted in place. This held a small quantity of ingredients which, mixed, formed an explosive of great power.

But the tooth was gone. Whoever had searched him had done so with great thoroughness. His hair had even been washed, lest it hold chemicals that he might employ in escaping.

His hands told him that a stone wall encircled him. The room was round, and the stones of the wall were fitted together with such mastery that there was not a crack large enough to admit even a finger nail.

A leap upward, arms extended, proved the ceiling to be nearly ten feet in height. Doc began a more thorough inspection of the walls, walking slowly, dragging his hands over the stone, pushing frequently with all of his great strength

There was an opening some seven feet above the floor, an aperture almost a yard square, and inset with vertical flaps of stone that were not unlike bars.

Clinging to these bars and thrusting an arm through, Doc found only emptiness beyond and intense darkness. The livid murk accounted for his not finding the aperture earlier.

Grasping the stone slabs, he wrenched at them. They did not give in the slightest, failing even to groan in their sockets.

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Doc continued working. By clinging to the edge of the hole and performing something of a gymnastic feat, he managed to insert his legs between the bars and after some effort to hook his toes together beyond them. The hold, akin to the "scissors" of a wrestler, gave him tremendous leverage

Sinews became hard as metal, writhing and knotting as Doc labored and perspired.

The stone groaned.

Shifting his grip a little, Doc applied more pressure began to swing himself from side to side. That did it.

With a sound as brittle as breaking glass, one of the slabs collapsed. After that, it did not take long to work the ends from the stone sockets so that Doc had an opening which would pass his giant frame.

He eased outside.

ALONG THE intensely black passage Doc crept, and up a flight of steps.

Sunlight appeared ahead, very brilliant

Doc approached the light slowly, so that his eyes would accustom themselves to the glare. He could see fairly well when he looked out.

Before him was a sort of plaza, covering perhaps an acre; and in the center of that was a structure, the sight of which caused the bronze man to stand motionless for many seconds.

This was a pagoda, too.

Doc reasoned – by the manner in which the streets converged upon it – that it occupied the very center of the abandoned metropolis in the jungle. Carved hands and feet had ornamented the most outlying buildings of this ghost domain.

Then, closer in to the heart of the city other parts of the human anatomy had been the decoration motif. So the ornamentation of this central pagoda was not unexpected.

Doc eyed it steadily.

A pagoda of heads!

Its architectural lines were not those of the usual pagoda, for the shape of the thing was that of a monstrous, repulsive head. From the head projected other smaller heads by the thousands.

Those small heads explained why Calvin Copeland, the explorer, had been so anxious to reach this eerie place – each head represented a fortune, as civilization measures wealth.

They were of gold, possibly not solid, but at least thickly plated, and each forehead was set with an enormous jewel. The eyes were gems; the teeth lesser brilliants.

Doc calculated the size of the heads. They were small only in proportion to the pagoda as a whole, hence some of the jewels – diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, pearls – were enormous.

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The opening through which Doc Savage peered was not large enough to admit his huge frame. He went on, came soon to another and larger aperture, and crouched just within it, listening and using his eyes.

He had come upon a tiny ledge of a balcony. Below lay a narrow alley, stone-walled.

Unexpectedly, Doc heard sound, the first noises he had distinguished other than the fantastic shufflings and flutterings to which this fabulous ruin had given birth. But this sound was as unreal, as hair-raising as that other, for it was a low murmuring, a throbbing undertone which grew louder.

The cadence had a regular beat, a monotonous rise and fall. It was not unmusical, this undulating groan, yet it possessed a quality of repellent fearsomeness.

Doc waited where he was, for the noise seemed to be approaching. He noticed that the sun was low, causing the strange buildings to cast grotesque shadows. In an hour there would be darkness – possibly in less time, for there is little twilight in the tropics.

The monotonous droning loudened, and now that Doc had heard it for some time, he was sure that it did not have a definite pattern, a tune. Too, it possessed a human quality.

The sound was, he realized abruptly, a long chant, mumbled by human voices. He watched closely for a glimpse of those who chanted.

Around a corner, some two-score yards distant, a Thousand-headed Man appeared.

Doc stared at the awesome individual. For once, the bronze man was surprised to such a degree that his metallic features registered his feeling.

There was more than one thousand-headed man!

Another appeared, a third, a fourth – a long file of them. They resembled each other greatly. All were huge, larger even than Doc Savage.

Balanced atop his head, each monstrosity carried a basket. The containers were large, possibly two-bushel capacity. They were tightly woven of rattan, and each bore a rich ornamentation of gold and precious gems. Hinged lids on all baskets were closed tightly.

In the middle of the file of fantastic, head-studded creatures walked a white man. The man had long, uncut hair and a profuse beard; hair and beard were white. His body was thin and wasted, and his walk was that of an automaton. The flesh seemed to have melted away under his skin, leaving only bones and a few muscles that were like strings. He stared straight ahead, a hopeless rigidity in his gaze.

The white man was Calvin Copeland, the explorer, but vague indeed was his present resemblance to his newspaper picture which Doc Savage had seen in London.

A slender stout line of sutera was looped around Copeland's neck. One of the many-headed men held the other end of the cord, leading the Englishman.

The odious procession approached. Except for the white man, obviously a prisoner, those in the file kept in step. As they moved they chanted, their low, guttural voices mingling in a harmony which rose and fell, only a few of the words being distinguishable.

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This chanting was the sound which Doc Savage had heard. He now tried to identify the words. His knowledge of languages was vast; he spoke and understood most of the dialects of the orient. This speech eluded him partially, however, although certain of the words might be of khas origin, that being the tongue of the aboriginal inhabitants of Indo-China.

Doc stepped back. He flexed his arms, crouched and straightened to limber his huge tendons; then he waited.

The cavalcade passed below. Doc let the first few go on; but when Calvin Copeland shuffled abreast, Doc leaped.

The drop was nearly ten feet. Doc landed beside one of the many-headed men, lightly and silently.

The bronze man swung a fist. The head-studded victim saw it was coming and shrieked, his voice a great, frightened bawl. The sound ended as if his jaws had been invisibly corked, and he fell on his heads.

His rattan basket rolled end over end across the white cobbles. From within it came a sudden fluttering and shuffling – the weird sound which before had always presaged unconsciousness.

Doc hurtled forward. His hands grasped the being who held the sutera cord that ran from Calvin Copeland's neck. That monster also began to cry out.

Doc wrenched. There was a tearing sound, a convulsion among the heads which covered the man's body, and the hideous appendages came away.

The heads were not real! They were hideous little things carved out of wood and attached to a tight-fitting garment that resembled human skin.

THE MAN inside the masquerade covering was a huge brown native. Doc struck at his face. The other ducked and Doc missed, his fist grazing two of the orange-sized heads which had merely been glued above the man's eyebrow.

Doc struck again, stunning the fellow. Then he grasped the man and ran him backward like a battering ram. For all of his huge size, the brown native was soft; grasping him was like holding a rubber tire filled with warm water.

Speed had marked Doc's movements. The other figures in the procession barely had time to turn. Then they were knocked from their feet. Their baskets went spinning, and began to give off a sinister fluttering and rasping.

Gaunt, wasted Calvin Copeland stared, stupefied. With a snap, he came to life, his lethargy vanishing.

"Run!" he screamed. "Don't fight them. Run!"

Just to satisfy himself that none of the heads which covered the strange big men were genuine, Doc Savage wrenched another skin-tight garment off the victim.

"There's hell in those baskets!" Copeland shrilled. "Run for it!"

Taking his own advice, the explorer legged it down the alley of a street.

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Abruptly comprehending the man's meaning, Doc Savage set after him. Copeland was weakened; his speed was not great. The bronze man quickly overhauled him. "Where is your daughter?" Doc demanded.

Copeland was so astounded that he would have stopped, had the bronze man not grasped his arm and propelled him on.

"Lucile – my daughter – here?" Copeland gasped. "Where? Have they got her?"

Doc Savage, not answering, turned his head and looked back, The thousand-headed men were scrambling to their feet, dashing for their rattan baskets. Not until they had secured these did they rush in pursuit.

"Where's the best place to make a fight for it?" Doc demanded.

Copeland shuddered so violently that he nearly fell.

"There is no such place," he said. "Those devils range the jungle for miles on either side. There are hundreds of them, all members of the thousand-headed sect."

"Sect!" Doc echoed.

"A cult of fanatics," Copeland explained. "They worship The Thousand-headed Man."

"Is there actually such a being?"

"There is no Thousand-headed Man," Copeland muttered. "That is only the name of their hideous mythical deity."

Chapter 23. THE TERROR IN BASKETS

BEHIND DOC Savage and Calvin Copeland, the worshippers of The Thousand-headed Man set up an unearthly bawling and shouting, which held a disappointed note, for they were losing ground, being too fat to run swiftly.

"Watch!" Copeland warned. "There are more of them. They're all over the city."

"The gang who had you was my first sight of them," Doc said.

"They keep under cover. They're cowards. They have secret passages and hidden paths through the jungle, and rarely show themselves."

Doc kept a sharp lookout, and before long stopped Copeland with an out-thrust arm. The bronze man's eyes had detected movement ahead – it looked as if some one had ducked behind a building.

"What is it?" Copeland demanded. Doc told him.

"We'd better change our course," Copeland groaned. "They'll head us off – surround us with their damn baskets."

"What's in the baskets?" Doc asked.

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Before the explorer could reply, a clatter came from a spot some fifty feet ahead. From a doorway a basket rolled. The lid flopped open.

An object fell out of the basket. At first, this resembled a coiled rope. It was alive, for it squirmed and erected itself. The upper portion expanded into a hood.

"Cobra!" Doc breathed.

"No ordinary cobra!" Copeland choked. "Back, back!" The urgency in the man's tone moved Doc to quick compliance. They retreated toward the nearest side street.

The cobra was one of the largest of the species Doc had ever seen. The body of the snake was as thick as his own cabled wrist. The reptile rushed them, and its head made rapid darting movements.

As the head snapped forward, a fine spray, almost a vapor, seemed to squirt from the distended jaws.

"They throw their venom!" Doc said, enlightened. The two men sloped down the side street, Doc helping Copeland along.

"They're no ordinary cobras, I told you!" The explorer was coughing, already winded. "They are bred and raised by these devils who worship The Thousand-headed Man."

Doc steered their course toward a house. "We'll take to the roofs," he said.

"But that's impossible," Copeland gulped. "The space between the houses is too –"

He did not finish, for Doc Savage grasped him, tucked him under an arm as if he were a child, and mounted, springing to a window sill, grasping a projecting ornament and going on upward by the use of one hand and bare feet.

The feat caused Copeland's jaw to sag in astonishment. They reached the rooftop and the bronze giant, still carrying Copeland, sprinted to the brink of a gap between two buildings.

Copeland screeched, "You'll fall –" and the cry ended in a choking noise as they hurtled through space. They landed safely on the other side.

Copeland could not speak for some moments, so shocked was he by what he believed to be a hairbreadth escape from death.

Not until they crossed to another rooftop in the same fashion did it dawn on the explorer that the fabulous strength

"Who – are you?" he asked in a tone that awe made small of this mighty bronze man was capable of far greater feats than this.

"Doc Savage."

"Oh!" Copeland pursed his lips. "I've heard of you in England, India, Siam – all over. I always wondered – what you were like."

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DOC SAVAGE halted after a time, lowered the explorer, and swept the surrounding buildings with his eyes, alert for some signs of pursuit. From where he stood he could see the bejeweled, fabulously rich Pagoda of the Heads.

"My daughter – we're not going to leave without her?" Copeland asked uneasily.

"No," Doc assured him. "But we've got to make some kind of a plan, something to combat those cobras. How far can they throw their Venom?"

"Not far, actually," Copeland replied. "Only a few yards. But the stuff is not like the usual cobra venom. This vaporizes. It's more like a gas. It produces unconsciousness."

"That," Doc told him, "doesn't sound like cobras."

"The snakes have been carefully cultivated for centuries," the explorer said earnestly. "These men – these devils who belong to the cult of The Thousand-headed Man, are experts. They have a knowledge that has been handed down for generations."

Doc considered this. "There are, of course, occasional stories of cobras which are able to throw their venom, but not much credence is placed in the tales."

The bronze man stood erect and his eyes roved the roof-tops, searching for some sign of movement. Discerning none, he sank down again, after which Copeland continued speaking.

"This particular type of cobra was developed by these Cult-men centuries ago, when this was a populous city," he said. "So horrible were the reptiles that the original inhabitants were driven out, and the city left in the hands of the snake men."

"Which explains how the city came to be abandoned," Doc commented.

"Exactly. The men of the snake cult have dwelled here since. It is part of their unholy creed that contact with the outer world, even with tribes in the neighboring jungle, is degrading. They believe all other than to be pariahs, unclean beings. The mere presence of an outsider, according to their ideas, is a contamination."

Doc nodded. "That is the doctrine of many oriental creeds. The cult system of India is an example. Certain high-caste Hindus consider the mere touch of a low-caste person, or even the presence of such an individual in the neighborhood, a threat to their chances for future salvation."

"For centuries, all outsiders have been kept away from this place," said Copeland. "It has been done with those venom-throwing cobras."

"Will the venom cause death?"

"Only in great quantities."

Doc considered, at the same time listening. Certain vague sounds told him that their enemies were searching the vicinity, and it was only a question of time until they would be routed.

"The cobras are trained," Calvin Copeland muttered. "You see, the members of the cult have a secret mixture of jungle berries and plant bark. They drink the stuff. They mix it with water in which they bathe. It renders them immune to the cobras."

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"Immune!"

"It is like a serum," said the other. "It inoculates them against the vapor thrown by the reptiles, or at least partially so. If the cobras attack them directly, they might be overcome. But the snakes are trained not to do that."

Doc eyed the explorer. "How does it happen that you were kept alive?"

"I was getting to that. You see, these followers of The Thousand-headed Man keep their prisoners alive as long as they can. They use the captives in training the cobras."

"Then, when I jumped them, they were taking you – "

"To the jungle," said Copeland. "They intended to release me and set the snakes in pursuit. The reptiles in the baskets were young ones but partially trained."

"They have done that to you before?"

Copeland shuddered. "Several times. Eventually, of course, the venom would have killed me. Then they would have used the other prisoners."

"Other prisoners?"

"They have many other captives here," Copeland muttered.

DOC SAVAGE received this last bit of information without appreciable change of expression. It did not, however, mean that he was unmoved. The words were a startling revelation to him.

"Your wife?" the bronze man demanded.

Copeland tangled his hands into bony, agonized knots. "She is here."

"Who else?"

"The pilot and mechanic who were with me when I first sighted this place from a plane. There are natives, too, some of whom were with me on my second expedition."

"Where are they held?"

Copeland pointed across rooftops. "The cells are near where you rescued me. They are round, with stone-barred ventilating openings. They have holes in the ceiling through which the prisoners, as well as food and water, are lowered."

The bronze man stood erect. "Let's go."

Copeland came to his feet, and his knees shook a little from weakness.

"I am afraid the cobras would have finished me this time," he groaned. "I am very weak."

They advanced over the rooftops, Doc carrying Copeland bodily when they had to leap from one roof to another; the explorer could hardly have jumped his own length. Since Copeland was wasted until his weight

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did not exceed a hundred pounds, the bronze giant was not greatly hampered.

Soon an inarticulate, depraved squawl from one of the big brown worshippers of The Thousand-headed Man apprised them that they had been seen. Shortly after that Doc sighted hulking figures bearing baskets, and these converged upon them.

A roof coping of small stones came to Doc's attention, and he wrenched several of the rocks free, crashing them together until he had numerous fragments, none larger than half a brick. With these, he dashed suddenly in the direction of the nearest enemy.

The stalker fled, the grotesque heads of his masquerade flopping in lively fashion. He dropped his rattan snake basket in his haste.

"Beastly cowards, all of them!" declared Copeland. "Worse than their snakes! You should see them crawl through the jungle, never showing themselves. That night they raided my camp there was no sign of men about – just that rustling made by the cobras as they flare their hoods and dart their heads forward to expel the venom."

Doc Savage, recalling his own experience at the Pagoda of the Hands, and at the Pagoda of the Feet, nodded slowly. These cult men must have been at both pagodas near Sen Gat's planes, too; but there had been no sign of their presence. They were masters of stealth.

Unexpectedly, the low reverberations of a drum throbbed over the eerie metropolis, to be joined shortly by another, then several more. Their sound was a conglomerate rumbling, something to raise the hair.

"What does that mean?" Doc queried.

Copeland shook his head. "Blessed if I know."

The drumming slackened after a time, and shouts pealed out. The men in many-headed costumes seemed to become more numerous.

Doc, comprehending some of the shouted words, understood the meaning of the drumming.

"They have summoned their fellows from the jungle," he said.

THE DISCIPLES of The Thousand-headed Man seemed content to remain in the background with their unholy baskets, merely watching the two white men. Doc reasoned that they were awaiting the gathering of their cult.

"Should we try to leave the city, they'd probably rush us now," he conjectured. "Where are these prison cells?"

"Ahead," said Copeland, and pointed.

The dungeons were in close proximity to the plazalike space which held the Pagoda of the Heads. The sun, very low now, sprayed its rays over the jewel-encrusted edifice, with the result that the structure presented an aspect of shimmering, breath-taking wealth.

"Damn that pagoda!" Copeland groaned. "The gold – the jewels! They led me here."

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"You saw it from the plane when you first sighted the place?"

The explorer nodded. "Yes. There was no sign of life. We naturally presumed the place was abandoned, and that the stuff was ours for the taking."

Doc picked Copeland up, sprinted, and was on the point of leaping to another rooftop when he jerked to a stop. He wrenched out one of the rocks which he had brought along.

One of the strange cobras had reared on the other roof. A brown man had left it there, being too cowardly to remain himself.

The serpent's hood expanded, its head darted; and the thin skin and ribs of the hood, whipping the air, made the characteristic fluttering. A faint haze of the stupefying venom appeared.

Doc threw his stone – and the snake, struck squarely, collapsed.

The bronze man did not go to that roof, but carried Copeland to another, circling the now invisible cobra vapor. Shouts reached them. excited, and guttural. Grotesque men appeared, running to head them off.

"It's dawned on them that we're after their prisoners," Doc declared. "We'd better step on it!"

Once it was necessary to descend into a street, run down it, then climb again to the roof. Soon they reached a long tier of buildings that fronted upon the plaza where stood the bejeweled Pagoda of the Heads.

The roofs of these were of stone, and inset in each was a circular opening not unlike a manhole. Huge, tapering plugs closed the aperture.

Doc tugged at a plug, but was forced to release it and hurl a stone at a head-studded brown giant who sought to carry his cobra basket close

The fellow retreated, managing to dodge the missile.

"My wife – is here!" Copeland gasped, and fought the heavy rock.

Lending aid, Doc got the lid open. A black abyss appeared below.

"Mrs. Copeland!" he yelled; and Copeland found himself echoed, "Fayne!"

A stirring came out of the pit.

Copeland darted to one side and returned with a flexible ladder made out of rattan cables and cross sticks of jati. This had obviously been used to pass the captives into their pits. The explorer lowered it.

After a moment, his wife clambered out, her movements agonizingly slow.

IN THE London house of the Copelands, Doc Savage had seen a newspaper picture of Fayne Copeland, mother of the exquisitely pretty Lucile; but there was hardly the resemblance he had expected. This specter of a figure clambering from the dungeon had the tallness which had been so marked in the picture, together with some of the almost masculine competence.

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But Fayne Copeland was a ghostly shadow of the woman in the news photograph. Terror and suffering had marked her features; fear swam like an unearthly shadow in the pools of her eyes.

Doc Savage left Copeland to explain the situation, and ran on to the next stone lid. Wrenching, he got it up.

Sen Gat and the apish Evall clambered out. They stared at the bronze giant; their faces became stark and they looked almost willing to descend into the cell again.

Sen Gat's sinister face was tear-streaked. The amazing finger nails on one of his hands had been broken, which possibly accounted for the tears. The nails had been his rabid pride.

"Ma'afkan sahaya!" he wailed, fear-stricken. "A thousand pardons! When we tried to get the black sticks from you, it was only because those many-headed devils made us! The jewels they gave us –"

Doc shoved him. "Open the other lids!"

Sen Gat gasped, "Bronze man, save me and my ancestors will bless –"

"Get a move on!" Doc rapped.

Sen Gat scuttled to the manhole-like cover of another cell and wrestled with it. He seemed almost happy about it, for he had fully expected Doc to toss him back in the circular stone room. Some of his satisfaction vanished when Lucile Copeland clambered out of the dungeon which he had opened.

Lucile, not aware of what was occurring, got the idea that Sen Gat meant her harm. She grabbed the swart oriental's most vulnerable part – his finger nails – such of them as were still intact – and pulled hard.

Sen Gat screamed. Two of his nails broke. Then the girl saw Doc Savage, understood the situation, and released Sen Gat.

The slant-eyed man, eyeing his ruined nails, began to blubber and make hideously tearful faces.

Evall took advantage of the excitement to attempt an escape, running to the edge of the rooftops and preparing to drop over. Sighting several of the venom-throwing cobras in the street below, he drew back, considered, then all but fell over himself in his haste to help free the other prisoners.

"I was just lookin' things over!" he mumbled to Doc, attempting to alibi his actions.

The bronze man said nothing, but got open another cell. Two men came forth – the aviator and mechanic who had accompanied Copeland on his first attempt to reach the ruined metropolis of The Thousand-headed Man. Their first words revealed their identity.

Other dungeons yielded natives – brown Malays and swart Hindus – for the most part. These gathered in a frightened cluster and trailed Doc.

Maples, very thin and reedy, came out of a pit, unharmed.

The gorillalike Evall got a lid open and lowered one of the rattan and jati ladders. When no one appeared, he leaned down to scrutinize the interior of the cell.

He howled and recoiled, clutching a flattened crimson streaming nose. A fist, flying out of the cell, had struck him. The owner of the knuckles promptly appeared.

It was the homely chemist, Monk.

Chapter 24. THE JEWELLED PAGODA

DOC SAVAGE had recognized Monk even before he came out of the circular opening – recognized his fist, rather, for it was doubtful if a more furry and knobbed set of knuckles were in existence.

The huge, hairy list was the most welcome sight Doc had seen in many days, since it signified that the pleasantly ugly chemist was alive and hinted that the other four of Doc's men might also be intact.

"Monk!" Doc rapped.

"Doc!" Monk echoed, then grabbed Evall. "Man, I'm gonna clean this guy's plough!"

"Later!" Doc told him. "Where are the other four?"

With manifest reluctance Monk released Evall, turned and indicated other cells, then lent a hand at opening them.

Big-fisted Renny was the next to appear; then skeleton-thin Johnny and Long Tom – somewhat more pale than usual, if that was possible. Ham scrambled out of the last cell.

Under Ham's arm was a squirming bundle of gristle and coarse hair to which were attached long legs and wing-sized ears.

"Blast it!" Ham grated. "Who put them up to throwing this hog in with me?"

"Habeas Corpus!" Monk howled, appropriating his pet from Ham.

In the excitement and boisterous pleasure of reunion, danger had suddenly seemed far away, something of minor consequence. But now an ominous reverberation of drums swept the weird metropolis and yells went up, the sounds washing like a cold rain over the warmth of their joy.

Doc's five men, it became instantly apparent, had no conception of their position. They stared around, greatly bewildered, and sighting one of the big, brown men in a head-studded costume, started violently and eyes all but popped from their sockets.

"Ham, d'you see what I do?" Monk gulped.

Ham nodded slowly. "At last I've found it!"

"You crazy?" Monk snorted. "Found what?"

"Something with the shape of a man that is uglier than you are," Ham said unkindly, unable to pass the chance for agitating Monk.

Monk took it with a wry grin, but made no retort, collaring Evall instead and demanding to know the nature

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of the monster with the multiplicity of head.

Evall, being frightened to an ague of Monk's iron-hard fists, jumbled his words in his haste to explain that the apparition was merely a big brown man in a head-speckled costume. Doc Savage in the meantime was busy opening the remainder of the dungeons, getting for his pains several rogues – almond-faced Asiatics all – who had comprised the crews of Sen Gat's planes. Renny gave Doc assistance in freeing them.

"We passed out on a river sandbar," Renny explained, "and woke up here!"

Doc nodded. "I found your tracks. It looked like the crocidiles had gotten you. But the members of The Thousand-headed Man cult, after overcoming you, must have carried you off. They were clever enough to leave no tracks. They probably used boats."

The great hullabaloo of drumming had been rampant during the past few moments. Now it subsided slowly until the clamor died entirely in a few throbbing beats, and from the outskirts of the city came much shouting. This indicated that big, brown men, called in from the jungle by the drums, were arriving in numbers.

Monk, finishing with Evall, glanced about thoughtfully, then approached Doc and Renny. Monk's shirt was tightly buttoned to the neck, this being unusual to a degree, since the apelike chemist had a habit of shedding his shirt when a fight impended and etiquette permitted.

"Say, there's a flock of them head-covered guys," Monk grunted. "They've got us surrendered. Hadn't we better be doin' things?"

Renny shoved out his huge fists. "Let's rush 'em, Doc."

"We couldn't do worse," Doc told him.

"How come?"

"The cobras," said Doc.

"Cobras?" Renny's stupefied expression, the kindred look on Monk's features, gave proof that they knew nothing of the venom-throwing serpents.

"Have you two ever heard that old argument about whether a cobra can throw its venom or not?" Doc asked. "It's about like the question of a porcupine throwing its quills, or not throwing them."

"I've heard the argument," Monk admitted. "The snakes don't throw their venom. That argument may come from the fact that the reptiles strike so quick that the eye – "

"You'll have to change your ideas," Doc told him.

With rapid sentences, the bronze man told of the cobras with which they had to cope.

"Possibly the snakes were originally a venom-throwing species of which science knows nothing," he finished. "Again, the quality of expelling their poison might have been developed by the ancestors of these worshippers of The Thousand-headed Man. Since this poison is not like cobra venom of the accepted type, the latter belief seems credible."

Long Tom, the pale electrical wizard, came up. "Doc, it looks like they've got us hemmed in," he said.

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The bronze man nodded, then did some reconnoitering on his own, finding it as Long Tom had said. On three sides, the many-headed men swarmed with their rattan baskets, while on the fourth flank, in the direction of the jeweled pagoda, there were fewer foes. The enemy seemed to have realized this, since natives could be seen moving toward the pagoda to reinforce that side.

Doc studied the Pagoda of the Heads, observing the steep steps that led to the edifice and the comparative smallness of the doom. From his present vantage point he could see that the pavement at the top of the pagoda steps was composed of small, white stones, these apparently being set without mortar, so that they might be loosened readily. These could be used as missiles.

"We can make it to that pagoda," he decided.

"Reckon that's our best move," Renny agreed.

They launched the charge for the bejeweled structure at once, Doc leading, his hands full of stones. The others trailed him, Copeland, his wife and daughter keeping close together, the joy of their reunion not yet having been dispersed by their undoubted peril.

Evall, Sen Gat, and the others formed a compact group.

Huge brown men yelled angrily as the pagoda rush started. They scuttled forward, rage making them bolder. Loosening the lids on their rattan baskets, they hurled these containers ahead as far as they could, then withdrew.

The baskets opened and cobras fell out, greatly agitated by the rough treatment. The reptiles writhed toward Doc's party.

Doc hurled stones, picking off the foremost of the serpents. Monk and the others, finding some of the cobbles could be loosened with fingers, joined the barrage.

They kept all but one of the reptiles at a safe distance, the exception being a snake which wriggled close enough to make one of Sen Gat's fliers dizzy.

"I oughta leave 'im!" Monk growled, then seized the fellow and guided him along with them.

The pagoda steps were steep, some of the weakened prisoners had trouble with them.

Once inside the structure, they found the architecture differed greatly from the pagodas which they had found in the jungle. There was much woodwork here, tough and tawny jati wood for the most part. The woodwork was elaborately carved, covered with plates of rare, beaten metals and encrusted with exquisite brilliants.

No large rooms were inside the pagoda, the edifice being rather a labyrinth of cubicles, passages and tiny chambers. These were irregularly shaped, and Doc abruptly realized they were intended to represent the cavities inside the human head.

"Scatter and hunt weapons!" he directed.

OBEYING THE bronze man's order, the gaunt Johnny scrambled up into a slit of a passage which was possibly some prehistoric architect's idea of a sinus channel. The geologist reached the level of the head-shaped pagoda's eyes, peered out, and saw that the paved area on all sides of their retreat now swarmed with basket-carrying foes.

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"Thousands of them!" Johnny breathed, and shivered.

He was suddenly appalled by their predicament, it having come to him that their chances of escaping were small. They had no really effective weapons. True, there were the stones which they could throw, but with the coming of darkness, now imminent, they could never hope to keep all of the cobras at the distance of fifty feet or so which safety demanded.

Monk clambered up and joined Johnny.

"Monk, you're a chemist," the geologist said uneasily, "What're our chances of rigging up gas masks effective against this venomous vapor?"

"Slim," said Monk. "I just asked Doc about it. He thinks the blasted stuff takes effect when it touches the skin, as well as when it's breathed. We'd have to cover ourselves all over to be safe."

Johnny considered this. The fact that he was not speaking with his usual big words indicated how worried he was.

"Maybe those brown devils wear the head-covered costumes partially as a protection against the venom," he stated thoughtfully.

"Likely," Monk admitted.

From below came crashing of wood, rending of timbers, and a clatter as the wood was piled together.

"Doc is ripping out some of the woodwork to build a barricade," Monk explained. "It may not help much, but it's giving the others something to do that'll keep their minds off the jam we're in."

The two men peered out through the eye-opening and were in time to witness an interesting event, one which had a bearing on past events.

"Look!" Monk exploded.

A brown man in a head-studded costume was dashing forward. Instead of a basket, he carried an ordinary bow and arrows, together with a bit of burning wood. He fitted an arrow to his bow, touched his brand to the tip, and the arrow began to blaze brilliantly.

He discharged the missile at the pagoda, endeavoring to set fire to the barricade Doc and the others were rigging.

"Arrow smeared with pitch or somethin'!" Monk gulped.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" breathed Johnny.

Monk eyed him in the murk, "What's eatin you?"

"Remember that mysterious flame that dropped out of the sky and set our plane afire?"

"Do I!" Monk snorted. "Say, that was the strangest – Hm–m–m! Blazes! Why, I'll be a – it was a burning arrow!"

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"Exactly!" Johnny declared. "We turned just in time to see the arrow in the air, or rather the flame alone, for it hid the rest of the arrow. That was what made it so weird."

"But the plane was metal!"

"One of the brown devils must have sneaked out and opened the gas tanks without our noticing. That would explain it"

MONK AND JOHNNY worked on up into the cranial cavities of the Pagoda of the Heads, hoping to locate weapons. They squinted, for it was quite gloomily.

A larger room deployed before them. They stood on the threshold, peering about.

"Hey!" Monk squawled. "Lookit!"

Scattered about the chamber were weapons – not native arms, but modern hunting rifles and efficient pistols. No two of these were alike, this indicating the guns had been the property of ill-fated explorers who had ventured too near this fabulous city. The tiny supermachine pistols formerly carried by Doc's group were among the assortment.

Strewn on the floor also were articles of clothing, bits of equipment.

"Glory be!" grinned Monk. "This is where they stored the stuff they took from their prisoners. What a break!"

"Supereminent!" Johnny's tongue found big words with the rise in his spirits. "This alters circumstances."

He started forward to gather up weapons. Monk moved suddenly, his hairy hands flashed out, wrenched Johnny back and down.

Simultaneously, the sound of a shot whooped in the room. Rock particles spurted off a wall. A bullet, missing Johnny only by grace of Monk's yanking him away, had loosened the stone.

"Back!" Monk rasped.

Another shot roared! That bullet also missed. In the murk of the storeroom, they sighted a shadowy figure leaping swiftly to get in position for more accurate shooting.

"Sen Gat!" groaned Johnny.

"Yeah!" Monk continued hauling the geologist away. "The slant-eyed lug found them guns ahead of us! Heard us comin' an' ducked back."

"How are we going – " Johnny swallowed his words and dived wildly for the nearest stairway, as Sen Gat popped out of the storeroom and endeavored to shoot them down.

Sen Gat had secured one of the supermachine pistols; its bull-fiddle moan throbbled with ear-rupturing violence, the bullets – they were the mercy slugs – spattering like raindrops.

Monk and Johnny scuttled further down. An instant later, Doc Savage was beside them.

"What happened?" demanded the giant bronze man.

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"Sen Gat – guns!" Monk ground his teeth. "The weapons were stored up there – and our pal found 'em first."

"Sen Gat's gang!" Doc rapped. "We've got to keep them from joining their chief!"

With all the flashing speed of which his bulging trained muscles were capable, Doc whipped back into the lower regions. In the stress of their predicament, he had let Sen Gat's men range for themselves, since they all had a common interest in escaping from the big brown men.

Doc was too late. Sen Gat must have gotten word to his followers before Monk and Johnny came upon him in the storeroom, for the slant-eyed men, even apish Evall, had mounted to the upper regions by a rear passage.

DELIGHTED SHOUTING indicated Sen Gat had his sinister crew united; a burst of firing showed that he had them armed. They were shootings – not at Doc's party, but from the upper windows at the brown followers of The Thousand-headed Man.

Many of these fell, the others retreating, so that soon the plaza around the pagoda was vacated, except for sprawled forms of the slain, and a few cobras.

"Savage!" Sen Gat called triumphantly. "Do you hear me?"

"Yes," Doc answered.

"Sila-lah dudok!" Sen Gat laughed loudly "Sit down, please! We are going to be very generous and not harm you! You will wait quietly!"

"The mug!" Monk gritted. "He's gonna leave us here!"

Sen Gat evidently heard that, for his harsh mirth cackled again and he said, "If one of you shows his head, he will be shot!"

"He means it," Doc advised. "Stay under cover."

Big-fisted Renny rumbled, "But he'll get away!"

Doc nodded. "We're better off without him."

"But we'd be still better off if we had the guns," groaned Long Tom.

There was, however, nothing they could do about that, for Sen Gat posted men at the stairway. Doc, showing his head for a split-second, drew a storm of bullets which, thanks to his sudden withdrawal, did nothing but warn them that an attack would be hopeless.

Noises soon began coming from above – clatterings and shouts, besprinkled with gloating gasps of elated exclamations. Bits of wreckage spilled from the top of the pagoda, rock fragments and pieces of wood for the most part; but once a large ruby fell and rolled down the steps, clinking, glinting in the last rays of the sun.

Several of Sen Gat's men swore regretfully at this occurrence.

"They're looting," Doc decided.

"Uh-huh," Monk grumbled. "Harvesting the gold and jewels off the top of the pagoda."

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"Wonder where that stuff came from – the jewels, I mean," pondered big-fisted Renny.

Johnny fingered, with skeleton-thin digits, at the lapel of his coat where his monocle-magnifier usually hung. This article had been appropriated by The Thousand-headed Man worshippers.

"I made note of the gem mountings," he stated. "From the weathered condition of those, and the cut of the jewels themselves, it is my opinion that the stones have been there for centuries."

"You mean they were put there by the people who built this city?" Renny asked.

"That is my opinion."

Doc Savage took no part in the discussion, for he was watching through the narrow doorways, there being several of these around the circumference of the pagoda. What interested the bronze man was the actions of the ugly natives with the rattan snake baskets.

There were now hordes of fanatics in evidence, barely distinguishable in the dusk, but none of them ventured within range of the guns held by Sen Gat and his party. Mad shouting showed that the desecration of the pagoda was being witnessed – though not with pleasure.

Abruptly, Sen Gat's men could be heard descending the stairs toward a rear door.

Doc and his group promptly seized stones and hurled them but without avail, for Sen Gat's guns kept them from showing themselves.

They were forced to stand and watch Sen Gat and his party race across the plaza, weapons in hand, each man bearing a great bundle of loot. They headed for the river.

Monk scowled uneasily as the last figure vanished in the dusk.

"Now we are in a pickle," he mumbled.

Chapter 25. BLACK SHIRT

SEN GAT and his crew were not to walk out of the city of The Thousand-headed Man without trouble.

A vast tumult arose from all around the pagoda, a shouting and beating of drums. Big, brown figures in grotesque costumes scampered madly, converging on the fleeing party in such numbers that they resembled cinnamon-colored torrents flowing along the narrow streets.

Pistols and rifles rapped; superfirers emitted hooting roars. Sen Gat's voice piped shrill orders, and his men shouted, screams of victims mingling with their cries. And over it all pulsed the drums, the guttural chanting and howling of the brown fanatics.

But the manner in which the bedlam receded from the pagoda indicated that Sen Gat's party was making headway in the direction of the river, which swirled past one wall of the metropolis.

"Wonder if we stand a chance of beating it now?" Renny pondered.

Testing that possibility – Doc Savage stepped outside. His appearance was the signal which brought a swarm

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of threatening brown figures out into the plaza. These did not venture close, possibly fearing that those still in the pagoda had guns; but they were present in such numbers, all with rattan baskets, that escape was obviously impossible.

A search of the upstairs rooms, moreover, disclosed that Sen Gat's group had taken all arms, together with the finest jewels and the thickest plate from the top of the pagoda.

Calvin Copeland, his wife, and Lucile stood close together. They had not separated themselves from each other since their reunion – as if haunted by the fear that they might be lost to one another again. Even the peril of the situation had not wiped from their features the joy that had come upon their release from the dungeons.

Doc went to them. "Copeland," he said.

"Yes?"

"There's one thing we didn't clear up entirely – the matter of the black sticks."

The explorer nodded. "If we had them, we might get out of this."

"I gave them to Monk," Doc explained. "When he was captured, the sticks must have been taken from him. What were they?"

"The antidote which the brown men use to make themselves immune to the effects of the cobra venom," Copeland stated.

"You discovered its nature?"

Again Copeland nodded. "Yes, on my first visit to this region. You see, when my pilot and mechanic were seized, there was a fight. I caught one of the brown men, and he was carrying a bag filled with herbs and certain jungle berries. I got that before I was forced to flee for my life."

"And you carried it to England with you," Doc hazarded.

"Righto. At the bottom of the bag there was also a little ball of black substance. I naturally believed that to be the antidote. In England, I experimented with the herbs and berries until I had made a similar compound. Out of that, I moulded the black sticks."

Doc considered. "It still seems strange that you told no one of the antidote, or serum, which it more properly is. You did not even tell of the existence of the jeweled pagoda or the lost city."

Copeland looked very uncomfortable. "You have been told that I was ill and at times slightly – er, irrational, when I reached England. That was from the effects of the venom, coupled with a fever I caught while making my way back through the jungle."

"Lucile informed me of your condition," Doc admitted.

Copeland shrugged. "That is the explanation. They would have thought me insane. The story was too fantastic."

"That was not the best of timing," Doc said slowly.

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"I realize it now," agreed the explorer. "Maybe I was a bit off mentally, or I would not have kept the whole thing a secret. Too, I believe thinking about all those jewels affected me. I was madly afraid some one would beat me to them. I feared some one would steal the black sticks from me."

Monk ambled over. His shirt was still tightly buttoned. "Did I hear somethin' about them black sticks?" he asked.

"Right," Doc told him. "The black sticks I gave you. I presume they were taken from you."

"Wrong," Monk grinned.

"What?"

"I fooled around with the things," Monk explained. "I figured out they were some compound and discovered that heat would melt 'em to a liquid almost as thin as water."

"What did you do with them?" Doc questioned sharply.

Monk stripped open his shirt, revealing his undershirt. Usually, it was white silk. Now it was very black.

"I melted the sticks and soaked the liquid up with my undershirt," he chuckled. "If you want the black stuff, all we gotta do is heat my shirt and wring it out."

The dapper Ham, who had heard the whole thing, went to the homely Monk, to whom he had not spoken a civil word in years, and draped an arm around the apish chemist's shoulders.

"My sweetheart," he breathed ecstatically. "I love you. I love your hog."

DOC SAVAGE went to work swiftly, rigging up a fire-making apparatus with sticks, and with shoestrings from Monk's footgear. This whirled a pointed stick upon a flat slab until the friction created heat, then a tiny coal that was carefully nursed and fanned until a fire was going.

A sheet of gold off the roof, left behind by Sen Gat, was fashioned into a receptacle to hold the black substance.

They did not work in silence – for there was the shouting of the fanatics outside to keep their actions company. From a greater distance, in the direction taken by Sen Gat's party, came more subdued howling. This latter bedlam seemed to be slackening – the rapping of rifles, the blare of supermachine pistols coming with less frequency.

Finally, the shooting stopped entirely.

"Wonder if Sen Gat got away," Renny boomed.

Maples, tall and thin and silent, had taken little part in proceedings, but now that there seemed some possibility of escape, he brightened to a marked degree and scampered about, seizing timbers and smashing them into smaller fragments which would serve as clubs.

"A good idea," Doc told him. "When the men in the headed suits see their snakes are not going to overcome us, they'll probably get up nerve enough to tackle us."

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Monk's shirt was wrung out, and the black material with which it was saturated proportioned among the party. Since they had no idea of the quantity necessary to give immunity to the cobra venom, they divided it equally.

"How long d'you suppose it takes to work?" Monk asked.

Doc, after mulling that over, concluded, "Since it is assimilated through the digestive system, half an hour might do it. We'll wait that long, then give it a try. One of us will go out alone and see what happens."

They waited the half hour, and when it was time for the test, there arose an argument about who was to be the subject.

Doc, by the simple expedient of turning a deaf ear to the others, took the task upon himself.

Venturing forth, he approached one of the venom-throwing cobras in the plaza. The black compound he had taken had made him dizzy, slightly ill, but had not detracted from his agility or keenness of sense.

There was, as he stood within a few feet of the cobra, only a slightly greater dizziness, a feeling akin to a mild intoxication. He went back.

"The stuff works," he reported.

They set out. Doc's five men and the more husky of the rescued natives, together with Copeland's aviator and mechanic, took the outside. For arms, they carried lengths of tough jati wood and baseball-sized rocks.

"Toward the river," Doc suggested.

Monk grinned, "But there's a slew of 'em that way. The outfit that chased Sen Gat"

"But they undoubtedly have boats on the river," Doc pointed out. "If we can get them, that's our best bet. We'd never distance them through the jungle."

A great turmoil arose around them. Drums clamored. Big, snuff-colored men, grisly sights in their head-covered garments, dashed forward to release their serpents. When the reptiles had no effect on Doc's party, they seemed stupefied.

"We got 'em guessin'!" Monk snorted. "They're used to their cussed snakes takin' care of everything. When that flops, they kinda feel up in the air."

The worshippers of The Thousand-headed Man undoubtedly held scant liking for physical combat, being great cowards as Calvin Copeland had said. Only a few ventured close enough to hurl spears or discharge arrows, and the scant number of these missiles made it simple to evade them.

Down narrow streets the retreat led. Foes thickened in numbers. Doc, Monk and Renny, the giants of the party, went ahead to wield clubs. Through the howling mob they beat their way.

Time after time, serpents were launched at them. The strange venom had only the effect of making them slightly nauseated. With the clubs, they beat down such foes as came near. A few spears shivered against the cobbles. They threw these back at the donors.

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Renny, swooping abruptly, picked something off the pavement, eyed it and exploded with pet ejaculation. "Holy cow!"

He had found one of the supermachihе pistols.

THE SIGNIFICANCE of the abandoned weapon was soon apparent; the rapid-firer was loaded with mercy bullets.

Renny released a few moaning bursts, brown men were cut down in droves to lie unconscious, and a path was cleared.

Doc and the others advanced. Soon they came upon a rifle, then scattered pistols and revolvers.

"Sen Gat didn't make it!" Renny rumbled. "The blasted snakes got 'im!"

Doc hastily gathered the fallen weapons and distributed them. Just why they had not been taken by the brown men did not puzzle him greatly, for he knew something of the psychology of the orient.

No doubt the servitors of The Thousand-headed Man considered the weapons contaminated because they had been in the hands of unbelievers. They could be touched by a true believer only after suitable purification ceremonies.

Now that Doc's party was armed, the advance became a simple matter. They pounded through the murk, shooting only occasionally.

Copeland and his wife, weakening, were helped along by the bronze man, a service for which Doc received a low word of gratitude from Lucile Copeland.

The street widened; it became one of the Venice-like boulevards – down the center of which was a long pool filled with sparkling blue water.

"Hah!" Monk made for the water. "Am I thirsty!"

"No, no!" Copeland yelled. "Those water pools are all poisoned! That's just another of their schemes to keep outsiders away."

A moment later, Doc pointed. "Look! Sen Gat and his men!"

Sen Gat's crew apparently had carried along such of their crowd as had been overcome, until the venom of the cobras had finally brought an end to their fight.

The bodies lay in an angle of the street, where Sen Gat's party had withdrawn for their final struggle against what amounted to a remorseless fate. Occupying contorted positions, not one of the forms was stirring.

Doc ran forward, stopped some yards from the bodies and wheeled.

"Keep the women back," he called.

Monk ambled up, squinted his small eyes at the bodies, and said, "Blazes!"

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The worshippers of The Thousand-headed Man had used clubs upon Sen Gat and his crew. Sen Gat, Evall, the others – all were there. Every skull had been caved in.

"Whew!" Monk grimaced. "If anybody ever had it comin', they did. But lookin' at it kinda gets your insides."

Doc made a quick examination while hooting supermachine pistols kept their foes back, but every spark of life in Sen Gat's gang had been batted out by a club.

"Let's move," he said.

"Wait." Monk pointed. "What about that junk?"

In the angle of the street where the bodies lay, there was a recess, possibly a door which had been walled up centuries ago. In this reposed numerous crude, bulky bundles made from shirts and coats, packages which bulged and here and there had leaked scintillating baubles.

Sen Gat's party had obviously placed the stolen wealth there.

"The stuff off the pagoda," said Monk. "Whatdo we do about it?"

"You would think of a crazy question like that," snapped the dapper Ham, running toward the fabulous hoard. He began scooping up bundles.

"These many-headed lugs ain't entitled to it at that," Monk decided for himself. "Their ancestors probably swiped it from the original owners."

Doc Savage said nothing, but the fact that he helped carry the jewel-and-gold laden bundles showed that he agreed with Monk.

THEY HAD little trouble in reaching the river, being forced to discharge only a few bursts from the machine pistols.

Inset in the river bank were walled setbacks, and these held boats. The craft were kapals, crudely fashioned dugouts, with their only mesas of propulsion being dayongs, the latter none too efficient as paddles.

The wealth from the pagoda was loaded into the kapals. They all got aboard, the clumsy oars were distributed, and they shoved off. They headed upstream, toward the planes.

For a time, the brown men of the cult of The Thousand-headed Man trailed them along the shore. Eventually these were left behind. After that, the paddling showed signs of slackening.

"Step on it!" Doc warned. "If they beat us to Sen Gat's planes and destroy them, we're still in a jam."

That danger failed to materialize, however, for they found Sen Gat's three ships intact in the clearing.

Doc Savage hastily set about unearthing the motor parts which he had buried. Renny and Monk set about replacing them.

"Will the planes carry all of us?" Calvin Copeland asked anxiously.

"Without any trouble," Doc assured him. "Sen Gat bought the best type of ship."

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In the distance, drums mumbled and shouts made a vague clamor, an indication that their foes had not given up.

Skeleton-thin Johnny, listening, grimaced violently.

"The sight of United States terrain is going to afford me profound pleasure," he declared. "There, things that happen do not smack of impossible magic – as did that flaming arrow, for example."

Johnny clambered into the plane. Monk tossed in his pet pig, Habeas Corpus. The others loaded aboard, engines were started, and they got the planes off.

In wedge formation, they droned over the jungle.

Lucile Copeland came forward and eased into one of the control cockpit seats alongside Doc, who was handling the stick.

"Father wants me to tell you that we wish no share of that stuff from the pagoda of The Thousand-headed Man," she said.

"Nonsense!" Doc told her. "It'll be divided into two parts. One of those halves will be shared between yourself, your mother, your father, Maples and the other ex-prisoners. The second half will be turned over to a fund to build hospitals and schools in Indo-China."

The girl seemed stunned. "But what do you get out of it?"

"Believe it or not," Doc advised her, "we get some fun out of this sort of thing."

THE END