

THE FANTASTIC ISLAND

A Doc Savage Adventure By Kenneth Robeson

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The Fantastic Island

was but a small volcanic outlying island of the Galapagos Archipelago; but when Johnny wrecked on it and Doc Savage went to his rescue, the island spawned a plot as gigantic as it was small

A Complete Book-length Novel

By **KENNETH ROBESON**

Chapter I SHIPWRECKS TO ORDER

THE disappearance of William Harper Littlejohn attracted no public attention whatever. The reason for this was simple. The public never learned about it.

William Harper Littlejohn was a very famous man. It was impossible that, if ten average men on the street should be stopped and asked who William Harper Littlejohn was, they would not have had the slightest idea; but, in his field, William Harper Littlejohn was tops. His field was archaeology and geology. Wherever men are interested in such things, he was known.

William Harper Littlejohn's disappearance was simple. He had chartered a ship and was taking an archaeological expedition to the Galapagos Islands, below the equator in the Pacific Ocean. The Galapagos are said to be the world's strangest islands. William Harper Littlejohn simply disappeared. The ship vanished also. The whole expedition, too.

It could not have been that their radio merely failed. There were three radio transmitters on the expedition ship. No, there was some other reason. It was strange.

Just how strange it was, no one had any idea at the beginning of the thing.

William Harper Littlejohn happened to be one of the five men associated with that remarkable man of mystery, Doc Savage. Word of his disappearance reached Doc Savage at his New York headquarters. Doc Savage acted promptly.

Two of Doc Savage's aids—he had five of them altogether—were on a vacation cruise in the yacht *Seven Seas*, which chanced to be off the coast of Panama, in the Pacific. Aboard the yacht also was Patricia Savage, a remarkable young woman, whose relationship to Doc Savage was that of cousin. Pat had gone along for the trip, she claimed; but it was to be suspected that she was looking for excitement.

If she was looking for excitement, she was certainly destined to find it.

Doc Savage, man of bronze, individual of mystery, mental wizard and physical marvel—to quote the newspapers—sent a radiogram to the yacht *Seven Seas* headed for the Galapagos to look for William

Harper Littlejohn, who was better known as “Johnny,” and his expedition.

The *Seven Seas* was now about to slam headlong into more trouble than those aboard would ever have believed possible.

THE *Seven Seas* was riding a radio beam radiated, by special courtesy on the part of the powerful United States Naval radio station, from the Panama Canal Zone. This beam simplified navigation, and they were riding it straight for the Galapagos.



Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks stood on the dripping deck of the *Seven Seas* and stared into an immensity of black sky and blacker water. Occasionally he scowled anxiously upward at the radio rigging. Water slapped and phosphoresced around the bow.

Right now, the yacht was rolling in a huge ground swell, rolling alarmingly. Rivets strained and bulkheads creaked. There was at least half a gale blowing, and it made noises in the rigging like the sighs of dying men.

Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks was commonly called “Ham,” a name which he did not like. He now frowned darkly and made his way to the pitching bridge.

“This is dangerous,” he snapped. “We may run onto a reef any minute.”

“Don’t I know it?” a surprisingly childlike voice retorted from the semidarkness of the bridge. “This ground swell is bad—mighty bad. When it piles up like this, it means the water is getting shallow.”

Ham snapped, “But I thought you said—”

“Something screwy,” piped the childlike voice. “According to your log, we’re supposed to have more than a hundred miles between us and the nearest land.”

retracing the course they had been sailing, when it happened.

A curling wave lifted the bow of the *Seven Seas* high in the water and hurled it down. The yacht shuddered with a wrenching shock that knocked Monk and Ham sprawling on the wet deck. There was a nightmare of grinding and scrapings as steel plates were wrenched from the hull by jagged coral.

Caught fast on the submerged reef, the craft did not rise with the next wave. She heeled half over instead, with a groaning of tortured steel; and the wave washed in an avalanche of water over the deck.

Ham and Monk were battered against the anchor winch. They staggered up, half drowned, to claw their way toward the bridge.

"Aid Pat, if she needs it," Monk bellowed. "Me, I'm goin' for Habeas Corpus!"

Habeas Corpus was Monk's cherished pet pig. He never went anywhere without the animal, much to Ham's disgust and frequent infuriation.

A streak of light, blue-white, darted from the *Seven Sea's* bridge, knifed across the rock-fanged water.

"Turn that searchlight off," Ham shouted to Pat, as he went down again under a drenching cross-wave.

"It'll help us see to swim ashore," Pat protested.

"It'll draw sharks," Ham snapped, as he caught the life preserver Pat threw him.

"So you're afraid of sharks," Pat said.

But she switched off the searchlight and joined Ham at the submerged rail. Monk appeared on deck an instant later with the squealing, kicking armful of razorback hog that was Habeas Corpus.

Habeas Corpus had a snout like a wood-rasp, flopping coal-scuttle ears, long ungainly legs. The special life preserver which Monk had previously fashioned for Habeas did not improve his appearance. It added to his buoyancy, however. Monk jumped into the water with the wet pig.

"That hog'll draw sharks," Ham yelled.

"Habeas, he fights sharks!" Monk roared back. "Come on!"

PAT and Ham went overboard, Ham still holding tightly to his slim black cane which was almost as much a part of him as

his shirt. The cane was in reality a formidable weapon—a sword cane. Its innocent-appearing exterior sheathed a length of gleaming steel, the point of which had been impregnated with a chemical capable of producing almost instant unconsciousness.

Under the red lightning glare, surf on all sides broke against hidden reefs, churning the water to a bloody froth. But Pat and Ham came through the barrage of wave-dashed rocks and reeled, half drowned and gasping, onto a mangrove-studded beach. Monk swashed ashore close behind them, holding the squirming Habeas Corpus under an arm with difficulty.

HABEAS CORPUS



"That hog'll kick a rib out for you some day," Ham warned, breathing hard.

"Lay off Habeas Corpus," Monk gasped, "or I'll be kickin' out some ribs on my own account."

The red luminance bloomed again against the clouds. It crawled and writhed, disappeared, and blanketed out again like a bloody mist floating in air.

"What is it?" Pat demanded, shivering in spite of the sultry night.

"Nothing supernatural," Ham explained. "You notice the color on the clouds does not seep through from above. The light is reflected from underneath—"

"There's an active volcano somewhere on the island," Monk summed up.

Pat pressed water out of her drenched hair. "Do you suppose here's where Johnny is?"

"We'll have to find out," Ham said, grimly.

"One thing I'd like to clear myself on," Pat said earnestly. "The shipwreck. I was holding dead in the middle of the channel when it happened."

Pressing through the mangrove sink, they came out upon a height of land that was nothing if not weird. Volcanic rock, black lava sharp as broken glass, swallowed them up in a welter of fantastically shaped hills and gullies. Much of the razor-edged glass was in tilted sheets which were prone to slip and shatter under the weight of a footfall. Giant cactuses rooted in the crevices and dangled their spiny pads overhead, like hooded cobras ready to strike.

They lost all sounds of pursuit.

The low-raking clouds lifted and the three pressed on under the pale white light of equatorial stars.

"I hope we get somewhere quick," Pat said, appalled.

"They speak of the Galapagos Archipelago as the 'world's end,'" Ham remarked.

"They don't miss it much," Monk grumbled. "How we're goin' to find Johnny in this volcanic scrap heap, I dunno."

"Did either of you get the impression," Pat asked suddenly, "that our League-of-Nations attackers were being careful not to kill us?"

"Yeah," Monk admitted. "Even those rocks were not thrown too hard."

"They wanted us alive, I guess," Ham supplied.

"My guess, too. But why?"

"That's anybody's guess."

"We could sure use Doc Savage about now."

Climbing higher up the glassy slope, they passed through a belt of cold volcanic pits and cones, where, ages before, the molten rock had bubbled like mush and cooled in scabrous pockmarks.

They came out on a wide plateau where nothing grew, not even the cobra-head cactus, and where the pits were smaller, clogged with earth and so close together that it was necessary to skirt the region to make any forward progress.

Monk stopped suddenly.

"These pits are all in geometric order," he declared. "They're not volcanic pits like the ones below. They're manmade."

Ham stared. On the plain, the glassy rock had given way to a kind of reddish clay, or hard-packed volcanic ash.

"Right," he clipped. "The pits are crumbling away now and mostly buried under loose earth. Hard to tell, but they must have

been laid out originally with the regularity of cells in a honeycomb."

As they continued on, the honeycomb pattern became more apparent as the pits were revealed in a less crumbling condition.

"These were dug later," Ham observed.

"Yeah," Monk agreed. "The farther we go, the fresher the pits look."

"But what are they for?" Pat wondered. "Say, this all gets queerer and queerer. What's it all about?"

"LISTEN," Ham said, tensely.

Wafted on the miasmatic breeze came sharp, cracking sounds. There was unearthliness about the sounds, as though they sprang from the air of their own volition.

"What is it?" Pat asked uneasily.

"No animal ever made a sound like that," Monk blurted.

Suddenly through and above the cracking sounds, came a long-drawn wail which quavered up and down the scale in agony so appalling that a trickle of icy water seemed to be loosened on the back of each of the three listeners.

Pat gasped: "I never heard anything like it. Horrible!"

"A dying animal of some kind," Ham said.

"Dying man!" Monk corrected, grimly.

"Come on," Ham said, gripping his sword cane.

As they pressed forward, the pits in the rocklike ash actually became as sharply delineated as the cells in a honeycomb. A giant honeycomb. These pits were about ten feet in diameter, and some ten feet where they were not filled with loose earth. The mysterious cracking noises sounded louder.

"Ahead there," Ham rapped under his breath. "Look!"

"Shadows!" Pat gasped. "Like men moving!"

The three worked closer, holding to the concealment of the fringing thicket. White-pointed thorns tore at them, viciously shredding their clothes and piercing flesh. But they succeeded in approaching opposite the place where the shadows moved, and from where the cracking, cutting noises issued. Here the plain stretched on, but the advancing line of pits came to an end.

widened in startled recognition. He said nothing, but kept on digging.

Ham shot a quick glance around, saw that the nearest overseer was intently engaged in a bullying cross-examination of Pat. Ham squirmed close to the edge of the hole, so that his lips were almost at the digger’s ear.

“Where’s the rest of the ship’s crew—and Johnny?” he whispered.

“Crew’s in the pits, diggin’,” the man answered in a kind of wrenching sob.

“Where’s Johnny? Is he alive?” Ham hung on the answer fearfully.

“Alive, but he won’t be long.”

“Where is he?”

“A big guy with a black beard took him away. I don’t know where. I only know they’re gonna kill Johnny. They’re gonna kill all of us!” The man’s voice rose to hysterical rasp.

“Don’t talk so loud,” Ham cautioned, fiercely. “What have we got into here? Tell me what you know. Quick! While we’ve got the chance.”

“I can’t tell you—but I can—” Then the man’s voice rose in a choking shriek, out of all control now. It was an insane shriek.

Plainly, the fellow had broken under the tortures he had endured.

WHATEVER it was he meant to tell, or not to tell, Ham, remained forever untold. The overseer rushed forward, mouthing unintelligible curses. His arm reared up, and down. The leaded whip handle struck with gruesome thump against the crazed man’s head. It was a blow heavy enough to have dropped anything alive. But the man in the pit was not exactly alive now. He was a raving madman, mercifully removed from all consciousness of pain. His whitish eyes rolled madly. Crimson foam bubbled from his lips.

The leaded whip handle descended again. This time the man slumped, a slack weight in the pit. He was dead before his body hit the bottom.

The overseer—he was some unidentifiable Asiatic type—bawled orders in harsh gibberish. Two guards shoved forward. One was a giant brown-skinned man; the other a paunchy Caucasian of indeterminate race. The brown man bent and commenced ripping the thongs from Ham’s hands and

feet. The other guard jumped heavily down, unlocked the iron cuff from the dead man’s leg, and heaved the limp body out of the pit.

The guard on top grunted, and pushed Ham roughly over the edge. Ham fell sprawling. The guard in the pit was ready for him. He jangled the chain against the stake, grabbed Ham by the foot and slapped on the iron cuff, warm from the dead man’s leg.

He picked up the dead man’s shovel, thrust it into Ham’s hands. The overseer above cracked down with the whip. A thick welt bloomed on Ham’s cheek. He started digging.

Overseers herded Monk a short distance down the line of horror holes, and put him similarly to work.

Chapter III PRISONERS OF THE PITS

PAT experienced a somewhat different fate from that of the two men. She was consigned to one of the pits; but, though she was chained to the stake, she was not whipped, nor was she compelled to dig.

She was greatly relieved at this concession to her womanhood until, cutting through the harsh medley of groans, whip-cracks and guttural cries, she heard the close voices of two guards conversing in English.

“Make her dig.”

“No. The count will surely order her to be brought to the palace. He will not want her worn out from digging.”

“But she could well stand a little bit of whipping—”

“No,” the other protested. “In this case, the count will prefer to do his own whipping.”

“Maybe you’re right,” the overseer growled, and moved away down the line of pits.

The other guard bent close over the edge of the hole. Pat shrank back. All at once, the pulse throbbed violently in her wrists and in her blue eyes sprang a look of desperate hope. She was recognizing this guard. He was another member of the expedition that had disappeared with Johnny.

“Aren’t you—” she started to suggest.

“Al Fredrickton, first mate,” he supplied.

"But you—that whip!"

"I have to whip to keep from being whipped," he whispered, savagely. "I'm on top today. Tomorrow they may yank the collar off my neck and pitch me in a hole. I'm just as much a prisoner as these poor devils digging."

"But what is it all about?" Pat questioned.

"I don't know any more about it than you do. I only know that men dig and die."

"Dig and die!" she echoed, starkly. "What about Johnny?"

"He was taken to the palace. He may be alive. Listen: 33 Redbeach Road, Long Island. Can you remember that?"

"33 Redbeach Road—I've got it."

"Boris Ramadanoff, at that address."

"I've got it. What about it?"

The man's breath came faster. "You're our only hope," he rasped. "They'll take you to the palace. Try to contact Johnny. Tell him the name and address. There's a powerful short-wave radio sending set at the palace. Johnny must get a message to Doc Savage. Tell Doc Savage to contact Boris Ramadanoff."

"Yes, but what good will that do?"

"Ramadanoff can tell Doc Savage all he needs to know to effect our rescue. Ramadanoff is the brother of the big shot here on the island. They quarreled, the two brothers. And Boris left for New York."

"How did you find out all this?"

"After our ship fallowed in the false harbor lights and was wrecked, we were taken prisoners. The steward and I were retained to work in the palace kitchen. The steward heard the brothers quarreling. He learned Boris's new address and passed it on to me."

"Where is the steward?" Pat asked.

"Dead!" said the man. "They suspected he knew something. They killed him."

Pat shuddered. "Life isn't worth much here, is it?"

SOMETHING happened the next moment to demonstrate anew the fiendish ruthlessness of the sinister genius in control of this island.

A drumming beat sounded against the ground and a huge horse, ridden hard, snorted to a stiff-legged stop in front of the

line of working pits. The horse was a quivering black shadow under the wan starlight, and the rider was a shadow proportionately huge and black.

With virulent curses, the rider urged the plunging horse in among the cowering overseers. He leaned far out of his saddle, cracking heads right and left with a fearful instrument—a knout, fashioned somewhat on the order of those used in Imperial Russia. Again and again the knout descended, its woven leather thongs, reënforced with wire and hardened by a rosin treatment, biting down deeply and forcing agonized yells.

One of the guards showed fight. He dodged the blow of the knout, flung in close against the plunging horse and reached up to pull the horseman from the saddle. The man in the saddle only laughed a raw ghoulish clacking, pulled a revolver from holster and shot the guard dead.

The horseman kept laughing and driving bullets into the guard's body, even after the fellow was slumped in a still, dead heap on the ground. After that, no one offered resistance.

The horseman raised his voice in a bawled order. Guards scurried frenziedly into the pits where Monk and Ham and Pat were shackled. They unlocked the leg irons and motioned for the captives to climb out of their holes.

The three were brought before the man on the horse. The man spoke in precise English. His voice was suavely sinister.

He said: "It was a stupid blunder of my slaves to chain you to the pits. It is only the Asiatic immigrant ships sailing to South America that I intercept for my pit laborers. Those, and occasional Ecuadorian fishermen, guano and moss hunters. When, upon rare occasions, a yacht comes this way, its occupants are received as welcome guests."

"How does a guest get off this island after his ship is wrecked?" Ham asked dryly.

"My dear General Brooks," came the precise voice from the darkly-bulking figure on the horse, "none have ever gotten off."

"This lug knows who we are!" Monk muttered. Then, aloud, he said: "They're all on here now, the guests?"

"They are, my dear Colonel Mayfair, though a bit unrecognizable, some of them."

Monk bristled. "Johnny better be recognizable."

“Doubtless you have reference to Professor Littlejohn,” the other murmured. “He is quite recognizable. I shall take you to him. But first permit me to introduce myself. I am Count Alexander Ramadanoff.”

Turning to the guards, the count barked an order. Men padded forward with peculiar contrivances, resembling wicker hammocks. They deposited the litters on the ground and stood a little back.

The count’s hand waved out. His sardonic voice sounded: “There is one for each of you. Recline, and I will conduct you in state to the palace.”

Monk hooted, “No hospital cot for mine. I’ll walk!”

“Recline,” the count ordered again, and the knout swung menacingly in his hand.

They took their places on the wicker litters—Monk grumbling, Ham doubtful, and Pat frankly grateful for the convenience.

“Hey!” Monk blurted. “We’re forgettin’ Habeas Corpus.”

“You have reference to the trained Arabian pig?” the Count questioned with suave politeness.

“You know everything, don’t you?” Monk growled. “Yeah, I mean my pig.”

Count Ramadanoff exchanged a few guttural phrases with the overseers, then addressed Monk.

“The pig must have escaped into the jungle. He will find company more to his liking there. Wild swine overrun this island.”

Ham said, “Well, anyhow, we’ve seen the last of that hog.”

Monk glowered at Ham. “It’s your fault, shyster. *You* let him go.”

“If it wasn’t for you and your pesky pig, we wouldn’t be in this fix,” Ham retorted.

Count Ramadanoff cut short their quarrel by ordering the litter bearers to proceed. Through a narrow path hacked in the vine-matted jungle growth, they jogged along, the count, on his horse, bringing up the rear.

They came out on a strip of rocky coastline and the “guests” stared with astonishment.

“Blazes!” Monk gulped. “Blazes! Look!”

RISING sheer, washed by ocean spray on one side and bathed in the blood-red glare of volcanic light on the other, a

palace of medieval Slavic type flung its black rock turrets high above the jungle growth.

Through a drawbridge in the bastioned wall of twenty-foot thick volcanic rock, they entered the bleak palace courtyard. The drawbridge swung ponderously closed behind them.

Pat shivered. She felt as though she was locked out of the world.

“An army couldn’t get through these walls,” Ham reflected uneasily.

“Some joint,” Monk mumbled.

Past the high buttressed towers the “guests” were carried and deposited in front of a low-arched doorway. The count dismounted from his black horse and waved them inside.

“Some joint is right!” Monk said emphatically, as he stopped inside the stone threshold and stared around.

The room was huge, high-vaulted—an oppressive cavern of black volcanic rock and wooden beams. Demoniacal blue flames leaped within a fireplace large enough to have engulfed a whole ox for roasting. The fire shadows swooped on long curtains of somber ruby red which hung on brass hoops. Silver samovars glowed dully from shadowed recesses. Ancient icons looked down from the walls. The only modern touch in the whole vast room was a grand piano draped with costly sea otter furs and brightly illuminated by crystal spangled candelabras which shed a yellow light from high overhead.

Count Ramadanoff indicated ornately gilded, ruby-plush chairs. “Sit there before the fire,” he invited, “while your chambers are being prepared.”

In the light, the count was revealed as a magnificently proportioned man, broad-shouldered, muscled, well over six feet in height. He was dressed in black—black riding boots, black breeches, black coat, black satin string tie. His Czar-of-Russia beard was black too, and his black eyes smoldered with a sinister light which it was impossible for him to conceal.

Pat sat on the edge of her high-backed chair and mentally chewed her finger nails because there had been no opportunity for her to divulge to Monk or Ham the information she had learned regarding the New York address of the count’s brother.

specialty was electricity, of which he had profound knowledge. Electrical patents recorded under his name were legion.



Long Tom looked like a man on his last legs. But appearance in his case was a terrific lie. His chalk-white face did not indicate ill health. He happened to be one of those rare individuals who, no matter how much they expose themselves to the sun's rays, cannot get a tan. There was incredible strength in his fragile-appearing body.

Long Tom turned in at a building which towered, a sheer mountain of gleaming stone and steel, nearly a hundred stories into the sky. The entire eighty-sixth floor of this building constituted the New York headquarters of Doc Savage.

Past a phalanx of elevators in the skyscraper lobby, Long Tom strode, and paused before Doc Savage's own private elevator shaft, fishing in his pocket for a key. This speed elevator was of Doc Savage's own ingenious designing, and it maintained lightning passage between that eighty-sixth floor and the main lobby, as well as the basement where, in a subterranean garage, Doc's remarkably equipped motor vehicles were housed.

Fitting the peculiar key to the hole, Long Tom gained access to the speed elevator.

He jumped wildly just after he stepped into the lift. There was blurred movement as something—it appeared to be an amazingly elongated mouse—scurried between his feet and disappeared around the corner in the lobby.

Long Tom popped his head out of the elevator to get a better view. All he got was another impression of blurred motion. The thing, strangely, did not seem to be running on legs, nor did it writhe like a snake. It flowed, seemingly.

Like a grayish-blue streak it flowed against the shiny black oxford of a uniformed

elevator starter and disappeared within the recesses of his trousers leg.

The elevator starter was an active young man, who liked to practice tap steps when no one was around. He was rather good at it. But the dance routine he went into when that grayish-blue streak flowed up his pants leg was like nothing executed on a stage or ballroom floor.

Long Tom grinned at first, watching the young man's epileptic antics. But suddenly he quit grinning and started forward with great strides.

He had caught a glimpse of the elevator starter's face. The young man's features were knotted in stark agony. A shrill cry broke from his writhing lips. His knees bent under him. He fell, arms gyrating wildly.

Long Tom caught him before he struck the floor and bent over the shuddering body, his hands patting frenziedly over the young man's trousers leg, attempting to crush that unseen thing responsible for the fellow's tragic condition.

"STAND back," Long Tom warned, as men and women in the lobby surged close, curious.

They paid no attention, of course, crowding in and staring, asking aimless questions. New Yorkers invariably behave thus, when one of their number acts in a manner slightly deviating from the normal.

"Get a doctor," some one advised.

"Stand back," Long Tom warned again, sharply. "Something bit him. There's a poison snake, or bug, or rat or something, loose in here. You're all in danger!"

Even that did not move them. With new recruits continuously pressing in from behind, the crowd swelled closer. Curiosity was an emotion more rampant than fear.

Then something happened which did move them. They became all at once conscious of a man approaching. He neither spoke nor shoved, but there was such quiet mastery in his face and manner that, instinctively, they looked at him, and then with a kind of awe, pressed back to allow him free progress through the crowd.

The man was a giant. His strong features, kilned by tropic sun and arctic wind, and held under superb emotional control, seemed to be molded in bronze. He topped, by fully a head, every man in the lobby. And

yet, so perfectly was his huge frame developed, prodigious muscles molded in perfect symmetry, that it was only the manner in which he towered above the close-pressed crowd that revealed him as the giant he really was.

His crisp hair seemed made of bronze only a shade darker than his skin. His great neck sinews, only slightly less hard than metal, showed decidedly above his collar. Cables of the sinew ridged his hand.

The most remarkable feature of all about the bronze man, was his eyes. Strange eyes they were, hypnotically compelling; like pools of flake-gold, stirred with restless life, as though tiny whirlpools kept the fine gold flakes continually in boiling suspension.

For an instant after the bronze giant was discovered in their midst, a hush settled over the lobby.

"Doc Savage!" some one said.

Others took up the name. From lip to lip, the murmur flew: "Doc Savage!" . . . "Doc Savage!"



DOC SAVAGE was bending over the unconscious form of the elevator starter. Cabled fingers which could, without exaggeration, twist a horseshoe into a straight line, rolled up the trousers leg of his patient with gentle deftness. On the calf of the leg, two rows of blued holes were revealed. There was no swelling, no inflammation, just that double row of tiny lacerations.

Suddenly, penetrating the many-mouthed murmur in the lobby, came a weird

sound, a kind of musical trilling which ran up and down the scale, softly, fantastically, as though the sound emanated from the air itself. It was suggestive of the sibilant slipping of an evening wind through palm fronds, or of the call of some golden-winged bird out of an Arabian Nights fairy tale.

This sound came from Doc Savage himself. It was an unconscious part of the bronze man, a thing he did in moments of stress or at times of great surprise.

Doc Savage spoke to his aid, Long Tom. The bronze man's voice was arresting, deep, pleasantly resonant.

He said, with impressive simplicity, "We will take him upstairs."

Doc lifted the unconscious man with noticeable ease. The crowd made a path for them to the elevator.

On the eighty-sixth floor, Doc Savage and Long Tom entered the headquarters reception room. The room, with its great comfortable chairs, deep-piled oriental rug, solid table exquisitely inlaid with ivory, reflected the power and solid dignity of Doc Savage.

Doc examined his patient more closely and administered a hypodermic.

Long Tom hovered close. "Will he come out of it, Doc?"

"He will," the bronze man said, quietly.

Doc listened then attentively, while Long Tom related what he knew of the elevator starter's injury.

"Did you identify the thing which attacked him?" the bronze man queried.

Long Tom shook his head. "I only glimpsed it. It seemed to flow along the floor so fast, I saw only a blur. It didn't appear again, after attacking this lad. I think it must have been trampled under the feet of the crowd."

Doc pointed to the parallel rows of lacerations on the patient's leg. "Only one thing could have left such marks."

"Centipede?" Long Tom hazarded.

"Correct," Doc said. "Judging from the angle in which the anterior legs, or modified fangs, have dug into the flesh, and the space between lacerations, and the immediate effect of the creature's poisonous bites, I should say one of a species of giant centipedes indigenous to the Galapagos Islands."

"The Galapagos! That's where Monk and Ham and Pat sailed, looking for Johnny!"

"They have arrived," Doc said grimly. "And they found trouble."

LONG TOM stared. "How do you know?"

"This message came in over the short-wave set, a few minutes ago."

Doc handed Long Tom a copy of Ham's and Monk's message, reading:

PRISONERS ON FANTASTIC ISLAND IN GALAPAGOS GROUP STOP CONTACT BORIS RAMADANOFF THIRTY THREE REDBEACH ROAD LONG ISLAND STOP GRAVE DANGER—

Long Tom whistled. "I'm beginning to get it! It's a long arm that reaches from the Galapagos to New York City. This centipede was meant for you, Doc! It was introduced into your elevator as an attempt upon your life."

"Perhaps," Doc Savage admitted, "though the immediate intent was probably to render me unconscious, as the first step in a kidnaping plot."

"How do you figure that?"

"A centipede's bite is rarely fatal. But we all seem to be under the thousand-legged's shadow. Consider: Johnny was first apprehended; now Ham and Pat and Monk are taken. And almost paralleling their message of distress, comes this Galapagos calling card in the form of a centipede."

Long Tom was silent for a moment. As a result of their unceasing war upon the most ruthless and cunning forces of criminal adventurers, Doc and his aids lived always in the shadow of danger. But at the moment, they had no active case under investigation. The developments of the last few minutes had struck with stunning suddenness.

"What do you make of it, Doc?" Long Tom questioned, uneasily.

"Frankly," said Doc, "I don't make anything. It's a complete mystery."

"That address in the radiogram; we ought to turn up a clue there."

Doc nodded soberly. "I was on my way to 33 Redbeach Road when I ran into the excitement downstairs. Let me suggest you see about getting this young man to his

home, then jump in your car and join me at the Long Island address."

Doc descended in the private elevator to his subterranean garage, the existence of which was known only to a few people outside the immediate circle of his five aids. From among the number of specially built vehicles, Doc chose a low-swung coupé of gunmetal finish and expert streamlining. The car was, in reality, a rolling fortress, with bullet-proof glass, armored body, chrome-steel fenders, and bulletproof tires of cellular rubber construction.

The garage doors, actuated by photo-electric cells, opened silently as Doc eased the car forward; the doors closed automatically behind him as he rolled along the ramp into the stream of uptown traffic. Toward Queensboro Bridge and Long Island he headed, the powerful motor under the beetle-backed hood propelling the car with silent, flowing motion.

SEEKING 33 Redbeach Road took Doc Savage to a semi-deserted tide-flat region on Long Island Sound. He turned in at a brush-grown lane. Swirls of fog were rolling in from the Sound. An ancient brick house with sagging porch roof and rusted rain spouts loomed through the mist. The place had evidently once been a fine estate, but it gave every evidence of having been deserted for a long time.

Doc parked under a dragging-branched elm which dripped water from leaves sodden with condensed fog. He did not get out on the steering-wheel side of his car. He slid over to the opposite side, stepped to the ground and disappeared in a grove of wet birches.

Doc had no reason to doubt the authenticity of the Galapagos radiogram. He was not expecting trouble. But it was his policy never to take unnecessary chances.

After a few minutes of reconnoitering, he approached a side entrance to the decaying mansion and knocked. There was a long silence. Doc knocked again. Still nobody came.

Doc Savage, through years of patient training, had perfected his hearing to an animal keenness; he could hear sounds above and below the scale audible to the average person. Within this house which appeared to be as deserted as a snatched

trilling. He thought it was some static manifestation at first, but almost instantly he identified the sound as that subtle emanation peculiar to Doc Savage in moments of stress or surprise.

"Doc," Renny thumped, "what is it?"

The bronze man countered with a question of his own. "How long has Boris Ramadanoff been there?"

"Long as I have, anyhow—ten minutes."

"Describe him."

"Old-fashioned little guy with a black cutaway coat and a black Czar-of-Russia mush all over his map. Talks with an accent. What's the excitement, Doc?"

Doc complied: "A man claiming to be Boris Ramadanoff sought to kill me, a few moments ago. Sit tight, Renny. We have good reason to believe that the lives of Johnny and all those who went after him—maybe our lives too—depend upon what we do within the next few hours."

AS Doc stepped out of his elevator on the eighty-sixth floor and entered the headquarters reception room, a remarkable man shifted his towering bulk out of a comfortable leather chair and lumbered forward. Alongside any one but Doc Savage, this individual would have been considered enormous.



This man had a long, puritanical face that was shrouded in gloom, as though he had lately returned from a funeral and contemplated going to another. As a matter of fact, the expression was habitual whenever he was expecting action, which was most of the time. Queerly enough, it

meant he was happy. His fists swung restlessly at his sides. Huge fists they were, larger than Monk's, rivaling the flint-padded claws of a Kodiak bear.

The big-fisted man was "Renny"—Colonel John Renwick—an engineer who had possibly built dams and bridges in more parts of the world than any man alive—and knocked out more door panels with those appalling fists.

Renny's hand waved toward a little man who had sprung up from a chair and was in the middle of a courtly bow.

"This is Boris Ramadanoff," Renny announced.

The black-bearded little man continued to make bows.

"I am prostrated," he said in precise English. "From the colonel here, I have just learned that you met with trouble from a man posing as myself."

"Do you have an address on Redbeach Road?" Doc asked, cryptically

"But yes! The number is thirty-three."

"Within the last hour at that address, several men, one of whom claimed to be Boris Ramadanoff, did try to trap me," Doc admitted.

The little man's eyes gleamed. "Was he a bullet-headed fellow with close-cropped hair?"

"The one who claimed to be Ramadanoff? Correct."

"I know of him. I repeat it, sir, I am prostrate! To think that you should be set upon by thugs in my own home! The truth is, I have many enemies. Doubtless they took possession of my house, their intent being to apprehend you, in the belief that you could furnish them with information regarding my whereabouts. Accept my most profuse apologies."

Doc nodded. "You wished to see me?" he suggested.

"From South America, I have come to see you!" The little man bowed again, and with a quick, birdlike motion thrust a leather folder toward Doc.

"THIS establishes your identity," Doc said to Boris Ramadanoff, as he handed back the papers. "And now—"

"I seek your aid, sir," Boris said earnestly. "I need it desperately. Lives hang in the balance. I will come quickly to the

Carrying the man he had captured under one arm, Doc Savage hurriedly searched the rooms.

Boris Ramadanoff was gone!

DOC SAVAGE carried his prisoner to the fire escape, hurriedly descended. His purpose was to watch the rear of the apartment building. The police, by now, were around in front. They would take care of the entrance.

Doc Savage, noting that from the spot where he had parked his coupé he could watch the court that gave to the rear entrance of the apartment, hurriedly carried his prisoner to the car. It was just as well to get the fellow out of sight of the police, thus avoiding the delay which explanations would, necessarily, cause.

The radio was still turned on in the coupé. Static crackled from its loud-speaker, and mingled with that was the frantic crackle of words.

Doc recognized the voice. It was Long Tom, no doubt speaking from the transmitter of his car at the Redbeach Road address where Doc Savage had left him on guard. The electrical wizard's voice came in frantic bursts, almost inarticulate.

"Doc—centipedes—killing me—"

The words suddenly ceased coming.

That changed Doc Savage's whole plan of action. Any danger to Long Tom transcended in importance what might have happened to Boris Ramadanoff. Doc switched the coupé's engine on; with a squalling of tire rubber, it got under way. The car rocketed down the street, siren squalling. The use of the siren was permitted Doc by the police department. Doc depended upon it, of course, only in dire emergencies.

While he wheeled along, Doc called through the coupé's radio, attempting to renew connection with Long Tom; but he got no response.

He shifted his call back to Renny at headquarters. Renny was listening in, feverishly awaiting directions.

Doc said, "Better get over here to Ninety-seventh Street and stand by. Try to avoid trouble with the police. Leave your radio switched on in your car, so we can keep in contact."

"Right, Doc," Renny answered.

Doc replaced his microphone on the hook and turned his attention to the captive he had lugged into the car with him. He was "Rats" Hanley, the scrawny-chested, rat-eyed individual who had been going to clip the handcuffs on Doc.

Doc put pressure on him and learned from him that the bullet-headed man was Jans Bergman, and that Bergman worked for some one higher up. Gaining this information, Doc put Rats to sleep by pressing on a hidden nerve. Later, Rats would be sent to Doc's "crime college" in upstate New York. There, by surgical means, the crook would be cured of his criminal tendencies.

Doc's coupé crossed the Queensboro Bridge over the East River and continued along the Sound. Sea fog still hung heavy over the run-down estate, the decaying red brick house at 33 Redbeach Road, as Doc swerved his car in at the gate and rolled silently up the brush-grown lane.

There was no sign of Long Tom.

THE bronze man spent no time in reconnoitering. With Long Tom's life threatened, even seconds were important. He leaped from the car, traversed the short distance to the house in great bounds. He tried the door. It was locked. He used Renny's pet method, and one of his fists, propelled by prodigious arm and shoulder muscles, crashed through the solid oak panel.

Like closing vises, his hands caught the splintered wood and wrenched. He tore the door half down, then walked through the rest of it with forward-pressing force which shattered the entire door frame.

In the dim interior, he moved around. His footfalls sounded hollowly throughout the ghostly house. The place seemed to be deserted. He whipped out a flashlight, snaked its searing rays over floor and walls. Black corners leaped into white life.

In one room, he found evidence of a furious struggle. Furniture was overturned. Still-wet scarlet was on the carpet.

The crimson was not the most alarming thing. Scattered over the floor were the crushed bodies of fully a dozen centipedes. Hairy legs on some of the broken segments were still writhing.

While Doc's flashlight poked its white beam around the shambles of the room, there came a sound from the hall of a floor board creaking. Doc whirled, crouching a little, the light from his flash snuffing out.

He glided to the wall and waited, frozen close. The creaking from outside the door sounded louder. It paused, started up again, paused a second time within the doorway. Doc could hear the cautious breathing of the stalker.

The unknown took a wide step to clear the bare floor and land soundlessly on his feet on the carpet. He got his foot on the carpet, all right—then his whole body left the floor. With his feet as high as his head, he fell heavily on his back.

Doc had taken advantage of opportunity, when the stalker took his wide step, to pull the carpet from under him.

The man's trigger finger started jerking spasmodically. Plaster showered and the room rocked to gun thunder as orange flame stabbed the gray light. Suddenly, the echoing uproar stopped. There was a metallic clatter and a hollow thump. Doc, with one leap, had landed in the middle of the room, knocked the gun to the floor with one hand and whacked the man's head down with the other.

He looked at the man he had knocked unconscious. There was enough light to reveal features. The man was no one Doc had seen before.

But the next moment, Doc was looking upon a face which he *had* seen before. It was one of the few times in Doc's life that an enemy succeeded in actually surprising him.

A floor board creaked in the doorway. Doc looked up to find himself covered at deadly range with a submachine gun. The gunner had been able to advance without being heard because of the uproar the pistol shots had made.

The smooth skin of the man behind the submachine gun gleamed with pale menace in the half light. The wide mouth opened. Thin lips writhed in triumphant grimace.

The gunner who stood there threatening quick death was Jans Bergman, the man with the close-cropped hair whom Doc had left on Ninety-seventh Street, Manhattan, in an apartment with a squad car of the police department closing in.

"THERE is only one way you could have gotten here so soon," Doc said, quietly.

"One way," Bergman agreed, with his heavy foreign accent. "In the luggage compartment of your coupé."

"You are clever," Doc said.

"You had a lot on your mind," Bergman said grimly. "That helped. Stowed away in that compartment, I heard the radio S O S that came through from here."

"How did you leave everybody on Ninety-seventh Street?"

"Pretty badly shot up. It was a nice trick—the smoke. Your last trick, I think."

Doc straightened.

"Hold your hands high!" Bergman slashed. "Keep them wide apart! The fingers, even—keep them open."

Doc complied.

"And the feet—step them wide apart."

Doc moved to stand wide-legged.

"That's better," Bergman said. "You don't trick me this time."

Doc stared with a certain grimness into the slitted eyes of his enemy. He spoke what he was thinking.

"But few men have opposed me before, and risked another meeting."

"I," Bergman bragged, "am a bold man."

"Perhaps only foolhardy."

"You are the foolhardy one, if you think you can outsmart Jans Bergman. Maybe you're wearing bulletproof clothes. Don't depend upon them. My machine-gun lead will push your face out the back of your skull."

Doc shrugged, asked evenly, "Now that you have the bear by the tail, what do you propose to do?"

Bergman stared, slitted eyes glittering. "I'll keep holding the bear by the tail until—until a very few moments. Do you hear what I hear?"

Outside the house, an auto was droning up the driveway. The sound throbbed close, died. Car doors slammed. Feet scraped across the wooden porch, entered the house.

Bergman yelled, "This way, you guys!"

Foot scufflings, muttered curses sounded closer.

"Inside here," Bergman ordered. "Get a line on him from four angles. If he moves a finger a quarter of an inch, let him have it—in the face!"

Four men, black shadows in the gray gloom, eased inside the room and took positions within a yard of Doc, machine guns poking for his face.

Bergman bent, placed his rapid-firer on the floor, and approached Doc with handcuffs in one hand and an automatic in the other.

He said hoarsely, to cover his nervousness: "Now you will see how we treat the bear we have caught by the tail."

Something happened then and Jans Bergman was jolted by surprise greater than any which had come to him in his active life.

DOC SAVAGE did not move his feet. He did not move his hands. He did not even move his fingers. But, suddenly, there was a sound that might have been explosion in slow motion.

There was superwhite light, too. It was an undertone of blue, and looking at it was something like looking at the arc of an electric welding operation. It did things to the eye. In fact, it brought blindness that was momentarily complete.

Doc Savage had his own eyes closed tightly, and thus escaped the blinding effect of the flash to a great degree. He ducked for safety as lead spurled with ear-shattering clatter.

Jans Bergman began bellowing for his men to quit their suicidal shooting. More than any of them, Bergman came near understanding what had happened. He had caught the flash of Doc's wrist watch an instant before the flash came. He had realized the bronze man had expanded wrist muscles so as to split the case and release the contents.

Jans Bergman, of course, knew nothing of the chemical composition of the powder which had been in the watch and, when released into the air, had ignited instantly by spontaneous combustion. Nor did he know that the powder was one which, when burning—it burned like ordinary flash light powder—gave off those rays of light most destructive, over a temporary period, to the delicate nerve mechanism of the human eye.

While his enemies were milling about, cursing, shooting, gradually getting vision back into their eyes, Doc Savage plunged out into the hall. He slammed the door behind him, streaked through the shadowed house and outside into the sea fog which still rolled in from the Sound.

The bronze man made for his coupé in the driveway, got there in time to hear Renny's frantic voice trying to raise Doc through the loud-speaker. There was no way of telling how long Renny had been calling.

"Doc!" Renny was rumbling urgently. "Calling Doc Savage! Important!"

Doc grasped the microphone and said into the apparatus: "Listening."

"Doc," Renny thumped, "I am shoving off in my car—gonna join you. I've learned something. Boris Ramadanoff! Holy cow—he—"

A grinding crash blasted from the microphone.

It was a noise such as might have been made by two cars crashing together at high speed.

"Renny," Doc called in alarm, "are you all right?"

"All—right—Doc," sounded Renny's voice, faintly.

"Quick—what did you find out?"

A new voice jumped from the microphone, harsh, mocking.

"The same thing you'll find out, Savage—after it's too late!"

Chapter VII SUBWAY SEIZURE

DOC trod the starter of his car; but the great motor under its long hood did not throb into life. It remained as cold and unresponsive as the water-dripping trees which loomed through the fog.

He dived out and lifted the hood. He could see at a glance what was wrong. Wiring had been torn loose and ignition parts smashed. Jans Bergman, obviously, had used a monkey wrench before entering the house.

The gunfire had ceased inside the house. But it soon cracked from close outside. Lead skidded off the armor plate of the gunmetal coupé, mushroomed against

The bronze man bent his fingers upward till they could touch the end of his coat sleeve. His fingers moved deftly, unraveling a thread. From a pocket in the coat sleeve his hands received a small metal envelope, flexible as lead foil. Doc opened one end of the envelope with his finger nail and carefully maneuvered his hands to pour the liquid contents—a few drops only—on the handcuff links.

The talking men outside had now approached close enough to the door that Doc could hear what they were saying. He recognized one of the voices. It was Jans Bergman's. The blond, bullet-headed leader with the skull-tight skin had apparently just come in. His glib pronouncements sounded strange, when uttered with that foreign accent.

Doc heard him saying, "You left his clothes on? You fools—"

A sullen voice answered: "We frisked him—got everything he had."

"You couldn't have gotten half of it! Savage has a thousand pockets. You could yank out his teeth, shave his head, and pull out his nails and he'd still have enough chemicals hidden on him to blow up a battleship."

The other cursed nervously. "I don't like it—monkeyin' with this bronze guy."

"You're getting your cut."

"What good's heavy sugar, if I croak before I can blow it?"

There was a silence, heavy, oppressive.

Then Bergman asked, "Has he come out of it yet?"

"Look through and see for yourself," the other snarled. "I ain't even lookin' at him any more. He's like a poisonous snake to me."

There was a sharp, metallic rasping as Bergman slid back an eye-slit in the door and peered through.

HE saw Doc lying on his back, feigning unconsciousness.

"He's still out," Bergman said.

"He ought to be. We both of us give him a tap that would have busted a cable on Brooklyn Bridge."

There was another silence, more ominous than the one before. When

Bergman spoke again, it was in a hoarse voice, curiously hushed.

"We've got to kill him," he said.

"Maybe you're right," the other muttered. "But how would we kill him? A gunshot would bring one of them thousand-legged bugs crawlin' down our necks."

"A gunshot, yes—but a slit throat makes little noise."

"Get close enough to that bronze guy to cut his throat? Not for mine."

"He's handcuffed."

"Suppose he skins out of them cuffs?"

"How can he?"

"How can he do a lot of things he does?"

"All right, suppose he gets out of the cuffs? He can't; but if he does, look at the knives. We won't have to get so close to him as you're thinking."

Bergman tiptoed aside. From under a litter of boxes and excelsior packing he lifted two huge knives, bone-handled, with blades nearly half a foot in width and close to a yard long.

To Doc's ears came the gasped words: "Sugar cane knives, ain't they?"

"Right. I'm going to cut Savage's head off." The heavy door swung open with ponderous creaking and Jans Bergman, followed closely by his companion, advanced across the damp bricks toward Doc's prone form. The assassins walked in a crouch, their machetes raised high.

ONCE in reach of Doc, they paused.

"If I don't make a clean job with the first stroke," Bergman muttered, "dip your own knife in the blood. Then follow me out in a hurry."

The other's teeth started chattering. The massive knife wavered and he grasped it with both hands.

"I'm practically out on the sidewalk now," he husked.

Bergman's knife lifted higher, then down it chopped, the wide blade glinting dully in the half light.

The first stroke was not enough. It was not even a starter. As the blade swished close, Doc, whose muscles had been tensely braced against the floor, wrenched head and shoulders forward.



Steel met steel with grinding clangor, and the knife aimed at Doc skittered in the air. . . .

It was too late for Jans Bergman to change his stroke. The frightful blade slammed past Doc's head and sank inches deep in the mortar.

Before Bergman could pull the blade free, before his companion could chop down with the other knife, Doc sprang an even greater surprise on them.

His arm, free from the handcuffs, struck out and down, against the back of the mortar-imprisoned blade, knocking it forcibly from Bergman's grasp. At the same time, his

other hand streaked forward and grabbed the handle.

"No handcuffs!" the other man shrieked in terror, as he chopped down, holding his knife in both hands.

Doc parried the down stroke with the knife he had taken from Bergman. Steel met steel with grinding clangor, and the knife aimed at Doc skittered in the air, glinting like water heaved from a bucket, and clattered on the bricks at the other side of the room.

"No handcuffs!" Bergman echoed, and the skin was drawn so taut across his

Doc, listening in the hall, had caught the sound of human breathing inside the room. As he smashed through the door, a man who had been bending over, twirling the dials of a modern safe, straightened up with a guttural curse.

From the crashed-in door, all that was visible of the man was a bulky body, a blunt, close-cropped head. Jans Bergman!

IN the time it took for Bergman to jerk his bullet head around to look, Doc Savage had cleared the width of the room and locked a steel-thewed arm around the man.

Bergman struggled, trying to get at the automatic in his pocket. He was a big man; during his youth in his native country, he had won recognition as a wrestler. But, with Doc's arm holding tighter and tighter, strength flowed out of Bergman's body until, if Doc had not held him up, he would have fallen to the floor.

Doc appropriated Bergman's automatic and tossed it clattering onto the writing surface of an old-fashioned roll-top desk. Then he allowed Bergman to slump into a chair.

Doc indicated the safe. He said, "Greed brings many men to ruin. You did not leave when you had the chance. You came back here to help yourself to more money."

"Yes! Let's get out of here—while we're alive!"

Jans Bergman was staring up at Doc with panic creeping into his slitted eyes. Sweat was beading his brow and glistening in the close-cropped hair on his head.

"Who is your boss?" Doc questioned.

Bergman's thin lips pressed so tightly they disappeared in the stretched smoothness of his skin. He shook his head.

Doc shrugged. "All right. But here is one you *will* answer. Where are my two men, brought here before me?"

Bergman's lips writhed. "I have nothing to say!"

Doc settled himself on the large roll-top desk, and said, "We will stay here until you talk."

"Savage, you're nuts!" Bergman jabbered. "It's as dangerous for you in here as it is for me! Sometimes a man drops dead with nobody near him, and what has killed

him is a little hole in his temple about the size you could poke your thumb into."

"What makes that hole?" Doc queried, curiously.

"I don't know. But I'll tell you where your men are—"

In the twilight murkiness of the room leaped a peculiar sound, a kind of fleshy crunch. Bergman's words died in his throat. His head flopped sidewise. His shoulders followed it with flowing motion. His head thumped hollowly against the floor. His body lay there in a twisted huddle.

Doc leaped from the desk, made a quick examination. His fingers encountered a bone-crushed depression in the left temple, a smooth, white wound, in its size and contour the same as a man's thumb would have made if jabbed into white lard.

Even as Doc looked, the wound commenced to ooze scarlet in red pin points which quickly built up an overflowing red puddle. Bergman's flat ear divided the two streams, which ran onto the floor.

Jans Bergman's racketeering days were over. He was a victim of what he had called the "thumb-hole death."

A VOICE sounded in the room, precise: "The same thing could have happened to any one—any one!"

No one had come into the darkening room. There was no one standing outside the doorway. There was only that mocking voice rebounding from the walls.

Doc turned, fastened his gaze on the roll-top desk.

A laugh floated mockingly into the room. "Congratulations, my dear Savage. You have located my voice. Almost any second now you may look toward the doorway where you will be confronted by a second menace, not so mysterious, but fully as deadly as that thing which Jans Bergman so quaintly called the 'thumb-hole death'."

Shoe scuffling sounded from down the hall. Doc turned to see two men loom inside the doorway. They were clearly none of Bergman's men. They were squat Mongol types, massive of shoulder, heavy of jowl. They carried equally heavy, squat weapons—short guns with stubby barrels flared at the muzzle.

"Meet my personal bodyguard, Savage," the voice sounded. "Their weapons

a grating sound that would have set a man's teeth on edge. It was caused by Doc Savage's finger tips scraping on smooth metal. The same mechanism which had blocked the doorway with heavy sheet steel had similarly actuated a steel window barrier.

With both door and window barred to exit, Doc drove his metallic fist against the plaster of the wall. It was a futile move. He found that the walls had been reinforced with heavy metal back of the plaster.

Still holding his breath against the anaesthetic vapor, Doc hurled himself across the room. He had one last hope—the movable panel in the roll-top desk. There was not time to look for the control key which would open the panel. There was time only to crash it in. Swiftly, Doc felt out the boundaries of the stout oak with his sensitive fingers.

Then his fists drummed a mighty tattoo. Fists were not enough. His shoulders lunged. He braced himself against the wall and kicked. His hand drifted out and contacted a heavy chair, swung it in a wide arc. The chair splintered in a dozen places, and the panel remained unmoved.

Doc was trapped! Not from the gas, however. That would become harmless in a few seconds, as it mingled more completely with the air.

Faintly, from an unidentifiable source, voices sounded. The words were not articulate, but Doc could recognize the tones. It was Renny and Long Tom shouting from some part of the building. They had heard the noise and, aware of Doc's presence in the building, they were shouting in the frantic hope that their voices might direct him to their rescue.

They had no way of knowing that the bronze man's situation was as desperate as their own.

Doc could breathe now. The anaesthetic gas had dissipated its powers, due to chemical reaction with the oxygen in the air.

Doc flung himself upon the massive roll-top desk. His attack was not chaotic, but planned so that he could use every muscle in his powerful body. Wedging himself on top of the writing surface with knees jackknifed in air, feet braced against one end, shoulders against the other, he pushed.

MUSCLES bunched and quivered, and suddenly his jackknifed knees went straight. There was a screeching of rent metal as he pried the desk apart. Doc parted the rest of the desk with his hands, making an opening large enough to squeeze through.

He found that the sliding panel had given onto a secret upward passage, converted from an old dumbwaiter shaft. Before plunging in, Doc leaped back into the room and examined the prone bodies of the two Asiatics.

He found about what he had expected. Both men were senseless from the anaesthetic gas and would remain so for some time.

Turning, Doc bolted for the dumbwaiter shaft. His hands closed on the rungs of a built-in ladder. He streaked upward like an islander climbing a palm.

A partition had been roofed across the shaft at the next floor level. In the side wall in front of him, Doc's probing fingers found a wooden door. His fists battered, the blows ringing hollowly. The door was as stout as the one built into the roll-top desk. It did not yield.

But Doc's pounding occasioned an uproar from the other side of the door. Voices came through in wild clamor.

"Doc, is it you—" That was Long Tom.

"Holy cow, Doc!" That would be Renny.

"Stand back from this door," Doc called.

He jackknifed his body between the door and the opposite shaft wall, using the same kind of bodily leverage he had utilized on the roll-top desk. The door broke in with splintering crash, and Doc was catapulted inside the room.

Beyond the Palisades, the sun had gone down. Already Broadway was blazing under a sun of its own making. A billion electric bulbs supplied scattered illumination for the rest of the city. But the room in which Doc stood reunited with Renny and Long Tom was dark. Electrical connections had long since been cut off from the outside.

Renny boomed, "The little squirt with the bush on his map yelled at us just before you came. He said—"

"—he's firing the building and leaving us to burn!" Long Tom cut in.

"This trap would go up like a gasoline tank, Doc."

Long Tom added, "We've been trying to break down the door—"

Renny cracked his big fists together, wailed, "I've nearly wore 'em out on that door, Doc! She almost breaks, but not quite."

It was evident to Doc that Renny considered his reputation at stake, as well as his life. Renny had long boasted—and backed up his boast—that his bare fists could pound the panel out of any wooden door.

"I smell smoke!" Long Tom gasped.

Doc's sensitive nostrils had already detected the acrid odor of the smoke.

"This building has been fired," he admitted.

"Listen!" Long Tom breathed.

A heart-stopping sound—the seething crackle of flames feeding through dry wooden floors—wafted to them faintly.

"We got to get out of here!" Renny blared.

"Right," Long Tom seconded.

"Come on, Renny," Doc directed. "We will try the door."

UNDER the combined fist battering and shoulder lunging of Doc and Renny, the door shuddered, groaned, then collapsed like a hut in a tornado. Smoke billowed in as all three men burst out. It was slightly lighter in the hall, in spite of the smoke.

"Stay close," Doc rapped, and leaped for the stairway.

Renny roared. "Holy cow! That's the wrong way!"

"The other way is down," Long Tom added.

Doc, taking the steps several at a time, did not pause to explain. He disappeared in the smoke and darkness of the floor above and forged on up the next flight of stairs. His flake-gold eyes, ever alert, had seen something his aids had missed.

Doc had glimpsed Boris Ramadanoff scuttling around the bend of the stair landing above. The bronze man's giant strides slashed the distance between himself and the murderous little man. At the top of the roof flight, Doc was only a little behind.

Ramadanoff went out on the roof like an eel. He got the door shut behind him. A

snap lock caught and held as Doc rammed the panel with terrific force.

After Doc had tried his strength on the door that once, he did not waste time on it again.

From the roof, Boris Ramadanoff shouted with raw gloating: "Stay there and burn!"

Doc did not hear. He had already vaulted the bannister and landed on the smoke-filled floor below. He met Renny and Long Tom coming up.

"Down," he ordered. "Back into the room out of which we just came!"

"We can't, Doc!" Renny thumped.

"Fire's already cut us off from that floor!" Long Tom cried.

Creating its own draft, the fire funneled up the stairway below them. A few flights down, there was a crash as something collapsed.

"Down!" Doc ordered, and led the way.

Unquestioning, Long Tom and Renny followed him, shielding their eyes, slapping at flames that caught their clothes.

"This was our only chance," Doc threw out, as they gained the room.

Long Tom's eyes were seared shut with smoke. "Doc, where are you?"

"This way!"

They followed his voice, crowding into the shaft out of which Doc had smashed his way a few minutes before to rescue them. Splintering wood showered down on their heads.

"The building's falling!" Renny roared.

BUT it was only part of the building—the overhead partition which had been built in to seal off the shaftway. Doc had torn it out.

Doc said, "Follow me up. There's no ladder above. We will have to brace ourselves, feet and shoulders in the shaft, and shove with our hands. It is only two floors to the roof."

"Is the shaft open at the roof?" Long Tom gasped.

"If it is not, we will have to open it," Doc replied.

"What good's it gonna do to get on the roof?" Renny questioned, hoarsely.

"Save your breath," Doc advised. "Climb."

Ramadanoff's finger was broken before he could clear it from the trigger. But the finger was the least of his troubles. He felt himself lifted and slammed. He knew what had him. Doc Savage!

Doc had leaped from a hidden door high in the warehouse side, directly on top of Ramadanoff. Doc dragged Ramadanoff inside the hangar door and said to Long Tom, "Haul Robbie in and get the door shut."

Long Tom chuckled. "Robbie will be needin' a new paint job on his face, Doc."

"Yeah," Renny boomed. "And a set of new teeth."

Ramadanoff stared, bleary-eyed, as Long Tom and Renny pushed the huge bronze figure, which had appeared in the doorway and taken the bullets, inside, and closed the hangar door.

"A dummy!" he ejaculated.

"Sure," Long Tom said. "A mechanical likeness of Doc. Robbie, the Robot."

"And can Robbie take it!" Renny rumbled.

"Had his face shot off him four times, so far," Long Tom added.

Ramadanoff was muttering profanely to himself.

"Don't you get it, Whiskers?" Long Tom demanded.

Ramadanoff scowled.

Renny explained sardonically: "Doc likes to coöperate, so he provided the shrubbery outside for guys that want to pot him from cover. Doc ordered the bushes big, so as to give plenty of room for a man with a gun to hide inside."

Long Tom continued, "And the bushes are wired so that any one crowding inside of 'em will cause a signal to flash."

Doc was already penetrating deep within the hangar.

"Come on," he called back.

Dragging their prisoner, Renny and Long Tom hurried after Doc Savage.

The bronze man was swinging inside the cabin of his large speed ship, a three-motor job with streamlined alloy hull. The wings tapered into the fuselage for minimum wind resistance. It was a combination land-and-sea plane and had a speed of nearly three hundred miles an hour.

"We taking this one, Doc?" Long Tom queried, hand waving out to indicate the plane before them.

"Right," the bronze man said.

Renny and Long Tom shoved their prisoner inside and piled in after him.

WITH the three supercharged motors delivering their full quota of power, the big speed plane hurled south through the Atlantic seaboard darkness.

They caught the slumberous twinkle of early morning lights in Cuba and roared on, doing better than three hundred miles an hour as they climbed high and rode the stratospheric air currents to the Canal Zone.

At Colon, they got a surprise.

They set down for refueling. A dark-skinned man in a white linen suit popped out of the directional radio station operated by the department of commerce and ran across the field toward Doc's plane. The man was waving a radiogram.

"For Doc Savage," he called.

The dark-skinned man leaned against the low-slung cabin with a hand resting on the ledge of an opened porthole, and his black eyes were centered in rapt admiration on Doc as the bronze giant opened the envelope and read the radiogram.

HAVE DISCOVERED BORIS RAMADANOFF IS WORKING WITH HIS BROTHER COUNT RAMADANOFF STOP DISREGARD OUR OTHER RADIOGRAM STOP ALIVE BUT MAY NOT BE FOR LONG STOP BETTER DO THINGS

MONK

Doc handed the radiogram to his aids.

"Huh!" Renny snorted. "We got Boris's number before they did, I guess."

"They're still alive," Long Tom said, tensely.

"Yeah, and we'll be there in a few hours," Renny thumped.

"Watch the plane," Doc instructed Renny. "Do not let Ramadanoff out, or let anybody else come near."

Doc, with Long Tom, the electrical wizard, accompanied the dark-skinned man back to the broadcasting station to try to get a line on what was the matter with the radio beam.

"A ship carrying one of my aids, while following your beam, was recently

rope. Then, if you have not indicated that you will speak the truth, he will let go the rope.”

Doc looked toward Renny. “Lower away.”

Ramadanoff had been lowered half of the rope’s length when the bluff worked. He looked up and squalled like a wild cat.

“I’ll tell!” he screamed.

“Hold him there a minute, Renny,” Doc ordered. He looked down at the cringing prisoner. “The location?”

Ramadanoff screamed latitude and longitude down to minutes and seconds. He had it on the tip of his tongue.

“WE will let him cool off now,” Doc decided. “Renny, take charge of him.”

“Will I, Doc!” Renny boomed.

Ramadanoff was so giddy from being dangled on the rope that he could not stand when he was first drawn back within the plane. Long Tom fitted the pack-’chute back on the man’s shoulders, and Renny dragged him ungently aft and locked him in the fuselage compartment again.

The plane ran into a fog bank as it droned southwest. Doc climbed the plane and came out on top, in dazzling sunshine. Occasional rifts in the fog showed him the blue Pacific below.

Eventually, a rent showed something else besides water.

“Land below,” Renny announced. “A small island.”

“Cocos Island,” Doc said. “We take our final bearings from here. The next land we sight will be the Galapagos.”

“That won’t be long, at the rate we’re traveling,” Long Tom said.

It was only a brief glimpse they got of Cocos Island, then the fog closed in again like swaddling cotton, seeming to wedge the hurtling plane against the sky.

“Bring out the prisoner, Renny,” Doc suggested, some time later. “We will try again to find out something more about this mysterious Devil’s Honeycomb.”

Renny grinned, and went aft to unlock the compartment door.

“We’ll make him talk,” Long Tom affirmed, grimly.

But they did not make Boris Ramadanoff talk.

Renny threw open the prison compartment door and stared, jaw sagging,

his generously proportioned mouth yawning wide like a tunnel opening.

“What’s the matter?” Long Tom called, sharply.

“Matter!” Renny howled, dazedly. He turned, dived forward.

“He busted a hole in the floor!” Renny squalled. “He’s jumped out!”

“HOW could he break out?” Long Tom demanded. “Nobody can break through the alloy skin of this plane. It’s even bulletproof.”

“How did he do it, Renny?” Doc asked, quietly.

“That was the compartment where we had the floor ripped up the other day, Doc,” Renny muttered. “It wasn’t welded; just small bolts set in temporarily.”

Doc looked at the chart. “It is too late to do anything about it now. Doubtless, Ramadanoff bailed out over Cocos Island. It is entirely too large an island for us to waste time trying to locate him.”

The great tri-motored speed ship scudded on, riding above the fog bank like a gigantic water bug skimming the surface of quiet depths.

“How’re we gonna locate anything in this fog?” Renny wanted to know, later.

“We can get our latitude and longitude above, then go down and land on the water to wait till the fog lifts,” Doc explained. “That, of course, may not be necessary.”

That logical plan, it developed later, was never to be put into execution. At the present latitude and longitude, given by Boris Ramadanoff under pressure, the fog became strangely reddish in color over a considerable area. This crimson glow was uneasy, flickering, brightening and dulling as though the leaping fires of hell itself strove to break through.

Doc banked the speed plane in a wide spiral around the scarlet-stained sector.

“What caused that?” Renny rumbled, awe making his voice somehow queer.

“Volcano,” Doc decided. “Active.”

“Let’s ease down,” Long Tom suggested.

They did go down, but not easily.

An ear-splitting crash sent a convulsion through the plane, then tilted it in a mad dip. Accompanying the detonation,

pick, gouged an entrance for himself into Johnny's pit.



The whip cracked down at Johnny. Doc's hand reached out, grasped the slashing rawhides, gave a downward jerk.

Almost the instant he arrived alongside Johnny, things began to happen.

"I'll be superamalgamated!" the bony geologist exploded, as Doc squirmed into view.

"Say it louder!" Doc directed.

"What?" Johnny blurted, startled.

"Say it louder," Doc repeated.

Johnny was so surprised at the whole business that he did not speak out in his accustomed verbose manner.

"It'll bring the guards down on us!" he protested.

"That," Doc said, "is what we want."

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny blurted his favorite expression again.

"Louder!" the bronze man directed.

Johnny gulped, raised his voice with determination.

"I'll be superamalgamated, superagalmated, superaglerated—aw, nuts,

Doc, you say it!" The word, for once, had gotten him down.



But it was not necessary for Doc to say it. An overseer lunged toward the pit. Doc was back against the side. The overseer did not observe him. The whip cracked down at Johnny. Doc's hands reached out, grasped the slashing rawhides, gave a downward jerk.

The unexpected tug pulled the overseer off balance before he had time to brace himself or let go the whip. He teetered on the brink of the pit, then fell inward, sprawling. Doc's fist lanced out, smacking against the fellow's jaw while he was still in the air. The man was unconscious before he hit the bottom.

Doc bent, flipped him over, yanked loose a key dangling from a thong on the lizard-hide collar. He fitted the key to the lock of Johnny's leg iron, twisted briefly and Johnny stood free.

Doc grabbed up the whip he had wrested from the guard and, swerving, ducked through the hole into Ham's pit.

"Follow me, Johnny," Doc suggested, cautiously, and reached to unlock Ham's leg iron.

SUDDENLY, from all along the line of fantastic pits, the groans and babblings, the whip-cracking, ceased. One note

dominated the nightmare scene: the deep, echoing clangor of a brass gong.

One of the overseers had witnessed his fellow plunge mysteriously into the pit and he had sounded the warning gong. While the dread hush spread over the pit, overseers converged, running, toward the hole where Johnny had been working.

"We'll never make it, Doc," Johnny snapped. "They kill anybody caught trying to escape!"

A cursing uproar burst out, as the first-arriving overseers discovered Johnny's pit to be empty. More of the lizard-collared guards swarmed down. A whip lashed into Ham's pit, as one of the overseers discovered the three men there.

Bellowed words brought the others crowding to the pit rim. Whips lashed down. As Doc lunged upright from unlocking Ham, the pit became a whistling storm of flesh-cutting rawhide.

Doc shoved the leg-iron key to Johnny.

"Follow me through into the next pit and unlock Monk," he shouted above the *swish* and crack of flaying leather.

Close at Doc's heels came Johnny and Ham. While the two bent to the task of releasing Monk, Doc stood upright, taking the rain of whip lashes, cutting back with the whip he had wrested from the first guard.

Under the red volcanic glare, Doc's face, uplifted to the lightning of whips, was a mask of emotionless bronze. He did not use his left arm to fend off the searing strokes. He had better use for that left arm. It cooperated like a machine with his whip-cracking arm.

Doc was not whipping aimlessly. Holding his left arm in such a way that he could protect his eyes, he sent his lash snaking upward from the pit with a twist of his cabled wrist. A deft jerk at the precisely correct instant caused the long, pliant rawhide to curl tightly about whatever object it struck. Sometimes it was a neck. Sometimes an arm or a leg.

But in every instance, a quick, backward jerk of Doc's arm brought his whip-hooked victim toppling into the pit. And then it was that Doc's left fist cooperated, driving against the head of each falling victim, pounding them into senselessness.

And after Doc had dragged some half a dozen men into the pit with relentless

precision, the remaining overseers drew back, cursing and shouting, out of range of the appalling rawhide lash.

"O. K., Doc," Johnny's voice sounded.

Monk kicked his loosened leg chain aside. "I'm clear, Doc!"

"Lead the way, Monk," Doc ordered. "Duck through the same hole I first entered by. The rest of you follow. I will hold them off with the whip and bring up the rear."

Monk, crowded closely by Johnny and Ham, butted through into the next pit back of the active working line. Doc ceased slashing his whip and bent to follow them, only to have his head rammed with a hollow thump against an object hurtling back through the hole from the other direction.

It was Monk's granite head that Doc had bumped.

"We can't get out that way, Doc!" Monk roared, in his frantic haste squirming past Doc and whacking his head on the bottom of the pit as he fell in.

Ham and Johnny came piling through on top of Monk.

"Carnivorous crabs!" Johnny loudly shrieked.

"Man-eating ones!" Ham augmented.

"Big as dogs!" Johnny insisted.

"And millions of 'em!" Monk finished, holding his head.

Chapter XIII BITS OF HELL

"THIS way, then!" Doc said, and whipped through the hole into the pit where Ham had been chained.

There was a blur of movement on the pit floor, accompanied by a fearful sound: a metallic clacking.

Then, Monk, coming through the hole in the wake of Doc, found himself jammed into the pit he was trying to leave.

"Blazes!" Monk protested. "What's the matter?"

"This route is barred, too," Doc said.

"Crabs?"

"Right! The pit floor is covered with them."

"They keep 'em in cages somewhere behind the working pits," Ham jerked. "They turn them loose to forestall escapes. I saw

one poor blighter go down under a wave of them, last night. They had his bones picked clean in a horribly short time."

The metallic clacking grew louder, coming into the pit with a din like the croaking of thousands of tree frogs.

"That noise is the crabs clackin' their claws," the academic Johnny said, ungrammatically, but forcefully. "They can take a man's finger off with one snip. They climb your legs, all the time hacking you up as if two razors were working on you."

"They're land crabs, too, Doc," Ham put in. "Something like those recorded in parts of Siberia, only bigger. Not as big as dogs, as Johnny said, but bigger than any I ever heard of before. Ferocious as tiger sharks!"

There was a thumping sound on the pit sides.

"Them guys with the dog collars are heavin' rocks!" Monk roared.

Ham's shout blended with Monk's roar. "Here come the crabs!"

"Kick 'em back!" Monk bawled.

"Kick them back yourself!" Ham snapped. "I have no shoes on!"

"Whadda you think I'm wearin'?" Monk growled. "I'm barefooted, too!"

"Block the hole with your head!" Ham suggested, sarcastically.

While they quarreled, they were acting; Monk had picked up one of the large stones which had been heaved into the pit and was smashing crabs as they came in. Ham was slugging at another hole with the weighted butt of the whip which Doc had dropped.

Some of the clack-clacking monsters got through. Johnny was dancing around on his bare feet, trying to stamp on their backs before their fearful claws could nip off his toes or slice through the muscles of his legs.

"Doc," Monk yelled. "They're comin' through faster'n I can pop 'em off!"

"Let a few of them in," the bronze man said, suddenly.

Puzzled, but aware the bronze man must have some plan, Monk complied. Doc, in the meantime, was stripping off his outer garments. He managed to get at the bulletproof chain-mesh undergarment which he wore, and removed it. He used it to shield his hands, grasped one of the crabs when an unusual brightness came into the unholy

crimson sky, and straightened. He hurled the fearsome thing at the nearest overseer.

There was light enough for the cruel fellows to see it coming. They emitted cries and crowded into the nearest of honeycomb pits in an effort to escape. The wall of earth between the pits was not wide enough to permit quick, mass action.

Monk got the idea and admitted more crabs, one at a time. Doc grabbed the things, hurled them. The overseers, as a matter of safety, withdrew.

"All right," Doc rapped. "We'll make a break for it, now, let me heave you up."

Monk ran, jumped into the bronze man's clasped hands and Doc gave a jerk, hurtling the apish chemist up to the pit run.

"Head for the underbrush," Doc called.

Ham and Johnny ran at the bronze man, and Doc heaved them up in the same manner. Then he himself leaped, caught the edge of the pit with one deft arm, drew himself up, and ran across the narrow walls of earth between the honeycomb pits, to join his aids.

THE overseers were already swarming upon them. Strangely enough, the fellows seemed to have no weapons other than the vicious whips. They were handicapped by their very numbers, due to the scarcity of the footing on which they had to work.

"Make it faster," Doc called.

His aids were having trouble. Their feet were bare and the volcanic rock had many of the characteristics of broken glass.

Stones began falling near them, rattling on the brittle rock, occasionally breaking off glassy fragments. Whips lashed, popped.

"Go ahead," Doc directed.

They went on, moving as rapidly as the tangled vegetation would allow. Lower down, the jungle growth became more dense. Matted vines and thorny branches disputed their way. Gigantic orchids, pale flowers of evil in the flickering volcanic light, dangled fleshy petals from overhead. Doc's huge frame often bored a way for the others.

"What's the hurry, Doc?" demanded Monk, puffing.

"Renny and Long Tom and Pat are prisoners at the palace," Doc said, simply.

"Well, why bust our necks in this jungle?" Monk queried. "Let's get on one of the turtle trails."

They were paralleling one of the well-beaten trails. At the moment, the red volcanic light was flaring. Doc moved close to the trail and scanned the way ahead.

"Come," he said, and started on a trot down the ancient path.

"This is better," Monk muttered, lumbering close behind.

Fifty yards ahead, Doc halted abruptly.

"Stand back," he said. "Look!"

He stood well to the side of the trail. His bronzed hand drifted out, plucked at something invisible to the eyes of the others. There was a *swish* of tree branches slicing through air, a glint of metal, a sharp thud.

Doc bent and pulled out of the ground a knife buried to the hilt. His hands moved, unfastening the knife from the branch to which it was deftly attached by means of leather stringing.

"An old Malay trick," he announced. "An animal-hair trigger is strung across the trail, practically invisible even in good light. A sapling is bent back with the knife attached. When the hair is broken by a man walking on the trail, the sapling springs upright, sinking the knife into the stomach of the trail walker."

Monk rubbed apprehensively at his midriff, said nothing.

"These trails are possibly guarded by other traps, also," Doc stated. "By daylight, looking sharply, they might be traversed safely, but at night they had best be left alone."

Doc handed the knife to Ham. "Perhaps you had better carry it till we locate your sword cane."

"That reminds me of something else we lost, Doc," Monk burst in. "Habeas Corpus—"

"That porker getting lost is the only good thing that's happened to anybody on this blasted island," Ham snapped.

"Come," Doc said, forestalling another resumption of the quarrel.

He plunged back into the tangled jungle growth. The others followed. They forged on, working interminably through darkness slashed occasionally by the lurid volcanic light.

shrugged. "Identifying it, you must have been all the more impressed by its formidable size. A Galapagos, or seagoing, lizard, attaining the length of six feet, would normally be considered a monster. You saw my pet in the courtyard. How long would you estimate him to be?"

"It appeared," Doc admitted, "many times that size."

"But how is it possible?" Pat protested.

She was not eating. She had no taste for food served in the sinister environment of the palace. The blue flames in the fireplace, instead of lighting up her lovely face, threw it in ghastly, bluish shadow.

PAT shrank back as the count's tapering fingers reached out to touch her arm.

"On this island are undreamed horrors," he murmured.

"And something else," Doc put in. "Something you wish found."

For the first time, something other than sinister evil seemed to come over the man before them. He straightened visibly in his chair and put down his eating implements.

"You have learned of that?" he asked.

"It has become evident," Doc Savage told him.

The big man leaned forward, smiling eagerly in his black beard. "You know what it is?"

"The name?—yes," the bronze man admitted. "The Devil's Honeycomb."

"You don't know more than that?" the other demanded.

"No," Doc admitted.

The bearded man settled back and seemed relieved. He began eating again, glancing once at them curiously, as if noting for the first time that they were consuming no food. He did not urge them to eat.

"I have need of your scientific abilities," said the count, casually. "I have tried the usual instruments for making subterranean surveys. They are not sufficiently sensitive. You can make more powerful ones, more delicate ones."

Doc Savage said, sharply, "In order to properly design the instruments, it will be necessary to know what you want located."

"That is impossible," the other said, abruptly.

"Then what you ask me to do is also impossible," Doc informed him.

The bearded man showed his teeth through his heavy whiskers.

"You have the reputation of a man who does the impossible," the count said, grimly. "You will manage to do it now, or take some very unpleasant consequences."

Doc Savage said nothing.

"With your exhaustive knowledge of geology and cartography, my dear Savage, it should not be too difficult for you to locate an object which I shall describe as having an atomic structure entirely different from the rest of the island," the whiskered man said.

The count raised his napkin and blotted his thin lips. He blotted carefully. For a moment, the whole lower half of his face was concealed by the stiff damask.

The blue flames which leaped in the fireplace commenced promptly to shorten. They died down to half their height, within the next few seconds.

Doc Savage spoke suddenly to Pat in strange language—words composed largely of guttural, though curiously melodic, sounds. Doc was using the language of the ancient Mayans, the remarkable people whose civilization flourished in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico long before the Egyptian pyramids were built.

It is doubtful if more than a dozen persons in the so-called civilized world were sufficiently conversant with the strangely syllabled speech to understand it.

EVEN as Doc talked, the blue flames shortened farther until they became little more than crawling stubs within the massive fireplace.

"What are you saying?" the count demanded. His voice had a noticeable nasal quality now.

"Nothing," Pat answered, tensely. She sat back in her chair, breathing deeply as Doc, speaking in Mayan, had directed her to do.

"Fill your lungs with fresh air," Doc had said. "And if the blue flame goes out, do

Doubling with laughter, Long Tom said, "You look like *Frankenstein!*"

"Anyhow, they fit," Renny growled. "And I don't look like a scarecrow in a garden patch, like you."

Monk and Ham made acrid comments on each other's appearance.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "It's sure swell to hear you two guys scrappin' again. This lug that calls himself a count, fixed up some skeletons with some of your clothes hangin' bloody on 'em, and we thought you had all been killed."

As they were all in the act of leaving the palace, Ham pounced upon the blade of his sword cane, where it had been concealed beneath the sea-otter robes on the piano. He examined the tip, found it still coated with the sleep-producing chemical, and shifted the blade back into the malacca cane handle.

Monk sighed. "Now absolutely everything is found but Habeas."

"And he won't be found," Ham said, hopefully. "Didn't you hear the count say the island is infected by fierce things?"

Monk insisted, "Habeas'll never be devoured by anything, on account of he'll do the devourin' himself, if any."

VOLCANIC smoke hung over the island in a black pall, dimming the equatorial sun as Pat, Doc, his aids, and their prisoner hurried from the palace courtyard.

"Now what?" Long Tom muttered.

Doc Savage studied the volcano for a time. Its glow seemed to have acquired additional brilliance.

"That volcano is not behaving in a manner calculated to inspire peace of mind," Doc said. "However, there are two things requiring our immediate attention."

"One is to rescue those poor devils digging those honeycomb pits," Ham offered.

"Right," Doc admitted.

"And the other," Johnny said tensely, for once using small words, "is to find out what this Devil's Honeycomb business is all about."

"Right again," Doc agreed.

As the party plunged into a grove of mangroves, Doc and the scholarly Johnny conversed in lowered tones.

"No doubt, you have already reached the conclusions that I am going to outline," Johnny said. "First, Ramadanoff insisted you

could locate this Devil's Honeycomb, whatever it is, with instruments. That means the Devil's Honeycomb is composed of substance different from the island and volcanic ash."

"Exactly," Doc Savage agreed. "And the fact that those pits are being dug close together indicates that the Devil's Honeycomb, whatever it is, is not large. If it was a large object, they would have dug the pits farther apart."

"I had not thought of that, but it bears out my theory," Johnny declared. "Now have you noticed the geologic structure of this island? That coastal plateau is really a ridge along the shore. That is where they are digging. I am positive the plateau was thrown up as a deposit of volcanic ash. This occurred not many years ago, judging from the lack of vegetation. Beyond the plateau, inland, is a small swamp section, heavily jungled."

Doc Savage put in, "There are indications that the swamp was originally the seashore."

Johnny chuckled. "I see you have reached the same conclusions as myself. Are we going to look the place over?"

"We are," Doc Savage told him. "We are going to examine that swamp quite thoroughly."

Monk dropped back to grumble, "I wish somebody'd tell me what all of those honeycomb pits are for."

"Did the overseers examine the volcanic ash you excavated from the pits?" Doc Savage queried.

"Sure," Monk said. "But not very closely."

"The purpose of those pits may prove to be somewhat of a surprise," Doc Savage said, and offered no more.

As the party proceeded, the mangroves grew more dense. The coiled roots were head-high in places, causing frequent stumbles in the spongy, water-logged soil. The volcanic smoke grew blacker. The red flashes became more lurid. A fine ash of volcanic pumice sifted down through the maze of weirdly curved tree branches above.

Uttering raucous alarms, frigate birds and fantail gulls skimmed over the tops of the giant mangroves. Red-footed boobies perched on their nests and squawked continually.

"These birds would drive a guy nuts!" Monk rumbled.

"They're sure to give us away, in case anybody's looking for us," Long Tom added.

"Snipers in these mangroves is one thing we don't have to worry about," Monk mumbled. "The count was afraid to let any one else on the island have a gun—"

"Down!" Doc rapped, unexcitedly. "Everybody! Get down!"

Monk, with the others, instantly dropped on all fours. A moment later, there was a crash of rifles. Lead snarled through the mangroves, chipping bark, tearing at boughs over their heads.

"My mistake about the snipers," Monk said, grimly.

Chapter XVI PORTUGUESE FREEBOOTER

DOC and his men returned the fire with the guns they had confiscated from the palace. With the sifting volcanic ash turning the shadowed mangroves into a place of perpetual night, the enemy guns flared in saffron bursts. Echoes crashed flatly.

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed. "Sounds like an army!"

Doc Savage said, "My guess is that brother Boris has flown here from Cocos Island and rounded up the slaves."

Renny groaned. "We should have let Boris drop when he was on the end of that rope hanging from the airplane!"

Monk fired a burst of three shots. Answering bullets chopped mangrove branches about his head.

"Trouble with firing at their gun flashes is, they shoot back at yours," Monk growled.

The battle went on, the mangroves rocking to gun thunder, and the black volcanic dust sifting down as though trying to blot out the livid bloom of guns. Lead whined and smacked, driving the combatants to seek additional protection by burrowing deeper in the mud.

"Monk's pig would love this!" the fastidious Ham gritted, bogged almost to his eyebrows.

Big-fisted Renny growled, "Let's charge 'em!"

Suddenly the enemy firing increased, coming noticeably closer.

"They're charging us!" Renny boomed.

"Keep down!" Doc ordered. Doc spoke calmly, hiding the alarm he must have felt. As a matter of fact, they were on as deadly a spot as any they had run against on the island. With lead slapping around them like hail, there was a good chance of none of them escaping.

"Let's charge 'em!" Renny roared again.

Johnny's scholastic voice said sharply. "Exsiccate, and attune auditory faculties."

"Huh?" Renny gulped, startled. "Whatcha say?"

"He means for you to dry up and listen," Monk interpreted.

Listening, they heard clearly above the whooping gun thunder a new sound, a massed grunting, as though perhaps a hundred or more of the count's hunger-crazed iguanas had escaped from the palace and were butting through the mangroves on a man-hunt.

The Count Ramadanoff, himself, was first to name correctly the sound. He did so with considerable excitement.

"Climb trees!" he bawled, abruptly concerned over his own safety. "I will call at our enemies to cease shooting!"

"What's comin'?" Monk demanded.

"The little wild hogs!" the count gasped. "They run in droves like peccaries; in sufficient numbers, they can bring down anything that lives!"

THEY listened. It was a herd of the ferocious little animals, undoubtedly. There was a good deal of noise in the mud.

The count was screaming at the enemy riflemen, beseeching them not to shoot, to climb trees themselves and seek safety. The response was interesting, for it seemed that Doc Savage's party had taken shelter in the only large trees immediately convenient, and that those where the besiegers lay, although thick enough for excellent concealment, were only bushes which would hardly support human weight.

In a mud-slogging wave, the herd of wild pigs approached.

everywhere—as though tortured rocks, far below the earth’s surface, were vibrating throughout the globe.

“What is it?” Pat gasped.

“The volcano,” Doc said.

“The exordium of the termination,” Johnny remarked.

“I get that one,” Pat said tensely.

“The beginning of the end.”

“We must drop everything,” Doc said, “and hurry ahead to rescue those poor devils in the pits.”

Doc led off, his aids and Pat trailing after him, bringing big, bearded Ramadanoff. Out of the jungle tangle, forging ahead through jagged lava beds, Doc’s party was within close view of the squat volcanic cone. The mountain’s mouth was wreathed in lurid light and smoke belched upward in a twisting spiral, to mushroom against high clouds and sift its pumice over the entire island.

“It won’t be long now!” Ham yelled.

“She’s been buildin’ for a bust ever since we’ve been here!” Monk agreed, loudly.

Doc slowed his giant strides to fall back alongside Pat. When no one was observing, he placed the jeweled compass in her hands.

“Keep it where it will be safe,” he admonished.

“You must be expecting violent action!” Pat gasped.

Doc said nothing, possibly because ahead, from out of gloom created by the black ash, gun flashes stabbed redly, like tiny, erupting volcanoes.

“Down!” Doc shouted. Bullets slammed whining past.

“BROTHER Boris again!” Monk squawked.

The volcanic rock afforded innumerable crevices. Concealing themselves, Doc and his aids returned enough fire to keep the enemies at a distance. Of even greater danger than the smashing lead, was the brittle volcanic slag which broke into thousands of pieces under impact of bullets, showering the slivered rock around like glassy needles.

Doc issued strict orders against reckless exposure on the part of any of his aids; then, leaving Monk and Ham and Pat in charge of the prisoner, he took the others with him to stage a flanking movement.

Taking advantage of lava gullies and dead, gas craters, Doc’s flanking party worked up close. Once they were sighted, and a burst of bullets hunted them. One slug felled a high torch thistle and slapped the frightful plant across Renny’s shoulders, which meant Renny would spend weeks picking the barbs from his skin. Bullets splattered volcanic glass, drove splinters.

Doc left them, merging away into the gloom. The volcanic ash was falling thicker now and the squat volcano cone was bathed in a perpetual rose glow. Appearing to ooze from the rock under foot, that fearful rumble, like caged thunder, came again.

Then came a crashing roar. Different sound! It sent echoes ricocheting through the lava canyons like a dynamite blast.

“Doc’s little capsule grenades!” Renny boomed.

Piercing the ash-laden air on the heels of the explosion echoes, stabbed frantic shouts. A ragged burst of gunfire came from Boris Ramadanoff’s men. These noises receded until there was only silence and the sifting black snow, and the mountain top gleaming a fiery red.

Rock crunched, and Doc loomed toward them from out of the murk.

“Foray was eminently successful?” Johnny suggested.

Doc nodded. “They’re on the run.”

“We better be, too,” Renny grumbled.

“The whole top of that mountain’s about due to blow off, if you ask me.”

“It is becoming more threatening every minute,” Doc admitted, gravely. “Come on; we’ll join the others.”

But Doc’s flanking party did not join the others. The others joined them. That is, part of the others did.

“Doc!” Monk and Ham roared together, as they came plunging out of the gloom.

“Here!” Doc called, sharply.

“The count’s gone!” Ham squalled.

“With Pat!” Monk bellowed.

“He cut his hands free on this glassy rock, I guess,” Ham gasped. “And he grabbed Pat!”

Monk howled in rage, “We couldn’t shoot on account he held her in front of him.”

“And in this dust and murk, he was out of sight in about six steps,” Ham finished. “We tried to find him, but no luck.”

“Go on to the pits,” Doc directed. “Let me hunt Pat.”

With a parting wave of his hand, the bronze man moved quickly away. He was out of sight in a few long strides.

WHILE Doc’s aids raced for the honeycomb pits, the underground thunder sounded again and the rosy light glowing above the volcano crater expanded violently, flinging fiery streaks through the ashy gloom and disgorging a torrent of lava, which cascaded in red streams down the blunt mountainside.

“I said she was ready to blow,” Renny grunted.

Johnny, the geologist, reassured them. “It would be excessively rare for the initial eruption to be of sufficient volume to inundate the plateau where the honeycomb pits are.”

Long Tom gasped, “Look!”

“Blazes!” Monk blurted. “Run!”

The warning was hardly necessary. Oozing down a defile upon them came a mass of red, liquid lava. It was a moving serpent of liquid, superheated rock which, disgorged from the gutted earth, had cascaded down the outside of the squat volcanic cone and was now seething forward. Heat in gaseous billows fanned out ahead of the molten avalanche. Doc’s aids felt the withering blast, as they climbed in a frenzy toward higher ground.

“Holy cow!” Renny gulped. “That was close!”

“And how are we gonna get back across that strip of melted hells?” Monk wanted to know.

“We’re only cut off on one side,” Long Tom pointed out. Nearing the pits, Doc’s aids fired warning shots. The overseers, having no firearms, did not contest their advance. Already filled with dread at sight of the volcanic activity, the overseers, shouting in panic, surrendered. Doc’s men, scattering over the entire front, forced the lizard-collared men into the pits to unlock the diggers.

So furiously the rescue work proceeded, so intent were Doc’s aides in effecting the release of every last one of the miserable fellows chained in the pits, that they were unaware for a time of a frightful trap closing in on them.

It was Monk who first became aware of their predicament.

“Blazes!” he roared. “There’s lava on both sides of us!”

It was true. The seething lava flood had swelled, curled out in a broad path on each side of the plateau, straddling it. The only escape from the plateau of the honeycomb pits was by the sea.

Renny cracked his huge fists together, helplessly.

“The sharks!” he gulped. “Brothers, we’re really jammed!”

Even as he spoke, the lava rivulets seemed to grow—like a doughnut swelling in a cauldron of boiling fat; the red ropes, fed by a continuous fiery flow from the spewing volcano mouth, swelled and swelled, pressing inward, threatening to engulf the entire honeycombed plateau.

Chapter XVIII THE MOUNTAIN MAKERS

WHEN Doc Savage took the trail of the count and Pat, his gold-flecked eyes ferreted out minute clues: a bit of shoe-crunched volcanic glass, a bruised leaf, missing barbs from a form of jumping cactus which grew rankly in the lava crevices.

Mounting upward toward the smoke-belching crater, Doc came shortly across in the crushed volcano glass indisputable evidence that the Count Ramadanoff had met brother Boris’s party and joined forces with them.

Trails of the brothers Ramadanoff led up and up the squat cone of the smoking volcano, headed directly for the fiery crater.

The trail grew fresher, Doc was high on the stubby cone of the mountain when the lava burst from the crater in an especially violent eruption. Flowing down in a mountain-high waterfall of fire in broad channels to the left of Doc’s position, the liquid rock, like the spawn of many glass furnaces dumped together, sprayed heat and light through the sooty air.

Then, above him, Doc glimpsed those he trailed. A yellowish pall of smoke smudged them from view; but the glimpse had been enough. The bronze man left the trail and lunged upward on a shortcut which would allow him to intercept his enemies.

It was hard going over old, lava-flow formation. The stuff was deceptive. Twice the ground gave way beneath Doc's plunging feet and precipitated him into head-high ruts. Needle-point lava showered down upon him.

The ground under his feet became hotter as he proceeded; noxious gases, oozing from fumaroles, made breathing a hazard. Nearing his quarry, Doc, to avoid being detected, half slid, half climbed into one of the fuming, cinder caves and groped his way across the bottom between smoking holes gleaming a raw red color and noisily horrible with the suck and gurgle of fluid rock below the cinder crust.

With lids slitted to prevent his eyeballs from being scorched, he waded through that withering heat and climbed the opposite slope of the clinker pit, maneuvering for a position which would bring him out above his enemies.

Doc gained the position—and then lost everything in the moment which should have been his greatest triumph.

The air in the deep fumarole he had just traversed was impregnated with an insidious gas—carbon monoxide—colorless, odorless, making its presence felt only by its sudden sapping of a man's strength. Doc had been aware of the possibility of this gas in the smoky atmosphere. Making his painful way across the scoria, or metallic rock froth, he had breathed no more than was imperative.

But even this little was too much. He felt a giddiness settle upon him. His legs grew leaden. Taxing his reserve strength to the utmost, he reeled to the top of the pit and then plunged down, an avalanche of needle-pointed clinkers sliding in a brittle wash behind him.

With his eyes momentarily sealed shut from the stinging reek of volcanic gases, his reeling steps had carried him onto a bubble-glass surface which had crashed under his weight, plunging him down a tortuous slope almost on the heads of his enemies. He was half buried in the downsurge of the metallic rock.

Before he could extricate himself, Boris Ramadanoff's revolver muzzle was a burning coldness against the back of his neck.

THE count stood in front of Doc, his bearded head thrown back, ghoulish mirth issuing in loud gobblings from his mouth.

"Everything, it is perfect!" Ramadanoff roared. "Better even than we could have planned it. Is it not so, brother Boris?"

Boris Ramadanoff nodded emphatically.

Pat Savage, imprisoned between two of the lizard-collared slaves, stared speechlessly, her face taut.

The count pointed a tapering finger at her. Even in the tenseness of the moment, Doc noted that the emerald was missing from the man's hand.

"We have the girl," the count rasped. "And we have you. And your other friends are trapped on the plateau."

Doc looked at the count, spoke in a composed voice. "No lava flow will flood the plateau of the honeycomb pits."

The count's eyes glittered. "One thing you have not taken into consideration. Brother Boris and I have long been prepared for this eventuality." He pointed with spasmodic eagerness. "Do you see that volcano crater?"

Doc said nothing. No one could have seen the crater through the smoke.

"It is mined with nitro charges," the count growled. "That is why brother Boris and I have climbed this slope—to explode those charges. With a new vent blown out for the lava, the plain of the pits will be covered with molten lava."

Doc shook his head. "You would not blow those charges."

"And why not?" the count asked.

"It is dangerous business tampering with the normal flow of volcanic lava," the bronze man reminded.

"If it were not for the fact that brother Boris is going to pull the trigger on the revolver which he is holding against your neck, you would see us dare it," the count said, ominously.

Doc, ignoring the threat, said: "There is still another reason why you would not flood the plain. That Devil's Honeycomb for which you have so long looked, digging your pits—you would hardly care to have it buried under a hundred feet of lava."

"So!" the count purred, dangerously, "you have deduced where the Devil's Honeycomb lies."

**Chapter XIX
HONEYCOMB OF THE DEVIL**

PAT demanded grimly, "Shall we follow the count?"

"We will," Doc Savage agreed; "but do not get too close to him. Make sure he hears us."

This combination of suggested action seemed to puzzle Pat. To remain behind the count and follow him furtively, she could have understood, but to follow him at a distance, and still let the man know they were doing so—that bewildered her.

"What's the idea?" she demanded.

Instead of answering her, Doc Savage paused and dislodged a heavy rock, letting it roll down a declivity. The man ahead had been traveling fast, but now he cursed. His speed became that of a madman. He knew they were behind him.

The earth had cracked in spots, probably under the force of expanding gases. They passed a stream of lava which had been diverted somewhere above and was already beginning to solidify in irregular waves, some of these head-high. In other spots, rivulets of the superheated stone twisted sinuously along.

They came to a region where imprisoned gases had long ago hollowed out the volcanic structure to form fantastic underground pits. It was as if monsters had dug dens in the sloping side of the cone. They waded through ground-glasslike clinkers in which they sank to the knees.

"It cuts like razor blades," Pat groaned. "My boots won't stand much more of this."

Unexpectedly, they came out on a level area, beyond which there was a sharp slope down to a cove. The wind was in their faces and it swept the dust back to the other side of the island. Accordingly, they could see a little better. Doc's flake-gold eyes scrutinized the terrain intently.

"Follow me," he directed Pat, and was suddenly gone.

Pat tagged after him as best she could. She was about exhausted. It seemed days since she had eaten, slept, had a peaceful moment, or drawn a breath of air that was fit to breathe.

A shout came from ahead; shots. She heard the count scream. Then Pat came on the scene.

It was at the edge of the little cove; the water was comparatively calm. Doc Savage was standing on the cove's edge, sheltered by a high boulder.

Fully two hundred yards away, the count was retreating warily along the beach, revolver in hand. He shot at Pat. She got undercover, crawled forward and joined Doc.

She looked at the bay.

A seaplane floated there—a high-winged, twin-motored amphibian, each motor being equipped with a three-bladed propeller. This ship was moored close to the shore, and on its fuselage a painted legend could be read:

**COCOS ISLAND TREASURE
HUNTERS, INC.**

"You headed the count away from the plane!" Pat gasped, suddenly understanding why Doc wanted their quarry to know he was being followed. It had kept the fellow frightened, had made him flee toward the plane. And it had worked.

"Right." Doc Savage waved at the plane. "That explains how the other brother got here. There must have been a treasure-hunting expedition on Cocos Island. There usually is, as a matter of fact. This plane was probably stolen from them."

This theory, upon later investigation, proved to be true.

They waded out to the plane and climbed aboard.

THE big plane had a stout fuselage, one made for heavy work, which was fortunate, because the landing on the other side of the island, although Doc Savage made it expertly, was not easy on the hull. No plane could land easily in that chopping riptide.

Monk, Ham and the others, howling their delight, met the ship on the beach, wading out and seizing the hull to keep it from being damaged on the rocky shore.

"We can't clear outta here too soon for me!" Monk yelled. "I gotta find Habeas Corpus. He's somewhere on the other side of the island."

