

THE PHANTOM CITY

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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THE PHANTOM CITY

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Chapter 1. THE SUBMARINE QUEST

NEW YORK is a city of many races. All nationalities are seen on her streets.

Hence, four brown-skinned men walking down Fifth Avenue attracted no unusual notice. They wore business suits, neat and new, but not gaudy. This helped them to escape attention.

They kept in a tight cluster. Their eyes prowled alertly. They were nervous. But strangers from far places, overawed by first sight of Manhattan's cloud-puncturing skyscrapers and canyon streets, often act thus. Their subdued excitement failed to draw more than casually amused glances from pedestrians.

Slight smiles aimed at the quartet would have faded to glassy, loose-jawed stares, had their real character become known. The four were as vicious a bevy of throat-slitters as ever sauntered along one of New York's cracks of brick and glass. Gotham's machine-gunning gangsters were babes compared to these four nervous brown men.

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They were on a mission – a mission which, had slightest hint of it reached the police, would have drawn a howling swarm of squad cars.

The slightly stiff-backed manner in which each man walked was due to a long, flat sword in a sheath strapped tightly against his spine. Thin, spike-snouted automatics were concealed expertly in their clothing.

Within the past hour, the tip of each blade and the lead nose of each bullet had been pressed ceremoniously into a piece of raw meat. The chunk of red meat was one into which a highly venomous serpent had been goaded to sink its fangs repeatedly, loading it with poison.

On other occasions, these men had proved that a scratch from weapons treated thus was sufficient to cause nearly instant death.

It was night. Clouds scraped spongy gray flanks against the sharp tops of the tall buildings. Flashing signs on Broadway splashed pale, colored luminance against the wadded vapor. A thin gum of moisture covered streets and sidewalks. It had rained at sundown, an hour before.

The four men turned into a side street, reached a darkened doorway, and stopped before it. The entry was shabby; its frame was scratched and grooved where heavy merchandise had been taken in and out. A large packing box, obviously empty, stood in the gloom.

Out of the big box came a voice.

"Qawam, bilaja!" it growled. "Make haste! Conceal yourselves in this place! Our quarry may soon appear!"

The quartet started for the box, evidently with the idea of wedging themselves into it.

"Not here, sons of dumb camels!" gritted the man in the box. "The doorway will be shelter enough! It is best that I remain hidden here throughout, not appearing at any time. Do not, by your glances or actions, betray my presence. Anta sami? Do you hear?"

In guttural Arabic, the four muttered that they understood. They arranged themselves in the murk.

Reaching under their coat tails, they produced their long swords. The sheaths were tight enough to hold the weapons in place, and they could be drawn downward in handy fashion.

"Fools!" their chief hissed from the box. "Replace those! There is to be no killing until we have the information we desire!"

Back into the spine scabbards went the blades, each man being careful not to prick himself with the deadly tip of his weapon.

"HE is coming soon?" one man asked in Arabic.

"At any minute," replied the man, remaining unseen in the box. "Watch the street to the left, my sons."

"How will we know him?"

"He is a big man. Wallah! He is the biggest man you ever saw! And his body is of a color and seeming hardness of a metal – bronze. A giant man of bronze!"

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The four peered down the street, then drew back.

"It is a dark street and full of bad smells," a man muttered. "You are sure he will come this way?"

"Directly across the street is a great steel door. See you it?"

"Na'arn, aiwah! Yes!"

"Beyond that door is a garage where this bronze man keeps many cars. In this street one is permitted to drive in only a single direction. Therefore, he will come from the left."

The four men peered at the giant steel doors across the thoroughfare. For the first time, they noted the towering size of the building above it. The structure was of shiny metal and expertly fitted gray masonry. It shot upward nearly a hundred stories.

"The bronze man lives there?"

"On the eighty-sixth floor," said the voice in the box.

"Wa!lah! This fellow must have great wealth to live in a place like that!"

"He is a strange man, this bronze one! He is a being of mystery, one about whom many fantastic tales are told. His name is familiar to every one in the city. The newspapers carry feature stories about him. Yet he is almost a legend, for he does not show himself to the public, and does not seek publicity."

"But he has that which we want?"

"He has. We have but to find where it is kept. That is your job."

Squatting like four brown owls, the quartet kept unwinking eyes fixed to the left, down the somber street.

"Have you found aught of the escaped white-haired girl?" asked the man in the packing case.

"No trace, O master. But our comrades search everywhere!"

"Taiyib malihi Very well! She must be caught and brought back to my yacht!"

"It is well none in this city can understand the language she speaks," a man said thoughtfully. "Only you, O enlightened one, can converse with her. And it took you, even with your learning, many days to master a few words of her tongue."

"Watch the street!" snapped the hidden man. "Draw your guns! But use them only to produce fright!"

One fellow muttered: "The girl should be slain –"

"Fool! We may need her to guide us to this Phantom City! We keep her alive and unharmed. Understand that. If something happens to a hair of her white head, Allah help the man responsible!"

The four squatting men drifted uneasy glances at the box, as if it held a dangerous monster. They feared this master of theirs.

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"The bronze man whose arrival we await – is he the only one we have crossed the ocean to see?" one fellow mumbled.

"He is the one," said the voice in the box. "He is Doc Savage!"

TWO blocks distant, a limousine cruised to a street intersection and turned left. The car was long, expensive, somber in color. There was nothing flashy about it. The windows were up.

The traffic cop on the corner glanced at the license tags. He snapped erect. In New York, low license numerals designate the cars of the influential – this one was a single figure. The officer squinted to see who was in the machine. He smiled widely and executed a brisk salute.

Several pedestrians who chanced to gaze at the car fell to staring, jaws slack. Each of them recognized instantly the limousine occupant.

At the next corner, a fat man stepped back to the curb to let the big machine pass. He got a good look at the man behind the wheel. He nearly dropped a bundle he was carrying.

"For the love of mud!" he breathed

An enterprising newsboy, witnessing the incident, rushed up and offered the portly man a newspaper.

"Wanta read about that guy mister?" he asked eagerly. "Buy an Evening Comet! It's got a feature story about him! Tells how he just cleaned up a gang that was terrorizing a manufacturing town!"

"Who is he?"

The newscarrrier looked disgusted. "Mister, I thought everybody knowed that man! Why, he went into this manufacturing town of Prosper City with his five helpers, and mopped up an outfit that had murdered no tellin' how many people! He does them kind of things regular! Helpin' people who need it, and punishin' wrongdoers is his profession!"

The stout man blinked. "Was that Doc Savage?"

"You said it!"

The limousine rolled on two blocks, and turned into the gloomy side street which led past the giant spire of gleaming metal and gray stone which housed Doc Savage's quarters. It neared the recess where the brown men lurked.

"Ta'al!" grunted one of the swarthy quartet. "Come along!" The four leaped into the street, spread fan fashion, and rushed. They flourished their long-barreled automatics.

"Wallah!" hissed one. "Truly, this man is of amazing appearance!"

A faint glow from the dash was sufficient to disclose the man at the limousine wheel – the only occupant of the car. The features of this individual were striking – so remarkable that it was very apparent why, a few seconds ago, the fat man had been awed by his single glimpse.

The figure behind the wheel was that of a giant sculptured from solid bronze. In the metallic man's neck, in the great hands on the wheel, huge sinews stood out in repose like bundled cables.

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The bronze of the hair was a shade darker than the bronze of the skin. The hair lay straight and smooth, like a metallic skullcap. The unusually high forehead, the lean, corded cheeks, the muscular mouth, advertised a rare power of character.

Most striking were the eyes – like pools of flake gold glistening in the vague light. Their gaze seemed to have a hypnotic quality, an intensity almost weird.

"Get your hands up!" gritted one of the Arabs in fair English,

DOC SAVAGE studied the four. His bronze features did not change expression; the quartet might have been putting on some kind of a show, for all the excitement he showed. His hands remained on the wheel.

The body of the limousine was armorplate steel, although the fact was not evident to the casual glance. The windows were an inch thick, of the latest bullet–proof glass; it would take a steel slug from a tank rifle to get through them.

He spoke in a low voice, not moving his lips. His words were distinct.

"Four men!" he said. "They look like Arabs. They popped out of a doorway with pistols."

The dark gunman quartet saw no lip movement indicating speech. They heard no words. The limousine was soundproofed against normal noises.

"Anta sami!" rapped the spokesman. "Do you hear? Get your hands up!"

Doc continued, still without moving his lips. "These fellows are strangers. Think I'll play along, and see what's on their minds. You men can cover us, if you crave a little action."

Once more the Arabs failed to realize words had been spoken. Had they heard, they would have been puzzled at the brief descriptive speech. It was unlikely that they would have understood its purpose.

Reaching over slowly, Doc unlocked the door. He started to get out.

"La!" grunted one of the men. "No! Stay where you are!" The fellow eased into the front seat, gun alert. The other three clambered in the back.

They did not notice the bullet–proof glass or the armor plate, and did not guess the bronze man's surrender was deliberate. They were jubilant.

"Talk freely, and you will not be harmed!" one advised.

"Shu biddak?" Doc asked in excellent Arabic. "What do you want?"

The four looked somewhat surprised.

"So you speak our tongue!" one muttered.

"Slightly," Doc admitted. He used the dialect peculiar to the part of Arabia from which these men hailed – the southern coast. He neglected to add that he had a fluent command of dialects from almost all other sectors of their native land.

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This business about the language was the first contact the four had with the bronze man's remarkable knowledge. This giant, metallic man was something of a mental marvel. The fact that he could converse fluently in the tongue of nearly any race on the globe, was only one of his fantastic accomplishments.

"You have a submarine," said one of the Arabs. "A submarine with which you once went under the ice of the north pole!"

"That is right," Doc admitted in Arabic.

The brown man reached under his coat tail, squirmed, and drew his flat sword. He indicated the poison on the tip.

"We want that submarine!" he declared. He put the sword point against Doc's chest. The steel slit a few threads of the bronze man's coat fabric. "You will take us to it!"

Chapter II. THE WHITE-HAIRED GIRL

DOC studied the sword. The edge was thin, hollow ground like a razor. Back of the cutting edge were grooves resembling the corrugations in a file. These held the poison.

"What do you want with the submarine?" he asked.

"That, bronze man, is our affair!"

Doc had expected some such answer. "If I refuse to take you to it, what then?"

The man tapped the sword. "This! You will die suddenly!"

"That does not leave me much choice," Doc said dryly. "Shall I drive you to the boathouse? It is not far."

"We will walk, sajiid! We do not know the city, and you might drive us to a station of the police."

They got out of the limousine. One man slapped hands over Doc's clothing, fingering pocket contents through the cloth. When he found nothing large enough to be a weapon, he seemed satisfied.

"Imshi!" he grunted. "Go on!"

They strode westward toward the Hudson River water front, setting a leisurely pace which would not attract attention.

In the gloomy street where the holdup had occurred, there was at no time a sign of the man who had given the Arabs their orders – the chap hidden in the box. He had kept under cover.

They walked through a section of garment shops, the streets almost deserted. The way sloped downward. The asphalt had been rutted by wheels of heavy trucks, and rain residue lay like pools of molten lead in the chugholes.

Body smells of the four Arabs reeked faintly. They were in need of a bath. Here, where the way was darker, the shabby streets empty of life, they kept their long-barreled pistols in hand.

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"Wallah!" hissed one of the four. "Is it much farther?"

"Not much." Doc pointed. "There!" A row of covered piers was before them. The buildings might have been gigantic match boxes, with slightly arched tops. Here and there was a wharf which was not covered.

Down the wide water-front street, a sign on the front of a pier warehouse read:

HIDALGO TRADING CO.

Perhaps two hundred feet nearer was an uncovered pier crowded with crates, moving cranes, and tool sheds.

Doc made directly for this pier. They entered the litter of boxes and machinery, worked outward through an alley between high stacks of oil drums. The floor planks were very greasy, oil-soaked.

It was very dark. The men found it impossible to see each other. Two guns were kept pressed to Doc's back.

Quickening his pace slightly, Doc drew away from the muzzles.

"Imshi 'ala mah!" gritted a man. "Go more slowly!"

An instant later, the guns again shoved against cloth.

"Go on!" grunted an Arab, when there was no movement. No answer.

The man cursed, dug a match out, and whipped it alight on his trousers.

"Wallah!" he wailed.

Instead of Doc's back, their guns were gouging a burlap covered bale of rope.

THE four brown men cackled Arabic profanity in chorus. "Son of a dumb camel!" snarled one who had brought up the rear. "You let him trick you! He slipped away in the darkness! There is no submarine here—e—e—o—oww!"

His words turned into the squawl of a cat with its tail under a chair rocker.

There had been no perceptible sound, but bronze hands had suddenly trapped the speaker's elbows from behind. The Arab's yell rose to a piping bleat of agony; he felt as if he had lost his arms at the elbows. Pain caused his hands to splay open. His gun bounced across the oil-saturated wharf planks.

He felt a terrific wrench at his back. Cloth tore; leather straps snapped. The poisoned sword came away from his spine, sheath and all.

The man was lifted, hurled forward. He was not flung head first, but sidewise. He struck two of his companions. All three piled against the baled rope.

The swarthy fellow with the match jumped aside. The movement extinguished his match. He flourished his pistol, but did not shoot. He was not too excited to realize the shot sound would draw the police. Wildly, he clutched for his sword.

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Great steel jaws seemed to clamp his ankles. He was lifted as lightly as if he had been a rabbit. He swung head downward. His whole body was carried up and down with a tamping motion, causing his head to bang the solid planks. He became limp as a punctured inner tube.

The trio piled against the rope bale untangled themselves and sought to arise. Then the blackness above them seemed to ram huge bronze fists. Metallic fingers touched various parts of their persons, seeking nerve centers, leaving numb paralysis and excruciating hurt.

"Mercy of Allah!" a man croaked. "He is not human!" The three found themselves without pistols. With rippings and snappings, the swords were torn from place. The weapons sailed away to drop into the near-by river.

One sought to flee, plunging blindly through the stacked boxes and machinery. He covered a score of yards, and began to entertain visions of safety. Then he was snatched up. A great arm banded his chest, tightened.

Air went out of the Arab's lungs with a sound as of water pouring from an upset bucket. His ribs ground together.

"O Allah, I am dying!" he gurgled.

He was mistaken. His ribs did not break, although one or two cracked. Doc Savage, possessing a profound knowledge of human anatomy, knew about how much pressure they would stand.

Doc carried his victim back to the other three. The one who had been dropped on his head was flipping his hands nervelessly with returning consciousness. The remaining two were too dazed for flight.

Roughly, Doc slammed them against the mound of rope bales. Then he waited for them to recover.

At first, the quartet showed more fight. Doc drove out bronze hands, open, and cuffed them back. The men shrank against the rope, shivering. They squirmed on the greasy boards.

They peered at the metallic giant as if he were some incredible Titan from another existence. They numbered four, and they were fighting men. Yet their best efforts had seemed puny, childlike. He was something new in their experience, this big man of bronze.

Doc produced a tiny flashlight. He gave the lens a twist, causing the beam to widen to a fat funnel, and placed it on the wharf boards. The glow sprayed over the four prisoners, and back-splashed on Doc himself.

The Arabs continued to stare at Doc. One by one, their gaze rested upon his strange golden eyes – stayed there.

"Wallah!" one repeated his earlier declaration. "He is not human!"

Doc did not change expression. His lips did not move. He was waiting, knowing that the more the men thought of the recent fight, the more frightened they would become.

Abruptly, the surrounding night seemed to give birth to an eerie sound. The note was trilling, mellow, low, like the song of some strange jungle bird, or the noise of wind filtering through a naked, cold jungle forest. It was melodious, but rose and fell without tune. It was not a whistle, and neither did it seem a product of vocal cords.

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The swarthy men squirmed and rolled their glances over the adjacent darkness. It seemed to come from everywhere, that sound. They looked at Doc, at his motionless lips, at the sinews that were like alloy steel bars on his neck.

Probably not one of the four realized Doc was making the weird note. They had no way of knowing that the sound was part of this mighty bronze man – a small, unconscious thing which he did in moments of utter concentration. It came when Doc was thinking, or when danger threatened; sometimes it precurred a plan of sudden action. Just now, it meant merely that the bronze man was pondering what possible motive the Arabs could have for wanting the under-the-polar-ice submarine.

Noting the fright which his tiny, unconscious trilling sound had caused, Doc decided to make his questioning as ghostly and fantastic as possible. These men, superstitious by nature, would be unusually susceptible to that sort of thing.

A hollow, unearthly voice, apparently coming from the darkness overhead, demanded: "Why do you seek the submarine?"

The four brown fellows gave tremendous starts. They shrank back; their eyes popped. It was evident they had never before encountered ventriloquism – at least, never the voice-throwing art handled with the uncanny facility which Doc possessed.

They did not answer the question.

"What use do you intend to make of the underseas boat?" the voice repeated.

The swarthy quartet still made no reply. But their fear grew. Watching them closely, Doc became quite certain he could scare them into talking freely, given a little time. Like most barbaric people, they were easily terrified by something they did not understand.

The questioning, however, came to a sudden end.

There was a singular e-e-eek! of a noise. A vicious, brief combination of squeak and whistle. The ripping sound of it was almost against Doc's left ear.

A round hole – it might have been made by a bullet – opened in the rope bale before his eyes.

The bronze man whipped backward out of the flash glow. The best of gun silencers permitted some noise, he knew. There had been no such sound behind him. Yet the missile which had embedded in the rope had come with the velocity of a rifle slug.

His strange golden eyes roved alertly. He was puzzled. The mysterious weapon which had hurled that missile was something new in his experience.

E-E-EEK! The short, ugly bleat was well to the right this time. It was the sound of some sort of slug passing through the air. The thing glanced off a lifling crane with a loud clang, and moaned away in the night, not unlike a ricocheting bullet.

"Wallah!" gulped an Arab. They scrambled to their feet. Elation was on their faces.

Doc Savage threw his voice at a hulking crate some yards away, ordering: "Thda! Be quiet!"

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The dark-skinned quartet sank back to crouching positions. Simultaneously, another of the bizarre projectiles squeaked past, and sank deep into the big crate. It had been directed at Doc's voice.

Gliding backward, Doc encountered more neatly stacked oil drums. He climbed silently atop them. There was a feline stealth and quiet about his movements. He even put his weight only on the rims of the barrels, lest the metal heads boom, drum fashion, under his great weight.

He worked almost to the other side of the wharf, then veered shoreward. Over ropes, big-linked chain, shipping crates, machinery, he made almost no sound. A bystander a few feet away would have been ignorant of his passage.

Not having heard the bronze giant depart, the four Arabs crouched immobile, afraid to flee.

Near the shore end of the wharf, Doc paused briefly to listen. His hearing was in keeping with his other remarkable faculties—his aural organs had been developed from childhood by a system of intensive exercise, part of a two-hour routine which he took daily.

Keen as his hearing was, he had detected no sound to show from whence the mystery missiles had come. But they must have emanated from this vicinity.

He caught movement. The scrape of cloth against rusty iron. He whipped silently for the sound, gliding over the greasy wood.

Out at the river end of the wharf, there were grunts, curses, and the rattle of running feet. The four Arabs had gotten up nerve enough to take flight.

At that noise, the skulker in front of Doc stirred about, then headed shoreward. The grease squished softly under feet.

Doc lunged. His metallic hands, sensitive for all of their indurate strength, encountered cloth. They gathered in great fistfuls of the fabric and the yielding flesh beneath.

There was a gasp, a low bleat. A fist pecked twice at Doc's face. The tensile cushions of his cheek muscles absorbed the blows. Releasing his grip and clutching again with incredible speed, he captured his victim's hands. They were weaponless.

There was a telltale slenderness about the hands.

Doc moved to the right, where the beam of a distant street light glanced through the piled merchandise. Remaining in the shadows himself, he shoved his captive out into the dingy glow.

HE had rather expected what he saw. But the amazing beauty and exotic appearance of the girl all but caused him to loosen his grip. The slenderness of her hands had betrayed her sex.

She had white hair – the whitest hair Doc had ever seen upon a human being. It was unshorn, slightly wavy, a dazzling wealth of it like loose snow.

She came almost to Doc's shoulder, which made her very tall for a woman. Her features were regular, magnificent in their cameo perfection. There was color in her exquisite lips, in her entrancing eyes; but other than that, her face was pale. It was a paleness of terror.

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Her garb was unique, as astounding as her strange white hair and gorgeous beauty. She wore full, ankle-length pantaloons, after the Moslem fashion. Her blouse was of silk. Strange little slippers, silk-brocaded, shod her small feet.

Doc glanced at her wrists. They were ringed with narrow purple marks. She had, he decided, been tied recently with ropes.

She rocked her head back, and screamed. Her voice held a tearing fear.

Her words – three of them repeated over and over – were of a tongue Doc had never before heard. He failed to understand them, yet they had a vague familiarity.

He tried Arabic on her. "T'al, ta'al, la takun 'khauf! Come, come, don't be frightened!"

She answered him with another yowl – the same three strange words.

He mulled the words over, trying to place them in his memory, that he might address her in her own dialect.

Suddenly, he flung her away. There had come a rush of feet in the murk to one side. He sought to whirl, got half around. Then the equivalent of two lions seemed to hit him.

For one of the few times in his life, Doc was knocked down. The men who sprang upon him had the strength of monsters. His assailants were not the Arabs – all four of those could hardly have matched one of the pair who now held him. They swung fists which landed with the awful force of iron mauls.

The white-haired girl ran away in the night.

Faintly, over the sounds of his own fight, Doc could hear the four Arabs. They, too, were fleeing the vicinity of the pier.

Doc found the neck of one of his foes, reasoned there must be a jaw immediately above it, and let fly a fist. The report as it landed was slightly less loud than a shot. The wharf planks whined as an enormous form fell down upon them.

The second attacker stumbled over his toppled companion. Apparently he stooped and felt of the prone, senseless hulk.

"Holy cow!" The fellow's voice had the booming quality of a big animal roaring in a cave. "Did this guy kayo you, Monk?"

No answer from the fallen one.

"Pinch him and see if he's playing possum," Doc suggested dryly.

Chapter III. THE ARAB PRINCE

FOR fifteen or twenty seconds there was pin-drop silence. Sounds of the flight of the white-haired girl and the four Arabs had died away entirely.

"Holy cow!" gulped Doc's assailant. "Did we pull a boner!"

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"Who'd you think I was?" Doc queried.

"How was we to know? We heard the girl beller, and could tell somebody was holdin' her, but couldn't see who it was. We figured we'd find out. You spoke Arabic. That fooled us."

"You had seen the girl before?"

"Sure! We saw her as soon as we hit the street after hearin' you say four birds had stopped you. Say, how'd you manage to talk into the radio transmitter in the car without them guys gettin' wise?"

"The windows of the limousine were closed."

Doc's four late captors would have been astounded at this information. They were not aware of Doc's brief description of their first appearance, since he had spoken without moving his lips. Nor did they dream there was a short-wave transmitter in the big machine, sending on a meter length to which a receiver in Doc's skyscraper office was attuned.

"You trailed the girl here?" Doc asked.

"Yeah. She was followin' somebody – one man. We didn't get a good look at him. It was too dark. But I guess he was taggin' you and your four playmates."

"We seem to have had quite a convention. Light a match and let's see if we can wake Monk up."

The man with the roaring voice thumbed a match alight. The fitful glow revealed a remarkable personage. The fellow was a giant, yet he had fists so huge in proportion that the rest of him seemed undersized in comparison. Each was comprised of but slightly less than a gallon of rust-colored, case-hardened knuckles.

His face was long, puritanical, his mouth thin and grim. His habitual expression was that of a man who found very little in the world to approve of.

This was "Renny." Colonel John Renwick, the engineering profession knew him – a man among the three or four living greatest in that profession. He had made a goodly fortune at his trade. His sole diversion was a disquieting habit of knocking panels out of doors with his huge fists.

Renny was one of a group of five men who had associated themselves with Doc Savage in the strange work for which he had been trained from the cradle. That work was to go to the ends of the world, punishing wrongdoers, helping those in need of help.

A desire for excitement and adventure, and a profound admiration for the astounding bronze man who was their chief, held the little group together. Some men crave money, others works of art, and some go in for society—these five specialized in trouble. There was plenty of that around Doc; his path was always that of peril, of danger and thrilling adventure.

A second member of the group reposed on the pier boards, snoring softly in unconsciousness.

Hair, gristle, arms longer than his legs, a face that was incredibly homely – that was "Monk." He weighed all of two hundred and sixty pounds, and barely missed being as wide as he was tall.

If appearance was a guide, there was room for possibly a spoonful of brains back of a pair of eyebrows which were like two shaggy mice. Actually, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair – he was announced thus

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at scientific gatherings, if at no other time – was known in informed circles as a chemist whose accomplishments were almost magic.

"Sleeping beauty!" Renny snorted. "Isn't he a picture!"

THEY revived Monk by the simple process of grasping his heels, dangling him over the wharf edge and dunking him in the chilly river. He came up groaning, holding his jaw with both furry hands.

Wryly, he squinted at Doc.

"You don't need to tell me!" he groaned. "It was you we jumped! We made a mistake!" His voice was mild, childlike.

"Got flashlights?" Doc demanded.

"Sure." Renny produced one. It was small, powerful. Current was not supplied by a battery, but by a tiny generator actuated by a spring motor which was wound by twisting the rear cap of the flash.

Dizzily, Monk dug out an identical light. "When my next time comes to jump somebody in the dark, I'm gonna have a look at 'im first!" he muttered, pinching gingerly at his jaw.

"We'll spread out," Doc directed. "Search this pier!"

Renny rumbled: "But they all ran off!"

"The girl and the four Arabs did," Doc told him. "There was another fellow around here. Maybe more than one! Let's have a look."

They began at the shoreward end of the wharf, and worked outward.

"If you hear a shrill squeak, duck!" Doc warned.

"Say – we heard noises like that out at the end of the pier a little before we jumped you!" Monk grunted. "What was it?"

"Some kind of missiles which were fired at me."

"But we didn't hear shots!" Renny boomed. "No coughing of a silenced rifle, either!"

"I know."

"Then what fired the darn things? It couldn't have been an air rifle, because they make a noise."

"A silenced air rifle!" Monk suggested in his small voice.

"You hairy dope!" Renny rumbled. "You can't silence an air rifle until not a blame sound can be heard!"

Doc put in: "When you birds finish your argument, we'll look around!"

Renny popped his enormous fists together; the resulting sound was like two concrete blocks colliding. "O. K.! Let's go!"

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They looked behind every bale, under the covers over each piece of machinery, and tried the tops of all boxes to see that they were nailed solidly.

"Well, we found what the little boy shot at," Monk, grinning, said when the search was over. "Where'd he go, d'you reckon?"

"Whoever it was must have skipped out at the same time as the white-haired girl and the four Arabs," Doc concluded.

"There wasn't a sign of an empty rifle cartridge lying around," Monk added, his small voice somewhat ludicrous for such a giant.

"I think we'll find those things were not propelled by explosive powder," Doc advised.

Renny rattled his hard knuckles together. "Say, I been thinkin'! I told you the girl was followin' somebody here when we trailed her! We only got a couple of glimpses of the fellow ahead of her, and neither of them were clear. But I think he was carryin' somethin' about like a big fiddle case."

"I'm pretty certain he was!" Monk echoed.

"Then it is a safe bet that he launched those projectiles!" Doc decided.

Searching, Doc speedily located the rope bale against which he had crowded the four Arabs, preparatory to questioning them. He plucked at the burlap covering, his powerful fingers tearing it off easily.

The rope was two-inch stuff, very stiff. He worked the coils apart without great difficulty. Near the opposite side of the bale, he unearthed the missile which had made the squeaky whistle.

Monk and Renny peered at it.

"Holy cow!" exploded Renny. "First bullet I ever saw like that!"

The slug resembled nothing so much as an elongated aerial bomb, half an inch thick by four inches long. It even had the metal guiding vanes on the tapering tail. It was solid steel.

MONK picked up the strange projectile, sniffed of it, and shook his head. "No powder smell on it!"

Doc nodded. He had already made certain of that fact.

"Got any idea how it was launched?" Monk queried.

"Nothing definite enough to mention," Doc told him.

Monk and Renny swapped glances in the flashlight glow. To an outsider, Doc's reply might have conveyed the impression that he was utterly puzzled. To Monk and Renny, who knew this amazing bronze man and his remarkable ways as well as any did, the answer meant that Doc had a very good idea how the missile had been launched. Had he been baffled he would have said so.

They did not press for information, knowing it would be useless. Doc always kept theories to himself until they were proven facts.

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Renny changed the subject. "Any idea why they wanted the submarine?"

"None whatever," Doc assured him. "But it's pretty evident they want it badly."

"Pretty!" Monk grinned. "Say, that kinda describes that white-haired girl, too! What I mean, she knocked a man's eyes out! A looker, huh?"

"She was dressed like she'd just jumped out of some Turk's harem!" Renny said sourly.

"Yah – you would suggest that she's married!" Monk snorted.

Renny eyed Doc solemnly. "Did you get enough of a look at her garments to tell whether or not they were theatrical stuff?"

"They were genuine," Doc assured him. "Some of the cloth had a weave peculiar to the southern coastal tribes of Arabia. She was no actress."

"That's dang queer!" Monk uttered. "Even Arabians don't dress like that when they come to this country!"

A brief flurry of rain washed in from the river. The men dashed along the wharf, reached the street, and found a prowling taxi. The hack carried them to the murky street beside the tower of a skyscraper which held Doc's office.

Glistening in the rain. Doc's limousine stood where it had been deserted at the curb. Entering, Doc wheeled it toward the big metal doors. A special lift lowered the machine to the basement garage which held other cars belonging to the bronze man. These were roadsters, coupes, phaetons, and an assortment of trucks; all were powerful vehicles.

An elevator carried them to the eighty-sixth floor.

"We left Ham in the office." Monk grunted.

Halfway down the corridor, a door bore a name in small, unobtrusive letters.

CLARK SAVAGE JR.

They opened it and walked in. A man sat in a chair across the richly fitted office. He was not facing them, and only the top of his natty slouch hat was visible.

"Ham must be asleep on the job, the shyster!" Monk chuckled.

The man in the chair stood erect.

"Huh!" Monk gulped, staring. "You're not Ham!"

THE fellow was a sleek, expensively clad Arab. He had plenty of height, a good breadth of shoulder, and rosy muscles rolled under a skin that was smooth as brown silk.

The man's right eye moved as he appraised Doc and his two companions – but his left eye remained strangely fixed. He showed most of his teeth in a great smile. The teeth were artificial, of platinum or white gold. In the center of each was set a clear diamond of fair size.

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The combination of rigid left eye and bejeweled teeth was bizarre. The man resembled a carnival freak.

"I am Mohallet," he said in excellent English.

Monk blinked small eyes which were like sparks in little pits of gristle. "Where's Ham?"

The Arab seemed puzzled. "If you mean the gentleman who introduced himself as Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, he stepped into the next room a moment ago."

"That's him!" Monk swung across the office to a door. It let him into a vast room in which almost every foot of floor space was occupied by bookcases. This was Doc Savage's library. It held one of the most complete collections of scientific volumes in existence.

Beyond lay another room, even larger. Stands, cases, and work tables laden with scientific apparatus stood everywhere. The mechanism was of the most modern type; indeed, much of it was so advanced as to be beyond the comprehension of the world's leading scientists.

This library and laboratory were unique. Men of science had come from abroad to inspect them, to study there. Usually they went away proclaiming them the most perfect of their kind to be found.

There was in existence a greater library and laboratory, however. None knew of it, or its whereabouts. This establishment was also the property of Doc Savage. It was located at a remote spot in the polar regions, at the place Doc called his "Fortress of Solitude."

To his Fortress of Solitude, the strange bronze man vanished at intervals. At such times, none knew whence he had gone, or how to find him – not even his five aids. He spent these periods – weeks and sometimes months – in intensive, uninterrupted study, preparing for greater tasks ahead.

These sojourns were responsible for the almost superhuman mental development of the bronze man. They had given him a knowledge which seemed to a layman nearly unlimited.

A slender, waspish man was bending over a workbench in the laboratory. He was dressed in the height of fashion. His garb was sartorial perfection.

He was carefully stropping the long, thornlike blade of a sword cane across a hone.

"Who's your friend out here, Ham?" Monk demanded.

BEFORE replying, "Ham" gave his blade a few additional whets, then sheathed it. The thing became an innocent black walking stick. He flourished it a time or two, purposefully delaying to aggravate Monk.

Ham, one of Doc Savage's five aids, was probably the most astute lawyer Harvard had ever turned out. He was never seen to go anywhere without his sword cane.

He and Monk were rarely together without being in a good-natured quarrel. This state of affairs dated back to the Great War, to an incident which had given Ham his nickname. As a joke, Ham had taught Monk several French words, which were highly insulting, telling him they were the proper things with which to flatter a Frenchman. Monk had used them on a French general, and had landed in the guardhouse.

A few days after Monk's release, the dapper Ham had been hailed up on a charge of stealing hams. Somebody had planted the evidence. Ham had never been able to prove Monk had framed him. The incident still irked

him.

Monk bloated indignantly as Ham delayed his answer.

"Some day I'm gonna muss up that pretty face of yours!" he promised, his small voice angry.

Ham scowled at Monk's hairy, apish frame. He waved his sword cane again. "And one of these days I'm gonna give you a shave – right down to the bone!"

Monk grinned. "Who is that Arab with the jewelry in his mouth?"

"He said he was a Mister Mohallet." Ham advised. "He came up here a few minutes ago, looking for Doc."

The two swapped glares, then went back to the richly equipped outer office.

Mohallet was showing his diamond-set teeth in a smile, and addressing Doc. "You are Doc Savage?"

Doc nodded, his gaze fixed on Mohallet's rigid left eye. The orb was artificial – glass. That was why it did not move.

"Some months ago, newspapers all over the world carried a story about an expedition you made under the polar ice by submarine," Mohallet continued. "Do you still have that submarine, if I may ask?"

"It was the Helldiver," Doc said. "We still have it."

Mohallet flashed his jeweled teeth. "I am an agent sent from Arabia by Prince Abdul Rajab. My mission is to charter the submarine."

Chapter IV. THE SNATCH

DOC took the Arab's words without change of expression. That did not mean he was uninterested. So schooled were the bronze man's nerves that he possessed the unusual ability to show emotion only when he wished.

Monk and Ham forgot to glare at each other. Renny's long face became even more sober.

"Who is Prince Abdul Rajab?" Doc asked quietly.

"The ruler of a rich tribe in southern Arabia," Mohallet explained. "He is quite wealthy. And he has authorized me to pay any reasonable sum for the rental of the submarine."

"Why does he want the craft?"

Mohallet drooped his shoulders apologetically. "I greatly regret that I cannot tell you. I do not myself know."

"Then you're wasting your time," Doc said shortly.

Mohallet sprang erect, showing his jeweled teeth in a profuse smile.

"The Prince Abdul Rajab is something of an explorer," he declared hastily. "It is certain that he wants the

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submarine for some expedition, probably under the ice at one of the poles. Since you wish to know the use he intends to make of the underseas boat before you will rent it, I will cable him for the information. I hope that will be satisfactory?"

"It might help."

Mohallet waited for Doc to say more, was disappointed, then queried: "You will charter the vessel?"

Doc ignored the question. "Who is the white-haired girl?"

Mohallet blinked his right eye. His left orb, the glass one, had a disconcerting habit of remaining always unlidged, staring. He replied nothing.

"Who were the four Arabs with poisoned swords who seized me in an effort to learn the whereabouts of the sub?" Doc continued.

Mohallet's jaw sagged.

"And who was the man who tried to kill me with a mysterious silent weapon which fired torpedo-shaped projectiles of steel?" Doc went on.

The diamonds in Mohallet's teeth winked as he ran his tongue over them. "I do not understand!"

"You know nothing of these things?"

"Believe me, I do not! Ahadha sahih? Is it true? Has some one from my country been seeking the submarine?"

"They have. When you cable your Prince Abdul Rajab, you might ask him about that."

"Wa-asafah, akhkh!" Mohallet was lapsing into Arabic in his perturbation. "Alas! I – cannot understand this! I hope these incidents have not persuaded you to refuse to charter the Helldiver?"

"Not if the craft is to be used for a good purpose."

"I am sure you will approve of the use to which it is to be put! I shall cable my master, Prince Abdul Rajab."

"Immediately!"

Mohallet hesitated. He passed a finger tip over his fantastic teeth. "Before we enter negotiations, I should like for you to show me over the submarine. I wish to make sure that it is in working condition. Then I shall cable my chief."

Doc's bronze features remained immobile. "I'll show you the Helldiver. Come on!"

They went out into the corridor, entered an elevator. Doc's three aids, after receiving a nod from their giant chief, followed.

Down in the ornate, mirrored lobby, Doc turned back abruptly.

"I left my keys upstairs," he explained. "I'll go back for them."

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A BULKY safe stood in eve corner of the eighty–sixth floor office. Doc opened it and extracted a case containing scores of flat keys.

He did not leave immediately. Instead, he glided into the laboratory, traveling with great speed. He came back almost at once, carrying a large glass vial filled with a bilious–looking chemical.

He sprinkled the stuff on the rich office rug. His own footprints, Monk's, Renny's, and those of Mohallet, immediately turned a yellowish color.

The footprints of Ham, who had not left the office recently, did not become visible on the rug nap.

Doc whipped to a telephone. He called the number of New York's most famous hotel.

"Connect me with the banquet room, where the American Society of Scientists is holding its meeting," he requested. Then, when he had his circuit: "Major Thomas J. Roberts and William Harper Littlejohn, please!"

"I am sorry," replied an uninterested voice. "I cannot call those two gentlemen. They are the most important speakers of the evening."

"This is Doc Savage."

"Huh!" gulped the voice, no longer casual. "Just a moment! I'll call them!"

Possibly a minute later a new voice said briskly: "This is Long Tom Roberts. Johnny's right here by me."

"We seem to be in trouble again," Doc told "Long Tom."

"Great! Me and Johnny will ditch this banquet pronto! We weren't doing anything up here but shooting off our mouths!"

There was little about Long Tom's speech to show that he was probably America's greatest electrical wizard. The man with him – "Johnny" – was an archaeologist and geologist whose works on these subjects were already becoming classics. They were the remaining members of Doc's little group of five aids.

"Come right down here, then," Doc suggested. "Orders will be in the usual place."

"O. K."

The conversation terminated, Long Tom and Johnny going back to explain briefly to the august gathering of scientists that important business necessitated their immediate departure. Any call from Doc meant excitement and adventure. And that was the stuff for which they lived.

Doc extinguished the office lights. Then he stepped to the window. From a pocket, he brought a tiny object – a crayon of peculiar substance.

With the crayon, he wrote rapidly on the windowpane.

He finished, stepped back, and turned the light on briefly. There was nothing visible upon the glass to show he had written. Nor would examination with a microscope of moderate power have revealed anything.

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Long Tom and Johnny, upon their arrival, would turn a small lantern projecting ultraviolet light upon the window, for orders were commonly left there by Doc. Under the ultraviolet rays, the writing would fluoresce, or glow, in the fashion of vaseline and other materials when treated thus. The letters would spring out with a dazzling electric blue.

It was Doc's custom to communicate directions to his aids in this secret fashion. His life work of punishing wrongdoers and aiding the oppressed had made all criminals his enemies. Interception of his slightest command might on occasion be a matter of life and death.

MOHALLET and Doc's three friends were waiting downstairs when Doc joined them. Ham was adjusting his immaculate clothing in one of the many mirrors, while Monk looked on, disgust on his simian face.

Ham's natty attire was famous; tailors often followed him down the street to see fashionable clothing being worn as it should be.

Mohallet and the other three loaded into a taxicab. Doc rode outside on the running board. This was a thing he habitually did when danger threatened. Little escaped his amazingly sharp eyes.

Mohallet peered often through the cab windows at Doc as they rolled toward the Hudson. He seemed fascinated by the bronze giant.

It was still raining. Doc wore no hat. His bronze hair shed the drizzle, duck-back fashion, and the moisture seemed not to cling to his fine-textured, metallic skin.

Doc glanced backward often as the cab progressed. His presence on the running board had a pronounced effect on such traffic policemen as they passed. The officers fell over themselves to open a lane through streams of cars.

There were few policemen in the city who did not know this mighty bronze man by sight. The lowliest rookie knew there was a mandatory order out that Doc Savage should receive every co-operation from the police department.

Each of Doc's five aids held high honorary commissions on the force.

The taxi passed the pier where Doc had taken the four Arabs, went on, and halted before the vast warehouse on the front of which a sign read:

HIDALGO TRADING CO.

The Hidalgo Trading Co., had any one cared to investigate, was Doc Savage himself. It did no business, and owned only this warehouse.

They dismissed the cab. Doc inserted a key, and admitted them to the huge structure. His touch upon a switch brought lights.

"Ana mut'ajjib!" gasped Mohallet. "I am astonished!" He had reason to be. At the outer end, the concrete floor sloped downward into the river. Cradled upon the floor were numerous planes. They ranged from a gigantic trimotored speed ship to small gyros, which could ascend and descend vertically. All ships were amphibians capable of landing on earth or water.

Doc led the way to the right, opened another door, which gave into a partitioned part of the gigantic building.

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"There it is!" he announced.

THIS section of the structure was a long boathouse, literally a big indoor drydock, in fact. For in the huge concrete trough where the Helldiver lay there was no water.

The craft was slender, cigar-shaped, possibly a hundred yards in length. The hull was without a superstructure, although there was a collapsible shield which could be raised to form a navigating bridge. The bows terminated in a spring-steel ram of a bowsprit larger than a telephone pole. The rudders and propellers were inclosed in steel baskets to protect them from ice cakes, as were the diving fins.

From bow to stern ran massive steel runners, intended to enable the strange craft to skate along under the polar ice floes.

"Come aboard," Doc suggested. "You can soon tell she's in good shape."

They crossed a swaying gangplank and began their inspection.

Months ago, Doc Savage had visited the vicinity of the north pole in the Helldiver. As far as the rest of the world knew, the expedition had been a scientific one, in which hardship had brought death to all aboard the craft, excepting Doc and his five men.

Actually, the jaunt had been a mad, bloody, perilous race for a derelict liner with a fifty-million-dollar treasure aboard. Since that frightful venture the Helldiver had lain here – no one had shown a desire for such a craft.

Mohallet did not carry his scrutiny far.

"I can see she is in excellent condition!" he declared. "Let us return and conduct our negotiations."

They left the strange submarine, crossed the big room which held the plane, and stepped out into the leaking night.

"Keep close together!" Doc directed. "We'll find a taxi." Crossing the wide street which paralleled the water front, they sought the shelter of high buildings along a narrow thoroughfare.

Feet clattered behind them. Men appeared, closing in from the rear. A full dozen of them!

Doc splashed the beam of a flashlight. It revealed swarthy evil faces. The visages of the four who had attacked the bronze man earlier in the night were among them. All held weapons.

"Wallah!" Mohallet gulped. "What does this mean?"

E–e–eek! The vicious, whistling squeak of a noise was close overhead. A bomb-shaped steel projectile dug a shower of fragments off a brick wall.

"It means we'd better hunt cover!" Doc suggested dryly. "Up the street!"

"The devils!" hissed Mohallet. "If I had a gun –"

"Up the street!" Doc repeated, and gave him a shove that propelled him many feet.

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Doc's three men followed the Arab. For a moment, they lost track of their bronze chief in the darkness. Then wood splintered ahead. Doc had preceded them, with the tremendous speed of which he was capable, and had forced a door.

"C'mon!" Monk puffed.

An instant later, Doc's low voice guided them to the doorway through which he had broken. Tom remains of the panel crunched underfoot as they piled through.

"There's a stairway!" Doc rapped. "Up it, and hold 'em back at the top! Where's Mohallet?"

A loud wail from the street answered that question. Blows followed, curses, grunts.

"He must've been a poor runner!" Renny boomed. "They've got him!"

Mohallet's voice screeched from the street: "They have seized me! Help!" It ended suddenly.

RENNY and the others started back outdoors. Nothing appealed to them more than a fight. It made no difference that there were a dozen foes outside, with poisoned swords and some very mysterious silent weapon which launched terrific bolts of steel.

Doc blocked them. "Upstairs, men!"

They went up, obeying not because they feared Doc, or had to take his commands, but because they knew his directions were usually the best.

Doc was not with them. They knew that before they were at the top of the creaking flight. He had eased back into the drooling night.

Silent as the sinking raindrops, Doc floated to the right. He intended to circle, cross the street, and launch himself upon the dark horde from the rear.

A man trotted across the pavement to the left. Doc veered for him.

The fellow thumbed on a flashlight. The glare waved like a gigantic plume, then smacked into Doc's face. The flash wielder gasped.

"U'a!" he squawled. "Look out! Here he is!"

Doc whipped forward. The light made such a glare that he could not distinguish the man behind it. But, as the fellow struck with a sword, movement of the flash betrayed the direction of the swing. The light traveled slightly with the sway of the tawny body.

Judging with uncanny facility, Doc knew the blade was traveling in an overhead swipe. He twisted aside. The steel hissed past. Force of the blow carried it down until the metal chopped the pavement. The blade snapped off halfway to the hilt.

Doc grasped the hand holding the flash, twisted. The man shrieked. His light, falling, jarred out lens and bulb on the pave. Doc jerked again; once more, the victim wailed. In his agony, he lost his fragment of a sword.

Approaching feet were almost a roar.

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"Wait!" croaked a hollow voice in Arabic. "Get back! I will handle the bronze devil!"

A grisly e-e-eek! echoed the words. More followed. They came faster and faster, until their noise was an almost continuous scream.

The man Doc had disarmed gave a hideous squawk as one of the steel bolts drove through him. More of the weird projectiles thudded into flesh.

There was no sound from the weapon firing them, but only the eerie squeal of the missiles themselves.

Then silence fell.

"He is dead!" the hollow voice said with certainty. "I swept the entire street, both at the level of a man's chest and close to the pavement! A light, you sons of camels!"

A flash spiked a white rod. It waved, nudging the body of the man Doc had tackled. The unfortunate fellow had been pummeled by the steel bolts until he retained little of the shape of a human.

"The fool!" rumbled the hollow voice callously. "We had to slay him to get the Bronze man. But he had it coming for permitting himself to be overpowered so easily."

The flash beam continued to dart about. Gradually, the truth dawned. Doc Savage, or his body, was not in sight.

"He must have reached cover!" snarled the man with the light. "Into this doorway after the others!"

Swarthy figures piled into the door. They crowded shoulders up the stairs. Then, amid a great screeching and cursing, they came toppling back.

"They have found heavy boxes of goods to hurl!" a man moaned.

There was a short, profane palaver. It ended in the gang gathering up their injured and taking to their heels in a big rush.

Chapter V. THE WHITE-HAIRED GIRL'S CALL

THE fleeing gang were not yet out of the narrow street when Monk came banging down the stairs with ungainly leaps. Renny and Ham were close at his heels.

"Doc!" Monk called anxiously. He used his flashlight.

The luminance danced along the front of a building just in time to disclose Doc's bronze form as he dropped from the deep sill to a rather high window. His spring to that haven had taken him clear of the storm of steel from the silent mystery weapon.

Monk played his light on the body of the slain man. "That ghost gun is a devilish thing, whatever it is!"

Renny and Ham flung in pursuit of their late attackers.

"Better let 'em go!" Doc suggested.

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The two stopped. Renny boomed: "But we might be able to tail 'em to their hide-out!"

"Long Tom will do that!"

"Huh! I thought he was makin' a spiel at a banquet of scientists to-night!"

"I phoned him," Doc explained. "Then I left orders on the office window for him to tag after us, hang around this vicinity, and trail any suspicious brown gentlemen. He was not to take part in any fighting, unless necessary."

"What about Johnny?"

"He was to remain at the office and relay Long Tom's messages to us."

A few blocks away, car motors began roaring loudly. The noise sank away in the distance.

"They must have had cars waiting," Monk said in his small voice. "I hope Long Tom can tail 'em!"

Doc made a brief examination of the slain man's clothing. He found a few half and quarter lira coins, some nickel ten and twenty-paras pieces, but no American money. There was a package of Arabian cigarettes, mutilated by one of the steel projectiles.

He found nothing which would identify the man.

"Did you get a look at the mystery weapon?" Ham queried in a hopeful voice.

"Too dark," Doc told him. "Come on! We'll get to a telephone and wait for some word from Long Tom."

They walked rapidly eastward, keeping close to building fronts to avoid as much of the rain as they could. Four blocks, five, and they found an all-night drug store. Telephone booths stood in the rear like a row of sentinels. Doc entered one and dialed the number of his headquarters.

Johnny answered almost instantly. "No word yet, Doc."

Johnny had a precise, classroom manner about his speech. This came, no doubt, from the interval he had spent as head of the natural science research department of one of the nation's most famous universities.

Doc held the wire.

Renny, leaning against the phone-booth door, tapped his big fists together thoughtfully. He was wondering how the swarthy men who had attacked them in the street had trailed them to the spot. Going to the boathouse, Doc had ridden the taxi running board.

Renny knew it was almost impossible that any one could have followed them without being observed by the bronze man.

He put his bafflement into words. "How'd those brown babies locate us, Doc?"

"Followed us from the office."

"Huh!" Renny's fists gave an extra loud bang. "You saw 'em!"

"Right!"

"Holy cow! How'd you know they wouldn't cut down on us when we came out of the boathouse? They had a swell chance at us there!"

"We kept in a compact group, you'll recall. They couldn't have fired upon us without danger of hitting Mohallet."

"You think they didn't want to harm Mohallet?"

"It's certain they didn't. He is one of them – possibly their chef."

MONK and Ham, trading scowls like two unfriendly tomcats, shouldered up to the booth to hear the conversation.

Wonder rode Renny's puritanical face. "Mohallet was in with the Arab gang!" he gulped. "How'd you figure that?"

"Remember anything about the planking of that pier where we had our first scuffle with the outfit?" Doc countered. The homely Monk answered that. "Sure! It was greasy!"

"Exactly," Doc told them. "On the rug in the office, I sprinkled some chemical which turns yellow when it comes in contact with grease, even in minute quantities. Mohallet's footprints became the same shade of yellow as our own. In other words, he had been walking around on a greasy surface, just as we had."

"Then he was on the pier!" Renny grunted. "I wonder if he was the bird who fired on you with that noiseless weapon?"

"It's possible."

Ham twirled his sword cane slowly. "I see now that you were just playing with those fellows, Doc. What was the idea?"

"I'm very curious to know what they're up to. And we might learn some interesting facts if we could get a line on that white-haired girl."

"Yeah!" agreed the homely Monk, who always had an eye for a pretty girl. "She'd sure be worth talkin' to!"

Doc spoke into the telephone to make sure he was still connected with Johnny. The skyscraper office had a second phone. Long Tom's call would come in over that, to be instantly relayed by Johnny.

"These birds may try to swipe the sub, now that they know where it is!" Renny boomed softly.

"They won't get far. There are burglar alarms all over the boathouse, wired to the office." Doc kept the phone receiver to his ear. "And even if they got to the Helldiver, they couldn't take her to sea. Essential parts of the mechanism are missing. Mohallet was not submarine expert enough to notice that."

"I wonder if Mohallet's story about being the agent of a Prince Abdul Rajab was a lie?" Ham pondered.

"No telling."

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Johnny's precise scholastic voice came abruptly from the phone.

"Long Tom just called," he said rapidly. "He saw enough to prove that bird Mohallet is the leader of the gang."

"Where are they?" Doc demanded.

"Watching your office here."

"What?"

"Long Tom is calling from a corner cigar stand two blocks away. He says the whole crew is sauntering up and down out in front! Apparently they're waiting – for crying out loud!"

The last was a loud gasp of surprise. Silence followed.

"Johnny!" Doc called sharply.

Some seconds later, Johnny gulped: "You'd better blow right up here, Doc! I can't make heads or tails of what she's saying!"

"What who's saying?"

"A white-haired girl who just walked in! By George, she's a peach for looks!"

Echoing Johnny's words came ugly sounds. Men cackled in shrill Arabic. Guns crashed. A feminine voice cried out loudly; it sounded more angry than afraid.

A loud snap, and the uproar came to a sudden end. The phone had gone out of commission.

DOC pitched out of the phone booth, rapping: "The office!" He gained the street. No taxis were in sight. This was a poor district; the dwellers were users of the subway more than cabs. He headed for his office.

His men trailed him. They were in good condition, probably able to hold their own with the average sprinter. But by the time they had crossed the street, Doc had negotiated a goodly portion of the next block. He was faster than his men.

They pushed on, the bronze man's vastly superior speed increasing his lead in amazing fashion.

Doc sighted a taxi at a stand, but ignored it. By the time he could enter the machine and get the driver awake to the urgency of matters, he would save no time.

The hour was not late. Near the center of Manhattan pedestrians with raincoats and umbrellas still were plentiful. Entering that district, Doc took to the center of thoroughfares. His remarkable appearance, the amazing speed with which he traveled, attracted pop-eyed stares.

Twice, gaping drivers let their cars bang into other machines.

There were no swarthy men visible before the skyscraper. A single roving glance of Doc's golden eyes told him that. He was not surprised.

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The sounds he had heard over the phone had been the brown fellows attacking the office.

Doc used the side entrance, through his private garage. From there, a high-speed elevator of special construction carried him upward. The lift was one which operated at a far swifter pace than even the fast express cages; the mechanism was of Doc's designing.

He popped out in the eighty-sixth-floor corridor.

The office door gaped open. It was badly torn about the lock. Burned powder smell soaked the air. A brassy litter of empty automatic cartridges freckled the floor.

There was no sound.

Doc sloped through the door, saw bullet pocks in walls and furniture, and leaped for the library. No one was there. Nor was anybody in the laboratory with its fabulous assortment of scientific apparatus.

He glided back, noting the door between office and library was dotted with bullet marks. The panel was of heavy armorplate steel. The lead had done nothing but batter off paint.

Going out into the corridor, Doc pressed an urgent thumb on one of the elevator call buttons. He waited thirty seconds, a minute. There was no response.

With an ear pressed to the sliding metal doors, he could hear, from the chimneylike elevator shafts extending hundreds of feet downward, excited yells.

Doc ran to his private lift. It sank so swiftly that his feet completely left the floor. For fully sixty floors, he literally fell through space. Then came the slow, wrenching shock of the halt.

This private lift of Doc's operated from an individual battery-generator system in a room adjoining the basement garage. Because of this, it was independent of the power leads which fed the other elevators.

Doc investigated the electric main which supplied the great bank of skyscraper cages. He found the big switch open. He closed it.

He was in the lobby when cages, stalled above, began arriving. Johnny and Long Tom got out of the first.

JOHNNY was a six-foot bag of bones. His coat hung on his bony shoulders as on a crosspiece of wood. He wore spectacles, the left lens of which was of remarkable thickness. Actually, this lens was a powerful magnifier. Johnny had virtually lost the use of his left eye in the Great War, and, needing a magnifier in his profession as archaeologist and geologist, carried it there for convenience.

Long Tom seemed, at first glance, the weakling of this strange group of trouble hunters. His complexion was somewhat pale, unhealthy. His hair and eyes were colorless. He was slender, and looked fragile.

Long Tom's unusually bulbous forehead hinted at his mental caliber. His command of electricity was little short of wizardry.

Johnny held his glasses on as he bounced out of the elevator.

"They got the girl!" he barked. "When we tried to follow, they jerked the power switch and stalled the elevators!"

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Long Tom made angry gestures with his pale hands. "I trailed 'em up and got out at the floor about the office. Tried to jump the gang from the rear! There was too many of 'em!"

Johnny removed his glasses entirely – he had no real necessity for them, since his right eye was perfectly normal.

"The brown whelps made the attack for the sole purpose of grabbing that white-haired girl," he declared.

"Did she have time to talk to you?" Doc questioned.

"A little." Johnny shrugged his lathy shoulders. "But, bless me, Doc – I couldn't understand a word she said!"

Small, thoughtful lights flickered in Doc's golden eyes. Johnny had been unable to understand the white-haired girl. That was unusual. Only two or three living men possessed a greater command of languages, ancient and modern, than Johnny. He could, for instance, read ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics as readily as the average individual peruses a popular novel.

Johnny studied Doc. "It's a bad break that you didn't get to talk to her!"

Johnny was no egoist. He knew very well that Doc Savage's command of languages was greater than his own vast knowledge. In fact, not a little of his own learning had come from his association with this amazing man of bronze.

This same state of affairs applied to Long Tom and the others. Long Tom's command of electricity, great as it was, could not equal Doc's fund of electrical lore. Renny and his engineering, Monk and his chemistry, Ham and his law – the bronze man excelled each in his line.

Came a commotion at the lobby entrance. Renny and Monk, giants both, charged inside. Ham, sword came tucked under an arm, trailed them.

Monk eyed Doc and groaned: "So we're too late, huh?"

"That," Doc told him, "remains to be seen!"

THEY took the high-speed elevator to the eighty-sixth floor. Previously the terrific speed of the cage had no pronounced effect on Doc, due to his almost incredible strength. But his five aids were slammed to their knees by the force of the start.

A wide grin wrinkled Monk's homely face in the lift. Riding this superspeed car was one of his diversions. He never failed to get a kick out of it. When Doc first had the thing installed, Monk had nearly worn it out joyriding.

Ham, fiddling with his sword cane, scowled blackly at Monk. He did that on principle. Ham disliked anything which entertained Monk.

Johnny polished the magnifying lens in his spectacles as they entered the office.

"That girl – the language she spoke!" he grumbled. "It puzzles me. From her manner as she ran into the office, I think she had come to tell us something. But I couldn't make heads nor tails of it!"

"Say, was she really good-lookin'?" Monk asked hopefully. "The only squint I got at her was in the dark."

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"She was exquisite!" Johnny declared fervently.

A blissful smile wreathed Monk's pleasantly ugly face. He squinted at the dapper Ham. "It's too bad you got a wife and thirteen children, you overdressed shyster!"

Ham purpled indignantly. Monk had recently acquired a terrible habit – terrible from Ham's viewpoint – of telling every personable young lady they met that Ham had a wife and thirteen half-witted children. The truth was that Ham had neither wife nor offspring.

"You'd better hope the white-haired girl is from Zamboanga!" Ham told Monk nastily.

"Yeah?" Monk was puzzled. "Why?"

"The monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga!" Ham jeered. "She won't be too surprised when she sees you!"

Doc ignored this mild squabble. It was always going on, anyway. He hurried to the great laboratory, was gone only a moment, and came back with a device which resembled a hand garden sprayer.

His five aids eyed the object. They knew what it meant, having seen it used before. They stepped out into the corridor. Their gaze sought the tiled floor.

On the floor was a film of colorless fluid not unlike pale, sticky molasses. It was hardly noticeable.

This was a peculiar chemical mixture of Doc's own concoction. Ordinarily, it was without odor. Doc kept it there at all times.

The sprayer held another chemical. This, when mingled with even a tiny quantity of the first mixture, produced a powerful and striking odor.

The pale stuff before the door stuck to the shoe soles of any one walking through it. Tracks, unnoticeable to the naked eye, would be left for some time. When a mist from the sprayer touched these, the distinctive odor was produced.

Descending to the lobby, Doc proceeded to trail the whitehaired girl's captors. He did not use the sprayer steadily, but at intervals of a rod or so, like a hound on a fast scent.

The tracks led eastward. wayfarers, amazed at the sight

a giant metallic figure of a man engaged in the apparently senseless procedure of spraying the sidewalk, stared in wonder. Some even started to tag along curiously. They were seen left behind, for Doc moved swiftly.

THE trail entered a side street. It crossed Park Avenue, went on toward the East River, and threaded a sector of gloomy, squalid tenements.

"Funny they didn't take to their cars!" boomed the big-voiced Renny.

"Probably afraid we had the license numbers!" suggested the bespectacled Johnny.

Long Tom, the pale electrical wizard, advanced another theory. "Maybe they put the girl in a car and sent her off!"

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Since they were trailing entirely by odor, there was nothing to tell them whether the girl was still with the group they were following. But Doc, putting a query to the clerk in a tobacco shop which they passed, clarified that particular point.

The clerk had seen the group of swarthy men, and the white-haired girl was still with them. He had not realized she was a captive, but had been stricken by her exquisite beauty.

The way became darker, more deserted. Odors from a distant fish market mingled with the peculiar scent they were following. The rain drooled from low clouds. Out on the river, there was steam-like fog. Boats squawked whistles at each other.

The trail ended abruptly.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "We're sunk!"

The spot, where the strange odor they were following became no longer evident, was near the doorless, windowless side of a storage warehouse.

Doc, whose olfactory organs were developed far beyond those of his companions, kept the sprayer going for some moments. At the same time, he bent close to the none-too-clean walk.

"They entered one or more cars here," he announced.

He examined the street. The asphalt, washed clean by the intermittent rain, retained no definite tire prints that could be followed.

They stood at the curb, a grimly silent cluster. As Renny had said, it looked as if they were sunk.

A car drove past. It was an old touring car, very large. The curtains were up. The driver was the only occupant. He glanced at Doc and his group, and fell to staring.

Suddenly the man halted his machine, then backed it up. He leaned out.

He was pudgy, with big ears, small chin, and eyes so watery that they seemingly had been held out in the slow rain. His collar was soiled, and so wrinkled that it might have been a rolled handkerchief tied around his neck.

"Good evening!" he said nervously. "Were you – looking for somebody?"

"Several dark-skinned men – and a white-haired girl," Doc told him.

"That's the party who forced me to haul them away!" gulped the weak-looking man.

Chapter VI. THE GHOSTLY DEATH

RENNY cracked his big fists together and rumbled: "What a break for us!"

"They hired you?" Doc demanded of the man.

The driver nodded uneasily. "They gave me five dollars. I got to wondering why they didn't take a taxi, and

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so, after I dropped 'em, I drove back here to see if there was anything funny about them. If there was, I was gonna tell a policeman where I took 'em!"

Doc swung near the touring car. "Can you take us to the place?"

The man hesitated. His lower lip jerked, rabbit fashion. He seemed scared.

He mumbled: "I don't know about this – "

"Ask a policeman, if you're in doubt," Doc suggested. The man wiped his wet eyes. "I guess it'll be all right, mister."

Doc stood on the running board, as was his fashion. His five friends loaded inside. The car rolled ahead.

Their course was southward and eastward, into an even shabbier section of the city. Here the poorer element lived. It was a district where two and three families in a room were not uncommon.

The fine rain frosted the windows in the touring-car curtains. There was no windshield wiper, and the driver reached out from time to time to swipe a puffy palm over the glass. The car top, old and porous, was soaked.

Doc Savage, seemingly as impervious to moisture as a statue of the metal he resembled, kept an alert watch. He saw nothing alarming.

The meek fat man stopped the touring car by putting on both foot and emergency brakes. He pointed. "There's where they went!"

The house was an old brownstone, with unwashed windows. It was narrow, two stories in height. There was no light in it.

Doc dropped off the running board and glided close. The windows were lidded on the inside by drawn curtains. They were very dirty, except for a square patch in the middle of one pane.

He went back to the car and asked the driver: "Did you see a cardboard 'for-rent' sign stuck on the window when you brought them here?"

The man was slow with his reply. "No, I don't think I did."

"Did they walk right in like they had a key?"

"They sure did."

Doc went back. Bending close, he used his flashlight on the door lock. The plate which held the keyhole was scratched. Bright metal showed in the scratches.

Even a novice would have recognized the signs. The lock had been picked recently with a sharp instrument.

Doc glanced up. The cracks between the stone blocks offered easy climbing to any one at all skilled in the trade of the so-called human fly. Few individuals plying the trade of human fly ever possessed quite the agility and strength of this mighty man of bronze.

Doc drew himself up the wail as readily as another would surmount a ladder.

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Those in the touring car saw him attain the roof. After that, he was lost in the darkness and rain.

ABOARD a ship moored on the near-by water front, a bell began striking ship's time. Before it ended, more bells took up the clanging chorus. Fog whistles hooted softly, mournfully.

In the houses, radios jangled. A baby cried somewhere. On the elevated, a train slammed south. Rivulets of rain water sobbed in the gutters. Minute after minute dragged past.

Renny boomed softly: "I don't like this!"

He got out of the touring car. The others followed, except for the driver, who humped close to his wheel, a bit white-faced.

Doc did not appear. The clanging of ships' bells had ceased. The radio jangle ended suddenly as it was switched off.

Monk looked at an expensive wrist watch almost lost in the coarse red fur matting his skin.

"Five minutes!" he grunted. "I'll wait a minute more, then I'm goin' in!"

Southward in the harbor, the horn of a liner set up an awful, prolonged moaning, a dread dirge like the pain cries of a stricken thing.

Doc appeared on the house roof. He descended as rapidly, as surely, as he had gone up, and came to the car.

"I could hear no one at the rear," he said softly. "We'll pick the lock and go in the front way."

The car driver said nothing. He might not have heard. Producing a small, curved bit of steel from within his clothing, Doc seemed only to insert it in the lock, and the tumblers clicked. The panel swung open. It creaked once, a mousy sound.

"All right," Doc said, his voice reaching only his five friends. "We'll ail go in at once."

They entered, feeling their way down a passage which was very dark and full of plaster and rat smells.

E-e-eek! The hideous squeak came without warning. It was followed by others, a procession so swift that their combined note was one fearsome scream, with only the faintest of stutters to mark the interval between them.

Slender, tapering steel projectiles wiped plaster off the walls. A few screeched into the street.

Out of the black, screaming hallway came startled cries, grunts, moans – and, finally, silence.

The hideous wailing from the mysterious weapon continued a time. It was evidently oscillating back and forth, for again the missiles launched out into the street.

One projectile glanced from a building in such a fashion that it whirled back and landed in the headlight glare of the touring car.

Leaning forward, the driver stared at the snout of the slender bit of metal. It held a foul smear – poison.

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THE driver laughed; the sound was a nervous gobble in his throat. He let in the clutch and drove away. At the corner, he looked back.

The awesome whistling of the missiles had ceased. In the old brownstone house, a dead silence had fallen.

"It worked!" the driver gurgled. "A slick scheme! It got 'em!"

He turned the dilapidated car around a corner and onward. He kept only a mild pressure on the accelerator. He had had dealings with the police, this fellow, and he knew that a speeding car might easily excite suspicion.

Going westward to Broadway, he turned north. He followed the angling course of the street until he was in the brilliant glare of the theatrical district around Times Square.

He veered into a dingy little street just above Times Square, and pulled in to the curb before a small hotel. He started to get out.

A dark-skinned man had been waiting in the hotel door. He stepped out swiftly into the rain. It was Mohallet.

Seeing him, the driver sank back behind the wheel. The swarthy man got in.

"How did it go?" he asked, taking pains with his English.

"Great!" leered the driver. "They never suspected a thing! Walked right into it!"

"It is well," said Mohallet.

"I pulled it neat!" bragged the driver.

Mohallet nodded. "It was indeed a wise move when I got hold of you, and held you ready for just such an emergency. My own men could never have managed the deception."

"Now I get paid, huh?" suggested the other.

"You do. But first, draw up the street a few yards and park. It is best that no one should see me giving you money at this spot."

Obediently, the touring car pulled ahead half the length of the block, and nosed in to the curb.

Mohallet reached into a pocket – the one next the driver. He fumbled.

The driver gave a violent start.

"You stuck me with somethin'!" he gulped.

"A thousand pardons!" Mohallet murmured, and sidled away slightly. "It must be a pin in my clothin'!"

The driver sat perfectly still for a moment. Then, wildly, he sought to move his limbs. They seemed paralyzed. His face was turning a weird, mottled scarlet hue. His lips opened, writhed in distorted fashion. No words came out.

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The man continued his grisly struggles for possibly thirty seconds. Then he slumped over, motionless.

Mohallet felt of the fellow's wrist.

"Good!" he jeered. "You have collected your pay from me, my friend."

The man was dead.

Mohallet removed a long, sharp needle from his pocket, which had been next the driver. The tip was poison-smearing. He inserted it in a screw-cap, metal pipe case intended to hold it.

He glanced cautiously out of the car, to see if he had been noticed.

What he saw caused him to start violently, to emit a horrified squawk.

IN the old brownstone house in the slum district, Doc Savage and his five men examined an interesting piece of apparatus.

The thing was not unlike a machine gun with a greatly distorted barrel. Mounted on an efficient stand, it was equipped with a geared device which caused it to sweep from side to side. There was a trigger.

To the trigger was attached a cord which ran through eyelets and was stretched across the hall. Upon entering, they had hit this.

"A trap!" Doc explained. "I entered through a rear window and found it. I simply set the thing so it would fire over our heads. That was to fool the driver."

"He was one of 'em?" Monk asked in his mild voice, surprised.

"At least hired by them. It's a safe bet that he'll get in touch with them to report that we are done for."

"But how'll we know where he goes?" Monk wailed.

"I called the police and asked them to send a car to shadow the fellow," Doc explained. "I allowed time for the car to reach this vicinity. That's why I was gone so long."

Monk, remembering the anxious wait in the street, grinned widely.

Long Tom had been examining the unusual weapon on the floor. He showed the natural interest of an electrical expert in touch with something new in his profession.

"Dang me!" he exploded. "You know what this thing is?"

Doc nodded. "But you tell the rest of 'em!"

"It's a magnetic gun!" Long Tom explained. "I've experimented with models of small power, but never with one as strong as this. There's a powerful set of batteries, not unlike flashlight cells, wired to an electromagnet. The steel slugs are fed from a magazine, and by a system of contacts, magnetism is employed to set them in violent motion in the barrel. The current shuts off at the proper instant, and lets them fly out."

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"That's the general idea," Doc agreed. "The thing is the only type of gun which can be considered truly silent in operation."

Long Tom fingered the magnetic gun eagerly.

"Watch it!" Doc warned. "Those slugs are poisoned!"

Long Tom shouldered the strange weapon. "I'm going to add this to my museum."

Of late, the electrical wizard had taken to collecting unusual objects which they encountered in their adventures. He had equipped a private museum at his bachelor quarters in a high-class club. His assortment already contained some interesting articles.

Doc started for the door. "Let's get in touch with the police."

"Aren't you gonna search this place?" Monk demanded.

"I did that on the first visit," Doc explained. "There's nothing here. They just broke into an empty house and set their trap."

Three blocks away, they found an open-all-night drug store. Doc got a phone circuit to police headquarters, and held the wire.

Several minutes later a police voice rattled in the receiver.

Doc hung up swiftly.

"We got a bad break!" he told his friends.

HE whipped for the door, the others close on his heels. There was a taxi stand at the corner. They raced for that.

"What d'you mean – bad break?" rumbled big-voiced Renny.

"The police car followed the driver, all right," Doc threw over his shoulder. "Mohallet joined the fellow, and killed him. The cops saw that. They rushed Mohallet."

"And he got away?" Renny howled.

"Not exactly. But he got to his hotel. The police have him besieged there now. There's a young war going on around the hotel!"

They piled into a cab; Doc took the running board. Horn blaring steadily, accelerator on the floor boards, the machine rooted up Broadway.

A fire engine could not have made better progress through the desultory traffic. Policemen far ahead reared on tiptoe, saw the giant bronze form of Doc Savage clinging to the outside of the taxi, and tweeted their whistles madly, opening a lane.

Around the little hotel in the Times Square district, there was pandemonium. Police had roped off the street facing the hostelry. Radio patrol cars, big detective phaetons, motor cycles with bulletproof shields on the

fronts, swarmed about.

Shots banged. Men ran around yelling, guns in hand. Ambulances stood, engines panting.

Monk piled out of the car, homely face all aglitter. This was the sort of thing he loved. Excitement! The others trod his heels. They breasted the police lines.

"Here – you can't get through!" a burly sergeant began. Then, catching sight of Doc, he gulped and turned red.

"If you need any weapons, sir, we have 'em!" he offered, anxious to atone for his mistake.

"No, thanks," Doc said. "We have enough."

This, despite the fact that Doc had no firearm. He rarely carried a gun, although his ability as a marksman was in keeping with his other accomplishments. Doc depended on his wits, on his unusual scientific devices.

Too, Doc never took human life if it could be avoided. His enemies, however, had a distressing habit of coming to an untimely but deserved end in traps they had themselves set for the bronze man.

His five aids carried an unusual type of firearm. They drew them now. The guns resembled oversized automatics, fitted with curled magazines. These were machine guns of Doc's own invention. They fired even more rapidly than the latest type aircraft weapons, the shots coming so swiftly that the average human ear could not distinguish the interval between them.

They used these guns more for the fear their terrific rate of fire instilled than for lethal effect. For, like their bronze chief, the five used every precaution to avoid taking life.

In his clothing, each man carried ammo drums for the rapid-firers, charged with what big-game hunters term mercy bullets. These, striking a man, would not penetrate deeply enough to produce death.

They caused an unconsciousness which lasted for less than an hour.

Chapter VII. FLOWN BIRDS

MOHALLET'S brown men were holding out from the windows of the hotel. The hostelry was a narrow slice of brick, wedged between office buildings. It had a highly ornamental front, after the fashion of twenty years ago.

Monk counted the stories. "Ten! The buildings on each side are fourteen floors! That means they couldn't have slipped away on the roof tops!" He hailed a policeman. "You got the rear covered?"

"There's forty cops around there!" grunted the officer.

E–e–eek! A thin steel projectile smashed through a ear behind which they were crouched. Glancing from street to curb, it whined up into the air, then came clanging back.

"That's what's kinda got us bumfuzzled!" muttered the cop. "We can't imagine what kind of a gun they're using! There's no flash and no noise. We can't locate the snipers!"

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"It's a magnetic gun," Long Tom explained. "We just collected one like it."

Doc, with a quick dash, secured the missile from the magnetic rifle. He examined it, centering his attention on the snout. He had feared there would be poison on it. There was none.

Doc summoned the police captain in charge of the siege. "Tell your men to keep under cover," he directed. "The missiles from his noiseless gun are not poisoned, it seems, but the brown fellows in there carry knives and bullets which are doped. Had any one been badly hit?"

"Nobody got a scratch as yet," the officer admitted. "So far, it's been mostly noise. You got any ideas?"

"Darken the street," Doc directed. "And that means really darken it. Douse the street lamps. Get those big electric signs over on Broadway turned out!"

The police captain looked puzzled, but did not press for explanations. He knew the power of this bronze man, the esteem in which he was held by the police commissioner.

It was well known that Doc's magical skill at surgery had once saved the life of the police commissioner.

Doc eyed Long Tom.

"O. K.," grinned the electrical wizard. "I know what you're planning. I'll go get the stuff!"

Long Tom departed swiftly in the direction of Doc's skyscraper laboratory. The command to darken the vicinity had told him the method of Doc's intended assault upon the hotel.

Policemen scampered away. In a few moments, lights began going out. The great flashing signs along Broadway, the monstrosities of illumination which had earned the section its appellation of the Great White Way, blackened one by one. An abysmal, wet darkness settled.

Police searchlights were turned on the hotel entrance. The besieged brown men sought to shoot these out. They got three or four, but more were hurriedly rushed to the scene.

Alarmed, the fellows in the hotel now sought to combat the darkness by turning on lights in hotel rooms, and running up the shades. Police riflemen, judiciously positioned, shot out the bulbs.

Many newspaper cameramen swarmed about, reckless of danger, snapping flashlight pictures. The batting white flashes of their lights flushed the streets for many blocks. The reflections resembled lightning on the low clouds.

Doc Savage, towering head and shoulders above the burly policemen, was the center of pictorial attention. It was a rare occasion when the news hawks caught Doc in action.

"Man of Mystery," the newspapers called Doc, since they were able to learn so little about him, although they heard many rumors. The tabloids were making a gala occasion of the siege at the hotel.

Long Tom returned, elbowing his way through the throng. He earned two large hand bags.

DOC SAVAGE opened the bags. From one, he extracted a device which resembled a magic lantern. He actuated switches on the sides of this. Apparently, nothing happened.

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Actually, the lantern began to project rays of light of a wave length too short to be visible to the naked eye.

Long Tom, from the other bag, dug out goggles with lenses fully as large as condensed-milk cans. These were fluoroscopic eyeglasses. Doc had perfected them. Wearing these queer goggles, it was possible to see by use of the infra-rays the lantern projected.

To the watching newspapermen, the procedure smacked of black magic. They were not of a sufficient scientific turn to realize that Doc had merely adapted a common method of photography by use of infra-rays to his own needs.

Before morning, every paper in the city would probably come out with word of this marvelous new invention the bronze man had perfected. The truth was that any electrical engineer could duplicate, on a cruder scale, what he was doing.

All lights were now out. News photographers were warned to take no more flashlights, on pain of seeing the inside of the precinct jail.

Doc and his men donned the fluoroscopic goggles. To the bystanders, it seemed that they advanced on the hotel in complete darkness. To their eyes, however, the hotel front was plainly visible, although looking somewhat weird in the infra-ray light.

Long Tom carried the projector lantern.

A brown man leaned from the hotel window. It was dark. He thought no one could see him.

Taking deliberate aim, Monk shot the fellow in the shoulder with a mercy bullet. The man seemed to go to sleep on the window sill. He would awake later, not greatly harmed.

A second swarthy fellow fell a victim in almost an identical manner.

"That's two for me!" Monk snorted gleefully.

A cinnamon-colored sentry was crouching inside the hotel door. He seemed to stare directly at Doc as the giant bronze man approached. Yet, in the absolute murk, he could see nothing.

Doc handed him a leisurely clip on the jaw. The watcher melted down as if he were lard on a hot griddle.

There seemed to be no one else downstairs.

When the fracas started, the guests in the hotel had apparently locked themselves in their rooms. The screaming of the women, the frightened shouting of the men, could be heard.

Doc and his gang mounted.

"I hope they haven't harmed the white-haired girl!" Monk muttered.

In the second-floor corridor, they found no one. Standing at a third-floor window, rear, was another swarthy gunman. He held a spike-nosed automatic in his right hand, a flashlight in his left. From time to time, he was darting the flash beam down the corridor.

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He splashed his light just in time to illuminate Doc and his party. He yelled then and lifted his automatic toward Doc.

Renny was standing alongside Doc at the instant. He did not realize, until splits of seconds later, what had happened. He felt only a wrench at his fist. Later, he knew Doc had seized the gun.

Doc's shot banged in the corridor. No mercy bullet this, but solid, jacketed lead. The slug, directed with uncanny precision, centered in the flash lens. There was a spray of glass, and the flash was driven backward from the brown man's claw.

The fellow squawled, flipped stinging fingers. To him, the surroundings were now in darkness. He whirled, wrenched at the window. and got it up. A fire escape was outside.

He was clever. He beat the sill to imitate sounds of a man going out. Then he crept back along the hall.

WHAT followed was somewhat ludicrous. The swarthy man was like one stricken suddenly blind. But he thought his foes were also unable to see, so he came on boldly, on the balls of his feet.

He drew a flat sword from its spine sheath and held it, poisoned tip ready for a sudden stab. Had the battle actually been in the darkness, he would have been a dangerous foe.

As it was, Monk simply took deliberate aim and shot him in the leg with a mercy bullet. The man swayed, tried to charge. then swatted down flat on the floor, asleep.

Doc's group mounted on upward. From the rooms came frightened whimpers, from some a grim silence. Other guests shouted questions. These, Doc warned to keep under cover.

"They're in the room next to mine!" yelled a man. "I heard 'em poundin' in there!"

Doc ran to the room adjoining the voice. He tried the door. It was locked on the inside. He called, but no answer.

"I'll fix it!" Renny thumped.

He threw one of his enormous fists, a straight-out-from-the-chest punch. With a splintery explosion, the panel jumped out of its grooves. It was a stunning exhibition of what human bone and gristle could stand.

Renny blew splinters off his knuckles, reached in, and turned the key. They entered.

A hole perhaps two feet across gaped in the opposite wall. Plaster and brick debris from the aperture paved the floor. Two fire axes stood against the wall. A third – the metal head shattered – lay on the floor, where it had been dropped after being broken in making the opening.

The opening looked small for Doc's size. But with a rubbery ease, he writhed through.

Renny and Monk, their big frames less flexible than Doc's, failed to make it. Ham, punching Monk forcibly with the end of his sword cane, snapped: "Get out of the way and let somebody shaped like a man get through!"

Ham squirmed after Doc. Long Tom and Johnny followed. They found themselves in a shabby office. The door beyond was open, frosted-glass panel broken out.

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In the hall, they found a janitor knocked senseless. On the roof, a skylight gaped open.

From this higher building, it was possible to travel from roof to roof the remaining length of the block. On the last building, they discovered another skylight ajar.

"They got away with the girl!" Long Tom gritted. "The four devils we got were left behind to give the others a chance to get clear!"

MOHALLET had made good his escape. Further investigation proved it. A newsboy vending his papers on Broadway, had seen the swarthy men and the beautiful white-haired girl depart, but had thought nothing of it.

Doc sought out the police captain commanding the besieging officers. He spoke a few words.

The four unconscious brown men were carried to a room in the hotel before newspaper reporters were admitted. And once the news hawks were on the scene, no mention was made of the dark-skinned quartet. Every one had escaped, they were permitted to believe.

Some reporters found this hard to credit; but it was dark, and they had not glimpsed the men Monk had shot with mercy bullets.

"You can forget the four prisoners," Doc told the police captain. "They have not harmed anybody."

"Er-um-m-m!" mumbled the officer doubtfully. "I had better see if that is all right."

He called his superior, came back with his ears red, and said effusively: "The prisoners are yours. Officially, they do not exist."

The officer wondered about those prisoners for the rest of the night. He would have liked to haul them to the precinct station, hand them a good shellacking; and learn what this was all about.

The policeman would have been astounded had he known the disposal Doc Savage would eventually make of the four captives. They would be sent to a unique institution which Doc maintained in upstate New York. Very few individuals knew of this place.

At the remote establishment, the villainous brown men would undergo a delicate brain operation which would wipe out all knowledge of their past lives. They would not know their own identity after awakening.

Later, they would receive training in the ways of a law-abiding citizen, complete even to a trade by which an excellent living could be made. Once discharged, they would not return to criminal ways; at least, no crook had ever done so after having undergone Doc's somewhat astounding treatment.

Doc kept his institution a secret. Had news of it gotten out, there would be a nationwide hullabaloo, no doubt and much publicity.

First, however, Doc intended to question the prisoners.

Preliminary to that, he made a search of the room which had the hole in the wall. Cigarette stubs of Arabian tobacco showed Mohallet's men had used this room for something other than digging the hole.

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Monk and Renny were dispatched with the sprayer device to see if it was possible to trail Mohallet's gang by some of the chemical which might still remain on their shoe soles.

When they had gone. Doc pushed his search. He scrutinized the walls, peeled up the carpet, dissected the furniture.

Eventually, he turned his attention to the bathroom. Two or three minutes later, Doc came back and got one of the fire axes. He reentered the bath. There was a loud crash.

Johnny, Ham, and Long Tom ran to the door. They were just in time to see Doc wrapping a bulky object carefully in a towel.

They looked at the tub. It was one of the cast-iron, enameled type which stood above the floor. A great piece had been knocked out of one side.

Obviously, it was this piece of the bathtub which Doc was bundling so painstakingly in the towel.

RENNY and Monk, two mountains of disappointment, came back to report that Mohallet and his fellows had apparently entered a taxicab shortly after reaching the street. At least, the scent trail had ended at the curb.

"Two or three other people saw the girl," Monk muttered. "By golly, she must be a looker to attract attention like that!"

"Did she still wear the trick Turk trousers?" Ham queried.

"Sure."

"That explains it! The harem rig would start a panic anywhere."

Numerous curious glances were slanted at the towel-wrapped bundle which Doc was now carrying carefully. Why the bronze man should knock a slab out of the hotel bathtub and keep it in his possession as if it were something precious was a puzzle to the others.

Since his questioning might take some time, Doc had the four swarthy prisoners bound and gagged and inserted in large laundry baskets. This latter act was to delude the many newspaper reporters.

Doc Savage was one of those rare individuals – a man who really disliked publicity. Too, newspaper yarns about himself were dangerous, for they gave his enemies a line on his movements. And his foes were legion.

The laundry baskets, senseless men inside, were loaded into innocent laundry trucks which transported them to Doc's more or less secret garage in the skyscraper basement.

Doc and his men rode in the vehicle. Doc carried the segment of a bathtub.

The laundry truck was dismissed. The captives were carried up to the eighty-sixth floor in the speed elevator.

Renny looked the four over with an experienced eye. "These are tough babies! Getting the truth out of 'em is gonna be a job!"

Doc examined them. "It will be some time before they revive. Let's try a little hocus-pocus on them!"

Speaking rapidly, Doc outlined his plan. Listening, the others began to chuckle. Then, with deft speed, they set to work making preparations.

Chapter VIII. THE VOICE FROM HELL

BALID was one of the four prisoners. In the language of his race, Balid's name meant "stupid." It was not an apt descriptive. Balid had acquired the nickname in his youth, when he had been wont to pretend to being a very dumb lad, entirely lacking in the brains to commit the clever thieving of which he often stood accused.

Since he was the man who had been knocked off by Doc's hard fist, Balid was first to revive. The others had been overcome by the mercy bullets, the effects of which were more lasting.

In awakening, Balid's arms and legs sought to perform the usual nerveless twitchings. Strangely enough, they would not move. Balid realized he was in a place which was very warm. He opened his eyes.

He emitted an involuntary cry of horrified surprise.

A hideous apparition towered near by – nothing less than a fiery skeleton. The thing was all of eight feet in height. Its blazing fire was an uncanny greenish hue.

All the rest of the room was in blackness, the solid sepia of an abyss. There was no sound.

The eerie skeleton of fire suddenly extended its arms on either side. The arms stretched slowly. To Balid, it seemed that each arm became at least twenty feet in length.

The thing of fiery bones opened its skull mouth. A spurt of flame came out, brief, blinding. This was accompanied by a squirming ball of white smoke.

Balid watched the smoke. Instead of spreading, it writhed and drew into a compact bundle. Then it suddenly assumed a definite shape. Balid's eyes protruded. He tried to cry out, but was so shocked that the screams rattled in his throat.

The smoke puff had suddenly become the head and shoulders of Baud's master, Mohallet. Mohallet's throat was cut neatly from ear to ear. Crimson rivulets trickled from the gash.

The hideous apparition then vanished abruptly. A glowing arm of the odious green-flame skeleton now stretched down and touched Balid. There was a hissing and crackling. An intolerable agony shot through Baud's frame.

He tried to move, to get up and flee. But he could not move. His limbs seemed paralyzed. He was hot, oh, so hot.

"You are here!" said the skeleton in a hollow, sepulchral voice.

That was no news to Balid. He knew he was present. And how! A more frightsome place his superstitious brain had never imagined.

"You are at the great halfway point, a place between the worldly sphere and the Great Beyond!" continued the fearful, tomblike voice. "It is at this spot that your material life is reviewed, and your future determined!"

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Balid did his best to shudder, although his body would not move. He was dead! He was sure of it! There was no other explanation.

Out of the darkness before Balid's eyes, a hook now appeared. Upon it were fiery characters in Arabic. Across the top was a heading: "The Deeds of Balid."

The volume closed before Balid could read more. "This is a record of your life," said the awful voice. "It is all there. It is a very bad record. It almost consigns you to the place where the evil go. There is one thing which may save you. Tell the closing events of your worldly life. Speak the truth, and it may mean your salvation. Lie, and I shall certainly know it!"

Balid made several croaking sounds, then got his explanation under way. "I was one of the men Mohallet brought to the United States with the white-haired girl – "

"Begin further back than that!" commanded the sepulchral one.

BALID was almost sobbing in his terror. "Shall I start with the first appearance of the white-haired girl, O mighty one?"

"Further back than that! Start with something of Mohallet!"

"Mohallet is the chief of a robber tribe which operates on the southern Arabic coast!" Baud whimpered. "He has many followers

"What of the Prince Abdul Ra ah?"

"There is no such person. That is only a name which Mohallet uses at times."

"Tell the truth, O worm!" thundered the ghostly skeleton of flame, its fiery teeth chopping the words out. "Lie, and I will know and condemn you to everlasting damnation! Now tell me of the white-haired girl!"

"Mohallet found her walking along the coast," Balid wailed. "She wore strange garments, and upon her wrist was a bracelet of a white metal. This Mohallet kept. She spoke not the language of any people we knew.

"She was held a prisoner, and in the weeks which followed, Mohallet learned her language."

Balid paused, but when the fiery arm of bones reached out and touched him, with a resulting surge of tingling pain, he continued wildly.

"I know not what Mohallet learned when the white-haired girl could speak with him! Whatever it was, it greatly excited Mohallet! He took six men and the girl in a motor launch with him one night. I know not where he went, but he came back in a great rage, and the six men were not with him, but only the white-haired girl.

"We later found the bodies of the six men, dead on the beach. We said nothing of it, because they had died from poisoned bullets of a size which fitted only Mohallet's pistols."

"Mohallet killed them so they could not tell where he had gone?" rumbled the voice from the bony jaws.

"I know not, but I think so."

"Continue!"

"With an armed party, Mohallet sought to penetrate the great desert of Rub' Al Khali, where no man from the outer world has gone. There are savage tribesmen along the coast. They drove us back, with great loss of fighting men."

"Mohallet sought to enter the great desert, and could not?"

"Yes. Then he came to the United States on his yacht."

"His yacht?"

Balid squirmed – or tried to. "Perhaps, O flaming one, it is not Mohallet's boat. He stole it from an Englishman some months ago."

"Mohallet came after the submarine owned by Doc Savage?"

"He did."

"And why did he want it?"

"I know not! I can only guess. It must have been that he wished it to reach something of which the white-haired girl told him – something located in the great desert of Rub' Al Khali."

"The truth, O worm! What is this thing Mohallet seeks?"

"It is the truth I tell – what it is, I know not!"

"Where is Mohallet's yacht anchored in New York?"

"In the river the Americans call the Hudson, near the street numbered One Hundred!"

"You have talked well!" said the ghoulish voice.

Monk's tone pealed out in ribald laughter. "I'll say he has!" he chortled. "As a reward, we'll have to return him to life!"

To the click of electric switches, brilliant lights came on.

BALID stared about, eyes rolling. He was in Doc Savage's laboratory. He looked down. He was incased in a box which reached to his neck – a box filled with nothing more mysterious than ordinary sand. The sand was heated to an almost unpleasant warmth by common electric irons embedded in it.

The skeleton was nothing more than a tall framework of wood, painted with phosphorus. The joints were rubber bands, which had permitted the amazing stretch of the arms. From the right arm of this contraption dangled an insulated wire. Touching Balid, this had introduced an electric shock.

The book which had portended to contain Balid's life history, was a common scrap book, decorated with phosphorescent writing. In Balid's pockets had been a coin purse with his name upon it, which had enabled Doc to head the book with the fellow's cognomen. Also, in the book was a short story of what had happened at the hotel in the Times Square district – although Balid had had no time to read it.

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Flash–light powder had made the flame from the skeleton's mouth; a wadded sheet had imitated the smoke cloud. And the head of Mohallet, the throat cut, was merely a picture Doc had hurriedly executed from memory. Doc possessed no little ability as an artist.

Balid moaned and shut his eyes tightly. He began to wish he were actually dead. He had told all he knew of Mohallet and the white–haired girl. If Mohallet found out, he would inflict a form of death far from pleasant.

Doc, speaking in his normal tone, said: "We'll go take a look at that yacht of Mohallet's."

With a hypo needle. Doc administered a drug to each of the four prisoners. This would keep them unconscious until the application of another compound, a counteragent, revived them. Doc had no further use for the four.

Within a few hours, a mysterious white ambulance would come to the city and take the quartet away to the upstate institution, where they would undergo Doc's unique treatment.

Doc's speed elevator took the little group to the basement garage. They loaded into one of the big cars – the same limousine which the brown men had stopped earlier in the night.

Fifteen minutes later, they parked near the end of One Hundredth Street. Using night glasses, they peered out over the Hudson. They investigated the shore line.

Finally Monk ignited a chemical flare of his own invention. This gave a light of intense brilliance. The secret of its construction had earned the homely chemist a medal when he turned it over to the war department.

The light disclosed no yacht.

"Balid must have lied to us," Renny rumbled.

"I don't think so," Doc said thoughtfully. "Superstitious cuss that he was, he really thought he was halfway to purgatory!"

"Then Mohallet has pulled his freight!"

"It's likely," Doc agreed. "The affair at the hotel probably gave him quite a fright. He was safe in figuring the town had become too hot for him. He's set sail, all right! Come on!"

They ran back to the limousine. A regulation police siren wailed under the hood as they hurtled southward. They made directly for the vast pier warehouse – the Hidalgo Trading Co.

Each man ran to a plane. The wheels of the cradles on which the ships rested were well greased. Each craft rolled down the sloping concrete ramp to the river water under the impetus of its own propellers.

Taking the air, and using Monk's powerful flares at frequent intervals, Doc and his aids made a search for any suspicious–looking yacht.

The skipper of a ferryboat gave them a description of the craft which had been anchored at the foot of One Hundredth Street, when Doc landed near the ferry shed upriver.

"She was a tub of fair side," he explained. "A classy looker. You can't fail to recognize her. She was all black, with gold striping and gold funnel bands."

THE PHANTOM CITY

The planes were equipped with compact short-wave radio transmitter's and receivers. Doc wirelessly described the yacht's description to his friends.

Flying up and down the harbor, circling Manhattan Island they kept an intent lookout for a black yacht. Doc's five aids were all excellent pilots.

At the harbor mouth, a customs officer reported a black yacht had steamed out to sea at full speed.

"They're trying to make their get-away!" Doc informed his five men by radio. "We'll see if we can overhaul them."

FLYING out into the Atlantic, they found black clouds matted almost against the sea. They were leaking steady rain. Below them, fog was like wadded, dirty cotton. It hid all ships.

Back and forth, the planes swung. Time after time, Doc landed and, engines shut off, dropped the pick-up microphone of a submarine listening device over the side. This device, one used extensively in the Great War, would register the sound of a ship's screws for a distance of many miles.

Doc heard numerous craft. The mouth of New York harbor was a busy spot. It was impossible to pick out the screw sounds of the yacht they sought.

Monk's flares, brilliant as they were, could not combat the soupy fog. For some four hours, the planes combed the sea in a fruitless search.

"No use!" Doc spoke into the radio transmitter at length. "The fog has us whipped!"

The radio transmitters and receivers were synchronized perfectly on the same wave length. The effect was not unlike that of a party telephone line. Any man could enter the conversation at will.

"Want us to turn back?" queried the clipped voice of dapper Ham.

"The shyster is anxious to see his wife and thirteen nitwit offspring!" Monk chuckled.

"The winged ape speaking!" Ham jeered.

"Don't you mugs ever get tired of that?" the roaring tones of Renny questioned mournfully. "We're up against a stone wall on this proposition, and you eggs wisecrack!"

"Say, Doc," Johnny's scholastic voice put in, "you carried piece of bathtub away from that hotel. didn't you?"

"Right," Doc admitted.

"Why'd you do it?"

"Mohallet apparently flung the white-haired girl in the bathtub for a time when he was holding her at the hotel," Doc explained.

"So what?"

"So she wrote a message on the tub."

"What'd she use for ink?"

"A cake of toilet soap."

"What'd the message say?"

"Search me," Doc replied. "The characters are unlike any language that I have come in contact with."

"Do we go back and try to read 'em?" demanded Long Tom, for the first time taking part in the aerial conversation.

"We do," Doc decided.

Chapter IX. THE MYSTERIOUS CITY

IT was the dawn hour. A few early delivery trucks rattled in the streets, sounding like loose-jointed monsters galloping through the fog-crammed cracks between the beetling buildings.

In Doc's eighty-sixth-floor quarters, five men waited patiently and watched the sixth, their chief, work.

Renny and Long Tom were dozing. Johnny, the archaeologist, was poring through massive books, scratching his head, using a pencil and paper. The homely Monk and the immaculate Ham sat apart, facing each other. From time to time, they swapped good-natured insults.

Just now, Monk was making a great show of reading a magazine of men's fashions, which he had secured from an all-night news stand. Occasionally he read passages aloud, one eye on Ham's sartorially correct attire. Ham's garb was letter-perfect. But from time to time, Monk misread a sentence to make it seem the dressy lawyer had violated some rule of correct fashion.

Ham took it patiently.

Disgusted, Monk discarded the periodical, got a pair of shears, and began cutting small paper pigs out of a newspaper.

Color crawled up in Ham's neck. Any reference to parkers which Monk made invariably got his goat.

Doc Savage was working over the segment of hotel-room bathtub. He had sprinkled ordinary black finger-print powder over the enameled surface, applied a slight amount of heat, then blown off the surplus powder. The soap lettering, softened by the heat, had retained enough of the finger-print powder to make it readily seen.

The hieroglyphics themselves were strange.

To Johnny, with his profound knowledge of ancient languages, the characters were a mystery. Just now, Johnny was brushing up on his fund of information about the great and mysterious desert of Rub' Al Khali, which covers most of southern Arabia. As an expert on geology and archaeology, this was his natural forte.

Doc had covered numerous scraps of paper with marks as he probed the message left by the white-haired girl. He was jotting down characters from ancient tongues of the biblical days, and various vocabularies of modern Syrian, and comparing them with the stuff on the tub.

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There was no resemblance.

"Chicken tracks!" Monk had called the marks – with no idea of making a wisecrack.

They did resemble the prints of a five-toed bird. Sometimes there was only one print – never did more than five appear.

Doc sat back abruptly. "That's what I get for trying to make something hard out of 'em!"

The others stared at him. "You mean you've got 'em translated?" Renny boomed, awakening.

"Any one of you fellows can read them easily," Doc said dryly.

"Holy cow!" Renny got up and lumbered over to peer at the hieroglyphics. "I still don't see how!"

"Any one of you can read 'em!" Doc repeated. "See if you can guess how! In the meantime, let's hear Johnny give a lecture on this desert of Rub' Al Khali."

Johnny adjusted his spectacles with the magnifying left lens.

"The encyclopedia contains one of the most remarkable facts about this desert," he began in a classroom voice. "Most individuals think the north and south polar regions contain the largest areas on the globe as yet unexplored. This is not the fact. The largest totally unknown region is this desert of Rub' Al Khali.

"The southern half is entirely unexplored. It is reported to contain ruins of an ancient civilization, as well as great salt marshes."

"What about inhabitants?" Monk demanded.

"A few savage tribesmen, it is believed," Johnny announced. "There is no fresh water, only salty brine from the marshes. It is said there is a species of camel which can subsist on the salt water, and that the natives in turn live on the milk of these camels."

"What else is known?" Monk persisted.

"Very little. An Englishman made perhaps the most ambitious attempt at exploration a few years ago, when he took an expedition across a portion of the desert. Others have gone in – and vanished."

Monk wrinkled his pleasantly ugly face. "How come it ain't been explored with airplanes?"

"Simply because a flight over this desert is more dangerous than one over the pole. There is no water over a tremendous area. A forced landing is almost certain to mean death by thirst. In addition, there are savage tribesmen along the coast."

Doc Savage put in: "A further explanation can be attributed to human psychology. You fellows are highly educated. But how many of you knew this desert of Rub' Al Khali was the largest unexplored region in the world?"

No one admitted previous knowledge of that fact.

THE PHANTOM CITY

"There you are," Doc told them. "Explorers, public belief to the contrary, do their exploring for fame and monetary return from books and lectures. A flight over the poles is good for newspaper headlines everywhere. A hop over the desert of Rub' Al Khali might rate a scant paragraph, providing there was no big gangster killing that day."

"That is probably the real reason why the district is so unknown," Ham declared, voicing a knowledge of human traits garnered in many a courtroom battle. "If this desert was as famous as the north pole, you can bet it would be full of explorers."

Renny had been eying the fragment of bathtub during the dissertation.

"I can't read that stuff!" he boomed. "I'll swear I can't!"

"You know the deaf-and-dumb sign language, don't you?" Doc countered.

Renny nodded. Not only did he himself know the sign language, but Doc and the others could converse in it fluently. They often used it to exchange information when it was imperative that no sounds be made.

"Look!" Doc directed.

He formed a letter of the sign language with his fingers, and held it beside one of the hieroglyphic characters.

"Holy cow!" Renny grunted. "That's the letter 'M'!"

"Exactly," Doc agreed. "The message is in English, although hardly understandable when translated. Wait, I'll write it out."

Doc printed the words on a fresh sheet of paper. When he was done, he held it up for the others to study.

"Huh!" Monk gulped. "What a mess!"

The missive read:

BD MAN SCARE, G HOM, BOT. TKE GIRL, PRSNER. BD MAN HOM, CRYIN ROK, SOUTH EDG
WATR. HELP PESE. GIRL TKE YO PHANTOM CIT –

The weird message ended there.

"Probably she was interrupted." Doc explained.

"Blast it!" Monk snorted. "I still can't read it!"

"Here," Doc said, and added omitted letters until he had the communication in a more coherent form:

BAD MAN SCARED, GOING HOME ON BOAT. TAKING GIRL, PRISONER BAD MAN HOME,
CRYING ROCK, SOUTH EDGE WATER. HELP PLEASE. GIRL TAKE YOU TO PHANTOM CITY –

"The bad man is Mohallet," Doc surmised. "And by 'girl,' the white-haired young lady means herself."

"I see it!" Monk grinned. "She tried to tell us that Mohallet's hangout is at a place called Crying Rock, on the southern Arabian coast. But what's that stuff about a Phantom City?"

THE PHANTOM CITY

"That," Doc said thoughtfully. "probably explains what is behind this mess."

Ham tapped the paper with the end of his sword cane. "This was in English if you could call it that. Yet the girl certainly did not speak English."

Doc considered. "Suppose you came in contact with a deaf-and-dumb person of some race – Arabian for example – who could not read or write, and you wanted to teach him to talk on his hands. Couldn't you do it, giving him the signs in English and pointing to the corresponding actions and objects as you did so?"

"Undoubtedly," Ham admitted.

"Then, after the passage of many years, or in case that person taught the sign language to some one else, many of the letters might be omitted. Isn't that possible, too?"

"That must explain it," Ham agreed. "The white-haired girl can talk English of a kind on her fingers, but can't speak it!"

"Something like that. The tongue she spoke was some dialect from the interior of Arabia, I am certain. I only heard the three words which she cried when I seized her, but they closely resembled Arabian."

"This thing is strange!" Johnny muttered.

"We'll probably find it has a very simple explanation," Doc assured him. "That is, providing you birds want to follow it up."

Monk grinned with all his agreeably unlovely countenance. "You couldn't keep me off it, Doc."

"A pretty girl in distress would make Monk tackle anything!" Renny rumbled.

"Mention of a Phantom City is what intrigues me!" murmured the more scholastic Johnny. "That desert of Rub' Al Khali is rumored to hold some very interesting things in the way of ancient ruins!"

WITH a heavy hammer, Doc Savage smashed the fragment of bathtub. He burned the papers on which he had scribbled. It was just as well that no one else get the whitehaired girl's message. Its contents were indelible in his retentive memory.

"There may be a financial angle to this, too," he told his companions. "To all appearances, this fellow Mohallet is the chief of a gang who make their living by robbery. He did not come all the way to New York and risk his neck trying to steal our submarine unless there was plenty of money at stake!"

Monk grunted explosively. "Say – we ain't found out yet why he wanted the sub!"

Doc made no reply; if he had any theories, he was keeping them to himself.

He eyed his five aids, saw they were all anxious to get on Mohallet's trail. He had expected that. This venture smacked of the thing they lived for, exotic adventure in a foreign land.

"We'll head for Arabia by submarine!" he announced. "Since Mohallet came after the underseas boat, he must need it badly. We might find use for it."

Monk groaned. "O. K. But I sure don't fancy crossing the Atlantic in that thing! Grease and oil and pitch and roll! Even the grub tastes of grease! Or it did when we went to the pole."

The dapper Ham smiled widely. He had just remembered that the contortions of the submarine kept Monk continually on the verge of sea sickness.

"I'm gonna enjoy the trip," he decided aloud.

The ambulance from Doc's strange institution in up-State New York now arrived. Doc had summoned it earlier in the night.

Unnoticed by pedestrians about at this early hour, the four brown prisoners, still sleeping, were removed by way of the private lift and basement garage. Within a few hours, all knowledge of their past lives would be wiped out. In less than a year, four honest citizens and skilled workmen would be released from the establishment.

"We'd better start getting the submarine ready," Doc decided.

Monk, Ham, and Renny were dispatched to initiate work on the Helldiver.

Chapter X. A GUIDE TO TROUBLE

THE sky was like the white-hot concave paunch of a furnace overhead. A round hole in the brazen heavens, a peephole to the glitter and heat of a hell flame, was the sun.

The Helldiver crawled through the Arabian Sea as through hot oil. She pulled a milky funnel of wake along behind. Spray, jumping up from the bows, dried almost instantly when it hit the sun-heated deck plates and runnerlike guard rails.

Monk, his furry hulk clad only in trousers, sat on deck with a high-power rifle, watching for sharks on which to test his marksmanship. He waved a slow arm.

"What'm I offered for my share of Arabia and the whole blasted ocean, brothers?" he asked gloomily. "Do I hear any offers? Thirty cents will buy it!"

Ham, immaculate in white ducks and sun helmet, smiled blissfully. Monk had spent a miserable time crossing. There had been much rough sea.

They had been many days negotiating the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea. Monotony and much hard work was all the trip had offered. The Helldiver was equipped with an excellent set of master controls operated from the central control room, enabling the tiny crew of five men to handle the craft.

There had been no sign of Mohallet, or his black yacht with the gold trim.

"The Helldiver is fast for a submarine." Doc declared, clambering out of the main hatch. "Chances are that Mohallet's yacht is much swifter, however. Considering the few days we lost rigging the submarine for sea, Mohallet probably beat us here by a day or two."

"Maybe he didn't even come to this neck of the ocean," Monk suggested gloomily. "His yacht had not passed

through the Suez Canal."

"You'll recall one of the prisoners told us it was a stolen boat," Doc pointed out. "Mohallet, not daring to take it through the canal, must have sailed around the lower end of Africa. I've been figuring his probable maximum speed and our own rate, and the chances are that he did not beat us by more than a couple of days."

Johnny and Long Tom were on duty at the controls, below.

Doc's golden eyes ranged across the bows.

"Arabia!" he announced.

Monk squinted. "It looks like a sand pile to me. I've seen some bleak country, but it was a luxuriant jungle compared to that!"

Seven or eight miles distant lay the shore line. It was low, almost entirely of sand and rock. Beyond, wrapped in jittering heat waves, were bald mountain fangs.

The Helldiver crawled ahead, the big Diesel engines mumbling.

Tiny specks on the shore grew in size, boxed themselves out in the shape of houses crowded along narrow streets. It was a town, small, heat-baked.

"The town of Bustan," Doc offered. "In Arabic, the word means 'garden!'"

Monk snorted noisily

"It's the last outpost along this desolate coast." Doc continued. "We'll go ashore here and see if we can get a line on a place known as the Crying Rock. Even the best charts show no such landmark."

FROM the shore, many dark eyes watched the approaching Helldiver. Bustan was a dead hole. There was no harbor, and vessels of necessity anchored off a beach which was rock-spiked and dangerous in a blow. Hence, ships seldom visited the place.

The authorities ruled Bustan with an iron hand. They had to; otherwise, robbers from the surrounding desert would have taken the town over. There was, considering the frontier outpost nature of the settlement, very little lawlessness.

The local hakim had the reputation of being a bad governor to fool with. He frequently caused criminals to be tried and executed the same day they were caught. If ever there was a town where justice had teeth, Bustan was that place.

Gentry of evil ways haunted the town, however. But they masqueraded as honest traders or tribal nomads.

One of these was among the many who watched the strange-looking Helldiver. He was a fat fellow. His face resembled a ball of rancid yellow lard stuck full of very black whiskers.

This man maintained his scrutiny only long enough to make certain the Helldiver was going to drop anchor offshore. Then he wheeled and scuttled up a cramped street populated by robed and whiskered men, an occasional woman with covered face, donkeys, one-humped Arabian camels commonly known as dromedaries, and an infinite number of dogs.

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He entered a large and not unattractive dwelling. Over the roof of this, a radio aerial stretched. Broadcast receivers were not unknown in Bustan. Ostensibly, there was one hooked to the end of this aerial lead-in.

The real purpose of the aerial, however, was to radiate the energy from an efficient short-wave transmitter and receiver. This was concealed under a slab in the floor of one room, and the slab was in turn masked by a rich rug.

Mohallet was a robber chief with modern ideas. Occasionally, the government of some nation sent a gunboat along the coast looking for him. He maintained several radio stations to tip him off when such craft approached. This was one of them.

The man with the lardy face was soon in communication with the yacht of his chief. The set operated on voice, and the harsh tones of Mohallet himself soon crackled in the receivers.

"What is it?" he demanded in Arabic.

"A strange-looking submarine has appeared offshore."

"Describe it!"

"It is long and narrow, and has no conning tower," said the fat man, who was a merchant as far as the authorities of Bustan were concerned. "It has large steel runners extending from bow to stern. The name on the bows is Helldiver."

A storm of profanity poured from the receivers. Mohallet, in his youth, had been a camel driver. He had assembled a choice collection of epithets.

"Wallah!" he ended. "It was an evil day when I went to New York! No doubt that devil of a bronze man is aboard the submarine. In some fashion, he has learned why I wanted the underseas boat. How he secured that information, I do not know. He must be a magician!"

"All magic is trickery," said the fat man meaningly. "Perhaps, O master, it might be wise to try some sorcery of our own!"

"You have an idea?" queried Mohallet.

Smirking, the plump man spoke rapidly and in a low voice, his black whiskers against the microphone. He was one of Mohallet's most clever followers, this fake merchant. Through him, quantities of the loot Mohallet took from inland tribesmen and coastwise vessels was disposed of.

In a secret room under the house, much of Mohallet's loot was now stored, awaiting fencing.

Mohallet laughed fiercely when he had heard the scheme to the end.

"It is good!" he chortled. "Carry it through at once!"

After concealing the radio outfit, the portly man hurried up to the roof of his house. From there, he could see a boat was being put off from the Helldiver.

THE boat was a collapsible one of metal. It fitted beneath a hatch in the Helldiver's steel plates.

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Doc Savage and Johnny seated themselves in the little shell. They were attired in worn garments, the dress of common sailors. The information they desired – the whereabouts of the mysterious Crying Rock – could best be obtained by mingling with local citizens. They did not wish to attract attention to themselves.

A small, powerful outboard motor kicked the boat beachward. Several officers met them. But Ham, who took care of the legal angles of their jaunts, had been foresighted enough to secure papers which made their landing entirely legal.

Doc and Johnny separated. Both spoke fluent Arabic; both knew the customs of the country.

"Be careful that no one thinks we are seeking Mohallet," Doc suggested. "But pick up anything you can regarding him and the location of this Crying Rock."

"O. K.," agreed Johnny.

The gaunt archaeologist ambled along, idling before bazaars and little drink shops. A turjuman clubbed a camel up before a grog shop, alighted, and went in, each step jarring dust from his robes. The fellow had the appearance of one having just come from the desert.

Johnny followed him in, picked his chance, and told the dragoman: "I am thinking of journeying to the spot known as the Crying Rock. Would you be interested in guiding me there?"

"Wallah!" said the turjuman. "I have never heard of such a place!"

Disappointed, Johnny went on. He decided to try a part of the town where fishermen lived. If the Crying Rock was situated on the coast, they might know its whereabouts.

Striding along, he entered an area where the miserable streets were narrow, smelly rips between the walls of houses.

A figure in feminine robes came toward Johnny, carrying a large basket of dried fruits and nuts. The features were completely masked by the inevitable face cloth. Johnny paid no attention. Just another Arab woman.

The next instant, there was a collision. The basket spilled its contents over Johnny's person. Their forms tangled momentarily.

"You ran into me!" Johnny said sharply in Arabic. But, motivated by politeness, he bent over to help the woman retrieve her dried fruits.

Three wiry brown men hurtled out of a doorway upon the gaunt archaeologist. They had discarded their usual flowing burnouses, and were naked except for loin cloths.

Robes flew off the womanish individual. It was no woman, but another lithe brown man.

Johnny's bony frame ordinarily had the appearance of being about as graceful as a brush pile. But now he danced backward with an astounding agility. He jerked off his needless spectacles with the magnifying left lens.

He speared out a long arm. His fist took one of the attackers on the jaw. The fellow went over backward as abruptly as if turning a back flip of his own accord.

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The other three darted back and forth. They had drawn long-bladed swords. The tips of these weapons were muddy with poison compound.

Johnny drove a hand to the armpit holster, where he carried his small machine-gun pistol.

It was gone. The pretended woman had lifted it, of course, in the collision,

JOHNNY, seeking to retreat farther, brought up against a wall. Poisoned blades menaced him in front, on both sides. The thin archaeologist dodged frantically. He had no other weapon, except an extra drum of cartridges for the missing rapid-firer.

He whipped out the drum and hurled it at a knifeman. The fellow dodged with an expertness that spoke of years of practice at avoiding the bites of evil-tempered camels. The ammo drum bounded down the street. A yapping dog ran out and pursued it.

Other dogs appeared and surrounded the fighting men, their frantic barks making a great bedlam. The knifemen cursed the dogs and Johnny. They weaved in, venomous blades alert.

Johnny was in a spot. The wall behind was too high to leap. And he was sure that one touch of the poisoned steel would mean his death.

Then the rescuer arrived. He came charging around a corner, a stocky man, neatly clad.

"Imshi!" he yelled at Johnny's assailants. "Beat it!"

He skidded to a stop, whipped out a revolver, and leveled it. The gun gulped a throaty roar!

A brown man squawled, dropped his sword, and wrapped both arms over his middle. He turned, and ran weaving down the street.

The other assailants promptly followed.

Johnny seized upon the fallen sword and set out after the runners. But the plump newcomer got in his way.

"Better not!" he said in good English. "Let 'em go! The police will be here in a minute. They'll jail us. They've got a habit of throwing everybody concerned in the can when a fight comes off!"

"Maybe you're right!" Johnny agreed.

He inspected his rescuer as they trotted through crooked streets, leaving the vicinity. He was impressed by the man's neat garb, his smoothly shaven features. Men who shaved regularly were scarce in this part of the world.

"My name is Karl Zad," said the portly man.

"William Harper Littlejohn – Johnny to my friends!" ejaculated Johnny, shaking hands. "And by helping me out of that hole, you certainly qualify as a pal."

Karl Zad dropped behind, ostensibly to look for pursuers, but really to permit himself an evil grin.

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It had worked. thought Karl Zad. This fool bag of bones did not suspect that the attack had been deliberately staged so that he, Karl Zad, might be the rescuer.

Overhauling Johnny, he received a friendly grin from the gaunt archaeologist. Johnny, of course, had no way of knowing Karl Zad was the same lard-faced, bewhiskered pretended merchant who had been in radio communication with the archvillain, Mohallet.

"I AM a merchant, a trader along this coast," volunteered Karl Zad. "They are devils, these natives! They have robbed my caravans until they have about nut me out of business."

"You are not a native of this district?" Johnny hazarded.

"I am from Mecca. I wish I had never left there, too! I never saw as many thieves as there are on this coast! They are organized under a leader known as Mohallet."

Johnny all but fell down at this information. Here, it seemed, was a ready source of information.

"Have you," asked Johnny eagerly, "ever heard of a place known as Crying Rock?"

Karl Zad did not reply immediately. "I have heard of such a place – a great cliff which is said to make horrible sobbing sounds at times."

"Can you give me the exact location?"

Karl Zad did some squirming and forehead wiping to simulate embarrassment.

"Maybe it is a dirty trick to take advantage of your gratitude," he mumbled. "But I'd like mightily for you to give me a job guiding you there. Frankly, I'm about broke."

Johnny smiled widely. "Great! I'd appreciate that!" The details were quickly settled. Karl Zad was to receive a reasonable fee for escorting them to Crying Rock. Johnny knew Doc would approve of the idea, especially when he learned Karl Zad had saved his life.

"I shall pay up a few minor debts, get my dunnage, and meet you at the water front," suggested Karl Zad.

"Need any money?" Johnny offered.

"No. And many thanks!"

They parted.

Johnny found Doc Savage at the little collapsible metal boat fitted with an outboard motor. A ring of gaping Arabs surrounded the bronze giant. They had never before seen a man obviously possessed of such mighty muscles.

"No one seems to have heard of Crying Rock," Doc said thoughtfully. "What'd you learn?"

"Plenty!" Johnny exploded. He told of the fight and the find he had made in his rescuer. He effused at length on Karl Zad's excellent appearance and intelligence.

"Go over the part about the fight again," Doc requested.

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Johnny did so.

"You say Karl Zad shot one of your attackers?" Doc persisted.

"In the stomach, yes. The bullet doubled him over, and he ran."

Johnny spoke for a few moments more on the merits of Karl Zad, then, shading his hands, peered out at the submarine. He could see the huge forms of Renny and Monk on deck.

When Johnny turned. Doc was gone. The big bronze man had departed silently. Johnny showed no surprise: Doc often went away in this fashion when he had something important on his mind.

DURING the next few minutes, there was a great deal of commotion in the ancient streets of Bustan. The excitement was like that of chickens after the shadow of a hawk had passed. In this case, though, the turmoil was caused by the flashing figure of a mighty bronze man who whipped along the streets at a bewildering speed.

Doc made directly for the spot where the attack on Johnny had occurred. He found a crowd. He mingled with them. His golden eyes switched intently over the cobbles.

He was looking for blood from the man who had been shot in the stomach. He found none. He did, however, pick up a small, round wad of blackened cardboard.

For the briefest instant after Doc had found the object, those near by were startled by a weird, indefinable trilling note which seemed to come from nowhere, yet everywhere, persist for an instant, then die away. They glanced about curiously. It was unlike anything they had ever heard, that sound. Some looked at the giant of a man who resembled metal, wondering if he could have anything to do with it.

Doc faded away from the vicinity. The round cardboard he had picked up was the wad from a blank revolver cartridge.

Doc rejoined Johnny. He did not volunteer word of where he had been. Johnny did not ask. He knew Doc's habit of telling what he thought should be told, and no more.

Karl Zad appeared. He carried two large hand bags of excellent leather. Both were new. They seemed rather heavy.

"We will be very glad to get Your help," Doc said politely, after Johnny had performed the introductions.

Johnny was enthusiastic. He was not gullible. Karl Zad was simply a smooth worker, as clever a rogue at deception as could be found on the whole Arabian coast.

They went out to the submarine.

Karl Zad expressed amazement at the compact efficiency of the submarine, at the remarkable controls which enabled such a small crew to handle her.

He was shown to a stateroom, where he deposited his baggage.

"Leave your luggage here, and Johnny will show you over the sub," Doc suggested.

Karl Zad did not seem greatly pleased at this. But he left his bags and permitted himself to be led off forward, where Johnny began lecturing on the automatic depth-measuring device, a contraption which utilized sham sounds sent to the ocean bottom and echoed back. An electrical 'ear' measured the interval needed for the sound to go down and come back, and the speed of sound waves through salt water being known, the depth was readily ascertained.

Doc was below decks for some time. Then he came up and had Ham ferry him ashore in the little folding boat. He carried a big box.

"Go back to the sub," Doc directed. "Some of them may want to come ashore before we sail."

Doc then walked away rapidly, his large box under one arm.

Ham returned to the Helldiver. Sure enough, it was not long before Karl Zad came hurriedly to the deck.

"I forgot my watch!" Karl Zad gasped. "I left it in a shop to be repaired. May I go ashore and get it?"

"Sure," said Ham, and offered his services as boatman.

Chapter XI. DOC'S FAST ONE

ONCE ashore, Karl Zad did some fast moving. He went directly to the zabit in charge of the local police.

"I am Karl Zad, a law-abiding merchant of this town," he declared. "Aboard the submarine Helldiver is some of the loot from a desert caravan which was robbed near here some six weeks ago! There are at least two new suitcases filled with it! There may be more!"

"How do you know this?" he was asked.

"They tried to sell the stuff to me. I went out to the submarine to look at it, not knowing they were thieves. When I learned the truth, I told them I would have to come ashore to get money. And I hurried straight to you!"

The zabit swallowed this volley of lies. He grabbed his turban, a rifle, and summoned a squad of thin-faced, efficient officers.

The raiding party departed on a run in the direction of the submarine.

Karl Zad walked in the opposite direction, a satisfied smirk on his face. He set a direct course for his house, not looking behind him or showing interest in those he passed. Once inside, he uncovered the short-wave radio set concealed under the floor.

He got Mohallet after calling a few moments.

"It is working perfectly, O master!" he reported. "I got the stuff aboard-loot which I was keeping here in my house."

"I hope you did not pick out the Valuable articles!" growled the greedy Mohallet.

"Only material which can be identified as loot from ransacked caravans. Jewelry with outstanding

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characteristics, together with worthless papers from the wallets of robbed merchants."

"Good!" said Mohallet. "Now, when Doc Savage and his men are in jail, we will steal the submarine."

"I will attend to that, too, O master."

"You did not tell them anything they may find of Value?"

"No. They asked me about a place known as Crying Rock. I told them I knew where it was."

"You lied!"

"Of course. But I had to tell them I knew. I never heard of such a place before."

"That is good!" gritted Mohallet, and there was a quality in his voice which said it might be a bad thing for Karl Zad if he did know where Crying Rock was.

"What is behind all this trouble, O master?" asked Karl Zad.

"That is not business of yours!"

Karl Zad made an angry face, but his voice remained meek, servile. "Very well."

At this point, curtains over a door on the opposite side of the room parted noiselessly. A huge nemesis in bronze flashed across the floor. A metallic hand lifted, chopped down.

Karl Zad never knew of the presence of Doc Savage. He went to sleep instantly. Such was the force of the blow that he would slumber at least an hour.

Doc Savage leaned close to the radio microphone. "Wait, O master, on the air, and I will look and see if the police are as yet bringing the bronze man and his five helpers to shore."

The voice was a perfect imitation of that of Karl Zad. An eavesdropper in the next room could hardly have told the difference. Among Doc's other accomplishments, which he had perfected by intensive study and practice, was a remarkable command of voice mimicry. He could imitate almost any tone. Moreover, he could simulate what defied most male mimics – the voice of a woman.

Doc did not go outside. Instead, he ran into the next room, got the box he had brought ashore, and came back. He opened it. Out came a sensitive directional radio receiver.

He switched off Karl Zad's transmitter. Then, tuning until he found the carrier wave—marked by a strong hissing on a certain part of the dial of Mohallet's sender, he rotated the loop aerial until the signal was strongest. This gave him the direction from which the waves were coming.

He made a mental note of the compass bearing. Later, on the submarine, he would draw a line on a chart, using that bearing. Somewhere along that line, Mohallet was now located.

Doc switched on Karl Zad's transmitter.

"There is no news," he said, imitating Karl Zad's voice in uncanny fashion.

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"Call me when there is," commanded Mohallet. "This ends our conversation. Naharak sa'id!"

Mohallet's carrier wave now died. In businesslike fashion, Doc now smashed Karl Zad's wireless set. When he had finished, it would never send another message.

Doc left the house. When he reached the beach, the Arabian zabit and his squad of policemen were approaching from the submarine. Doc waited for them.

They were very angry.

"We were tipped off to search your submarine," they told him. "It must have been some Yankee idea of a joke. We found nothing!"

Just to make sure, they searched the box which held Doc's radio receiver.

"I can prove that we came here directly from New York," Doc announced.

The policemen evidently believed him.

"I cannot understand this!" their chief muttered in disgust.

"I suggest you search thoroughly the house of the man who made this false charge against me – Karl Zad, the merchant," Doc suggested.

"Wallah!" hissed the zabit. "We will do that!"

Doc now hired one of a swarm of boatmen and 'vent out to the submarine. He found his men puzzled, angry. Johnny, especially, was in a boiling rage.

"That was all a trick!" Johnny roared, windmilling his sticklike arms. "When I get hold of that Karl Zad, I'll skin 'im alive, I will!"

"I imagine the police will take care of that," Doc said dryly. "They're going to search his house. And I overheard enough to guess there is much loot concealed there."

Doc explained how the wad from the blank cartridge had put him on Karl Zad's trail.

His five aids fell to grinning widely.

"So all Mohallet's phenagling done was to give us a line on his whereabouts!" Renny boomed.

Johnny fumbled with his glasses which had the magnifier on the left side. "Karl Zad must have carried loot aboard in his bags to plant it!" he ruminated. "But what happened to the stuff, Doc?"

It was a rare thing when Doc smiled. He smiled now.

"I took it out and threw it overboard," he said'

Chapter XII. DECOY

THE sun was not quite up. It was near enough to the horizon to spread a great scarlet fever over the sky, chasing stars, moon. The fever grew; increasing light bloodied the lazy surface of the Arabian Sea.

Renny, in the Helldiver chart room, lowered an enormous right hand over a coastal map. On the map was a straight red line, starting at the town of Bustan and angling entirely across the sheet. This was the radio bearing which Doc had taken upon Mohallet's transmitter.

Carefully lifting a red-headed glass pin, Renny consulted some figures penciled on a paper, then stuck the pin back in the chart, perhaps a quarter of an inch from the red line.

"About thirty miles!" he said, his vast voice vibrating in the steel cell. "Of course, we don't know where Mohallet was located along that red line. He might have been ashore, even."

Renny, accomplished engineer that he was, had few equals as a navigator. He was setting the course of the submarine.

"I wonder if Mohallet is near this Crying Rock, whatever that is," pondered Johnny, polishing the magnifier half of his eyeglasses.

"We should know before long," Doc told them.

The big bronze man now went out on deck. The sea was calm, but the speed of the Helldiver caused a steady shower of spray to fall along the decks.

Clad only in gym trunks, Doc proceeded to take a two-hour routine of exercises which had been his daily ritual from childhood. They were greatly different from the usual, those exercises; and they were solely responsible for the bronze man's amazing physical powers.

He made his muscles work one against the other, straining until filming perspiration mingled with the sea spray. He juggled a number of many figures in his head, multiplying, dividing, extracting square and cube roots – keening his faculties of concentration.

He employed a mechanism creating sound waves of frequencies so high and low the ordinary human ear could not detect them. Through a lifetime of practice, Doc had perfected his ears to a point where he could hear these sounds beyond ordinary ken. He named scores of different odors after a quick olfactory test of small vials racked in a special case.

He read pages of Braille printing, writing for the blind, which is a system of upraised dots on paper. fingers moving so rapidly that they seemed merely to stroke the sheets. This was to sharpen his sense of touch.

He had many other details in the routine. They occupied the entire two hours. with no time out for rest.

There was no magic about Doc's remarkable abilities. Probably no man had taken such exercises for such a long daily period from the cradle on. Were there individuals who had done so, their strength, agility, and acuteness of senses might have equaled those of Doc Savage.

Long Tom came out on deck when Doc finished. The electrical wizard looked tired. He had been at the radio instruments for many hours continuously since they had sailed from Bustan.

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"Not a peep out of Mohallet's radio transmitter," he reported. "But I picked up some other stuff which is not so hot."

"Yes?" Doc prompted.

"The Arabian authorities at Bustan have radio communication with their capital city," Long Tom explained, mopping spray off his rather unhealthy-looking face. "I listened to messages they sent during the night. The stuff wasn't coded. They found some of Mohallet's loot at Karl Zad's house. And they scared Karl Zad into telling everything he knew about Mohallet."

"Which was not a great deal, I'm betting," Doc offered.

"Right! It wasn't. But they wirelessly the complete story to their capital, even to the details about Karl Zad being knocked out at his home. They do not know who made that attack."

"Did they mention Karl Zad's smashed wireless apparatus?"

"I'll say!"

"Not so good!" Doc said dryly. "Mohallet, if he overheard this stuff, is clever enough to guess the smashing of the radio transmitter was my work. No doubt he knows all about radio direction-finding. Too, Mohallet probably has men listening to the government wireless stations, to pick up news of any expeditions being sent out against him."

Long Tom nodded. "Another thing – Karl Zad is dead."

DOC's bronze features remained expressionless. "How come?"

"He tried to escape from the Bustan police. He killed one officer. Then he was himself killed."

"A break for Mohallet," Doc said slowly.

"Yeah. If they ever catch Mohallet, they can't use Karl Zad for a witness against him

An ear-splitting howl came from below decks! There were loud smacks, the frantic clatter of feet. An instant later, Monk shot up out of the deck hatch like something furry erupted by a noisy volcano.

Under one arm, Monk carried a pig. The shoat was fully as homely a specimen of the porker species as Monk was of the human race. It was a razor-back with legs as long as those of a dog, and ears so big they resembled wings.

Ham came close on Monk's heels, belaboring with his sheathed sword cane. He was in a dancing rage.

"You hairy missing link!" he howled. "I'll skin you alive! I'll hollow you out until that pig can use you for a garage! I'll –"

"what's the trouble?" Doc questioned.

An innocent look on his homely face, Monk scratched the enormous ears of his pig. "The shyster don't seem to like Habeas Corpus, here!"

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Ham shrieked: "You dressed the pig up with my best necktie!"

"Habeas Corpus likes corn." Monk smirked. "The necktie was corny yellow, and Habeas was a bit seasick, so the tie made him work up an appetite

"I'll work you up!" Ham gritted.

Renny emitted a thundering laugh. "Where'd you get that missin' link of the pig race, Monk?"

"In Bustan," grinned Monk. "He's got the makin's of a great hog, Habeas Corpus has. I found 'im chasin' a dog big enough to fight a lion."

"And you probably stole him!" Ham sneered. "Nix! I paid his Arab owner one qirsh for 'im! That's about four cents, American money. This Arab said Habeas Corpus had taken to goin' out in the desert and catchin' hyenas." Monk gave Ham a meaning look. "He kept so many dead hyenas dragged up to the Arab's house, that it was a nuisance, and so the Arab had to get rid – "

"Are there hyenas in the Arabian desert?" Renny queried.

"I forgot to ask the Arab," Monk grinned.

Doc went below and got a pair of powerful binoculars. It was always something like this. Ham, touchy on the subject of pigs since the wartime incident which had given him his name, was in for a tough session. Monk would probably make a trained pet of his ridiculous-looking porker, just to torment Ham.

Back on deck, Doc turned his glasses across the bows. The sun was up, now. He shaded the lenses.

"Get your glasses, brothers!" he suggested. "Here's something worth looking at!"

Monk and Ham forgot their quarrel. There was a general rush for binoculars. They trained them in the direction which Doc indicated.

"Mohallet's yacht!" Renny thundered.

THE shore line was a range of low mountains which shot up sheer from the water. There was no vegetation; the terrain seemed solid rock. Moreover, there appeared to be no spots level enough for anything to grow.

Directly ahead was a slight indentation in the frowning heights. It was rimmed with the light line of a sandy beach. As far as the eye could reach along the shore, there was no other beach.

A black yacht with gold trim swung at anchor in this open cove. The craft was something over a hundred feet in length. It had trim lines of speed. It showed no flag, pennant, or other bunting.

There was no sign of life aboard.

The bony Johnny scrambled down to the wheel and bent the submarine toward the somber yacht.

"Take it easy!" Doc warned. "They may be using that old war gag – a disappearing gun. One high-explosive shell in the innards of this boat, and we'd really have something to worry about!"

The bronze man kept his lenses trained on the yacht. There was, he saw, no name upon the black hull.

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"I'll swear there's nobody aboard!" muttered Renny, whose eyes were second in sharpness to Doc's.

The sea was glassy. Barely moving, the Helldiver crept ahead. It might have been a steel fish after some dark, floating insect. But the insect was dead. Nothing happened.

They came alongside. Johnny's expert touch nosed the Helldiver's bow to within a few feet of the yacht anchor chain.

With a springing leap that gave, by its ease of execution, a hint of Doc's remarkable muscular development, the bronze man clutched the anchor linkage. Dangling by his hands, he raced up like a spider on a web.

The deck planks once might have been clean—scrubbed. Now they were soiled, crusted with brine, littered here and there with bottles, tin cans, and bread crusts. Mohallet's crew had been an untidy lot.

Listening, Doc detected no sound but the idling of the sub engines behind him. He went forward, probing into cabins, saloon, crew quarters, engine room, the galley.

He found no one. Of signs of recent occupancy, there were plenty. Liquor rings on tables were still wet where they had been implanted by glasses. The galley stove would scorch the fingers. Bedding was still damp where men had slept upon it and perspired during the night.

There was, in a converted guest cabin, a laboratory which showed Mohallet was beyond the average as a scientist. There was much apparatus, tool racks.

Several of the silent magnetic rifles were there, and others were in various stages of manufacture.

Too, there was a layout for making the poison for sword tips. In an adjoining cabin, Doc found a hideous assortment of venomous snakes – reptiles from many climes. Evidently these were the source of the raw poison.

In Mohallet's private stateroom – denoted by its lavish hangings – stood a large safe. Doc settled to his knees before this. A professional cracksman would have been interested in the results; the combination operated and the door swung open in a surprisingly few seconds.

The shelves inside held a sum of money, both in the gold lira coins of Arabia, and English and American bank notes. The amount was considerable. Searching, Doc found a few jewels, all rather small and obviously pried from settings.

Occupying a bed of honor in a folded square of velvet lay what vaguely resembled a bracelet of shiny, slightly hardened lead wire. The metal, however, was not lead.

The thin circlet, when Doc tested it, bent easily. The workmanship was a bit crude – he could distinguish indentations left by the hammer which had shaped it.

The bit of jewelry bore evidences of much wear. Ornamentation, if any, had long since been wiped off by use.

Doc recalled what Mohallet's man, Balid, had told him in New York of a bracelet of white metal which the white-haired girl had worn when found. This must be it. The thing would about fit her wrist.

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Doc replaced everything, locked the safe, and went on deck. He surveyed the beach with his glasses. His first sweep showed him a surprising vision.

The white-haired girl stood, sheltered by a great boulder, waving frantically in the direction of the black yacht.

THE girl continued to gesture. Her hair, long and strangely white, fluttered like the strands of a partially loosened turban.

Doc ran to the bows, swung over, and descended by the anchor chain. An acrobatic flip carried him to the submarine deck, between two of the sturdy sledlike runners.

Renny and Long Tom had already wrenched up the deck hatch, and were hauling out the collapsible metal boat. Doc lent a hand. He and Renny scooted the little shell over the side.

"Johnny and Long Tom will stay aboard," Doc directed. "The rest of us will go ashore."

The pair designated to remain aboard showed disappointment, but voiced no protests.

The others sprang into the folding boat. Renny twisted the outboard motor flywheel with one big hand, much as he would spin a top. The twin cylinders stuttered.

The little boat raised its bows and dragged a fan of wake shoreward.

Monk had his pig, Habeas Corpus, between his knees. With his furry hands, he fished out one of the compact rapid-firer pistols. Ham also produced one of the remarkable guns.

"Ease up about a hundred yards offshore!" Doc directed.

Renny obediently cut the motor and pulled their craft broadside to the beach. Doc's golden eyes raked, probed. He used the high-magnification glasses.

"That deserted yacht – nobody but the girl on shore – the whole thing is strange!" Monk muttered. "What's become of Mohallet?"

Doc lifted one hand. Slowly, carefully, he formed letters of the deaf-and-dumb language.

The girl had left the message in the vernacular written on the bathtub. She should be able to understand it.

"What is the trouble?" he signaled.

They had drifted in closer; the girl must have had sharp eyes – she deciphered his transmission. Her hand came up; her fingers writhed.

"Help!" she appealed.

"Are you alone?" Doc fingered.

Her transmission was barely readable, for most of the words were minus letters of more or less importance.

"Ys," sent the white-haired girl. "Bd men g, scare!"

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"She says that she's alone, and that the Arabs fled in fright," Doc elaborated, doing some guesswork.

Monk, Habeas Corpus under one arm, stood erect.

"If she can spell English out on her fingers, she should be able to speak it," he muttered. "I'm gonna give her a hail!

"Are you sure you're alone, miss?" he called loudly.

"Ask her if her husband's around!" Ham jeered.

The white-haired girl, however, gave no indication of being able to understand the English which she could transmit upon her fingers. She made more characters on her slender brown fingers.

"She says she doesn't understand English," Doc reported. "Also, she says to stop talking and come ashore and get her. Let's do that, Renny."

RENNY fed the little outboard gas. The boat skittered for the beach. It rasped its metal bottom on surf-rounded pebbles. The sand of this beach was of very coarse sand, and mixed with gravel.

Monk, clutching Habeas Corpus, was first out of the boat. He lumbered toward the girl, grinning pleasantly.

A surprising thing then happened. The girl peered closely at Monk's apish figure. The furry bulk of the man seemed to frighten her. She suddenly fled backward.

Monk came to a stop. "Dag-gone it! Is she scared of me, or of Habeas Corpus?"

Doc advanced, and the girl hesitated in her retreat. Doc spoke on his fingers. The young woman replied in the same fashion. This was the first glimpse they had gotten of her in good light. Her beauty was even more entrancing than they had thought.

"She wants us to put a chain on Monk before she comes close," Doc reported. "Either that, or knock him over the head."

Monk looked pained. The dapper Ham began to titter.

"why?" Monk grunted.

Doc talked with his fingers – received a reply.

"She's disgusted with us!" Doc translated. "She asks if we do not know that Monk is one of the White Beasts, only black-furred."

Ham emitted a squawl of laughter. Between salvos of mirth, he choked: "She sure got Monk's number!"

"Yah-h-h!" Monk growled at Ham. Then, to Doc: "What in thunder's she talkin' about – white Beasts?"

The girl was staring at Ham, as if wondering whether his paroxysms of laughter did Dot mean he was a bit demented. She was an exotic figure. She still wore much the same garb that she had in New York.

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Since she gave no signs of wanting to get close to the furry Monk, the men approached her. They were now some yards from their boat.

Once more Doc addressed the girl in the digit vernacular. Her reply was lengthy. The English words were so chopped, so incomplete, that only Doc could follow them.

"She thinks Monk is one of a race of strange white-furred savages which she fears greatly," Doc reported. "The thing is very mysterious. It's about the strangest thing I ever ran up against."

The white-haired girl suddenly shot both arms out in front of her. She screamed piercingly.

"She can talk!" Monk gulped. "She ain't dumb – "

Ham spun.

"I'll say she ain't dumb!" he yelled. "Look!"

The group whirled. Burnoosed brown men were springing up along the beach. They seemed to materialize magically from the sand. They had been concealed in pits, cleverly covered over.

A machine gun clamored from a hiding place among the rocks. The storm of lead was not aimed at Doc's gang, but at their boat. Lead slugs hosed against the little craft, literally tearing the thin metal hull to ribbons.

The boat folded strangely, like a thing with its back broken. It was all but cut in halves – rendered entirely useless.

Chapter XIII. BROWN DEVILS

"INTO the rocks!" Doc snapped.

Monk's little machine gun spewed a stream of reports. Its roar was like the note of a gigantic bull fiddle. Ham and Renny also turned loose.

Burnoosed brown men folded down. Two, four, five of them!

Doc began: "No killing if you can help – "

"Mercy bullets!" grunted Monk. ~They only put 'em to sleep!"

They raced for the nearest shelter–boulders and monster slabs of stone which had slid down from the heights above during past ages.

The white-haired girl seemed stunned by the abruptness of developments. Then she wheeled and raced ahead of them to cover.

"Blast her!" Ham gritted. "She led us into a trap!"

"Nix!" snapped Monk. "She was as surprised at sight of these birds as we were."

The machine gun snarled in their direction, but a bit too late. The lead torrent hammered harmlessly among

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the boulders. A brown man, resembling a dark-faced white ghost in his robes, sprang up forty yards to the right. He lifted a rifle.

Ham's gun stuttered – the rifleman spilled off the rock on which he stood.

Now came Monk's chance to change the white-haired girl's opinion of him.

Two burnoused men darted out ahead of them.

Near by, Mohallet's voice shouted at the pair: "Seize the girl! Get her clear so that we can kill this bronze devil and his men!"

One of the swarthy pair grasped the girl. The other struck at her head, club fashion, with a pistol. Twisting, she evaded the blow.

Monk emitted a bellow which was astounding in view of his usually mild voice! He charged, picking up a rock as he did so. Such long arms did he have that he seemed hardly to stoop in grasping the rock.

The fellow trying to club the girl sought to reverse his pistol. Monk flung the rock. It caught the dark man in the face. There was a mushy plop as it hit, and the whole character of the man's features changed.

Throwing the rock was Monk's way of avenging the attempted clubbing of the girl. He could have shot the fellow with a mercy bullet much easier, but that would have inflicted little pain.

Releasing the girl, the other man sought to flee. Two jumps, he made. Then Monk overhauled him and gathered him in a great bear hug. One of the man's arms broke. Monk's strength was tremendous.

Dropping his victim, Monk cuffed him as he fell. The flat-handed blow against the skull knocked the man senseless.

The white-haired girl gave Monk a faint smile, and the homely chemist grinned from ear to ear.

"Under cover!" Doc called sharply at Monk.

"Let 'im stay out there makin' eyes at her and get shot!" Ham suggested.

Monk, beckoning the young lady, dived into shelter.

For possibly three minutes that followed, there was a sort of tense silence, broken frequently by shots. Doc's men had latched their rapid-fire pistols into single-shot operation.

Almost every swarthy head that eased into view received a chemical-charged bullet which induced instant unconsciousness. It was uncanny shooting, marksmanship the like of which the brown men of Mohallet had never before gone up against.

Heads ceased to appear.

In a low voice, Doc addressed the white-haired girl. He tried Arabian of various districts. the dialects of such desert tribes as possessed a vernacular apart.

The girl brightened. She spoke rapidly.

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Doc listened, then shook his head. "She speaks a tongue which was once Arabian, but it's so distorted that it'll take several hours of practice before I can converse intelligently with her."

He resorted to his fingers. He was forced to go slowly, leaving plenty of space between his words. It was like an expert telegraph operator transmitting to a beginner.

The reply was lengthy.

"They pulled a fast one on her," Doc told the others. "They brought her ashore during the night. She didn't see those fellows hide themselves. A small party of them were holding her. At sight of the submarine, they put on a great show of fright. She made a try at escape during the excitement, and succeeded. Of course, they arranged for her escape. She didn't realize that."

"I knew she wasn't tryin' to trap us." Monk grunted.

"You fellows stick together!" Doc directed.

The next instant, he was gone from the spot.

DOC made directly for the point from which Mohallet's voice had come. If possible, he wanted to get his hands on the master villain. The fellow was a murderer, the type who would be a menace to mankind as long as he was at liberty.

Mohallet, moreover, knew what this was all about. No doubt he held the explanation of the presence of this strange white-haired girl who spelled English on her fingers, yet who could not speak the tongue, and who feared mysterious savages whom she called White Beasts.

Once Doc got his hands on Mohallet, he had no apprehensions that the sinister fellow with the false eye and the jeweled teeth would tell what he knew. Doc possessed many ways of making men talk.

Mohallet had retreated, however.

Doc came upon a skulking, burnoose-clad rifleman. The man had time for one terrified yell before the crash of a metallic fist jarred him into unconsciousness.

Another of Mohallet's followers saw the bronze giant from a distance. He threw up his rifle and fired. But when the bullet arrived, there was no visible target, other than a waste of rock and a sky already beginning to blaze with a terrific heat.

Mohallet's men were drawing away from the vicinity, appalled by the uncanny marksmanship of the men they had attacked, and fearful of the giant bronze one who was chief of the five.

A flurry of shots from the submarine drew Doc's attention. He glided to the right and sought a high eminence of rock.

Johnny and Long Tom had run the submarine close inshore, apparently with the idea of joining the fight at long range. Their intentions were good, but the way things were developing, they had made a very bad move.

Some distance down the beach, Mohallet's men had carried light boats, fitted with outboard motors, to the water. Loading into the craft, they were skimming toward the sub. They used guns.

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Lead began to streak the bay surface about the Helldiver. No mercy bullets, these! Deadly, metal-jacketed, the slugs squeaked and clanged off the thick steel hull of the underseas boat.

Johnny and Long Tom, greatly outnumbered, were driven from deck. They were in too close to submerge. There was no time to drive the heavy craft into deep water. Before it as much as began to move, Mohallet's men were swarming over the deck.

Mohallet himself was in one of the light boats. He bent close to the sub hatch.

"Surrender!" he yelled in English. "Or we will drop a depth bomb alongside!"

Nothing happened for some moments. Whether Mohallet's words could have been heard within the submarine or not was a question.

"Surrender!" Mohallet repeated. "Or we shall also kill the men who are ashore!"

John and Long Tom must have had the deck hatch loosened a crack so as to catch the words. There was a short conversation, so low-voiced that Doc could not catch the words. Then the deck hatch opened.

Mohallet and his followers swarmed down into the Helldiver's innards.

KEEPING under cover, Doc returned to his five friends and the white-haired girl.

"We're in a kinda tough spot!" boomed big-fisted Renny.

"Yeah!" grunted Monk. "We sure ran into a streak of tough luck!"

Doc nodded slowly. Although his bronze features showed none of his thoughts, he was disgusted. It was a rare occasion when he fell into a trap as simple as this one. He should, he believed, have observed that men were hidden along the beach, cleverly though they had concealed themselves.

His attention had been riveted on the white-haired girl and the sign talk with her. That accounted for his entering the trap.

"Getting careless!" he said aloud. "Riding to a fall like this – we had it coming!"

Monk had been trying to talk to the girl on his fingers. He was finding her abbreviated words too much for him.

"Dag-gone it!" he complained. "I can't keep up with this shorthand she uses!"

"Let me try," Doc suggested. "I'm anxious to hear her story."

There was to be no conversation now, however. Doc had not formed a dozen characters when a loud hail came from the direction of the Helldiver.

"Ahoy, Doc Savage!"

It was Mohallet's voice.

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Doc made no answer, going on the principle that a Silence would shake Mohallet's confidence to some degree.

"I want to make a deal!" Mohallet called again.

"What kind?" Doc demanded. His mobile voice was pitched in a tone that carried strongly without being loud.

"A deal which will save your lives!" Mohallet retorted.

"Would you be kind enough to point out what danger now threatens our lives?" Doc inquired. "Certainly this pack of dogs you call your followers offers no menace."

Mohallet cursed expressively.

"Wallah!" he yelled. "You would never be able to make your way from this spot to civilization!"

Doc laughed. The sound was remarkably hearty, and expressed an entire confidence in his ability to reach Bustan, the nearest settlement.

"We will kill your two men whom we have aboard!" threatened Mohallet, trying a new tact.

"What is your deal?" Doc queried.

"Come aboard, bringing the essential part of the submarine machinery which is needed to permit it to submerge, and which is missing," Mohallet requested. "In return, we will permit you to remain alive, and will take you along with us, unharmed."

"Huh!" Monk exploded. "Machinery missing! Who – "

"We weren't born yesterday!" Doc yelled.

"What has the date of your birth got to do with it?" asked Mohallet, who was apparently not up on American slang.

"I mean simply that we are not children enough to believe you'd keep your word!"

Mohallet swore some more. "What is your price?"

"Get off the submarine with your men! Clear out entirely!"

"La!" Mohallet howled. "No!"

Doc debated. "Take us fully into your confidence, telling us what this is about, and permitting us to remain in control of the submarine, to sail it wherever you wish to go!"

"Wallah! That is agreeable!" Mohallet was entirely too prompt in taking up the offer.

Renny rattled his huge fists together. "The louse! He don't intend to keep the bargain!"

"Neither do we!" Doc said dryly. "There wasn't a word said about us not climbing Mohallet if we get the chance."

Chapter XIV. THE PIG KISS

DOC, his three men, and the white-haired girl were not fired upon as they walked down to the beach. They retained their weapons.

"Hey!" Monk whispered. "You ain't carryin' no part from the submarine, Doc! Where'd you put it?"

"I didn't remove any."

Monk blinked his little eyes. "Then Johnny and Long Tom

"Put over some kind of a fast one," Doc finished. "They must have removed the part themselves and given the impression we had it."

Boats came from the submarine. Only one man was in each.

"Makin' a big show in hopes we'll think he's goin' to play square!" Renny rumbled.

Brown men appeared amid the rocks behind them. They fingered their guns eagerly, but offered no violence. Neither did they come close. They had acquired a mighty respect for their foes.

Doc and his companions entered the boats. Reluctantly, the girl followed them. Her attractive face was twisted with distress.

"She feels pretty tough about gettin' us into this mess!" Monk decided.

Doc addressed the pretty young lady on his fingers.

"Don't worry about us," he told her.

She smiled wryly.

"She's got nerve!" Ham admitted, fiddling absently with his sword cane. "I wish we had time to get her story."

"That'll have to wait until we get out of this scrape," Doc told him. "If we kill time, this bird Mohallet might use the interval to think up a scheme slick enough to sink us."

There were no weapons in sight upon Mohallet's person, or on those of his men, when Doc reached the Helldiver.

"You see we are keeping our word." Mohallet murmured. "Now, if you will kindly replace the missing part."

He peered at Doc's person, obviously wondering where the missing mechanism was concealed.

"Where are my other two men?" Doc demanded. Johnny and Long Tom were led into view. They were unharmed, although their arms were bound.

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"Cut them free!" Doc commanded angrily.

This was done.

"Now, we will go below and replace the part," Doc announced. "All in a group, please!" Mohallet commanded. Monk had retained his pig, Habeas Corpus, throughout the trouble. Monk would not readily turn loose of such a potent instrument for annoying the well-dressed Ham. He carried the strange-looking porker, big ears flapping, as he clambered below.

They went forward, moving in a tight group. The girl and Mohallet brought up the rear.

Doc's whisper reached only to Long Tom's ear. "What did you fellows take off the machinery?"

"Nothin'!" chuckled Long Tom. "I simply shortcircuited some of the wires which lead to the electrical mechanism controlling the diving rudders."

Mohallet, a hit in the rear, did not hear this statement.

He crowded up, a false smile exposing his grotesque, bejeweled teeth. He was going to permit no plots to be hatched against him.

"I must be a party in any conversation, of course," he smirked.

Doc Savage showed no emotion. But he spoke rapidly, low-voiced. The words were a weird combination of gutturals and clackings.

MOHALLET'S one good eye stared; his other eye remained fixed, like the orb of a dead man. He had not understood a syllable of the tongue. In fact, only Monk and Mohallet had heard the words.

Mohallet did not know it, but there were few who could comprehend that language. It was the pure speech of the ancient Mayans, those people of Central America who once had a civilization that rivaled the Egyptians. Doc and his men had acquired facility in the use of this tongue on a visit to the strange spot which was the source of the fabulous wealth which Doc possessed.

In the lost valley in a remote Central American republic lay a gold mine of almost fantastic richness. A handful of survivors of the ancient Mayan race lived there, unknown to the rest of the world, and worked the mine. They had a powerful radio receiver. At high noon on certain designated days, Doc had but to broadcast several words of Mayan over a powerful radio transmitter.

Within a few days, the Mayans would send out a treasure pack train of burros. The value of these cargoes invariably ranged into millions. This wealth, it was understood, was to be used by Doc only to further his strange object in life – the righting of wrongs and the punishing of evildoers all over the globe.

Mohallet, knowing nothing of all this, was baffled by the weird words.

"You will speak a language I understand!" he snapped, teeth bared in a snarl.

Doc ignored him.

Monk, a grin on his homely face, scratched Habeas Corpus behind the ears.

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"I'm gonna put my pet in my stateroom," he said mildly.

"You will stay with us!" commanded Mohallet, his evil and grotesque face ugly.

Monk paid no attention. He walked away.

Mohallet glared, did nothing.

Doc and the others worked on forward. Several brown villains joined Mohallet. Some of them went ahead of the party. They were patently suspicious of a trick.

Doc killed time in the little compartment which housed the diving–rudder mechanism.

Monk rejoined the party. He did not have the pig. "O. K.!" Doc said loudly. "We'll repair the mechanism!"

Long Tom whispered: "Mohallet is sure to pull something the instant we do."

"Let him," Doc replied in a low voice. "Let's trail along with this thing and see what happens. There's something big behind the whole business, and I'm getting anxious to learn what it is."

"Make the repairs!" Mohallet commanded impatiently. "It was part of the bargain that you tell us what use you intend to make of the Helldiver," Doc pointed out.

"I will tell you – when the repairs are made!" hissed the barbaric–looking Mohallet.

Long Tom now replaced the control wires which he had shorted. The task took only a moment. He wheeled on Mohallet.

"You could have done that yourself, if you had known anything about submarines!" he jeered.

"Son of a camel!" Mohallet gritted, sparks seeming to fly from his diamond–studded teeth.

He sprang suddenly backward. A sweep of his arm sent the white–haired girl reeling through the low door in a steel bulkhead. With surprising speed he followed her, scooped her up, and ran aft.

She fought, but was helpless against his strength.

He crossed a compartment which contained no machinery, but was walled with bunks – the sleeping quarters.

Doc pursued them, ignoring the group of brown men behind. The swarthy fellows, not closely acquainted with Doc's ability to move swiftly, did not note that the bronze man was a bit sluggish in his actions.

Doc and his five friends crowded into the sleeping compartment in a group. They lumbered along between the bunks.

Instantly, doors slammed fore and aft. Metal dogs rattled.

Renny crashed his great frame against one panel. He handed it a resounding wallop with one of his huge fists. Nothing happened.

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At the opposite end of the chamber, Monk was fighting the other door. The slabs of plate steel were proof against anything less than a cutting torch or high explosive.

"Were trapped." Monk howled. "And they've got the girl!"

HIGHLY perturbed, the five men stared at Doc. He showed no concern. Selecting a comfortable bunk, he stretched out in it.

Ham sheathed his sword cane, which he had bared. He peered at Doc. Then he grinned, straightening his immaculate coat.

"You expected something like this," he accused Doc.

"Not something like this – this very thing!" Doc told him.

"But, blast it, we're in a worse

"Keep your shirt on!" Doc soothed. "We'll play the same game as those birds. Incidentally, they're not quite as slick as they think they are."

"You mean the sub still won't run?"

"It'll run, all right – if they have men aboard who understand the machinery."

"They haven't! The fact that they didn't find the disconnected wires on the diving mechanism proves that."

"Not necessarily. That mechanism is not the usual type. A man who has spent years on naval submarines would have to puzzle it out before he saw how it worked."

Doc's prediction speedily proved to be correct. The Helldiver got under way, showing there were men in Mohallet's crowd who knew enough of underseas craft to operate this one.

They heard a deck hatch clang forward, an indication that the men in the bow compartment had clambered out and joined Mohallet and the others in the control and engine compartments.

For fully two hours, the Helldiver did nothing but cruise at varying speeds. Several times, a swaying of the steel floor showed the craft was turning.

"What's the idea of this cruisin' around?" Monk pondered.

"They're familiarizing themselves with the controls and the handling of the boat," Doc hazarded.

The aimless cruising persisted for some time longer. Then the Helldiver' made three short dives. The first was ragged, the sub standing almost on its nose when it was down. The second was better; the third fair.

"They're improving," Ham admitted.

Monk made a fierce face. "I wish they'd get along with their mud-pie making!"

He got his wish. The sub straightened out and began to cruise at fair speed. Then it turned and slowly submerged.

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"They've gone along the coast some distance," Doc announced. "They're now heading straight for shore."

The others showed surprise. It was high tribute to Doc's concentration and keen senses that he had been able to keep track of their erratic progress. The others had no idea where they had gone.

Doc now pressed an ear to the hull plates. For a long time there was no sound but the labor of the engines.

There came a sharp shock, a blow delivered from the bottom. The Helldiver had touched the sea floor. The engines now stopped, apparently while Mohallet's men made sure no damage had been done. They did not know that the sub would stand a much greater shock.

"Listen!" Doc suggested.

His friends crammed their ears to the sweating steel plates. They caught the sound immediately – a combination of eerie gurgling, mumbling, and hissing. Faint, fantastic, the noise went on and on.

Monk groped for a descriptive. Finally, he grunted: "Like some monster crying!"

"Crying Rock," Doc reminded.

A MOMENT later, the engines started again. The Helldiver inched forward, the stout runners – they were attached to the keel and the sides, as well as to the deck – gritting over a rocky bottom from time to time.

"But what made that infernal crying noise?" Renny boomed.

No one answered. Doc was quiet, showing no concern, as always. The rest were on edge, nervous. They darted from one point to another in the little sleeping compartment, jamming ears to the hull. But they could hear now only the engine moan.

The Diesels used on the surface had been shut off, and electric motors were propelling. Their note was a dull whine, mingling with the harsher gear noise, the rushing of water, and the occasional gobble of machinery as diving or steering rudders were operated.

"Blast it!" Johnny snapped, wrenching off his glasses to shake sweat from the lenses. "I wish I knew where we're goin'!"

Five minutes – ten – fifteen. The suspense grew. The motors were barely turning. The Helldiver must be making no more than three miles an hour.

A shock! It resembled a blow from the top this time. It was not especially hard.

"What the' blazes?" rapped Johnny. He pocketed his glasses in a case which had a special recess for the thick magnifying left lens. "The deck runners hit something that time!"

"We're evidently going places," Doc told him dryly.

A sharp uptilt, a loud sobbing as the ballast tanks blew, showed the Helldiver was coming to the surface. The Diesels did not start; the electric motors continued propulsion.

But not for long! The submarine veered to one side – they could tell this because there was an abrupt tendency for their bodies to sway to the left.

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The hull runners grated on rock. They could hear men banging feet on deck. Chains rattled. Hawsers made faint scraping noises as they were dragged from special drums in the hull.

The motors died; the Helldiver sagged backward briefly, then stopped with a faint jar. She had been moored.

Doc listened at the plates. He heard a low gurgling on the outside of the hull runners.

"We seem to be in a moving current of water," he stated. Voices from Mohallet's men were now audible. The stout steel walls made the words indistinguishable. But the tones were shrill, excited.

Ham, straining his ears, tapped the hull in puzzled fashion with his sword cane.

"They sounded like they're scared stiff!" he volunteered. "Now what can be wrong?"

Monk's homely face cracked a big grin. "Habeas Corpus must be doin' his stuff!"

Ham bristled. "Don't mention that pig to me! When we get out of this, the first thing I'm gonna do is make breakfast bacon out of him!"

Monk acquired a foxy look. "I've got a great big kiss for the little thing that's gonna get us out of this!"

Ham should have been more wary. But he was mad. And he thought suddenly that Doc and Monk had conspired with the attractive white-haired girl that she should release them.

"Me, too!" he snapped. "I'll kiss the one who rescues us from this mess!"

"Mean that?" Monk demanded owlshly.

"Cross my heart! It's a promise!" Ham scowled at Monk's homely face. "And I'm sure it won't make her sick, either!"

"You guys heard 'im promise!" Monk told the others solemnly. "He said he'd kiss Habeas Corpus."

"What?" Ham squawled.

"The pig," Monk explained sweetly. "I put a chemical mixture on his bristles. It works kinda like the itchin' powder the kids have fun with, only lots worse. One of Mohallet's gang has touched Habeas Corpus and started burnin', and when the others grabbed 'im to see what was wrong, they began burnin', too!"

Monk leered happily at Ham. "It looks like you kiss the pig! Mohallet's men will let us out to stop the itchin'!"

Ham said a gloomy nothing. The rescue had suddenly lost its charm.

Chapter XV. THE WORLD OF BLACKNESS

MOHALLET'S voice penetrated the door in the stern bulkhead. He sounded frightened. He was very angry.

"Wallah!" he snarled. "When you spoke in the tongue I did not understand you planned a trick! That khazir – that pig! What has it done to my men! Wa-asalah, akhkh! Alas! And to me, too!"

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Doc came close to the bulkhead. "Have all of your men been affected?"

"The fools?" grated Mohallet. "They have! Like dogs, when they began to itch they scratched each other, and that spread the curse!"

"That is very bad," Doc said.

"It will be bad for you, bronze man! We are going to put a bomb in the submarine and go off and leave it if you do not tell us how to get rid of this devilish affliction!"

"Try washing it off."

"Curse you! That only spreads the agony! What is it that you have given us, bronze man?"

"It would be terrible, would it not, if, after hours of the pain you are undergoing now, the flesh should begin to turn white. then drop off in great chunks?" Doc suggested.

Mohallet swore shrilly. "You are trying to frighten us!" In the rear of the sleeping compartment, Monk whispered to the gloomy Ham: "Doc's got 'im goin'! This stuff makes a little white blister! They'll be scared green when they see those!"

Doc continued badgering Mohallet.

"It would not be pleasant," said Doc, "if, as you watched lumps of your own body drop away, there was great agony. But not quite enough agony to kill you until, perhaps. you could see a few of your own bones. Nice thought, eh?"

Mohallet launched a stream of his best maledictions.

"That stuff won't have such an effect!" whispered bony Johnny.

"Is Doc saying it will?" Long Tom snorted. "He's just askin' the guy how he'd like them things to happen."

Mohallet was screaming: "We shall go away and leave a bomb"

"Go ahead!" Doc rapped. "Go off and die!"

Mohallet apparently did leave for a few moments, evidently running a little bluff of his own. But he was hack before long, driven by the smarting of the pernicious chemical.

"We will let you out, bronze man, if you will agree – "

"We agree to nothing!" Doc told him shortly.

Mohallet outdid all his previous outbursts of vituperative. His sulphurous word flow ran some three minutes, seemingly without time out for a breath intake.

"What are your terms?" he asked.

"Send the white-haired girl to turn us loose!" Doc ordered. "You and each of your men will advance, one at a time, and hand over all his arms. Then you will gather on deck."

"And after that?"

"You get an antidote for what ails you. Beyond that, we make no promises!"

Mohallet departed again. There was a long wait, punctuated by much agitated yelling and galloping about. Too, several times there was sound of boxes being moved in the storeroom.

"They're cookin' up somethin'!" Monk decided uneasily.

Moving water continued to gurgle along the hull of the Helldiver.

"I wonder where we're at," pondered big-fisted Renny. "There are no rivers along this coast."

Mohallet came to the bulkhead and cried angrily: "We accept your terms!"

COMPLYING with instructions, the white-haired girl loosened the mechanical dogs which secured the door. Her eyes were radiant. She said something, happy and excitedly, hut unintelligible, in her native tongue.

"Shed your weapons!" Doc yelled at the evil faces framed in the compartment to the stern.

A pistol skittered across the gridded floor. More followed, then rifles.

"Don't forget those poisoned knives and swords!" Shimmering in the electric luminance, blades cascaded to the floor. The heap of arms grew, spread.

"Holy cow!" chuckled Renny. "They carried enough weapons for an army!"

Finally, Mohallet snarled: "That is all! Now the cure!"

Doc stood for a moment watching the brown men. They were in great discomfort, to say the least. Their fingers were going almost steadily, scraping their smarting hides. Their efforts only spread the chemical and caused it to work deeper.

"Out on deck!" Doc directed.

The swarthy men backed away. They could he heard climbing the companion which led to the main hatch above the control room.

"Go mix the antidote, Monk," Doc directed.

Monk hurried to his little stateroom. He carried a remarkably compact assortment of chemical ingredients – almost a complete laboratory in itself – with him wherever he went. The stuff had been rifled, hut none of the bottles broken.

He worked swiftly at mixing a potion which would stop the smarting instantly. To a man with his vast knowledge of chemistry the task was an easy one.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, appeared. The unlovely specimen of a shoat seemed not greatly bothered by the itching chemical.

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"That's what comes of having a hide toughened by Arabian fleas and lice!" Monk chuckled. He lathered Habeas Corpus liberally with the antidote, grinning: "Gotta get you prettied up! Ham is gonna kiss you!"

Monk rejoined Doc. The group clambered for the deck. They did so warily, expecting trickery, alert for it.

"Holy cow!" Renny bawled when he had his head outside. They were in an abysmal darkness. Sunlight had been glaring, nearly blinding, when they had gone below. It had been morning. Night could not have come so quickly. And there never was a night with blackness such as this pitch darkness.

Water gurgled; it seemed to sob and course all around them. The air throbbed with the sound of it – the sucking, swishing and splashing of a vast, muffled waterfall. This noise was not loud; they had not noticed it while below, had been aware only of a stream pouring past the moored Helldiver.

That the submarine was moored became speedily evident. Mohallet's voice came out of the abyss to the right. "Wallah! The remedy, quick!"

A chorus of agonized yells echoed the demand, pleas by Mohallet's men that their distress he relieved. Doc Savage knew now, as he had earlier suspected, that the insistence of Mohallet's followers, ignorant and easily frightened, was responsible for the speedy capitulation.

Doc spiked a flashlight beam at the voices. He saw a huge shelf of stone, worn smooth, and grooved deeply by the waters of ages.

"An underground river!" Renny boomed. "We're in a great underground stream!"

The engineer's vast voice rumbled away in echoes, thumping, muttering, bouncing back and forth.

Following closely the echoes, as if set off by them, came a cataclysmic roar. It was as if the two halves of the world had jumped apart and come together like a clap of gigantic hands.

THE titanic sound of the blast mounted until it seemed to crush skulls, and it was followed by lesser noises, as if buckshot were rattling in a tin lid, only of infinitely greater loudness.

The waters of the underground river lifted, writhed, expanded, as if the stream were a colossal snake of liquid, sucking in a great breath. The Helldiver came up on that awful surface, chip-light.

The anchorage hawsers snapped like threads on a package. The sub rolled as if she were a steel hog trying to wet her back.

Doc gripped the big runners with one metal clamp of a hand. His other hand collared somebody – it was the white-haired girl. He held her from falling.

He called to his men to hold tight. That was hardly necessary. His great voice was lost in the whooping thunder which filled the huge cavern.

Back and forth gamboled the echoes, ear-splitting in themselves. The noise subsided, slowly it seemed, because of these echoes. The submarine ceased to pitch so greatly.

Renny's great voice boomed from toward the stern: "Everybody all right?"

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"You'd better shut up!" came a somewhat shrill crack from Long Tom. "Lookit what you started with that other yell!"

Doc came to his feet. He bore the white-haired girl toward the deck hatch. She had made no outcry other than a gasp, and she was silent now. Evidently knowing her words could not be understood, she did not speak.

Fortunately, only the single hatch had been open. There was water below, but not enough to destroy the Helldiver's buoyancy. Doc switched on pumps to clear the water before it worked into the battery rooms.

Doc threw the control which should have automatically started the engines. Nothing happened. He tried the electric motors. Again, no response!

He dived for the engine room. First glance showed him the trouble – Mohallet had been tricky enough to do what he had been deceived into thinking Doc's men had done earlier. He had taken essential parts of the mechanism, light stuff, which could be carried easily.

Doc veered back for the deck, passing the white-haired girl, who was trying to smile her gratitude. He had wanted the engines going so he could cruise about in search of his men, had any been washed overboard.

On deck he found all five safe, but wet and puzzled.

"What happened?" Johnny pondered.

Doc did not answer immediately. He dropped back below, got an empty bottle poured a little phosphorus in it, and corked it. Back outside he flung the bottle into the water. The glowing phosphorus made a surprising light in the infinite darkness.

The shiny spark surged about, eddied this way and that, but did not move greatly. Doc turned his flashlight on the cavern walls. The submarine did not seem to be drifting.

"An explosion that blocked the river mouth!" he declared. "Mohallet must have planted the dynamite or nitro – we had a quantity aboard plainly marked. He had a man stationed to set the blast at a signal. The fellow heard Renny yell, could not distinguish the words in the cavern, and thought it was Mohallet He set the blast. And the river is blocked. We're not moving! They must have set the blast to keep us from turning back!"

THEY watched a bit longer, to make sure there was no motion. Doing that they noted a fact of undeniable interest.

"The river is rising?" Johnny pointed out. "Rocks that were sticking out of the water a few minutes ago, you can't see now!"

Yells came from the shore. Mohallet's men! The peculiar acoustics of the cavern made them sound like an excited coyote pack.

"They've put themselves in a pickle," Monk chuckled.

"And us in one too" Doc pointed out. "They have the engine parts. They' closed the river mouth, to keep us from going back, of course!"

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Going to one of the deck hatches, Doc opened it and broke out a folding boat – there were several aboard. He placed this in the water.

Long Tom, from his electrical equipment, produced a powerful portable spotlight. This was mounted with a clamp upon the bow of the collapsible boat.

Doc went alone to bargain with Mohallet.

He found the outlaw and his followers – a chastened, itching group – upon the ledge. Between scratching themselves and watching with popping eyes the rising water, they were exceedingly busy.

They did not curse the sight of Doc this time. A swimming sinner in the Great Flood never looked at Noah and his Ark with more longing gaze.

Mohallet tried to make terms. "You must agree to make us your equal partners when we reach the Phantom City."

"The Phantom City?" Doc demanded. "What is that?"

"I will tell you when you take us aboard. You must also return our arms and permit us the run of the submarine."

"That's a laugh!" Doc jeered.

"We have parts of the machinery which you must possess before you can escape the rising waters which will soon flood this cavern!"

"Do you know how long the Helldiver can remain under water?"

"What has that – "

"It can stay down several days in a pinch!"

"But you cannot leave – "

"We can stay down until you drown," Doc said shortly. "We have diving suits aboard, the self-contained kind which need no air hoses. There is a diving lock which will permit divers to leave the Helldiver, and return while it is submerged. We can simply come and get the machinery from beside your drowned bodies."

"You might not find it!" Mohallet said desperately. "In a pinch, we would have enough time to make replacements right in the submarine."

Doc now switched into Arabic, for the benefit of such of Mohallet's men as might not speak English, and repeated his dire predictions. This had the effect he hoped for. The swarthy fellows began to insist on complete submission.

It ended with the missing parts being tossed to Doc in the boat.

The bronze man immediately guided his little craft away. He was pursued by wild cries. Some of Mohallet's men wanted to go back with him.

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DOC left the replacing of the parts to his five aids. He still had not had time to question the white-haired girl. And, even now, it was necessary to postpone that a bit.

He wanted to inspect the scene of the explosion. With the bow searchlight of his boat ramming an expanding rod of white, he drove downstream. He considered, testing the air with his nostrils. It was foul, like that in a cave. If there was ventilation through crevices in the rock above, it was very meager.

He tipped the searchlight up. The roof was perhaps three hundred feet above. The opposite wall was fully twice that distance away.

The place was vast, but as underground caverns went, not without precedent. The huge Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico had a room both higher and wider than this. That did not detract from the uncanny air of the place, however. The darkness was especially effective. The searchlight beam was like a white inlay in ebony.

If this was a river, the water should be fresh, Doc decided. He dipped a finger, touched it to his tongue.

The water was very salty.

The scene of the explosion appeared. It was at a sort of sinkhole where the salt river dipped down to come out beneath the sea. The sinkhole had caused a whirlpool effect during high water, and this had worn ledges on which Mohallet had placed his explosive.

The river, as near as Doc could ascertain, was blocked completely. He investigated the surface of the piled rock. He stripped and dived at the front edge, ascertaining how much it sloped out, and thus getting an idea of the possible thickness.

He spent some thirty minutes in this intensive investigation.

Returning, Doc found the Helldiver in running condition, the parts replaced. They cruised slowly toward the spot where Mohallet and his men stood.

BETWEEN the itching and the water – the latter was now around their ankles – the brown men were almost mad with fear.

Several sprang into the river, so frantic were they to reach the submarine. This excited the rest; they followed. Those who could not swim, and they were plenty, piled in after the others, fearful lest they be left.

Arms flailing screaming wildly for help, they churned for the sub. Here and there men began sinking. These when ever their heads were above the surface, emitted grisly screeches. It was a bedlam.

Doc, Renny, and Monk promptly dived overboard to help the tear-crazed brown fellows. It was no mean task. The instant they came near a swarthy man, he sought to climb atop them. It was necessary to clip them senseless with fists.

Doc's other three men, rapid-firing little pistols in hand, stood on deck and in the control room, and herded the swarthy gang below.

Mohallet was one of the first to come aboard. He scrambled down the metal ladder, jeweled teeth hidden by angrily puckered lips.

The other members of the villainous swarm were rescued and hazed into the sub.

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Immediately, a yelling went up for the potion which would alleviate the smarting affliction.

Monk went to his tiny cubicle and concocted a fresh supply of the stuff. The first lot had been lost overboard in the turmoil of the explosion which had closed the underground river mouth.

The prisoners had been wedged into the compartment which had previously held Doc and his aids – the sleeping quarters. This chamber, intended to accommodate a large crew, was the most ample room in the Helldiver.

It would accommodate Mohallet and the others – more than a score and a half of men, all told. Mohallet had evidently left the rest of his followers on the gold-trimmed black yacht.

Johnny and Long Tom protected Monk with machine-gun pistols as he opened the compartment door to pass in the lotion. Monk handed in the large bottle. Then he thrust in his head. He intended to tell them that a thin application of the stuff would prove to be sufficient.

"Hey!" he howled.

He sought to leap into the chamber. A volley of fists, an avalanche of hissing brown bodies, opposed him.

Monk struck back, grunting and howling. Monk's fights were always noisy. But the foes were too many for him. He was forced backward; the metal door shut, and the dogs rapped into place.

"What was it?" Johnny barked.

"That white-haired girl!" Monk groaned. "During the excitement as they came aboard, they must have seized her! They're holding her in there!"

Jamming his homely face close to the steel panel, Monk ordered the young lady's release. He promised fiercely to pull the ears, the arms, and the legs off each swarthy man if she was not freed.

They laughed at him.

Monk hit the steel door a few times, knowing he would never get in that way. He spun away. There was a cutting torch aboard. With that, they should be able to force the door.

Doc intercepted Monk.

"Let it ride," he suggested. "The water is rising fast! We'd better sail upstream and see if we can find an exit. If we can't, we're the same as entombed."

"But that girl – "

"We'll drill a few holes in the bulkhead so we can watch and be sure they don't harm her."

"O. K." Monk ran for the control room.

Chapter XVI. VOYAGE OF TERROR

INSET in the hull plates of the submarine were floodlights of mammoth candlepower. Thick lenses protected

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these. Near each light was an inspection port – a small window of glass which would withstand tons of water pressure from without. The original purpose of these had been to permit those within the submarine to peer out at the under surface of the polar ice pack.

The floodlights were switched on. Glare sprayed. Walls of the cavern seemed to jump out of the black abyss at them. The rock was worn, channeled and ribbed by high waters. There were no stalactites, the usual icicles of stone found hanging from cave roofs. Water seepage was necessary to form those, and there was little rain on the arid waste above to make seepage.

The river, although not flowing, was full of eddies and flecked with foam. It was a tortured monster, bloating, filling the fantastic hole which was its lair.

"I never did like caves!" Monk grumbled, flinging out a furry hand to harvest Habeas Corpus, who was on the point of leaping overboard for a swim.

Long Tom, in the control room, crouched over the sonic device for measuring the depth of the water. The electrical wizard had made this particular apparatus with his own hands. It was a good deal more sensitive than the "fathometer" mechanism, utilizing the same principle, in use on most modern ocean liners.

In addition, Long Tom's device would measure accurately the distance between the Helldiver hull and a mass of ice or stone above or near the sides. This latter feature would be invaluable, should the sub have to dive in the underground river, since Long Tom's mechanism would register a distance of a few feet.

Very soon, they had to make such a dive. The cavern closed down into the river ahead. Dropping below, they dogged the hatches. Doc eased away buoyancy and set the diving rudders.

The floodlights were still brightly lighted. Ham took a bow inspection port, Renny and Monk to port and starboard. They kept a close, anxious lookout.

Doc, handling the controls, eased the Helldiver ahead. Microphones and loud speakers were banked along the control-room wall. They relayed each word of the watchers at the inspection ports.

Doc sank the submarine until the runner-protected keel was no more than eight or ten feet from the bottom. Soon there came a slight jar.

"Kind of a ledge in front," Ham reported. "About thirty feet high – a waterfall effect. Ease the bows up, and we can get over."

The floor – it was covered with a rubber composition grid, would not become slippery with grease – tilted a bit. They crossed the ledge with a grumbling of steel runners on

"This business is worse than goin' under the polar ice!" Monk grumbled. "Up there, we always knew that in a pinch we could release a chemical from tanks in the hull, and melt the ice overhead –"

"Dry up!" snapped Ham, who was wearing a headset hooked in the loudspeaker circuit. "Your jabber gives me an ache – for the love of mud!"

Ham's eyes popped; his jaw fell. He dropped his sword cane, something he rarely did.

SPINNING slowly with the sluggish current, a hideous, hairy apparition had come within range of the floodlights. It was a body, the cadaver of some hideous dead thing.

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In stature, the specter attained nearly six feet. The arms, stiffly outstretched in rigor mortis, had a span somewhat greater than the height of the figure.

The face was an unlovely mingling of the beast and the human. Enormous was the mouth, the bared teeth porcine; the nose was flat, with the nostril holes seeming to open outward instead of downward.

The creature was furred almost as plentifully as a bear.

The hair was white, as if the monstrosity had been wrapped in cotton, it seemed.

Dapper Ham, startled as he was, did not pass the chance for a verbal snapper at Monk's expense.

"Look!" the lawyer howled. "Monk's ghost!"

The thing did have Monk's simian build, his furry hide – only that the hair was white instead of a rusty red. The slight underwater bow wave from the Helldiver caused the apparition to be flung outward. Still spinning, first to the side, then head over heels as the vagaries of current dictated, it was lost to sight.

Doc, leaping to an inspection port in the control room, had secured a glimpse of the creature.

"Hey!" Monk yelled. "Was that thing human?" This caused Ham to give a loud, unkind laugh. Through the electrical communication circuit, Doc called:

"Do you fellers recall the crack the girl made about a White Beast, when she first saw Monk?"

"You mean this must've been a specimen of the things?" Monk questioned.

"What's your bet?"

"That it was one of 'em!" Monk decided. "Furthermore, it was not a white-furred ape or a gorilla, but a human being of low mentality." Then, as Ham laughed again: "Say, shyster, you ain't kissed Habeas Corpus yet, as you agreed to do!"

Ham sobered. No more was heard out of him for many minutes.

"The creature was human, all right," Doc agreed.

"But how come its hair was white?" Renny boomed.

Doc said dryly: "The girl's hair is white, too."

Monk grumbled in defense: "Her and that thing don't belong to the same clan! This guy was a savage! You could tell that!"

"That's not what I meant," Doc told him. "Both of them having white hair indicates that both might have come from the same environment."

Monk snorted 'I don't think I'm gonna like that environment – if we get there. "

Doc now gave all his attention to navigating the Helldiver. It was a task akin to handling eggshells. This was no ice floe under which they were traveling; if they got stuck in the rock, there would be no melting their way

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free with chemical from reservoirs in the submarine's skin.

The river waters aided no doubt by the grinding effect of great boulders rolled along the bottom by the current had grooved out sizable trenches. There was always a chance the submarine would wedge into one of these.

The ceiling was still under water. Current had strengthened. They were moving out of the backwater. Doc touched the levers which controlled the motor speed. Whine of the machinery increased. Breasting the river, the sub worked on.

It was like a metallic fish exploring the hole made by some water-dwelling animal. Blind, except for the few yards the floodlights penetrated, it nosed along. If there was peril ahead, they would be almost upon it before its presence could be detected.

There came a jarring, a shriek of runners on stone! The strange underseas boat came to a dead halt.

"Holy cow!" Renny thumped. "The current rollin' over a ledge ahead jammed us down in a floor groove!"

No semblance of hurry entered Doc's movements. He touched buttons. Compressed air shrieked, water squished and bubbled, as ballast tanks blew. The Helldiver was fitted with two caged propellers, one port, one starboard.

Incidentally, there was a third propeller in the center, completely inclosed in a box of steel plates, which were hinged, and, in an emergency, could be dropped to permit use of the screw. This prop had never yet been used, except in tests. Nor did they need it now.

With a rasping grunt of stone and steel, the sub came free. Letting water pour back into the tanks, Doc trimmed the craft before it banged the ceiling.

They felt their way onward.

Ten minutes later they came to the surface. The cavern roof arched above, sometimes a few feet distant, sometimes many yards. Black enough to be solid, the darkness stretched ahead interminably.

Now that navigation was not so ticklish a proposition, Doc turned the controls over to gaunt Johnny.

Out on deck, Doc sampled the air. "Here's some encouragement!" he called.

"What d'you mean?" Renny rumbled.

"The air is fresher!"

Every one not needed to navigate the Helldiver' now clambered out on deck. The purity of the air – and it was noticeably more breathable, although still saturated with water and cavern odors – indicated there was an opening.

They used powerful flashlights; they were strong enough to give nearly the illumination of a searchlight. These whitened the cave walls to either side and the roof above.

Great crusts of dried salt, resembling a deposit of frost, was the principal scenic feature. The briny water flowing past seemed as sepia as a rushing flood of drawing ink.

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Renny yelled to test the acoustics. His vast voice gobbled and thumped, crashing back and forth in echoes that seemed as loud as the original shout. The weird hullabaloo set up by his cry persisted many seconds before it died.

The Helldiver's Diesel surface engines were turned on. Their clamor, hardly to be considered loud on the open sea, became a monstrous growling in the confines of the huge underground river.

DOC and his men discussed the situation. Doc had noted the reading of a sensitive barometric altimeter, and its slow crawl as they progressed. This gave the height to which the river had lifted. It was not great.

"It's a sluggish stream, as rivers go, at best," Doc declared. "We have lifted enough, however, to know that there is no doubt but that the lower reaches of the stream, which we just quitted, are flooded."

"Queer this thing has never been discovered," Monk muttered.

"The mouth must be under the sea, but slightly exposed at low tide," Doc suggested. "The rush of water leaving together with the charge of warm air from outdoors to replace the cool air inside, probably combine to make the sounds which gave the cavern mouth its name of Crying Rock."

Johnny, whose geology knowledge included an understanding of such phenomena, seconded Doc's reasoning.

"But the river is salt," Monk pointed out.

"The desert of Rub' Al Khali lies overhead," Doc told him. "You remember the discussion we had about the place. Many rumors are heard about what lies in the region – great salt marshes, the ruins of cities erected by prehistoric peoples, and so on. The salt marshes might explain this river. It may be their overflow the sea."

Before many hours had passed, Mohallet and his men, imprisoned as well as barricaded within the hull, set up a great clamor. They were starving, they explained.

Doc offered them food for the release of the white-haired girl. They refused.

"You can consider yourselves on a diet, then," Doc informed them. "No girl, no grub. And if any harm comes to that young lady, you're out of luck!"

Mohallet tried to argue. Then he sought to obtain information about their progress.

"How many qasabalis have you covered?" he wanted to know.

"Why?" Doc countered.

"Bronze man, you do not know whence we are headed. Make me and my men your partners, and we will share alike. Too, you will have our help. You will need it."

"You mean there is danger ahead?"

"Great danger! A danger greater than you can imagine!"

"And what else is there?"

"That I will tell you if you will release me!"

"Nothing doing. You got this information from the girl?"

"Wallah! I got it! No matter how!"

"How did the girl get out of this place to which we are going?"

Mohallet's reply was a derisive grunt.

Doc persisted: "You wanted the submarine to go up this underground river. That's why you came to New York to get it. But why didn't you try planes?"

"Wa—asafah, akhkh! Alas! I did!"

This was news. There had been no previous hint that Mohallet had sought the use of airplanes before making his unfortunate attempt to get Doc's submarine.

"Didn't the planes succeed?"

"The desert is no place for planes, bronze man," Mohallet said disgustedly. "The land is of such a great roughness that there is nowhere a landing place. And there are great sandstorms which cause sand to work into the motors. Too, the white-haired girl did not know whither direction this underground river went. Wallah! We searched long from the air! But we did not find the Phantom City! Nor did we find any sign of the White Beasts!"

"So you did get your information from the girl!" Doc mused. "Let's hear some more about this Phantom City and White Beasts."

Mohallet proceeded to imitate a clam.

Chapter XVII. THE WHITE BEASTS

"LIGHT!" Magic was in the cry. "Sunlight ahead!"

Renny, perched on a protective runner near the bows, was first to make the discovery. They had been wending along the river for a long time. The chronometer in the control room said it had been days. They had barely kept ahead of the rising water.

Each twenty-four hours, Doc had taken his regular two hour exercise routine. He had just finished. He increased the Helldiver's speed slightly.

It was like the dawn, the blooming of that sunlight ahead. It whitened until it hurt their eyes. Fifteen minutes later the submarine nosed into the solar-irradiated outer world.

For a short distance, they sailed through a sheer-walled canyon. The rock sides, although not fabulously high, were water-polished so smooth as to be unclimbable.

A rocky island appeared. It was like a tongue upright in the gullet of the canyon. It was as bare and rounded as an egg. It stood in the canyon center.

The walls spread. A second island came into view, also in the channel middle. This one was less worn,

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spotted with boulders, and considerably larger than the first.

The stony walls fell away suddenly. Ahead lay a vast mirror – a mirror of salt water.

"One of the great salt marshes in the interior of Arabia," Doc decided. "This river must be an outlet for all the marshes!"

"Huh!" Monk seemed somewhat disappointed. He waved an arm. "There ain't nothin' here but sand, rock, salt water, and plenty of hot sun!"

"What were you expecting?"

"The Phantom City."

Ham, who had not yet complied with his promise to kiss Habeas Corpus, sniffed audibly. "It looks like the Phantom City is a phantom."

Down below, Mohallet and his men set up a howling. They had been doing that often of late. They were really hungry by this time.

Doc and his men had bored several holes in the steel bulkheads, and had thus kept tab on the white-haired girl's welfare. Mohallet had treated her surprisingly well, especially after Doc had demonstrated how a machine-gun pistol muzzle would fit through the loopholes. Through these, the girl had received liquid food.

Surplus cloth from several burnouses had contributed to a recess in one corner of the prison cell, where the young woman could have privacy.

Going down now, Doc conversed briefly with Mohallet. The outlaw chief refused to do anything unless given his liberty. Doc left him, knowing hunger would eventually do its work.

The Helldiver was bent a few degrees to port when Doc returned to deck.

"Thought I seen something moving," explained Monk, who was at the helm. He pointed at a low knob just off the bows.

The water ended against a range of bare, sun-scorched hills. These supported only the scrawniest of desert Vegetation. Even close in, the water was fairly deep.

They managed to maneuver the submarine with jumping distance of the shore.

"Even if we did go aground, we'd be lifted off later," said Johnny, who had clipped colored sun lenses to his glasses. "The lake is bound to rise, because of the closed river."

"Renny will remain aboard," Doc decided.

The others went ashore. They had donned tropical sun helmets, pocketed extra ammo clips for their guns. They took no food. They expected to be away no more than an hour or so – long enough to see if Monk had really seen anything, and to climb a hill and look at the country.

The spot where Monk thought he had perceived movement was not far from the larger of the two islands at the river entrance.

"It might have been an animal," he explained. "I couldn't tell."

"Probably the heat!" Ham sneered.

"Or maybe a pig," Monk retorted.

They worked around a low headland, over a small ridge. Doc, in the lead, halted.

"What Monk saw seems to have been plenty!" he said dryly.

BODIES lay side by side, about the same distance between each. They numbered eight. Seven were large, grotesque; the eighth was smaller, more symmetrical. All of them were stiff and dead.

"Seven of the White Beasts – and the body of a white-haired man!" muttered Johnny, suddenly wrenching off his glasses and their sun shield.

Doc surveyed the vicinity, then advanced at a run. He examined the forms of the seven white-furred, apish men – for men they were! Each wore a breech cloth of stiff camel hide.

The eighth man was of excellent physical development, with a fairly intelligent face. His skin was sun-browned, his white hair, and a flowing white beard giving him a striking appearance.

His garb was interesting.

"Look at his duds!" gulped Ham, who was naturally intrigued by such things.

The attire consisted of a short tunic and shorts, with a close-fitting head covering. The garments were made of flat plates, none larger than a silver dollar, loosely riveted together so as to be flexible. The workmanship was excellent.

The color of the weird mail was that of silver, only richer.

Stooping swiftly, Doc eyed the stuff. He touched it, bent one of the plates between his powerful thumb and forefinger.

"What're they made of?" demanded Ham.

"We'd better analyze it and make sure!" Doc told him. A rare thing had happened to the big bronze man's voice. It sounded puzzled.

Whipping erect, Doc began to circle rapidly. His course spread over a wider area. Sand lay among the rocks. He found prints – the feet of the hairy, apish man. He followed them a short distance.

They suddenly told him a story. He raced back to his fellows.

"We interrupted some kind of a ceremony!" He gestured at the eight bodies. "All of these fellows, if you'll notice, were killed with sharp instruments, probably spears. They've been dead some time. But there were many more of the white-furred creatures here not many minutes ago. Sand particles are still tumbling into the tracks they left. And they circled around us – headed for the Helldiver!"

"Huh!" Monk gulped. Wheeling, he sprinted back in the direction of the submarine.

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The others followed. Heads down, silent, they ran. Sweat began writhing in pale rivulets down their frames. It was oppressively hot.

Long before they came in sight of the submarine, they heard Renny's thunderous voice boom out; heard howls, the bull-fiddle moan of Renny's rapid-firer.

THE White Beasts had attacked the Helldiver. There was a horde of them, at least a hundred. They swarmed over the submarine hull like pale flies. Forward of the conning tower. Renny's giant form centered a fighting cluster.

"Use the mercy bullets!" Doc directed.

He led his four aids in. They came close before they began firing. They had latched their guns into single-shot, to conserve ammunition.

At the first rapping shots, the big, white-furred men spun upon this new menace. Bellowing in a strange, guttural dialect, they charged.

They were less inhuman when seen alive, these apish fellows. They were, in fact, not a great deal nearer missing links in appearance than Monk. The hair of some was not a true white, but ranged to yellowish and even a pale brown.

They carried spears armed with primeval tips of stone, and crude bludgeons.

They dropped like flies before the mercy bullets, which were little more than soft-metal shells filled with sleep-inducing drug.

Renny, still fighting, was toppled off the submarine. He hit the salty water with a great splash, sank, came up, and struck out at hirsute foes who had followed him in. His huge fists were as effective as blacksmith hammers.

In front of Doc and the other four, the bestial men wavered and began to give way. The little guns seemed to carry terror.

Suddenly, a new courage swept them. They bawled in their coarse lingo.

From behind Doc came a great roll of yells. The sound of hundreds of brutish voices, all screeching at once. The beat of feet became a mumble like the noise of stampeding cattle.

Doc and his four aids veered around.

"Blazes!" Monk gulped. "There's so many of 'em they look like a snowstorm."

The hills were emptying a swarm of the hairy men. They had been congregated back there.

"These fellows are not entirely ignorant!" Doc said grimly. "They set a trap. And we tumbled right into it! They've got us cut off! Try to make it to the sub!"

That, it speedily developed, was a Herculean task. It defied accomplishment. Their foes at the Helldiver made a concentrated rush, hurling spears, throwing clubs. They came faster than they could be put to sleep with the mercy bullets.

THE PHANTOM CITY

Johnny went down, bony limbs thrashing. Monk, his snorting and bellowing surpassing the uncouth cries of his foes, waded in and got the gaunt geologist to his feet. Then they both vanished under an avalanche of snowy forms.

Doc plunged to their aid. He was met by a determined cluster of the hairy men. They seemed to sense this bronze giant was the chief of those they had attacked. They concentrated on him – and got a surprise of no mean proportions.

Spears thrust at the bronze man impaled only sun-heated desert air. Smashing clubs encountered space. The speed with which Doc weaved and dodged was uncanny.

The brutish men emitted cries, shrill bleats like the whimpering of puppies thwarted in some desire.

THE swarm charging down from the hills arrived. A white tidal wave of fighting men, they overwhelmed what resistance Doc and his men could offer.

Dodging, twisting, dropping an occasional hulking fellow with rapier blows which impacted before they were seen, Doc sought to keep in the clear. Diving, a hairy man got him around the knees. There was tremendous strength in the anthropoid arms. Another hirsute figure launched upon his shoulders. Arms with a wrenching, animallike power inclosed his neck.

So mightily was the bronze man muscled that it was seldom he encountered human beings capable of meeting him on even terms. He had met them now.

They crashed down in the sand, thrashing, striking. Doubling, Doc got corded hands upon the creature who held his knees. His fingers probed for nerves, found them. With a hideous bleat, the fellow flopped to the earth, temporarily incapable of more motion.

Reaching up and back, Doc seized the head of the one who gripped his neck. He pulled, doubling simultaneously. The hairy man gyrated through the air, and splashed into deep water.

Half a dozen figures charged Doc. It was almost magic, the way he slid through their clutches, leaving only parts of his garments behind.

One snowy man got Doc's rapid-firer, however. He knew the little black implement was a weapon. He fumbled foolishly with it, lacking the intellect to operate the thing.

Doc's eyes roved. What he saw was far from pleasant. All his men had succumbed. Battered, bruised, skinned, they were in the grips of hairy captors. None seemed seriously damaged.

Doc knew that it was only a matter of moments until he would himself be captured. The odds were hopeless.

Escape landward was out of the question. The hairy men were so many there that they resembled a drove of sheep.

Whirling, Doc leaped into the water. He filled his lungs in the air, stroked deep, and sought to get under the keel of the Helldiver. He found it necessary to swim downward steadily in order to remain beneath the surface. He felt light as a cork. That meant the water was heavy with salt in solution, literally a brine.

He collided with the Helldiver hull, pulled himself downward and under the keel by gripping the steel runners. On the other side, he bobbed to the surface.

THE PHANTOM CITY

The hairy men were not watching here. Unnoticed, Doc clambered up. They saw him just as he dropped down the control-room hatch. Yelling, they rushed for the sub.

Doc ran to the compartment where Mohallet and his followers were imprisoned. They were shouting, beating on the steel door, anxious to know what was going on outside.

Doc loosened the metal dogs which held the panel, then whirled and sprinted back. He was sheltered in another cubicle before Mohallet and his men got the door open.

The swarthy men fought each other to be first outside. Not one remained in the prison they had occupied for days.

The white-haired girl did not appear.

Doc ran into the prison compartment.

At sight of him, the girl cried out in her strange tongue. Her voice was glad. She crouched in a corner. Despite her long imprisonment, she had managed to keep her exotic garb remarkably neat.

She spoke rapidly, then realizing Doc could not understand her words, she reverted to abbreviated deaf-and-dumb finger signs. She wanted to know what had happened.

"The White Beasts." Doc informed her with signs. She shivered. The gladness seemed to ooze out of her.

Chapter XVIII. JOY RIDE

FIGHTING was rampant on deck. Mohallet and his followers, without exercise for days, were getting it aplenty now. From the sounds, they were not doing so badly.

"They're welcome to whatever headway they make," Doc thought grimly.

He knew he had not sent Mohallet and the rest to any fate which they would have escaped had he not released them. Left imprisoned, they would certainly have been captured.

A swarthy man, streaming crimson from a head cut, fell down the control-room companion, and ran along a steelwalled corridor. Half a dozen breech-clothed, white-haired savages pursued him. More followed.

Doc swept the girl forward. They exchanged no more sign talk. There was not time for it.

A try at submerging the Helldiver would be useless. It was moored to a rock hump ashore with a hawser which the best efforts of the engines would not snap.

Wrenching open a small cabinet. Doc took out two diving "lungs." These consisted of little more than nose clips and mouthpieces, from which a hose led to an oxygen and air-purifying tank which could be strapped on the back.

In another cabinet lay other diving equipment, pressure suits for deep-water work. Heavy leaded ankle weights were there. Doc seized some. They would be necessary in this buoyant salt water.

The diving lock – a chamber which permitted ingress and egress under water – was situated near the bows.

THE PHANTOM CITY

He made for it, closing the water-tight pressure door behind them.

Five minutes sufficed to don the "lungs" and the heavy anklets of lead. Doc instructed the girl in the simple operation of the apparatus, repeating his directions several times. Then he thrust the lever which opened the diving compartment to the water.

Brine rushed in, filling the little chamber. The buoyancy of it lifted them; the weights tugged at their ankles.

Doc dropped out. He sank perhaps ten feet. It was possible to keep his eyes open in the water. The stuff was remarkably clear, for all of its salt content.

The girl glided down to his side. Her hair – it was not inclosed by the diving lung, which was hoodless – seemed even whiter beneath the surface.

Doc grasped her hand. They walked away, leaning fat' over to move against the weight of the water.

Having retained his sense of direction, Doc set a course parallel to the shore, veering in a bit where the depth was not so great – possibly twenty feet above their heads. The pressure there was not uncomfortable.

Brilliant sunlight, penetrating the brine, seemed to dispel its body. It was as if they were walking in a strangely solid air. Such bubbles as arose, and there were a few, resembled jewels.

Past experience had told Doc about how far they would go in a given time. Distance covered was deceptive under water, since it required a great deal more effort, and their steps were short at the best. Fifteen minutes later, he angled over, found a low place which meant a gulch, and quitted the water.

The white-haired girl tramped at his side. They were in a wash with gently sloping, sun-heated sides. Doc motioned the girl to remain where she was. Stripping off diving lungs and weights, he clambered up the slope.

Affairs at the submarine had taken a turn different than he had expected.

MOHALLET was palavering with the whitish, apish men. The swarthy fellow was waving his arms and talking with great vehemence. His followers were gathered behind him. They seemed to have suffered few casualties.

Doc discovered his own five friends. They had been bound tightly, flung down on the sand, and were under heavy guard.

Turning, Doc beckoned the girl. Obediently, she scrambled up to his side.

He spoke slowly and carefully in a dialect peculiar to certain inland nomads of Arabia.

It was evident that she comprehended many of his words, but not quite enough to get his meaning. This proved what he had surmised. Her tongue was merely an inland dialect of Arabia.

He reverted to the fingered words. "Does Mohallet speak the language of the White Beasts?"

"My own tongue and that of the White Beasts is almost the same," he read from the girl's fingers. "Mohallet learned to speak with me, so he can converse with the others."

THE PHANTOM CITY

Doc decided to settle a point which had puzzled him from the first.

"How does it happen that you can transmit English on your fingers, yet do not speak or understand the tongue?"

She smiled slightly – a grand tribute to her courage.

"Some forty years ago, a man of your own race came to my people out of the desert. He had been unlucky enough to be captured by the White Beasts, and we rescued him in a raid upon their village."

Doc nodded. The wanderer who had come to her people must have been some unlucky explorer.

"The White Beasts had tortured this man – they had cut out his tongue before we arrived, and thrust sharp thorns into his ears, rendering them useless," continued the girl, her slender fingers flashing letters rapidly.

Doc nodded once more. The explorer had been the same as deaf and dumb. He saw the light. He watched the girl's fingers go on.

"Unable to hear our language, this man looked in a book which was in his supplies, and from it taught us a way of talking on our fingers, that he might converse with us," the abbreviated finger talk continued. "He lived with us the rest of his life. I knew him in my youth. He taught me the language, and grateful for my kindness to him in his old age, he made me many small presents."

Her youth could not have been long ago, Doc reflected. She was not more than twenty, if he was any guesser.

He squinted at the submarine. Nothing radical had developed. Mohallet was still haranguing. He turned his attention back to the girl, anxious to get her story.

"How did you get out of this place?" he questioned.

"The White Beasts captured me," she replied, then looked as if that explained everything.

"I do not understand," Doc persisted.

"The White Beasts throw their prisoners, dead and living, into the mouth of the underground river, as sacrifices," she transmitted. "It chanced that the stream was very low when I was thrown in. The seasonal rains had not come, and the sun had sucked up the waters until they were low. I got through."

Doc perceived how that was possible. The salty brine would make it simple, since a human form floated easily in the stuff. From this, it was evident that the mouth of the underground stream at Crying Rock was occasionally exposed.

"What did you do for food?" he queried.

"I did without. I was very weak, and could not run away when a raiding party from Mohallet's main band found me."

Doc was catching her abbreviated words more easily now – he found that repeating them under his breath as they were formed helped. Of course, a person could go downstream much faster than the submarine had come up. But her long voyage underground must have been a ghastly ordeal.

THE PHANTOM CITY

"Why is Mohallet so anxious to get to the Phantom City?" he asked.

"I do not know."

"Is there any platinum in the city?"

"I do not know what platinum is."

DOC considered, then decided to go deeper into the platinum subject. "It is a grayish, shiny metal."

"There is much of that."

"There was a man lying dead on the shore," Doc explained. "He was evidently one of your people. He wore garments made of plates of a shiny metal. Is that the same metal of which you have so much?"

She showed distress. "The White Beasts kill many of my people, and have done so for years, until there are but few left. Yes; that is the metal."

Doc scratched his head thoughtfully. It was not often that he made any kind of gesture when thinking.

"Were you wearing garments of this metal when Mohallet found you?" he asked.

"No. They were too heavy. I threw them off."

"But you told Mohallet of the stuff?" he asked.

"Yes. I told him how much there was. That was before I knew him to be an evil man. My words seemed to excite him greatly."

"I don't doubt it!" Doc said aloud. But he sounded puzzled. He reverted to fingered words.

"Were you not wearing bracelets or rings of white metal?"

"Yes. One bracelet. It was very dear to me because –"

"Wait!" Doc rapped in English, then held up a hand to make himself understood.

Mohallet's confab with the White Beasts had come to an end. An end favorable to Mohallet! Some sort of an agreement had been reached.

The White Beasts, it was evident from what now ensued, had accepted Mohallet and his swarthy villains as allies, temporarily at least.

Doc's five friends were lifted and carried to the submarine. They were not taken below, but dumped on deck.

As many of the furry white savages now clambered aboard the Helldiver as could cling. Many of them went below. From the way they fingered around, stroking the guard rails, opening and shutting the hatches, and laughing wildly, it was apparent they were intrigued by this great steel toy.

The mooring cable was cast off and hauled in. The vibration of the surface Diesels came to Doc's sensitive ears. The Helldiver began to move.

THE PHANTOM CITY

"Wonder what they think became of us?" Doc pondered on his fingers, giving the girl a smile to insure her confidence.

The smile had a somewhat different effect than Doc had hoped for. The entrancingly pretty, white-haired girl returned it with a look Doc had seen before on the features of members of the fair sex.

He made his bronze countenance sober. It was invariably something like this when he was thrown with a young lady. Whatever race the girl belonged to, the same thing happened. And it always made Doc genuinely uncomfortable.

The white-haired girl was stricken with the bronze man's undeniable good looks. She would be affected more as time passed.

It was always that way.

As had many another, she was headed for disappointment. Doc had long ago made up his mind that the fair sex had no place in an existence such as he led – a life in which hardly a day was without its deadly peril, not only to Doc, but to those associated with him.

He made a very intent job of watching the submarine. Mohallet's followers were evidently taking their savage allies for a little joy ride.

THE Helldiver swept some distance offshore, then cruised along at a fair pace. The white-furred savages did much squawling in their low dialect, and jumping around. They took turns diving below to inspect the marvels there. Since some had to come up before others went down, it was evident the interior of the underseas boat was jammed.

Something happened

The sub veered suddenly for shore. It put on great speed. Spray flew from the bows. Terror seemed to sweep the decks. Mohallet's men piled wildly out on deck and crowded for the bows, as if greatly desiring to get that much nearer land.

Then the truth became evident.

The submarine was sinking. Going down by the bows! The presence of Mohallet's men on deck showed the submersion was not deliberate.

Some accident had occurred below.

"One of them opened the door of the diving compartment, not knowing what it was, and they can't get it closed!" Doc informed the girl in the sign language. "Water is coming in – flooding the sub!"

The scene which followed would have thrown a movie director into ecstasies of delight. It was mob terror in its most spectacular form. Long before the Helldiver reached shore, men began leaping overboard.

It was not necessary for them to swim. The salty water floated them like corks.

"There's machinery which will close the diving-compartment door!" Doc yelled, making an effort to save the craft.

He had put himself in plain view. His great voice romped across the briny surface with surprising volume.

But there was too much yelling confusion aboard the sub for him to be heard.

The Helldiver sank perhaps a hundred yards offshore.

Chapter XIX. THE RED CITY

DOC remained where he had appeared in his unsuccessful effort to shout word of how to close the diving compartment hatch to those aboard the unlucky submarine. Although Mohallet and the others had not heard him, they had seen him. There was no necessity for going back in hiding.

He saw his five friends, still bound, bobbing about on the salty surface. It was fortunate they had been on deck when disaster came. They were seized like so many floating logs and hauled ashore.

Great though the confusion had been, Doc concluded every one had escaped from the Mel/diver. He discerned Mohallet paddling shoreward in the wake of a hairy savage who seemed to be chief of the White Beasts.

For several minutes, monster bubbles came up from the sunken underseas boat. They made hollow coughing noises as they broke. An oil slick appeared on the surface. There was not a great deal of the oil – only that which came from saturated waste, drip pans, and possibly an open oil can or two.

It was impossible to tell from this distance how deep the submarine sank before encountering bottom.

The first savages to reach shore jumped up and down, and screamed shrilly. They walked in small circles, making gestures of tearing something to pieces and contorting their already unlovely faces into hideous grimaces. This performance seemed intended to convey the same idea which an American puts across by shaking his fist at an enemy. They were making their threats in the direction of Mohallet.

But the wily bandit chief put on a wrath act of his own the instant he reached shore. He poked his arms frantically in the direction of Doc and the girl.

Howling, the furry men raced for Doc. It was to be suspected from their actions that Mohallet had made his superstitious allies believe that Doc was responsible for the sinking of the submarine.

Doc whirled. The white-haired girl was putting her diving lung back on.

"No!" Doc told her on his fingers. "We might have trouble leaving the water. And once in it, we could not keep track of my five friends."

His shirt, torn in the fight, was merely a few soaked rags. He discarded it and his undershirt, which was also torn. The sun, hot as it was, would not blister his bronze skin. The bronze hue was itself due to exposure to tropical suns.

Doc tied the two diving lungs at his belt. The heavy lead anklets he discarded. If necessity arose, large rocks would serve the same purpose.

"Do you know this country?" he asked the girl.

THE PHANTOM CITY

She gave a perfectly American nod of affirmation.

"What direction is best for our flight?"

She pointed to the north.

They set out, clambering up the opposite side of the small canyon. Beyond it lay other gulches, some sheer of wall, almost unscalable; others were gentle valleys.

There were a few scrawny desert shrubs, thorn-armed. Nowhere was there grass. The rocks themselves had the appearance of having once been baked in a furnace. They were heat-cracked, grooved where sand and wind had worn away veins of softer substance.

Baying like animals, the white-haired savages surged in pursuit. Their long-armed, apish forms seemed adapted to the rough going – the way was almost half steady climbing up, and down. They came on with appalling speed.

WITH the passage of less than two hundred yards, the white-haired girl began to show distress. Except for the liquids taken through the bored holes, she had been without food during the long period of confinement with Mohallet inside the submarine, and was correspondingly weak. She realized her condition.

"You had better go on alone –"

Doc shook his head. "No."

"Or I had better enter the water, while you go –"

He picked her up, handling her weight lightly, and draped her across a shoulder. One hand kept her there, firmly in position. She would not be uncomfortable.

If the girl thought they had been traveling fast, she received a surprise now. The bronze man went ahead with a speed which exceeded by many times that of their pursuers.

Instead of scrambling down rocky cliffs, he negotiated them with long drops which seemed certain to shatter his powerful legs, yet never did. Several times he spanned rocky cracks with leaps which caused the girl to make choking sounds of horror. Then her confidence in the mighty bronze man increased, and she made these sounds no more.

The pursuing White Beasts and their swarthy allies fell behind rapidly

Doc stopped.

"What is your name?" he asked the girl, using one hand.

"Ja," she told him.

He lowered her. "You will remain here, Ja. I will be back shortly. I'm going to persuade our pursuers to use caution."

He left her hidden in a rocky recess and turned back. His speed now was even greater. He slowed a bit when he could hear the labored breathing of those who followed. Peering around a boulder, he saw them.

THE PHANTOM CITY

Four of the apish men had distanced all the others. They were the strongest and most agile of the White Beasts. They had lost their crude weapons in the submarine accident, it seemed, for they carried no arms, and none were concealed in their scanty hide garments.

Doc let them come close, then rushed suddenly! His fists lashed two terrific swings and dropped a savage!

The others howled in rage! But they had courage; they did not flee. Before charging the bronze giant, they groped about for small rocks to use as weapons. That was their undoing. One fell, his jaw battered out of kilter, even as his furry paws closed over a stone.

The surviving pair danced about clumsily, seeking to adopt Doc's style of fighting with his fists. That was even more unfortunate than their pause to get rocks.

Gliding up to them, Doc weaved away from their ungainly blows, simultaneously landing punches of his own.

There was a frightful power in the bronze man's fists. They hit with precision, searching out vulnerable spots. And they left squarish patches of crushed, broken skin which oozed scarlet.

Doc left all four big savages spread senseless on the sand. He returned to the girl. Despite his exertion, there was hardly a perceptible increase in his breath pace.

The girl had a suggestion on her finger tips. "Why not go to my people and secure their help?"

Doc considered this briefly. "Is it far?"

"They dwell in the Phantom City. It is nearly half a day's journey from here." She seemed to consider her late experience with Doc's pace of travel. "But you might make it in two hours."

Doc nodded. "We will go there. Ja," he told her.

He did not add that his purpose in going was to get her to a place of safety, leaving himself free to go into action unhampered.

They set out to the northward.

IT was a city carved from solid rock – a mountain of stone, hewn and hollowed into walls, streets, and dwellings. The rock was a pale red in color.

Doc Savage, from a distance of possibly a mile studied the strange sight. He had noted specimens of the red stone in the course of their two-hour journey. The stuff was porous, easily worked. Yet a fabulous amount of labor had gone into the carving of the Phantom City.

The fantastic metropolis was situated at a considerable height above the level of the salt marshes. Beyond it, mountains towered even higher. Down these precipitous slopes crawled a stream of fair size. No doubt it was fed by springs, so that it ran the year around.

Vegetation rimmed the creek. On level ground below the city of rock were small patches of growing crops, obviously irrigated. Doc stared at these tiny plots of grain. They were most interesting.

The crops were not green, but strangely white – a color akin to the hair of the people who lived here.

THE PHANTOM CITY

"Is the water in that stream drinkable?" Doc asked.

"Yes," explained the girl. "It is the only drinkable water for a distance of countless qosabol's. The White Beasts also get their water for drinking and bathing from it."

Doc was silent a bit. The luster of the sun seemed to kindle small flames in his golden eyes, an indication that he was pondering the puzzle of the white hair, the white grain fields.

Then he got it.

"It is something in the water that makes your hair white, isn't it, Ja?" he asked.

"It must be," she replied. "The stranger who taught us the talk of the hands had black hair when he came, but it became as our own hair when he had dwelt a while."

Idly, Doc reflected that an American beauty specialist could clean up if he had this stream available. The bleaching compound was no doubt dissolved from a formation somewhere near the stream's source. Whether drinking the water, or bathing in it was responsible for the whitening process, it was difficult to say. But the shade of white was beautiful.

Ja was rested now. She ran by Doc's side as he swung toward the Phantom City. The going was somewhat smoother here.

In the past two hours, Doc had managed to pick up a great deal of the girl's language. His very complete knowledge of Arabic root words made that simpler. He had simply to ask her for the word which corresponded with one transmitted on his fingers in English.

It was necessary for her to give him the words only once; that was enough to fix them in his retentive memory.

The red rock walls of the strange metropolis shoved up ahead of them. The fact that they were one great mass of stone, without joints anywhere, gave the place a modernistic aspect.

There was no sign of life, but this did not alarm the girl.

"They do not know whether we are friends or enemies," she said, speaking slowly, trying to use words Doc had learned. "They will remain hidden until they are sure."

The walls were perforated with a massive gate. Coming close. Doc observed these gates with interest. They were of metal. It was covered with a corrosion. But at points the corrosion film had been scraped off. The metal below had the color of silver, only a bit deeper.

As they came nearer, Ja pointed a slender hand at these gates and said: "That is the metal of which I told you – the metal which you called platinum."

Doc was shocked into one of his rare exhibits of surprise. Those gates were solid, massive. They must weigh tons. He glided close. studied the metal; he picked up a rock and scraped it through the gray-green corrosion.

He spun on the girl. "Listen, Ja, was the jewelry you wore when Mohallet found you – "

THE PHANTOM CITY

His query was never finished. With a lusty groaning, the monster metal gates swung ajar. There had been no sound from within. No one had appeared.

There was no sound now. Nor did men show themselves. The gates simply opened, actuated by some crude but efficient mechanism contained in chambers hollowed out within the walls. The effect was ghostly, one befitting the eerie name of Phantom City.

"Come!" The girl started within the walls.

"Wait!" Doc said sharply in her tongue. "I do not like this!"

The girl hesitated, then retreated a few paces from the gates.

"It is strange that they have not hailed us!" she murmured.

Doc, not understanding some of her words, nevertheless got enough of them to secure her meaning.

"Lift your voice and call to them," he suggested..

The girl complied. Loudness seemed to detract nothing from the quality of her musical voice.

For some seconds after her cry, no answer came.

A man appeared abruptly within the gate, and a little distance back from it. He was a tall man – handsome and powerful of build. He had the same remarkable snow–white hair as Ja.

This individual spoke so rapidly in the strange tongue that Doc could not catch the words, slight as was his familiarity with the language.

"He says that there has been a great fight with the White Beasts," the girl translated slowly. "Many are wounded, and he is the only one at the gates. He asks us to hurry in, that he may shut the gates, should the White Beasts again come."

Very careless, Doc reflected, to have only one lookout at the gates. Or perhaps other fighting men, tired from combat, were sleeping near at hand where they could be called in case of an attack by the White Beasts.

He entered the gates at Ja's side.

A street stretched ahead – a ditch cut in the solid rock, the sides perforated with doors, all of which seemed of exactly the same size.

Bodies lay in the streets – men killed in recent combat. Some were those of white–haired folk, powerfully formed; by far the greater number were the apish White Beasts.

They approached the single living figure, the man who had summoned them in. He stared at them. There was something rigid, queer, about his stance.

Suddenly the man screamed words in the dialect.

The white–haired girl whirled.

"A trap!" she shrieked. "He was promised his life if he would decoy us in – "

Out of doorways around them, simian White Beasts bounded. They flooded the vicinity of the gate, blocking egress there.

Chapter XX. PHANTOM

SUDDEN appearance of the hairy white savages told a story in itself. They had taken the Phantom City, capturing or slaying the inhabitants. This explained why no one had appeared upon the walls. The White Beasts had waited, and with an animal cunning had thought of the decoy trick.

The decoy had repented too late. His warning accomplished nothing but his own death. For, with a hideous bellow, a hairy man smashed a club against the fellow's head. He tumbled down, instantly dead.

A stone-headed spear came hurtling at Ja. Only Doc's quick 'wrench which pulled her to her knees saved her. The spear, rotating rapidly as it flew, hissed on and smacked its head into a thousand fragments on a red stone wall.

It was imperative that they get out of the street.

"To the right – the house roofs!" Doc rapped.

Fighting silently, he strove to open the way. Some one threw a heavy club. Doc saw it coming, but did not get out of its way. Instead, when it was half an arm's length from his head, he caught it, stepping backward in the fashion of a baseball catcher absorbing the jar of a fast ball.

An instant later, the club thrower was down, several ribs broken by his own weapon, which had come back at him too swiftly for his eyes to follow.

There were too many of the White Beasts. They closed upon the girl, grasped her, and hauled her to the street, which was also of hard red rock.

Doc, a windmill of dangerous fists, churned in to help her. It was hopeless. Even his fighting qualities had a limit. The hideous foes were so thick they clambered atop each other to get into the fight.

Despite his best efforts, Doc was forced away from the girl. He did, however, manage to maneuver under a wall. He crouched, then sailed upward in a great leap.

His fingers gripped the edge of a roof. He swung up. A flung club smashed against one arm as he went over. It bounced back as if it had collided with steel springs.

Doc ran across the roof – it was flat like the top of a stone block. There was another street beyond, rather narrow. He cleared it easily, with a leap that would have seemed prodigious to another man.

He examined his arm where the club had hit. There was a great ache in it; the skin was broken slightly. But the giant muscles and the bone beneath were not damaged seriously.

A weird sort of hound-and-hare game now ensued. The apish savages, lacking the agility to leap the streets, were greatly handicapped. But what they lacked in grace, they made up in persistence. Back and forth, the chase led.

THE PHANTOM CITY

From the roof tops, Doc discovered he could see over the city walls for a considerable distance. To the eastward lay the marshes. They stretched so far they were lost in distant haze, like a sea.

There should, Doc reflected, be water grass growing in the brine or around its edges. None was evident. A moment later, he understood the reason.

This salt marsh must be one of many which covered a considerable area. Of these, the outer world knew. The other marshes, no doubt situated on higher ground, fed into this one. The closing of the underground river had caused the brine to rise. That was why no water grass was visible. It had been covered to a depth of many feet.

Doc dropped down and entered a hollowed stone house. He discovered passages leading downward, and it speedily became evident that there were corridors and cross-corridors undermining the whole city. Doc entered these.

His anthropoid pursuers were as unfamiliar with this underground labyrinth as was Doc. Their pursuit lagged. Before long, they had no idea where, in the many acres the Phantom City covered, Doc was lurking.

They had made no more progress by nightfall.

DRY clarity of the desert air made the night heavens a thing of brilliant splendor. The moon seemed to come thousands of miles nearer the earth; the stars were distinct as distant electric lights.

Doc Savage left a subterranean chamber of rock where he had concealed himself, and made for the city walls. They were not so high but that he could drop over them safely.

With his agility, he could have quitted the city of stone at any time during the afternoon, and escaped. But he had remained behind – for a reason. He had wanted to eavesdrop on the White Beasts and get a line on any plans they might have.

He had succeeded. Conversation of two warriors, spoken lazily because they were tired and the afternoon hot, had been slow enough for Doc's comprehension.

The prisoners from the submarine would, no doubt, be brought here. There was no word of that, for the savages in the Phantom City as yet knew nothing of the submarine episode. But here was to be the future headquarters of the hairy men, in this city of solid stone.

The white-haired girl, Ja, still lived. She had been placed with perhaps two-score other persons – the stoic survivors of the Phantom City inhabitants.

These captives, Doc had gathered, were to be sacrificed, a few at a time, by being tossed in the underground river.

Poised near the city walls, Doc waited. His eyes probed the brilliant moonlight, both in search of the party who held his five friends prisoners, and to consider various avenues of flight.

Toward the marsh seemed to be the best route; down the river. During the afternoon, Doc had noticed numerous small, irregularly shaped objects scattered along the bank some distance downstream. He had figured out what they were.

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Inflated camel hides used for boats. Rafts, rather. Such craft were used by Arabian nomads along the River Jordan. A small incision was made in a slain camel, and flesh and bones removed – the camel was taken out of his skin. instead of the skin from the camel. Once this was done, holes were sewn tightly, and the skin blown up with air.

These camel rafts would support much weight. but Doc did not have a high opinion of their sailing qualities.

Camels seemed fairly plentiful in the surrounding desert. In the course of the afternoon Doc had glimpsed a number of them. They were drinking, not from the river, but from the salty brine of the marsh. This verified scientific reports that this great desert held such a species of camel.

As for the water from the stream, Doc had quenched his thirst from a jar of that which he found in a dwelling. The stuff had a pronounced but not unpleasant taste of chemicals in solution. Doc was now quite sure bathing in the stuff was what turned the hair white. The chemical content simply bleached the hair.

His thoughts snapped suddenly to the present. Coming through the moonlight was a file of savages and burnoosed brown men. The serpentine caravan crawled closer. Coarse shouts pealed from the red stone walls of the Phantom City. Other yells came back from the newcomers.

Doc discerned the form of Mohallet. With a burly, bleached savage, evidently the chief of the White Beasts, he led the caravan.

Doc's five friends marched about halfway back. Their wrists were bound at their backs.

The massive gates of whitish metal swung open to admit the arrivals.

A GREAT excitement seized Mohallet the instant he saw those gates. He ran to them, scratched them with a dagger which he had managed to salvage somewhere, and his ecstasy increased at the shine of the metal beneath.

"Platinum!" he screamed in Arabic. "Wallah! It is platinum! These gates are alone worth millions of dollars!"

It was impossible for Mohallet to be sure the gates were of platinum, since they were in the moon shadow beneath the walls, Doc reflected. Mohallet must have been certain he would find much of the metal which composed the bracelet the white-haired girl had been wearing when his men found her wandering on the Arabian coast.

There was a great rejoicing around the gates. All of Mohallet's swarthy men joined in. They considered their fortunes made. For the time being, how they would get out of the country was forgotten.

Doc's five friends stood by, grimly silent.

The White Beasts also stood around, unable to understand why shiny metal should drive their allies to a species of insanity.

The march was eventually resumed.

A bronze ghost of a figure haunted the journey through darkened streets of stone. Doc could move with uncanny stealth – he had perfected this ability by studying the methods of masters of stealth, the hunting carnivora of the jungles. None saw him.

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A burnoosed brown man, spying a dead man in a side street, and noting the form was clad in a mailed suit of the shiny metal, could not resist the impulse to slip away from the column and secure the armor.

He was wrapping the metallic garment in a bundle when some kind of a monster seemed to swallow the world. At least, that was the swarthy fellow's impression. There was a great blackness before his eyes, a roaring unconsciousness.

Doc Savage lowered the senseless bundle of bones. His fist, landing on a vulnerable nerve center, had produced unconsciousness about as quickly as was possible.

He wanted the man's burnoose to use as a disguise. Securing the flowing garment required only a moment. He did not fancy the smelt of the thing, but it was no time for squeamishness. He donned it.

Several of Mohallet's followers stared suspiciously as the burnoosed figure of a man glided up and joined them. They had noticed the fellow depart; perhaps now in their subconscious minds was the thought that the one who had returned was a bit larger than he who had departed.

Doc used a simple method in allaying their suspicions. From his burnoose he tugged an end of the metal armor. The others, seeing it, grinned widely. Their suspicions, never quite real, vanished. They could understand a side trip for pilfering.

The column tramped on, no one aware that Doc Savage had affixed himself to it. It was dark in the streets, and Doc kept his hood pulled well over his features.

THE cavalcade came finally to a structure hewn in what had been the peak of the red rock mound which had been sculptured to create the Phantom City.

They entered a large amphitheater, open to the sky. This was undoubtedly an audience chamber where rulers, in the heyday of this weird city, had received the populace.

Doc now secured one of the important pieces of information he was after. The prisoners were confined in a large room opening off the amphitheater.

Doc was among the group who conducted Renny, Monk, and the others to the prison room. The interior was lighted with torches of thornwood. Doc saw Ja. She was not hurt seriously, however.

Most of the other captives were marked with wounds of more or less degree. All, however, were capable of keeping their feet.

A metal door was shut on the prisoners.

In the center of the amphitheater, a conference got under way. Mohallet was losing no time. Confronting the chief of the White Beasts, he spoke in a loud voice, slow and distinct enough that all could hear. His own men naturally could not comprehend the tongue of the White Beasts, in which Mohallet spoke.

Doc, due to the effort Mohallet made to speak slowly and distinctly, understood most of it.

"The bronze man and the five who accompanied him are demons!" Mohallet announced. "They have closed the outlet of the marsh. You have noticed the water is rising. It will continue to rise, until this city and all the rest of the world is flooded."

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Mohallet was exaggerating greatly, Doc reflected. But the white-furred savages, ignorant as they were, believed him. A loud, angry rumble went around – largely composed of threats against Doc and the others.

"You must kill the bronze man; then maybe the river will flow under the mountains again!" bellowed Mohallet.

"Will it flow if we slay him?" demanded the chief of the White Beasts.

"It may, but I cannot be sure!" said the canny Mohallet.

"Will it flow if we slay not only the bronze one, but his five men, and our other captives as well?"

"You will try and see!" directed Mohallet cold-bloodedly. "But I have told you I can guarantee nothing."

"Shall we make the sacrifices immediately?" pondered the bewildered chief. "The lake has risen much, and my people are greatly worried. They think the rising of the waters is a curse upon us for taking this city!"

"Nonsense!" shouted Mohallet. "The curse is this white metal which you have come in contact with. You must get rid of it – send it where you will not touch it and be contaminated."

He allowed time for this statement to be absorbed, then went on: "You will gather all the metal together and have your men convey it far into the desert to the southward to a spot to which I shall direct you."

Watching intently, Doc decided the ignorant White Beasts would comply with this ridiculous suggestion. It was merely a slick scheme Mohallet had hatched for getting the metal transported much of the distance down to the sea coast.

"First," Mohallet continued, "you must capture the bronze man and slay him."

Unnoticed, Doc Savage walked slowly to the single guard at the door of the chamber which held the prisoners. With a single terrific fist blow, he felled the sentry.

Chapter XXII. CAMEL BOATS

A SURGE of one mighty shoulder sent the metal door open.

"Monk! Renny! C'mon, you men!" Doc rapped. He added the same command, couched in the dialect of the Phantom City dwellers.

Men surged from the door – big-fisted Renny first, the others crowding his heels. After them came the other prisoners. Of these, women and children outnumbered the men.

The door by which the amphitheater had been entered was only a few yards distant. Doc's sudden course of action was not as reckless as it seemed. If every one could get through that door, they stood a chance of escaping the Phantom City.

Moreover, Doc was convinced that Mohallet would persuade the White Beasts to start slaying their captives immediately

shrieking in dismay, Mohallet's men and their unlovely allies raced to intercept the flight. Some of Mohallet's

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followers waved guns – the tiny rapid-firers which were Doc's own invention.

Had the swarthy killers known how to handle the weapons, the fight would have ended disastrously in split seconds. But the little guns had a pronounced recoil; it took some practice to be able to hold them on any kind of a target and get good results.

The pistol-like machine guns jumped about uncontrollably when they were put in action. They fought the brown men like angry, moaning animals. Leaping wildly, the bullet streams felled numbers of their ugly allies.

Doc and his five men, charging fiercely, added to the confusion. They had spent their lives on the trail of violence, these six. Odds did not faze them. Monk often boasted that he would rather fight fifty men than two, because they got in each other's way.

"Don't let 'em cut you off!" Doc warned. "Keep to the outskirts!"

Himself doing directly the opposite of what he had cautioned against, the bronze man waded into the middle of his foes.

A brown man with a machine gun saw he was the object of the rush, and sought to flee. He dropped before taking a dozen steps, clubbed down by two fists that felt like steel.

Doc seized the rapid-firer. One bullet he fired at the stone amphitheater floor. The way it splashed showed him it was one of the mercy slugs. After that, he hosed those about him liberally with the sleep-inducing missiles.

Even in the most heated combat, Doc never took life directly if it could be helped. His kindness, however, did not keep him from permitting his foes to occasionally fall a victim of some death trap of their own.

The last of the Phantom City dwellers were through the door.

"All right – out we go!" Doc Savage called.

He waited until his five friends had preceded him outside, then slammed the door. There was a bar of the same heavy, soft metal which composed the panel. He shot the bar home. The metal felt cool under his hands.

IN reaching the eastern wall of the Phantom City, they had only two encounters with their foes. Both were minor, quickly ended by Doc's accurate use of the rapid-firer pistol.

Doc still wore his purloined burnoose. It was of excellent fabric. Torn in strips, it became a rope stout enough to lower them all to within safe dropping distance of the ground.

Working on a plan of action which he had formulated, Doc led the group of fugitives eastward, down the stream.

Behind them, the Phantom City emptied itself in pursuit. Renny dropped back to Doc's side. "We overheard enough talk to show us why Mohallet was so anxious to get here!" he boomed. "The Phantom City is lousy with platinum. There must be a great mine near here! Mohallet wants the stuff."

"I know." Doc told him "Mohallet found a platinum bracelet on Ja's wrist."

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"Who's Ja?"

"The girl – that's her name!"

"Oh, oh!" Renny's chuckle thundered. "So you're calling each other by first names!"

"If she has a second name, she forgot to tell me!" Doc took great pains to explain.

The party came to the inflated camel hides upon the stream banks – the weird contraptions which served as boats. There were paddles, crude things of heavy wood.

Under Doc's direction, the skin craft were put afloat. Some were opened and allowed to fill partially with water. These were loaded upon others which were intact. Thus was a supply of drinking water carried.

"What're we gonna do for food?" Monk demanded.

"There are wild camels in the desert," Doc explained. "Water is the main thing."

"Camel steaks – phooey!" Monk shuddered. "I ate one, once! The only difference between it and a slab of wood was that I didn't get any splinters in my tongue!"

"If you still had Habeas Corpus, you could eat him!" Ham jeered.

"What became of the pig?" Doc queried.

"Three of our hairy friends were chasin' 'im through the rocks, the last I saw of 'im!" Monk muttered, then added cheerfully: "I don't think they caught 'im!"

They embarked. Monk, with a masterly piece of maneuvering, outwitted Ham, who was seeking to get the pretty Ja as a passenger on his inflated camel hide. Ja rode with Monk.

The homely chemist, however, at once experienced great difficulty in navigating the unwieldy craft. He did nothing but go in circles until Ja took a paddle and demonstrated the method used in keeping the tricky raft on a straight and narrow course.

Thanks to the fantastically rough nature of the ground along the stream, they kept ahead of their pursuers. Reaching the lake, Doc set a course toward the mouth of the underground river.

"We can't get out that way!" Monk called pessimistically. "The cavern is probably entirely full of water by now."

"Don't it stand to reason that is the point nearest the coast?" Doc Savage countered.

They had covered two or three miles when other air-filled, camel-hide rafts appeared on the briny surface behind them. The White Beasts, it seemed, themselves possessed a supply of these ungainly vessels.

The pursuers did not gain. Neither did they fall behind. Time dragged. Paddling the clumsy rafts was a nerve-shattering task. There was nothing mechanical about it; each stroke of the paddles had to be different, or the hides would spin like drunken tops.

Doc, dropping back alongside Monk's raft, carried on a conversation with Ja.

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"How did your people get to this region in the first place?" he asked.

"No one knows that for sure," she replied. "There is only a legend handed down from my ancestors."

"What is the legend?"

"It is that countless sinin ago, the river did not flow underground, but through the mountains to the sea. My ancestors came up this river and built the Phantom City, carving it from solid rock – since that was almost as easy as quarrying stone. They dwelt here, mining the white metal, until a day when the river suddenly began to flow underground. After that, none could reach the sea because of the savages who inhabited the mountains and desert."

This sounded reasonable enough. More than once, colonies established in ancient days had been lost completely to the parent nation through the encroachment of surrounding savage races.

For Monk's benefit, Doc was translating Ja's conversation.

"They were here to mine the platinum!" Monk muttered. "Say, Doc, how are we gonna get our share of that platinum?"

"You'd better concentrate on how we're going to get out of here, alive," Doc advised him. "Anyway, it belongs to these people." He waved an arm at the Phantom City dwellers on the rafts ahead of them.

"If you wish it, they will be glad to give it all to you as a reward for saving them from the White Beasts," Ja offered.

As Doc translated, Monk grinned widely at this. Doc showed no expression – a fact which plainly disappointed the ravishingly pretty white-haired girl.

The night dragged on interminably. The strange-tasting water was rationed carefully from the camel-skin sacks. Men took turns at using the clumsy paddles.

"Why do we not cross the marshes and take to the mountains?" Ja wanted to know.

"Our friends behind would be certain to overhaul us!" Doc Savage pointed out to her.

Doc gazed frequently at the shore. The moonlight and the fact that he was viewing the terrain from the great expanse of brine, made it look different. But during the day he had fixed certain landmarks in his mind.

Dawn was not far off when he directed their little flotilla inshore.

Johnny, bony arms wielding a paddle with seemingly tirelessness, perceived their position.

"The submarine sank right ahead of us!" he ejaculated.

With an uncanny precision that came of combined keen memory and excellent observation powers, Doc stopped over the sunken Helldiver. Without a word, he slipped off the camel-skin raft and stroked into the brine.

The sub lay at a depth of slightly more than thirty feet. The main hatch leading to the control room was open, a shadow-stuffed maw. Doc pulled himself within.

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A metal cabinet held high-powered rifles. They had not been disturbed. He clamped three of them between his knees and churned up to the surface with them, using his hands.

"These will outrange the little rapid-firer pistols," he explained to his five friends. "Use them to keep our pursuers at a distance. Try to puncture their inflated camel hides."

Renny took one of the rifles. He set the telescopic sight carefully; then fired a single shot, not at their foes, but at a distant rock. This was to test the range of the bullets.

He then sighted deliberately at an air-filled camel-skin raft. Next to Doc, Renny was the most accomplished sharpshooter in the group. The rifle whacked violently!

A volley of yells drifted from the distant enemy. Several were soon bobbing about on the salty marsh surface. Renny had punctured their ungainly conveyance.

Four or five more shots caused the whole flotilla to come to a baffled halt. Machine-pistol bullets came skipping across the surface, but the range was too great to permit effective shooting.

DOC SAVAGE was diving again and again to the Helldiver. Each trip, he carried a load of much-needed supplies. Arms and ammunition came first, then canned concentrated food which had not been harmed by the water.

"What're the chances of raising the sub?" Renny asked.

"Not worth trying," Doc told him.

"But there should be compressed air in the tanks! We might use it – "

"The compressed air was all wasted by Mohallet's men in their wild efforts to keep the sub from sinking," Doc explained.

"How are the batteries?"

"Some have been ruined by the salt water," Doc told him. "But the greater number of the cells, inclosed in waterproof containers, the air vents of which close automatically to keep out water, are still serviceable."

"Then if we could get her on top, she'd still run!"

"Right! But it would take powerful lifting cranes and big buoyancy tanks to get her up – equipment we do not have."

Doc made one more dive. He brought up a large waterproof box.

Renny and the others peered at the container, puzzled. Doc had brought considerable apparatus aboard the Helldiver at the start of the voyage – stuff the use of which they were unfamiliar with. This was one of those items.

Doc vouchsafed no explanation. He placed his box carefully on his own raft.

"Let's go!" he directed.

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It was time they were getting under way. Mohallet's men and the White Beasts had fanned out in a semicircle, and were seeking to surround them, just out of rifle shot. Some had gone ashore with the idea of sharpshooting from behind sheltering rocks.

Doc set a course for the larger and more rugged of the two islands in the canyon, through which the river ran before diving into its underground channel.

Just before reaching the chasm, Monk abruptly turned his raft shoreward. He landed, dashed into the rocks, and came back with Habeas Corpus. He paddled up with the homely pig perched on the bloated camel hide.

"He was hangin' around waitin' for Ham's kiss!" Monk grinned, indicating the big-eared, spindle-legged porker.

Ham expressed a personal and very explicit opinion of Monk, his idea of humor and pigs in general. Ham rarely swore. But he could use dictionary words and get the same effect.

"What is he saying?" Ja asked Monk on her fingers.

"He's telling me what a pal I am," Monk explained in the same fashion.

They reached the island without incident. The sun, a gory ball of heat, was lifting as they landed.

Chapter XXII. THE TORRENT

UNDER Doc's direction, his five men stationed themselves at regular intervals around the rocky island. The two-score individuals rescued from the city carved in rock, unfamiliar with firearms, were virtually useless in any but hand-to-hand combat.

From that moment, the morning air was rent by an occasional rifle shot or the moan of a machine pistol. The latter weapons, in the hands of Mohallet's men, did little damage. The range was too great.

The canyon sides could be reached by the rifles Doc's men held, but effective return fire could not span the distance.

Moreover, their pursuers did not dare paddle past the isle and attempt to surround them. The canyon walls, too steep for climbing at this point, prevented their foes landing and carrying their clumsy pneumatic rafts downstream.

"We're snug as bugs in a rug!" Monk grinned, interrupting his diversion of teaching Habeas Corpus to shake hands.

"Until our grub and water run out," Long Tom reminded. "Say, I'll scout around and see if I can't find something to feed that pig. If we can fatten him up, he'll do for eating!"

"Nix!" Monk growled. "You'll eat me before you touch Habeas!"

"That's a very good idea!" Ham said nastily.

Ham, for once in his life, was without his sword cane. His captors had taken it. Its absence did not help his humor.

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Monk, leering cheerfully, proceeded to address the pretty Ja on his fingers. Ham looked on, carelessly at first, then with sudden rage.

"You homely missing link!" he screeched. "You're telling her that lie about me having a wife and thirteen nitwit children!"

The pair began making fierce faces. An onlooker would have thought sudden death impended for somebody.

Attractive Ja evidently thought so. She settled things by promptly leaving them both. She went in search of Doc. The bronze man, carrying his mysterious box, had gone off by himself.

Ja found Doc on a sector of the isle where the rock was solid. He had opened the box; an array of intricate apparatus was disclosed. Tubes, batteries, and coils were assembled compactly. A large piece of mechanism was affixed tightly to the rock. Doc wore a headset.

The white-haired girl gave Doc a ravishing smile. The response to this, as far as she could see, was none. She covered her disappointment by looking with pretended interest at their surroundings.

The sun was hotter. Down the chasm, in the direction of the underground-river entrance, the other island reared. Much of it had been covered by water. It was a rock hump, bare of shelter or life.

Beyond that, the maw of the cavern no longer yawned. It had been covered completely by the rising marsh waters.

Ja, after gazing some seconds, again tried her wiles on Doc. Once more, the results were negligible.

Doc was not unaware of the young lady's entrancing beauty, or her sly purpose. He was simply giving her no encouragement. He downed an impulse to tell her to go talk to Monk, who was always appreciative of the company of a pretty girl.

Quite disgusted, Ja whirled to flounce away.

"Will you make a round and tell every one to maintain absolute quiet for a short period at an interval of every ten minutes," Doc called after her. "No moving around. Every one is to remain absolutely quiet. And no shooting."

The girl nodded stiffly, then went on the mission. She did not understand the purpose of the unusual request. Nor was she alone in her puzzlement. The others did not understand it, either.

THE entire day passed without a happening of importance.

Mohallet and his allies seemed to have settled for a siege. They had sought to dive to the submarine to replenish their stock of weapons. It was evident, though, that they had not been able to enter the Helldiver.

"I locked all the hatches but one from the inside," Doc explained. "Then I put a padlock on that one. They will have difficulty breaking in, working under water."

Boulders offered some shelter from the midday heat. The water was rationed as sparingly as possible.

Night came, the heavens again brilliant with stars and moon.

"If you ask me, we oughta try to do ourselves some good!" Monk grumbled. "Sittin' around this way, we're playin' into this guy Mohallet's hands, if you ask me."

"Use your head!" Renny boomed.

"Why suggest the impossible?" Ham sneered. "He hasn't any!"

"What're you drivin' at?" Monk asked Renny, ignoring Ham's jab.

"I mean that Doc must have some plan," explained the big-fisted engineer.

"But we ain't got a chance of gettin' out of here!" Monk persisted.

"I'm betting Doc does!"

Monk grumbled: "I don't see how you –"

"Will somebody knock the gorilla in the head so I can get some sleep?" Ham requested.

Monk bristled indignantly. "By golly, you ain't kissed Habeas Corpus yet? You're gonna do it now!"

The homely chemist, seizing his pig, prepared to leap upon Ham and force fulfillment of their bargain.

"Quiet!" Doc called from the distance.

Silence instantly fell. No one moved or spoke. They had been observing these intervals of stillness all day, none knowing the reason therefore. So far, nothing had come of them.

But this was the exception.

"All right!" Doc yelled loudly. "Onto the rafts! Everybody! Make a great deal of noise! We want our enemies to come close enough that we can talk with them!"

Their foes evidently saw the first inflated camel-bide craft as it put off from the isle. Mohallet himself paddled within shouting distance.

He yelled in Arabic: "If you will surrender, you will be allowed to live!"

"We're not surrendering!" Doc's mighty voice volleyed back. "We're moving away from here! And if you follow us, it will mean your death! That's a warning!"

"Wallah!" roared Mohallet. "Lies! Try to flee and we will follow and kill you!"

"You follow us and it'll be your finish!" Doc repeated earnestly.

"You're wasting your time trying to talk him out of it!" said Johnny, fiddling with his glasses.

"I'm afraid so," Doc admitted. "But he was warned!"

By now, all the inflated skins were afloat. Doc clambred on the last one and shoved off. He did not have Ja for a passenger this time.

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The young lady had dismissed as a hopeless task her efforts to snare Doc. She was riding with the homely but happy Monk.

"Where do we go?" called Long Tom.

"To the other island – the bare one!" Doc replied.

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed. "There ain't a sign of shelter there! They'll pick us off!"

"Put some action into those paddles!" Doc commanded. "You fellows may not think you're in a hurry, but you are!"

THE bare hump of rock for which they were headed was nearly half a mile distant. They worked furiously to reach it, as Doc had directed.

Behind, a swarm of puffy skin rafts bobbed in pursuit.

Shouting, Doc warned them to go back.

A chorus of fierce shouts was his answer. Mohallet and his allies thought they saw the finish of their quarry.

When nothing had happened by the time the bleak rock knob was reached, Doc's men exchanged uneasy glances, wondering if they had not made their position hopeless.

The rafts of their foes crowded in. Haunting the shadows banked against the sheer canyon walls, they were enabled to come within range. The chasm was narrower here.

Bullets began snapping spitefully against the rocky spire, leaving gray smears. Doc's men returned the fire, shooting as accurately as they could from the rocking skin boats.

Renny rumbled: "This is bad! If something doesn't – "

"It's happening now!" Doc rapped. "Take a look at the water!"

Renny stood up to peer at the surface. His eyes popped. He smacked his huge fists together. His yell romped like thunder in the confines of the chasm.

"It's moving! The water's moving!"

The river had started flowing. Slowly at first, the water crept along; then its speed increased. Current ripples appeared. They mounted. A roar, starting as a dull whisper, loudened to a great babble of sound.

"The barrier at the outer end of the underground stream has just broken down!" Ham barked.

"Not 'just'!" Doc corrected. "It gave way some time ago. The movement of the water has just reached here."

"How'd you know that?" Ham demanded.

"The apparatus I've been using all day," Doc told him. "It is simply a powerful amplifier to pick up earth sounds. It works on the principle of a seismograph, utilizing sensitive microphones and audio amplifiers. It picked up the rumbling as the barrier gave way, and the jarring of the flood through the underground cavern."

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Ham pondered. He realized now that Doc had been certain the barricade would collapse: their flight from the Phantom City had been guided by the supposition that it would.

"How'd you figure it would give way?" he demanded.

"You'll recall I spent some time going over it," Doc reminded him. "The barrier obviously wasn't strong enough to hold against great pressure. There were rifts through which water could pass. This was eventually certain to loosen the whole mass. It was a question of time. We could have held out for days on the other island, waiting for it."

Talk ceased. They fell to watching Mohallet and their other enemies.

THE river had become a torrent of doom. Mohallet and nearly all the rest were afloat on the inflated camel-hide rafts. The craft were too clumsy to cope with a moderate current.

This was no current of moderation. Foam covered the whole surface by now. Waves fought each other. Small riffles came into being, grew into convulsing monsters that tossed a dozen feet upward. Swirling and roaring, the flood converged on a great whirlpool which marked the maw of the cavern.

Helpless in the abrupt rush of waters, Mohallet was among the first to be carried into the vortex. Such was the power of the sucking current that his raft was crushed, drawn from view together with its rider.

"He won't have a chance in there!" Monk said.

Monk did not sound gloomy. He was hardened to violence and sudden death. And no one had ever earned his end more thoroughly than Mohallet.

Other rafts were pulled into the spinning gullet. Wailing, those who rode them fought the current. They might as well have tried to battle Niagara with a toothpick for a paddle. They were swallowed in rapid succession, many even before they reached the full force of the whirlpool.

Some managed to land on the bald rocky spire which harbored Doc and his companions. These were glad to surrender their weapons in exchange for safety.

Half an hour saw the chasm clean of camel-skin rafts. Of the horde who had besieged them, only a few score on shore, and others who had made the isle, remained alive.

They had met a fate, these men, which had a way of seizing upon those who opposed Doc Savage. They had gone to join others who had come to an end in like fashion – caught in a sudden reversal of some trap they had been closing upon the giant bronze man and those who helped him.

Throughout most of the night, the torrent moaned and rushed. For a time, there was no appreciable lowering of the marsh level. There was a great deal of water to be drained, water fed by other briny swales on higher levels.

By dawn, the water was falling, leaving a crust of brine which dried white in the hot sun.

By noon, the river had become sluggish. It would not fall much more. And they could work upstream with their clumsy inflated rafts.

Doc allowed five hours more, for safety's sake. Then they put off, paddling upstream.

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Such of their enemies as had reached the isle, they left behind. These could swim ashore, to mingle with the other survivors. The chief of the White Beasts and the more fierce of the warriors had gone to their death in the cavern. The power of the savages was broken.

They came within sight of the spot where the Helldiver lay.

"Holy cow!" exploded Renny. "Have we got luck!"

The brine had lowered enough so that the long steel spine of the sub was fully exposed.

"ALL we've got to do is open the hatches and bail her out!" Renny declared. "She'll float, then! Even if she don't, it'll be a simple matter to rig winches and cables, and slide her into the water."

"Think we can get out through the cavern – the way we came in?" Monk asked Doc.

"Not a doubt of it," Doc assured him. "From the way the water went out, it's almost certain the channel is cleared of obstructions."

Monk grinned at pretty Ja. "Great! We'll float the sub, and ferry these white-haired people out."

"Maybe they'd rather stay here," Doc reminded.

A conference followed. To Monk's infinite disgust, it developed that Ja and her people elected to remain in their strange city carved from stone.

From what Ja had seen of the outer world, and the men who dwelt there – Mohallet, for instance – she did not think highly of it.

"This is their home," Renny said thoughtfully. "They probably wouldn't be satisfied away from it."

Arms and ammunition aplenty would be left in the Phantom City, it was decided, and the inhabitants instructed in their use. This would guarantee against any future threat by the White Beasts.

Doc was taking no part in the consultation. He had dropped off one of the air-filled camel skins and was examining the Helldiver. The hull was intact. She could be floated in a few hours – made ready to take them back to civilization.

Civilization! Doc smiled faintly, wryly. The word was not a synonym for safety or security to himself and his five men. It meant simply that they would be on deck for more trouble for some call which might take them to the far corners of the earth.

Monk's voice reached Doc. "Now, let's see if we can't trade these people something for a little of that good platinum – "

"You'd better forget the platinum," Doc told him.

"Huh?"

Doc addressed the white-haired girl, using the deaf-and-dumb dialect on his fingers that his friends might comprehend what was being said between the two of them.

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"You were wearing a bracelet when Mohallet found you," he signaled. "Where did you get it?"

"From the stranger who came here years ago – the man who taught us the talk of the hands," the girl replied. "It was the case of a watch, which he melted and beat into an armlet."

"Say!" Monk ejaculated. "A watch! A watch case! Well, for –"

"Mohallet saw the bracelet," Doc explained. "It was platinum. He asked Ja if there was much similar metal here, and she told him there was a great deal of the shiny stuff. Mohallet made the natural mistake of presuming it was all platinum."

Monk gulped and swallowed several times. "You mean to tell me –"

"Did you look closely at the metal of those gates?" Doc asked.

"Only close enough to see that it was shiny and soft, like platinum," Monk admitted. "Was it?"

"It is lead," Doc told him dryly. "The kind you make bullets out of!"

THE END