

# **MASTERS OF DEATH**

Maxwell Grant

# Table of Contents

<u>MASTERS OF DEATH</u> .....	1
Maxwell Grant.....	1
<u>CHAPTER I. THE SILVER COFFIN</u> .....	1
<u>CHAPTER II. HAND OF DEATH</u> .....	5
<u>CHAPTER III. THE VOICE FROM THE PAST</u> .....	9
<u>CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW DEPARTS</u> .....	11
<u>CHAPTER V. THE MAN WHO RETURNED</u> .....	16
<u>CHAPTER VI. THE LONE THRUST</u> .....	19
<u>CHAPTER VII. THE HIDDEN TRAP</u> .....	22
<u>CHAPTER VIII. THE SECOND MEETING</u> .....	26
<u>CHAPTER IX. NIGHT OF DOOM</u> .....	30
<u>CHAPTER X. THE SHADOW'S TURN</u> .....	34
<u>CHAPTER XI. THE PERFECT SNARE</u> .....	37
<u>CHAPTER XII. MIND VERSUS MIND</u> .....	42
<u>CHAPTER XIII. THE CORPSE THAT LIVED</u> .....	46
<u>CHAPTER XIV. CROOKS LEAD THE WAY</u> .....	50
<u>CHAPTER XV. THE TRAIL BELOW</u> .....	53
<u>CHAPTER XVI. THE FINAL STROKE</u> .....	57
<u>CHAPTER XVII. WHERE GUNS FAILED</u> .....	59
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. THE CURTAIN FALLS</u> .....	62
<u>CHAPTER XIX. FROM THE DEAD</u> .....	66
<u>CHAPTER XX. THE WRONG CALL</u> .....	70
<u>CHAPTER XXI. HOUSE OF GOLD</u> .....	74
<u>CHAPTER XXII. TO THE DEATH</u> .....	76

# MASTERS OF DEATH

Maxwell Grant

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- [CHAPTER I. THE SILVER COFFIN](#)
  - [CHAPTER II. HAND OF DEATH](#)
  - [CHAPTER III. THE VOICE FROM THE PAST](#)
  - [CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW DEPARTS](#)
  - [CHAPTER V. THE MAN WHO RETURNED](#)
  - [CHAPTER VI. THE LONE THRUST](#)
  - [CHAPTER VII. THE HIDDEN TRAP](#)
  - [CHAPTER VIII. THE SECOND MEETING](#)
  - [CHAPTER IX. NIGHT OF DOOM](#)
  - [CHAPTER X. THE SHADOW'S TURN](#)
  - [CHAPTER XI. THE PERFECT SNARE](#)
  - [CHAPTER XII. MIND VERSUS MIND](#)
  - [CHAPTER XIII. THE CORPSE THAT LIVED](#)
  - [CHAPTER XIV. CROOKS LEAD THE WAY](#)
  - [CHAPTER XV. THE TRAIL BELOW](#)
  - [CHAPTER XVI. THE FINAL STROKE](#)
  - [CHAPTER XVII. WHERE GUNS FAILED](#)
  - [CHAPTER XVIII. THE CURTAIN FALLS](#)
  - [CHAPTER XIX. FROM THE DEAD](#)
  - [CHAPTER XX. THE WRONG CALL](#)
  - [CHAPTER XXI. HOUSE OF GOLD](#)
  - [CHAPTER XXII. TO THE DEATH](#)
- 

## CHAPTER I. THE SILVER COFFIN

THE Oriental Museum looked like a morgue, inside as well as out. The customs inspector noted the resemblance as he ascended the darkened steps of the squatty brick building and entered the gloomy entrance hall.

Great bronze idols glowered from their pedestals; fearful things, that looked like the creations of a Chinese pipe dream. There were effigies of mandarins in silken robes; of Japanese shoguns clad in half-armor.

Dummy figures, those. Still, the customs man didn't like them. The Chinese mandarins did not matter much; their glass eyes were stern, but their colorful garments made the effigies look harmless. The shoguns, though, were a different matter. Each figure had a mailed fist, gripping an ornamental tsuba, or handle of a long, curved sword.

The customs man gave those warriors a suspicious look, as he quickened his step. When he reached a side passage, he let his face relax. He had reached the open door of the curator's office; he was beyond the danger

zone.

Not that the curator's office was a modern place. Contrarily, its antiquated furnishings made it something of an exhibit in itself. Perched upon old-fashioned desks and rickety wooden filing cabinets, were Hindu idols of various sorts and sizes; from Buddhas with glimmering gems in their foreheads, to three-headed Siva statues, that set the visitor blinking.

As for the curator, Isaac Newboldt, he looked like something that the room had hatched. He was a middle-aged man, but he seemed to carry the weight of centuries upon his stooped shoulders, while his roundish face was as solemn as those of the surrounding idols.

At least, Newboldt wasn't stuffed. He arose slowly from his chair, extended his hand in methodical fashion. Surveying the customs man in owlish fashion, Newboldt nodded and gave a dryish greeting:

"Good evening, Mr. Matthew."

The customs inspector was pleased. He had been here before, but that was five years ago, when he had held a subordinate position. It was nice to know that Newboldt remembered him. It struck Matthew, however, that the curator was the sort who would remember everything.

"The truck ought to be here by this time," announced Matthew, producing a batch of pacers. "If you'll look over that casket with me, Mr. Newboldt, I think we'll be able to clear it without much bother."

"A mummy case is not a casket," corrected Newboldt, as he took the papers. "Such misnomers cause difficulties, Mr. Matthew."

The customs inspector gave a hopeless shrug.

"We'd have labeled it a mummy case," he said, "coming in from Egypt, the way it did. Only, it's made of metal –"

"Of metal?"

"Yes. That's why we tagged it as a casket. Maybe you'd better take a look at the thing, Mr. Newboldt."

The curator's interest was aroused. His stride became rapid, as he led the way from the office, through a gallery of mummy cases that loomed like sentinels in the dark, to a stairway illuminated by a single light. The steps went downward; at the bottom was an open door, where a drab man in grayish uniform stood waiting.

The drab man was Kent, the museum's chief attendant. He announced that the truckmen were waiting in the alley. At Newboldt's order, Kent stepped outside. There were scraping sounds from the truck; six men appeared, lugging a burden that was actually too heavy for them.

Though the long box was crated, Newboldt could see the dull glimmer of metal, which he took for lead. Kent was pointing the truckmen up to the mummy room, but Newboldt shook his head.

"Have them put it in the little exhibit room," ordered the curator. "The one we are reserving for the Polynesian collection. This is not a mummy case, Kent."

Then, turning to Matthew, Newboldt added:

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"There is a mystery about this matter. I expected a mummy case, not a leaden casket."

"Maybe the mummy case is inside," suggested Matthew. "The lead box may be a" – he hesitated – "a sar – a sar what do you call the thing?"

"A sarcophagus," replied Newboldt. "No. An Egyptian sarcophagus would be made of stone, not of metal. Besides, this casket is longer than would be required for a mummy case, and too flat to contain one. It may be a wrong shipment."

"Then I'd better keep the truck around?"

"Yes," decided Newboldt. "Until we have solved the riddle."

THEY went up to the little exhibit room, where the truckers had set the crated casket on the floor. Newboldt ordered the men to remove the crating, which they did, except for the cross braces on which the casket rested.

All the while, Newboldt's eyes were becoming wider, rounder. Plucking at Matthew's sleeve, the curator whispered tensely:

"Send them downstairs."

The customs man dismissed the truckers, telling them to wait out back. Turning about, he saw Newboldt making the rounds of the room, testing its barred windows. Newboldt's actions seemed jerky; his hand trembled as he pointed to the door; his voice was hoarse as he ordered Kent to stand guard there.

Then, stepping to the low, flattish casket, Newboldt shakily drew a handkerchief from his pocket and massaged the dark metal. Under the rubbing process, the metal took on a luster which brought a surprised exclamation from Matthew:

"Silver!"

"Silver," repeated Newboldt. Then, in an awed tone: "A silver coffin. The coffin of Temujin!"

Matthew didn't understand.

"Temujin!" repeated Newboldt, with a shudder. "The true name of Genghis Khan, the great war lord of the Middle Ages, who ruled half the world with his powerful Mongol hordes!"

The reference struck home to Matthew.

"Say!" exclaimed the customs inspector. "If you're right, Mr. Newboldt, this thing should have come from Asia, not from Africa."

"It did come from Asia," insisted Newboldt, as he polished the decorations on the coffin's lid. "Observe these engraved designs; the curve of the coffin's lid. They match the description given by the Belgian missionaries who saw the coffin of Temujin in the region of the Ordos Desert, half a century ago."

Matthew had stooped to examine fastenings of the coffin, which reminded him of a low, elongated trunk. The casket appeared to be hermetically sealed.

"What's in the thing?" he inquired. "Bones?"

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"The remains of Temujin," replied Newboldt, solemnly. "Whether they are bones, or ashes, inspection alone can prove. When last reported, the coffin of Temujin was on the move. Its guardians, descendants of Mongols appointed centuries ago, were anxious to prevent its capture by invading Japanese."

"Why so?"

"Because they feared that ownership of the coffin would allow the Japanese to appoint a puppet emperor for Mongolia; a man who could claim himself the legitimate successor of Temujin, the Kha Khan, or great ruler —"

Newboldt stopped himself with a gulp. His stooped frame shivered. Gripping Matthew by the shoulders, he drew the astonished fellow to the door, where Kent stepped back, inspired with the same alarm.

"This is beyond us, Matthew!" voiced Newboldt, in tremolo. "I have just remembered that there is a man who calls himself Kha Khan. His name is Shiwan Khan; he seeks to rule all the world."

"You mean he must have grabbed this coffin?" queried Matthew. "That he shipped it here by way of Egypt?"

"Undoubtedly," quavered Newboldt. "From his hidden kingdom of Xanadu, somewhere in Sinkiang, which is west of Mongolia, and therefore on the route that the coffin must have followed."

Pointing to the door of the exhibit room, Newboldt told Kent to lock it and bring the keys to the office. Gripping Matthew by the arm, Newboldt started for the office, dragging the customs inspector along.

As they went through the mummy room, the curator was babbling incoherently; tiled walls echoed his words, voicing them back, as though the dried tongues of long-dead mummies were joining in the chatter.

By the time they reached the office, Matthew was convinced that Newboldt was crazy, but he wasn't sure enough of his own sanity to do anything about it. Then, Newboldt was fumbling with the telephone dial, saying that if he could reach a man named Lamont Cranston, everything would be all right. Matthew decided to let him go ahead.

Both had forgotten Kent.

BACK at the door of the little exhibit room, the drab attendant was locking up, as Newboldt had ordered. But Kent's hand was shaky. He couldn't find the right key on his ring.

Kent remembered Shiwan Khan, the being who styled himself the Golden Master, and the recollection was not a pleasing one. To Kent, the name of Shiwan Khan meant murder.

He was thinking of Shiwan Khan in terms of the silver coffin; and had Kent been gifted with the ability to see through a door, he would have known that his thought was more than coincidence.

Inside the barred room there was motion. Slowly, the lid of the sealed coffin had begun to rise!

Up from the strange casket came a gold-clad form. Above the collar of the decorated robe was a saffron face, the exact hue of the room lights. From its wide forehead the face tapered to a pointed chin. Green, catlike eyes glistened from beneath thin, wide-curved brows. Long mustaches drooped beside lips that were streaks of brown. A dab of beard gave Shiwan Khan an expression that was truly satanic.

Green eyes stared at the glowing lights; their fixed gaze took on a gleam. Brown lips dripped the single word:

"Return!"

Though subdued, the word was heard. It came, like a mental command, to Kent just as the attendant was inserting the right key in the lock. Kent did not connect the thought with Shiwan Khan. The drab man merely recalled that he had forgotten to turn off the lights.

Opening the door, Kent stepped in to press the light switch. Centered on that action, he didn't look toward the silver coffin until he had started pressure. In the last, brief instant that the light remained, Kent saw the gold robed figure, met the demoniac gaze of Shiwan Khan.

Then, darkness, as Kent's hand finished its downward tug. Similarly, the hand of Shiwan Khan had completed a fling from the end of its gold-sleeved arm. Kent did not shriek; his lips were petrified. The sound that disturbed the darkness was a whir.

Silence hovered; it ended with the thud of a body that sagged heavily against the door, shutting it with a sharp click. Through the totally thickened blackness came the fiendish chortle of the Golden Master, Shiwan Khan!

## CHAPTER II. HAND OF DEATH

ISAAC NEWBOLDT was pacing his office, wringing his hands with every stride. The curator was in such dither that he gave Matthew the jitters. Observing a half-filled whiskey bottle on a corner shelf, the customs man reached for it.

"What you need is a drink," he told Newboldt. Then, when the curator made no reply: "Mind if I take one?"

Newboldt offered no objection. Matthew found a glass and poured himself a brace. Hearing the trickle, Newboldt stopped his pacing, made a wild grab for bottle and glass.

"Don't drink that!" he exclaimed. "It's a sample of an Egyptian embalming fluid!"

Then, as Matthew recoiled, Newboldt calmed himself and stated:

"We shall not have long to wait. I have called the Cobalt Club and talked with Police Commissioner Weston. He is a friend of Lamont Cranston, and is sure that he can find him."

Matthew couldn't understand why Cranston was so important in the matter. The curator explained that Cranston was a world-wide traveler, acquainted with the mystic doctrines of Tibet. Shiwan Khan was also a master of those doctrines; it took a mind like Cranston's to fathom the deep purposes that marked the moves of Shiwan Khan.

In putting it that way, Newboldt was trying to control his own alarm. Actually, the museum curator knew full well the menace of Shiwan Khan. Three times, the Golden Master had come to America, each visit the result of insidious plans for conquest. Unquestionably, Shiwan Khan still termed himself invincible, though on each of those occasions, he had met with defeat. (Note: See "The Golden Master," Vol. XXXI, No. 2; "Shiwan Khan Returns," Vol. XXXII, No. 1; "The Invincible Shiwan Khan," Vol. XXXIII, No. 1.)

Shiwan Khan had met his match in The Shadow.

To Newboldt, The Shadow was quite as much a mystery as Shiwan Khan. A black-cloaked fighter, who seemed to dwell in night itself. The Shadow had uncanny abilities that enabled him to combat the most formidable of foes. In some fashion – Newboldt did not know just how – Lamont Cranston was linked to The

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Shadow.

It had never occurred to Newboldt that the guise of Cranston might be one that The Shadow, himself, had adopted.

Such an idea would be ridiculous; as preposterous as supposing that Shiwan Khan had come to America again, in the silver coffin of Temujin!

Dismissing such absurd notions, Newboldt tried to impress Matthew with his new-gained calm.

"The police commissioner is sending a man here from headquarters," Newboldt recalled. "Why don't you go out front and meet him, Mr. Matthew? His name is Cardona – Inspector Cardona."

Welcoming the opportunity to leave the spooky confines of the museum, Matthew went out. Seating himself at the desk, Newboldt rested his roundish face in both hands.

Staring at the door, he began to wonder what was keeping Kent. He couldn't go to find out, because there would be no one in the office to answer the telephone, should the commissioner call. His nervousness returning, Newboldt decided to call the Cobalt Club again.

He had just dialed the number and was getting a response, when an odd thing occurred. Newboldt felt a shock that seemed to pass from the hand that touched the dial, to the other, which was holding the receiver. He managed to jerk his hand from the dial; the sharpness ended, but a numbing sensation remained.

Then, as the curator was managing to gasp a hello, something clanked on the desk beside him. While he was listening to a voice on the telephone, he heard another tone, close to his numbed elbow. It was Kent's voice:

"You wanted the keys. Here they are, sir."

"Very well, Kent." began Newboldt. Then, speaking into the telephone: "No, no. I wasn't asking for a Mr. Kent. I would like to speak to Commissioner Weston... Gone out, you say?... Did he leave a message?"

Learning that the commissioner had left no message, Newboldt inquired if he had gone out with Mr. Cranston. The man at the Cobalt Club did not know. Ending the phone call, Newboldt looked at his numbed right hand, found that the fingers worked.

"That was odd, Kent," he said. "I received a shock from the telephone. It reminds me of –"

HALTING, the curator looked for Kent. The attendant was gone. Picking up the keys, Newboldt jingled them, while his face showed a troubled expression.

He had been about to say that the shock had reminded him of an Oriental superstition relating to naljorpas, strange mystics from Tibet, who had the reputed power of numbing persons who approached them.

But Newboldt wasn't in a mood to talk about naljorpas; they were too closely associated with Shiwan Khan who had all their powers, and more.

In fact, Newboldt was becoming quite nervous. He decided that he needed fresh air, like Matthew. Figuring that Weston had started for the museum, Newboldt saw no reason to wait further for a call. He left the office and went out through the entrance hall. As he neared the front steps, a man sprang in to meet him.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

It was Matthew. The customs officer gave a gratified gulp at seeing Newboldt. He made a worried gesture toward an armored dummy representing a Japanese shogun.

"I thought one of those guys was creeping up on me," confided Matthew. "Only about five minutes ago, when I was sitting on the steps, I got to feeling woozy –"

The screech of brakes interrupted. A police car had pulled up outside; from it came a stocky man, whose face was swarthy and stolid of expression. Newboldt introduced Inspector Joe Cardona, of the New York police.

As soon as the curator began to talk in terms of Shiwan Khan, Cardona beckoned for a pair of detectives to come from the police car.

As they started toward the locked exhibit room, Cardona voiced what he considered to be a profound opinion.

"If this has got anything to do with Shiwan Khan," he declared grimly, "it's poison! Bones or ashes, I'm going to see what's inside that silver coffin."

"We'd better wait for Mr. Cranston," advised Newboldt. "We had trouble here once before, inspector."

Cardona remembered the time. He had made a mistake, on that occasion, when he unwarily handled a dagger called a phurba, which had a mystic spell attached to it. But that was different from a silver coffin that had been shipped, tightly shut and crated, from Egypt or somewhere farther.

When Newboldt unlocked the door and turned on the light, Cardona saw the closed coffin in the center of the little room. He approached and examined it; then nodded, when Newboldt repeated his advice to wait. The curator went out to call Kent; they could hear his shouts echo through the museum. Finally, Newboldt returned.

"I can't find Kent anywhere," he declared, soberly. "He didn't go out by the front door, and the truckmen have not seen him. He came to my office and left the keys there; but I can't imagine where he went afterward."

A sudden idea struck Cardona. He pointed to the silver coffin.

"Do you think Kent took a look inside this thing?" inquired Joe. "You left him here, didn't you?"

"Yes," admitted Newboldt, "but I told him to lock up, and he did so."

"But he could have opened the coffin first," argued the police inspector. "You didn't say anything to the contrary."

"No. I didn't. But I don't see why Kent –"

Cardona didn't listen to the rest of it. His hunch was that Kent had opened the coffin and found something valuable inside. If Kent had slipped away with all that he could carry, there still would be some contents left. The way to test that double theory was to look in the coffin.

Stationing a detective at each end of the long silver box, Cardona took a central position in front and gripped two curved ornamentations that served as handles for the lid. As he started to lift, he found that the lid wasn't clamped at all, which bore out his opinion that Kent had pried it loose.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

The lid started heavily at first, but under Cardona's increasing heave it shifted back on its crude hinges. Straining upward, Joe twisted his hands to push from beneath. Half crouched, he lunged into a hard shove. As he did, the room echoed to a chorus of yells.

BOTH Newboldt and Matthew had seen something; so had the detectives at the ends of the coffin. But none of those four had time to act. The person who came to Cardona's immediate rescue was a new arrival, a tall man with hawkish, masklike face, who had just entered the exhibit room.

The newcomer was Lamont Cranston; though noted for his leisurely manner, on this occasion he showed a remarkable speed.

As the big lid lurched backward on its hinges, Cranston reached Cardona with a single bound, caught him around the neck and yanked his stocky form sideways.

The two were twisting as the lid jounced wide; from within the coffin came a flashing blade of steel that whizzed straight for the spot where Cardona's head had been!

Skimming the police inspector's drooping shoulder, the knife zipped between Newboldt and Matthew. It reached the wall beside the door and buried itself there with a quiver.

As the whole blade seemed to whine, another man side-stepped from the doorway, to get as far from the weapon as possible. The second arrival was Commissioner Weston.

The knife thrust wasn't all. With the skimming blade came a hand that flung across the edge of the coffin. Its gray-sleeved arm seemed to relax with the hurl it made. The man's gray figure dropped back into the coffin, as though seeking refuge after making the murderous thrust.

Yanking their guns, the detectives aimed for the coiling assassin. But the shots they fired were wide. Disentangled from Cardona, Cranston made a grab for the first detective and hauled his gun hand to one side. Seeing his friend's move, Commissioner Weston grabbed the second detective and disturbed his fire, also.

It was Cardona who came to his feet and pointed a revolver into the coffin, yelling for the thwarted killer to surrender. Newboldt, drawing close, recognized the gray uniform and exclaimed:

"It's Kent!"

The huddled attendant did not stir. Reaching into the coffin, Cardona clamped him by the shoulder and tried to haul him out. He could scarcely budge the fellow, until Cranston rendered assistance. Together, they pulled Kent upward, over the front edge of the coffin, where the form slipped from their grasp and logged weightily upon the floor.

Amazed eyes saw the reason for Kent's inert behavior. The front of the attendant's uniform was covered with blood from a gory wound. Kent had taken a knife thrust previously; a stroke exactly like the one that Cardona had escaped through Cranston's intervention!

Strange, indeed, was the murderous attack that had come from within the silver coffin: so strange, as to be incredible, even to those who had witnessed it.

For the hand of death that came with that stroke belonged not to a living man but to a dead one!

### CHAPTER III. THE VOICE FROM THE PAST

KEEN eyes were viewing the figure on the floor: burning eyes that peered from the maskish face of Cranston. The Shadow was analyzing the motive behind strange crimes: the death of Kent; the mysterious attack upon Cardona.

He heard the excited voices of those about him. Newboldt was telling how Kent had placed the keys upon his desk; instead of clearing the mystery, the testimony added to it. Then came a calm, even-toned interruption: the voice of Cranston, spoken by The Shadow.

"You saw Kent when he left those keys?"

"Why, no," admitted Newboldt. "I was speaking on the telephone at the time. But I heard Kent –"

"It was not Kent," interposed The Shadow, calmly. "It was Shiwan Khan."

Newboldt's roundish face became a starchy-white. Remembering the numbing sensation, he realized the truth of Cranston's statement. It was plain that Shiwan Khan had murdered Kent, and taken crafty measures to cover up the crime. Matthew was putting in excited testimony; he was sure that someone must have gone past him on the outer steps.

It was Weston who asked a pointed question.

"Why should Shiwan Khan attempt to cover up?" demanded the commissioner. "He has always been ruthless in his crimes."

"He is quite as ruthless as ever," assured The Shadow. "Shiwan Khan merely preferred to keep his presence in America unknown."

Stepping to the wall beside the door, The Shadow pulled the knife from the woodwork. In Cranston's leisurely style, he moved back to the coffin. Cardona was looking at the interior, puzzled because he found it entirely empty. There wasn't a visible explanation of how the knife had been hurled.

Cardona saw the knife, as Cranston weighed it. It was a long, light-bladed dagger, with an ornamental handle of carved ivory.

"A phurba," he heard Cranston say. "An enchanted blade, that can supposedly fling itself from any hand – even a dead one. But we can find a simpler explanation."

He thrust the knife blade between the hinged lid and the solid back of the coffin. It remained there, clamped in the narrow space. Carefully, The Shadow drew the heavy lid upward and forward, finally bringing it down to a shut position.

Pointing to the back, he showed that the tip of the dagger projected through the crack. Moving everyone from in front of the coffin, The Shadow told Cardona to grip one end of the cover, while he took the other.

Then, while the witnesses watched tensely, The Shadow spoke the quiet order:

"Lift."

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Together he and Cardona flung the lid up and over, as Cardona had handled it before: but on this occasion, no one was lifting from the front. As the lid went wide, its clang muffled the click of the pliable knife blade.

Levered by the great weight of the shifting lid, the deadly dagger snapped from its place; flashing, it flipped point first and drove like a winged arrow, straight for the opposite wall. Its whir was evidence of the speed that the levering poundage gave it; so was the force with which the phurba burrowed into the wall.

Cardona pointed to Kent's body.

"Then Shiwan Khan must have got him first!" exclaimed the police inspector. "He propped him in the coffin, and stuck the knife between the hinges. So it would look like Kent had chucked the knife –"

"Exactly," took up The Shadow as Cardona paused. "In addition, Shiwan Khan expected gunshots to riddle Kent's body, making death appear to be a matter of bullets."

"Then Shiwan Khan must have guessed a lot," decided Cardona. "He must have figured that I would bring a couple of men with me."

"Not necessarily, inspector," was Cranston's calm reply. "He expected you to fire the shots, when I opened the coffin."

WITH those words, The Shadow cleared the remnants of the mystery. Once before, Shiwan Khan had tried to dispose of Lamont Cranston by means of a dagger thrust.

Weston and Newboldt were recalling the occasion; they agreed that Cranston, with his knowledge of Tibetan ways, was a natural obstacle to the plans of Shiwan Khan.

In itself, that was a logical reason. But there was a deeper motive behind the attempted murder that Shiwan Khan had tried to pin upon a dead man. Shiwan Khan knew the real identity of the person who posed as Lamont Cranston.

The death thrust had been meant for The Shadow!

Such a detail was one that The Shadow naturally reserved for himself. Still playing the part of Cranston, he questioned Newboldt about the silver coffin; learned how it had been shipped to New York instead of an expected mummy case.

Obviously, the substitution must have taken place in Egypt, a few weeks before. But it was quite as apparent that Shiwan Khan had used the coffin as a unique means of not only entering the United States, but reaching the man whose life he wanted. As a means of entry, the system had worked; as a scheme of assassination, it had failed.

Kent's death, incidental to the general purpose, had neither enabled Shiwan Khan to conceal his own presence in New York, nor to eliminate his superfoe, The Shadow. It was simply another heinous deed to be charged to the evil account of the monstrous Golden Master.

But the return of Shiwan Khan was, in itself, a menace. It meant that every law enforcement agency in the country would have to prepare for a relentless struggle.

Behind the inflexible calm of Cranston, The Shadow listened to Weston's summary of former outrages committed by Shiwan Khan. The Golden Master had made three previous trips to America.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

First, he had sought planes and munitions for use in world-wide conquest. Again, he had tried to acquire important inventions, useful in warfare. Thwarted in such efforts, Shiwan Khan had influenced persons of genius to return with him to Xanadu, there to form the nucleus of a future race that would dominate the world through sheer intelligence.

Until tonight, nothing had been heard of Shiwan Khan since that experiment began. But The Shadow had evidence to prove that the great dream of the future had not worked as the Golden Master anticipated. Again in America, Shiwan Khan was to be dreaded more than ever before. His arrival could mean but one thing: that he meant this visit to be permanent.

The attempt upon The Shadow's life was proof. In seeking to rid the scene of his archfoe, Shiwan Khan unquestionably had schemes of supercrime within his golden sleeve. Knowing The Shadow to be crime's greatest enemy, Shiwan Khan had tried to pave the way to sure success by means of one swift opening stroke.

A distant jangle mingled with The Shadow's reflections. It was the telephone bell in Newboldt's office. The curator heard it and interrupted Weston's discourse. Supposing that the call might be for him, the commissioner followed the curator to the office.

After answering the phone, Newboldt gave a relieved sigh.

"It's only the Cobalt Club calling," he said. "Not for you, commissioner. For Mr. Cranston."

Looking about, Weston saw that Cranston had followed them to the office. Receiving the telephone, The Shadow spoke a calm "Hello." His face was imperturbable, as though he really believed that the call came from the Cobalt Club.

But the voice that The Shadow heard was not that of a club attendant. In answering the call, Newboldt had been tricked again by the same person who had imitated Kent's style of speech. The voice that spoke to The Shadow was brittle, icy, yet with the clear ring of a bell, that made each word an indelible utterance.

It was a voice from the past, brought to the present; a tone delivering an ultimatum that concerned the future.

The voice of Shiwan Khan!

### **CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW DEPARTS**

LIKE the notes of a discordant chime, Shiwan Khan's chortle trickled across the wire. Recognizing Cranston's voice, the Golden Master knew that his second murder had failed; he was free, therefore, to make his presence known.

For the evil brain of Shiwan Khan had a skill at analysis that sometimes matched The Shadow's. The Golden Master could picture much that had occurred since his departure from the Oriental Museum; enough, certainly, to know that The Shadow had laid bare the game.

This call was his test.

Had Cranston failed to answer, Shiwan Khan would have let the call go for what it seemed to be: a mere message from the Cobalt Club. The thing would have passed forgotten in the horror over Cranston's death.

But Cranston's response was an opportunity for Shiwan Khan to deliver another stroke; one which offered The Shadow life instead of death, yet which was in keeping with the scheming ways of the Golden Master.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

There was no anger in the tone; emotions were absent from the make-up of Shiwan Khan. He called himself the Unfathomable, and could live up to the title. From his chortle, it seemed that he relished the fact that The Shadow was still alive.

"Good evening, Mr. Cranston," spoke Shiwan Khan. His emphasis upon the name "Cranston" carried a trace of sarcasm. "I am informed that you contemplate a journey from New York."

"Yes," replied The Shadow, calmly. "I was leaving –"

"For the new city airport at North Beach," inserted Shiwan Khan. "To take passage for Miami, then on the airliner Panamania, bound for Buenos Aires."

"Quite so!" agreed The Shadow, in Cranston's style. "But before I left –"

"You called at the Cobalt Club," chimed Shiwan Khan. "Your friend the police commissioner told you of an urgent matter at the Oriental Museum. So you went there, instead."

The Shadow offered no response. He had learned the fact he sought; namely, that Shiwan Khan's spy service had preceded the Golden Master to New York.

Though the conversation, so far, seemed to favor Shiwan Khan, The Shadow had actually baited the Golden Master into certain statements. His present policy was to let Shiwan Khan resume the talk.

"There is still time to catch the plane," spoke the voice across the wire. "If you take the journey, I guarantee that it will be a safe one. But I advise against an immediate return, as you intended. A lone sojourn would be preferable. The climate in Buenos Aires could prove very healthful" – there was a pause; in concluding, the voice showed its first trace of venom – "for The Shadow!"

Shiwan Khan waited, to hear the effect of his ultimatum. He had proven conclusively that he held The Shadow surrounded by a ring of deadly spies, who had refrained from murderous thrusts only until Shiwan Khan attempted his own.

His offer of life was bona fide. When Shiwan Khan made a guarantee, he kept it; in a sense, that policy was the basis of the Golden Master's power. Again, by his very guarantee, Shiwan Khan had given The Shadow vital information; perhaps purposely.

It was evident that Shiwan Khan considered the temporary elimination of The Shadow to be quite as satisfactory as a permanent obliteration. It followed, therefore, that Shiwan Khan was planning crime of such swift and comprehensive nature that his position would be impregnable by the time The Shadow had completed a "long sojourn" in foreign parts.

Once away, The Shadow could never return in safety. Such was the burden of the ultimatum. To pretend acceptance of the terms, without abiding by them, would seemingly be useless on The Shadow's part, for Shiwan Khan would have spies on board the plane, to make sure that his defeated foe went south.

But Shiwan Khan's informants, competent though they were, had failed to learn why Lamont Cranston had booked passage on the plane. Inasmuch as they were due for a surprise anyway, it was quite as well to include Shiwan Khan.

"I shall leave here shortly," declared The Shadow. "Until I reach the airport –"

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"My guarantee is good," interposed Shiwan Khan, "until the plane departs. If you are on board, the proviso will continue. If you are not –"

THE tone ended in a melodious chuckle that struck a final off–key note, which made the whole tone bitter. There was a sharp click, as a telephone receiver settled on its hook. Hanging up at his end, The Shadow turned to the police commissioner.

"Rather unusual," said The Shadow, "to hear from a man so soon after he has tried to murder you."

"What!" exclaimed Weston. "Do you mean that you were talking to Shiwan Khan?"

"I was. As a result, I shall take the journey that I intended."

"But we may want you here, Cranston –"

"So may Shiwan Khan. No, commissioner, you won't need me. I have given you all the information that I can."

The Shadow was strolling toward the door, when Weston overtook him.

"But where can I reach you?" queried the commissioner, anxiously. "In South America?"

"No," returned The Shadow. "I think my next address will be Tibet."

"Tibet! Surely, Cranston, you are joking? Why, Shiwan Khan is from Tibet."

"Precisely. That is why I prefer Tibet. Anywhere that Shiwan Khan is from, is the best place for me to be."

Glancing at his watch as he strolled from the museum, The Shadow noted that he had fifteen minutes to spare in his trip to North Beach. Considering that there were double motives in everything that Shiwan Khan did, The Shadow decided that the Golden Master had made the call just a quarter hour too early.

Not by Shiwan Khan's own calculations. The Golden Master had wanted to impress The Shadow with the fact that there was ample time.

So there was; but The Shadow figured it in reverse. He preferred his present locality during the extra minute of grace that Shiwan Khan had so generously allowed him. It might prove better to be here, than at the airport.

Still, considering the probable proximity of the Golden Master's spies, it would be wise to play a subtle game. In approaching a limousine parked outside the museum, The Shadow showed no quickening of pace. He played the part of Cranston to perfection, even pausing to light a cigarette before entering the big car.

Such action, plus the slowness with which the limousine pulled away, was sufficient proof that Lamont Cranston was going directly to his destination. So he was, but he had chosen an earlier and closer objective than the North Beach airport.

Within the distance of a single block, The Shadow dropped his guise of Cranston. Working with smooth speed, he pulled out a drawer beneath the limousine's rear seat. From it he brought garments of black: cloak, slouch hat, and gloves. The cloak went over his shoulders, the hat settled on his head. He was putting on the thin gloves, when the limousine turned a corner.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

A rear door opened, toward the curb. With a deft twirl, The Shadow was gone from the moving limousine, closing the door as he completed his twist. Passing a parked taxicab, he spoke a whispered command to the drowsy driver, who immediately wakened from his fake sleep and remained alert.

It was The Shadow's own cab, its driver one of his secret agents.

Shiwan Khan's stress upon The Shadow's need for a long journey could well be camouflage to cover another point. Bound for the airport, The Shadow would be traveling away from the Oriental Museum, a place where things still could happen. With Shiwan Khan, things that could happen, generally did happen.

THEY happened quicker than ever on this occasion. The Shadow had scarcely reached the alleyway behind the museum, when he heard yells from the truckmen stationed there. They were husky, those fellows, but they looked puny as they scattered from the lighted doorway, for they were being shoved about by giants twice their size.

The Shadow knew the identity of those attackers. They were Mongols, huge fighters of the Ordos tribes, who served as guardians for the coffin of Temujin. They must have come to America on the freighter that carried the silver coffin.

The laugh that The Shadow delivered brought the Mongols full about. Perhaps they had been warned against the eerie mirth that they heard for the first time; for it wasn't in their nature to flee as quickly as they did. As The Shadow's guns, drawn from the coat beneath his cloak, began to serve out bullets, the Mongols used the shelter of the truck to reach the rear door of the museum.

By the time The Shadow reached that doorway, the Mongols were on the floor above. Following them, The Shadow saw six gigantic figures surge into the mummy room, where two detectives were retreating, firing wild shots. Cardona had gone out front, leaving his men to guard the silver coffin; but their flight was no discredit.

Mere bulk alone made the Mongols look like superhuman creatures out of a prehistoric past. Bullets didn't seem to bother them, as they flourished knives that were bigger than short swords. The detectives were diving to the corners of the gloomy room, hurling mummy cases into the path of the giant raiders.

Matthew came running in from the entrance hall swinging one of the huge Japanese swords. A towering Mongol plucked it from him, grunting as though pleased by a new toy. Then, contemptuously, the giant twisted the sword into a spiral shape and hurled it after the diving customs man.

Before The Shadow could open fire, a big Mongol flung a mummy case in his direction. The detectives had but tumbled those bulky cases, but the Mongol tossed it as if it were a piece of kindling wood. Dodging for a corner, The Shadow stabbed shots while twisting from the path of further missiles. His bullets were blocked by the nearest pair of Mongols.

Fierce howls told that gunfire could score results when a marksman took time to aim. But even blasts from .45 automatics could not stop the Mongols short. Bowled to a corner by the pair that he had wounded, The Shadow kept pumping bullets, while he wrenched away from mighty hands that could have snapped his back, had they gained a clutch.

The detectives threw themselves upon the bellowing pair and helped to flatten them. Matthew was joining the fray when Cardona arrived; the stocky police inspector drove for the same corner. Clear of the battle where he was no longer needed, The Shadow looked for the rest of the titanic band. He heard them, on the stairway.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Two of the Mongols were lugging the silver coffin that the six truckmen had found difficult to handle. The other pair slung knives, as they ducked below the stair top. The Shadow made a long, sideward dive at an angle that threw him into a sprawl. But the crazy leap was all that saved him.

One of the massive knives slashed the cloak that trailed from his left shoulder; the other actually grazed his right hip. One blade, at least, would have caught him, except for the angled dive.

Striking in the floor, The Shadow rolled into the empty exhibit room; came up with his guns leveled toward the stairs. By then, the two Mongols were plunging down the steps to overtake the pair with the coffin.

Following the fleeing giants, The Shadow heard a clatter behind him. Trouble was ended in the mummy room. Cardona and the rest were taking up the chase. The Shadow was counting upon little help from the truckers in the alley; but he had expected, at least, that they had gotten away in their truck.

Instead, they had fled on foot. The Mongols were in the truck, the coffin with them. One of them knew how to drive, for the truck was whining backward from the alley when The Shadow arrived.

The Mongol driver must have nearly yanked the steering wheel from its moorings, as he neared the mouth of the alley, for the truck made a rapid spin and shot away with the speed of a motorcycle just as The Shadow opened fire. By the time the cloaked fighter reached the entrance of the alley, the big vehicle was swinging the next corner.

THE SHADOW'S cab whipped into sight. Too late to take up pursuit of the vanished truck, it was in time to serve the black-cloaked crimefighter. With a long stride, he reached the running board and was whipped forward at twice his own speed, just as a scrawny figure made a lunge from the roof of the museum.

A knife clanged the side of the cab, three feet behind The Shadow's clinging figure. Pointing an automatic upward, The Shadow fired before the assassin could dodge back to cover. There was an approaching wail as the scrawny creature plunged headlong to the alley.

The Shadow had settled one of Shiwan Khan's murderous spies – a lurking naljorpa, whose deadly aim had failed when The Shadow's speed had been doubled by the lift from the cab. Even Shiwan Khan would have commended the fate of that killer. The naljorpa had forgotten the Golden Master's promise of immunity until the plane took off.

Of course, the offer did not apply to the fighting Mongols. They were acting upon different orders; The Shadow had attacked them on his own. Their business had been to get away with the silver coffin, at any cost. They probably considered the job a complete success sweetened, in a way, by the loss of two comrades.

For the Mongols of the Ordos breed were sworn to protect the coffin of Temujin with their lives, and considered death a privilege when it occurred in the upholding of their cause.

As for The Shadow, he still had a privilege: to reach the airport within the limit allotted him by Shiwan Khan. He had taken up less than his extra fifteen minutes in rescuing helpless men from the attack of the mighty Mongols. Perhaps that was the reason why he flung back a trailing laugh for the rest of Shiwan Khan's hidden spies to hear.

Perhaps there was another reason. If so, it remained known to one person only: The Shadow.

## CHAPTER V. THE MAN WHO RETURNED

BIG searchlights were playing high above the airport when The Shadow's cab arrived there. A ship was due in from the Pacific coast; it had flashed a radio report ahead, stating that one of the crew was in serious condition through sudden illness. An ambulance was waiting to receive the man in question.

Again in the guise of Cranston, The Shadow stepped from his cab, carrying cloak and hat across his arm as though they were ordinary garments. He stopped near the ambulance, where a physician was talking with airport officials.

Looking up, the doctor saw Cranston, caught the gaze of his steady eyes. An imperceptible nod passed between them. Strolling away, The Shadow approached the plane that awaited the take-off signal for its flight to Miami.

Immediately after The Shadow's departure, the physician requested that a space be cleared near the ambulance. Very soon the vehicle was deserted, and standing in comparative darkness. Meanwhile, The Shadow had stopped at the door of the Miami-bound airliner.

Eyes were on Cranston, when he finally stepped aboard; then as the door was closing, the hawk-faced passenger did a sudden turnabout and stepped back to the ground. As the door slashed shut, he was almost beneath the wing of the great ship; it was quivering for the take-off. He was whisking his cloak over his shoulders, pressing the slouch hat on his head.

Excited gestures came from a window as the airliner started forward. The Shadow had no chance to spot the passenger who served as spy for Shiwan Khan; nor did he bother about others among the onlooking crowd. He was gone, off into the darkness of the ground, choosing a quick course of his own.

When The Shadow's cab started away, very suddenly, another car followed it. There was a soft laugh from darkness, as The Shadow watched that blind chase. Certain spies, at least, had gone upon a useless trip; others, still on hand, would never know it until too late.

A pygmy thing was descending from the higher darkness into the spreading glare of huge searchlights. It was the plane in from the Pacific coast; it made a perfect landing. Men with a stretcher received a burden wrapped in blankets. They carried the hapless crew member to the ambulance; the physician followed the stretcher in through the rear door.

Curious things happened as soon as the ambulance left the airport.

First, the patient propped himself up from the blankets. His face was drawn and thin; his whole form was emaciated. Showing a scrawny hand to the physician, the human skeleton inquired:

"You're Dr. Rupert Sayre?"

The physician nodded.

"I'm Felix Bryson," declared the emaciated man. Then wolfishly: "Give me food!"

Sayre handed Bryson an apple; warned the patient not to devour it too rapidly. Between bites, Bryson talked.

"Guess you've heard about me," he declared. "I'm one of those saps that went away with Shiwan Khan. He took us to that wonderful place that he calls Xanadu. He gave everybody what they wanted: gold, jewels,

## MASTERS OF DEATH

jade, just like he promised.

"I wanted nothing" – Bryson cackled at the thought – "but he gave me jewels, too. Look at them." Bryson pulled a bag from beneath the blanket. "About half a million dollars' worth. I mean it. The place was lousy with them!

"So I took my share before I left. Why not? I'd donated a swell yacht to Shiwan Khan. It was my boat, the Nautilus, that took us on our voyage, after we listened to Shiwan Khan instead of The Shadow. Bah! What fools we were!"

BRYSON reached for another apple.

Sayre gave him one; the skeleton man finished half of it, then inquired anxiously.

"Do you think I'll ever get my weight back? You wouldn't think, to look at me, that I once weighted close to two hundred."

Sayre tested the scrawny arms, gave an approving nod. He remarked that they were solid enough, and had good muscle. Bryson gave a prolonged laugh.

"Muscle?" he queried. "You're telling me? You'd better hear the rest of my story first."

Bryson told the story – one of the most fantastic that Sayre had ever heard. Arrived at Xanadu, the happy followers of Shiwan Khan had been eager for their initiation into mystic ways. The Golden Master had given them that promise, and he fulfilled it.

First, he had trained them in the ways of the naljorpas, until they acquired a mystic force called shugs. To demonstrate that ability, Bryson placed his fingertips against Sayre's shoulders; the physician instantly felt a numbing electric shock. Throwing aside the blankets, Bryson chuckled while he gnawed the apple core.

"They wrapped me in these things," he said, referring to the blankets. "What do I need with them? I'm a reskyangpa, a guy with tumo powers. They call it tumo when you can sit in the middle of a snow bank and make it melt. It's a cinch when you learn it. You just chuck your clothes and concentrate.

"But it got too tough, when Shiwan Khan made us become delogs. A delog is a fellow who has visited the land beyond and seen all there is to know about it. The regular delogs just dream it, but Shiwan Khan put us through the mill.

"What he did was fake a bardo, or land beyond, and give us all the tortures that those wacky guys dream about. The 'short path' was what he called it. Short, maybe, but tough."

Sayre looked past Bryson, to the figure that had risen from the end of the man's cot. The silent passenger that Bryson did not see was cloaked in black. He let the cloak drop from his shoulders, drew away his slouch hat, to reveal the features of Lamont Cranston.

The Shadow had secretly entered the ambulance that was bringing in one of Shiwan Khan's former dupes without the knowledge of the Golden Master's spies!

Catching a cue from The Shadow, Sayre put a question to Bryson:

"How did you get away from Shiwan Khan?"

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"We didn't, exactly," replied Bryson. "Shiwan Khan went away first. We were fed up by that time; that is, fed up with everything but food. So we walked out on his naljorpas, and they couldn't stop us. We knew the racket; they couldn't floor us with the shugs, because we knew all about it.

"We met a lung-gom-pa runner, somewhere in Tibet. Amazing fellows, those lung-gom-pas. They run along like antelopes, and keep it up for days without stopping. This fellow led us to a plain called the Chang Thang, where we met Lamont Cranston. He sent me home by plane; the rest are coming later."

As Bryson finished, he must have sensed that someone was in back of him, for he turned suddenly, to face The Shadow. Despite his occult training, Bryson showed amazement when he saw The Shadow's features.

"A yidam!" exclaimed Bryson. "A yidam!"

His eyes went glassy; he swayed, fell to the blankets. Looking toward The Shadow, Dr. Sayre showed alarm. He was met by a steady headshake.

"A yidam is an imaginary double," explained The Shadow. "Since he left Cranston in Tibet, Bryson naturally supposes that I am a creature of his imagination. He thinks that he has reached a higher sphere of understanding, and he has gone into a trance as the result."

A great fact dawned on Sayre. He had worked with The Shadow for a long while; always, he had supposed The Shadow to be Cranston, but he had never been sure. At last, Sayre understood.

There was a Lamont Cranston, an actual globe-trotter, who was at present in Tibet. While Cranston was absent from New York, as was usually the case, The Shadow adopted the globe-trotter's guise.

Evidently, there was an understanding between them. The Shadow must have requested Cranston to search for Bryson and other of Shiwan Khan's victims while in Tibet.

So Cranston wasn't The Shadow after all. The fact didn't solve the riddle for Dr. Sayre. It merely put him up against a deeper question:

Who was The Shadow?

A WHISPERED laugh came as an answer to Sayre's perplexed frown. Then, resuming his cloak and hat, The Shadow spoke in a cryptic tone; his first words made Sayre forget the problem of the cloaked being's actual identity.

"Bryson said that Shiwan Khan has left Xanadu," declared The Shadow in a low, strange whisper. "He is right. Shiwan Khan is in New York."

Despite The Shadow's presence, Sayre could not repress a shudder.

"Take good care of Bryson," ordered The Shadow. "Get him out of town as soon as possible. Shiwan Khan must not know that he has returned."

Sayre nodded. He saw The Shadow point forward, and understood. The ambulance had reached Manhattan and was traveling through darkened side streets, its bell clanging loudly. Sayre told the driver to slacken speed and forget the bell. The patient was feeling better; there was no need to hurry.

"Bryson will be all right," declared The Shadow, glancing at the motionless man. "It is well that he returned. His story is valuable. He said one thing" – Sayre could see the glitter of The Shadow's reflective eyes – "that may prove of special worth."

Stooping, The Shadow reached the rear of the ambulance. He laid one hand on the door, thrust the other to Sayre. The significance of the handclasp struck the physician, as The Shadow spoke explanatory words.

"When Shiwan Khan meets opposition," declared The Shadow in a strange, sibilant tone, "he robs persons of their reason, and their identities. Bryson is fortunate. He lost both, but will recover them.

"I can afford neither loss, not even temporarily. But I shall avoid such experience. My intelligence can equal Shiwan Khan's. My identity" – The Shadow's tone carried a touch of whispered mirth – "is my own secret.

"I know the limitations of Shiwan Khan, as well as the extent of his powers. This is to be my own campaign, against a foe whose methods brook no quarter. It will be a battle to the death!"

There was farewell in The Shadow's grip, despite its firmness. As the ambulance swung a darkened corner, the door went wide; a cloaked form dropped off, into blackness.

Sayre saw the door sweep shut; heard himself repeating The Shadow's final words:

"To the death!"

## CHAPTER VI. THE LONE THRUST

FROM a window of a musty, old-fashioned hotel room, a tall, gaunt man was staring out into the Manhattan dusk. His features, once bronzed, were the hue of pale copper; their lines showed the trace of worry. So did the gaunt man's stooped shoulders, although there was another reason for his posture; he was leaning heavily upon a cane.

The gaunt man was a forgotten hero. His name was Kent Allard; once a celebrated aviator, he had won high acclaim by his return from the jungles of Guatemala, where he had dwelt as a white god among a tribe of Xinca Indians, after a forced landing in his plane.

An observer, noting Allard at the window, might have supposed that the one-time hero was bemoaning the brevity of fame. The very streets that Allard viewed were those where he had ridden in triumph during a public welcome on the occasion of his return.

Today, few persons remembered Kent Allard; less recognized him when he walked along those streets. Rather than encounter proof of his vanished fame, Allard remained indoors most of the time. There was another reason for his lack of activity; his leg bothered him. He had injured it when he landed in Guatemala; since his return to New York, it had been getting worse.

Allard had some money; enough to live in simple style at this old hotel, and to keep a pair of trusted Xinca servants, who looked like squatty brown idols snatched from some Aztec temple. Thus, there was no mystery about Kent Allard; he was simply an ax-aviator, with no future.

Such, at least, was the impression that Allard successfully created; and there was a powerful motive behind his game.

Kent Allard was The Shadow!

## MASTERS OF DEATH

There were times when The Shadow became himself, but only to keep up appearances. He was very careful about such appearances, in a peculiar way. As Allard, he made himself seem old, instead of youthful. His worried air was a pose; his constant limp a fake. Both were part of the all-important game.

Having proven that Kent Allard could not be The Shadow, because of his years of absence during the cloaked fighter's period of early fame, he did his best to continue the illusion, by making Allard seem decrepit, while The Shadow's activity increased!

There were long stretches when Kent Allard was never in his suite at this old hotel: but only two persons knew it. They were the faithful Xincas, silent sentinels who would never tell.

Allard's face was closer to the window. His eyes showed a keen flash; the hawklike expression of his features was traceable, though it differed remarkably from Cranston's masklike visage. Night had come again, the third night since Cranston's disappearance. The Shadow's period of waiting was at an end.

Shiwan Khan was looking for The Shadow, but had failed to trace him. It was time for The Shadow to look for Shiwan Khan.

Otherwise, the Golden Master would strike, regardless. It was a sure thing that Shiwan Khan was preparing for supercrime; but, so far, he had not revealed his insidious hand. Whatever his schemes, Shiwan Khan would make provision for The Shadow's opposition; therefore, a longer wait would tend to help Shiwan Khan.

Three days had been necessary for The Shadow to sound out the situation. Through a contact man named Burbank, The Shadow had kept in cautious touch with certain secret agents who watched the underworld. From their reports, and his own secret forays into that terrain, The Shadow had proven the point that he suspected.

Shiwan Khan was lining up notorious men of crime, self-styled "big-shots" who had been idle during recent months. Willing lieutenants of the golden overlord, they were holding meetings among themselves. Through a lone thrust, The Shadow might hope to throw fear in their ranks, along with bullets, and thereby crimp the schemes of Shiwan Khan.

DUSK no longer reigned. Thick night was broken only by the glitter of Manhattan's lights, which would be few and far between in the district where The Shadow intended to go.

Limping from the window, Kent Allard paused wearily near the door. A stolid Xinca approached, held a cloak. Sliding his arms into the garment, Allard plucked a slouch hat from the servant's hand, clamped it on his own head as the Xinca caught the falling cane. The other Xinca opened the door, to let his black-cloaked master step out into the gloomy hall.

No longer Allard, The Shadow's wearied pose was ended. He became a swift, gliding shape of muffled blackness as he headed for a fire tower that offered a secret route to the outside darkness.

Through devious routes, The Shadow traveled a few blocks from the hotel before stepping into a cab, which was not his own. He was taking no foolish risks with his own cab, and its driver, Moe Shrevnitz. Both were valuable, and would remain so, provided they offered no link from The Shadow to the identity of Kent Allard.

Inside the random cab, The Shadow spoke in a tone that was neither Allard's nor Cranston's. Though surprised to find he had a passenger, the cabby offered no comment; he was only too glad to get a fare. Nor

## MASTERS OF DEATH

did he argue when he had completed a long trip to an East Side neighborhood.

The driver was too pleased over the five-dollar bill that fluttered into the seat beside him, accompanied by the order to "keep the change." Looking into the back seat, the cabby saw that his passenger was gone; on thinking it over, he realized that he hadn't gotten an actual look at the mysterious rider.

That didn't bother the cabby.

If modern ghosts had met with a mansion shortage in Manhattan and preferred to haunt taxicabs instead, they were quite welcome, so long as they passed out real five-dollar bills.

Moving through darkness, The Shadow neared the area he wanted. He passed an alley that ran through to the next street; noting the darkness of its walls, the odd shapes of the roofs above, he saw its double value as a lurking spot.

The narrow sidewalks were made to order for trigger-men, the sort of lookouts that Shiwan Khan's lieutenants would bring with them. Slanted roofs were proper shelter for naljorpas, the type of watchers that the Golden Master would provide as added protection for the meeting.

Bullets fired at ground level could prove no deadlier than knives hurled from vantage points above. The alley could prove a place of close-range doom, no matter from which end The Shadow might approach. His goal, a three-story house in the exact center, seemed hopeless. Skirting the block, The Shadow entered a short passage that ended in a wall. The blind alley offered no direct route to his goal, but The Shadow was used to obstacles.

Scaling the wall, he worked his way into an empty building and up through to the roof. Crawling to a rear ledge, he reached a narrow gap between the empty building and the house he wanted.

The Shadow covered that space with a long diving leap from a crouched position. He was on the roof that he sought; near its rear, The Shadow found a trapdoor, tightly clamped from below. It wasn't the proper means of entry, for guards were probably stationed just beneath. Continuing forward, The Shadow veered to the side of the roof and paused.

He could see the depth of the alleyway ahead, and knew that the black three-story canyon was under expert surveillance. But the side wall of the house was likely to be clear of watchers, since they supposed that it could only be reached from the front.

Swinging over the side edge of the roof, The Shadow dangled in darkness, found a third-floor window with his feet. He was in luck – the window was unlocked, which saved him considerable time and trouble. Working the sash upward with his soft-shoed feet, The Shadow took an outward swing, then dropped as he swayed inward.

Slicing the darkness at a perfectly gauged angle, the cloaked invader landed inside the window, doubling his head and shoulders as soon as they were through the space. Then, with silent creep, he was moving toward a dimly lighted hallway, gun drawn in readiness for whatever might occur.

THE hall was empty; silent, except for murmurs that came from the front stairway. Listening, The Shadow gauged the position of those voices, and established who their owners were. The talking men were guards stationed on the second floor, very close to the foot of the stairway.

It meant that the meeting was taking place on this floor: the third.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Moving rearward along the hall, The Shadow came to a strong, tightly closed door. Probing its lock with a tweezer pick, he found the key and gripped it. Silently, with painful slowness, he turned the key. Slow motion was necessary, so that the twisting key would not be noticed from the other side.

The lock yielded. Pocketing the pick, The Shadow gripped the doorknob with one hand, advanced his gun with the other, to cover the narrow crack that he intended to open.

Inching inward under The Shadow's expert pressure, the door revealed a thin slit of light. The space was enough; two objects appeared at the crevice. One was The Shadow's eye; the other, the muzzle of his automatic.

The Shadow was looking right past the shoulder of a husky guard who had been stationed to watch the door. Interested in what was happening in the room, the guard had faced about, trusting his ears to warn him if anyone tinkered with the door.

Thus, like the guard, The Shadow was witness to events in the squarish room beyond; and one brief view was all he needed, as proof that he had chosen the right goal.

Shiwan Khan was not present in the meeting room, but The Shadow had not expected him to be there. The men on hand were the sort that The Shadow anticipated; if anything, they exceeded his forecast. Instead of just a few they numbered half a dozen.

Big-shots in their own right, notorious specialists in varied fields of crime, these were the public enemies who had rallied to the cause of Shiwan Khan. In becoming lieutenants of the powerful Golden Master, they had increased their evil status, instead of lessening it.

From their leering faces, the gleeful note in their raspy voices, The Shadow knew that he was to gain an insight into the plans of Shiwan Khan, from the lips of the very men who were to play a part in crimes to come.

Crooks had heard from Shiwan Khan; then were soon to hear from The Shadow!

## CHAPTER VII. THE HIDDEN TRAP

SPOKESMAN for the six was Mike Borlo, a beetle-browed burly, noted as an all-around crook. Mike boasted that he had beaten eleven different raps, covering charges from arson to murder. Faked alibis, perjured witnesses, and legal technicalities always seemed to work in Mike Borlo's favor.

Next to Mike sat Snipe Shailey, a rat-raced character who considered himself handsome, which he was, in comparison to his present companions. Snipe had a long, sallow face, topped by sleek hair. His gimlet eyes were shrewd and glittery. Snipe's specialty was murder, but he confined his efforts to disposing of crooks who were muscling in on the rackets of others. It was difficult for the law to prove facts in such cases.

Straight opposite Snipe was Blitz Gandy, veteran of half a dozen sensational bank and pay-roll robberies. Coarse-featured and overbearing in his manner, Blitz didn't look as smart as the others, but he regarded himself their superior. At any rate, he had some claim to distinction; he had tried crime the tough way and was still at large.

The other three crooks likewise had reputations in the badlands. The Shadow noted Dobie Grelf, who specialized at cover-up work; Silk Laddiman, noted as a warehouse tapper; and Shag Flink, quite famed for his persuasive efforts in behalf of the numbers racket during its heyday.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"We've got together," announced Mike Borlo, "and that makes it all set. At our next meeting –"

"Why next?" demanded Blitz Gandy. "What's the matter with laying out the first job right now?"

"Shiwan Khan says to wait," put in Snipe Shailey, in a hard tone. "That's enough, ain't it?"

"I suppose you've been talking to this Shiwan Khan guy," retorted Blitz. "Like Mike here says he has."

"I've heard from him," said Snipe, coolly. "Maybe you will, too, Blitz."

Contemptuously, Blitz threw a look around the group. Tapping his forehead, he said scoffingly:

"You guys say it's all in the bean. Maybe it is, if the old bean's soft. This stuff of getting mental messages sounds wacky to me. I wouldn't have known about this meeting, if Mike hadn't told me."

The others offered only one argument; namely, that it was easier for one man to be soft in the brain, than five. It was Mike Borlo who finally voiced their sentiment, when he growled:

"All right, Blitz. Stay out, if you want. Only, I'm telling you I've talked with this guy Shiwan Khan, over a radio –"

"Over a radio?"

"Yeah, a radio with screwy lights, all different colors. Just when they get you feeling goofy, you hear Shiwan Khan. He told me there'd be two meetings –"

"Why two?"

"On account of Prex Norgan."

Blitz stared; then snorted.

"Prex Norgan?" he queried. "What're we going to do, heave posies over the cliff where he went off in his jalopy when the Feds were after him?"

"Prex Norgan isn't croaked, Blitz."

Blitz squinted, his big mouth opened wide. The others showed sudden eagerness to hear what else Mike had to say. This was the spokesman's first reference to Prex Norgan, formerly rated as the nation's Public Enemy No. 1, until his reputed death a year ago.

"I got it straight from Shiwan Khan," assured Mike, "the way he piped everything else. He says Prex Norgan is right here in New York, sticking in a hideaway. He's coming in with us, Prex is."

"A smart boy, Prex," commented Snipe. "An educated guy. Good stuff, Shiwan Khan bringing him back in circulation."

Rising from his chair, Blitz Gandy strode across the room, turning about to face the entire group.

"Another session is O.K. by me," declared Blitz, "if it means meeting up with Prex Norgan. If Prex is alive, and Shiwan Khan is wise to it, the guy must know everything. If this is the real McCoy, you can count me in."

## MASTERS OF DEATH

But I've got to lamp Prex, first."

BLITZ was turning toward the door. Mike told him to hold it. At Mike's suggestion, Snipe started to the door, pushed the guard aside, to take a look into the hall. When Snipe took a look for anything, he always had a gun ready. As he drew his revolver, the others did the same.

The door was shut, the key turned tight, when Snipe arrived. The Shadow saw no occasion to take on a roomful of Class A killers, under conditions which were to their advantage. With a lighted hall behind him and the crooks at the bottom of the stairway, he would be placed between two fires.

On that account, The Shadow returned rapidly to the side room by which he had entered.

From the edge of the doorway, he saw Snipe Shailey glance along the hall. The fellow's gimlet eyes noted everything, even streaky blackness on the floor. Watching for the patch to move, Snipe seemed disappointed. He returned to the meeting room, to join the others.

The Shadow waited for the whole group to appear. He was prepared to have a say regarding their next meeting; at least, to the extent of thinning out the participants. But the door did not open. Apparently, Mike Borlo had brought up some fresh subject for discussion and all were staying to hear it.

Moving out through the hall, The Shadow reached the meeting room again, found the door unlocked. As he edged the door inward, no light appeared along the crack. The room was dark; empty, too for The Shadow's ears could have caught even the slightest breathing. Carefully, The Shadow tested the darkness with a whispered laugh. Only echoes answered.

Remembering the trapdoor in the roof. The Shadow recognized that it was directly above the meeting room. For some reason, the crooks had taken that outlet. It might be that they had suspected the presence of The Shadow.

As he pondered upon such likelihood, The Shadow heard creaks from the stairs. Trigger-men were on the move, upward. They must have received some tip-off from Mike and the departing big-shots. Turning a flashlight upwards The Shadow saw that the trapdoor in the meeting room was tightly shut. He didn't have time for further inspection of the place. Enemies were at the top of the stairs.

Wheeling, The Shadow greeted them with a strident laugh from the doorway of the meeting room. He was stabbing shots with one gun, while he put away his flashlight and drew another automatic, all in one move. Revolvers were answering, spouting wildly. With a surge, a wave of thugs flung themselves into sight, driving forward in a suicide charge.

Again The Shadow laughed, as he wheeled back into the meeting room. As he went, he was calculating the reason for that maddened charge; he was also hearing repeated echoes of his own mockery, which this time had reached a fierce crescendo.

Then, all of a sudden, The Shadow's twist became a long, wild spring. He had found the answer too late to prevent his whirl into the empty room. The place was a trap, a pitfall that the crooks had prepared before departure, in accordance with orders from Shiwan Khan.

The deserted room was floorless!

CHARGING crooks knew it; that was why they had begun their crazy surge. As The Shadow's gunfire broke off, his laugh cut short, too.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

It was the crooks who were flinging gibes at their vanished foe. They hoped that The Shadow would have time to hear their taunts before he hit the cement basement, four floors below.

They also hoped that he would survive the plunge. They wanted to give him the finishing touches with their guns. Lunging to the brink, the thugs turned their flashlights down into the cellar in search of their crumpled prey.

The glare revealed the near half of the floor, hanging from heavy hinges. There was another half across the room, dangling in the same fashion beyond the glow of the lights. But the crooks were concerned with the pit: they saw two guns against the grimy cement, but The Shadow wasn't there.

Then from across the meeting room came the quiver of a laugh. Aiming thugs were greeted by a spurting .45 that staggered them. One flashlight flinging upward from a hand that loosed it, gave a momentary view of The Shadow's new position.

Sensing the pitfall as he was wheeling into it, The Shadow had flung away his guns and made a tremendous leap across the room, hoping to reach a window ledge.

Missing that mark, he had caught the upper edge of the half-floor on the far side of the room. Hanging on that slab, he had drawn one of the reserve guns that he carried when equipped for heavy battle.

Thugs were taking The Shadow's bullets. Two of those staggered foemen pitched forward, plunging into the pit intended for The Shadow. The rest made frantic retreat, some reeling as they took the brunt of The Shadow's barrage.

His gun emptied, The Shadow put it away and drew another. The last of his weapons was not needed for the present. He cloaked it, when he heard the last of the thugs stumbling madly down the stairway.

Working up to the window, The Shadow reached the ledge. Reaching for the trapdoor, he pushed his fingers in under the edge. Mike Borlo and the other aces hadn't tried to clamp the trapdoor from the upper side. They hadn't considered it necessary.

There were new sounds from the hallway. Defeated mobbies had summoned reserves from the front street. But The Shadow was through the trapdoor by the time the arriving trigger-men began to test the floorless room with bullets.

Which way the big-shots had gone, did not matter. They were too far ahead to be overtaken. Returning along his own route, The Shadow went down through the empty house, out the window to the wall that marked the end of a blind alley. He did not forget that things might have happened elsewhere during the course of his trip.

From the wall top, The Shadow took a quick look upward bringing his gun to firing position. He was just in time to sight a shape above – a wiry, scrawny naljorpa, like the one who had slung the knife from the museum roof.

This killer was on a rooftop, too. He had reached the roof that The Shadow had so recently left. Flinging half across the edge, the naljorpa loosed the knife so swiftly, that the blade seemed to dart downward of its own accord.

The Shadow's gun spoke simultaneously. Blade and bullet must have passed in mid-flight. But only one missile was swift enough to find a target. It was the bullet.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Rolled from the wall edge by the recoil of his gun, The Shadow escaped the knife point that nicked the narrow stretch of brick. He flattened in the blind alley; as he struck, he heard a snarl coming from the darkness above.

It was the naljorpa, bound for a longer fall than The Shadow had taken. The snaky assassin landed with a bony clatter on the far side of the wall.

Shaken by his own short drop, The Shadow reeled off into the darkness, steadying as he neared the street. Aiming for the nearest corner, he nicked a trigger-man who was coming into sight. The yell brought other thugs in that direction, while The Shadow was taking an opposite course.

Battle against a horde of lesser crooks was useless, particularly when naljorpas were in the offing. The Shadow had not made this trip to thin out ranks that Shiwan Khan could easily replenish, either from his own reserves or those of his lieutenants.

The Shadow's chief mission was accomplished. He had listened in on the assemblage of big-shots, learning who they were. Tracing them would not be difficult in the future. By damaging their efforts, The Shadow could eventually reach Shiwan Khan.

In the meantime, he would be ruining the Golden Master's own campaign, which seemed to be the launching of crime on an unheard-of scale. As for the traps of Shiwan Khan, they were not the sort that could ensnare The Shadow. Shiwan Khan had failed to use the proper bait.

Perhaps that very fact would strike Shiwan Khan, when he heard of The Shadow's latest exploit!

### CHAPTER VIII. THE SECOND MEETING

NEWS always reached Shiwan Khan swiftly. Moreover, the Golden Master had rapid ways of transmitting it to others. When Mike Borlo reached the apartment where he lived, he turned on the radio that he had mentioned, just to see its lights flash.

Odd lights that blinked a medley of red, green and blue across the center dial. They always made Mike feel woozy, but he didn't always hear the voice. That depended upon Shiwan Khan. Mike didn't expect to hear from the Golden Master again tonight.

But the voice came.

It was like a bell, a thing that clanged inside Mike's head, leaving words there. When the voice ended, Mike turned off the radio; shaking himself from his daze, he reached for a telephone.

The telephone bell was already ringing. Snipe Shailey was on the wire. He, too, had received a message, after staring at a special electric light bulb that flashed dazzling colors.

Between them, Mike and Snipe agreed that the others must have heard from Shiwan Khan, with the possible exception of Blitz Gandy. Knowing where to reach Blitz, Mike said he would call him up. A few minutes later, he had Blitz on the wire.

"Get this," began Mike. "You know that rig we had to drop The Shadow, in case he showed up...? Yeah, the phony floor... I knew we set it, all right, but it didn't get The Shadow... Yeah, he showed up. He dropped in it and out of it, somehow..."

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"Anyway, the word was piped to Shiwan Khan... Yeah, some of those skinny guys must have passed it... We've heard from Shiwan Khan, all except you. He wants us to meet up with Prex Norgan, before The Shadow gets hep... I know where to go, so hop over here and I'll take you along..."

Blitz arrived within ten minutes. Mike took him on a subway trip, well downtown. They walked a few blocks eastward, came to an old building, where Mike rapped at a basement door. Blitz was looking across the street. He started to whisper:

"There's one of the skinny guys –"

The door swung open. Blitz thought he saw another slinky figure beyond it but when they stepped into a gloomy hall, there was no one about. Mike led the way to a solid wall; glancing back, Blitz saw the door go shut.

But no human hand was visible. Except when they hurled their weight in knife flings, Shiwan Khan's naljorpas were capable at keeping from sight.

A panel slid up. Mike pointed Blitz through the wall. They came to another door, which opened at Mike's tap, while the panel behind them closed. Stepping into a subterranean room, they found the others waiting: Snipe, Dobie, and the rest.

The place was furnished lavishly; it made the most luxurious hide-out that the visiting big-shots had ever seen. But Blitz wasn't interested in the furnishings. The coarse-featured crook stared at a motionless figure seated on a thick cushion.

Recognizing the wide-browed, square-jawed face, with its hardened stare and suavely smiling lips, Blitz exclaimed in his nearest tone to wonderment:

"Prex Norgan!"

The suave man rose from the cushion. His eyes showed a knowing glitter, as he shook hands with the new arrivals.

"I guess they told you that the Feds didn't get me," said Prex, in a smooth tone. "Kind of hard to believe, isn't it, Blitz?"

Acknowledging that it was, Blitz studied the public enemy. Once, Prex had been sleek; at present, he looked very thin. He had lost at least twenty pounds, by Blitz's estimate, during the past year.

Smiling, Prex pointed across the room; near a curtained doorway, Blitz saw another seated man. The fellow was rawboned; his ribs showed through his tawny flesh. Attired only in a loin cloth, the man was evidently a native of the Orient.

"His name is Pashod," said Prex. "He is a gomchen; a hermit to you, Blitz, if you know what hermits are."

Blitz growled that he had heard of them. Addressing the others, Prex continued:

"Pashod is also a guru, or teacher. He has been training me in mystic ways, during the past few months. Watch!"

## MASTERS OF DEATH

STEPPING to his cushion, Prex seated himself cross-legged in one easy motion. His eyes took on a fixed glitter. Like Pashod, Prex seemed completely entranced. Minutes ticked, while he remained immobile, his eyes upon a crystal ball across the room, the same object that held Pashod's gaze. Then, in a far-away tone, Prex spoke:

"I have heard. I shall obey!"

Snapping from his trance, he unlimbered as easily as he had seated himself. Pashod must have received the same mental command, for the gomchen also arose and retired to a corner, from which he surveyed the visitors without the slightest trace of curiosity.

"The credit goes to Shiwan Khan," declared Prex. "I'd have gone nuts in this dump, if he hadn't sent Pashod here. But after I took this yoga business, days went like that!"

Prex indicated the passage of a week by seven snaps of his fingers.

"Stick with this racket long enough," he told the others, "and you'll learn the whole works, too. You get so you don't even need to eat, and it puts you in trim. Look at Pashod; he's been living on a bowl of tsampa for ten days and hasn't finished it yet."

Blitz saw the bowl that Prex mentioned and didn't like the looks of its mealy content. He grunted that he didn't like Pashod's looks either; that he couldn't see any percentage in the starvation stuff. Prex merely smiled.

"If you don't think that Pashod is tough," he told Blitz, "Just make a pass at him."

Accepting the invitation, Blitz approached the gomchen, drew back his hand to deliver an open-palmed slap. It would not have mattered if Blitz had used his fist. He did not manage to even start the blow.

Hissing a snarl between bulging teeth, Pashod made a wide sweep of his thin hands. Blitz staggered back, as if jarred by an electric shock.

"Try it on me," laughed Prex, "if you want another dose. I can't dish it out as well as Pashod, but I'm plenty good!"

This time, Blitz declined. Finished with banter, Prex reached beneath a table, drew out a large coil of paper, and unrolled it. He motioned the others closer, to study the diagram that he showed them.

"Shiwan Khan doped this out," informed Prex, "and flashed it through to me. This is the lay for our first job, the Battery Trust. It's ready any time."

Detail by detail, Prex mapped out the plan for the most perfect bank robbery that any of the crooks could have imagined. It was to be staged at night, beginning with a false alarm that would actually bring the police to the premises, along with certain bank officials. Unwittingly, those arrivals would pave the way to the job.

Each big-shot was to play a part, and Blitz Gandy had the most important share, due to his experience in such jobs. Blitz swelled at the assignment, particularly because it gave him a higher rating than Mike Borlo, whose superior attitude had become annoying.

But Mike did not seem to care. He had been working for harmony among the lieutenants, and felt that this would satisfy Blitz. In fact, it seemed to suit everyone, until Snipe Shailey saw a loophole in the chart and

## MASTERS OF DEATH

questioned Prex about it.

"That's for The Shadow," explained Prex, coolly. "He'll be around too."

Instantly, objections filled the air. Springing one trap for The Shadow had been good enough; but it wouldn't do to try the game again. Particularly when a few hundred thousand dollars were at stake, as with this job. Prex began arguments; his companions voicing him down with talk of dough.

Then, with a peculiar suddenness, the babble ceased. An icy stillness filled the hide-out; of one accord, the mobsters began to turn toward the curtained doorway across the room.

What they saw, froze them rigid.

THE curtains had spread. Advancing from between the drapes came a figure clad in gold. Above the ornamented robe the big-shots saw a strange triangular face, lined with thin, curving brows and drooping mustaches. Those features seemed penciled upon the saffron complexion, except for the robed man's eyes which shone with a greenish glitter.

To every brain, there sprang a name:

Shiwan Khan!

This was the famed Golden Master, who had influenced them from afar. His expression was unfathomable; his lips, when they opened, became parting slits of brown. His words had a bell-like tinkle.

"Of what use is money," spoke Shiwan Khan, "while our one real enemy remains alive?" He paused. The listeners realized that he had put a statement, not a question. Then: "To insure our plans for wealth, we must eliminate The Shadow."

Crooks found themselves ready to agree, though they did not say so. They were waiting to hear more from Shiwan Khan. His words had a note that made them expectant.

"Tonight was a mere test," continued Shiwan Khan. "It proved that no ordinary trap will do. We must have bait for our friend, The Shadow. I shall provide it."

He indicated a dotted line on the sheet, one that marked the path that the police and bank officials were due to follow. Again, Shiwan Khan was demonstrating his double methods.

Already, Prex had explained how people who arrived at the bank would pave the way to crime. Shiwan Khan was showing how those same persons could be used to bait The Shadow!

"Always, you have erred." There was a touch of reproof in Shiwan Khan's tinkly tone. "As men of crime, you have hoped that your deeds would escape The Shadow's notice. Such an assumption is ridiculous. The Shadow knows all –"

There was a long pause, broken only by Shiwan Khan's discordant laugh, which voiced a contempt far more subtle than any words.

"All except the ways of Shiwan Khan," completed the Golden Master. "Let him trace you. Let The Shadow gain an opportunity. Then, let him be confronted with a problem other than his own. Let him face a threat that will seal the fate of innocent victims, unless he attempts their rescue."

"That is when The Shadow will rely upon chance instead of wisdom. His mistaken policy of justice will prove his own undoing. Perhaps our victims will escape us, but their protector will not. The Shadow shall produce his own destruction!"

Those words left a tingle. Eyes on the diagram, the elated criminals realized the full extent of Shiwan Khan's remarkable scheme. Taking his cue from the Golden Master, Prex Norgan was pointing out how the mesh would close, in smooth, mechanical fashion. Finding their tongues, the whole group turned to babble their praise.

But Shiwan Khan had gone. All that they saw was a glitter of the golden robe, as the curtain closed behind the Unfathomable's departing form. All sensed a voice, however – even Blitz – a voice that could have been a product of their own thoughts.

Chiming, yet discordant, that tone was a token of farewell from Shiwan Khan. Not a farewell of the present to these lieutenants of the Golden Master, but a farewell of the future – to The Shadow!

### **CHAPTER IX. NIGHT OF DOOM**

CROOKS were on the move again. Like slimy creatures crawling from beneath a lifted stone, they had come to The Shadow's attention. He was keeping close tabs on them personally, as well as through his agents.

Yet there was an oddity in their actions that might have perplexed The Shadow, had he not known the identity of the master plotter, who had coaxed big– shots from cover.

Last night, there had been a gun fray in an old house on the East Side. The law was still investigating, wondering what it was all about. The episode did not fit with the things that the law most feared, a thrust from Shiwan Khan.

But The Shadow knew that the hand of the Golden Master was behind the whole event.

As Allard, The Shadow was watching from his window while awaiting a call from Burbank. His own plans were fashioned. He had posted men to check on Mike Borlo, Blitz Gandy, Snipe Shailey – any of the others. A lead to one would be a lead to all.

Given an opportunity, The Shadow would move in turn; but, so far, those big shots and their squads of mobbies were roving like flocks of honey bees, settling nowhere.

As yet, the crooks were thinking in terms of ordinary crime under the guidance of Shiwan Khan. More than a single crime, of course. They counted upon a run of evil opportunities that would mount into a crime wave. But how far that billow would carry was beyond their imagination. Only two persons could picture its ultimate possibility: Shiwan Khan and The Shadow.

Always, Shiwan Khan's power increased in proportion to success. He wasn't thinking of a crime wave that would subside, like others. He was looking forward to a tidal wave that would submerge everything. Each success would bring more crooks beneath his rule, until Shiwan Khan would be the master mind of crime throughout the nation.

Thereafter, crime would pay. Old theories would be reversed. Crime with vast profit, swamping all opposition from the law, would become America's greatest industry. It would literally split the country into two groups, producing a national issue of a revolutionary size. When that happened, crime would win.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Long had The Shadow foreseen such dire consequences. There was nothing of the incredible about the proposition. The thing had occurred often in international affairs, when criminal nations imposed their iron will upon others that favored harmony and order.

All that crime had ever needed to dominate the nation was an absolute dictator. In Shiwan Khan, crime had found just such a master brain.

Yet the rise of Shiwan Khan, like that of other power-seeking schemers, could still be ruined if nipped in the early stages. The only solution was opposition from a fighter of equal mettle; and justice was fortunate to have such a champion in The Shadow.

It would mean a battle to the death, with the fate of a nation in the balance. With such an issue almost at hand, it was difficult to be patient, even for The Shadow.

Crossing the room in Allard's limping style, The Shadow took the telephone that a Xınca servant handed him. Calling Burbank, he found it difficult to retain his calm-toned style while asking for reports. No new ones had arrived. Crooks were still on the roam.

Across the wire, Burbank's voice carried a methodical note that was customary with the reliable contact man. Recognizing its value in this emergency, The Shadow gave a series of unusual orders.

"Await final reports," he told Burbank. "Then order all agents off duty. Immediately after delivering such instructions, prepare for an active assignment of your own."

It was an absolute reversal of The Shadow's usual process, but Burbank showed no traces of astonishment. He seemed to recognize that everything was working in reverse; perhaps even crime, since it was under the management of Shiwan Khan.

ELSEWHERE, in fact, things were quite in reverse.

Working late at his desk in headquarters, Inspector Joe Cardona was in a total quandary. So far, he hadn't managed to score a point in the law's campaign against Shiwan Khan. The mess at the Oriental Museum had led him nowhere.

The silver coffin, of course, was a matter of Federal investigation, since it had caused a problem for the customs officials. Feds had come in from Washington to see what they could learn about it, but they were still stabbing in the dark.

There wasn't even proof that Shiwan Khan was really in New York. Cardona was forced to concede that someone other than the Golden Master could have entered as a passenger in the silver coffin. Tracing, Shiwan Khan was worse than looking for a needle that wasn't in a haystack.

The only policy was to wait for Shiwan Khan to pop up somewhere. The thought gave Cardona an actual chill.

He was thinking that Shiwan Khan might pop in sight right in the middle of this office. It wasn't impossible. Shiwan Khan had done far more amazing things in the past.

His thoughts interrupted by the telephone bell, Cardona had a fleeting hunch that Shiwan Khan might be on the wire. Joe was laughing it off as he answered the call. In an instant, his manner changed.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Cardona knew the voice that spoke to him, recognized it as more important than Shiwan Khan's. It was the whispered tone of The Shadow, the one being who might solve the riddle of the Golden Master's return!

"Call the officials of the Battery Trust Co.," spoke the voice, in the sibilant tone that Cardona knew. "Tell them to meet you at the bank. Get there as soon as possible. Investigate the alarm that occurs, although it may prove a false one."

Heaving his shoulders in relief, Cardona set the telephone upon the desk. He was glad that he had heard from The Shadow instead of Shiwan Khan. It didn't occur to Cardona that there was one person who could fake The Shadow's tone.

Had he thought it over, Joe would have realized that such a trick could be staged by Shiwan Khan!

In twenty minutes, Cardona was outside the Battery Trust, talking with half a dozen anxious men. Finding everything quiet, as well as mysterious, Cardona rang the night bell. Two watchmen were on duty. One of them opened a massive door, while the other remained in the background.

The watchmen had seen nothing amiss. They were puzzled by the arrival of Cardona and the bank officials. But while the subject was still under discussion, a clangor occurred from deep within the bank. Cardona gave his companions a triumphant look.

"Don't worry," he told them. "It's likely to be a false alarm. That's what the tip-off said. We'll look into it."

Cardona had a small squad with him. His men were coming in from a patrol of the neighborhood, which they reported to be quiet. Leaving the outside patrol to Detective Sergeant Markham and two others, Cardona took another pair of men with him and entered the bank, followed by the worried officials.

One watchman went ahead to show them the way, the other remained on duty at the door.

It wasn't long before the trouble was located. It proved to be a short circuit in the alarm system, a broken wire running along a heavily barred window. But the thing had hardly been fixed before the clangor began again. This time, a short-circuit was discovered on a balcony.

By then, the trouble seemed obvious. Someone had tampered with the alarm system, about as far as crooks could hope to get in a bank as stoutly protected as the Battery Trust. Nevertheless, Cardona decided upon a natural course to allay the worries of the anxious officials. He announced that he would make a full inspection of the entire premises.

Word was relayed back to the door. The inspection took on the aspect of a simple routine. The group made the rounds on the upper floors, then descended to the vault room, which was below the ground level.

Scarcely had the flashlights descended the steep stairs before events occurred outside the bank.

THE first thing happened at the door, where a lone watchman was on duty. A writhing shape detached itself from a cornice just above the doorway and plopped beside the watchman. As hands sped toward the watchman's throat, his whole body was numbed by a sharp shock. Then, choked into submission, he fell silently upon the tiled floor. A wily naljorpa had handled the first task swiftly.

The officers who patrolled the block were similarly attacked, with equal skill and speed. The only remaining man was Sergeant Markham. As he approached the doorway he saw the watchman's huddled form and stooped beside it. The first naljorpa bounded from the inner darkness and numbed Markham before he could

give a shout.

Of burly build, Markham managed to put up a struggle, despite his numbness. The naljorpa whipped out a knife, was about to loose the deadly phurba for Markham's heart, when a gold-sleeved arm moved in between, supplying a long-nailed hand that stopped the thrust.

In curious jargon, the gold-robed arrival dismissed the naljorpa as other men appeared upon the scene. They dropped from passing cars, to settle Markham in rough and ready fashion, binding him along with the watchman.

They were mobbies, these arrivals, headed by Shiwan Khan's new lieutenants. Roving crooks had converged at the given time to take up their appointed stations. One band followed Shiwan Khan into the bank; the group was headed by Blitz Gandy.

A human beacon in the gloom, the gold-robed Shiwan Khan led the way to the vault room. Descending with silent stride, he signaled for the others to be cautious on the stairs. Shiwan Khan reached the lower level to find Cardona and the officials standing in front of the massive vault door, which they had opened.

A long-nailed hand made gestures to the men above, slitted lips delivered a tinkly challenge. Cardona swung about; his hand stopped before it reached his gun.

There was hypnotic power in the greenish gaze of Shiwan Khan. His very presence carried a numbing force. Beneath the glow of the vault-room lights, he seemed a fiend materialized from some lost limbo. But behind the mental sway of the Golden Master was a visible, physical threat.

Blitz Gandy and his crew had arrived with bristling guns. While a pair of crooks kept the victims covered, Blitz and the rest rifled the vault in rapid, effective style.

Sending men upstairs with stacks of currency that filled their arms, Blitz advanced with his two trigger-men. Imitating Shiwan Khan's cold glare with an ugly leer, Blitz backed Cardona and the bank officials into the vault.

Then the crooks were moving away at a chimed command. Alone, Shiwan Khan was standing at the entrance of the vault. The glitter of his eyes was more ominous than guns; he held Cardona and the other prisoners paralyzed.

Slitted lips gave an off-key chortle. With an imperious sweep of his golden arm, Shiwan Khan swung the great door shut. The clang of the huge barrier was echoed by fragmentary tinkles, like the shattering of glass. Shiwan Khan had throated that threat of doom.

Alone, outside the vault door, Shiwan Khan turned off the lights. In darkness, he stepped toward the stairs, where Blitz and the last two mobbies had already gone.

The first scene was ended, with Shiwan Khan predominant. The next act in the tragedy would bring The Shadow. Not as a rescuer, but as another victim in the scheme of doom.

Such was the strategy of Shiwan Khan!

## CHAPTER X. THE SHADOW'S TURN

CRIME had moved ahead of The Shadow, but not by many minutes. He had received reports from several quarters as soon as bands of roving crooks began to converge. All indications pointed to the Battery Trust as the common target.

Leaving his hotel, The Shadow made a quick trip to that vicinity, picking up Burbank on the way.

All was quiet around the bank. The door had been closed, apparently for greater safety. From their cab, The Shadow and Burbank saw a patrol car passing, keeping on its way. The officers had evidently been informed that the place was under the law's own control.

To The Shadow's eyes the scene was too quiet. As the cab swung a corner, he noticed cars pulling away from the next block. In doorways, he spied glittered reflections that had the glint of gun muzzles.

The ease of the departure, the presence of the cover-up men, indicated that crime could already be completed. Still, nothing had been heard from within the stony walls of the bank building. The silence intrigued The Shadow.

He whispered a command to Burbank. The contact man told the cabby to stop in the middle of the next block. Alighting in a rear street, The Shadow waited until Burbank had dismissed the cab; then beckoned his companion with green glimmers from a tiny flashlight.

Carrying a bulging satchel, Burbank followed the blinking beacon into total darkness. The Shadow was threading a course through spaces that few others could have found.

Blocked by a low wall in a narrow, blind alley, he scaled it. Muffling green flashes within his cloak folds, he reached down for Burbank's bag, then gave the contact man a helping hand to the wall top.

Though a comparatively low building, the Battery Trust towered above the squatty houses of this neighborhood. Its gray granite walls were topped by a flat roof, with a severe cornice that offered little chance of concealment.

Quite sure that no naljorpas could be close, The Shadow looked for a means of entry into the formidable structure, and saw one. Where a jutting corner of the bank building met the extension of a low garage, a square, barred window was in easy reach.

The light was blinking green again. The Shadow had dropped in darkness beyond the low wall, and Burbank followed. They were near the corner of bank and garage, when the light flashed red. Stopping, Burbank heard The Shadow's approach, only because the cloaked investigator uttered a whispered command.

Receiving a coiled wire from the bag, The Shadow ascended the wall, using a wedging process between the granite blocks of the bank and the brick surface of the garage.

From the top, his light blinked green; Burbank caught the end of the wire that sizzed downward. The light blinked red. While watching for the next signal, Burbank put on a pair of insulated gloves from his kit.

A green flash called for the bag. Burbank sent it up by the wire. When the wire came down again, it was Burbank's turn. His heavy gloves proved valuable protection, when he lashed the wire tightly about his wrists. At a green flash from above, Burbank began his own attempt to scale the wall.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Ordinarily, his clutches would have been inadequate, and his toe holds were uncertain. But the wire was drawing upward under The Shadow's haul. It gave the needed support whenever Burbank floundered. The Shadow could actually sense his agent's progress by the varying strain upon the wire. At last, Burbank flopped over the roof edge like a landed fish.

They were atop the low garage, The Shadow and his agent. A big blot approached the barred widow of the bank; it was The Shadow, cloak outspread to hide the figure within it. Under that shelter, The Shadow began to probe the bars with the tiny beam of his flashlight, which had turned to white.

Then he was whispering for tools that Burbank, crouched close by, provided from the bag.

A low laugh stirred the darkness as the barred frame came free. Taking it as a summons, Burbank crawled closer. The Shadow showed him two ends of a cut wire, part of the bank's alarm system. Though no one had previously entered by this route, the way had at least been cleared from within the bank itself.

ENTERING, The Shadow and Burbank were within a little office that concealed old furniture, quite out of keeping with the modern style of the bank. A slight glow from the window showed a word on the glass panel of the office door. The reversed letters read: SUPERINTENDENT.

In a corner, a watchman's dinner pail was resting on a table, a half-finished cup of coffee beside it. Instructing Burbank to find out what he could about the damaged alarm system, The Shadow moved ahead alone.

The superintendent's office was in an isolated corner of the mezzanine. It enabled The Shadow to hear whispery sounds that carried from the high-roofed banking room. Following along the balcony rail, he saw occasional flashlight glimmers. At times, the whispers raised to the tone of voices.

Crooks were stationed everywhere. Little by little, The Shadow could picture the whole arrangement. One mob, probably headed by Blitz Gandy, had staged a robbery. Others were covering, here inside the bank, while more were outside. Each group was probably under the control of a separate big-shot, such as Mike Borlo or Snipe Shailey. Perhaps Prex Norgan was also present.

Just who the leaders were, and what their duties, did not matter at the moment. At least the crooks had left the superintendent's office unguarded. Maybe they intended to use it for a getaway, which would be very nice from The Shadow's standpoint.

With that office as a pillbox, The Shadow could stand off the combined crews until the law arrived. But as for attacking crooks in their present entrenched positions, behind tellers windows and solid-walled entries, the attempt would be suicidal. Even The Shadow recognized limitations when it came to pitched battle against assembled hordes.

Returning to the superintendent's office, The Shadow found Burbank examining a switch-box. A special lock controlled the alarm system. Someone had broken the lock and gotten at the wires.

The Shadow could picture one of Shiwan Khan's sneaky naljorpas, secreted in the bank, ready for such duty. But he could also visualize the deed producing an alarm throughout the bank, unless some short circuits had troubled the system earlier, in which case would have been localized alarms.

The Shadow was gaining definite clues to what actually had happened.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Burbank was examining big switches hooked to the high-tension circuit that provided the bank with light and power. That system had not been touched. Burbank was announcing the fact, when a sharp buzz interrupted.

It came from the other side of the office accompanied by a blinking light. Stepping across, The Shadow found a special telephone in the wall. The instrument was labeled with a single word: VAULT.

Lifting the receiver, The Shadow spoke in one of his between tones, which could not be identified with anyone. He recognized the voice that responded; it belonged to Joe Cardona.

It was fortunate that The Shadow had not used his sibilant whisper. If he had, Cardona would have supposed him to be Shiwan Khan, for the inspector had by this time guessed the Golden Master's trick. Hearing, a voice that might be anybody's, Cardona talked, figuring that he had nothing to lose.

"We're in the vault," informed Joe, "talking over an emergency phone. The watchman is locked in here with us, but we thought there might be a chance of somebody showing up in the super's office.

"We've got air enough to last us a while, but not too long. There's a guy with us that knows the combination. If you come down to the vault room, whoever you are, you can let us out. I'm Inspector Cardona. Listen while we give you the combination –"

THE voice cut off with a groan. Cardona had just heard an interrupting whisper. It was The Shadow's tone, but Joe didn't believe it. Thinking that he was talking to Shiwan Khan, Cardona was starting to hang up when The Shadow pressed a button that produced a buzzing clatter over the wire.

Jarred to attention by the sound, Cardona heard The Shadow's tone again and decided that it might be real, since its owner was so insistent upon continuing the conversation. Again convinced that he had nothing to lose, Cardona repeated the combination as he received it from one of the bank officials.

Mechanically, The Shadow wrote down the numbers as Cardona droned them; but all the while his keen brain was ferreting other facts. The course that lay ahead was entirely too logical. It made The Shadow cold to his usual urge of supplying rapid rescue.

Chance could have brought about an unguarded window in the very room where the call for rescue would come. But The Shadow was dealing with Shiwan Khan, the crime master, who invariably turned chance to his own evil advantage!

Hearing a reflective laugh across the wire, Cardona's hopes went flickering again. But The Shadow's next words produced a change in the suspicious police inspector. The Shadow was talking in terms of rescue, but with a new slant.

He asked Cardona to describe the interior of the vault door. Cardona said that it consisted of a big sheet of plate glass, set in a heavy metal frame. He could see the vault's mechanism through the glass.

The Shadow wanted a description of the mechanism. Cardona gave it. The Shadow must have recognized the type, for he was soon talking, while Cardona listened. The Shadow asked if members of the party were equipped with penknives. Cardona answered yes.

"We've got guns, too," he began. "If you can get us out of here –"

"The penknives come first," interrupted The Shadow. "Unscrew the metal frame and remove the glass. Use the knives to throw the tumblers in the combination mechanism. The blades will do it, easily. Here are the

exact instructions –"

As The Shadow whispered details, Cardona repeated them to the others in the vault. Slight clangs across the wire told that men were setting to work with the great steel box, while The Shadow still continued with instructions.

Then Cardona was listening to orders that were understandable, yet baffling in their purpose.

"When you open the door," said The Shadow, "push it two thirds wide. Move everyone to the front corners of the vault room, as silently as possible. Cut the telephone wires and connect them to the hinges of the vault door."

"The telephone wires?" echoed Cardona. "But they'll be no good –"

"They will not be needed for the telephone," inserted The Shadow, "after the vault is open. Listen carefully while I explain their purpose."

Cardona was not the only man who heard The Shadow's next statements. Burbank had drawn close; he was checking the details, too, for they concerned him. When The Shadow had finished, Burbank got to work without awaiting an order.

From the open satchel, Burbank brought tools and lengths of wire. Tilting a flashlight toward the superintendent's switch box, Burbank began methodical operations.

The Shadow was asking Cardona how many guns he and his companions had. Joe counted four – his own, two belonged to captive detectives, and one in the possession of the watchman with them. The Shadow told him to station two guns on each side of the stairway that led up from the vault room.

Then came Cardona's tense announcement that the door had yielded. The Shadow told him to move the prisoners out. Listening intently, The Shadow could hear slight sounds from the receiver; when they ended abruptly he knew that Cardona had cut the telephone wires.

Turning to Burbank, The Shadow approved the competent technician's rapid work and gave him further orders. Moving out from the little office, The Shadow glided silently along the balcony, to pick a route below.

Whispers had ended below. Barricaded crooks were awaiting their zero hour. They knew that the time was near for the stroke that Shiwan Khan had arranged, the sure-fire thrust that would mark the finish of The Shadow.

Shiwan Khan had made the plans – it was The Shadow's turn to execute them, to the black-cloaked fighter's own undoing.

Unless The Shadow, too, had ways of turning chance to suit his own design!

## CHAPTER XI. THE PERFECT SNARE

ALL during his descent to the subterranean vault room, The Shadow was aware that crooks were following his progress. The vantage points where enemies were posted were like lairs in a web provided by Shiwan Khan's naljorpas.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Brushing threads in the darkness, The Shadow could feel them tighten and break. He knew that mobsters, crouched in safe spots, had felt those snaps, also. There were times when the floor gave slight crackles, despite the caution of The Shadow's tread.

Shiwan Khan's mystics had strewn those places with fine-grained sand that matched the color of the tiled door. The crunches were audible to listening crooks whose ears were laid to the floor.

Those tokens were supposed to be unnoticed by The Shadow; at least, he was not expected to divine their full significance. Shiwan Khan recognized that The Shadow would suspect the presence of crooks, but had calculated that it would not change the cloaked rescuer's quest. So far, The Shadow was performing according to the schedule. He was going to the vault room.

His methods seemed entirely true to form.

Once below, he would release the prisoners, confident that crooks had not spotted him; after that, he would return to offer battle. A simple process, typical of The Shadow. But on this occasion it was slated to end in disaster.

The faintest of crunches told that the black-cloaked master over crime was descending the lowermost steps. Not an eye had seen him; ears had merely detected The Shadow's direction, not his actual location. But the fact that he was going down the steps was quite enough. A squarish chunk of wall moved forward from beneath a metal counter in the main banking room.

The thing was a movable shield, mounted on rubber-tired wheels. Behind it was Dobie Grelf, the cover-up specialist, flanked by two triggermen, who were to aid him in a task of swift murder. The snout of a machine gun poked through the metal shield and pointed toward the lower stairs

When the shield reached the steps, its wheels found tracks. The stairway had an ornamental baseboard, running from top to bottom. The projecting tires fitted neatly upon those ornamental strips. Of its own weight, the heavy gun shield drew the assassins downward.

Behind Dobie and the two men with him, came other members of the murder mob. Dobie's pale face carried a pleased grin upon bloated lips. The Shadow wasn't going to stand a chance tonight.

All the way down, the gun and its shield moved noiselessly. The whole contrivance was rubber mounted and geared so that its descent would be even. Not only was it a silent juggernaut, equipped to deliver a rapid, deadly hail; its bulk served to muffle all sounds behind it.

Even The Shadow's keen ears could not have heard the mob descending by the stairs. As for sneaking crooks above, they were far out of earshot. Other lieutenants were moving their mobs to new positions. One group was working toward the balcony, the other in the direction of the watchman's door, where they had laid the bound forms of Markham and other prisoners.

Blitz had already gone with the swag. After Dobie ripped loose with the machine gun, it would be his turn for a getaway. The remaining mobs would cover his flight, then depart on their own. In turn, they would be covered by outside crews.

It was like a game of giant leap-frog, this system instituted by Shiwan Khan. Best of all, the last leap would be covered by the craftiest of rear guards, Shiwan Khan's corps of naljorpas, who were waiting a few blocks distant. No one would ever trace those slinkers of the night.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

For the only person capable of trailing a naljorpa would be dead: The Shadow!

The smoothly descending bulwark had halted at the bottom of the stairs. Peering over the top of the shield, Dobie watched for a glimmer of light. He and his men had followed while The Shadow was still somewhere on the stairs; had the cloaked fighter turned to challenge them, they would have drilled him in greeting.

But it was preferable that The Shadow should be below in the squarish vault room, where he couldn't find a place to dodge. The Shadow couldn't possibly have opened the vault by this time, even if he had the combination. That was why Dobie was watching for signs of a flashlight. He expected The Shadow to use one when turning the dials.

No sparkle came. It didn't seem possible that The Shadow could manipulate the combination in total darkness; nevertheless, Dobie wasn't going to let him get away with it, should he be capable of such a feat. The light switch was on the stairway wall near Dobie's elbow. Nudging the gunners to be ready, Dobie pressed it.

The sharp click produced no light. Someone had cut off the current. Instantly, a whispered laugh came from the vault room, a chilling tone that gathered menace from the many echoes that rose with it. It seemed like mockery from nowhere, a rising taunt that could bring shivers even to murderers like Dobie Grelf.

The laugh of The Shadow!

AT Dobie's snarled order, the machine gunners cut loose, spraying the vault with a terrific avalanche of bullets. The chatter drowned The Shadow's mockery. The crooks thought that they had ended the tone forever.

Reaching to the top of the shield, Dobie turned on a spotlight. It was hooked to dry-cell batteries. The thing gleamed like the triumphant eye of a mighty Cyclops, above the smoking muzzle of the machine gun.

But the wide circle of light showed no trace of a black-cloaked figure on the floor in front of the vault. Nor did it reveal the shiny surface of a steel door, that Dobie expected to see tight shut.

The vault was open, its door swung at a two-thirds angle. The vault's inner walls were scarred by machine-gun bullets, but the yawning steel-lined cube showed vacancy. The Shadow had disappeared before the crooks opened fire!

Then came new mockery – a taunt that Dobie located, not by the shivery sound itself, but through a streak of blackness that traced itself upon the wall, then vanished.

Dobie recognized the hawkish profile. Momentarily, The Shadow had thrust himself into the glare, then twisted back to cover.

He was behind the slanted door of the vault, protected by its bulk. He seemed to be inviting crooks to come and take him, bringing their machine gun with them.

The idea suited Dobie. He saw a way to make The Shadow's laugh a short one. The open vault was exactly what he wanted.

While he and his pair of henchmen were pushing across the room, the rest of the mob could take the vault as shelter. If The Shadow tried to hurdle the big shield, he would become a target for the men in the vault. With its steel walls, the vault made a perfect pillbox.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Turning about, Dobie snapped the order. He and the machine gunners heaved, pushed the big shield clear of the jamming stairway, started it rolling toward the open door of the vault.

As the big contrivance cleared from the path, five trigger men leaped from the stairs and made for the vault. Two were veering to throw their weight against the door, hoping to jam The Shadow in back of it, while the other three were ready to cover.

Meanwhile, the side of the rolling shield had almost reached the door edge when The Shadow wheeled from cover, diving past and below the muzzle of the machine gun. Dobie's men swung the shield on its pivot.

Even before the big shield struck the door edge, the air was riddled with sparks. The crackling spurts came as Dobie's trigger men reached the vault. They were jolted, twisted, by some devastating force; their clattering guns sparkled like short-circuited wires.

Then, as Dobie sprang about to view those lashing forms, the steel shield took the juice. Blazing with spurts of artificial lightening, it relayed the current into the men who handled the machine gun. The rubber insulations did not help. They had been packed in place to produce silence, not to stop a current of some thousand volts.

Where metal touched metal, sparks flew. Only Dobie was clear; the rest of his men, machine gunners included, were tossing about like balls of fat in a hot skillet. Yells were ending, as Dobie dived for the stairs; in his mad flight, he fancied that he could hear his mobbies sizzle.

It was all a result of The Shadow's foresight, plus the cooperation of Burbank. Some credit was also due Joe Cardona.

Up in the superintendent's room, Burbank had carefully hooked the high-tension circuit to the telephone wires that Cardona had attached to the hinges of the vault door. The simple pull of a switch had transformed the steel walls and the door into a high-powered frying pan that did not show its nature until tested.

The right men had tried it. Dobie's crew of murderers had reached the equivalent of the electric chair in a rather novel form. They had found a hot box, instead of a "hot seat."

HIGH-POWERED current burned out the spotlight. The sudden darkness enabled Dobie to reach the stairs. Finding remnants of his mob who had remained to cover the stairs, he yelled for them to be ready for The Shadow.

The trigger men weren't fast enough. Big guns spouted before their revolvers could talk. Sprawling crooks heard the laugh of The Shadow, as he drove up among them in pursuit of Dobie. At the top of the stairs, Dobie yelled for other big-shots to aid him; as he howled, he ran for the far door.

Guessing that he couldn't make it, Dobie spun about and jabbed shots for the stair top. His aim was just a trifle high. Flattening below the uppermost step, The Shadow picked his target and jabbed a reply.

Dobie was shooting at a blackened square that represented the stairway. The Shadow chose a much better mark; Dobie's spurting gun. The Shadow's shot drove home. Jolted, Dobie lost his revolver, and sprawled upon the weapon as it clattered to the floor.

From his present position, The Shadow could cover every avenue of approach. Secure in that stronghold, he was backed by four other gunners. Cardona and the rest had come from the front corners of the strong room, where they had been safely placed while The Shadow was drawing Dobie's mob in his own direction.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Two groups were putting up a fire: Mike Borlo was giving orders from the outer door, Snipe Shailey from along the balcony. The Shadow not only answered those shots, he delivered a welcoming laugh that invited his enemies to attack. Hearing The Shadow's mirth, Burbank cut off the circuit to the bank vault.

When lights glimmered from the vault room, The Shadow knew that the machine gun was no longer electrified. He sent Cardona and others down to get it. Meanwhile, Burbank finished repairing the alarm switch. Brazen throated bells began a clangor from all over the bank.

Mike's crew fled out by the doorway fearing that arriving police would cut them off. Springing from his safety spot, The Shadow followed, peppering them with bullets to prevent them from killing the prisoners who lay in the doorway.

The crooks managed to take a few cripples along, including Dobie, but they abandoned Markham and the other captives. Reaching the prisoners, The Shadow released them. He told them to arm themselves with guns that thugs had dropped.

The Shadow's sprint across the banking floor was so unexpected that he was halfway to his goal before Snipe and the balcony mob began to open fire. They missed him with their wild shots, and their chance at better aim was spoiled by Cardona's action with the captured machine gun.

Tilting the shield straight upward with the aid of the men about him, Cardona kept drilling bullets along the balcony rail, even after The Shadow had completed his dash.

Snipe and his gang made for their only outlet, the window of the superintendent's office. They were well back from the rail, to avoid Cardona's rattling fire; but The Shadow picked off a few of them by long-range shots from the door.

With pals dropping like the moving targets in a shooting gallery, Snipe and the rest did not stop. They dashed through the superintendent's office and sprang from the window to the garage roof, without encountering Burbank at all. The contact man had discreetly stepped into a closet, knowing that he could not combat so large a mob alone.

Burbank was using a gun, however, when The Shadow arrived. Firing slowly, but carefully, the methodical contact man nicked a pair of Snipe's tribe, while the rest were dropping through an opening into the garage. All had gained cover when The Shadow reached Burbank's window.

The garage route offered a good exit. The Shadow took it, accompanied by Burbank. Cars roared away into the night, before The Shadow could overtake them. Snipe's mob was off to join the others, as Shiwan Khan had ordered. The beaten crooks had managed to get clear before the law closed in.

Moe's cab had come warily into the neighborhood. With Shiwan Khan's followers vanished, mystics as well as thugs, The Shadow decided that it would be safe to use the cab without danger of leaving a trail. He and Burbank entered it.

AS the cab rolled away, a strange thing happened. A long, limber creature twisted from a doorway and broke into a trot. In his stride, the elongated runner seemed to bounce like a rubber ball. His lopes were amazingly long, and so swift that his feet touched the ground in fleeting fashion.

The man was a lung-gom-pa runner, a mystic of the strange type that Bryson had mentioned during his ambulance ride. Eyes fixed dead ahead, the lung-gom-pa kept them on The Shadow's cab, and held to the course through the darkened, narrow streets that Moe preferred.

There were moments when the runner loped into the light, revealing himself as a brown-faced man, clad in a short, ragged tunic. Under his arm the lung-gom-pa clutched a phurba, and his long fingers were the sort that could loose the enchanted dagger with all its reputed accuracy.

Never did the runner remain long in the light. His swift pace always carried him into darkness before eyes could notice him.

To the lung-gom-pa, the side streets of Manhattan were a better racetrack than the grassy plains of Tibet. When the cab went beneath an elevated structure, the runner followed, keeping away from the traffic lane except when he swerved to pass the steel elevated pillars.

He was on the trail of The Shadow, whose keen eyes did not spy the lung-gom-pa during occasional glances back from the cab. Victor over massed men of crime, The Shadow had postponed his search for Shiwan Khan only to be trailed in turn!

### CHAPTER XII. MIND VERSUS MIND

THE gaunt features of Kent Allard showed their usual worry, but this time there was a cause for their expression. Not that The Shadow was actually worried; he had long ago forgotten how that emotion felt. But he had, at least, lost some of his usual confidence.

Two nights ago, he had fought a terrific battle and had won it, saving the lives of others through tactics that had outmastered the strategy of Shiwan Khan. The Shadow had expected further results from that victory, but they had not come.

Crooks who had been easy to trace were gone entirely from the scene. Shiwan Khan had spirited them away, as effectively as if they had been creatures of a dream. Neither The Shadow nor the police had obtained a clue to the whereabouts of the missing big-shots.

Certainly, Shiwan Khan had not disposed of them. Even their failure to eliminate The Shadow could not have enraged the emotionless Golden Master, particularly when the blame rested upon only one man: Dobie Grefl.

They had been real enough, those fighters, as The Shadow could testify. They had not been yidams, or other phantom creatures, that Shiwan Khan claimed he could produce by mental means. They had left too many of their number on the field.

Nor could Shiwan Khan have transported them into a bardo, or land beyond. Such a world was imaginary in itself. If Shiwan Khan wanted a bardo, he had to fake one. It followed, therefore, that the missing crooks were still somewhere in Manhattan; but that did not prove that they could be found.

One public enemy, Prex Norgan, had been in town almost a year without being discovered.

There was something else that impressed The Shadow, none too favorably. Despite his precautions to protect his identity of Allard, he could sense that he was being watched. Such a sensation was a tricky thing to analyze, but The Shadow had been able to check its actuality.

The Xınca servants were his index. Those stolid servitors were restless. Their tribal instincts, that made them keep together when jungle beasts approached, were at work here in New York. Perhaps the Xincas did not realize that their watchfulness had increased, but The Shadow could observe it.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

This night was drizzly. Darkness was very thick outside the window. Extinguishing the light, The Shadow dropped his limping pose; he raised the sash and swung across the sill. Clinging to the ledge, he stretched out and peered toward the corner wall. He saw a scrawny form sidle from sight like a spider seeking a crack.

Dropping back into the room, The Shadow closed the window. He turned on a lamp as he passed it, and approached the door, leaning on his cane.

The Xincas were slow, reluctant, as they brought him his black garments. Speaking reassuring words in their native tongue, The Shadow garbed himself in cloak and hat, dropped the cane and made a quick wheel out into the hall.

He had a gun in readiness, but it was not needed. No living creature was in sight.

Descending by the fire tower, The Shadow adopted a most unusual policy, which he continued after he reached the street. At intervals, he openly showed himself, only to fade from sight with quick, evasive twists. If naljorpas were in the offing, the only course was to draw them out and meet them in combat before they could return to Shiwan Khan.

Ending a long whirl in a doorway, The Shadow gave a quick look along the street. His eye detected motion near an opposite doorstep. Following its direction, The Shadow's keen eyes spotted a loping figure that appeared fleetingly, some yards away. The thing was gone by the time he realized what it was.

A lung-gom-pa!

FIXING his eyes on the corner, The Shadow saw the runner turn. Taking a route through an alley, The Shadow reached the next street and stepped into a cab. He passed the driver a ten-dollar bill; his hat removed, The Shadow let the driver glimpse the face of Allard.

"Go exactly where I tell you," said The Shadow in a crisp tone. "I'm looking for something; when I see it, I'll let you know."

What Allard was looking for, the cabby never guessed. He was too busy following the orders that his eccentric passenger gave him. At times Allard called for speed, then sudden halts. He pointed to corners, then changed his mind about turning them.

He seemed to prefer the worst streets, and the darkest ones, and his whole course was a zigzag. The meter had ticked off two of the ten dollars when they reached an area filled with old-fashioned houses. There Allard kept the driver going around the block, until they had made three circuits.

The tour satisfied him. He dismissed the cab, without asking for any change. As he stepped to the curb he became The Shadow. Sidling from one basement entry to another, he reached an old house that looked no different from any others in the block.

But The Shadow was positive that he had seen the lung-gom-pa take a final lope up the brownstone steps of that particular residence. In his turn, The Shadow chose the basement door; he picked its lock, and entered with drawn gun.

The whole basement was dark. Using the tiny spot of his little flashlight, The Shadow found a stairway and went up to the first door. There was a dim light in the hallway; avoiding it, The Shadow looked for the lung-gom-pa, but saw no sign of the missing runner.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Moving up to the second floor, The Shadow noted dust streaks on the banister. The whole house seemed empty and deserted, but the light in the lower hall meant that there must be occupants. A few moments later, The Shadow had actual proof.

The second floor was dimly lighted. Crouching on the stairs, The Shadow saw two figures approaching with slow, deliberate stride. The stairway ended at the center of the hall; the patrollers were coming from the ends.

They were brownish men, with fixed looks on their thin faces. They wore baggy trousers, drab robes that came to knee-length, and their heads had short-clipped hair. Though they resembled Shiwan Khan's naljorpas, The Shadow identified them as a different breed.

These men were dubchens, skilled wizards, of a higher class than the naljorpas. They carried daggers of the phurba type, but seldom used the weapons. Where a mere naljorpa fought at close range by temporarily paralyzing an unwary opponent, a dubchen had the reputed power to strike at a distance.

Hailstorms, floods, even avalanches, were believed to be the product of dubchens, when they chose to stir up such elements. Such was the belief in Tibet. While such exaggerations could scarcely be credited, it was a certainty that any dubchen was stronger than a naljorpa in all forms of combat.

As they met, the dubchens stared mutually for several seconds; then, as if in response to a mental signal, they turned away from the stairs and faced a door directly opposite. They bowed solemnly, then paced away, each in an opposite direction.

Both sentinels had turned their backs, but they seemed quite unconcerned. Silent in their tread, their thoughts focused on their duty, they had an air of confidence, as though able to detect anything that happened behind them.

Whatever their ability, it did not apply in The Shadow's case. His glide was silent as he crossed the hall. He had time to test the door before the dubchens swung about. The test was all he needed. The door gave when The Shadow turned the knob.

Inside were curtains at the end of a little entry. Silently, The Shadow closed the door. Drawing an automatic, he stepped to the curtains, whisked them boldly aside and swept into the room beyond.

In the dim glow, he saw a stooped form seated on a low throne across a small room. With a challenging laugh, The Shadow aimed his .45 straight for the enthroned figure.

Surprise tactics were the only way to deal with Shiwan Khan. For once, The Shadow was tempted to be over-quick with his trigger, but he managed to restrain his finger until the enthroned man lifted his head.

As the face came up, the room lights rose. The Shadow's hand relaxed, his gun sank toward his cloak.

THE man on the throne was not Shiwan Khan, nor was he attired in a golden robe. Instead of the satanic features of the Golden Master, The Shadow saw a benign countenance that might have been a hundred years ears old, judging from the parchment texture of its flesh. Steel-gray eyes gazed toward The Shadow; their flash seemed to carry welcome.

Thin, dry lips wrinkled in a smile. As they did, they spoke in a tone that was truly musical:

"I am Marpa Tulku. You are welcome here, Ying Ko. I was confident that you would follow my messenger."

## MASTERS OF DEATH

The name of Marpa Tulku was sufficient. The term tulku signified a living deity, and this man, Marpa, was regarded as such in Tibet. His robe, striped with deep–shaded colors, was one token of his rank. More important was his odd–shaped hat, which bore a huge, glittering diamond in its center.

The hat itself was yellow, which meant that Marpa Tulku was a Gelugpa, or member of the Yellow Hats, the predominant group among Tibetan mystics. Never before had a true tulku been known to travel far from the Land of Snows. That fact told The Shadow why Marpa Tulku was in America.

Though not a word had left The Shadow's lips, Marpa Tulku smiled again. Once again, he addressed his visitor as Ying Ko, the Chinese name for The Shadow.

"You are correct, Ying Ko," declared the tulku. "I have made this journey because of Shiwan Khan. His schemes of conquest do not concern me, because it is a worldly affair. But there is another matter that demands a settlement.

"Shiwan Khan has made false claims." Smiling lips had straightened, their tone had lost its music. "He has proclaimed himself a tulku, like myself. He has lured treacherous naljorpas into his service. He has even induced a gomchen to aid him in schemes of evil.

"These things are wrong" – the tone was slower, solemn – "and I have come to rectify them! I have learned, Ying Ko, that your cause is the same as mine: to destroy the power of Shiwan Khan. Let us, therefore, seek the way together."

Descending from his throne, Marpa Tulku drew a handful of roundish pebbles from the folds of his robe. Solemnly, he laid them in a circle. The Shadow knew his purpose. Marpa Tulku was forming a kyilkhor, or magic diagram. He intended to perform a dubthab ritual.

The proceeding was not claptrap. It was Marpa's way of reaching a state of intense concentration, that would enable him to exercise clairvoyant powers. Ability to see distant scenes was so common in Tibet that it was accepted as an ordinary phenomenon, not as some supernatural accomplishment.

But there were few who could exercise that faculty to its full degree. Of those few, Marpa Tulku was one.

SEATED in the center of the kyilkhor, Marpa Tulku drew his body erect. His eyes closed; color welled into his ancient face. He pressed his long hands tightly against his chest. His breath fully drawn, Marpa Tulku held it for minutes.

As he exhaled, he spoke. His words seemed far away.

"I see Shiwan Khan." He paused, drew in a spasm of breath. "It's Shiwan Khan in his robe of gold... I see the glitter of his eyes... They are watching –"

A convulsion shook the tulku. His breath left him with a sigh. He drew another long supply of air, then continued:

"He is watching men... They are men that you have met, Ying Ko... They are in a room, a low room... It is somewhere underground. I can hear their words –"

With a violent gesture, Marpa Tulku threw his hands in front of his closed eyes. The color left his face as he recoiled. His dropping hand brushed aside the stones from the surrounding diagram. Roused from his trance, the tulku faced The Shadow with a solemn gaze. Marpa Tulku recognized what had happened.

"As I listened," he said, "my thoughts became identical with those of Shiwan Khan. He has telepathic powers. Not only can he send messages on the wind, he can receive them. He sensed the interference and injected disturbing thoughts.

"Further effort would be useless at this time. Later, I shall perform another dubthab, perhaps with results. What I have told you so far, Ying Ko, is accurate. I am sure, moreover, that Shiwan Khan is planning another crime, like the one that you defeated."

Rising, Marpa Tulku stepped through the curtains. Opening the door, he signaled the patrolling dubchens. They halted while their master again addressed The Shadow.

"My cause is yours, Ying Ko," repeated Marpa Tulku. "You may call upon me for any aid that you require. My servants are yours, whenever needed."

Returning the bow, The Shadow stepped from the room. A dubchen followed him down the stairs and ushered him out into the night. It was not until he had merged with distant darkness, that the black-cloaked venturer delivered a whispered laugh.

The Shadow had solved the riddle of the spies who had kept so close to him. They belonged to Marpa Tulku, not to Shiwan Khan. The Shadow's true identity, that of Kent Allard, was safe with Marpa Tulku. But that was not the reason for The Shadow's mirth.

He was thinking of his interview with Marpa Tulku. He had come to a complete understanding with the Tibetan master; they had formed a lasting alliance toward the destruction of Shiwan Khan.

Yet, in that entire interview, The Shadow had not spoken a single word!

### **CHAPTER XIII. THE CORPSE THAT LIVED**

THEY were in their low-built room, the lieutenants of Shiwan Khan, exactly as Marpa Tulku had described them to The Shadow. The place was lavishly furnished; thick rugs strewed the floor. But the walls were of roughly finished stone; his impression of that surface had given the tulku the fact that the place was underground.

Prex Norgan sat at the head of the conference table, acting as spokesman for Shiwan Khan. Neither he nor any of his companions knew that Shiwan Khan was watching them through a curtained doorway at the end of the room, behind Prex.

The distant vision of Marpa Tulku had disclosed a fact that had escaped observers close at hand!

Prex Norgan was flanked by Mike Borlo and Snipe Shailey. Farther down the table were Silk Laddiman and Shag Flink; they were keeping silence, glad that they rated among the big-shots. But Blitz Gandy, at the far end of the table, was having plenty to say.

Blitz regarded his end as the head, and with good reason. He had pulled the real job, two nights ago. He had gotten away with the gravy, while others were bungling things. Blitz didn't hold that against them; he simply felt that it went to his credit. In the midst of a loud statement, Blitz was interrupted by Prex's cold tone:

"You talk too much, Blitz."

"Dough talks, don't it," countered Blitz. "Who got the dough from the Battery Trust – you or me?"

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"You did," conceded Prex. "But a lot of good it was. It's all listed currency. That makes it hot."

"Shiwan Khan wanted it," argued Blitz, "so I got it. That puts it up to him to freeze it."

"He'll handle that all right. He handles everything."

As Blitz began an objection, Prex came to his feet. Despite his months of mystic training, Prex was losing his temper.

"Lay off the big talk, Blitz!" he stormed. "Shiwan Khan figured out the job. He fixed up this slick hideaway for us. We're all set here, with our mobs. We're ready for another job, and nobody can stop us, not even The Shadow!"

"Yeah?" Blitz growled. "He did some stopping the other night. What about those guys that fried? He wiped out Dobie's mob, The Shadow did. What's more" – Blitz glanced from Mike to Snipe – "some of the rest of us lost good trigger-men."

"We've got more than we need," retorted Prex. "They come a dime a dozen."

"You mean guys like Dobie?"

There were murmurs, ugly ones from the group. Blitz's argument carried weight. Dobie Grelf had died in transit from the bank to this hideaway. His death was something that the others did not like; not just on Dobie's account.

They had been told that in the service of Shiwan Khan, they would be immune from personal danger. Such immunity had been specifically implied in case of battle with The Shadow. Mike and the other listeners agreed with Prex that mobbies and gorillas did not count. But they sided with Blitz, in the matter of Dobie Grelf.

Before Prex Norgan could think of anything to say, the curtains parted behind him. Mutiny smoldered, though it still existed, when the lieutenants saw Shiwan Khan step into the room. Imperiously, the Golden Master approached the table. At his gesture, Prex yielded the seat at the head.

Greenish eyes studied the group. The others let their own heads turn, even Blitz. They didn't like to meet those eyes, at all. No one guessed that mere words from Shiwan Khan would have forced them to face his gaze. The Golden Master could have turned them into mere machines, had he so chosen.

Had Shiwan Khan wanted automatons, he could have created them from ordinary mobbies. He valued his present lieutenants because they had individual abilities. He preferred to hold them without recourse to dominating powers of a hypnotic sort.

But Shiwan Khan was quite willing to provide a phenomenal demonstration that would convince them that he was more than human. With such a scheme in mind, he spoke mildly; his tone even had an abject touch.

"These men are right," Shiwan Khan told Prex, who was standing close by. "I promised them life. Dobie Grelf received that promise. Of course, in a sense, Dobie was merely wounded –"

"He was as good as croaked!" interjected Blitz, angrily. "Ask Mike. He's the guy that lugged Dobie out of the bank."

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"He was still alive," put in Mike, who felt uneasy sitting so close to Shiwan Khan. "If we'd had a medico on the job, right then, why maybe –"

"Maybe nothing!" stormed Blitz. "Dobie was through, and you know it! Anyway, we didn't have a saw–bones with us. So what?"

Shiwan Khan raised a gold–sleeved arm. His tone carried a melodious tinkle. Only Prex caught the ugliness behind that tone. It occurred to him that he might soon be Shiwan Khan's only lieutenant.

But Prex was wrong.

"I have only one course," announced Shiwan Khan. "I must keep my promise. Let me assure you, however, that it is exactly what I intended. It is the reason why I came here."

Lifting his hand, he clapped them three times, very slowly. In from another room came two Mongols, so gigantic that they had to double their bodies to get through the low door. Blitz did not like the size of those Ordos tribesmen. He shifted uneasily, was reaching for his gun, when he saw the burden that the Mongols carried.

It was a stretcher, bearing the body of Dobie Grelf. Rising, Shiwan Khan approached the stiffened corpse.

FROM that moment onward, the Golden Master was watched by riveted eyes. If ever a man was really dead, Dobie Grelf could be so classed. But Shiwan Khan, master of the incredible, was ready to challenge any physical fact.

Clawlike hands stretched above the dead man's sightless eyes, Shiwan Khan distorted his own features until they were hideous and livid. From deep in his throat came the high–pitched utterance: "Haik!"

The odd shriek rang through the low room. Shiwan Khan repeated it, then gave other syllabic utterances. He was bounding like a dervish; all the while, his greenish gaze was fixed on the dead man's glassy eyes.

Suddenly, Shiwan Khan flung himself beside the corpse, gripped its hands with his and stretched them wide. His livid lips were breathing upon those of Dobie, as if to stir their bloated death–grin.

At times, Shiwan Khan wrenched the body upward; at first, Dobie's neck went back, as if hinged. But on the final attempt, Shiwan Khan's jerk of the extended arms affected the head as well.

It stayed upright; so did the half–lifted body, as Shiwan Khan relaxed his grip. Then, tightening his hold upon the hands, the Golden Master pulled the dead form to its feet.

Other lieutenants shrank away as Shiwan Khan swung the corpse in their direction. Then, to their utter amazement, the figure of Dobie Grelf began a slow pace forward, under the guidance of the Golden Master. Glazed eyes still bulged, but they looked alive. The bloated lips were moving, almost uttering words!

Taking Dobie's shoulders, Shiwan Khan started him toward the curtained door. Pointing with one hand, he pressed the walking corpse forward with the other. Then, releasing Dobie entirely, Shiwan Khan stepped aside and lifted the curtain so that the slow–pacing figure could go through!

Gradually, the Golden Master let the curtain drop. He gestured to the Mongols; they took away the stretcher. Through the curtain, Shiwan Khan spoke words; after tilting his head to catch a reply, he nodded and spoke again. Turning about, he resumed his seat at the head of the conference table.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"I promised life," announced Shiwan Khan, "and I have given it! Of course, we must expect a slow recovery. It will be weeks, perhaps longer, before we can depend upon Dobie for further duty."

The lieutenants were shrunk in their chairs, mopping at their foreheads. They were used to seeing living men turned into dead ones; in fact, they all had dabbled in such business. But to see a dead man brought back to life rather horrified the group of murderers.

They were wondering how they would stand, if certain dead persons came back among the living and told all they knew. They were thinking in terms of the electric chair, when it struck them, one by one, that they could even beat as tough a rap as that, if they remained loyal to Shiwan Khan.

What he had done for Dobie, he could do for them! From his place at the head of the table, Shiwan Khan watched the looks of gleeful confidence that swept the faces of his lieutenants.

Turning to Prex Norgan, Shiwan Khan suggested:

"Proceed with your unfinished business."

"Our next job is Traymer's jewelry store," Prex told the lieutenants. "We can go over the lay tomorrow. The main point is this: we're giving the job to Silk Laddiman –"

"Why to Silk?" interjected Blitz with a growl. "He handles warehouses. A jewelry store comes in the bank class."

Blitz's argument didn't make a hit with the others, particularly Silk Laddiman. Their faces tightened, as Blitz began again to brag about how he had handled matters at the Battery Trust. All eyes turned toward Shiwan Khan.

"The point has merit," declared the Golden Master, calmly. "We shall let Blitz repeat his competent work."

Grumbles ended. No one cared to dispute a decision made by Shiwan Khan. But Blitz was chuckling triumphantly, bragging more than ever, as he and others went from the room to their quarters in the huge underground hideaway.

Only Prex remained. Shiwan Khan had gestured for him to stay. The Golden Master conducted Prex through the curtained doorway. On the floor, just beyond, lay the crumpled form of Dobie.

"A rolang," confided Shiwan Khan – "a corpse that dances. It was better to keep the performance impressive."

"I know," nodded Prex, "Pashod told me about them. It takes more than shugs, though, doesn't it?"

"The warmth of tumo is necessary," declared Shiwan Khan. "It requires long practice, to transfer vital energy from a living body into a dead one. Ordinarily, the demonstration is useless" – Shiwan Khan seemed weary, as he spoke – "for it can be no more than temporary."

"But on this occasion, it proved its worth. I can depend upon my chosen lieutenants. They will no longer fear death. Later, when I have shown them the short path to understanding, they will know that death is a mere illusion."

Prex agreed. He had completed the "short path," under the tutelage of Pashod, and believed in the things that he had learned. But Prex was still interested in worldly matters.

"About Blitz," he began. "Giving him the jewelry job will make the others pretty sore."

"They will be recompensed," stated Shiwan Khan, with an off-key chuckle. "They will relish whatever may happen to Blitz Gandy. No one will insist that I again demonstrate my ability to bring the dead to life."

"You're getting rid of Blitz?"

"He is useless alive. In death, he may serve us. Where he goes, The Shadow will follow, believing that the way is safe. Death to Blitz can mean –"

Shiwan Khan had stepped to the curtained doorway. He paused, as he lifted the drape; he completed his statement as the curtain fell. His words, though the finish of a sentence, were a harsh-chimed promise in themselves:

"Death to The Shadow!"

## CHAPTER XIV. CROOKS LEAD THE WAY

AT noon the next day, Prex Norgan called the lieutenants together and showed the plans for the next job. Again, they were intrigued by the way in which Shiwan Khan had prepared for everything. Their only objection was that the job looked too easy.

Blitz Gandy took the statement as an insult. He argued that every job was tough for the guy that did the real work. Warming up to an angry heat, Blitz put himself in perfect fettle for the next step ordered by Shiwan Khan.

As soon as he was alone with Blitz, Prex used some subtlety that the Golden Master had suggested earlier in the day. He began by agreeing that the job was tough.

"How about getting some new gorillas?" queried Prex. "If you've got a bigger mob, the thing will be lot easier."

"I like things tough," returned Blitz. "Besides, why should I borrow any monkeys from lugs like Mike or Snipe?"

"Who said to borrow any?"

You mean you want me to sign up some new gorillas, on my own?"

"That's the idea, Blitz. A big guy needs a big mob."

Prex put the final comment suavely. It flattered Blitz. He was a big guy, right enough, and he could picture himself becoming bigger than any of the other lieutenants. Bigger, even, than Prex Norgan, who at present enjoyed Shiwan Khan's chief favor. But Blitz, despite his love for brag, was shrewd enough to keep the final sentiment to himself.

As for suitable mobbies, Blitz could name a half a dozen to amplify his fair-sized band. The question was how to contact them without leaving this hideaway where Shiwan Khan was keeping his lieutenants and their

## MASTERS OF DEATH

followers thoroughly secluded. In fact, Blitz didn't know the location of the underground stronghold; he had come here in a covered truck.

Of all the lieutenants, the only one in the full know was Prex Norgan.

"Don't bring the new gorillas here to begin with," declared Prex. "There's a phone at the base where you're going to start from. Call them up when you get there; not all six of them, but just one or two. Have those guys get hold of the rest."

The suggestion suited Blitz. It naturally meant that he and his mob would have to start early. Prex advised him not to tell the new recruits where to come, until they had all assembled at some suitable place, where they could stand by for another call.

Later that afternoon, Blitz and his original crew left the sizable hideaway by a passage that had once been a water main. It brought them to a small garage, managed by a couple of Prex's men.

Blitz and the thugs entered a furniture van. Driven by a muffled Mongol, the vehicle set out; tightly sealed in the interior, Blitz and his bunch began a pinochle game by the glow of an electric lantern.

They didn't care where they had started from. Their destination was more important. They reached it in about half an hour. Backed into a blind alley, the van unloaded its thuggish freight; under its shelter, the crooks slid down through an opened cellar grating to reach their new base.

Blitz used the telephone soon afterward; calling two recruits, he told them to contact the others. They were to hear from Blitz again, by nightfall.

They were to hear from The Shadow, too, though Blitz did not know it. Such was the design of Shiwan Khan.

The Golden Master knew that his cloaked foe would still be keeping tabs on the underworld, seeking any clue that would lead him to vanished big-shots like Blitz Gandy. Any gathering of new candidates for Blitz's mob would prove conspicuous in the badlands, so far as The Shadow's surveillance was concerned.

For at present, The Shadow's only method was to keep close check on scattered small-fry, who were hoping that former acquaintance with the missing biggies would make them eligible for future service in crime's greatest, and most mysterious push.

AT dusk, six boastful thugs were gathered in the rear room of an underworld dive. Blitz Gandy was consistent; he preferred other braggarts as members of his mob. These thugs had covered their tracks in clumsy, elephantine style.

When Blitz's call came through, they moved out from the meeting place, exchanging comments as they went. Two of them actually named their destination, while they were crowding into a sedan that was parked in the rear street.

Even before the sedan had started, a black-cloaked figure was sliding off through darkness. A block away, The Shadow blinked a green signal that brought Moe Shrevnitz's cab. In a few minutes, the swift driver was taking The Shadow straight to his goal, which he could easily reach ahead of the recruits, who were at least smart enough to take a roundabout route.

As the cab rolled into a side street that led toward Times Square, The Shadow noted three buildings.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

The first was a corner jewelry store, the large house of J. C. Traymer Co. It bore no signs; everyone was supposed to know where Traymer's was; people who didn't, could not be regarded as proper customers for so select a concern.

There was a main entrance on the avenue, a small one on the side street. Past Traymer's was a narrow parking place, paved with cement. The next building was an old theater, which had lately been remodeled.

The theater was named the Pandora, and it was open for business, presenting Shakespearean drama. Already, patrons were arriving for the evening performance, which was to be "The Merchant of Venice."

Beyond the theater was a squatty building, one of the Nineteenth Century type. It was closed; a big sign on the front stated that a certain wrecking company would soon demolish the old structure. The Shadow studied the squatty building quite carefully, as he passed it in the cab. It was to be his first stopping place.

The cab swung corners and reached the next street, in back of the condemned building. Dropping off in darkness, The Shadow let Moe continue through. On foot, the cloaked investigator approached a blind alley, stopping in a doorway short of it.

Queer-shaped roofs dominated both sides of the street; good lurking places for naljorpas. The Shadow could almost sense the electric presence of the murderous mystics who served Shiwan Khan. The scene was quite as he expected it. Mobsters would be passed through, but the naljorpas were on close lookout for any intruders.

One invader could pass that cordon: The Shadow. He had worked through such meshes before. But even he found it necessary to pick a favorable opportunity. One knife, skimmed from darkness before The Shadow could spot it's launcher, would be enough to end the cloaked fighter's career.

Calmly, The Shadow awaited his opportunity. It came, in the form of Blitz's new recruits. Alighting from their sedan, they began a cumbersome sneak into the alley, moving in by pairs. No lurking naljorpas could have failed to identify them, for each pair had a flashlight.

When the final brace of crooks entered the alley, The Shadow followed. One thug had a gun; he was gesturing it about, while the other sprayed a flashlight along the cobbles, from one side of the alley to the other.

But the shape that trailed them closely was never in the glow. As darkness kept closing behind the shoulders of the advancing pair, The Shadow's solid form came with it, part of the very gloom.

Reaching the opening in the base of the building wall, the crooks slid through. Being the last of the scheduled arrivals, they clanked the grating tight in place above them. Hardly had their flashlight moved off through the cellar, before gloved hands were at work.

Defly, silently, The Shadow raised the hinged grating and squeezed through the narrowest of places. It was swift, that entry, and The Shadow let the grating settle down in place almost in the same move. Watching naljorpas could not possibly have seen the blackish motion, nor heard the slightest of sounds.

ONCE inside the building, The Shadow's only problem was the matter of Blitz's mob. Once he had handled that crew, he could choose any exit, even the alley. Getting in had been the difficulty. In getting out, The Shadow could use the shelter of the cellar window, while baiting naljorpas with his laugh and battering them with his bullets.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

But it would take more than pitched battle to settle Blitz's oversized mob. The Shadow's only course was to let the crooks move along their road to crime; to thin their ranks by nibbling tactics, then find an advantageous spot from which to ambush them.

Such was The Shadow's way of nullifying heavy odds. Certain master minds were familiar with The Shadow's strategy. Among such masters was a great brain named Shiwan Khan.

Elsewhere, Shiwan Khan was putting plans of his own into action. One of his locations was the Pandora Theater, that lay midway between the old office building and the jewelry store. A limousine had pulled into the parking space that flanked the theater. The big car had blackened windows; its chauffeur was a Mongol.

Prex Norgan stepped from the car as soon as its rear door opened. He was followed by two other big-shots, Mike Borlo and Snipe Shailey. Three more men joined them, smooth-looking trigger experts. One belonged to Prex; another to Mike; the third to Snipe.

Instead of going around by the box office, Prex rapped at a side exit of the theater. An usher opened the door. Prex showed him six tickets. A five-dollar bill greased the usher's objections to the irregular procedure. Taking the tickets he conducted the six patrons to a curtained theater box near the exit.

In the gloom of the box, the big-shots and their right-hand men were indistinguishable only by the starched fronts of their Tuxedo shirts. They could easily be taken for a respectable theater party.

The curtain was rising as the six took their chairs. The crooks heard the opening line, from the lips of Antonio:

"In soothe, I know not why I am so sad –"

"Hear that," undertoned Prex, with a chuckle. "There's a guy that's sad right at the start of the show. But I know a bozo that will be a whole lot sadder before it's over."

Though Prex Norgan did not specify the person, he meant The Shadow. The one lieutenant in Shiwan Khan's full confidence, Prex knew all the details of the Golden Master's latest scheme to rid crime's pathway of the black-cloaked fighter who alone had managed to dispute the rule of the mighty Shiwan Khan!

## CHAPTER XV. THE TRAIL BELOW

PACKED in a room that was cramped with cigarette smoke, Blitz Gandy and his thugs were ready for their coming venture. They had guns and flashlights drawn; they were merely awaiting a buzz from the telephone to signal the moment for advance.

Blitz still hadn't mastered the ability to catch mental messages from Shiwan Khan. Perhaps that was another reason why the Golden Master had decided to discard the argumentative lieutenant.

At the door, Blitz had posted two lookouts. It would have been suicidal for The Shadow to attack the massed mob while watchers were alert. In a darkened passage outside, The Shadow was continuing his waiting policy.

There was a buzz from the muffled telephone bell. Blitz answered; he leered his recognition of the crystalline voice that spoke across the wire. Shiwan Khan had given the word. Dropping the telephone, Blitz turned to a corner of the cellar room.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

There, he bashed the cement with gun butt. Astonished mobbies saw the stone fall apart. It wasn't cement, but merely a layer of plaster over a strip of wall board. Having gashed a jagged hole in the wall, he stepped through and ordered the others to follow.

The mobbies filed after Blitz, leaving only the two lookouts. One of those thugs turned to admire the trick opening in the opposite wall. While he was studying the gap, he heard a thud behind him; something like an echo of Blitz's gun strokes.

It wasn't an echo, though. The thump had been delivered by another gun butt, straight to the skull of the watcher at the door. The turning lookout saw his companion crumple; then, across the sagging figure, came a shape cloaked in black.

The Shadow reached the second crook before the fellow could fire. Again, a long hand, shoving forward, planted a hard stroke with a reversed automatic. The heavy handle of the .45 carried the effect of a sledge hammer. The second thug collapsed.

Picking up the telephone, The Shadow made a call to Burbank, told the contact man to phone police headquarters and give Inspector Cardona an accurate tip-off, by way of variety. Then, after swiftly binding and gagging the unconscious lookouts, The Shadow took up the trail below.

Soon clear of the office building, he entered the cellar of the theater. Across a wide room stacked with scenery and props, The Shadow came to a short passage that led to another section of the theater cellar.

The passage ended with a steel door, its lower half solid, the upper half criss-crossed bars. The door served as a barrier to a sub-cellar, which contained most of the theater's machinery. The door was unlocked, for Blitz considered the place safe from invasion.

Descending half a dozen stone steps, The Shadow reached the sub-cellar. It was lighted; the glow showed dynamos and other machinery, a long row of fire extinguishers along one wall.

On the far side of the sub-cellar was a metal partition; from it The Shadow heard a muffled thrumming sound. It was the fan room, important to the theaters air-conditioning system.

In a corner to the right of the partition, The Shadow saw a black, irregular gap in the wall. Blitz had hacked through another well faked section of stone. Through an underground passage beyond it, the big-shot and his crew were taking a direct route to the jewelry store!

REACHING the gap, The Shadow listened. He heard muffled scrapings ahead; peering through the break, he saw flashlights pointing upward. The crooks were evidently working their way up into the store, this time prying solid stone from their path.

Sappers had probably dug the entire tunnel while the theater had been under repair; but they had necessarily stopped short before it was completed. Blitz was superintending the remaining task – that of actually puncturing a path into Traymer's.

Again, The Shadow waited. He wanted to give the police time to arrive and throw a cordon around the entire block. He calculated that Cardona had heard from Burbank by this time. Earlier, The Shadow had made sure that Joe was in his headquarters office.

Could The Shadow have viewed the interior of the jewelry store and watched events there, he would not have been so certain of the future.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

The store had a watchman, who was patrolling the main floor, along broad aisles that ran among cloth-draped counters. Hearing taps from somewhere on the floor, the watchman stopped to listen. The wide gleam of his flashlight included a stairway that came down from a balcony, but the watchman did not see what happened there.

The light gave off a dazzling reflection, as a golden shape weaved close to it. A robed figure grew from the steps; green eyes, monstrous in their gaze, studied the watchman. Like a jungle creature on the prowl, Shiwan Khan had found his prey.

He spoke; his tone was metallic. The startled watchman sprang about, saw clawish hands advance beneath the green eyes. Those flowing orbs petrified him; so did the clang of the repeated voice. Approaching hands stopped short of the watchman's throat. Choking methods were unnecessary. Shiwan Khan's work was done.

Numbed by some shocking force that seemed to spark from the claw-tipped fingers, the watchman swayed. His body stiffening, he fell prone upon the floor, shattering the flashlight as he flattened.

Shiwan Khan turned, ascended the stairs to the balcony. Stepping into a little office where he had remained, unnoticed, since the store's closing hour, he picked up the telephone. His ways, unfathomable as ever, Shiwan Khan made a call direct to police headquarters!

He heard an angry voice over the wire: Cardona's. For a half hour, the inspector had been trying to check upon a long-distance call that had come to the office. The operator claimed it was from Washington; Joe supposed it must be from the F.B.I., never guessing that the whole thing was a fake.

Shiwan Khan had seen to it that Cardona's phone was constantly busy, in order to prevent the inspector from receiving any word from The Shadow.

Cardona's anger turned to astonishment, when he heard the voice of Shiwan Khan. Tonight, there was no fakery in the tone. Shiwan Khan was speaking as himself!

His words were brittle. They left a ringing tone, like the stroke of a table knife against a half-filled goblet. Shiwan Khan offered no apologies for his past misdeeds; nevertheless, he had an explanation for them.

"My purpose is to control crime," he told Cardona, icily. "Such can only be accomplished when all criminals avow a master whose power they fear. I am to be that be master!"

Cardona was interested. He grunted: "Go on."

"Those who do not obey my mandate," continued Shiwan Khan, "must take the consequences. Tonight, such men are engaged in a most daring robbery. They have entered Traymer's jewelry store through the side door, and are at present rifling the premises.

"They are gluttons, those criminals. Eager for spoils, confident that they are undetected, they will remain long in the place. Long enough, inspector, for you to find them still at work."

ABRUPTLY, Shiwan Khan ended the call. He descended from the balcony; heard louder tapping beneath the main floor. Picking up the paralyzed watchman, he carried him to the side door and propped him just within it. Coolly, the Golden Master unbolted the door and left it ajar.

Returning to the balcony, Shiwan Khan took an observation post behind a table that was topped by a large, well ornamented porcelain vase. The tapping was almost below the spot where he stood. So motionless that

## MASTERS OF DEATH

he seemed a part of the gilt-decorated wall behind him, Shiwan Khan awaited results.

The floor gave with a clatter. Blitz and his clumsy crew bowled up from below like hobos rushing a bread-line. They were greedy – as Shiwan Khan had described them – but not for food. Springing for the draped counters, they ripped away the cloth covers and began to smash glass panels with their gun butts.

Blitz was even greedier than the rest. He did not fear interruption; he had been assured that any watchmen would be handled before he and his mob arrived. But Blitz, fascinated by the glitter of many gems, was anxious to make a complete haul.

He intended to take all the swag to Shiwan Khan. Not that Blitz was honest; he was merely shrewd enough to calculate that the Golden Master might have appraised the stock beforehand. Since he wasn't going to pocket any gems for himself, he was anxious that his mobbies would play fair, too.

Wherever flashlights turned, they produced beckoning sparkles from massed arrays of jewels. Blitz's eyes followed every gleam. He kept ordering his vandals to pile the gems in the cloth coverings that they had taken from the counters.

They obeyed, and aided Blitz by checking on one another. Moving all about the floor, Blitz picked up the separate cloths and brought them to a corner, dumping the contents into one group.

Soon, Blitz had an actual sack load of bracelets, necklaces, pendants, and assorted rings; a great, brilliant pile of staggering weight as well as value. Knotting the corners of the cloth, Blitz formed one bundle, then began another, which grew as rapidly as the first.

He had tied the second sack, when growling gorillas complained that they were running out of good pickings. Blitz looked toward the balcony, saw some showcases near the stairs and sent men up to rifle them. He told the rest to scour around and gather what they had missed. He wasn't going to quit until he had a third bundle the size of the other two.

From the far side of the balcony, Shiwan Khan had ceased to watch the outspread crooks. He was staring straight downward, his glistening gaze fixed on the hole in the floor. He could see the top of a ladder, but the rest was blackness. Motionless black, that showed no trace of an occupant.

Shiwan Khan was looking for The Shadow. As yet, he had no proof that the cloaked fighter was on hand.

Then come sounds that made the Golden Master shift his gaze. He heard footsteps, creeping in from the obscure side door, and knew that the arrivals were Cardona and his squad. Reaching behind him, Shiwan Khan pressed a switch on the wall.

The clamor of a big alarm reverberated throughout the store. Hearing the bell, Blitz Gandy sprang from the big bundles that lay half obscured behind a corner counter.

At Blitz's yell, the thugs leaped to join him near the center of the floor. Ever quick to spot danger, Blitz pointed his gun toward the side doorway, just as Cardona and a headquarters squad surged into sight.

Blitz's followers were as swift as their leader. With all their clumsiness, the mobbies acted like a well-drilled team. Stirred to rapid action, they actually gained the bulge on the police and would have scored first blood, in plenty, except for the sudden intervention that came to the law's aid.

Fierce, challenging in its mockery, a laugh rose through the gloom, riveting the aiming crooks. They knew that taunt, and feared it. It seemed to come from everywhere, uttered by a being who had materialized from empty space.

It was a laugh that carried triumph, even before battle had begun.

The Shadow's!

### CHAPTER XVI. THE FINAL STROKE

BEFORE the chilled crooks could fire, The Shadow was among them. He had come from the gap in the floor, stretching a long, upward leap into a tremendous lunge. Only by striking into the very center of Blitz's congregated crew could he offset the opening advantage that the crooks held.

From the balcony, Shiwan Khan saw that sweep; his green eyes supplied a vicious glare. The Golden Master had relaxed his watch for The Shadow at just the wrong moment. He had expected The Shadow to start shooting from the pit, where he could be easily reached, not by crooks but by Shiwan Khan himself.

Instead, The Shadow had preferred close-range tactics. He was among Blitz's mob before Shiwan Khan could snap a dagger from the sleeve of his golden robe and fling it for the cloaked fighter's back.

The crooks had become a mass of whirling bodies; the core of that spinning medley was a fighter in black. Arms lashing right and left, The Shadow was slugging down the opposition with the big guns that projected from his gloved fists. Some of the mobsters were slashing back at him; others were shooting at the police, but firing wildly.

The Shadow had turned the mob into a pin wheel of spurting guns, that was traveling fast but getting nowhere.

Then Cardona and his squad had reached the melee, holding their own fire because The Shadow was in the mess. The Shadow's slugging tactics ended; his guns began to pump. So did those of the police; like The Shadow, they fired when their muzzles were pressed squarely against human targets.

Smart enough to dive away, Blitz yelled for the rest to do the same. Mobbies heard his shout amid the gun blasts and scattered for the counters. Of their number, nearly half remained upon the floor. The ranks of the police were scarcely crippled. The headquarters men went after the diving crooks.

A long piercing call came from the balcony. The Shadow recognized the cry. He had heard it long ago, when traveling the deserts of Mongolia.

The call told The Shadow that Shiwan Khan was present. Furthermore, it signified that he was summoning a new, and stronger, breed of fighters: his Ordos tribesmen.

They could only be coming from outside. With a wide veer through the darkness, The Shadow reached the side doorway. He met the surge as it arrived; instantly, he was swept backward by a wave of giants. He managed to twist clear, long enough to carry the drive toward a corner. Otherwise, he might have been downed by bullets, instead of the sword-like knives that the Mongols handled.

For Cardona and his men did not see the cloaked figure that the yellowish wave engulfed. They were turning to open fire on the giant tribesmen, when The Shadow changed direction.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Blitz Gandy saw a chance for escape; he did exactly what Shiwan Khan expected. Clearing a counter, Blitz bounded for the hole to the cellar and went down it like a hasty rat. His scattered followers saw him beckon as he dropped; they made for the hole, too – the few who were still able.

Thinking that The Shadow had diverted the Mongol attack, and then eluded it, Cardona shouted for a pursuit of Blitz's mob. Like Blitz, Cardona was acting as Shiwan Khan had planned.

Whatever Cardona started, he liked to finish. Settling the mobbies was his immediate goal. Joe wanted to overtake them before they reached a stronghold; moreover, he foresaw that he and his own men would be better placed, below, if they had to stave off a Mongol attack.

Judging by the smallness of the hole, Cardona doubted that any of the Ordos giants would be able to squeeze through it, which made the route all the better. Besides, Cardona judged that Blitz and his companions had filled their pockets with jewels. Reclaiming the swag was part of Joe's job.

Firing back at the Mongols in haphazard fashion, the whole headquarters squad went through the hole, taking a few slightly wounded members with them. The last man was hardly on the ladder, when counters clattered in the far corner of the store.

The Shadow had twisted from the clutches of the Mongols; but two of the giants were looming over him, as he turned to find some vantage spot.

CONTINUALLY slashing with his guns, The Shadow had done no more than ward off knife thrusts. He had planted a few bullets, but the Mongols had taken them like buckshot. Even a blast from a .45 could not stop one of those fighters, unless it reached the giant's heart.

There was only one refuge for The Shadow: the same hole through which Cardona's squad had followed the remnants of Blitz's mob. The Shadow knew the exact length of the passage to the sub-cellar of the theater. He could hold it, even if the Mongols did manage to squeeze through.

The Shadow's race across the floor was an odd one. He could have outdistanced the Mongols, might even have turned and put in some accurate gun stabs of the sort that he had been unable to give before. But The Shadow needed those Mongols as temporary cover against Shiwan Khan.

One sweeping blade sliced The Shadow's cloak from shoulder to hip. The other cut the brim of his hat, just as he made a quick twist of his head, fortunately in the right direction. Then, almost beneath the balcony, The Shadow put everything into a sprint.

He shot from under cover of the Mongols like a human cannon ball leaving the muzzle of a spring gun. Twisting as he reached the hole, The Shadow grabbed the rungs of the ladder at the moment of his downward plunge.

At that instant, Shiwan Khan gave a short, low-wailed command. The two Mongols stopped in their tracks, then dived away.

Over in the far corner, the remaining giants were halted beside the loaded bundles of jewels, actually wondering where The Shadow had gone. They thought that their two companions had followed the imaginary fugitive, until they heard Shiwan Khan's new call.

Shiwan Khan wanted his huge fighters to accompany him in his own departure, taking the loaded jewels out through the side door, which had become an open pathway. But first, the Golden Master intended to apply a

cure for a certain trouble maker called The Shadow.

So far Shiwan Khan had not managed to deliver a personal stroke against The Shadow. There were moments when he could have flung a knife, but never with certainty. He had given Blitz's crew their opportunity; allowed the Mongols one, as well. Both hordes had failed him; but it did not matter.

The time had come for the final stroke, and Shiwan Khan was pleased, for it was to be his own. Moreover, according to his own estimate, Shiwan Khan never failed.

Though The Shadow had dropped into the pit below and was swallowed in total blackness, he was not beyond the reach of Shiwan Khan. With a mere touch of his fingertips, the Golden Master tilted the big porcelain vase that stood upon the table by the balcony rail.

The vase went over the edge. It was placed exactly above the pit; therefore, it did not stop when it reached the level of the main floor. Instead, it plummeted down into the pitch-black hole, while the halted Mongols listened for its crash.

They did not hear the vase shatter. Instead, a huge blast came from the pit; the force of the explosion made the whole floor shudder. Great chunks of tile heaved upward; broken loose, the smashed slabs roared into the widened pit, to meet the cloud of smoke that was pouring upward.

As the echoes died, a chiming voice spoke from the balcony. The tone was Shiwan Khan's farewell to The Shadow. Whether or not the cloaked fighter had escaped the blast or not, was something quite immaterial to Shiwan Khan.

The explosion had accomplished its purpose. It had closed the only path of retreat. Down below, The Shadow would be unable to return; he would have to go ahead, through the cellar beneath the theater.

Should The Shadow still be able to take that route, it would lead him to certain doom, according to the calculations of Shiwan Khan. The end of The Shadow would be a matter of mere routine.

That was why the Golden Master congratulated himself upon having delivered the final stroke in crime's death struggle with The Shadow!

## **CHAPTER XVII. WHERE GUNS FAILED**

PREX NORGAN and his companions were enjoying the show in the Pandora Theater, but in a manner different from the rest of the Shakespearean audience. While Prex was watching the stage with a dead-pan expression, Mike Borlo and Snipe Shailey were exchanging wisecracks.

"We ought to have Blitz with us," chuckled Mike. "Say – he's so dumb, he'd think this guy Sherlock was a dick."

Prex leaned forward to half the guffaws.

"The name is Shylock," he told Mike, "and that makes your joke a flop. Lay off the ha-ha stuff. I'm listening for something more important –"

The thing that interested Prex was a muffled reverberation that sounded like a distant explosion. Prex knew that it was closer than it sounded. It was the signal that he awaited.

"Sit tight, guys. Have your gats ready."

With that warning, Prex pressed a concealed switch beneath the box rail. Smoothly, noiselessly, the interior of the theater box slid downward. The others staring in surprise, lost sight of their companions as the floor descended into blackness. But Prex was talking, soothingly.

"I told you there'd be another act," he said. "We're the guys that are going to stage it. Get ready, like I said."

By then, the other five realized that the floor of the box was an elevator, and a cleverly contrived one. Not only did the floor go down; a ceiling followed it, from beneath the balcony box above. All sounds and other occurrences below would be cut off from the theater audience.

Dull lights appeared. The crooks saw a crisscrossed grating pass them. Then they were behind a half barrier of solid steel, peering through the grillwork. It was the door to the sub-cellar of the theater. The elevator had filled the passage above the stone steps. A click told that its descent had snapped the lock of the barring door.

Stooping forward from his chair, Prex poked a gun muzzle through the close-knit grating, and told his companions to do the same. As they watched, they saw men sprawl from a jagged hole in a far corner of the sub-cellar. One bulky figure raised itself, crawled forward and rolled face up.

It was Mike who mouthed recognition:

"Say – that's Blitz Gandy!"

"Too bad, isn't it?" spoke Prex, smoothly. "Well, we can ask Shiwan Khan to put some life into him, like he did with Dobie Grelf. How about a vote on it?"

Growls showed that the vote was in the negative. Having turned down the proposition of Blitz's revival, the others began to question Prex further.

"Who nicked Blitz?" queried Snipe. "Got any idea about it, Prex?"

"Keep watching the corner," advised Prex. "You'll see."

Other men came into sight. Despite the dullness of the light, the crooks promptly recognized them as Joe Cardona and a group of headquarters men.

The whole squad looked rather shaky. They had finished Blitz and his fugitive mobbies with bullets, only to find themselves flattened halfway along the passage by an explosion that had occurred in back of them.

"They're groggy," declared Mike. "Let's be nice and rub them out while they won't feel it much."

"Hold it," ordered Prex. "When I give the word, start shooting. But don't hit anybody. Aim for those fire extinguishers over along the side wall."

CARDONA was close to the center of the sub-cellar, his companions right behind him, when Prex gave the word. Six guns tongued from the grilled door. Immediately, Cardona and the detectives began to fling themselves to cover. They found shelter behind dynamos and other machinery.

Human targets had been spared, but the line of fire extinguishers was wrecked. Gas was sizzling from the big containers, through the holes that the crooks had drilled. The stuff was visible; it formed a greenish vapor,

## MASTERS OF DEATH

that crept like a rising fog along the floor below the steps.

Prex was still watching the exit from the passage. He saw a vague stir in the darkness.

"The Shadow," said Prex, coolly. "Get him!"

Those mobbies came nearer to getting The Shadow than any other gunners ever had. Their failure was to be blamed on Prex. He wanted to be the first to fire, that he might take credit for the fatal shot.

But Prex's gun wasn't enough. It needed a barrage to drop the black-cloaked figure that wheeled suddenly from the gaping corner and launched across to closer shelter. Prex fired a trifle wide; by the time that other guns were barking along with his, The Shadow had reached a squatty dynamo and was close behind it.

His laugh was more than a challenge. It was a threat of future retaliation that made the crooks huddle lower. The sinister mockery drowned the hiss of the escaping gas. Quivering echoes were ominous, as they tongued from the stone walls all about. The passage in the far corner seemed to catch the mirth and throat it back.

"Don't let that fool you," argued Prex in an undertone. "The Shadow has handed us that ha-ha twice too often. Give him a little while to dope out what's really up. He won't laugh a lot longer. If he does, it won't mean anything."

Tense seconds went by. The whole scene had the appearance of a stalemate, with the crooks firmly barricaded and The Shadow entrenched along with the police. But the absence of The Shadow's laugh told that he had scented something.

Looking toward the leaking extinguishers, The Shadow saw the escaping gas. He distinguished it not only by its color, but by the odor that he could trace in the air. It was a chlorine gas, non-inflammable and heavier than air.

Its purpose was apparent. The leaks were too many to be stopped. Once it had filled the sub-cellar, the gas would bring death to all the occupants. There was no chance of retreat to the jewelry store; the passage was on the same level as the sub-cellar. The explosion that The Shadow had barely outdistanced, had completely filled the vertical outlet.

While death crept closely about The Shadow and his hapless companions, Prex and the other crooks would be quite safe. The passage to the upper cellar was just high enough to keep them comfortably above the level of the rising gas.

It was a far better trap than the one at the Battery Trust. Here, The Shadow again had helpless men to save; but to accomplish it, he would have to lead an attack upon the grilled door. There was a chance, a very long one, that such thrust could save the others, but only at sure sacrifice of The Shadow's own life.

Only The Shadow had the swiftness and the stamina to keep on driving forward, though riddled by a hail of bullets. Perhaps, by a dying effort, he could thrust his hand through the barred section of the door and get a death grip that would release the catch. That done, the police could push on through to do battle with the crooks.

The chance was so slight that Prex and his trigger specialists were eager to accept it. With The Shadow dead, they were willing to meet Cardona's squad on even terms; but they doubted that they would be forced to such a sequel.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

WARILY, The Shadow tested the steel lattice with shots. The crooks kept below the solid portion of the door. Their guns were poked through openings; they answered with random fire. The Shadow could take chances; not they. When he drove for the steps, any kind of shooting would find him as a target.

Meanwhile, the gas was working for the crooks. Writhing clouds of ugly vapor were enveloping the crouched headquarters men, bringing hackish coughs from their tortured throats. His cloak sleeve across his face, The Shadow tightened for the desperate charge, that would be worthless if delayed a half minute longer.

Perhaps worthless even at this moment. It wasn't the thought of his own sure death that made The Shadow pause. It was the fact that even a heroic sacrifice might fail to rescue the other men from doom.

In planing this trap, Shiwan Khan had made just one mistake. The Golden Master had given The Shadow too little chance. The Shadow could consider sacrifice, but not sheer suicide. His hesitation enabled him to note another sound, scarcely audible amid the sizzling of the gas.

It was the whir that he had heard before, from the metal partition at the far side of the sub-cellar. The tinny wall was just behind The Shadow's back. Still crouched, the cloaked fighter wheeled about and blasted shots at the partition.

Thin metal caved. Leaping for the ruined sheeting, The Shadow was away from gunfire, thanks to the lowness of the sub-cellar ceiling. Hammering, with the butts of his empty guns, he completed the wreckage that his bullets had begun. With gloved hands, he seized a half-dangling chunk of the partition and ripped it wide away.

The roar of the fans drowned the gas. A great gust of wind howled from the gap, with the force of a typhoon. The air from the huge fans caught up the weaving gas, swirled it away from the choking police, and drove the greenish cloud straight for the grilled barrier where the entrenched crooks crouched with their guns.

Along with that cyclonic whirl came a strident, triumphant laugh that seemed to burst from the center of the greenish twister. It was The Shadow's mockery, telling men of crime that they – not their victims – were caught in the toils of their evil master, Shiwan Khan!

## CHAPTER XVIII. THE CURTAIN FALLS

AS the cloud of poison gas engulfed them, the crooks flung aside their chairs and fled from their useless stronghold. They were taking the quickest way to escape the deadly chlorine – out through the passage behind them, to the main cellar of the theater.

The gas was coming in billows. It piled up at the steps, rose in cloudy mass and sent a wave through the grating; then, subsiding like some greenish monster, it became a crouching thing that gathered strength and leaped again.

Working at speed far greater than the leaking cylinders, the big fans cleared the sub-cellar in less than half a minute. Driving for the barred door, The Shadow threw his cloak across his eyes, merged with the last gathering cloud of green, and shot his hand through the grille work to reach the catch.

The door went wide. With its opening, the vapor leaped away from The Shadow like a thing released from bondage. It carried up the steps and through the passage, in a last deadly wave that followed the fleeing crooks.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Seeing The Shadow start up the steps, Cardona coughed for his squad to come along. Willingly, the rescued men took up the trail, prepared to aid The Shadow in a death combat with the murderous crooks ahead.

Prex and his pals had reached the next cellar and were trying to get outdoors. Choking sounds told that the gas had bothered them badly, although they were surviving its fumes.

Spreading when it reached the main cellar of the theater, the vapor had thinned considerably. But in slashing a path to the outdoor air, the mobsters had created a draft that carried the gas along with them.

At the grating in the alleyway, the crooks popped out like demons from an inferno, for the green clouds that came with them seemed the products of hell itself. Stumbling blindly for the street, they were shouting for assistance, hoping that some outside mob would be on hand to give it.

The Shadow emerged from the opened grating, enveloped in the last wave of the gas. His black shape was not discernible in the green-tinted gloom. Side-stepping, he dropped to a corner of the blind alley and delivered a long, throbbing laugh, a mockery that reverberated from surrounding walls.

The taunt brought whizzing knives directed for the outlet that the cloaked figure had just left. As the blades clattered, The Shadow opened fire for spots along the roofs. He couldn't see the lurking naljorpas; they remembered the fate of others and were keeping well to cover. But The Shadow's shots completed the task that his challenge had begun.

His laugh had drawn the stingers from some of those human hornets. Having flung their blades, they could make no further thrust. The Shadow's shots were a barrage that drove back remaining lurkers, sending them along with the others.

The assassins were on hand to spot persons entering the alley; not to cover a getaway. Shiwan Khan had wanted The Shadow to get through, and had arranged to close the path behind him.

No getaway was on the schedule. Blitz and his clumsy crew had been marked for annihilation. Prex, Mike, Snipe, and their trigger-men were supposed to return up into the theater on the elevator.

As for The Shadow, the naljorpas had been told not to expect him at all. His laugh, issuing from darkness, had utterly amazed them. They actually believed that they were hearing a laugh from the bardo, the invisible world that only delogs visited. They had flung their knives hurriedly, almost as a mere gesture. Even naljorpas could not battle a creature that did not exist!

THE SHADOW'S barrage cleared the way for other comers. Cardona and his squad poured out into the alley and dashed for the street. They saw the big-shots and their subordinates streaking past the theater, toward the parking lot.

Gunfire drove the police to cover. Outside mobs were on hand, managed by Silk Laddiman and Shag Flink. But they were far along the street, near the parking lot, and their opening fire was wide. Moreover, it got them into trouble.

Patrol cars had arrived at the jewelry store, attracted by the blast. Though too late to head off Shiwan Khan and the Ordos tribesmen who carried away the swag, these police were quick to battle the cover-up crews.

Neither Silk nor Shag was as handy at this work as Dobie Grelf had been. Instead of making a stubborn retreat, they jumped into cars, their mobbies with them, and took the police off on a running chase. They knew where they would find a closed van that would take them back to their hideaway, wherever it might be.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

They wanted to get there in a hurry.

Prex and his pals dodged into the parking lot, waved their guns at scared attendants and sent the fellows scurrying to shelter. Reaching the big limousine, they piled into it and waited, expecting the car to start. When it didn't, Prex guessed the reason.

"There's coppers around," he declared, savagely. "Cardona and those headquarters dicks must have seen us duck in here."

"Why don't we get started anyway?" demanded Mike. "This mongrel that's driving for us is supposed to be tough, ain't he?"

"He's tough, all right," put in Snipe, "but he's got some sense, too, or he wouldn't be working for Shiwan Khan. Sitting tight is the right idea. How about it, Prex?"

"It would be," gritted Prex, "if we had only the bulls to think about. But we've got to figure on The Shadow, too."

Opening the door a trifle, Prex saw that the police had passed the limousine. The dull black of the windows made them seem deep; gave the big car an empty appearance. The front windows were black, too and the windshield was of special glass, which gave only one-way vision, from the inside. The Mongol at the wheel was quite as invisible as the crooks in the back seat.

Parked near the limousine was a small, open-topped roadster, a very innocent looking car. Since the weather was chilly, a lap robe lay on the seat beside the wheel. Prex noted a bulge beneath it. He gave a satisfied chuckle, as he turned to his companions.

"There's an old jalopy here," he told the others, "that belongs to us. Shiwan Khan didn't have anybody bother to take it away. I'll hop in that buggy and get started. I'll get the bulls away, so you fellows can clear."

"Yeah?" queried Mike. "How are you going to get back to the hideaway?"

"I'm one guy that knows where it is," returned Prex. "I'll meet you there later."

"Which way will you head?" asked Snipe. "Out toward the corner?"

"No." Prex shook his head. "That's where the coppers are. I'll have to go the other direction, to get a good start on them."

Promptly, something occurred to both Mike and Snipe.

"Say!" began Mike. "If you go past the theater –"

"You'll run into The Shadow." interrupted Snipe. "When the bulls all go one way, he usually covers from the other."

Prex nodded.

"That's right," he agreed. "I want to run into The Shadow. If you guys keep your eyes and ears open, you'll find out why."

## MASTERS OF DEATH

EASING out to the parking lot, Prex raised himself in front of the limousine's windshield and made gestures that the Mongol driver could see and comprehend. Drooping low, he reached the roadster, slid behind its wheel and started the motor. The small car shot toward the street.

Cardona was yelling for detectives to prevent the getaway, but they leaped for the running board too late. Sprawling on the paving, they came to hands and knees and fired after the rocketing roadster; but it was away. By then, Cardona was in another car; as he started after Prex, detectives joined him.

As announced, Prex swung past the theater. He hadn't much of a start, but the roadster was speedy and could increase his lead. As the police car reached the street, the limousine nosed forward, ready to take the opposite direction as soon as the chase had turned the corner. Their faces to the crack of the partly opened door, Mike Borlo and Snipe Shailey watched events.

Unconcerned by the blasts of police guns behind him, Prex Norgan was driving with his left hand. His right had tossed aside the lap robe, to pick up a roundish object on the seat. The thing was a bomb, of the type that Shiwan Khan had used in the porcelain vase.

Some yards beyond the theater was the alley that led into the cellar of the squatty office building. The mouth of the alley was Prex's objective. As he veered toward that darkness, he raised his hand to chuck the pineapple. Prex was confident that The Shadow was still lurking in the darkness, waiting to head off just such an escape as this.

It wouldn't take careful aim to finish The Shadow. A quick chuck of the bomb would do the trick. Rising from behind the wheel, Prex let his hand dart forward. It hadn't moved an inch before a gun spurted from the gloom.

Prex's arm jolted. His clawing fingers juggled the bomb. The Shadow's bullet had cracked his wrist, but Prex was still trying to complete the throw. His left hand veered the car outward to the center of the street, but he was twisting, hoping to make a clumsy thrust across his shoulder.

What happened was his own fault; not The Shadow's. Prex could have let the bomb drop to the street and twisted the car clear before it struck. Wounded, he would have had to surrender to the law; that was one reason why Prex didn't stop. Another, he couldn't give up his thought of vengeance against The Shadow.

The bomb skidded from Prex's fingers, as his arm made the cumbersome fling. The bulbous object glanced from the crook's right shoulder. Frantically, he tried to elbow it away from him but failed.

His jab was a mistake; it diverted the falling bomb from the car's cushioned seat to the wooden floor.

It wasn't just the bomb that blasted. The whole car split to atoms. With a thunderous gush of flame, the roadster was gone and Prex Norgan with it. Chunks of twisted metal cluttered the sidewalks; oil spattered the cracked paving of the street.

Prex Norgan, chief of Shiwan Khan's lieutenants, had met the death that he intended for The Shadow.

As the police car shrieked to a stop, Joe Cardona sprang out. He didn't look back toward the parking lot; hence he failed to see the limousine that started in the opposite direction. Cardona was worrying about The Shadow; he wondered how close the cloaked fighter had been to that blast of sudden death.

Joe didn't find The Shadow in the alleyway, nor in the cellar route below. Gas had cleared, so Cardona made a search, but discovered nothing. One thing, however, surprised him. As Joe remembered it, there had been

some theater chairs in the passage that the crooks had used as a pillbox. Those chairs were gone.

The audience in the Pandora Theater was wondering about disturbing sounds from outdoors; people noticed, too that the place was getting stuffy, as if the ventilating mechanism had gone awry. One person could have told them the reason for those annoyances.

He was Kent Allard, seated alone in a theater box. Cloak and hat discarded, The Shadow had come up by way of the camouflaged elevator, to watch the finish of the play. When the curtain fell on the final scene, Allard limped out from the theater, wincing as though sorry that he had not brought his cane.

Across his arm, the cloak looked like an ordinary topcoat; the slouch hat was concealed beneath it. But there was nothing ordinary in The Shadow's gaze, as he studied the outside scene. His eyes were keenly looking for stray hoodlums or secret spies of Shiwan Khan. The Shadow saw none of either breed.

Night's curtain had also fallen, upon a drama more startling than the Shakespearean brand; a play of life and death, wherein The Shadow had carried the leading role!

### **CHAPTER XIX. FROM THE DEAD**

THERE was gloom in the many roomed hideaway where Shiwan Khan had secreted his lieutenants and their mobs.

Gloom that Mike Borlo shared, though he now rated as the Golden Master's chief lieutenant. The promotion did not offset the loss of Prex Norgan. The crooks had begun to lose their confidence, believing that there were certain dead who could never return.

The Shadow had found a way to wipe them from the earth, and had demonstrated it in Prex's case. The revival of Dobie Grelf, in which the mobsters thoroughly believed, was no longer a comfort. They were afraid that they would meet Prex's fate, not Dobie's, if Shiwan Khan kept up his campaign against The Shadow.

Despite his own doubts, however, Mike was trying to stifle the mutiny that the other lieutenants displayed. As they gathered in their meeting room, he handed each a chamois bag.

Opening them, they found large, unset jewels: rubies, emeralds, sapphires. Even to their unpracticed eyes the stones were matchless; too good to have come from any jewelry store.

"Shiwan Khan is getting rid of the hot stuff," explained Mike. "These rocks are ones he brought from China. We won't have any trouble peddling them."

"We've got to get out of here first," growled Snipe Shailey. "This joint is safe enough while we're in it; but the bulls are getting pretty close. They trailed the van a long way, the other night."

Snipe shot an angry look across the table at Silk Laddiman, who shrugged as though the blame belonged to Shag Flink. Observing a rift among the other lieutenants, Mike Borlo took advantage of it. He pointed to a radio cabinet in the corner of the room.

"Scram, you guys," he ordered. "I'm going to make my mind concentrate, and see if I can pick up a flash from Shiwan Khan."

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Alone at the radio, Mike pressed the switch. Colored lights flashed in varied fashion. Entranced by the ever-changing glare, Mike could hear a faraway voice: the chiming tone of Shiwan Khan.

"All is well," spoke the Golden Master. "Soon you will be joined by your friend, Prex Norgan."

Mike gave a hollow gasp.

"Concentrate hourly," said Shiwan Khan, "for periods of ten minutes. The others must be with you. When your minds are as one, Prex will return among you."

The stroke of a distant gong sounded in Mike's brain. Coming from his trance, the lieutenant went out to give the good news to the others.

ELSEWHERE, two persons sat in silent meditation. Kent Allard, otherwise The Shadow, was with Marpa Tulku in the little room that the tulku called his ritod, or hermitage. Gazing toward the far wall Marpa Tulku spoke:

"It is clear, Ying Ko."

The Shadow saw the thing that Marpa Tulku meant. It was a moving image against the wall; a shape that seemed struggling to wrest itself from the flattened surface and take on a solid form. Already, it had gained a resemblance to a human figure.

"It is a tulpa," defined Marpa Tulku. "An illusion which Shiwan Khan is seeking to produce by the power of his great mind. We are more sensitive to such impressions than the persons he hopes to influence. Should he succeed, however, as he doubtless will, they will see the tulpa suddenly in its full form."

The Shadow was quite familiar with the process. He had delved deeply into the history of ghosts and phantoms and knew their scientific cause. Such illusions were produced by telepathy, or thought transference; picked up by sensitive brains, they were easily converted into hallucinations.

Sometimes, such hallucinations required added suggestion. Thus, a person receiving a telepathic call from a dying friend might not gain the hallucination for days or weeks. When it came, under circumstances conducive to hallucinations, the image would naturally impress the viewer as a ghost.

In Western nations, such facts were doubted, regarded often as pure superstition. But throughout the Orient, particularly in Tibet, telepathy and its by-products were studied and cultivated like any other branch of psychology.

In fact, telepathy was better understood than some simpler mental reactions. Such emotions as fear and sorrow, for example, were considered nonexistent by many Tibetans.

Crass brains like those of Mike Borlo and the remaining lieutenants were not the sort that could pick up distant impressions easily; but Shiwan Khan had obtained some results with them. In a way, the situation helped him; for, as Marpa Tulku declared, if they should see the tulpa, it would strike them as an actual being.

In fact, the phantom was already taking on a complete solidity in the eyes of Marpa Tulku and The Shadow. It was The Shadow who saw and recognized the wide browed, squarejawed image, with its hard eyes and suavely smiling lips. He spoke the name:

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"Prex Norgan."

"It is a yidam," declared Marpa Tulku, solemnly. "The double of a man who no longer lives. They will believe the yidam to be real, those others, when it appears to them."

The Shadow inquired how soon results might come. Marpa Tulku estimated that it would require three or four periods of concentration, at least. While they spoke, the yidam faded, obliterating itself against the wall.

"A hard strain upon Shiwan Khan," asserted Marpa Tulku. "He is putting every ounce of mental energy into his task. He will be pleased when it is over."

There was a soft laugh from The Shadow. He took on some of the quality of a tulpa, as he left the ritod. Marpa Tulku watched the cloaked form fade from the doorway of the little room, out past the patrolling dubchens who were on duty in the hall.

It was night. For the next few hours, The Shadow's course was untraceable, though there were intervals when he momentarily appeared in a neighborhood where police had been making a search all that day.

It was the area where they had last seen the van that carried away Silk Laddiman and Shag Flink, with their combined mobs.

The Shadow finally struck results, some three blocks outside the suspected area. He did not find the garage; its front was cleverly camouflaged to resemble an old, empty house. What The Shadow did discover was a basement entry to a residence that had been converted into a small apartment house.

The entry was floored with wood, as a protection to cracked cement beneath. With an ordinary house, it would not have mattered; but this building had been partly reconstructed, and new cement should normally have been installed. When The Shadow tested the boards, a portion hinged upward. He found a passage beneath.

HAVING found one of the secret inlets to the hideaway, The Shadow soon reached the rooms themselves. He recognized that they were the deep foundations of some incompleting structure.

Recalling a warehouse in the neighborhood, he decided that it had been built upon a site originally intended for a skyscraper. Such changes in building plans were not unknown in Manhattan.

Shiwan Khan had evidently tapped into the foundations through water mains, abandoned subway exits, and other suitable passages. As it stood, the vast hideaway was a veritable stronghold, with so many outlets that it would be almost impossible to trap the occupants.

Guards were on duty, members of the various mobs. But they had become accustomed to security, and were lax. Alert enough to detect massed invasion by the law, they were satisfied with their own vigil. They hadn't calculated upon The Shadow making a secret trip into the midst of their domain.

Reaching a small room, The Shadow saw a curtain just beyond. He heard pacings outside the door that he had entered, knew that guards had come on duty. There were voices beyond the curtain; tones belonging to Shiwan Khan's lieutenants.

The Shadow, it seemed, had come into another trap; one more dangerous than those which had actually been prepared for him. In this stronghold, with crooks everywhere, escape would be hopeless, once the cloaked fighter was discovered. But The Shadow was not troubled by the situation.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Whipping off his cloak and hat, he tucked them underneath a small table, where they lay in darkness. Stretching his hands ahead of him. The Shadow parted the curtains and deliberately stepped into the light, letting the drapes close behind him!

Mike Borlo was sitting at the head of a table, his back toward The Shadow. The chief lieutenant was talking to the others.

"Didn't Shiwan Khan send the sparklers?" demanded Mike. "Pashod brought them, and he'll bring more every time we pull a job for Shiwan Khan. He's come through every time, Shiwan Khan has. It may sound screwy, him saying that Prex will show up, if we think about it long enough. But I'm telling you –"

Mike didn't tell the rest. He was looking at Snipe Shailey, who was at the far end of the table. Snipe, in his turn, was staring at The Shadow!

Such a sight was remarkable in itself. Even more surprising was the fact that Snipe did not see The Shadow. He saw Prex Norgan!

After leaving the abode of Marpa Tulku, The Shadow had disguised himself as Prex. He remembered the dead big-shot's features well enough to imitate them for his present purpose. The Shadow had correctly analyzed the opinions of crooks like Snipe and knew that they would not expect to see Prex exactly as he had been.

The Shadow's disguised features were chalkish. The brow and chin were constructed. The eyes, lacking something of The Shadow's burn, were good enough. As for the lips, they were perfect. The Shadow had no difficulty imitating the suave smile of Prex Norgan, for it had been a forced expression, even with the crook himself.

Snipe Shailey uttered one word:

"Prex!"

The others turned, saw the living ghost that faced them. Far better than the yidam that Shiwan Khan was trying to create, The Shadow held his viewers in awe. Where a yidam could not have spoken, except in the minds of those who saw the phantasm, The Shadow voiced real words.

"I have come," he declared in Prex's smooth tone, "to prove the power of Shiwan Khan. Later, when my new life is complete, I shall be with you as I was before. For the present, I return to our master, Shiwan Khan."

LOOKING at Mike Borlo, The Shadow saw the fixed effect of the chief lieutenant's gaze. With a gesture suited to Prex Norgan, The Shadow waved the others from the room. Lifting his hand, he pointed to the radio. Mike understood.

Turning on the varicolored lights, Mike contacted Shiwan Khan. The moment that he heard the bell-like tones of the Golden Master, Mike voiced his story.

"We've seen him," he exclaimed. "Prex! He's here!"

The Shadow could almost sense the jangling laugh that Mike received from Shiwan Khan. Then Mike was hearing other things. The Shadow waited until the chief lieutenant turned.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

"It's all set, Prex," declared Mike. "There won't be any hitch, now that the rest have seen you. Do you know what Shiwan Khan just told me?"

The Shadow smiled as if he, the false Prex, knew all. But his suave grin also invited Mike to tell the rest.

"Tomorrow night," asserted Mike, "Shiwan Khan is going to bring Joe Cardona and those headquarters boobs to his own joint, wherever that is. He's going to finish them himself. Those guys, and somebody else –"

"The Shadow?"

"Yeah, The Shadow," nodded Mike, pleased by Prex's interruption. "Where they go, The Shadow will show up too, like he did before. Only, this time, he'll meet up with Shiwan Khan!"

"All I got to do" – Mike nudged a big thumb toward the radio – "is wait for a flash. That'll mean for me, and the rest of us, to come along and help the mop-up."

Remembering that Snipe and the other lieutenants were supposed to hear the news, Mike turned toward the far door. He was halfway there, when he thought of something.

"How about you, Prex?" he questioned. "Are you sticking here, along with us?"

"I return to Shiwan Khan," replied The Shadow in a suave, but cryptic, tone. "We shall meet again tomorrow night."

As soon as Mike was gone, The Shadow sprang to the radio. Rapidly, he found the gadget that controlled the flashing lights and noted its contacts. Removing bulbs of different colors, he changed them to other sockets. He transposed red with blue, green with yellow.

Going beyond the curtains, The Shadow picked up his cloak and hat. Back through the meeting room, he took the exit that Mike Borlo had used and found a clear passage beyond it. Again garbed in cloak and hat, The Shadow threaded his way from the underground stronghold.

When he reached the open air, The Shadow laughed. He had done a favor for Shiwan Khan, by visiting the crooks ahead of the yidam that the Golden Master was trying to produce. More important, The Shadow had turned that favor to his own account.

Not far from the underground hideaway, The Shadow encountered the lung-gom-pa who belonged to Marpa Tulku. He was not surprised because the runner had trailed him to this neighborhood; in fact, he was quite pleased because Marpa Tulku was concerned about his safety.

The Shadow was depending upon Marpa Tulku. He gave a message to the lung-gom-pa and told him to carry it to his master. Then, with a whispered laugh, The Shadow was gone into the night.

## CHAPTER XX. THE WRONG CALL

THE all-important evening had arrived. The one man who did not know it was Inspector Joe Cardona, who was pacing his office at headquarters. Cardona had never been confronted by such a dilemma before. Usually, he knew whether he was right or wrong; tonight, he didn't.

Anything might be right – or wrong. Joe had followed tip-offs – one that he thought came from The Shadow; another that he knew had been from Shiwan Khan. He had followed both of them and put himself in wrong,

only to have things turn out right.

Cardona was used to being criticized for mistakes that he hadn't made. At present, he was being commended because of his mistakes. All that he could do was hope that his luck would hold; probably it would, if The Shadow stayed around.

But Cardona wasn't even sure that The Shadow was around; not after the explosion near the Pandora Theater. As for Shiwan Khan, he was certainly around, but the question was to find out where. Even with the right answer, that question was likely to bring a one-way ticket to the morgue.

Of one thing, Cardona was sure. At present, he was receiving praise for having mopped up two notorious big-shots and their mobs: Dobie Grelf, at the Battery Trust; Blitz Gandy at Traymer's. But the newspapers were beginning to talk about the funds that had gone from the bank and the gems stolen from the jewelry store. Soon they would be asking why Cardona had not reclaimed the swag.

The total of the two hauls exceeded half a million dollars, and it bothered Joe worse than the national debt annoyed Congress. Cardona was ready to accept a gold medal with one hand, and pass in his resignation with the other. It was about time that the Feds took over; for once, Cardona wished that they would.

He was muttering those sentiments, when he thought that he heard the telephone bell ring. That was just it; he thought he heard it, but he wasn't sure. Picking up the telephone, he gruffed a hello and waited.

After long, interminable moments, he heard a voice that spoke the single word:

"Come!"

It was the crystalline tone of Shiwan Khan, but it hadn't told Cardona all he wanted to know. Finding that he still had a voice, Cardona queried:

"Come where?"

The voice gave instructions; Cardona repeated them aloud. The summons was from Shiwan Khan, but it was worth while to listen. He finished with the query:

"When do I start?"

"At once," replied Shiwan Khan. Then: "You may bring men with you, but all must come together. When you have started, you will remember my instructions."

The call ended; Cardona rubbed his forehead. He understood what Shiwan Khan had meant by the word "remember"; for all the instructions had been wiped from Joe's mind. It dawned on him that if he picked a squad and left headquarters, he would recall the route as he went along. Such was the significance of Shiwan Khan's final statement.

But it struck Joe, also, that if he tried to outwit the Golden Master by ringing in lot of reserves, Shiwan Khan might find it out. It was better to play along on Shiwan Khan's own terms. Why not take a squad and go to it?

"Why not?"

Putting the question aloud, Cardona found that he was talking to Fritz, the janitor, who was standing in the doorway. Fritz was a stoop-shouldered, dull-faced, who was dumb enough to work overtime without getting

## MASTERS OF DEATH

paid for it. He had cleaned Cardona's office earlier, so apparently his day's task was finished.

"Get out, dope," growled Cardona. "Don't you have enough sense to go home?"

Fritz turned and shambled away. As he went downstairs, his lips repeated the instructions that Cardona had heard and temporarily forgotten. Those recollections pleased Fritz so much that he laughed when he reached his locker. His mirth was the whispered tone of The Shadow!

LAYING aside a mop and bucket, The Shadow gathered a cloak and hat from the locker. Stepping out by a basement door, he met a lurky figure in the darkness. It was the lung-gom-pa runner.

The Shadow repeated words in a strange tongue; the racing mystic loped way. His run was not a long one; he was picked up by Moe's cab, which was to carry him to Marpa Tulku, and return.

Up in his office, Cardona was debating whether to take along a squad of bluecoats or plain-clothes men. Uniformed officers could recognize each other more easily than the others; still, plain-clothes men could move into places with more efficiency. Cardona had just made his decision and was shouting it over a telephone, when he heard a whispered laugh behind him.

Dropping the telephone, Cardona turned to face The Shadow. The cloaked intruder spoke firmly, steadily.

"Summon your squad," The Shadow told Cardona. "Follow the instructions of Shiwan Khan. But do not start until you receive my command."

The tone ended in a whisper that carried singular mirth. It told Cardona that The Shadow, too, had plans for this night's adventure. While whispery echoes quivered from the walls, The Shadow was gone.

SEATED in the central room of their expansive hideaway, Mike Borlo and his fellow lieutenants were awaiting the promised summons from Shiwan Khan. Colored lights were spinning, blinking with erratic sparkles. Rubbing his hand over his forehead, Mike turned to Snipe Shailey.

"I'm groggy, Snipe," said Mike. "The lights have kind of got me tonight. They seem different. I'm hazy in the bean."

"Show more concentration," argued Snipe. "That's what you need, Mike. Don't let us bother you."

Mike concentrated on the lights. Gradually, his lips began to move. Then, aloud:

"I'm getting it," he said, slowly. "Yeah, I'm getting it. Stick close, all of you, and listen –"

Ten minutes later the big-shots and a picked crew of followers were sneaking through darkness outside an exit from the hideaway. They were picking their own path tonight.

Forming little groups, they took cabs when they found them, and rode southward. They met again on a gloomy side street, and approached a darkened house.

The door above the brownstone steps was open. They moved into a dimly lighted hall, up a flight of stairs, to a door just opposite. At each end of the hall they saw brown-skinned men in tunics; rigid sentinels, who made no move. Inside the doorway, Mike beckoned the others toward a curtain.

"This is the real McCoy," he said. "Shiwan Khan's own joint. Let him do the talking. You guys listen."

## MASTERS OF DEATH

The room was dark. The crowding thugs had filled about half its space, when lights glimmered, rising to show the scene. The crooks saw an enthroned figure; not until the lights had considerably increased did they guess that it was not Shiwan Khan.

On the throne sat Marpa Tulku!

The aged Tibetan master fixed his gaze upon the visitors. His expression tonight was anything but benign. His eyes had a stern glitter that each viewer felt was directed straight at himself. They were eyes that bored with phenomenal power.

Not a single crook stirred. Hands that had moved toward guns were motionless. For a minute, perhaps longer, Marpa Tulku held the whole group spellbound. It was Mike Borlo who managed first to wrench himself from that amazing mental sway.

"Snap out of it," rasped Mike, to the others. "Maybe this guy can put the hyp on one of us, but not on a whole bunch together. It can't be done!"

Mike's fingers found a gun and drew it; when Snipe Shailey copied the action, other mobbies began to stir. Hands were slow in their motion, for Marpa Tulku, his fixed gaze unchanged, did have some semblance of control. But the spell was breaking; Mike recognized it, as he snarled:

"It's curtains for you, old crab-face!"

Only Marpa Tulku, staring straight ahead, saw the shape that entered behind the crooks. But the big-shots and their mobbies heard the laugh that put an end to gunplay before it even began. Turning numbly, they let their guns drop as they faced The Shadow.

He held two automatics, moving them slowly from side to side, to keep the whole tribe covered. Flanking The Shadow were the mystics from the hallway, Marpa Tulku's dubchens, drawn daggers ready in their hands. Behind The Shadow were other men. who pushed gun muzzles into sight. They were The Shadow's agents, recalled to duty for this task.

Disarming the crooks, the agents and the dubchens lined them up and forced them, one by one, to Marpa Tulku's throne. The Shadow's guns had taken over where the power of the tulku left off, but again, the ancient Tibetan held sway. He was taking evildoers individually, placing each man beneath a powerful hypnotic spell.

In a corner stood The Shadow. Beside him was a device with flickering lights, tuned to the rotation of Mike Borlo's radio dial, but with the colored bulbs in the new arrangement that The Shadow had provided, Shiwan Khan had flashed a summons to Mike this evening, but the chief lieutenant had not received it.

Instead he had tuned in on Marpa Tulku, who was as great an adept as Shiwan Khan. On his first attempt, Marpa Tulku had put through a message that Mike had accepted as one from Shiwan Khan.

Leaving the rest to Marpa Tulku, The Shadow moved past the curtains, to a telephone downstairs. He called headquarters and spoke to Joe Cardona in a tone that the ace inspector did not doubt. This was the message that The Shadow had promised.

Tonight, Joe Cardona had received another wrong call; but its evil was nullified. The inspector had listened to The Shadow's call, instead. Whereas, the lieutenants of Shiwan Khan had been tricked in Cardona's stead. They had missed the right call from the Golden Master, and taken a wrong one from Marpa Tulku.

Only once had a message from Shiwan Khan been supplanted by another. But that one wrong call was vital to The Shadow's purpose: the destruction of the Golden Master!

### CHAPTER XXI. HOUSE OF GOLD

FORGOTTEN, in the mid-section of Manhattan stood a great, dark mansion once the property of a millionaire, who had died at the turn of the century. Built to endure, tangled in legal controversies between disputing heirs, the mansion had remained as a landmark of the Gay '90s.

Its appearance had changed little during forty years. It still stood like a fortress, somber behind the great brown walls that fenced its grounds from the corner of a secluded avenue and a quiet side street.

The mansion had been sold to another millionaire, who seldom came to New York at all. Why he had bought it was a mystery that could have been explained by Shiwan Khan. The real purchaser of the mansion was the Golden Master.

Long had Shiwan Khan reserved the structure for some future use. It had the proportions of a palace, suitable for an owner who had kingly ambitions. For the present, however, the Golden Master regarded it partly as a fortress wherein he could stave off any attack.

Always ready to strengthen his strategy by a total reversal of his plans, Shiwan Khan had the qualifications of a real dictator. Tonight, instead of wanting visitors to stay away, he was inviting them to his great mansion. First, he had summoned men of the law; later, men of crime.

Between those two sets, Shiwan Khan expected another visitor, a lone one. He was depending upon The Shadow to be present at this house warming. Since leads to crooks had been well covered, Shiwan Khan was quite sure that The Shadow would be checking the moves of the police, in hope of finding some trail to crime.

Only Shiwan Khan would have risked an open invitation to Joe Cardona. The Golden Master was quite sure that the police inspector would follow its exact terms. His trick of giving instructions, then having the listener forget them temporarily, was a stunt familiar to all hypnotists.

It was called post-hypnosis, and Shiwan Khan had perfected it. He had given Cardona a series of suggestions, so that with each step along the way, Joe would remember the next.

Under such conditions, Cardona would naturally obey the admonition of bringing a squad, without reserve. He would have to make sure that the thing wasn't a hoax, before making a big issue out of something that he couldn't fully explain.

There were eyes in the mansion, peering from curtained windows. They saw figures moving in through the unlocked gate: a chunky leader in plain clothes, followed by a squad in uniforms. The cautious invaders reached the mansion's grime-encrusted walls, began testing doors and windows.

Then the watchers observed another figure that sidled past the lamplight beyond the gate. It was the cloaked shape of The Shadow, casting a momentary streak of blackness upon the sidewalk. Moving into darkness, The Shadow trailed the squad ahead.

The mansion's big door was unlocked. Clustered invaders crept into a great hallway, where a soft, dim light outlined them. It was impossible to discern their faces in the half-gloom, but their slowing, strides betokened astonishment.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Everywhere, the scene was golden. Walls of gold, stairs of gold, furniture crusted with the same precious metal!

This was the abode of Shiwan Khan, the Golden Master.

PRESSING past curtains woven from gold cloth, the entering men saw other rooms, more lavish even than the hallway. Those rooms were decorated with jewels, that sparkled from every quarter.

Green emeralds, glittering like the eyes of Shiwan Khan; ruddy rubies, like those of his naljorpas. Perhaps the Golden Master and his fiendish servants were on watch, though the silence gave no token of it. Shiwan Khan had turned his premises over to the law, to let the police decide the next step.

In the rear wall of a great side room was a door, its outline marked with jewels. The door was of gold, but that did not make it conspicuous in this mansion. The door seemed important because it was closed. It invited the invaders to pass beyond it. They accepted the invitation.

Hardly had the door closed behind the uniformed squad, before a blot of blackness moved in through the front hall. Usually, dim light muffled the cloaked figure of The Shadow; but against the golden background, the black form showed more plainly than those that had gone ahead.

Shiwan Khan had expected The Shadow to observe the disadvantage and act accordingly. True to form, the cloaked arrival moved swiftly along the path that the others had taken. Reaching the golden door, he opened it quickly and stepped beyond.

Figures showed in a mellow light that spread through a huge room of glass. The room had once been a conservatory; Shiwan Khan had turned it into a hothouse, easily identified as such by its humid atmosphere. Great tropical plants were visible, rising toward the high ceiling. The floor was thick with foliage, like a jungle.

On the far side of the mammoth hothouse was a solid wall. There, above a low platform, was a doorway hung with golden curtains. Lights were stronger in that quarter; the gold drapes formed a subtle lure.

From somewhere – beyond the curtains, perhaps – came low strains of barbaric music known only in Tibet, for the instruments were peculiar to that Land of Snows. Wailing notes were provided by a type of oboe called a gyaling; the low accompaniment, with a trumpet's tone, was provided by a rag-dong. Strange drums, identified by other bizarre names, kept up a thrumming cadence.

Strange that this music of the lofty Himalaya Mountains should be heard in a tropical atmosphere!

That paradox did not restrain the men who were crunching through the foliage. They were seeking the platform, the curtains beyond it. At moments, they stumbled; their shoulders were lost among the plants. At other intervals, they halted.

Occasionally, there were sounds like grumbles, that became suddenly stifled. The piping music was rising to a higher pitch, the instruments were still Tibetan, but the tune carried thoughts of India. From the near side of the tropical room a solitary black-clad figure waited, watching for those ahead to reach the platform.

Blue uniforms did not appear. A low laugh sounded; sibilant, but with a touch of harshness. Gloved hands drew big automatics; the lone venturer started through the foliage. Drums welcomed that advance with a new beat, like the pound of tom-toms.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Then from the brush along the floor came a coiling thing with little, glittery eyes, that spied the cloaked form in the darkness. Leaves rustled as a great serpentine shape wrapped itself around the man in black. Like those in uniform ahead, he was dragged downward, helpless, his guns useless!

Golden curtains were flung apart. Onto the platform stepped Shiwan Khan, his catlike eyes ablaze. His laugh, harsh, discordant, was a call for lights. The tropical scene was flooded with a glare. While music throbbed, Shiwan Khan enjoyed a hideous sight.

Looking for Inspector Joe Cardona, Shiwan Khan saw a stocky form entangled in the coils of a great python. All about were men in uniform, fighting against the grip of other massive snakes.

Beyond, at the very start of the jungle route, was the greatest python of all. Close to forty feet in length, it held The Shadow, wound from head to foot, in spiral twists!

SHIWAN KHAN was speaking, his tone chiming with the music, as he picked a trail through the plants. He was followed, at respectful distance, by Pashod, the gomchen who had given full allegiance to the Golden Master.

"You have disturbed my snake temple," Shiwan Khan told the victims, with a chiding laugh. "These serpents are my friends; I brought them from Penang. As my friends" – his tone was harsh – "they show no mercy to my enemies! When the music stops –"

Shiwan Khan had reached The Shadow. Pashod was stopped beside Cardona. As Shiwan Khan whipped away The Shadow's slouch hat, Pashod yanked a felt one from the head of Joe Cardona.

A vicious snarl came from Shiwan Khan. As Pashod echoed it, the python hissed, filling the room with a sibilance that seemed a pronouncement of doom for the coil entangled victims.

Doom it could be, but not for the victims that Shiwan Khan wanted. He was staring at a face that he recognized and knew as a real one. Not a face belonging to The Shadow, but the sallow, rattish visage of Snipe Shailey!

Pashod wasn't looking at Joe Cardona. The man whose hat the gomchen had ripped away was Mike Borlo. Nor were the other helpless men police. Uptilted faces were those of Silk Laddiman, Shag Flink, and members of their mobs.

Into the heavy beat of drums came a crash like that of a dozen cymbals, as a side door of the conservatory shattered, flinging living darkness inward.

From the hidden lips of a real black-cloaked invader came the sardonic laugh of The Shadow, challenging Shiwan Khan to a duel of death!

## CHAPTER XXII. TO THE DEATH

WITH a snakish twist as swift as the lashes of his trained pythons, Shiwan Khan sprang for the nearest refuge, the golden door leading into the front of the mansion. Despite his speed, he could not have beaten The Shadow's shots, had not the music stopped.

As the instruments halted, knives flashed from the curtains past the platform, followed by scrawny forms that loosed them. The musicians were naljorpas, rallying to Shiwan Khan's defense. Quick though their attack was, they had no opportunity to reach The Shadow with their blades.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

The stopping of the music had warned the cloaked fighter of the thrust. The Shadow had wheeled to outer darkness, as the knives skimmed in his direction. His one loss was a chance for an immediate settlement with Shiwan Khan.

As the golden door clanged behind Shiwan Khan, The Shadow spun into sight again, his guns blasting toward the platform. The naljorpas scattered, thinking it was safer. They were wrong.

In behind The Shadow surged a squad of plain-clothes men headed by Joe Cardona. For once, they were finding naljorpas out of cover. They made the most of it.

Scrawny men somersaulted before they could reach the tropical foliage. Some who actually gained the brush were riddled by bullets that mowed through the fringing plants. All the while, Pashod was screaming imprecations, that ended when Cardona sprawled the gomchen with a well-placed shot.

Pashod had been yelling at the naljorpas, shrieking for them to play music. It was the only way to make the pythons uncoil, thereby releasing the four lieutenants and the mobsmen. But the music never came. Its cessation doomed the crooks.

Lulled to varying degrees by the changes in the tunes, the pythons had so far been lenient with their human prey. Without any form of music, the great snakes were totally unrestrained. Twining tightly, they crushed their victims utterly.

No bullets could have saved Mike Borlo, Snipe Shailey, and the rest. Nothing short of an explosive shell could have shredded a python's tightened coils.

Shiwan Khan's allies, the pythons, had disposed of another set of warriors that served the Golden Master – the crooks who were the charter members in his long-planned empire of crime!

The Shadow had reached the golden door and was in full pursuit of Shiwan Khan. Cardona and his squad followed, circling the tropical garden to avoid becoming python fodder. The snakes were still too busy to be looking for fresh victims.

Shiwan Khan was halfway up the great stairway, when he heard The Shadow's laugh behind him. Wheeling on the landing, the Golden Master thrust forth a long hand. A knife, sliding from within his golden sleeve, was plucked by fingers that aided it on its way.

Expecting the blade, The Shadow had dropped back. The dirk went wide by more than a foot. The Shadow's gunshot, fired while he twisted, was also wide but only by an inch. Lucky to escape that bullet, Shiwan Khan kept on his way.

Though he knew nothing of Marpa Tulku's alliance with The Shadow, Shiwan Khan could guess the events that had ruined his best laid schemes. Lured from their hideaway, the gang lieutenants and their crew had been placed under a powerful hypnotic influence.

Guided by the commands of another mind, Mike Borlo and the mobbies had impersonated Joe Cardona and a squad of bluecoats, while Snipe Shailey, given cloak, hat and gloves, had fancied himself to be The Shadow. As such, they had come, instead of the expected invaders.

The Shadow, meanwhile, had restrained Cardona and a squad of plain-clothes men from approaching the mansion until the others were inside. All of which informed Shiwan Khan that The Shadow must have overheard the phone call that the Golden Master made to Joe Cardona.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

But Shiwan Khan was concerned with other matters. His one thought was escape. With it, he hoped still to control the tide of battle by the one form of counter attack that was still within his power.

DASHING across a second-floor hall, Shiwan Khan yanked open a door to a centrally-located room.

The walls of the room were draped with gold. From the doorway, Shiwan Khan gave a shrill call that brought new fighters to his aid. Great Ordos tribesmen sprang from doorways; with them were a few snakelike naljorpas.

Dropped at the stair top, The Shadow greeted them as they came. The scorching fire of his guns produced results. The naljorpas launched their knives, at an angle far too high, then dived rapidly for cover, getting their scraggly forms out of harm's way.

The Ordos bodyguards of Shiwan Khan, coming onward despite The Shadow's rapid fire, were finally sprawled by a supporting bombardment supplied by Cardona and several detectives, who had reached the stair top during the fray.

Lunging between a pair of drooping giants, The Shadow cleared another of the Mongols as the giant fell. Reaching Shiwan Khan's doorway, he saw that the Golden Master had whipped away a curtain, to get at the wall beyond it. Standing beside Shiwan Khan was the silver coffin of Temujin; it was upright, its lid half-opened, like a door.

Shiwan Khan was yanking a chain set in the wall. It snapped; with a backward twist, the Golden Master recoiled into the silver coffin just as The Shadow opened fire. One of the bullets must have scored a hit, for the gold-clad shoulder drooped as it disappeared.

Then the coffin lid clanged shut, catching a portion of the golden robe, which remained outside, in sight. If Shiwan Khan expected concealment in the coffin, he had found it, but in an ostrich-like style.

Clangs were still coming from the silver coffin lid, produced by The Shadow's bullets. The cloaked fighter had only to spring across the golden room, yank open the coffin front, and get at Shiwan Khan. Instead, The Shadow wheeled full about and hurled himself upon Cardona and arriving detectives, flinging them back into the hallway.

It was a timely move, speeded to the limit, because The Shadow knew the ways of Shiwan Khan. Double purposes, always. The Golden Master had not chosen his present shelter merely as a protection against bullets. The Shadow remembered the chain that Shiwan Khan had torn from the wall.

A vast rumble came from deep below. The foundations of the massive mansion trembled, as a mighty explosion ripped upward in volcanic style. Its target was the floor of the golden room, where Shiwan Khan had hoped The Shadow would be.

The blast split the floor, lifted its spreading timbers through the roof. Curtained walls heaved outward; the force of the concussion hurled The Shadow and the detectives almost to the stairs. With the cataclysmic roar came flames like great tongues from a blast furnace.

From cellar to roof, the center of the mansion had become a tremendous chimney; black smoke, gushing with the flames, proved that the blast had set off an oil tank. Sucking air from every floor, the fire was beyond restraint.

## MASTERS OF DEATH

Crackles from the floor below meant that the golden walls were mostly painted gilt, another sham of Shiwan Khan's. The mansion was ablaze; it behooved all occupants to make a quick departure before the billowing fire became a holocaust.

The Shadow pointed Cardona and the others down the stairs; as they started for safety, the cloaked fighter turned about. He didn't have to look for the doorway of the golden room; most of the walls were gone.

Through flame and smoke, The Shadow saw the silver coffin. It had been hurled outward by the blast, off through the opposite wall. It was flat on the floor, the strip of Shiwan Khan's robe still showing from the lid. The Golden Master still expected rescue; The Shadow could see an open path to a balcony beyond.

In from shattered passages came staggering Mongols; the wounded fighters had crawled through other rooms, to reach the space beyond. They were stooping, tugging at the coffin. Dropping back to the stairway, The Shadow made a dash, took a long leap straight through the smoke and flame.

THE room was more than a dozen feet across, not too long a jump, provided that the far floor was solid. Timbers cracked as The Shadow struck; he went knee-deep in the debris. Catching the end of the silver coffin with one hand, he stabbed shots at the Mongols with the gun that he carried in the other.

Great knives hacked wildly, as the Ordos bearers tried to beat off The Shadow and still retain the coffin. His gun was bashing away their slashes, his bullets sagging them. They lunged, unwillingly, coffin and all; then tried, too late, to crush The Shadow with their mighty burden.

The coffin was swinging at an angle. Rolling in the other direction, The Shadow escaped it and jerked his feet clear of the broken floor. He was past the Mongols, almost to the balcony, when he turned.

Rallying, the mortally wounded giants made a last effort to drive the coffin toward the balcony doorway, which was open. The Shadow aimed.

Out of swirling, pitch-black smoke came a grimy naljorpa; though weaponless, he attacked, driving his bony hands for The Shadow's throat.

Stooping, The Shadow caught the attacker in a quick grip, propelled him over head and shoulders, turning the fellow's lunge in a long dive that sent him through the balcony rail.

The Shadow's gun was spurting when the rail crashed. Dying Mongols caved under battering bullets. The coffin struck the sagging floor; its weight splintered the beams that the flames had weakened.

With a topple, the silver casket went across the brink. Its lid flopped upward as it twisted. The Shadow glimpsed the writhing figure of the gold-robed occupant. A solemn laugh was The Shadow's farewell to Shiwan Khan, as the coffin plunged, end first, to the depths of the mighty furnace that the Golden Master had himself created.

The heat of that inferno would melt the coffin of Temujin. Like its human contents, the casket had gone to absolute destruction. Before choosing that refuge, Shiwan Khan should have remembered The Shadow's terms of battle:

"To the death!"

Flames roared upward, as though inspired by the fuel they had just received. Wheeling from their gush, The Shadow reached the balcony. From below, Joe Cardona saw the cloaked victor swing through the splintered

## MASTERS OF DEATH

rail and drop to the darkened ground below.

A laugh trailed amid the roar of the mounting flames. Shivery echoes blended with the fire's crackle. Mirthless, the laugh told of triumph over Shiwan Khan, the fiend who had defied The Shadow's vengeance!

THE END