

# **THE AWFUL DYNASTY**

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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# THE AWFUL DYNASTY

## A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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Scanned and Proofed  
by Tom Stephens

### Chapter I. SIGN OF THE SCARAB

IT just happened that a peculiar incident took place a moment or so before the great ocean liner sailed from Southampton, and because of this no one observed the arrival of a remarkable man with bronze features. The bronze man, via another gangway, slipped to his stateroom unnoticed. He remained there, in seclusion, throughout the remainder of the voyage to New York. And so nobody realized that Doc Savage was on the liner.

But what they did know and talk about was the presence of the two dark-skinned men with the copper tube. The fellows looked like Egyptians. They had come hurrying up the gangplank at the very last second, almost.

Preceding them, there had been various sorts of rackets. A police car, siren working, had drawn up to the pier. It had been followed by another.

Between this and yet still two more police cars that followed had been the taxicab containing the two Egyptians and four other men who looked like New York bodyguards for an old-time gangster.

The two Egyptians hurried from the cab with the long copper cylinder held between them. It did not appear to be heavy, and yet each man clung to the thing as though distrustful of allowing the other full possession of it. The four blocky-jawed bodyguards formed a cordon around them as they came on shipboard.

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Passengers gawked. Some who got too curious, and who shoved in close in order to get a better look, were elbowed aside gruffly by the four men with blocky jaws.

The entourage with the long, shining copper cylinder moved swiftly through the ship, picked up a purser, then headed directly for a large suite on A Deck. There seemed to be a whole lot of solemnity in bringing the copper cylinder aboard. The two dark-skinned Egyptians and their four bodyguards might have been pallbearers at a funeral, so glum were their expressions.

One of the onlookers was a young college student. He was quite an intelligent individual. He got close enough to get a good look at the thing which the two Egyptians were carrying so carefully.

About three feet long, the cylinder was perhaps three inches in diameter. It gleamed with a red-gold coppery hue. It appeared to be capped at both ends. And on the smooth, gleaming surface of the tube was a scramble of funny-looking figures.

The college boy stared. He squinted his eyes to take in all he could of the thing before the men carrying it disappeared down a corridor. Then, his alert young gaze bug-eyed, he grabbed his nearest companion and let out a cry.

"Did you see what's *on* that thing?" the student demanded.

"You mean them funny decorations?" asked the other passenger.

"They're not decorations. It was *writing!*"

"Writing?"

"Hieroglyphics," explained the college boy. "It just happens I caught some of the characters on that thing!" His voice rose excitedly.

"And so?" The other passenger was not yet impressed.

"That . . . that copper cylinder," the youth gulped, "has something to do with the Fourth Dynasty of Cheops! Five or ten years ago, several archaeologists *died* trying to open a tomb containing, they believed, relics of that dynasty. It's awful!"

"Awful?" There was a puzzled frown now upon the second passenger's face.

"That dynasty everything connected with it is cursed. Men die who try to penetrate its mystery!"

The college boy moved away from the spot. He called back in a thin, tight voice, "Keep away from that thing. It's *cursed!*"

ADJOINING the corridor down which the Egyptians and their bodyguards had disappeared, was a small inside space that was more or less a smoking room. It was through this space that the college youth was moving when he let out the startled cry about something being cursed.

A man seated in a deep armchair reading a newspaper looked up. He got to his feet. Several people standing about looked at him.

For the man was very tall and so thin that most passengers had to stare up at him. He had a high forehead, the

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aesthetic face of a thinker, and it was a bet, when he started to walk, whether his clothes would fall off his long thin body. From his lapel dangled a ribbon to which was attached a monocle with a thick lens.

He had overheard the student's remark. And, as he listened, he overheard other remarks now being made about the strange copper cylinder. He caught the words: "curse of the Fourth Dynasty of Cheops!"

The long thin man murmured to himself. "I'll be superamalgamated!"

Then he followed a crowd of curious passengers as they pushed through the ship corridor in order to stand and stare at the stateroom door through which the Egyptians had disappeared.

None could know that the tall man was William Harper Littlejohn, an eminent archaeologist and scholar. And also one of the aids in the unusual organization headed by Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze.

"Johnny" as William Harper Littlejohn was called by his most intimate friends was also on shipboard in somewhat the capacity of a bodyguard. His assignment at the moment was to see that Doc Savage was not disturbed throughout the entire voyage to New York.

For the bronze man from time to time went into seclusion when he had his remarkable brain centered upon a particular problem. In this case, it was a treatise on a new type of brain surgery that was going to startle a good part of the world. It was Johnny's job to see that no one disturbed Doc Savage.

This explained why Johnny had been seated in the small smoking room that gave a view of the corridor. The bronze man's stateroom was a few feet down that corridor. In the excitement of sailing, someone was liable to try to enter it by mistake. Johnny was to see that they didn't try.

The crowd passed the bronze man's doorway now as they pressed down the corridor in search of the men with the copper cylinder. They reached another group jammed about a closed door only a dozen yards or so away from Doc Savage's stateroom.

One curious fellow was stooped down trying to peer through the keyhole of the door. Another was on his hands and knees trying to look through the crack formed by the bottom of the door and the sill.

They could see nothing.

Someone asked, "What was all the secrecy about that copper cylinder?"

Another passenger shrugged, replied, "You're asking *me!* That's what we'd all like to know."

No one, from the excited conversation, seemed to have an idea of what the Egyptians could have been carrying so guardedly.

Johnny Littlejohn listened, and his interest deepened, and after a while his restless imagination got the better of him and he decided that he would watch the curious-acting Egyptians and their four bodyguards.

But the fellows remained in their cabins throughout the rest of that day.

It was about ten that night that they changed staterooms.

JOHNNY had been seated in the smoking room reading a magazine. Only twice had he been in to see Doc Savage. And both times the bronze man had been so intently concentrating on his medical treatise that he had

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not replied to Johnny's remarks. So the archaeologist had left him alone.

Johnny was just thinking of retiring when he saw one of the blocky-jawed fellows come out of the stateroom beyond the bronze man's own and look up and down the corridor. Then the man hurried aft. Shortly he returned with half a dozen ship's officers. The three other bodyguards stepped out into the passageway. They were followed by the two Egyptians carrying the mysterious copper cylinder.

Immediately a protective cordon was formed around the two dark-skinned men and their shining object, and the group started hurriedly forward.

Curious, Johnny Littlejohn followed at a discreet distance. He reached a turn in the corridor, had just started around it, when he noted that the group had paused at an inside suite doorway. Johnny drew back.

He heard someone ask, "You're *certain* there's no outside deck entrance to this suite?"

"That's right," came the officer's reply.

"And no outside windows?"

"None whatsoever."

"All right, then. We'll stay here."

Shortly, the officers moved off down the corridor. Johnny slipped along through the passageway until he came to the doorway of the strange-acting men's new suite. He listened quietly.

There were voices talking, but he could distinguish no words. Johnny frowned. What the devil was this mystery all about, he wondered. He moved out on deck.

Though the moon was shining overhead, there was fog lying like a thick blanket over the surface of the ocean. The liner was ripping through the tendrils of the damp, chill fog. And as Johnny stood there, leaning against the ship's rail, the stuff grew thicker. His clothes became damp. The few passengers who had been walking on deck quickly disappeared. He was left alone.

The liner's deep-throated, mournful foghorn started its half-minute blasts. The sound shivered through the throbbing ship, trailed off behind the fast-moving boat. In between each blast, there was heavy, deep silence.

Johnny had been standing there perhaps half an hour, thinking of the two dark-skinned Egyptians and their peculiar copper cylinder, when the woman walked past him. Or rather, floated past him. It was this that caught his attention.

For the woman walked with short, smooth steps that carried her trim small form along as though it were being moved on some sort of conveyor. Johnny had never seen anyone walk so smoothly, so effortlessly as this beautiful creature.

And beautiful she was!

A stanchion light gave Johnny one brief glimpse of the woman's face as she passed by. He caught a right-side view of her classic profile.

There was a thing exotic and mysterious about her olive-skinned, fine features. Johnny had an impression of

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dark somber eyes, of hair that was like ebony. She was not tall, but almost fragile in her delicate, exquisite form.

One thing about her formed a word in the gaunt archaeologist's thoughts. Egyptian! That was it! Perhaps she was somehow connected with

She had suddenly turned into the doorway through which Johnny had reached the outside deck. On a sudden impulse, he followed.

And a moment later he was staring as he watched the small, gemlike woman from a concealed distance down the long passageway.

She had paused before the room door of Doc Savage!

JOHNNY watched quietly. The woman's black-gloved hand raised to tap on the door. But midway to the panel, it suddenly paused. The woman seemed to hesitate. Her hand moved to her lips and she stood there staring at the closed door.

And then, abruptly, she turned away and ran hurriedly down the passageway, away from Johnny Littlejohn. The tall archaeologist let out a surprised yell. He leaped after the small woman.

But she had turned past a bulkhead. When he reached the point, she had disappeared. He stared around. A cross-passage led to either the port or starboard side of the great liner. The woman could have gone either way. Johnny went to the right.

And saw no sign of her.

He tried the other angle of the passage. And had no success.

All this happened on Tuesday night.

On Friday night the situation was unchanged. The ship was due in New York in a few hours. And yet Johnny had not once seen the dainty Egyptian woman again. Neither had he seen the two men with the mysterious copper cylinder.

Of course, at various times throughout the voyage, he had seen the blocky-jawed bodyguards moving in and out of the suite. But never more than two of the bodyguards left the cabin at any one time. There were always two left behind. Trays of food were taken from cabin boys at the doorway. *No one*, Johnny had observed, was ever permitted inside.

The game of watching for the Egyptian woman and observing the actions of the bodyguards had helped pass the time for Johnny. For Doc Savage was still in seclusion. He was in one of those intense moods of concentration that took hold of him from time to time. Johnny had perhaps seen him only a dozen times throughout the entire trip. And even then he had not disturbed Doc with details about the mysterious cylinder and the beautiful, exotic Egyptian woman who had seemed afraid to knock on his stateroom door.

The last night out was particularly dark and murky. There was no moon. At midnight, Johnny stood out on deck in the darkness and thought about the gemlike little woman whom he had seen only once. There was something mysterious about the way she had acted. He wondered who

Down deck, off in the damp gloom, he thought he caught a startled little cry. Johnny quickly moved that way.

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It *could* have been a woman's frightened exclamation. Ahead, he was certain, he detected a step.

And yet he could see nothing in the darkness. There was only the steady, ominous sound of the sea swishing past the ship's side plates, and the deep throbbing of the engines. He listened, moving quietly forward.

It was then that he saw the scarab.

At first, though, all that Johnny saw was the weird blue glow in the inky blackness. It was as his eyes grew accustomed to the light that he saw the other thing. The thing with a round, fat body and legs. A beetle. And a beetle, to the gaunt archaeologist, denoted the sign of the scarab.

The scarab Johnny saw was no more than an inch in diameter! It moved. Or rather, appeared to float through the air in a jerky, waving sort of motion!

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny breathed. The archaeologist never used small words if he could avoid it. The exclamation was one he frequently used when suddenly surprised.

He stepped forward, his head bobbing up and down as he followed the mysterious actions of the fat beetle surrounded by the uncanny blue glow. Johnny, with a start, saw something else—a thing that made him swiftly leap forward with a startled outcry.

And immediately, powerful hands seized him from behind, closed about his skinny throat and dragged him to the deck. Johnny gagged, kicked, smashed out with his fists. For a long thin fellow, he was unusually strong and quick-moving.

But other hands joined those that had seized him, and he was quickly subdued. Something rapped his skull. Even as consciousness flowed from the archaeologist's limp body, he had the thought that he should have spoken to Doc Savage.

He should have told Doc about the mysterious-acting Egyptians!

## Chapter II. DEATH STRIKES

PERHAPS if someone had told John Black that the archaeologist known as William Harper Littlejohn was connected with the Doc Savage organization, he would not have had anything to do with the thing in the copper cylinder. But John Black was not informed that Johnny Littlejohn knew Doc Savage. John Black was the man to whom the cylinder was delivered in New York.

John Black's name hardly suited his description. For he was an albino.

He had skin the color of skim milk, hair as light as oat straw, and eyes that seemed to be a shade of pink. He was a little stout man that made you think of a kewpie. But a very sanctimonious kewpie.

Because John Black had a habit of standing with his hands held in a holier-than-thou sort of gesture across his round middle, and of smiling piously and of saying, "Bless you," quite frequently.

John Black looked at the shining copper cylinder resting on his desk, and then at the two dark-skinned Egyptians who had just delivered it to him. His round, milky-white face beamed, and he sighed, "Ah, bless you, my children. So this is the scroll from my most worthy cousin in Egypt?"

The two Egyptians bowed low from the waist. Behind them, their blocky faces immobile, stood the four



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bodyguards.

"Yes, sahib," said one of the dark-skinned men. "We have delivered the scroll safely from most respected cousin. We shall now return."

John Black looked at the two. "To Egypt?"

Both men nodded solemnly. "Yes, sahib to Egypt."

John Black looked suddenly flustered. He reached toward his hip pocket, drew out his wallet, hesitated. His round face looked worried.

"Well, bless me," he started. "I want to pay you, but you see . . . ah . . . that is "

"The payment," said one of the somber-faced Egyptians, "has already been made. There is nothing owed us."

The beaming smile returned to John Black's features. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "Bless cousin Northrup. What a fine, upstanding man he is!"

The sextet prepared to take their departure. Their mission was ended. But one of the bodyguards paused, frowned, jerked a thick thumb at John Black. He addressed the two Egyptians.

"You're *positive* about this bird, now? You ain't made any mistake?"

John Black looked shocked. That anyone for the moment should doubt that he *was* John Black

"But," he cried, "I have proved to you that I *am* John Black!"

The two Egyptians nodded. One said: "Quite true, sahib. We have made quite certain. We shall go."

They bowed and went out, and as John Black closed the door behind them he let out a long, thankful sigh. He sat down in a chair a moment and closed his eyes. His lips moved as though in prayer.

For the ordeal before the cylinder from Egypt had been turned over to him had been quite trying. He had been forced to prove his identity beyond a doubt. He had produced also the cablegrams from his cousin Northrup in Egypt. He had convinced the Egyptian messengers that he was the party who was to receive the cylinder in New York.

Finally he got up out of the chair and returned to the table. He stood for a long time staring at the three-foot-long cylinder of copper. Then, with trembling fingers, he unscrewed one of the ends.

Unpending the tube, he carefully eased the contents out onto the wide table top. His pink-red eyes widened as he stared at what was revealed.

The object looked like the paper roll for an electric player piano. Only this stuff wasn't paper, but some ageless, rare form of parchment. As he opened it up, strange characters and figures met his gaze. Some of them looked like fat cows, and some like dogs, while others were like the kind of animals he had never before seen in his life.

He unrolled the scroll farther and saw that the whole thing was interspersed with such crazy hieroglyphics. And there was also writing, but it was like no kind of writing that had ever appeared in the Twentieth

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Century in *any* kind of language!

But the writing on the separate sheet of small white paper was in English.

The message read:

John

The inclosed might mean a great deal, or nothing. But until you are certain, guard it with your life. I suggest that you look up a well-known authority on Egyptology who resides there in New York. The man's name is Lucius Pettibone. *He* will be able to decipher this thing and tell you its real value. But remember, *don't consult anyone else.*

Northrup.

John Black reread the note from his cousin, and he looked up startled. His plump, pink hands came up and pressed his face, and he cried, "Oh, dear me! Perhaps I should send it back!"

He quickly put the scroll back in the cylinder and then, because he seemed confused, he sat down and looked at the copper tube for a long time.

It was Saturday morning, and the sun was shining brightly outside his home.

After a while, apparently having reached a decision, John Black went to the telephone stand and got the red directory that listed every type of business and profession in New York.

He located the name of Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone, Egyptologist. The man lived on Eighth Street, near the Village. John Black made an appointment for two o'clock that same afternoon. He was careful enough to say nothing about the copper cylinder over the phone. He merely stated that he wanted advice on something pertaining to Egypt.

Later, he wrapped the cylinder in old newspapers, and then he got out an old suitcase that was a good yard long. He packed the cylinder in amongst soiled linen that he jammed into the suitcase. If anything did happen, he could pretend he was taking his laundry to the Chinaman's.

At 1:30 he phoned for a cab and went to see the Egyptologist.

LUCIUS ETHELBERT PETTIBONE was a strapping big fellow with worried eyes and a nervous manner. Shaking hands with him was like taking hold of a piece of soap that has stood too long in water.

The moment John Black was seated in the Egyptologist's office, Pettibone got up from behind his desk again, moved toward a water cooler, poured himself a drink and then reached into his coat pocket for a small bottle. There were white pills that looked like aspirin in the bottle.

Pettibone shook out two of the pills into his palm, gulped them down with a mouthful of water. He looked at John Black and said worriedly, "Headache. You'll pardon me? I have terrible headaches all the time. Too much concentration. Too much work. I don't know what I'm going to do."

His sentences ran together as though he were blurting out the words while being chased by a pack of hungry wolves. It looked odd to see such a big man so nervous.

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John Black had the copper cylinder resting across his knees, his hands folded in the pious gesture across his fat stomach. Briefly now, he explained about the scroll he had received from his cousin in Egypt. He finished with:

"They say you're an authority on this sort of stuff. I want you to tell me if it is valuable. Bless you, I hope you *do* say it is!"

Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone's face twisted once or twice. His hands gripped the edge of the heavy desk. Slowly, though, some of the nervousness seemed to leave him. He took the cylinder when it was passed to him, opened it, removed the scroll and spread it out on his desk.

Suddenly, he jumped back, dropping the thing as though it were on fire. He quickly flung open a drawer of his desk and brought out a bottle with an atomizer top. He started spraying an evil-smelling substance around him and over the scroll spread out on the desk. He exclaimed:

"Germs! Germs all around us. Air is full of them. This thing probably contains millions of them. I'm afraid of germs. That is, I don't like them." He looked a little flustered. "Well, anyway, there's nothing like being careful!"

John Black gave the man a puzzled regard.

Pettibone put the atomizer away, got out a large magnifying glass and peered closely at the aged scroll. He studied the thing for long moments. He said nothing.

John Black sat fidgeting, anxious to hear the verdict.

But Pettibone seemed to have gone into a sort of trance. He sat staring at the scroll, still saying nothing. Only once did he speak, and then to read something aloud as though to himself.

"Cheops in the realm of the Fourth Dynasty of Pharaoh " Then the Egyptologist's words trailed off into a mumbled jargon. His lips moved, but he said nothing aloud.

Sweat popped out on John Black's forehead. He fidgeted with his fat hands.

Finally, Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone looked up. He put down the magnifying glass and leaned back in his desk chair. He said:

"This will take a little time. Could you come back, say, in about two hours?"

John Black decided that there was little he could do about the delay. These authorities, as a rule, were touchy individuals. He agreed to the suggestion.

But when he returned, he was almost a nervous wreck. The strain of waiting to hear the verdict was terrific. He sat down, watched Pettibone stare again at the scroll for long moments. He demanded:

"Well?"

Pettibone finally spoke.

"This one," he said, "is just like all the others. A hopeless mix-up. Utter fools must have written it."

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John Black leaped to his feet, trembling. "Then you mean "

"The scroll," announced Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone, "is worthless!"

LATER, John Black took his ancient scroll and his copper cylinder and went home, after paying the Egyptologist a ten-dollar fee for his services. He was thoroughly disgusted.

He decided to ship the blasted thing back to his cousin in Egypt. But this was before he had read the evening newspapers.

It was a custom for John Black to read the evening papers thoroughly each night before retiring. He lived alone, except for a manservant who kept mostly to himself. The servant was a deaf-mute, and therefore not a very talkative companion. But he was a good workman, thrifty, and thus John Black kept him around his home constantly. In fact, Jo as the deaf-mute was called had a bedroom across the hall from John Black's own.

Jo had gone to bed when John Black came upon the item in the newspaper. It read:

### MILLIONAIRE OIL KING TO FINANCE PLAYGROUND

The article below the heading on Page 3 went on to state that a local millionaire was going to sponsor the largest playground ever built for the children of New York City. His act was commended. There was a lot of ballyhoo about the wealthy man.

John Black had read halfway through the article when his small pink eyes became suddenly thoughtful. He quickly got the telephone book and looked up the phone number of another famous New York millionaire.

A. B. Chickerelli had been an immigrant boy who had made good in a large way. He was head of the largest banking chain in New York. He was a member of the Stock Exchange. He owned yachts and race horses. He was president of Regal Foods, Inc.

John Black, after fifteen minutes of clever persuasion, got A. B. Chickerelli on the phone at his Fifth-Avenue home. John Black spent another fifteen minutes giving himself a build-up.

He mentioned the fact that he was elder at a certain church, on the board of trustees at another, the author of various treatises on religion. He convinced A. B. Chickerelli that he was a very good-living, pious man.

And so, he wanted to know, would it be possible for him John Black to make an appointment for the next day? There was something of utmost importance, a little matter that might mean a fortune to A. B. Chickerelli.

The millionaire was finally convinced of the sincerity of John Black's proposition. Chickerelli was not a person to pass up an opportunity to make a dollar. He granted an appointment at his Wall Street office for ten the following morning.

John Black hung up, giving a satisfied long sigh. He returned to the table where he had carelessly thrown down the copper cylinder upon returning from the Egyptologist's. He picked up the tube fondly, as though it were something again very precious. He took it upstairs with him to his bedroom and laid it on a chair near the bed.

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Then he undressed, got on his knees beside the bed and said his prayers. He climbed beneath the sheets with the satisfied feeling of a man who has taken advantage of a precarious opportunity.

The time was approximately 10:30.

It must have been close to midnight when John Black was awakened by the guttural, terrified scream from the bedroom across the hall.

THE first thing John Black thought of was Jo his deaf–mute servant. And so he tumbled out of bed and raced across the hall. Even as he crossed the hallway he heard a loud thump from Jo’s room, as though something had fallen heavily. He flung open the servant’s door and started into the room. And drew up with a startled gasp.

Light from a street lamp outside the house shone into the bedroom. It cast a diffused, dim glow over the heavy carpeting of the bedroom. Sprawled out, partially revealed by the light, was the heavily built deaf–mute. The servant lay unmoving.

Stunned for the moment, John Black moved cautiously across the room. A bit of light angling between the window curtains touched Jo’s mouth and half of his face. What John Black saw held him petrified with dread.

The servant’s mouth hung open slackly. His eyes, oddly glazed, stared unseeingly upward toward the ceiling.

His spine tingling, John Black dared a step closer. He listened intently, straining his ears against the tight, heavy silence of the room. He realized the truth.

The deaf–mute was not breathing!

John Black was on the verge of jumping back to the hallway, to hurry downstairs and call a doctor, when something caught his gaze. Something that fluoresced with a weird blue light, a fat round thing that looked like a beetle!

And the beetle was on the forehead of the dead manservant!

As John Black watched, horrified, the fat beetle seemed to move across the dead man’s forehead. Summoning his courage, Black took another step closer. And watched.

Then he knew that a trick of the light had made it only appear that the beetle had crawled. It was still in the same place, in the center of the servant’s forehead. It seemed to be some sort of a mark, like the mark *of a scarab!*

That was it, John Black decided. A scarab! He had seen pictures of the things. In fact, there had been some of them in the characters drawn on the scroll!

The sudden remembrance of the thing brought John Black up taut. He spun toward his own bedroom, dashing to the chair where he had left the copper cylinder. He started to pick the thing up, suddenly recoiled from the tube and stared at it worriedly. Avoiding it completely, he backed toward the doorway, removed the key from the lock, inserted it on the outside and locked the bedroom door behind him.

Then he dashed downstairs and called the doctor. He stayed down there until the medical man arrived. He had a story all made up by the time the man arrived.

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Going up the stairs with the thin, alert-looking doctor in tow, John Black explained smoothly, "Poor Jo. He's had the spells before. Fits, I'd say. They had weakened his heart, poor fellow. This one killed him!"

The doctor did not doubt John Black's words. For Black was a fine, upstanding man in the community. He did a lot to help charitable organizations. He was a pillar of goodness.

The doctor preceded John Black into the dead man's room. Black himself switched on the lights. The doctor could not see John Black's wide, staring pink eyes as they sought out the corpse.

For John Black had said nothing about the scarab's mark. He would let the medical man figure that out for himself. He didn't want to explain anything about the copper cylinder, or that this thing might have any connection.

Moving forward, the doctor in front of him, John Black held his breath as he waited for the discovery. And then, scarcely controlling the outcry that tried to force its way from his throat, he stared. He stared and felt a cold chill race down his spine.

The sign of the scarab was gone!

### Chapter III. THE CURSE

AT one o'clock that same morning, the undertaker's conveyance drove up to John Black's house. A few moments later it departed, along with the doctor, with the corpse.

About fifteen minutes after this, John Black himself went out. Though it was a fairly warm night, John Black was wearing a long topcoat that came almost to his ankles. He was carrying the suitcase that he had used on the preceding afternoon when he had seen the expert on Egyptology.

At the nearest corner, he located a cab, hailed the driver and climbed in. He seemed to be nervous and in a hurry.

The two men who had followed John Black down the street, keeping to the shadowy darkness of doorways as they did so, stared as John Black's milky-pink features were revealed when he stepped into the cab.

One man quickly hailed another cruising taxi. The other blurted, "It's the wrong guy! That wasn't the servant at all!"

His partner grunted. "You're tellin' me! That was Black. That means he didn't croak!"

"There musta been a mistake! Wait'll Lou hears "

The other man grabbed his arm. Both men were near a street light. The lamp glow revealed their square, blocky faces. The two heavily built men were two of the four bodyguards that had accompanied the Egyptian messengers. Both looked worried.

"Lou's not gonna hear," said the first man. "We'll trail Black. We'll catch him, somehow."

"You mean, we'll grab the suitcase?"

"Yeah," snapped the other.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

The cab had drawn up to the curb. Both big men piled into the rear. They gave orders to the driver to trail the other cab, now a good two blocks down the wide avenue. For the time being, until they had worked out a plan, they merely ordered the other car kept in sight.

In the vicinity of Forty-second Street, the first cab swung left and headed toward Times Square. It turned right on Broadway, drew up to a stop near the Times Building.

The two men who were trailing John Black were a scant half a block behind when the first cab stopped. They ordered their driver to do likewise.

They watched John Black hop out of his taxi. They were on the verge of getting out and following him, when one man grabbed his partner's arm, rapped, "Wait! He ain't carryin' the suitcase. He's left it in the cab!"

They waited. Apparently John Black was going to return.

One of the two suggested, "We could grab it here."

"Fool!" complained the other. "You wanna get nailed by the law right here in Times Square? He's probably just getting cigarettes. We'll keep following him until we get a chance to run him to the curb on some side street."

"O. K."

They waited. John Black returned in about three minutes. He got back into his cab and the driver pulled out into the thin streams of after-midnight traffic. The car headed downtown. In the Twenties, it swung east. The side street was a long one, and especially dark.

One of the two big fellows leaned forward and spoke to the driver.

"Force that hack ahead over to the curb, bud." He dropped a bill through the open window behind the front seat. It was a ten-spot.

The driver grinned and stepped on the gas.

A moment later there was a squeal of brakes as he swung sharply right, cutting off the first cab and running it up onto the sidewalk. The first driver leaped out, cursing and making a lot of noise. In New York, cab drivers never come to blows. They merely make noise.

The two hard-looking individuals piled out also, leaped toward the rear of the first cab. But John Black had already gone out the door on the other side. He was racing frantically down the street, his long coat billowing out behind him.

One man started to jump after him. But his partner yelled, "Hold it! He's left the suitcase *here* in the cab!"

Since the suitcase and its contents seemed to be what they wanted, they forgot all about John Black and hurried into the cab. They climbed out with the suitcase, returned to their own taxi. To the first driver, they called, "Sorry, son, but that blasted so-and-so snatched our bag."

They ordered their own driver to return uptown. They had a last fleeting glimpse of John Black diving down into a subway entranceway.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

Then they settled down to examining the contents of the long suitcase. They quickly flung it open. And stared.

It was filled with newspapers, old shoes and two bricks.

WITH something like terror slowly spreading over their hard features, the two men stared at the otherwise empty contents of the suitcase. Sweat popped out on their brows.

One murmured shakily, "You know . . . what this means, Jake?"

Jake appeared to know only too well.

"Yeah," he whispered.

"Lou's gonna do something about it."

"Yeah. He will, all right."

"You ever see a guy die, Jake?"

The other big fellow trembled. "Like the way Davy did? The time that he crossed up Lou?"

His partner nodded. "Like that," he said.

"What do we do?" The palms of Jake's hands were moist with sweat. "What do you think could have happened to that damned cylinder, Steve?"

"I've got an idea," said Steve.

"What?"

"When Black went into the Times Square Building, he didn't buy cigarettes. That's why he was wearin' that long coat, too!"

"Coat?"

"Sure. Don't you get it? He had the cylinder beneath the coat. The suitcase was just to throw us off. He took that cylinder down there where all those subway entrances are and hid it in one of them dime lockers. That's what he done!"

"There's a thousand of them! Them lockers are all over the place down there beneath Times Square!"

"Sure. An' night an' day that place is crowded with people changing trains. We ain't got a chance of finding that cylinder. Besides, you'd hafta have a key."

As the two talked worriedly, in low voices, their driver had been cruising around. He suddenly turned his head and called through the window, "Where to, gents?"

Jake and his partner looked at one another. It was Steve who said: "There's no out. We'll have to tell Lou. Then we'll take turns watching them subway lockers and maybe Black will come back tomorrow."

"Who's gonna tell him?"



## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

They thought about that for a while.

Then Steve said, "We'll draw straws. *One* of us has gotta do it."

He took out a cigar, lit it, blew out the match. He placed it side by side with a fresh match, so that the burned end was down. He said, "Draw one?"

Steve himself was left the burned match. His jaw set grimly and he said, "All right; let's go."

They gave the driver the name of a street downtown. The cab swung around in the street. They rode in silence, both men thinking of what might be in store for them.

Apparently, Lou was someone to be feared.

Some time later, the cab swung from the avenue, rolled through a side street. Steve leaned forward and gave a house number. He started to sit back again in the seat in order to speak to his burly partner.

But something held him on the edge of the seat. He was staring out the right-side window of the cab. Steve's eyes were abruptly wide with astonishment and something else. He grabbed his partner's arm, cried, "Did you see that?"

But the one named Jake, obviously, had already seen. He was trembling. He blurted:

"Yeah. Just as the guy walked beneath that last street light, I got a good look."

Steve gasped. "But it *couldn't* be! What would he be doing down *here*?"

Then, as though in answer to his own question, he jumped. He exclaimed, "You don't think he *knows*? About that Johnny guy! About how we "

Steve's partner had swiftly jerked forward and was speaking to the driver. He rapped, "Get outta this neighborhood. Just drive around anywhere but not here. *Hurry!*"

The cab moved away from there.

In the rear seat, the two men sat, trembling, white-faced. Even after they had turned the next corner, they stared back through the rear window.

Jake, finally trying to show a little courage, said, "Maybe I was wrong. Maybe I've just been thinking too much about the guy."

"But you still think that it was . . . was "

Steve finished for him, "Doc Savage?"

The other man nodded as though a death sentence had just been placed on his head.

The two hard-jawed men drove around in the cab for about half an hour. They avoided the neighborhood where they had seen Doc Savage, for apparently they were more fearful of the bronze man than they were of the man referred to as Lou.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

Finally, they returned. The side streets seemed to be deserted. They should be, at this hour of the night. They directed their driver to the address that had been given earlier.

Steve said, "Just slow up. I'll drop off."

Jake, his partner, nodded. "Good idea. I'll keep riding around and pick you up in about twenty minutes. Then you can tell me what Lou said."

When the cab slowed, Steve jumped out. His partner slammed the door and ordered the driver to proceed. Jake stared back through the window. He could see no sign of Steve's heavy-set form. Steve, wisely, must have taken to a doorway until he was certain that no one was observing his actions.

The cab driver drove Jake over to one of the all-night lunchrooms on Sixth Avenue. There, they killed time drinking coffee. Once the driver remarked:

"You guys sure are being awful careful about something!"

Jake nodded. "You'd be careful, too, if you knew what we're dealing with!"

The driver waited for further explanation of Jake's remark. But Jake remained silent, brooding over his coffee, his eyes worried.

Later, they returned to pick up Steve.

They cruised slowly through the shadowy street. Here and there a street lamp cast saffron shadows on the sidewalk. No one was about.

Near the address they sought again, the driver slowed his hack. Abruptly he turned around in the seat, exclaimed, "Hey! There's something wrong!"

A moment later, he had stopped, was leaping out to the curb. Jake followed.

And in the next instant fear took hold of him like a live, repulsive thing and left him trembling, slightly ill.

The man on the sidewalk was writhing and moaning. Blood drooled from his mouth. Even as they watched, the body gave a last convulsive jerk, and then went all limp. The eyes remained open in a horrible stare of death.

But it wasn't this so much that held Jake rigid. It was the awful thing that was on Steve's face. He stared at it with bulging eyes, then jerked his gaze to the house before which he stood. Though the house was in utter darkness, it suddenly seemed to hold a great menace for Jake. He recoiled, started backing toward the cab.

The cab driver, seeing the expression on the big fellow's face, started backing off also. He couldn't understand it. But he, too, was horrified at sight of the thing on the dead man's cheek.

It was a round, fat beetle a thing with legs. About the beetle there was a sickly blue glow. The weird light seemed to make the fat beetle more bloated and repulsive.

Jake shuddered and, even though he was trembling with horror, he reached out a hand to brush the ugly bug from Steve's face. As he did so, it disappeared.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

With a half scream, Jake leaped back, grabbed the cab driver by the arm, almost flung him into the car. Jake started gibbering like a man suddenly gone insane.

"Get *away* from here. . . . Hurry! It's a curse, that's what it is! Doc Savage . . . maybe he knows! We . . . we should have never touched that cylinder! We're all gonna die!"

Jake had half fallen into the rear seat. The cab was already whirling away from the spot. The driver leaned back, queried, "What the hell? What's it all about, bud? Wasn't that your friend lying back there?"

But Jake had fainted.

### Chapter IV. MENACE IN BLUE

THE day was Sunday, and it looked as if there was going to be rain. John Black, still wearing his long topcoat, was walking through the hazy gray of early morning. He had been walking and thinking for hours.

His round pink-white face was worried. He was faced with the momentous task of making a decision, and he could not decide what to do.

He had the appointment with A. B. Chickerelli, multimillionaire. Chickerelli must be interested in the proposition Black had for him, otherwise he would never have made this Sunday-morning appointment at his office.

And then, at the hour of the appointment, John Black should be at church helping with the collection. He always did that religiously each Sunday morning. He had overlooked it when he had called A. B. Chickerelli last night.

Or he could call Doc Savage!

There was something about this copper-cylinder business that worried him. Take that sign of the scarab, the death of his manservant, Jo.

And the attack by the two, ugly-looking fellows in the cab! The whole thing was getting too menacing.

John Black had heard of this remarkable fellow Doc Savage. It was said that he delved into such mysteries. Perhaps he should turn the whole thing over to him.

John Black kept thinking about that, and kept walking. He walked for another two hours. It had started to rain.

Finally, he ducked into a drugstore, located the line of phone booths in the rear, started looking up the phone number of Doc Savage.

He found the name Clark Savage, Jr., and the address checked with a skyscraper location that John Black had heard was Doc Savage's headquarters.

He dialed that number.

When the connection was made, a voice a squeaky, small voice was saying, "An' here's another one for you, shyster: Confucius say "

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

There immediately followed a roar that sounded like, "Ye—e—ow!" The voice faded away from the phone. John Black held the receiver, puzzled.

And then the voice came back, the squeaky, small voice. It seemed more subdued. It asked, "Hello? Who's calling, please?"

John Black was just going to speak when, through the phone-booth glass door, his pink-eyed gaze happened to travel to a sign above the soda fountain in the drugstore. The fountain extended the length of the store, and the sign was opposite the phone booth. It said:

Millionaire's Special. Today only. 15 cents.

Something about the advertisement for the special ice-cream sundae held John Black's gaze. He wondered if it was sort of a prediction for him. Today was Sunday. Perhaps

Slowly, he hung up the receiver without speaking. As he did so, a voice was crackling in the receiver, "Hey! What the heck?"

John Black hurried out of the store, headed toward Times Square. A little later he had removed the copper cylinder from the dime locker where he had placed it last night. Though the long tube was wrapped in newspapers, John Black still moved in half terror as he boarded a subway train for downtown New York and Wall Street.

A. B. CHICKERELLI didn't look like a millionaire. He was small and thin, and plainly dressed. His suit looked as though it had come from Fourteenth Street. Special, marked down to \$17.95. This week only!

But he was full of a nervous energy that gave some idea of his capabilities. He walked restlessly up and down the carpeted office as John Black outlined his idea.

It was John Black who sat behind the millionaire's desk, his small, fat hands folded across his stomach in the pious attitude.

First, John Black had stated a string of references upon which A. B. Chickerelli had immediately checked. He had made almost a dozen phone calls. He had convinced himself that John Black was a very good-living citizen.

And now, for the past hour, he had listened to John Black's idea. Black finished with:

"There's a fortune awaiting us over there. My cousin knows the exact location of the place. All we need now is the right people at this end, men who are not afraid to put up a dollar and let themselves in for a little adventure. They won't regret it. They'll double or triple their money!"

Chickerelli came back to the huge desk and stood staring at the long scroll spread out there. John Black spoke with smooth, confident words. He started reading the ancient writing in the old manuscript.

He read as though he were the greatest living authority on Egyptology ever known. There was no hesitation as he pored over the manuscript.

And there should not be. John Black had been memorizing this speech throughout the night, as he had walked the streets.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

Finally, A. B. Chickerelli proved that he was a smart business man who did not pass up opportunities, even on a Sunday. He had a secretary waiting in the adjoining office. He called the man in, dictated a contract, presented it to John Black.

The contract placed John Black in full charge of the expedition. It put him in charge of the society that would raise all funds for the project. Only millionaires would be approached, was one stipulation. Chickerelli, apparently, knew the right people. He had no worries about getting enough wealthy members to put up the cash. When, the contract stated, John Black felt that there was enough money to proceed, applications for membership would be closed.

Chickerelli drew up a list of names. There were perhaps three dozen well-known wealthy men on the list. He said:

"By the time we have consulted the first twelve, we should have enough for the expedition. Not one of those first twelve will pass this chance up. They're too anxious to make a dollar."

John Black signed the contract, as did Chickerelli. The secretary and another employee, called in for a moment, signed as witnesses. The contract was dated as of the previous day, Saturday.

John Black, before departing, looked very sanctimonious and said, "Bless you, my dear fellow. You shall never regret this fine move. Your name will go down among the great in history."

A. B. Chickerelli, the deal over, shrugged his thin shoulders nervously and held the door open. He was not one to waste time. He had other things to do yet today. He planned to call on his millionaire friends and get them lined up in the expedition. And then Black could see them first thing in the morning. He could explain the idea in detail and start collecting the funds.

Chickerelli didn't give a damn about becoming a name in history. Black was so trustful that he had even left the copper cylinder and scroll in his care. A. B. Chickerelli figured that he had just pulled a smart business deal.

And in the hallway outside the office, as the door closed behind him, John Black rubbed his chubby hands together and sighed and murmured, "Bless me."

He

figured that he had just instigated what was to be the biggest fraud ever worked.

ONE of the first wealthy men to sign up for the expedition was ex-Senator Mortimer Stelle. Stelle had made quite a sum of money in railroads. That was before the depression.

Since then, unknown to the government, he had been connected with various other enterprises, some of which he failed to report upon in his yearly income-tax statements. But certain treasury department officials were getting too curious. Mortimer Stelle thought it might be a good idea to get away to some far country for a while. Here was a chance to make a little money without being too close to home.

He signed up first thing Monday morning.

There was another reason for his interest in the affair. Stelle collected Oriental treasures. He had only a few items from the country of the Nile. He'd like to add to the collection.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

On Monday evening, remembering something he had wanted to ask A. B. Chickerelli about the expedition, he put through a call to the millionaire. He was seated alone in his library, a vast collection of Oriental treasures surrounding him in the huge, paneled room. The collection including hunting knives, art work, pottery and porcelains was on shelves, protected in large glass cases, mounted on plaques on the walls.

Mortimer Stelle looked at the stuff proudly as he conversed with his friend, Chickerelli. He had visions of the things he hoped to add to this valuable collection. In fact

Abruptly, as he talked, his words trailed off and he stared across the room. He stared in horror at the small, uncanny, blue-glowing thing that seemed to move across the Oriental rug.

Like a distant, small flame glowing, the blue spot came closer, paused as though seeking something, then continued its silent, awesome approach across the carpet.

Once, as it hesitated on an intricate design in the Oriental rug, it appeared Stelle thought to look like some sort of bug.

Then the millionaire gave a start, jumped to his feet with the phone and receiver still clutched in his trembling hands.

For it was a bug. *A scarab!* Fat, loathsome hideous!

It leaped closer, almost touched Stelle's feet.

The ex-senator screamed. From the receiver which he still held clutched in his hand, Chickerelli's voice demanded, "What's the matter with you?"

Stelle gasped, "It . . . it's a scarab! It's moving. It's going to . . . to *touch me!*"

At the other end of the line, A. B. Chickerelli heard a terrified scream. Then something like a gurgling sound. And then silence.

He rattled the hook, tried to get Stelle back on the wire. There was no answer.

Remembering that Mortimer Stelle had another, unlisted phone number, he looked it up in his notebook and put through a call. Finally, after several moments, there was an answer.

Chickerelli recognized the expressionless, flat voice of Stelle's butler. Briefly, Chickerelli explained about how funny his friend had sounded over the wire. Perhaps Jarvis, the butler, should investigate.

Chickerelli held the phone while the butler proceeded to do so.

It was less than a moment later that the startled exclamation came to him.

"Mr. Chickerelli! Oh, good heaven, sir!"

The millionaire jumped at the tone of the butler's voice.

"Yes, Jarvis," he prodded. "What's wrong?"

"The master " the butler started, his voice quaking. "He . . . he's dead!"

"Dead?"

"Ye-es. The poleax is in his skull, sir. It's quite horrible!"

"The poleax?" prodded Chickerelli. "What's *that*?"

"A copper-bladed ax from the master's collection, sir. It's Egyptian. It used to hang here on the wall in the study. And now " The butler's words ended in a moan.

Chickerelli hung up, called the police, notified them of what the butler had told him. Then, for long moments, he sat thinking of the copper cylinder that was in a vault in his own home. He wondered just what was the real significance of the scroll contained within the cylinder. Perhaps he should have an expert look the thing over.

The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that he should further investigate. There was, he recalled, a man who had traveled all over the world, who was said to be an authority on Egyptology.

William Harper Littlejohn, the archaeologist!

But there was someone else who should know more than Littlejohn himself. The millionaire had often heard the name.

Doc Savage.

A. B. Chickerelli picked up the phone again and called the headquarters of the Man of Bronze.

## Chapter V. THE PRINCESS

THE skyscraper headquarters of Doc Savage were on the eighty-sixth floor of a block-square building in lower Manhattan. Entrance to the secluded headquarters was by means of a high-speed elevator that ran, without stop, to this topmost floor.

But you just didn't ride up there and barge in and talk to Doc Savage. The bronze man was a difficult person to interview. First, you had to state your case to one of Doc Savage's aids, and then if your problem was something very, very vital, a situation that meant the punishing of evildoers and the righting of a wrong you might get past the reception committee.

This reception committee was handled by two of the Doc Savage aids commonly called Monk and Ham.

Monk was an apelike individual about as broad as he was long. He had no forehead to speak of, enough mouth for several men, and visible parts of him were covered with a stubby red hair that looked like the kind of shingle nails used on barn roofs. His full name was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, but you didn't call him that if you wanted to keep in good with the insurance companies.

Also, Monk was one of the world's leading chemists.

Ham was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, a former Harvard Law School honor graduate, and perhaps one of the best-dressed men in the United States. The word "dapper" described him well.

Ham was seldom without an innocent-looking black cane that, in reality, contained a slender sword whose point was tipped with a drug made to produce quick unconsciousness.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

At the moment, both Monk and Ham were falling over themselves in an attempt to make an impression on the trimly built, small, dark girl who stood in the doorway leading into the reception room.

The girl had the exotic, olive-hued features of a woman of the Orient. She was as dainty-looking as a costly gem. She had large, deeply mysterious eyes.

Monk beamed and said in his strangely childlike voice, "My dear lady, come, come in! If there's something we can do for you "

Ham elbowed Monk aside. He bowed gallantly.

"This oaf," he said, indicating Monk, "is only employed here to scrub floors. May I help you?"

The girl merely stared at the two. Apparently she couldn't quite figure them out, which was nothing surprising. A lot of people had the same reaction when they met the two aids. Monk and Ham liked nothing better than a good argument. Most of the time it seemed that they were ready to cut each other's throats, whereas oddly they were the best of friends.

Ham, thinking the girl did not understand English, tried a different tack. He figured her for an Egyptian. And so he rattled off something in that language.

The girl said quietly, "I speak English. I must see Doc Savage. It is a matter of gravest importance."

Ham gulped. The girl spoke excellent English. He quickly drew up a chair, saw her seated. He tried to get in front of bulky Monk, but wasn't quite successful.

Lady," the hairy chemist blurted, "you just tell us what's wrong, and we'll get Doc Savage to help you."

Smartly dressed Ham shot his partner a brief look. It was quite obvious that the chemist had gone overboard completely for this exotic-looking creature. Monk was like that. He admired the ladies, especially pretty ones.

Ham used a more subtle approach.

"You say there is something of grave importance?" he prompted. "If you'll give us some idea "

The dark-eyed girl reached for her purse. She opened it and started feeling inside for something, saying, "Do you know this person "

At that moment, there was some sort of commotion in the doorway leading to the wide entrance hall to the elevator. So interested had the two Doc Savage aids been in the beautiful girl, that they had failed to close the door after her entrance.

The girl looked up, stared, abruptly leaped to her feet and screamed.

"That's two of them!" she cried. "The ones I was going to tell you about!"

There was something like a burst of thick black smoke in the wide doorway leading into the room. It spread quickly, enveloped Ham, Monk and the girl.

The men who took hold of Ham were within the concealing black cloud.



## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

IT was Monk who quickly pushed the small girl behind an armchair of the reception room. Then he dived into the smoke that was billowing in from the doorway and joined the fight.

Ham had tried to get free his slender sword, but the cane was knocked from his hands. He yelled something to Monk.

The chemist crashed into somebody, got hold of a neck and started squeezing.

Ham gasped, "Dunce! You've got the wrong one!"

Monk let go. Heavy fists crashed into his homely face. Somebody kicked him in the shins.

Monk gave a bellow and started grabbing hold of weaving forms. He couldn't see a thing in the black cloud, but he knew that the bodies he held were too solid for that of his dapper, slender-waisted partner Ham. Monk flung two men to the floor.

Immediately two other fellows seized him. Ham, from the assorted sounds, was having his hands full with a couple of others.

Monk spilled another man, grinned in the blackness and let out another roar. He was enjoying himself completely, as he did in any fight. And gone was his squeaky voice. He bellowed.

The fight was just getting worked up to a good noisy racket when a new person whipped into the mêlée. Startling, breath-taking speed followed. Monk became confused. He had never witnessed so much fast movement in his life. He'd grab a man, prepare to sock him, then find the fellow whisked away. There were groans and curses, and finally, in the concealing cloud, the sounds of running steps on the marble corridor just outside the reception room.

There was abruptly a sickening, heavy odor in the room. Monk and Ham choked. They fell back. There no longer seemed to be any men fighting them, and their heads felt funny.

They got down on their hands and knees and tried to maintain consciousness. Both heard the sound of a powerful exhaust fan running. The black cloud cleared. So did their heads.

Doc Savage was helping them to their feet. He had already placed the small dark girl in an armchair.

Doc said, "You shouldn't have left the hall door open."

Ham stared. "Where are they?" he demanded.

"Gone," announced Doc Savage. "They must have used gas on the elevator operator, as they tried to do on you. They had the elevator waiting for them."

Monk stared at the bronze man. He knew, now, that Doc was the one who accounted for the blurred, furious movement that had been added to the fight.

Standing alone, Doc Savage was an unusual person. Beside Monk and Ham, he was remarkable. It was the physical development of the bronze man that was striking.

He was a giant with Herculean muscles, and yet his development was so symmetrical that his true size would not be noticed were he standing alone in the room. His skin was of a bronze color that must have come from

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

countless tropical suns. There was a thing of striking handsomeness about his features.

The eyes were most compelling of all. Of an unusual flake-gold quality, they were almost hypnotic.

Even at first glance, it was obvious that there were many unusual qualities about this bronze giant.

Doc Savage was looking at the girl. Her eyes had been closed. But they opened now. She straightened in the chair, her eyes wide and fearful. And then, at sight of the bronze man, relief came into her lovely face and she relaxed.

She said, "You . . . you're Doc Savage?"

Doc nodded.

The girl leaped to her feet. She was again reaching into her purse, as she said, "Those terrible men, the ones who tried to capture your men just now, they've been following me ever since I got off the boat."

"Boat?" Doc asked quietly.

Monk and Ham both looked interested.

"Yes," said the olive-skinned girl. "My name is Princess Amen-Amen. I'm from Egypt."

There was a flickering of the bronze man's remarkable eyes.

"Yes?" he prompted.

"I came to tell you about . . . about " She was still fumbling in her purse. She brought out a small card on which a name was written.

" about one of your aids called William Harper Littlejohn!" the girl finished.

Monk jumped. "Blazes!" he yelled. "You know about Johnny?"

Ham said, "Good girl!"

Doc said nothing. He was looking at the girl's left hand. She had removed her gloves before reaching into the purse for the card. On the fourth finger on her left hand she was wearing a ring containing a large stone of rare sapphire-blue. The stone, even in the daylight, seemed to give off a slight glow.

Built into the stone was a scarab.

"EXACTLY what," asked Doc, "do you know about William Harper Littlejohn?"

"He has been captured! Captured by some of those very same men who followed me here!"

Doc was silent a moment. Monk grabbed the girl's arm. Doc had told them about Johnny's strange disappearance from the boat. There had been no word from the archaeologist since. Monk and Ham were worried about their friend.

Doc next asked a question that startled the two aids.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

"Has the capture anything to do with the copper cylinder?" the bronze man asked.

The girl nodded, her dark eyes worried. "Yes. Very much. There is a curse on the copper cylinder. Your aid, this one called Johnny, is in grave danger. He is liable to die."

Monk put in, puzzled, "What's this all about, Doc? What about a copper cylinder?"

Whatever Doc knew about the mystery of the cylinder, he had not yet imparted to the two aids. For the moment, Doc did not explain further. Instead, he looked at the girl.

"You know where Johnny is?"

"Yes, I think so. If you send someone with me "

Doc nodded. "Monk and Ham will accompany you." He turned his attention to the two aids. "You have heard of A. B. Chickerelli, the banker and millionaire?"

Both nodded.

"But what the heck " Monk started.

"Chickerelli," said Doc, "has possession of an ancient scroll contained in a copper cylinder. It is the thing that has something to do with Johnny's recent disappearance. Chickerelli is organizing an expedition to Egypt, in connection with this thing. He called me at a late hour last night, and is due here" Doc consulted his watch "in twenty minutes."

"And what has all this got to do with Johnny?" Ham wanted to know.

Doc spoke quietly, but there was a tone to his voice that held both aids tense.

"There is a curse attached to this thing, it appears. Johnny got too close to something, and because of that he has been captured. And, last night, a man died because of the curse."

The bronze man mentioned the name of Mortimer Steele, the millionaire found with an ancient ax blade through his skull.

Monk stared. Ham whistled.

"And so," finished Doc, "there is need for hurry." He looked at the Egyptian girl. "We have a lot for which to thank Princess Amen–Amen."

Monk goggled at the girl. "I'll say. Let's go!"

With Ham gallantly taking the girl's arm before the chemist could interfere, they started out. At the same moment, from the open doorway to a room beyond, two strange-looking creatures came following quickly.

ONE animal was a runt pig, scrawny, homely, and with a snout made for poking into gopher holes. The pig was Monk's pet, and was called Habeas Corpus.

The girl let out a frightened, small scream at the sight of the pig and the other animal that was accompanying it.

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Chemistry, Ham's pet, was a small ape that looked for all the world like a pint-size reproduction of hairy Monk. The two pets were a source of continual bickering between Monk and Ham. And they accompanied their masters almost everywhere.

On the way out, Ham said to the girl, "Chemistry is really a distant relative of Monk, only more intelligent."

The chemist let out a howl of rage. He poked a finger at the smartly dressed lawyer, touched the girl's arm, said, "Don't believe a thing that shyster lawyer tells you. He's married and has thirteen half-baked kids. All crazy!"

Princess Amen-Amen gave a smile that would have melted ice, and remarked, "My, what two charming men!"

Later, outside the building, the girl indicated a car, explained, "I'll drive you. It will save time. I have every reason to believe that your friend Johnny is being held in an old warehouse over in Brooklyn."

They climbed in, Monk pulling a fast one and managing to get a position next to the girl's trim figure in the front seat. Ham sat glaring, on the outside.

The girl made good time in traffic. Half an hour later, they pulled up before an abandoned old warehouse near the Brooklyn water front. The place looked as if it was ready to fall down any moment.

They parked. The girl led the way through a cluttered alleyway and around to a rear loading platform. Windows of the old building were broken.

Large steel doors were at the rear of the loading platform, but off to the left was a smaller entrance doorway. It was locked.

Monk shot his huge fist through a small glass pane, reached inside, unlatched a snap lock. They proceeded inside.

The building was musty, decaying. The girl clutched both aids' arms.

"Where?" prodded Ham.

She indicated a staircase off to one side of a huge, empty storage room. "Up there. Third floor. That's what I heard them say last night. I followed some of those men here, but . . . but I was afraid."

Monk grinned. "Girlie, your troubles are over. Just let us lead the way!"

Monk barged forward, up the stairs, the others following. There was just enough light coming through the grimy windows that they could find their way. The old building was as silent as a tomb.

The third floor once had been a series of partitioned-off offices. Monk headed for the door of the first one. It seemed to lead through to a whole series of small rooms.

Behind him and Ham, the girl said, "From what I gathered, those terrible men left him tied up on this floor."

Monk slammed through the first office, into the second. Ham was right behind him.

The six gunmen seated around the walls of the room in the second office pointed their weapons at the two

Doc Savage men and grinned coolly.

A short, fat little man came out of a doorway that was apparently an entranceway to the next office in line. He had milky-pink skin and pink eyes. He had to squint in order to see well. Apparently his eyes were not as strong as most men's.

He was John Black.

He looked at the girl, gave a pleased sigh and folded his hands across his fat stomach in a pious gesture.

"Bless you, my dear," John Black said, "you really managed it, didn't you?"

## Chapter VI. PINK-EYED RASCAL

THE table was about four feet long and half that amount wide. It contained a glass top of opaque color. A peculiar, diffused light came up through the glass and made translucent the length of parchment spread across the glass. The parchment was a part of the ancient scroll removed from the copper cylinder. The remainder of Doc Savage's large laboratory was in temporary darkness.

Short, alert-looking A. B. Chickerelli stood beside the giant bronze man. He remained quiet as Doc Savage studied the ancient writing. Doc had said nothing for long moments.

Finally, Chickerelli said, "I've had a hunch. A man named John Black brought this thing to me." He described the albino. "I figure maybe he's trying to pull a fast one. That's why I need your advice, Doc Savage."

Doc nodded, still studying the scroll. He used a powerful magnifying glass. He went over the parchment inch by inch, and Chickerelli fidgeted nervously as he waited.

Doc finally straightened and announced, "This thing is worth a king's ransom. It gives the location of a tomb in Egypt that has never been opened. Apparently that tomb contains treasures of a fabulous value."

A. B. Chickerelli's eyes brightened. A pleased smile spread over his thin, sharp features.

"Good!" he snapped. "Then we'll go ahead with the expedition plans curse or no curse. I've lined up six new members. John Black is seeing them today. By the end of the week, we'll have "

They were interrupted by the flashing of a small red light high in the wall of the bronze man's laboratory. The flash indicated that there was a telephone call.

Doc excused himself, moved out to the library. Chickerelli followed.

A second later, the bronze man was handing the phone to the millionaire, saying, "For you. A Mr. Anthony Bascom calling."

As Chickerelli stepped to the phone, he said to Doc, "Fine. I've been hoping he'd come through. Bascom's wanted to get in on something like this expedition, and I've given him first call."

He lifted the phone, said, "Hello?"

And then, his brow furrowed, he sat there with the phone in his slim hands, listening. Once, he looked at Doc

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Savage. And then, abruptly, he exclaimed, "There's something wrong! Listen!"

He held out the phone.

Instead of taking it, Doc whirled to a built-in cabinet in one wall of the library. He flung open a door and flipped down a small switch.

The apparatus was one for shunting any incoming phone call into a loud-speaker arrangement that magnified the caller's voice many times, so that all in the room could hear.

First, from the loud-speaker, there was a sound like a gasp. There followed a startled cry: "Good Lord! There's something . . . here . . . in this room! It . . . it's *moving* . . . like a big, fat . . . bug!"

The voice broke off. But there came the sound of a man's breathing, labored, strained, somewhat terrible.

The scream followed.

IN the magnificent home of Anthony Bascom, Wall Street millionaire, the scream floated through the many rooms of the house, echoed down a staircase, reached the ears of a maid who was dusting a ship model in the library.

The maid stiffened in cold fear. The scream she had heard was a man's outcry, and it was quite awful. For a moment, the girl was too frightened to move. Then, gathering her courage, she raced through the wide hallway and back to the butler's pantry. She flung past a swinging door, located the man, dragged him back with here.

"Mr. Bascom . . . he's . . . something's wrong!" she stammered. She indicated the rooms above.

Together, the butler and the maid hurried up the stairs. They passed three guests' rooms, reached the master's big bedroom at the front of the hall. The butler, seeing the door open, stepped across the threshold, saying:

"Begging your pardon, sir, but the maid said "

He stopped, gasping with horror.

There was a wide mantel across the room, some distance away from the huge four-poster bed located at the far end of the vast room.

Anthony Bascom was lying beneath that white mantel, his stout form spread-eagled on his back. The bronze dagger was sticking from his heart.

Though a good part of the blade was buried in Bascom's chest, at least six inches of it still remained exposed. Atop this, there was a haft of carved sheet gold. Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics formed a part of the intricate carving.

The maid was standing with her clenched hand jammed against her mouth. Abruptly she started making peculiar sounds in her throat. She got one hand outstretched and pointed. "Lo . . . *look!*" she cried.

The scarab the fat, ugly-looking beetle was on the palm of Anthony Bascom's outflung hand. The butler stepped close. He was a former War veteran, and he prided himself on being a person who did not frighten easily. He stepped down, lifted the dead man's hand, stared at the scarab thing.

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He drew back, shuddering.

For the mark of the scarab had burned into the dead man's palm and left the stench of seared flesh floating in the air. Nearby, where it had toppled to the floor, was the phone that the stout millionaire must have been using when he died so horribly.

The butler picked it up, rattled the receiver, got the operator and put through a call to police headquarters.

Later, he led the terrified maid from the bedroom and back down the stairs. In the lower hallway, pink-eyed John Black had just been admitted by another maid who yet knew nothing about the murder.

The girl said, "A gentleman to see Mr. Bascom."

The butler looked gravely at fat little John Black. He motioned him into the library. He ordered the two maids into the kitchen, suggested that they stay there for the time being.

A moment later, to John Black, he announced the sudden death of Anthony Bascom.

John Black stared out of his pink eyes. "Dead?" he gasped.

"Murdered!" rapped the butler.

"Mur " Black started to breathe.

"Murdered with a strange-looking knife. Mr. Bascom told me about it once. It was given to him by an old friend, a member of the Explorers' Club. Egyptian, it is. I believe it is a relic of the Fourth Dynasty of Cheops "

John Black pressed his fat palms together in front of his chest, the fingers pointing upward. He looked upset.

"Oh, bless me, bless me!" he cried. "This is . . . is horrible!" He started backing toward the wide hallway. "Dear me, I mustn't disturb you at such a distressing moment as this. I . . . I'll see you later."

With that he turned, and almost ran from the house.

JOHN BLACK returned to the old warehouse in Brooklyn. He didn't appear very upset now. His pale, pink eyes were harsh, and he mounted the creaky old stairs of the decaying building as though he had some grim purpose in mind.

Monk, Ham and the pets were tied up in one of the offices on the third floor. With them now was gaunt Johnny, the archaeologist. Johnny was gagged, as well as bound.

Half a dozen men stood guard over the trio of Doc Savage aids. They hardly looked like the type who went on Sunday School picnics. Each man held a gun.

John Black snapped, "This is getting serious."

The others looked at him.

"Anthony Bascom just died strangely" John Black told about the details given him by the butler in the Bascom home.

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"Someone either is trying to eliminate the expedition members, or there is . . . is a curse on this business!"

Everyone stared.

One gunman looked worried. He exclaimed, "Maybe we oughta forget the whole thing. Me, I'm afraid of them scarab things! I "

"Shut up!" rapped John Black.

Then he continued, "We're not quitting now. There's almost a hundred grand deposited in the bank already for the expedition, and I have *control* of that account. Do you think I'm crazy?"

Someone asked, "But what about this Doc Savage?"

John Black snorted. "We're going to take care of him." He indicated Monk, Ham and Johnny. "We made a good start. We'll finish the job in the same way." He looked around. "Where's the princess?"

"Gone to try and trap a couple others of them Doc Savage aids. They weren't at Doc's headquarters this morning."

"Fine!" said Black. "And now " He stared down at the captives, his pink eyes squinting. "We'll move them to the boat. When we have the whole crowd of them, we'll finish the job."

Monk climbed up off the floor and bellowed, "Brother, we're gonna finish the job now!"

ONE thug said, "*Whoof*" loudly and landed on his back on the floor. Monk's hairy, massive fist had caught him beneath the jaw.

The chemist grabbed two more men, held their heads, then started cracking their skulls together. Shortly they fell down.

Others piled on the homely chemist. Monk hit one of them. The fellow screamed, fell to the floor, got up again. Monk bounced him on the skull with a chair which he had whipped up into his hands.

The man fell down again and didn't get up. Monk swung on his next opponent.

John Black, at the first move from Monk, had leaped clear of the fight. His hand slipped beneath his coat now, came out with what looked like a tiny pistol. He raised the gadget, pointed it at Monk's face and pressed the trigger.

A stream of liquid squirted into the chemist's small eyes. Monk let out a howl, released his hold on two of his opponents and grabbed at his face. His eyes! He staggered around the room, blinded, and as he did so the men moved in and kept hitting him over the head with various parts of a broken chair.

Monk finally fell down, groaned, then lay still.

John Black said harshly, "Fools! You should have tied him with cables. That fellow has the strength of half a dozen men!"

They tied Monk up again. Those who had been knocked out were revived. Everyone hurried out of the room until the acrid fumes of ammonia had cleared.



Then John Black directed the carrying of the captives down to the rear loading platform. Habeas, the pig, and Chemistry were also bound and gagged. The thugs handled them gingerly as the animals twisted and squirmed against their bindings.

The captives were loaded into a van that was parked behind the old warehouse. Five of the gunmen climbed in the rear. The sixth man drove, John Black seated beside him. The driver followed little-used streets on a route that led right down to the water front.

There, against an old dock, a boat was tied up. The wharf was deserted. The boat was a gasoline launch with a good-sized cabin. The captives were placed inside and their constricting cords made more secure. Each Doc Savage aid had been well gagged.

There was a door leading into the cabin. John Black snapped a padlock in place, motioned his men back to the van, ordered, "We'll return tonight. Now we'd better check up on that bronze guy."

### Chapter VII. DISAPPEARANCES

AT that moment, Doc Savage was in the death room of Anthony Bascom, millionaire. With him was alert-looking A. B. Chickerelli. The police had departed, puzzled by a type of death that was new in the city's crime history. A man killed by a dagger centuries old. It was uncanny!

The mark of the scarab burned into the dead man's hand, they did not try to explain.

Doc Savage was an honorary member of the police department. The commission had been given him in recognition of work done in the past. And so a busy inspector, already tied up with more crime cases than he could handle, had suggested that perhaps the bronze man could find some sort of clue. He had departed, leaving Doc Savage a free hand.

Doc, for the past several moments, had been moving slowly around the room. Chickerelli watched him, fidgeting nervously.

"Well?" Chickerelli finally asked. "What caused his death I mean, outside of the dagger? What's *behind* this menace?"

Doc did not immediately answer. Instead, he looked at the butler, waiting in the doorway to the bedroom. The butler was still stunned by the sudden death of Anthony Bascom.

"And so," Doc asked, obviously having been talking to the butler previously, "you have no idea who might have desired your employer's death?"

The man shook his head quickly.

"Mr. Bascom got along pretty good with almost everybody, sir," he said. "He had no enemies."

The long dagger with the carved handle had been turned over to the bronze man. He had placed it on a table, wrapped carefully in a handkerchief, though it was quite obvious that there would be no prints on the thing. The ancient, intricate carving made it impossible for prints to be retained. The handkerchief was just a precaution in case some foreign substance should be stuck on the handle.

"And you say there are at least half a dozen ways to enter this room?" Doc continued. "A stranger could have got up here while you were downstairs in the pantry?"

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The butler nodded again. He pointed to various French windows located on two sides of the long room.

"There's a balcony outside, sir. Anyone could easily climb up there by means of the trellis which circles this side of the house, below the balcony. And " He indicated a door at one end of the room. "And the bathroom leads through to Mrs. Bascom's room. That, too, leads to a side porch. And then there's the front stairway. Anybody could have slipped up here "

Doc nodded. He had learned that Bascom's wife and family were, at the moment, in Canada. Naturally, at such a time, the efficiency of the servants was probably lax. Several persons could have slipped upstairs, and the help probably would have not known the difference.

Doc opened one of the French doors they were unlocked stepped out onto the balcony, and looked around. Shortly, he returned and took something from a small, portable case that he had brought with him. The device he took with him looked like a boxlike affair with a lens at either end.

He went over the balcony flooring inch by inch with the scanning device.

Chickerelli, interested, followed outside and watched the bronze man's careful movements.

ABRUPTLY, Doc swung over the railing of the balcony, climbed down the vine-covered trellis, reached a terrace below. The terrace led to a broad sweep of smooth lawn. Doc continued his minute examination of the ground.

After a while he bent down close and appeared to be following something across the grass. He stopped when he came to a gravel pathway that wound through the estate. He returned to where the wealthy Wall Street millionaire was impatiently waiting.

"Find something?" Chickerelli prodded.

Doc nodded. "Sandal tracks," he said.

Chickerelli frowned.

"You mean, sneaker tracks, like the kind "

"A type of sandal," explained the bronze man, "that was used in ancient Egypt. A thong passed beneath the arch and held the shoe on."

Chickerelli stared. Then he blurted, "What do you make of this? Do you really think "

But Doc Savage had moved ahead into the bedroom once again. He suddenly seemed anxious to be on his way. He picked up the long dagger, put it away in a special pocket in an equipment vest that he wore beneath his suit coat. He prepared to leave.

From a chair, Chickerelli picked up the long copper cylinder that he had brought along from the bronze man's laboratory. On the way out, he handed it to Doc.

"I'd rather that you keep this," he said. "I'd feel safer if you stored it away some place. Do you mind?"

Doc took the long tubular container. "That will be all right," he said. He looked at Chickerelli, and his flake-gold eyes flickered slightly. "You still plan to go ahead with the expedition, then?"

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They had reached the street, where the bronze man's car was parked. Before he stepped into the car, the little wiry banker looked at Doc and said slowly, "Yes."

There was determination in his sharp voice. "Even though there is . . . is this apparent curse connected with it." His eyes clouded and he stared at Doc Savage. He added:

"What do you make of that scarab thing that hideous burn that was on Bascom's hand?"

Doc swung in behind the wheel of the car. His great shoulders were almost the width of the car doorway through which he moved. He said:

"Nothing yet." Doc made no further explanation. It was a habit of the bronze giant's to remain silent on a subject until he had the thing solved. At present, he was not ready to say what the significance of the scarab might be.

As they drove away from the curb, far down the street behind them another car started up. It did not swing out directly into traffic, but instead moved slowly along close to the curb. Its movements, to a car some distance ahead as was the bronze man's would hardly be noticeable.

But the driver of the car had her eyes glued on Doc's big limousine.

The driver was small, exotic-looking Princess Amen-Amen.

TWO men rose up in the rear seat of the girl's car after it had proceeded a block or so. They looked like classmates of the gunmen who had seized Monk and Ham. Judging from appearances, their alma mater might be Sing Sing or San Quentin.

One said, "Nice going, princess. You keep tailing that bronze guy, an' we'll do the rest!"

Without turning her head, the girl asked, "Do you think Doc Savage found out anything back there?"

"Let's hope so," said one of the hard-jawed men in the back. "That's what we gotta find out."

"You're positive," continued Princess Amen-Amen, "that John Black had nothing to do with Anthony Bascom's death?"

"Hell, no!" exclaimed one of the two. "That's what has got Black so blasted worried. He's scared, if you ask me! You don't think he'd kill off the goose that lays the golden egg, do you?"

"Hardly," admitted the girl, her eyes still ahead.

"All right, then. That's why we gotta get hold of Doc Savage. That bronze guy is plenty smart. Black figures maybe Doc Savage knows something about this scarab business. Black's own servant was killed in a damned funny manner. That's why he let Chickerelli keep the copper cylinder!"

The girl said nothing in reply to that. She kept driving, following the bronze man's car, which was well ahead.

At a Manhattan street corner, they saw the bronze man's car stop. The millionaire, Chickerelli, got out, stood talking to Doc Savage a moment. Then he hailed a cab and the bronze man's car moved on.

Cautiously, Princess Amen-Amen followed. Ten minutes later they were approaching the skyscraper

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building that housed Doc Savages headquarters.

One of the men in the rear rapped an order.

"Stop here, princess. This is where we get out."

"But how " the girl started.

One of the men grinned.

"Hell, baby," said the other, "you don't think we went at this thing half-cocked, do you? There's five of our pals waiting up there on the top floor for that bronze guy to return. Me and Oscar will follow Doc Savage up. We've got him in one sweet trap!"

They climbed out, ordered the girl to wait, were soon lost in the crowd of pedestrians moving along the sidewalk.

Shortly they were entering the lobby of the towering structure. It was plain that the two had been here before, because they headed directly for the special elevator that made non-stop trips to the topmost floor. The operator had his car at the lobby floor, and they stepped inside.

One of the two flashed a card. "Elevator inspection," he said briskly. "Take us up to the penthouse."

Entrance to the machinery room atop of the building would naturally be from the top-floor corridor. The elevator operator took them swiftly.

In the eighty-sixth-floor corridor they met their five companions. Each group stared at the other.

One of the two new arrivals blurted, "Where's Doc Savage?"

"That's what *we'd* like to know!" one of the five snorted.

"No one's come up here? No one's gone into his headquarters?"

One of the five waiting near the bronze man's headquarters doorway shook his head. "Ain't been a blasted soul up here for two hours," he said.

All seven piled back into the elevator cage and ordered the operator back to the ground floor. The operator looked at them suspiciously, but made no comment.

In the lobby, all hurried through to the sidewalk. They stared around, seeking the bronze man's big car, which had been parked nearby, at the curb.

But Doc Savage, car and all, had completely disappeared.

One of the men started to say, "We left the princess waiting down the street. Maybe she saw Doc " He stared.

It was obvious, also, that Princess Amen-Amen had disappeared.

LATE that same night, the bronze man was still being sought. John Black, his plump little body tense as he

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stalked up and down the room of a secret hide-out, glared out of his pink eyes at a collection of his underworld hirelings.

"Doc Savage must be found!" he shouted. He stepped to a table, picked up an evening newspaper. In blaring headlines, the paper told of the mysterious death of a museum curator connected with one of the city's largest institutions.

"Another one!" cried John Black, slapping the paper. "Another death from the curse of the scarab! That man he was already to sign up for the expedition died at two o'clock this afternoon. He was an archaeologist, an authority on Egypt. We needed him."

"What killed him?" someone put in.

John Black's milky-pink features looked somewhat pallid. He said quietly, "Some sort of poisonous spider bit him while he was moving a mummy case at the museum. He died half an hour later, without regaining consciousness."

"Spider?"

"That's what the Negro porter up there at the museum called it. He saw the thing on the curator's hand just after the fellow collapsed. The . . . spider was gone when police arrived."

Murmurs of astonishment passed through the group. One man asked:

"A spider? Was that porter *certain*? It might have been that fat bug thing that scarab!"

"John Black whirled, glared at the speaker. He said, "The porter hasn't been seen since. He ran out of the building and, for all we know, is *still* running."

"But "

John Black stopped his restless pacing. His weak eyes blinked. "I tell you," he exclaimed, "we've got to learn what's *behind this menace!* We've got to find Doc Savage. Perhaps "

He paused, his eyes narrowing. He seemed to give a start. Then he spun toward two or three of his men, ordered, "The boat where we have Monk, Ham and that other one! Get down there! Doc Savage is shrewd. Perhaps he will trail them. Get down there and move them out to the place on Long Island. Step on it!"

Three men hastily left the room. Soon they were riding in the van that, earlier in the day, had been used to transport Monk, Ham, Johnny and the two pets to the boat tied up at the deserted pier. Sometime later, under cover of darkness, they pulled up to the wharf, climbed out, moved quietly through the enshrouding gloom.

The boat was in darkness. No sound came from within the locked-up cabin.

One man got out a key, opened the lock, swung back the door and led the way inside. The leader used a flashlight.

All three arrivals saw the trussed-up captives still lying on the deck within the cabin. One crook grinned.

"Ain't they cute?" he said. "As snug as bugs in a "

His words were cut off. Cut off because a bronze hand with great corded fingers shot out from behind the door and took hold of his throat.

A second bronze hand shot out and grabbed another arrival.

The third fellow stared in horror, gasped, "Doc Savage!"

## Chapter VIII. DEATH FOR THREE!

THE third man tried to jump back through the doorway of the cabin.

Doc Savage seized him. He was forced to release one of the first two captives in order to do this. But his great metallic hand moved with blinding speed.

Doc yanked the third fellow forward, got his powerful arms around all three captives, and pinioned the men's arms to their sides as he whirled them away from the doorway.

These three crooks had heard of the bronze giant. But this was their first actual encounter with him. They were stupefied at Doc's strength, at the furious speed with which he moved.

One fellow was knocked senseless to the deck. Doc struggled with the remaining two. He reverted to his original gesture seizing the men's heads in order to crack them together. The trick was always a quick way of getting results, especially unconsciousness.

Doc banged the two heads together and the two fellows joined their partner on the floor. The bronze giant spun to where his three aids were tied up on the cabin floor. He yanked the gag from Monk's mouth, went to work on the hairy chemist's bindings.

Monk said shrilly, "Doc! How the blazes did you find us?"

Doc Savage explained how Princess Amen–Amen had trailed him earlier in the day with her car. He revealed how he had been suspicious of the trap waiting for him at headquarters. When he had left the building by a lobby side entrance, the princess had again taken up the trail.

But Doc had fooled the girl, and before the day was over was trailing *her!*

"Tonight," Doc said, "she drove down here, looked around, later departed. So I investigated after she had gone."

Monk stood up, worked the kinks out of his squat form, gave a thankful sigh.

"That dame sure fooled us," he admitted.

When Ham was untied, he said unkindly to the chemist, "I'm going to kill a pig. They left Habeas tied up on top of my face. *Whew!*"

Monk gave a howl and leaped to rescue his pet. Ham was swiftly untying his own pet, the chimp. He swung on Monk, said, "Furthermore, you hairy goofus, you had a chance to help us, back there at the warehouse, and you muffed it. You might have got us all murdered, if it hadn't been for Doc!"

Doc Savage interrupted the argument. "You might help here with Johnny," he suggested quietly.

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JOHNNY, the bony-looking archaeologist, was somewhat weakened from being so long a captive. It was necessary to help him to his feet after he was untied.

Doc reached into his vest, took out a small hypodermic-type needle. He pulled up Johnny's sleeve and administered a shot of stimulant that had almost an immediate effect.

The gaunt fellow brightened, exclaimed, "A pretentious exemplification of "

"Whoa!" yelled Monk. "Cut out them long words. Let's hear what happened to you in English!"

Ham scowled at his hairy partner, suggested, "Make it simple, Johnny, so that Monk can understand."

Doc said quietly, "We would like to know what happened to you, Johnny?"

The archaeologist said, "On the boat, shortly before we got to New York, I was trying to find out more about something two Egyptian fellows had in a copper cylinder. I "

"We know about the cylinder," said Doc.

He told Johnny about the millionaire, Chickerelli, coming to him for advice. He also mentioned the strange deaths that had overtaken several members who had signed up for an expedition sponsored by the millionaire.

Johnny's eyes widened.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" he exclaimed. "This mark this thing you say is always in evidence when death strikes, what is it like?"

Doc described the mark of the scarab the loathsome, fat beetle of a thing.

Johnny's eyes grew still wider. "That thing!" he said. "I saw it on the boat, just before I was knocked out. It was sort of blue and glowing and about the size of a quarter, and "

"Could it have been a ring?" Doc prodded.

"Ring?" Johnny looked puzzled. "Well, it was so dark that I couldn't see. Just that beetle thing moving, and "

"Princess Amen-Amen," explained Doc, "wears a ring with such a scarab design. It is quite possible that the stone in that ring glows at night."

"Blazes!" exploded Monk. "Do you think the princess had something to do with them deaths?"

Ham scowled. "Some day, ape," he commented icily, "you're going to get wise."

"Wise to what, shyster?" the chemist demanded.

"Wise to dames. You fall for them. Why, I suspected the princess right from the start. I was stringing along, hoping to learn something "

Monk almost choked. He glared at his dapper partner.

"Listen, smart-Aleck," he piped shrilly, "you were so blasted interested in that girl that you "

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Doc said, "We might try questioning the prisoners."

That appeared to be a good idea.

THE three captives were still lying, unconscious, on the deck. Habeas and the pet chimp, also untied, were sniffing at the three strangers suspiciously.

Doc used some of the injection he had given Johnny. Shortly the three thugs were awake, staring fearfully at the bronze giant. Doc had a flashlight turned on he had been using it since untying his three aids and he directed the beam into one man's face.

"We want some information," said the bronze giant.

The man started to say, "The hell with " and then looked from Doc to hairy, powerful Monk. The chemist's expectant attitude didn't help the captive's thoughts any. Monk looked as though he was ready to fight.

The man looked back at Doc Savage.

"We were just hired by a guy to grab these assistants of yours," said the fellow.

"John Black employed you?" Doc said.

The man stared. Then he shrugged. "Sure, since you already know."

"And who is John Black working for?" prodded Doc.

"He ain't workin' for *nobody*! He's got a lot at stake, and now some crazy things are happening and he's tryin' to find out what it's all about!"

Doc mentioned the scarab curse and the deaths of several wealthy men who had signed up for Chickerelli's expedition.

"What has John Black got to do with those deaths?" demanded the bronze man.

The captive stared. "Listen," he cried. "Black ain't got nothin' to do with that! That's what has him worried. If you ask me, he's plenty scared. He figured maybe you guys were mixed up in "

Another of the captives had climbed to his feet. He glared at the one who was speaking. "You talk too damn much!" he snapped. "What's the idea of "

Outside the cabin of the boat, there was the sound of something rumbling over wood planking. Doc whirled to the door, whipped it open, then jerked back to his aids.

"Everyone outside!" he ordered.

The van that the men employed by John Black had used in their trip down to the wharf was now backing up. It was backing up to the very edge of the dock, its closed, rear doors facing the boat.

Monk, Ham and Johnny had led the three captives outside. The pets scrambled up onto the dock. Doc moved forward to investigate.



## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

At that moment, the rear doors of the van flew open and a man appeared in the opening with a machine gun held in his big hands.

Doc moved with blinding speed. He called, "Look out!"

Monk and his partners released their three prisoners and dived for safety behind heavy pilings on the dock's edge. At the same moment, the machine gun started a blast of leaden death. But the gun was not aimed at Doc and his men.

Instead, it mowed down the three captives who had been standing just outside the cabin door. They fell down screaming.

Immediately, the heavy van started moving away from there. Crouched in the rear-door opening was the machine gunner, and now he swept the menacing weapon in an arc that covered both boat and dock. Whining slugs ripped through the night, ate into the pilings behind which Doc's aids were concealed.

The bronze man himself, using the protection of a shed located near the end of the dock, had leaped out in an attempt to reach the driver's cab of the moving truck. Momentarily, he was out of the line of the machine-gun fire.

But the van moved too rapidly. Before the bronze man could reach the cab door, the rear of the van was almost abreast of him.

Doc was forced to whirl back to safety. A pile of metal oil drums near the shack furnished temporary protection.

The man with the machine gun covered the truck's retreat down a dark side street.

WHEN it was safe to venture out from behind the heavy piling, hairy Monk made a dive for the cabin of the boat. He was bellowing, "Blast 'em! When we were tied up, they took away our guns and dumped them in a trunk!"

What Monk referred to was a special type of machine pistol of the bronze man's own invention. The pistols used a drum-type magazine that held "mercy" bullets. These bullets produced temporary unconsciousness instead of death. Doc Savage never took a life, unless utterly necessary.

Monk came racing back with the weapons that had been taken away from them. But it was too late. The van had disappeared in the gloomy night.

Also, the bronze man had parked his car a good two blocks away, so that when he approached the old wharf he would not, by chance, be spotted.

They all returned and looked at the three dead thugs.

Ham asked, "But why would their own friends shoot them down?"

Doc's eyes were thoughtful.

"Perhaps," he said, "they were not friends."

Ham stared.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

"It is quite possible," continued the bronze man, "that those in the van were not John Black's hired gunmen. You might investigate that angle, and also try to locate John Black."

They returned to the bronze man's car, and on the way Doc explained that he had left a message at headquarters for Long Tom and Renny.

Long Tom and Renny were the remaining two Doc Savage aids. They had been temporarily out of town when the trouble started. Apparently, though, Doc looked for their return tonight.

In the car, Doc said, "You can drop off uptown. Notify the police about the dead men on the wharf. It will not be necessary to say anything about the copper cylinder or the mysterious scarab curse. Report back to headquarters as soon as you learn anything."

Doc was driving the big limousine. He leaned forward now, turned on a switch on a built-in transmitter below the dash. The receiver was part of a short-wave radio system that the bronze man employed in all his movable equipment and at his headquarters.

When the set warmed up, Doc lifted a small hand microphone from a hook and said, "Renny? Long Tom?"

Shortly, a voice crashed back at him out of the loud-speaker.

"Holy cow!" the voice rumbled. "That you, Doc?"

An angry lion released in a cave would have made about the same amount of thunderous roar as the voice that filled the car. It was Renny, the giant engineer in Doc's crowd, and Renny always bellowed like this.

"You got my message?" queried Doc Savage.

Renny said, "Yes, Doc. And Long Tom spotted the princess parked near here for a while. When she left, he followed. It seems she was trailing some car out to a place on Long Island. But this other machine got away from her and she came back. She's gone to her hotel."

Doc asked a few questions about the car that Princess Amen-Amen had followed. Surprisingly, Renny even knew the address of where the first car had gone. It appeared that Long Tom had been better than the girl at trailing it. Renny gave the address.

Doc signed off with the suggestion, "Wait for further instructions."

A little later, he dropped off Monk, Ham, Johnny and the two pets, stating that they would all meet back at headquarters before dawn.

Then he headed the car toward Long Island. Twenty-four hours later, there had been no word from the bronze man. It looked as though he had mysteriously disappeared.

## Chapter IX. PAT GETS A CLUE

IN the library of Doc Savage's headquarters, two men paced the room, paused, stared at one another.

One said gloomily, "Holy cow! Something *must* be wrong. Doc's not only missing, but now there's been no word from Monk, Ham or Johnny. What do you make of it, Long Tom?"

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

The speaker was a giant of a fellow with gloomy-looking features and massive fists the size of quart pails. This was Colonel John Renwick, better known as Renny, the engineer in the bronze man's organization.

The man to whom he spoke Long Tom was a skinny little fellow with pale hair and features. He looked an anaemic bundle of bones. But Major Thomas J. Roberts, the pale man, had never known a sick day in his life. He was the electrical wizard in Doc's crowd.

Long Tom said, "Am I supposed to be psychic?" in reply to Renny's question. "I've told you a dozen times. I trailed Doc out to that place on Long island, to that address you gave him last night. I got in there, and all I found was an empty house from which some guys had vanished. Vamoosed!"

Huge Renny's gloomy features were grim.

"They must be mixed up in something. Too bad we weren't here when "

The telephone rang.

Renny hurried to answer it. In his crashing voice, he kept saying, "No. . . . No. . . . No, sir," for several moments. Then he hung up.

Long Tom asked, "Was it that guy Chickerelli again?"

Renny nodded. "About the twelfth time he's called today. He's still worried about some copper cylinder that Doc had when he last saw him."

"Would Chickerelli tell you yet what was in that thing?"

Renny shook his head. "Guess he doesn't trust us."

"Wonder what it was the cylinder, I mean?"

"Whatever it is," suggested Renny, "it must have something to do with Doc's disappearance. Or with Monk and the others. Funny! I wish "

A buzzer sounded. It indicated that someone was at the outer-hall doorway.

Both aids hurried through the reception room, opened the door, then stared.

Skinny Long Tom exclaimed, "Pat!" His eyes lighted happily. "Gosh, Pat, you look more beautiful each time I see you."

The girl came into the room, smiled warmly, said, "You sound like Monk."

The arrival was Pat Savage, lovely cousin and only living relative of the bronze man. Pat was tall, slender, and had hair of the unusual tone of her remarkable cousin. Pat owned an exclusive beauty shop on Park Avenue, though if Doc would only approve she'd rather be involved in some of his adventures throughout the world.

A few times Pat had managed to join one of these dangerous cases, much against the bronze man's wishes. For Doc, like the rest of his aids, thought the world of Pat. He disapproved of subjecting her to danger.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

Pat was smiling and cheerful a moment, as she greeted Renny and Long Tom. And then her face sobered. Her eyes grew thoughtful. Long Tom eyed her shrewdly, commented, "Oh, oh! Here it comes! I'll bet you're up to something as usual!"

Pat didn't smile. She looked suddenly deadly serious. She asked:

"Have either of you ever heard of Princess Amen–Amen?"

BOTH aids stared. The name was new to them, but apparently it meant something to Pat.

Renny asked, "No. Why?"

"You've been reading the papers?"

"Sure, but "

"You've read about these strange deaths that have been happening here in New York? The police have tried to hush them up, but a tabloid got hold of it today. They're calling them the scarab deaths. There's a hint of an old Egyptian curse!"

Renny and Long Tom had seen the newspaper stories. Until now, they had given them little thought. But there was something in Pat's tone.

"What about it?" Long Tom queried.

"One of the papers," said Pat, "described this scarab thing. And late this afternoon, in my shop, I saw something that fitted a description of the thing perfectly."

"Yes?"

"It was a ring on the left hand of this Princess Amen–Amen."

Renny shrugged. "Holy cow, Pat!" he said. "That's just coincidence. Why should you get all excited about "

"Wait!" interrupted Pat Savage. "There's something else. This princess she appears to be an Egyptian, though she speaks perfect English well, she made a phone call from a booth at the beauty shop. Because of the ring she was wearing, and of those newspaper stories, I sort of overheard her conversation as she made the call."

Thin Long Tom winked at the giant engineer. "Sounds like Pat!" he commented. "Always sticking her nose into something. Always getting into trouble!"

Pat continued: "This call Princess Amen–Amen made was about something she was trying to trace. I caught something about Egypt and an ancient tomb. That's what made me think of the scarab deaths that have been reported in the papers."

Long Tom shrugged. "Still coincidence " he started.

"And," went on Pat without listening, "this princess was trying to find out something about a copper cylinder that she "

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

Both aids of Doc Savage gave a start.

"What?" exclaimed Renny, his voice crashing around the room.

"Something about a copper tube. I had to slip away from the booth before she completed the call, and I missed the rest. But I was wondering "

But Long Tom had seized Renny's massive arm. "That cylinder!" he cried. "It's the thing Chickerelli was asking about! He wanted to know if Doc had it!"

It was Pat's turn to show surprise. "You mean to say," she demanded, "that Doc knows something about a copper cylinder?"

"Apparently," admitted Renny. His gloomy face was taut. "But we can't *locate* Doc. There's something funny about that, too. If we'd only been around when Princess Amen–Amen made that call "

Pat suddenly brightened again.

"Look," she raced on. "I did a little sleuthing. I left the shop when the princess did, followed her, and and guess what I found out?"

"What?" unhealthy–looking Long Tom prodded.

"I learned where she went. First, she met two men who looked like Egyptians. They drove to this place in a car. It was a closed storage garage, a place that has gone out of business. It "

"I don't see how that connects with " Long Tom started to say.

"The place is only half a block away from the Hidalgo Trading Co. building," finished Pat Savage.

Long Tom jumped. Renny was already heading toward the door. "Come on," he said, "perhaps Pat *has* something."

Long Tom seemed to think so, too, for he quickly followed, taking Pat's slender arm.

The Hidalgo Trading Co. building was just a "front" for the bronze man's plane hangar–warehouse near the Hudson River!

THE parking garage was six floors high, its windows grimy from lack of cleaning. It was in darkness, and the neighborhood was a deserted one at this time of night.

Not far away, adjacent to the river, was the large building with the sign:

### HIDALGO TRADING CO.

It was within this structure that Doc Savage kept all his planes and extra equipment. It, too, was in darkness now.

Pat, seated in the car with Long Tom and big Renny, said, Princess Amen–Amen and those two men came here and went inside. I watched for some time, but they didn't come out again."

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

Renny said, "Perhaps this is a wild-goose chase, and yet there is that copper cylinder thing that connects Doc with it with the mystery. Come on we'll investigate."

They wanted to leave Pat in the car, but she would not hear of it.

And so, leaving the car parked a little distance away, they moved down the street and looked over the tall garage that had apparently been closed for some time.

A heavy padlock sealed closed the big entrance doorway. Beside this was another, a small door. It, too, was locked.

But, bordering the building, was an alleyway by which cars could be driven around to the rear. Renny led the way back through the alley.

There was a large parking space in the rear, but no cars. Quietly, they followed a rising ramp that led up to a huge steel door. Renny and Long Tom worked quietly, seeing if the door could be raised. But it was fastened securely.

Beside the ramp, extending off to the right, was a narrow ledge beneath a solid line of small-paned windows. The windows were built-in sections that could be swung outward from the inside.

Long Tom murmured, "Wait," and stepped up on the ledge. He wriggled along, trying each section of windows by prying his fingers beneath the steel casements that formed them. Finally, Renny and Pat saw one of the sections moved slightly outward.

Long Tom bent down, got his wiry form beneath the outswung window, and hopped inside the building.

Renny looked at Pat. "You'd better go back," he said.

But Pat's pretty chin was set decisively.

"Not me!" she rapped, and she started along the narrow ledge.

Shortly, all three of them were within the building. Silence enveloped the place. It appeared to be deserted. One or two cars were parked inside, on the main floor, but the rest of the place was vast emptiness.

They moved forward quietly, Long Tom indicating a ramp that led upward to the next floor. They covered the second floor, then the third and fourth. There was a closed-in stairway that they could have used, but the ramp was quicker.

They were just reaching the fifth-floor level when Pat paused, touching skinny Long Tom's arm.

"It's funny," she whispered, "but I thought I heard "

She half turned, staring back down the steep ramp behind them. The two Doc Savage aids turned also.

And there, where the incline started up from the fourth floor, the advancing foursome of gunmen were revealed.

Stealthily, they were closing in on Pat, Long Tom and Renny!

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

RENNY'S great, powerful arms moved with blurred speed. He swept Pat's slender form into his grasp, whirled with her away from the ramp's exit onto the fifth-floor level. Long Tom dived after them.

Immediately a blast of gunfire smashed out behind them. Leaden slugs came up the ramp and made thudding noises as they buried in the plaster wall around a freight-elevator hatchway nearby.

Renny continued his plunge across the room. This floor was a machine shop, apparently, and spread around the place were lathes and various sorts of machinery. Faint light came through the dirty windows at the end of the long room and revealed things vaguely. But, in a way, that dim light was a help. It covered Renny's movements as he tried to reach a place of safety with lovely Pat.

He ducked between the machines. They were not heavy enough, however, to form any sort of protection. But at the far end of the room, toward the rear, were several old cars in various stages of dismantlement. Renny dived for these.

He pushed Pat down behind one of the cars, ordered, "Don't move!"

Then, with thin Long Tom close at his heels, he leaped to a different location in order to draw the gunmen's fire away from the bronze man's cousin.

For a moment, the trailing gunmen had paused as they emerged at the top of the ramp. But they soon discovered the two aids' location. Again slugs whined in the air, hammered across the room.

Renny and Long Tom crouched down and unlimbered their machine pistols, the weapons that released the mercy bullets invented by Doc Savage. The blast of the pistols added to the bedlam of sound racketing between the four walls of the large inclosure. A windshield in a car broke and sprayed glass in every direction. A slug hit a tire, and it exploded loudly. Pellets spanged off metal.

The thugs were closing in.

Suddenly, a voice lifted over the uproar.

"What the hell!"

Long Tom was just aiming his weapon in the direction of the voice, when Renny seized his arm and bellowed, "Wait!"

Both aids stared, wide-eyed, across the shop.

Another group of men had arrived, as they could see, from the floor above. They were carrying a heavy form, and now they started to put it down as they joined their pals.

Long Tom stammered, "L-look! Good grief, it's Doc!"

The figure the men had quickly lowered to the floor was not bound or gagged. But it was limp, unconscious. Even in the vague light there was no question of the identity of that remarkable giant figure.

Doc Savage!

## Chapter X. WARNING

IT must have been the sight of towering Renny that threw the gunmen into frenzied action. For the big engineer had raised up from behind one of the cars, staring in astonishment as he saw the body of Doc Savage quickly placed on the garage floor.

Smashing action followed.

The groups of thugs united, moved forward in determined attack. They ducked behind machinery, scurried from one vantage point to another. Their guns made a great banging in the huge room.

Long Tom glanced back behind him, saw Pat Savage crouched behind a car several dozen feet away. She was out of the line of fire. The electrical wizard yelled above the uproar, "Use demolition bullets, Renny!"

The demolition slugs were only employed by Doc's crowd as an emergency measure. Two or three of them were capable of tearing down a house.

Renny slipped one of the demolition cartridges into his machine pistol, took careful aim toward the front of the garage and pulled the trigger.

Immediately that corner of the building looked as though it was falling down. Part of the ceiling caved in. Two steel lathes flew apart and sent smashed fragments flying in various directions. The concussion of the exploding slug knocked most of the advancing thugs to their backs.

Long Tom gave a satisfied whoop, and started slipping one of the demolition cartridges into his own gun. But Renny held him back.

"Careful!" he warned. "Doc's lying over there to the left!"

Thought of the bronze man's unconscious figure lying helplessly near the ramp entranceway drew Long Tom up short. He reverted to the mercy bullets, let go with a blast toward where some of the gunmen had climbed to their feet and were advancing again. Two men had not gotten up.

The gunfire was now a deafening roar. Long Tom yelled something at Renny, but the giant engineer merely shook his head. Obviously, he could not understand the electrical wizard. Renny was crouched down behind one car; Long Tom was behind another. They were firing from around the sides of the parked cars.

From time to time, Long Tom glanced worriedly toward where Pat was concealed. The last time he looked, he could not see her. His heart crashed against his chest. If anything should happen to lovely Pat

Something hit the front of the car behind which Long Tom was hidden. The front of the machine went up in the air and almost toppled over on the skinny electrical expert.

The explosion that accompanied the car lifting was enough to shatter eardrums.

LONG TOM goggled. The crooks were using a type of small hand grenade.

One cleared Renny's car, landed some distance away, toward the rear of the room. Almost a hundred panes of glass must have burst outward with a terrific blast.

The gunmen were still closing in on them.



## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

And then, above the uproar, a great, carrying voice rose above the sounds of gunfire.

"Watch out!" came the words in the deep-toned voice.

It was Doc Savage!

Renny and Long Tom, along with the advancing gunmen, turned to stare at the bronze man, now on his feet across the room.

In the same instant, Doc's metallic hand flicked outward. What he had thrown could not be seen, but almost in the same second a great cloud of black smoke sprang up around the advancing thugs. They started choking and gasping. Curses filled the air as their gunfire died down.

"Close in!" Doc Savage's voice crashed out, in a command to his two aids.

But Renny and Long Tom needed no urging. Long Tom let out a joyous shout and leaped toward the cloud of black smoke.

But at the same time, thugs emerged from the cloud and started a dive toward a ramp leading above to still another floor. Two or three crooks were left behind, lying on the garage floor.

Doc, Renny and Long Tom started toward the ramp entrance, but before they could reach it, the thunderous roar of a descending car warned them. They leaped back, got clear of the ramp exit onto this floor.

The heavy limousine, windows all closed, came down the ramp in the next moment. It hit the floor level, the driver swung it in a careening arc around the circle that led to the next ramp leading to the floor below. Rubber screamed, and the whole machine threatened to overturn.

Renny aimed his gun, fired pointblank at the closed windows. Long Tom did likewise. And stared.

For though the car windows webbed, they did not shatter. They were bulletproof.

The car went down the ramp. Rubber screamed again as it took the turn at the floor below, then the motor increased its roar and the driver sent it hurtling down to still another floor.

There shortly followed a crash as the big machine was sent slamming through the entrance doors of the garage. The driver had not even stopped with his carload of escaping thugs. Door and all was torn out of the building as he swung the racing car into the street.

Doc Savage had leaped to a window at the front of the building. Long Tom quickly passed the bronze man his pistol, loaded with demolition cartridge. Doc took a quick aim and fired. There was no time to be too accurate.

A part of the pavement bulged up inches behind the escaping car and left a deep hole there in the roadway. But the machine had cleared the spot in time. In the next instant, it rounded the nearby corner and disappeared from view.

Doc swung back. "You saw them?" he asked.

Renny was jerking his head.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

"Holy cow!" he bellowed. "They looked like . . . like Egyptians!"

Doc Savage nodded. "That was the impression," he said.

Long Tom, worried, shouted, "We got to find Pat!"

Doc had been moving toward the down ramp. He stopped, whirled, asked, "Pat? Pat is *here*?"

Renny and Long Tom nodded silently. They knew the bronze giant's attitude about having his beautiful cousin involved in any of his dangerous missions.

Fearful, both of them, Long Tom and Renny started toward the spot where they had left the girl. They took flashlights from their coat pockets.

And Pat Savage, her fine features flushed with excitement, climbed out from a large air-compressor and exclaimed, "Boy, was *that* something!"

DOC SAVAGE seldom revealed his emotions. But relief showed on his face now.

He said, "How did you get mixed up in this?"

Pat told him about the visit of Princess Amen-Amen to her shop in order to have her hair set, of the phone call that the princess had made while there. She also mentioned the unusual scarab ring.

Long Tom put in, "We've got Pat to thank for leading us here, Doc!" Remembering how Doc had been unconscious when they had seen him but a few moments ago, the electrical expert added, "You were out cold, Doc didn't have a chance "

But Doc Savage shook his head.

"Not unconscious," he said. "Merely a trick."

They all looked sharply at the bronze giant.

"Trick?"

Doc nodded.

"To gain information," Doc explained. He told how he had run into the Egyptian gunmen here, of a fight that had followed. The crooks had thought Doc Savage unconscious.

"By keeping up the deception," Doc went on, "there was a chance of learning what has happened to Monk and the others. Or of the whereabouts of a man named John Black."

The bronze man explained about John Black, of the seizure of Monk, Ham and Johnny the night before, and of their subsequent release of Doc himself.

Renny was puzzled as to how Doc Savage knew the other aids had been captured again, since he had not returned to headquarters.

Doc said quietly, "Something these men mentioned tonight. There is no doubt but that Monk and the others

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

are being held captives."

"By John Black and these guys who were here tonight?" Renny thundered.

"By John Black, yes," agreed Doc. "But not by these men. These Egyptians, from remarks made, are not in league with John Black. That is the puzzling part about this thing. They, too, are seeking John Black."

Long Tom, Pat and Renny all looked surprised. It was Long Tom who put their thoughts into words.

"Then this curse, this scarab business," said the electrical expert, "is something beyond John Black's control?"

The bronze man nodded.

He turned, moved over to where three dark-skinned men lay unconscious on the floor. "We'll try questioning them," said Doc.

But, after a short examination, it was evident that there was not going to be any questions asked of these three for some time. All three were ready for a hospital, and in pretty bad shape.

WHEN the police arrived, to investigate the large hole in the street and the smashed front doors of the garage, Doc explained to them. The unconscious men were carted off.

Doc returned with his cousin, Pat, and his two aids to the car that Renny and Long Tom had used in reaching the garage.

Pat's pretty eyes clouded as the bronze man helped her into the car. Doc said:

"Go directly home and stay there."

"But "

"You've had a narrow escape tonight. We are not taking any more chances with you," advised Doc.

Lovely Pat tried to protest, but there was no arguing against Doc Savage's determination. She put the car in gear, smiled, drove off.

Long Tom let out a sigh. "That's that!" he said. "Pat sure likes to get mixed up in trouble!"

The bronze man's car was, he revealed, parked in his warehouse hangar. Shortly they, too, were heading back to headquarters. Perhaps there would be some message from Johnny and the others.

There wasn't.

Headquarters was deserted. But the phone rang shortly after they had returned.

Renny took the call.

"Doc Savage?" a grating voice asked.

Renny said in his booming voice, "I'll take the message for him."

The man at the other end laughed harshly. "O. K., brother," he said. "Now listen carefully "

Renny rapped, "I'm listening. Get going!"

"You tell the bronze guy to stay right there at home and tend to his knitting from now on. Get that! He's gotta keep his nose out of things, or something is gonna happen to Pat, his nice-looking cousin!"

Renny's massive fist tightened on the phone. "*What?*" he bellowed.

The man laughed harshly again. "Listen!" he suggested.

In the next instant, Pat's strained, frantic voice was on the wire. She cried, "Renny, they're not fooling! They're holding me captive! If "

Pat's voice was abruptly cut off.

Big Renny rattled the receiver. "Pat!" he boomed. "Listen, Pat "

But the line had gone dead.

## Chapter XI. DEATH COMES SEEKING

THE air of the room was electrified with strained silence as the telephone receiver was moved away from Pat Savage's lips and the hook replaced on the instrument.

Pat Savage, tied securely, sat stiffly in the chair in the big room. Though she was helpless to move, two burly men stood guard over her, taking no chances. A bright ceiling droplight hung overhead, and its intense glare made a shimmering glow of Pat's bronze-gold hair.

A man stepped forward into the circle of light. He was short and fat and sanctimonious-looking. His little pink eyes, however, were bright with cold light.

"Well, gracious me," he murmured, "*that* should bring Doc Savage here in a hurry!"

It was John Black, the pious-looking albino. He squinted against the bright light as other thugs moved forward and joined him. They had been standing around the four walls of the big, almost empty room. It suddenly looked like a convention of crooks, there were so many hard-looking individuals in the room.

One fellow asked, "How long do you figure it'll take that bronze guy to locate this place?"

John Black shrugged. "An hour perhaps. In the meantime "

He turned, stared out of his weak eyes toward a corner of the room. "We'll make one more attempt with that Johnny guy. Come on! Hurry it up!"

Another light was switched on.

And there, revealed in a corner of the room, were the trussed bodies of hairy Monk, Ham and gaunt Johnny, the archaeologist. Baling wire had been used on their hands and feet. They were not gagged. The pets, Habeas and Chemistry, were likewise tied.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

Ham was glaring at Monk.

"You hairy mistake!" the lawyer rapped. "You thought you had a clue to John Black's whereabouts and look what it got us!"

Monk, for once, looked crestfallen. "How did I know it was gonna be a trap?" he said. "How did I know they left that trail so we'd purposely follow it?"

Ham snorted, sighed, "No," he said, "I guess you wouldn't be expected to know *anything!*"

Monk tried to roll toward his partner, found himself unable to move. His eyes blazed. "That sounded like a dirty crack! Listen, shyster, as soon as I get loose I'm gonna "

One of John Black's men walked over and gave the hairy chemist a nasty kick in the ribs.

The fellow snarled, "Shuddup, you!"

Monk howled with rage. "Blast it! Six guys are gonna die as soon as I "

John Black called across the room, "Shut that fool up!"

Tape was slapped across Monk's mouth. The same was done to Ham. Then several men moved to the gaunt archaeologist's side, picked him up, carried him back to the bright circle of light.

Another chair had been set up, beside Pat's. There was a table before the chair and some sort of papers spread out on the table, so that the overhead light hit them directly.

Pat's eyes were wide and worried as Johnny's trussed form was dumped into the chair. For once, the bronze man's beautiful cousin looked scared. Something about the air of tenseness in the room had made her realize that they all were in a pretty tight spot.

John Black moved up to the far side of the table, looked at Johnny and said, "And now, brother, we're going to find out about this scroll! You either tell us or you die!"

Johnny merely glared. He used small words that these thugs could readily understand. He snapped, "Hell with you!"

John Black nodded to one of the dozen or so men standing nearby. A big fellow stepped forward. He had a hard, blocky jaw.

John Black said, "Hit him, Jake!"

JAKE was the one who had been a bodyguard to the two Egyptian messengers aboard the ship. He was the one who had seen his pal, Steve, die with the curse of the scarab marked upon him.

Jake's cold eyes were like muddy-looking glass. His big fists balled; he stepped up to Johnny and hit him in the face half a dozen times.

They were hard blows, and they caught the archaeologist on the jawbone. Johnny's head was rocked from side to side. His eyes bleared.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

John Black waited until Jake was finished, then said, "That's just a sample, mister." He sighed. "Bless me, I hope that has convinced you!"

Johnny said nothing. He looked as if he was on the verge of passing out.

Pat Savage's eyes were suddenly misted. She cried out in a quavering voice, "Tell them, Johnny. Please tell them. They'll kill you if you don't!"

Johnny shook his head.

And a crafty gleam came into John Black's pink eyes. He motioned to one of his men, then indicated lovely Pat.

"Hit her," he said, as though asking someone to pass him a cigarette.

A man about the size of Jake moved in front of Pat's chair. There was a peculiar dullness to his small eyes. He pulled back his arm

Johnny gasped, "*Wait!* I'll read it!"

John Black grinned. He quickly spread out a section of wide paper on the table. The archaeologist's chair was moved close to the table. He indicated a certain section on the paper, ordered, "Read that!"

It could be seen that the papers were photostatic copies of some original. They were copies of the ancient scroll that had been originally delivered to John Black.

The albino said, "I took this to a guy, an expert named Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone. He said it was worthless. Now I want to know the *truth!*"

Johnny studied the copy of the scroll, looked at the part indicated by John Black's plump finger.

He read: "Cheops in the realm of the Fourth Dynasty of Pharaoh "

"O. K.," interrupted John Black, nodding. "I just wanted to make sure. Now go back to the beginning."

What John Black had done was check Johnny's translation against a specific part translated by Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone. Both men were in agreement. Therefore Black was convinced that Johnny was not now trying to fool him.

He listened while the Doc Savage aid went through the copy carefully. Once Black turned to one of his henchmen, grinned and commented, "I didn't trust that guy Pettibone. So I had a copy made of the original scroll."

SOMEONE remarked, "For a guy who acts like a good Samaritan, you sure pull some fast ones, boss!"

John Black gave the speaker a brief look. The fellow's face paled, and he shut up.

Johnny Littlejohn continued his translation. After a few moments, he looked up.

"This thing is worthless," he announced. "It's simply nonsense!"

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

John Black looked suddenly worried. "Then why," he asked, "is there this curse attached to the thing. These mysterious deaths?"

Johnny couldn't shrug very well, he was so carefully tied. But he made the attempt.

Black indicated the scroll again, ordered, "There's one thing I want to know even if this damned thing is worthless. Give me the locations mentioned in Egypt."

Johnny studied the copy again. He said, "It is in the Libyan Desert, an arm of the vast Sahara "

"Exact

location!" snapped John Black. He took a slip of paper and pencil from his pocket, and waited.

Johnny read: "Latitude approximately 29 degrees, 58 minutes and 51 seconds North. Longitude 31 degrees and 9 minutes East. That's "

John Black smiled. "O. K. And now "

The telephone rang. Someone picked it up, listened, hung up and turned quickly to John Black.

"That was Ben. He's spotted Doc Savage. He's on the way alone!"

John Black quickly started gathering up the photostatic prints. He nodded to a couple of his men. Johnny was taken back and dumped down beside Monk and Ham. He was gagged.

Pat Savage was then treated in the same manner.

Someone looked at their leader, asked, "Hell, boss, how are we goin' to fool this bronze guy?"

Black grinned, said, "Listen!"

He motioned to another of his men, ordered, "Show him, Charlie."

Charlie was a little fellow with features that, at sometime in the past, had been worked over with a knife. He opened his mouth and said:

"Blazes, Doc, we sure was gettin' worried. We're over here in the corner of the room. Get these dangd ropes off me!"

Charlie's words were an exact imitation of Monk's squeaky, childlike voice.

JOHN BLACK'S hired crooks, at his direction, took up positions in various corners of the big room. Lights were extinguished. The little fat man, said:

"Now, bless me, keep quiet! That Doc Savage is no fool. But if we work this right, Charlie will imitate that Monk's voice and trick the bronze guy."

Silence enveloped the room. Someone moved so slightly that it sounded like a breath of air floating through a window.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

John Black rapped, "Do that again, and I'll kill you!"

From then on, there was utter silence.

Doc Savage reached the hallway outside the room about fifteen minutes later. The hallway was on the fourth floor of an old tenement building that had not been lived in for over a year.

Doc Savage moved in total darkness, his feet making no sound, his breathing controlled.

Once, though, there was the slightest of *shuff* sounds. The bronze man's shoe had scuffed a piece of grit on the hallway floor.

There followed more silence.

Then there was the *feel* that the door to the room had opened. No sound. No view of anything in the total darkness. Merely the impression that something had changed. The door slowly opening!

The voice that was like Monk's now piped up. It told of the hairy chemist's predicament; it directed Doc Savage over to the corner of the room.

Smashing action followed as over a dozen men leaped upon Doc Savage. Lights came on in the room. The bronze giant was the center of a struggling, straining mob.

Sheer weight carried him to the floor. His great arms were pinioned. Six men sat on his powerful legs. Everyone was yelling directions at everybody else to be careful. This bronze man was tricky!

After a while they got Doc Savage subdued and John Black moved away from his safety point at the wall. His round, milky-pink face was twisted in a sneer. His watery eyes blazed. He stood over Doc Savage and said:

"We knew you'd have that phone call traced. We figured just how much time it would take you to get here. It was a pretty smart "

John Black abruptly stopped, seemed to give a start, stared at the bronze giant. He stammered, "I ah what "

A flush had crept into the bronze man's metallic features. The flush changed to a purple color as Doc Savage's mouth opened and he appeared to gasp for breath. His head rolled slightly to one side, his eyes bulged, and he made terrible strangling sounds.

But it wasn't this so much that held John Black horrified. It was appearance of the fat, loathsome thing that was vivid on the bronze giant's forehead.

It was the shape of a bug, swollen, with repulsive-looking legs. It was bluish.

It was the mark of the scarab!

John Black leaped back, screamed in terror.

"Out of here!" he cried frantically. "All of you! Run! Doc Savage is dying from the curse!"

Every crook piled out, as though Death were stalking the room with seeking, outstretched hands!



## Chapter XII. HELP NEEDED

A FEW moments later, Doc Savage got up off the floor and started untying his pretty cousin Pat. Next, he released Johnny and the others, including the two pets.

They all stared at the giant bronze man.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" exploded lanky Johnny. "I . . . I thought you were dying?"

Doc said quietly, "Trick," and swung toward a small case that he must have set down quietly upon entering the room in the darkness. It was near the door, behind a chair.

Monk goggled.

"Trick?" he piped shrilly. "But how "

And then he stared at the bronze man's forehead.

"Blazes!" said Monk. "There ain't a blasted thing wrong with Doc!"

There was no mark of the scarab on Doc's forehead. No flush to his face. Nothing whatsoever wrong with him.

Doc explained.

"The mark was put there with a special invisible chalk that would only glow when affected by perspiration. After Black and his crowd ran out of the room, it was a simple matter to just wipe it off."

Monk was astounded. Or perhaps disappointed, for there had been no real fight.

"Didn't you wanna *grab* those guys?" he prodded.

Doc looked at his tall, slender cousin. His flake-gold eyes were somber.

"No," he said briefly. "Not with Pat here. Too much danger."

The others understood. Doc Savage would face any kind of menace rather than have Pat's safety threatened.

The bronze man was still working with the equipment case. A small, compact radio receiving set had been taken from the case. A loop antenna was atop the small boxlike affair. Doc worked with various knobs and shortly picked up a series of steady, sharp signals.

"Their car," announced Doc Savage. "We should be able to trail it now that" he looked at his cousin "that Pat is out of danger."

"Their

car?" Ham asked. "But how "

"They were using a car that they had employed previously," explained Doc. "It was parked near this building. I merely concealed the small short-wave transmitter beneath the rear seat of their machine. It is giving out

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

the signals."

They all hurried out. Johnny was given the task of taking Pat home and making certain that she stayed there. Johnny was ordered to lock her up, if necessary.

Pretty Pat sighed. "Just when things were getting interesting," she complained.

"Too

interesting," said Ham. He was not quite as smart-looking as usual. Being tied up with baling wire does things to well-tailored clothes. But the lawyer was not self-conscious with Pat Savage. He knew, and admired her too well.

He took her arm, motioned her toward bony Johnny. "We'll tell you all about it later, little girl," he said, grinning.

Monk blurted, "Don't trust that shyster, Pat!"

Pat Savage made a face and let Johnny lead her away.

DOC, Monk and Ham, with the pets, returned to the bronze man's car. Doc was still carrying the direction-finder radio device. The signals, somewhat fainter, were coming from the instrument.

Doc drove, worked with dials of the radio-controlled gadget, was soon heading the car downtown at a fast clip. The signals grew stronger. The bronze man followed them uncannily.

They finally arrived in a section near Greenwich Village, a long, darkened side street. Doc swung the car left, slowed his speed.

The signals had abruptly stopped.

A scant block farther on, the bronze man did likewise. He pulled up to the curb.

Ahead, a short distance, a car had just started up. It was moving rapidly down the street, away from them.

Monk yelled, "Blazes! They must be in that car! Aren't you gonna follow them, Doc?"

The bronze man shook his head. He was looking at the house before which he had parked.

"This," he said, "is the residence of Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone, the Egyptologist."

Monk nodded. "Hey I know that guy! An old fluffy-ruffles! He's even afraid to shake hands with people because he figures he's gonna catch a germ. Why, he even "

Ham said, "Why would Black be after Pettibone, Doc?"

Doc was already out of the car as the lawyer asked the question.

"That is what we might find out," suggested Doc.

Leaving the two pets locked in the car, they hurried up to the entrance of the house. It was an old brownstone,

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

made over, and with, most likely, up-to-date apartments inside.

There was no answer from the apartment of Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone.

Ham looked worried. "Do you think anything could have happened to him?" he wanted to know. "That John Black crowd might have "

Doc, apparently, had reached a quick decision. He was not in the habit of entering people's apartments, but this obviously was something serious.

He took a ring of keys from his special vest and went to work on the door of the well-known Egyptologist. Shortly, they were inside the apartment. They found themselves in a well-stocked library containing every kind of volume on ancient and modern Egypt and the Holy Land.

They found all kinds of evidences of the Egyptologist's work.

But they did not find the man himself.

In a small office at the rear of the apartment, however, they found signs of something else. A fight. Things were overturned and the place, in general, was a shambles.

Outside of this, however, there was nothing to show what might have happened to Pettibone.

Doc and his two aids departed. They tried once more to pick up the radio signals, but had no success.

They found no trace of John Black, his hired hoodlums, or of Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone.

Two days later the situation was just about the same, with one exception.

The A. B. Chickerelli expedition, with the millionaire himself in charge, took off for Egypt.

ONLY one thing marred the departure of Chickerelli's huge plane. The millionaire and his crowd were taking off from an airport on Long Island. Their Clipper-type ship was capable of carrying about twenty passengers. But only eight wealthy men were aboard.

Two minutes before the take-off, an airport attendant ran, screaming, across the field. He acted strangely. Other attendants were sent chasing after him.

They found the man lying in bushes at the edge of the wide field. He was writhing, foaming at the mouth. His eyes were glazed.

Men tried to question him.

The stricken man finally managed to gasp, "Back there . . . plane . . . something like . . . like a fat beetle "

The fellow lost consciousness.

Some of the other attendants raced back to Chickerelli's waiting plane and announced what had happened. A search was made of the mammoth ship. Baggage was moved. Equipment had to be taken out of the wing storage chambers in order that every part of the ship could be inspected.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

They found nothing. No kind of bug or beetle.

Chickerelli and his millionaire partners figured it was some kind of gag. A trick to hold up the flight. They took off for Egypt a half hour later.

The plane rolled the length of the field. It was loaded heavily with supplies. Onlookers held their breaths, shuddered, then finally gave long sighs as the great ship finally lifted and cleared the trees beyond the airport field. The plane disappeared like a giant silver bird against the bright sun.

An hour later, the stricken airport attendant died in a nearby hospital. He died without regaining consciousness, without telling anything more about the beetle or a thing that he had supposedly seen.

Doctors at the hospital were puzzled by his death. They performed an autopsy and discovered that the fellow had died of a rare type of poisoning.

They also located the pin-prick mark on the palm of the dead man's hand, a tiny mark that could have been made by some sort of bite. The doctors working on an analysis of the poison finally decided that it was of a rare type produced by a loathsome insect of the Sahara.

And yet, this kind of insect was extinct today. The last of the species had been found thirty years ago in an old tomb of the Pharaohs!

The information reached the newspapers and created quite a furor when people read about it next morning.

But not nearly so much excitement as the black headlines that followed on that same afternoon.

The headlines told of the great Clipper-type expedition plane of A. B. Chickerelli. A frantic message had come from the plane as it was somewhere out over the Atlantic. There had been a cry for help, an urgent S O S. And then, the startling words:

THE CURSE HAS OVERTAKEN US. THE CURSE IN THE FORM OF

After that, nothing else at all. No further word from those aboard the giant plane.

Silence!

THE little old brown man arrived at Doc Savage's headquarters a half hour after the newspapers were on the streets. The old fellow's name was Menzala, and he spoke only in Egyptian. He was accompanied by gemlike Princess Amen-Amen.

Menzala said in his native tongue, "There has been a terrible mistake!"

Doc Savage and Johnny, who also understood Egyptian, listened. Ham was there, and he watched the pretty Egyptian girl suspiciously.

Monk came out of Doc's huge laboratory, got one look at Princess Amen-Amen and let out a howl.

"You!" the hairy chemist roared. "Look here, dark and dangerous, what the heck was the idea of "

Doc Savage said quietly, "Quiet, Monk. This is quite important."

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

Monk subsided.

"Mistake?" the bronze man asked of the little old brown fellow. "You might explain."

Menzala indicated dainty-looking Princess Amen-Amen. The old fellow mentioned a long, titled name, explained, "She is a real princess. She is a direct descendent of King Tutankhamen. The scroll, the ancient manuscript was stolen from her!"

Monk and Ham could not understand what was being said.

But gaunt Johnny jumped. "*What?*" he demanded.

"Stolen," Menzala repeated. "It was stolen by some of our own countrymen and brought to this country. The princess trusted John Black. She thought he was an honest, righteous man. In that, poor child, she was wrong. I must admit that she has done some things that have appeared suspicious. But she did not know, because she was confused. You must forgive her."

Doc Savage was thoughtful a moment. Excited, Johnny said something to the bronze man. He used long words that nobody could understand.

"I have come to you for help," added old Menzala. "We are helpless in this great country of yours. But we have heard about you, Doc Savage. They say you help people like us."

Briefly, for the benefit of Monk and Ham, Doc told what the old man had said. He added, "We shall check on his story."

Doc moved toward his laboratory, asking the princess and the old man to follow. The girl looked self-conscious, dejected. Her dark, deep eyes avoided those of the Doc Savage aids.

In the laboratory, the bronze giant used a lie-detector device, that was more fully developed than those in use in modern police laboratories. Doc subjected both the princess and Menzala to the machine. He asked questions. He made the old fellow repeat his story.

It seemed the old man was her uncle. He, too, had a title a long one. Menzala, though, was an easier name to remember.

Doc continued the questioning for some time. He watched the indicator needle of the machine. It showed that both the princess and her uncle were stating the truth.

Then Doc Savage moved to a telephone. He put through calls that should have made telephone company officials rub their hands together with pleasure. They would be able to declare an extra dividend.

Most of the calls were to Egypt, to various officials there.

When Doc had finished, he stood up and said, "Menzala is authentic. So is Princess Amen-Amen. They have been swindled out of something that is worth a fortune."

Monk stared. Ham did likewise.

The chemist said, "But blazes, Doc! Everyone says that blasted thing in the cylinder is junk! How come "

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"The scroll is not worthless," said Doc Savage. "It is merely that everyone has overlooked something very important in the ancient manuscript."

"You mean " Monk started.

"We are leaving for Egypt tonight," announced the bronze man. "Long Tom and Renny are already at the water front hangar. We have been readying a plane for just something like this."

Princess Amen–Amen, her dejection suddenly gone, gave a happy cry and flung her arms around Doc Savage. She choked out, "I could kiss you!"

Embarrassed, Doc Savage drew back. The attention of women was something that Doc avoided in his dangerous career.

But Monk, beaming now, jumped forward. "Hey!" he piped excitedly. "Try that on *me!*"

Smartly dressed Ham blocked the hairy chemist's path. He said icily, "You misfit!" He smiled at the girl. "Allow me, my dear "

Monk swung at his dapper partner, bellowed, "Why you blasted shyster! *You* were the one that said the princess "

It looked as if there was going to be a good fight.

The bronze man's words momentarily checked it.

"There is a great deal to do yet," he said.

### Chapter XIII. PYRAMID

PIOUS–LOOKING John Black was busy, also. He was just finishing up with a gruesome pirate party at sea.

The pink–eyed crime leader was accompanied by a dozen of his men. They were in the giant Clipper ship of A. B. Chickerelli.

Chickerelli and his companions had been dumped overboard!

The ruse that John Black had worked was simple.

The small fishing boat still carried a distress signal on her masthead. It had been set adrift, and now some of the struggling men in the ocean were frantically trying to reach it.

John Black and his men had been in the fishing craft, on a course that the giant plane would cover on its direct flight to Egypt. The navigator of the plane had seen the boat in distress. He had ordered the plane down in order that the hapless fishermen could be aided.

And that's when John Black had taken over.

All the wealthy men had been forced overboard. It looked as though a number of them weren't going to reach the drifting fishing boat. They could not swim.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

But the navigator and plane pilot had been spared. John Black needed them for the remainder of the flight. Shortly, the great amphibian ship was in the air again.

The hot sun dropped low in the western sky, and John Black strode nervously up and down the aisleway of the plane cabin. He looked worried. His little pink eyes squinted from one to the other of his henchmen.

"Something wrong?" one of his hard-looking thugs asked.

John Black paused in his nervous pacing up and down, looked at his men and snapped, "Bless me, yes! There's plenty wrong!"

"What, for instance?"

"That radio report about the airport attendant the way he died! What do you make of it?"

Somebody shrugged. "Who cares? Long as it wasn't you, why "

"It *could* have been!" said John Black.

That made everybody sit quiet for several moments.

One man grinned. He was Jake, the fellow of the blocky jaw and massive shoulders.

Jake said carelessly. "Aw, nuts! That scarab business is a lot of hooey, I figure. Sure, it had me scared at first, but I've got over it."

"Yeah!" said somebody sarcastically.

John Black frowned and went forward to the control cockpit. The assorted gunmen were taking turns guarding the pilot and the navigator. Black took a slip of paper from his coat pocket, located the markings on a chart spread on a small table before the navigator.

"We're going here," snapped John Black, indicating a point at the fringe of the Sahara. "And no mistakes!"

The navigator shrugged. A gun was held in the lap of the guard seated near him. There was little the captured navigator could do but agree.

The huge ship droned on through the night.

THE earth appeared to be a thing of vast whiteness on which the sun hammered down with an intensity that seared the eyeballs and made one's skin blister.

As John Black and his men climbed out of the huge plane, they cursed at the scorching feel of the hot sand and of the white brilliance everywhere that almost blinded them.

But Black had come prepared. As equipment was unloaded, he opened a box, removed colored eyeglasses and white pith helmets. He passed them around.

"These will help a little," said John Black.

Each man was assigned a box or a case to carry. There were a few grumbles of complaint.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

"Why the hell land *here*?" someone wanted to know. "We've got the whole blasted desert ahead of us!"

John Black shook his head. His little pink eyes were invisible behind the dark glasses.

"Not quite," he explained. "Only about five miles of it."

He consulted a compass that he wore like a wrist watch. "We go about five miles due east. There, we should find something interesting. At that point, we will be at our journey's end. Gracious me, yes, we shall!"

The pilot was ordered to remove certain parts from the plane's ignition system, so that there would be no chance of anyone escaping with the plane during their absence.

As John Black explained, "It would not be a good idea to land right at the exact spot we seek. Let's look the place over a little first."

They started out, trudging through the hot sands, and soon these city hoodlums were cursing the heat and their parched throats. John Black had trouble keeping them from drinking what supply of water they had with them, in canteens.

It took them three hours to cover the five miles, the walking was that difficult. Blisters appeared on the men's feet; their faces, even though protected somewhat by the white helmets, were beet-red.

But they held out, looking forward to this thing that Black had said would prove interesting at the end of the journey.

They came to an oasis. Green foliage ahead beckoned them to quicken their pace. Night was already falling, and there was a hint of coolness to come.

But there was no forewarning hint of the small band of wild-riding Arabs who came it seemed right out of the desert dunes to swoop down upon them.

Everyone dropped his luggage and got out gats and formed a small tight circle in the desert.

THE horsemen circled once, moved in a little closer. A rifle cracked, and the bullet went whizzing across the sand dunes, leaving a death song trailing along behind it.

Several of John Black's men let go with a blast from their automatics and revolvers. The damage was slight. One horse fell down.

And in return, a volley of rifle shots passed overhead about two inches over the heads of Black's crowd.

John Black screamed to his men, "Wait! Maybe we can outsmart these guys in kimonos!"

He got out a white handkerchief, started waving it frantically. To his men, he ordered. "Throw down your guns!"

Some hesitated. They had been brought up with guns, as some babies are brought up with silver spoons. They didn't like to part with their one means of defense.

But they took another look at the menacing white-garbed horsemen and changed their minds. They threw down their weapons.



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A rider left the inclosing ring of horsemen and approached Black and his men. It could be seen that he was a big man, entirely garbed in white. Even a white face-piece partially concealed his features against the desert heat.

He spoke in Arabic.

John Black shrugged. "What the hell do we do now?" he asked his men.

The one with the blocky features, tough-looking Jake, stepped forward. "I'll talk to that Egyptian cowboy," he offered.

"How?" someone exclaimed.

"Watch!"

Jake started jabbering in some sort of staccato lingo. The big horseman stiffened, seeming to be listening attentively. Suddenly, he answered in the same sort of tongue.

Jake made a motion with his hands, turned to John Black and grinned.

"Nothing to it," he said. "Snow White wants to know what the blasted hell we're doing here. And, boy, that guy knows some fancy cuss words in Arabic, boss!"

JOHN BLACK thought swiftly. A crafty scheme leaped into his ever-scheming thoughts.

"You tell Snow White," he said, "that we'll split with him on anything we get from the tomb in the pyramid we're seeking. Tell him we'll cut him in, if he helps us instead of slinging lead."

Blocky-jawed Jake translated John Black's words into the lingo that he and the bandit leader had been using. There was a lot of arm waving between the two men. Then Jake turned back to John Black.

All noted that the Arab leader had been making motions across the desert with his outstretched hand.

"He says," informed Jake, "that the pyramid is just beyond the next hill that the damned thing has been there since about 2100 B. C. and what the hell are we going to do about it? Explorers have entered the pyramid a dozen times. They have never found any treasure in the cussed place!"

John Black showed no sign of disappointment at the announcement. Instead, he looked pleased.

"Swell!" he exclaimed. "Bless me, that's fine! That means the treasure must still be there! You tell Snow White that I know something that no one else has ever discovered about the pyramid. Ask him if he has ever heard about the Queen's Chamber inside that rock pile?"

Jake talked some more. Everyone saw the Arab leader shake his head.

Jake turned back and said, "He says he ain't never heard of any such room in the pyramid. He says no one has ever found such a place."

John Black grinned. "That," he said with pleasure, "is what makes me different from the others. I have the key that will show us the entranceway to that chamber. It is there that a cool million in treasure ought to be found!"

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

Jake translated the information. They all saw the big Arab sit in stunned silence. Then he barked a command to his followers in Arabic. Rifles were sheathed. The white-garbed bandit tribe did not look quite so menacing.

Jake spoke to the leader again, then said, "Snow White says you and him are going to get along swell."

The group of horsemen got down from their animals and helped with some of the boxes and equipment. The procession set out through the gathering dusk. Everyone gave a sigh of relief.

Someone said, "We got to hand it to the boss." He referred to John Black. "For a guy who looks like a parson, he's got more crooked moves than a snake!"

The comment pleased John Black. His fat stomach, for once, looked a trifle smaller than his chest. He said, "Snow White's going to get one hell of a surprise."

They traveled onward through the approaching darkness. After a while the moon came up and it got light again; almost white, with the moon-glow hitting the gleaming white sand.

They cleared the top of the hill finally and saw the awesome spectacle ahead, about a mile away, set on a flat plateau of solid rock.

It was the pyramid, its limestone-treated sides a shimmering, breathtaking sight.

### Chapter XIV. THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER

THE following morning, in the bright, hot sunlight, the great pyramid looked even more spectacular. The sun gleamed off its limestone-coated sides. Here and there, most likely caused by the ravages of time, a part of the protective coating was missing. Darker stone shone through. But on the whole, the massive edifice was a thing to create awe.

In the Doc Savage plane, circling several thousand feet above the plateau on which the pyramid was built, the bronze man's aids stared downward at the huge edifice.

Monk's little eyes squinted.

"Gollywockus!" he piped shrilly. "Lookit, will you! Imagine how many guys it took to build that thing!"

Ham commented coolly, "They showed more sense than you do, misfit! Mathematicians have proven that the Great Pyramid of Gizeh is the most accurately orientated building known to engineering science. Why, it "

"Doggonit, you talk like Johnny!" Monk complained.

Doc spoke up.

"Nevertheless, Ham's statement is correct," said the bronze man. "This pyramid below is not the Great Gizeh, but it appears almost as large. For example, its square base covers an area of almost twelve acres. It is over seven hundred feet in height, and each of its four base lines measures approximately the same length."

"Golly!" Monk said.

Johnny said, "Also, in the building there are approximately ninety million cubic feet of stone. It is practically

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

a *solid* mass, unlike ordinary hollow structures."

This gave some idea of the pyramid's enormousness.

It was Long Tom who queried, "where'd you get all those figures?"

Doc indicated a package that was carefully tied up in the cockpit of the plane. The bronze man was at the controls, and the others had crowded in there to watch the awesome sight below them on the desert plateau.

"From the ancient scroll that was in the copper cylinder," informed Doc Savage. "Those details were mentioned, along with other things."

Later, they came down and Doc brought the huge plane to rest along a stretch of smooth, stone plateau. Everyone piled out, glad to stretch legs and arms again. Each Doc Savage aid was already attired in a white burnoose, the one-piece hooded garment worn by Arabs as protection against sand and sun.

Renny, the little brown man named Menzala, and Princess Amen–Amen were also in the cabin of the plane. They, too, were attired in the white nightgowns, as Monk referred to the things.

They all saw nothing save the gleaming desert sands, the stretch of wide plateau, and the towering stone pile of a thing directly ahead. There seemed to be no signs of life whatsoever.

Johnny remarked, "I'll be superamalgamated! Funny we didn't see any trace of John Black and his crowd!"

Apparently Doc's flight had taken him out of the way of the grounded John Black plane. For they had not seen it.

Satisfied that they had been the first to arrive, they advanced on the pyramid. Half an hour later they were at its extensive base. Doc and Johnny led the way around the thing until they were beneath the north wall.

The great, four-foot-high blocks of stone rose above them. Up up

Monk blinked. "Blazes!" he squalled. "How are we gonna get *inside* this blasted thing?"

"The secret entrance," explained the bronze man, "is on the fiftieth level on this side, exactly in the center of this wall. It is doubtful that it has ever been discovered. It is a sealed doorway that fits perfectly into the outer wall."

They all decided to climb up the pyramid and investigate.

It was somewhat of a task. Monk and Ham gallantly helped lovely Princess Amen–Amen. She was so small and gemlike that she had to be lifted from one set-back to another. Monk enjoyed that. Ham scowled whenever his hairy partner managed to help the girl first.

Habeas, the pig, climbed up on the chimp's back and made Chemistry carry him. Chemistry made squealing protests, to no avail. Habeas clung on madly, refusing to be shaken off.

At last they reached the fiftieth tier. Doc Savage calmly studied the formation of the massive stone blocks.

Monk asked, "How much does one of these pebbles weigh, Doc?" He indicated one of the stone blocks.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

"About two and a half tons," explained the bronze man. "But inside the pyramid, they are placed in such a way that passages cut through the structure at various angles. It is the secret door to one of these passageways that leads to the Queen's Chamber."

"The Queen's Chamber?"

Doc nodded. "That is the room we must locate first. It is quite important."

Doc had been bending down close to the huge blocks of stone. He removed a small instrument that looked like a chisel from beneath his burnoose, started scraping at the limestone covering of the pyramid. The material was cracked and dry from its centuries-old exposure to rain, wind and sun. Pieces of it came off in sheets, revealing the solid darker stone beneath.

Suddenly, the bronze man's chisel slipped into a crack. He worked the blade up and down. The crack grew longer.

Johnny looked excited. "I think you've found it!" he cried, so interested that he forgot to use big words. "It must be the doorway, because every other part of these pyramids was so carefully constructed that no seams were ever revealed!"

Doc's chisel was working rapidly now. The crack became a rectangle in the great stone block. It was perhaps a quarter of an inch in width. When the bronze man had it all cleared out, he stepped back, replaced the chisel beneath his burnoose cloak, and then motioned to huge Renny.

"Push on this part here," Doc directed.

They shoved on one side of the great block of stone.

It slowly swung inward, as the opposite side of the stone block swung outward. Hinged in the middle, the back of the massive stone block was circular in shape, and it cleared the opening neatly. It was a massive, well-made door!

The passageway beyond loomed like a black funnel of emptiness.

They all had brought along the spring-generated flashlights used by Doc Savage. These were turned on now as everyone crowded inside the opening.

AHEAD, slanting downward at an angle, was revealed the long passageway built between the great blocks of the pyramid. Mustiness, a dank smell, struck their nostrils. The flooring of the tunnel was slippery, so that it was necessary to move cautiously in order to avoid a fall.

Doc Savage and the others, stooped down because of the tunnel's low height, proceeded toward the bowels of the great structure.

Even Monk was quiet, inspired by the magnitude of this thing they had entered.

Ten minutes later they reached another passage. This, instead of slanting sharply downward, led upward again.

They started up the slippery incline. Suddenly, the wide opening on their right was revealed. Doc Savage led the way inside.

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

And all found themselves in a massive room about a hundred feet long and fifty wide. Great stone columns supported the ceiling of the room. Along the walls, blocks of the stone stood out like giant shelves. There appeared to be openings that might lead back into the pyramid mass.

Monk, curious, started forward, pointing ahead. Habeas was sniffing along close to the hairy chemist's heels. Monk yelled back, "Golly, there's somethin' over here that looks like a blasted crypt, an' it's "

Doc Savage's voice suddenly crashed out in the huge room.

"Wait!"

The bronze man leaped forward as Monk halted, startled. Doc seized the chemist and dragged him back. He indicated the pit almost at Monk's feet, as the others moved carefully forward.

Monk goggled as he stood on the edge of the pit and directed a light downward. He could not see the bottom. The pit was about five feet square at the top, and appeared like a well of some sort.

"Whew!" Monk exploded. He picked up a small fragment of rock that had dropped from one of the walls. He dropped it into the black opening, listened carefully as he counted seconds before the thing hit bottom.

And then he jumped when the stone finally struck. "Blazes!" Monk piped shrilly. "That thing's close to seven or eight hundred feet deep. It's deeper than the pyramid itself!"

Doc Savage nodded. "That is exactly what it is," he said. "The Pit. It goes right into the solid rock of the plateau beneath the pyramid. Centuries ago, it was perhaps used for the destruction of unruly slaves."

Everyone was silent for some time. And then they got away from there. They investigated the remainder of the great room and learned one fact.

There were no coffers, no mummy tombs, no signs of treasure whatsoever. Nothing.

HAM looked disgusted. He stared at Princess Amen–Amen and her elderly uncle, Menzala.

"A gag," he said sourly. "It looks like you aren't going to find anything here at all, princess." He patted the girl's arm.

Monk came up on the other side of the dainty–looking girl and squeezed her other arm. "Daggonit," he murmured, "I'm sorry."

Everybody but Doc Savage looked gloomy. The two pets, Habeas and Chemistry, sat down and looked disgusted. They even forgot to pick a fight with one another.

And then the bronze man spoke.

"The Queen's Chamber," he informed them, "is only a key."

"Key?" Ham the lawyer, stared. "But "

"A key to the real treasure chamber. It is from this room that we must find the secret entrance to the real storehouse."

Monk jumped up and down and let out a yell.

"Wow!" he bellowed. "That's different!"

His words came smashing back at him from some opening across the far side of the big room. It seemed to come out of a great depth.

Monk goggled. He tried again.

"Hey!" he called, and waited for an answer. The word came smashing back.

"Try out—yelling *this*, brother!"

Monk almost popped out his small eyes.

In the next moment, the blast of a gun made a deafening roar in the great stone room.

Men appeared in the openings up on the walls of the room. Men garbed in white burnouses and with rifles in their hands. A dozen of them! They started yelling and jumping down to the floor of the vast chamber.

Behind them, up in one of the openings, appeared John Black.

## Chapter XV. DESERT DEVIL

JOHN BLACK ordered, "All right, let that Doc Savage crowd have it!"

It was his voice that had answered Monk when the chemist had tried for the echo effects!

Powerful Renny had pushed the girl and her elderly uncle into the outer passageway the moment the white-garbed men had appeared. It was the passage leading back to the side wall entrance of the pyramid.

"Run for it!" the giant engineer ordered in his booming voice. "Get back to the plane. Lock the cabin doors. Wait there!"

Then he leaped back to help Doc and the others. Doc's aids had taken up positions behind the heavy supporting columns of the great chamber. Down the length of the room, using the protection of other columns, the Arabs were using their rifles.

Slugs banged around the stone walls, ricocheted, came screaming from all angles.

Doc's crowd had out their machine pistols. Monk let go with a blast. An Arab leaped into the air and came down on all fours. His rifle went flying across the room.

Monk howled with glee. "Got him!"

He ran out from behind the stone column protection, took aim on another dark-skinned figure.

But a slug nicked the hairy chemist in the leg and he leaped, howling, back behind the stone column.

Habeas and the chimp had scampered to a corner of the long room and were trying to get behind one another.

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Fat little John Black had disappeared from the wall opening a dozen feet above the stone floor of the chamber. But his voice carried out of a hidden opening beyond.

"Kill them! Murder them all!"

It was about then that Doc Savage threw the smoke grenade.

The black, thick stuff billowed out and spread quickly. It soon filled all corners of the room. Within it, the flashlights were useless. Men fought in a wild, noisy frenzy.

Monk kept howling.

"Got me another blasted nightshirt!"

And a moment later, "Ye—e—ow! Got another one!"

And Ham's voice cried out in pained anger. "Hey, you hairy ape! That's *me!*"

Monk kept quiet after that and was more careful of whom he grabbed in the darkness. Rifles and guns were useless now. There was too much danger of each side killing their own men. Even the Arabs were smart enough not to take any chances.

The greatest menace, though, in that entire room was the black pit of a thing that was somewhere just inside the entrance from the tunnel.

The fight moved like a great wave up and down the stone floor. Heads cracked. Fists thudded into flesh.

Again Monk let out a gleeful howl. "I *know* I got me the right one this time. He's got a beard! Allah be "

There followed a distinct crack as Monk's fist connected with a brittle jaw. The chemist yelled happily and reached out in the darkness for someone else.

And then, after a while, Monk found himself grabbing, at intervals, Ham, Johnny and his other partners. There appeared to be no Arabs left. Doc's men paused in their fighting and used their flashlights again in an attempt to penetrate the black fog. They listened.

No shots came. No sounds.

Slowly, the black stuff dispersed and they stared around.

Johnny yelled, "I'll be superamalgamated! They're gone!"

This seemed to be the situation. Also, there was something else. Ham was the one to discover it.

"Where where's Doc?" he cried.

But the bronze man was not in the great chamber.

Monk leaped toward the tunnel entranceway, yelling, "Maybe he went to help the princess and Menzala. Maybe he "

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And he almost crashed into the small, neatly formed girl as she moved into the room from the passageway. She was followed by her brown-looking uncle. Her face was strained with a look of horror.

"We we're trapped!" she gasped, gripping Monk's massive arm.

"Trapped? But the door opening up there on the side of the pyramid " the chemist started.

Princess Amen-Amen clutched Monk more fiercely. She said, "The opening has been shut off. We cannot get out!"

RENNY, who was perhaps the most powerful of all the Doc Savage aids, went up the long-ceilinged passageway to investigate. He returned to report:

"What the princess says is true. We're blocked in. That stone door of a thing has been closed, and there is no way of opening it again. Some sort of stone key has dropped down above it and sealed it tight!"

For several moments, everyone stood in stunned silence. And then they remembered Doc Savage. They started a search within the big chamber itself.

On the floor, they found two unconscious Arabs. They were not dead, merely stunned from effect of the mercy bullets. All knew that shortly they would regain consciousness. But little help that would be.

The Arabs would not be able to speak English.

They got up into the openings along the stone walls and investigated the spaces up there. There must be another outlet from this room, for that's where John Black had appeared.

But they found no openings except indentations that went back about a dozen feet and then ended against blank stone walls. There were no exits whatsoever.

Monk blinked his small bright eyes. "But blast it!" he snorted. "How did they get *out*? And where's Doc?"

They kept investigating. And half an hour later, they were convinced that, somehow, the bronze man had been captured. He had been captured by John Black and his Arab henchmen during the smoke blackout.

That was the most startling discovery.

The other was that they, themselves, were helpless prisoners within the great stone pile of a pyramid!

JOHN BLACK stood with a satisfied grin on his milky-pink features. He was standing not more than ten feet from where Princess Amen-Amen, her uncle, and the Doc Savage aids were trapped. What separated John Black from them was a block of stone ten feet thick. But so carefully was that stone balanced that it had slid back into position perfectly, locking off the room that was known as the Queen's Chamber.

"That," said John Black, "takes care of Doc Savage and his men. And the princess." He rubbed his fat hands together slowly. "They are locked in there forever. Bless me, I'm afraid they shall die."

He looked very happy about the whole situation.

John Black then turned his attention to others who were waiting for him in this room of the pyramid. There were some of his New York hoodlums. And Jake, the one with the blocky jaw was there.



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Also, the semi-masked figure of the Arab leader they had nicknamed Snow White.

Black said, "And now, palsy-walsy, we got to get the *real* treasure!"

Jake translated the words for John Black. The big Arab leader jerked his head. His eyes were bright behind his half-mask. He said something in his brittle lingo.

Jake translated, "He says that is O. K. with him. Let's go!"

The men were carrying lanterns. They moved across the room, reached an exit that led to another tunnel through the pyramid. This one slanted downward.

John Black was carrying the photostatic copy of the original scroll manuscript in his hands. He consulted it, passed it to the big Arab leader, then spoke to Jake.

"Tell Snow white to check the directions in that thing. Make sure we're following the right passageway."

Jake spoke to the white-garbed leader. The man nodded, pointed down the tunnel. He said something in his tricky language.

Jake explained, "He says we got the right tunnel. The scroll says that the swag is in the King's Chamber, in some sort of anteroom off that room. It is ahead somewhere."

John Black nodded. He squinted his weak, pink eyes as he proceeded, with his men, along the damp passage.

They arrived at last in the King's Chamber.

It was similar to the large space where the Doc Savage men had been left. But this room had been furnished. There were huge chairs engraved in copper and gold, that had withstood the centuries. There was a raised dais that must have been some sort of throne.

It was on this that the mummy was resting in the crypt. There wasn't much to it. Just a shriveled-up thing in some sort of wrappings. When they touched it, it practically fell away to ashes.

John Black moved about the large room. His eyes were bright with greed. But he saw nothing here that resembled great treasure. Not yet.

HE looked at the Arab leader, snapped to Jake, "Where's this damned antechamber he mentioned?"

Jake translated. The Arab moved across the room, stooped down. All saw the two-foot-high tunnel that entered the room close to the flooring.

The Arab started to crawl through. The others followed. And as he crawled, he talked. Jake did some more translating.

He said, "Snow White says, according to the scroll, everything is in the next room. The king was no dumbbell. He didn't have his wealth buried in the room with him. It was all placed in this adjoining, smaller room."

Shortly, on hands and knees, Black's men started emerging into the small room beyond. The Arab was first, some of Black's men behind him. John Black himself was still on his hands and knees within the little tunnel.

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Some of his men followed him.

Suddenly, from in front of him, came a yell. One of his own men cried, "The room is empty! Not a damn thing in here, boss!"

And then, more worried, the man's words came floating back. "It's a trick! Lookout, boss, this guy is "

The frantic, terrified scream followed. It ended on a dying gurgle.

The cry came back along the line, passed from man to man as they paused on hands and knees.

"Trick! We've been fooled. Get out. *Hurry!*"

John Black started backing through the tunnel as though a machine gun had been stuck up against his nose.

Another man screamed somewhere in front of him. There was confusion as men tried frantically to back up on hands and knees. They became a boiling, confused knot.

Someone yelled, "It's that damned Arab Snow White. He's shooting a gat into this tunnel!"

John Black finally got out of there and ran, panting, across the room of the King's Chamber. Jake was with him. They reached the throne platform. There was some sort of figure there, half fallen apart after centuries of standing. But it was still massive enough to offer protection.

John Black and some of his men got behind it and got out guns. They waited for the Arabs and their crooked leader to emerge into the room.

All realized that they had been cleverly tricked.

### Chapter XVI. THE DEVIL CALLED LOU

MEN backed out of the tunnel opening across the room. Black's men and some of the Arabs. They started fighting. There was a lot of racket and cussing in Arabic and English.

John Black, terrified, cringed against the statue thing got part way behind it, squeezed in against the massive rock wall.

It was then that powerful hands took hold of his throat.

John Black felt the world going to smash around him. He twisted, wondering what horror thing had a grip on him.

It was Jake.

Jake's blocky jaw was grim, his eyes afire with a queer light.

He held onto John Black's fat throat and snarled, "Brother, you've sure been a chump!"

"I ah what " John Black gurgled.

"You thought that airfield attendant died of the curse, didn't you?" demanded Jake.

Black jerked his head dumbly.

Jake grinned. "That guy was just jabbed with a poisoned needle. An ordinary beetle was released in the plane for a few minutes so that he could see it. That's what he was raving about before he died."

John Black gurgled some more. "But the others how "

"Poisoned, too!" rapped powerful-looking Jake. "Like your servant, that deaf-mute. Only we meant to get *you!* We left them marks around, to scare you off. Lou arranged all that!"

"Lou?"

John Black had to almost yell above the uproar that was taking place in the throne room. Beyond the protection of the statue behind which he and Jake were hidden, his men and the Arab raiders fought with wild fury. Men screamed. A New York thug coughed blood as a long knife was shoved into his lungs. Guns racketed, and the sound smashed around the big walls of the pyramid room.

Jake held on to John Black and sneered.

"Yeah, Lou!" he snapped. "Lou arranged all this. He worked the scarab business to scare everybody. But you got away before he could nail you in New York, and so now he's going to kill you *here!*"

Black goggled out of his weak, pink eyes. He stammered, "You . . . you're working for Lou! And yet you . . . you were one of the bodyguards!"

Jake nodded, laughing.

"Yeah. That's right. You fell for that note that was inclosed in the copper cylinder. You thought your cousin Northrup had written it. But we switched notes. Your damned cousin is dead!"

John Black tried to gasp. "But . . . but "

Just then, there was a great yell from the room behind them. Jake, holding John Black, pushed out to take a look. They both saw the big Arab leader emerge from the tunnel and stand with the grenade in his uplifted hand. The fellow was no longer wearing his face mask.

John Black jerked with terror, stared.

"Him!" he cried.

Jake said, "Yeah him!"

John Black half slumped against the wall behind them. His hands clutched wildly for support. They touched the knob of a thing built into the stone and the entire back wall behind the statute started swinging inward.

Doc Savage was standing inside the opening.

John Black, the coward now, clutched at the bronze man's arm and cried, "Help me! We've been tricked. The one behind this whole menace has been "

Jake had released Black and started to whirl out from behind the statue hiding place.

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The bronze man's left hand whipped out, took hold of the powerful fellow and held him rigid. Doc used a neck hold that rendered the man incapable of movement. He was the same as paralyzed. .

Doc Savage turned his attention back to John Black. They were all concealed from those fighting in the big room beyond.

"The one you refer to is Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone, the Egyptologist," said Doc. "The man to whom you went for advice in New York City."

John Black was stunned.

"You . . . You *know*?" he gasped.

The bronze giant nodded.

With Jake and the fat little albino still held in his grasp, Doc moved out from behind the statue and into the throne room proper.

And there, across the room, stood tall, heavy-set Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone, his hand still upraised, and speaking in English to those who stood in awe before him.

"One move, and you die!" rapped Pettibone.

He no longer looked like the nervous, fidgety professor of Egyptology. His eyes glittered. His gaze swung, and saw the bronze man with the two captives.

Pettibone yelled, "Fine. Here's where I get you *all*!"

In that instant, Doc Savage released his prisoners. His own arm moved in a flashing arc. Something went hurtling through the air.

But too late.

Pettibone's grenade had already left his fingers. It exploded near the group of cowed thugs. It made a great *whoosh* of a sound, and concussion staggered everyone.

It also knocked down one of the great stone pillar supports in the center of the throne room. One of the round columns that held up a huge stone block of the ceiling.

That part of the ceiling started falling down. Men started screaming and leaping out of the way.

Added stress on another column caused it to crack in the middle. It snapped in two. More ceiling came down and landed on some of John Black's thugs and two Arabs.

Perhaps John Black saw that he was doomed. Death was to be his, regardless. And in that last moment on earth he saw his opportunity for revenge.

With a scream of unholy rage, he leaped toward the moving figure of Lucius Ethelbert Pettibone the man known as "Lou"! A heavy pen-knife appeared in John Black's trembling hand. It clicked, and a blade five inches long leaped into view.

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Snarling, John Black hurtled his fat body toward the big man.

Everyone else was trying to press himself into the walls of the room, fear-filled eyes raised to where the ceiling was collapsing in the center of the vast chamber. Another two-ton block came down with a thunderous roar. Dusty, choking stuff that was dry as chalk, made the air a thick cloud. Figures moved vaguely in the haze.

Doc Savage, strangely, had not moved. He was hardly noticing the others. Instead, his eyes were looking steadily at the ceiling of the chamber, as though studying the construction of the place.

And then, abruptly, he moved, back behind the statue thing that had been swung open. He leaped into the passageway beyond.

FIVE minutes later, he was emerging into the room that held Princess Amen–Amen and his own men helpless prisoners. Doc's figure came into view up in one of the indentations on the stone wall. His great voice crashed out:

"This way! Hurry!"

Astounded, Monk, Johnny and the others stared up at Doc. Then they were racing across the room.

It was Renny's booming voice that thundered out. "Listen!" he said.

Everyone heard. A distant, steady rumble like thunder beyond mountains!

Doc's voice rapped an order again.

"Up here!" he snapped. "You'll have to run for your lives!"

The girl was swung up. Doc grasped her slim, small form and placed her on the ledge. Her elderly uncle followed. And then Doc's men. Monk and Ham had their pets in their arms.

The hairy chemist yelled, "Doc, we were *up* here! But there wasn't any outlet from the space!"

Doc Savage pointed. There was an opening now. It led into one of the dark tunnels that criss-crossed the giant pyramid.

Doc, leading the way with a light, said, "This opening was mentioned in the old manuscript. It is a way out."

"Out?" Monk yelled. "Blast it, Doc, I'm gonna find that John Black guy and twist off his pink ears!"

Doc did not argue. He merely motioned them onward, leading them at a fast pace. He had swung the girl, Princess Amen–Amen, and her uncle up into his powerful arms. He ran up the steep passageway with no apparent effort.

Moments later they emerged into light. They stared. Down below them, rolling off into the vast distance, was the flat plateau and desert. They were almost half-way up the side of the pyramid.

The girl cried, "We're out of that awful place. Good heavens, I thought "

She paused, terror leaping into her eyes. The great slab of stone on which her dainty feet rested had trembled.

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All heard the rumbling sound from within the great pyramid.

Doc's eyes flashed to his aids. He indicated the girl and her uncle.

"Get them down from here!" he commanded.

They went down the sides of the pyramid, from rock shelf to rock shelf with great leaping bounds. Each jump was a distance of four feet.

Doc carried the old man. Powerful Renny had the girl. Monk and Ham, worried, were clinging to their pets.

They reached the pyramid base finally, kept running a distance, paused to look back.

Doc's voice ripped out, "Keep going!"

They kept running until they had reached the bronze man's plane, still grounded some distance away from the towering mass of block stone.

And then they paused. They looked back and saw the awesome spectacle.

The top of the pyramid had disappeared, caving inside the massive structure!

LATER, Doc Savage told them about the room in which the pillar had been knocked down by the explosion of the grenade hurled by Pettibone.

"That room," said Doc Savage, "was sort of a keystone for the entire pyramid. Its collapse meant a cave-in of the whole mass. We were lucky to escape."

Monk looked at the bronze man.

"You said Pettibone "

Doc nodded. "Black went to him with the scroll. Pettibone was no fool. Agents of his in Egypt had already learned about a cousin named Northrup sending the copper cylinder to Black. And so Jake got a job as bodyguard. He was working for Pettibone."

"But everyone said the scroll was worthless," put in Ham.

"Yes," agreed Doc Savage. "But it wasn't. Pettibone, while he had the scroll in his possession a few hours, made a change in the ancient manuscript. I detected that change when we examined it beneath ultraviolet light at the laboratory. Also, in an invisible writing on the scroll, were directions showing that the thing was authentic."

It was the following day that Doc Savage made this explanation. The top third of the pyramid had disappeared inside the structure now. And no men had emerged from the great edifice. All inside had been doomed.

"But what about the scarab things?" Long Tom prodded.

Doc reminded them of the scarab that had appeared on his own forehead when the John Black crowd had thought he was dying.

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"You see how the trick was easily duplicated," said Doc Savage. "Chalk that glowed when affected by moisture, such as perspiration of the body. Later, it could easily be wiped off even by someone carelessly touching the body. Pettibone had to stop Black. He built up the menace idea, the old curse stuff about Egypt. He used, or borrowed from the victims' own homes, weapons and things that pointed to ancient Egypt."

The girl, lovely Princess Amen–Amen, stared.

"Then both of those terrible men were crooks?" she said.

Doc nodded.

"Black thought the scroll was a fake and tried to pull a big fraud. Pettibone knew it was genuine and tried to scare everybody off."

"And," put in Renny, "it was those poor expedition guys who had to suffer, had to die!"

But this time, the bronze man shook his head.

"They were saved," he informed them. "I had an idea John Black was going to try to stop their flight. The coast guard had been warned to watch out for them. All the expedition members have been picked up at sea, in the fishing boat."

Princess Amen–Amen gave a thankful sigh.

"I'm glad," she murmured. "I don't care that we can't reach any treasure even if there is any within the pyramid. I had planned to turn most of the proceeds from it over to some worthwhile charity, but now "

Doc said, "You still can. The treasure is intact. We can still reach it, even though the pyramid itself has collapsed."

Everyone was stunned.

BUT within the following two weeks, Doc Savage proved that he was right. He revealed that The Pit the well of a thing that, centuries ago, had been cut through the pyramid and into the very rock of the plateau, could be reached.

It was located by blasting a way through the plateau shelf itself, beneath the great pyramid. There, the jewels, silver, gold and ancient treasure were found. Doc Savage estimated its value at close to a million dollars!

It would take another week to get the stuff out.

The Pit was the real treasure room beneath the pyramid. It was the one item that all but Doc Savage had overlooked in the ancient scroll. None had thought of looking for the invisible writing that the bronze man had found.

During the job of getting out the buried treasure, Monk and Princess Amen–Amen had plenty of time to get better acquainted.

The dainty, small girl sort of fell for the hairy, easygoing fellow in a big way.

One afternoon she drew dapper-looking Ham aside. She whispered, "I like Monk. I think he's grand. But

## THE AWFUL DYNASTY

with all the money I have now, I'm afraid he would be too much of a gentleman to propose to me. Do you think I should do it instead?" Princess Amen–Amen smiled knowingly. "After all, Ham, it's Leap Year!"

Ham almost choked. He lost no time in consulting Johnny, Long Tom and Renny. They had to do something to keep scrappy Monk from getting married.

The following morning the cablegram apparently arrived from New York. It was addressed to Princess Amen–Amen, but inside, she found the message that had been sent in care of her for the hairy chemist. She could not help but see the printed words before, with apologies, she gave the message to Monk.

The message said:

COME HOME AT ONCE. FOUR OF OUR CHILDREN HAVE MEASLES. YOUR LOVING WIFE.

ANNA.

THE END