

THE OTHER WORLD

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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DOC SAVAGE FIGHTS PREHISTORIC DANGERS WITH MODERN WEAPONS IN

THE OTHER WORLD

A Complete Book-length Novel

by **KENNETH ROBESON**

Chapter I THE MYSTERIOUS FUR

WHEN the plane landed on a farmer's oat-stubble field in the Mississippi

bottoms near St. Louis, the time was around ten in the morning.

The farmer had turned his cattle on to the stubble field to graze, and among the animals was a rogue bull which was a horned devil with strangers.

This bull charged the aviator.

The flier then killed the bull with a spear.

Naturally, the farmer who owned the bull was astounded. The farmer happened to be watching, and his astonishment came not so much from the fact that the aviator killed the bull; if the flier had drawn a gun and shot the animal, the farmer would not have been surprised. The spear was the astonishing item.

The spear was small—seven feet or so in length, not very heavy. When hurling the spear the flier used a peculiar device, a stick about the length of his arm, equipped at one end with two thong loops for the forefingers, so that it could be clasped very tightly, while the other end of the stick was forked to grip the spear shaft. With this device, the spear could be thrown with great force, as a rock is hurled from the split end of a stick. There was something primitive about it.

“Hey!” The farmer dashed into the oat field. “You all right?”

“I’m extremely sorry,” the flier said.

“About the bull? Hell, that’s all right.” The farmer wiped off perspiration. “Brother, we been afraid that ox was gonna gore somebody.”

The flier said, “I shall pay you for the animal, of course.”

The farmer’s eyes began to pop with astonishment as he eyed the aviator. “I’ll be jiggered!” he said.

Because he had been a little astonished over the business of the bull, the farmer had failed to particularly notice the flier’s clothing.

“Bless my boots!” the farmer muttered.

The flier’s garments—skin tight trousers, very loose coat-blouse—seemed to be made of buckskin, or animal hide of similar nature. Further, his feet were shod in a covering that the farmer at first thought was steel, but later concluded must be some metal more nearly like aluminum. This metal foot gear was solid, after the fashion of Dutch wooden shoes.

“I shall,” repeated the flier, “pay you for the animal.”

The farmer was not too surprised over the pilot’s appearance to overlook a dollar. “Well now,” he said, “he was a pretty good bull. Thoroughbred. I can show you the papers on him.”

“Unfortunately, you will have to wait a few days for the money.”

“Eh?”

“I will leave my plane here,” the pilot said, “and be gone two or three days. Then I shall return and pay you.”

The farmer had noticed by this time that the man was having some difficulty with his speech, as if he had not spoken English for a long time, or had recently learned it.

Since an airplane was obviously more valuable than a bull, hence good security, the farmer said: “Sure. That’s all right.”

The flier took a large bundle from the plane—a package about three feet square, wrapped in the same type of skin from which his clothing was made, and equipped with pack-straps for carrying.

“As I said,” the aviator remarked, “I shall return later.”

He walked across the oat stubble and disappeared into a woods.

THE prominence of St. Louis as a fur-buying center, while possibly not fully known to the public, is an appreciated fact by the fur industry, a multitude of dealers in raw skins converging on the city during the season to dicker for pelts. Mink, raccoon and skunk from the Middle West. Muskrat from Louisiana. Fox from the Hudson Bay. Wolf from the Rockies. Chinchilla from South America.

The flier got a laugh when he walked into the market rooms. A rather contemptuous glance or two, as well. Some of them figured, from his skin clothing, that he was a nut.

“Dan’l Boone come to town,” someone said, and snickered.

The flier’s unusual metal shoes made a loud noise on the tiled floor as he crossed to an exhibition table, upon which he lowered his bundle. Before he opened his bundle, he made a speech. Not a long one.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “you can buy these furs for five thousand a skin.”

Someone laughed at that, but there was no mirth after the man opened his bundle and spread out the contents, slowly and proudly, handling them as though each was a jewel as fragile as a cobweb.

“Holy cats!” someone said.



With his strange device, the flier hurled the spear into the charging bull!

They weren't cat hides, but something else, something incredible. A fur so luxurious, with such subtle coloring and quality, that the buyers were stunned. A man stepped forward, held one of the skins up and stroked it with his hand, and it was indeed as if a fabulous jewel were being shown. Fur men came to the spot, magnetized by such a fur as they hadn't dreamed existed.

A fur man said: "Who owns that dyeing process? My firm will pay plenty for it."

The man who was holding up the pelt studied the fur closely.

"Not dyed," he said.

"You're crazy. There's no animal with fur like that."

They gathered around the table. They were not passing the skins about, but touching them reverently.

"How much did you say?" a man asked the flier.

"Five thousand a skin."

"Dollars?"

"Yes."

The other laughed. "Be yourself, guy. Chinchilla is the most expensive fur in the world, and it doesn't bring that."

The aviator did not seem impressed. "And what makes Chinchilla cost?"

"Scarcity. The animals are getting rare—"

"Not as rare as these." The flier held up his hand and silence fell; they listened to him speaking in his strangely difficult fashion. "You see here," he said, "a collection of skins which is complete. And by complete, I mean that in this pile here are all the skins of this animal that you will find in the world, and there will be no more such skins. Never. I have twenty-seven skins here, and there will never be any more."

"You mean," put in a new voice, "that no more of that particular fur you've got there will ever come on the market?"

"Exactly," said the flier.

"Why not?"

The flier seemed, judging from his hesitation, reluctant about answering that question.

"Because," he said finally, "there are no more of the animals. I killed and skinned them all. Their pelts are here."

One telegram recipient was named Arnold Columbus.

The other was named Wilmer Fancife.

Both of them were in New York City, although at different addresses.

**Chapter II
THE QUARRELSOME MEN**

THE fight at the airport that evening was a honey. The hostess saw it start. Two of her passengers—they had not left their seats during the nonstop flight from New York, had boarded the plane separately in Newark, hence obviously neither had known the other was aboard—arose to leave their seats after the big sky cruiser landed in St. Louis. The instant they saw each other, fireworks started.

One man was young, not far beyond late college age; he had the body of a young blacksmith, hair as yellow as a new oat shock, a rather grim expression.

The other fellow was a tough fat man. His mouth looked as if it had been made carelessly with a hatchet. Nature had not given him much of a nose, and this donation had been hammered upon until it had somewhat the appearance of a large wart. He was cross-eyed. His skin gave the impression of having been appropriated from a rhinoceros.

The fat man saw the young one first. He was carrying a suitcase, which he immediately lifted and crashed down on the young man's head. The case split and clothing erupted.

The young man was jarred down on his knees, but he got up and wheeled around to face his assailant.

"Fancife!" he yelled.

He lunged in, hooked a fist to the fat man's ribs. He might as well have slugged a draft horse. The fat man was tough.

The young man was no lily. He made a roaring noise, waded in. He slugged and got slugged. The two men fell on the plane floor amid the litter of Fancife's suitcase.

Seizing a necktie, the young man wrapped it around Fancife's neck like a garrote cord, and tied a hard knot in it. Fancife got an extra shoe that had been in the case, pounded the young man between the eyes, loosened him.

The thing became serious. Fancife snatched up a razor, tried to cut the other's throat. He failed. The foe got a belt, began whipping the other across the eyes, finally jerked the razor out of his hand.

Fancife began turning purple, due to the knotted tie about his neck.

The co-pilot—the hostess had been screaming ineffectually for them to stop it—came rushing back and tried to part the men. He made progress for a moment, then got two teeth kicked down his throat. He doubled over, coughed up the teeth, and as mad as either combatant, he rushed forward to hunt a wrench.

The fat man, Fancife, had started the fight with confidence. By now, he was changing his mind. The younger man was fighting with a fury that was maniacal.

Fancife snatched up a bottle of rubbing alcohol and struck the younger man on the forehead with it. The bottle broke, not harming the victim greatly. But the alcohol ran down into the young man's eyes, making stinging blindness.

Fancife took advantage of his foe's blindness to get out of the plane and run.

TEARING off the throttling necktie as he raced past the airport waiting room, Fancife vaulted a low steel-wire fence, reached a taxicab. He did not waste time. He reached into the cab, clutched the astonished driver by the coat, slugged him on the jaw and made him senseless, then dumped him on the ground. The cab leaped away, tires throwing gravel, Fancife at the wheel.

En route into town, Fancife proved that the taxicab could do eighty. Later, he abandoned the cab, straightened his ruffled clothing, and caught another hack in a conventional fashion. He changed cabs twice thereafter.

Between one of the cab changes, Fancife looked up the residence address of Gerald Evan Two Wink Danton.

Two Wink Danton, being owner of a vinegary disposition and a completely selfish nature, had always lived alone. At present he occupied a rat trap of an apartment—he was also as stingy as Scrooge—in a part of town that was down at the heels. The living room was lighted inadequately by a twenty-watt bulb dangling on the end of a cord from the center of the ceiling, and by this bad light, he

"All you've got to do with this is produce information," Fancife explained. "I want to know who brought the furs today, and where I can find the person."

"Wasn't there something said about five hundred?"

Fancife reached into his hip pocket for a billfold and began counting out twenty-dollar bills.

"You'll get it," he said.

Two Wink casually reached into his coat and a moment later Fancife was looking into the threatening twin maws of a large-caliber derringer.

"I'm afraid I'll need more than five hundred," Two Wink said.

THE two men examined each other during tense moments while Two Wink brought the car to a stop near a street light in a deserted section of the park. Each one saw that the other was not afraid, and a mutual respect sprang up between them.

"I didn't figure you would have a gun," Fancife said disgustedly.

"I did have, you see."

The strained silence continued. There was no noise other than the muttering of the engine and the ticking of a valve tappet. Breeze moved the park trees, and leaves cast squirming clusters of shadow.

"Well?" Fancife said questioningly.

"I can see only one answer to this," Two Wink said thoughtfully. "Someone has bred a new type of fur-bearing animal, and skins of that animal were offered on the market today. That fur, if a man had had a monopoly, would be worth millions. So I want in. I'm no hog."

"What do you mean—no hog?"

"I want fifty per cent. Half."

Fancife chewed his lower lip. He was thinking. "And if there was more to it than just a new fur-bearing animal?"

"Half. Still half."

Fancife continued thoughtful, until finally he drew in a deep breath.

"I like your style." He scowled at Two Wink. "I don't think I would care much for you personally, but you don't handle yourself bad. I could use you."

Two Wink said frankly: "I was just thinking the same thing. We might do each other some good."

There was a silence. Then, without further speech, with no other manifestation,

they shook hands to seal the bargain. Another silence followed, for they were both somewhat surprised, suddenly realizing that they understood each other fully, that their minds worked in exactly the same fashion, so that each seemed to know exactly what the other thought and intended to do. It was almost uncanny.

"We should make a team," Fancife said.

Two Wink put away his derringer, admitted, "Yes, we should."

"Our first move," Fancife announced, "is to get hold of the man who brought those furs to St. Louis. And the next move," added Fancife, "will be to get rid of a fellow named Columbus."

Chapter III THE GANG-UP

THE yellow-haired young man who was built like a blacksmith was having his troubles.

The airplane stewardess said: "I saw the fight begin, and he didn't start it. The other man hit him first."

The policeman asked, "Who kicked your teeth out?"

"The other one," admitted the co-pilot. "Not this fellow, but the one who got away."

The yellow-haired young man made an impatient gesture with his large, strong-fingered hands, then gave a convincing speech.

"So why not turn me loose?" he argued. "This fellow attacked me and I simply defended myself, so the fracas was not my fault. I didn't even know the man, therefore he must have been a nut of some kind. You better be devoting your time to finding him. Why, he's probably a crazy man running around loose, a menace to humanity."

The policeman said, "You didn't even know him?"

"My name," said the young man who had furnished half the fight, "is Arnold Columbus, but naturally I get called Chris Columbus. I'm from New York. I'm a fur specialist, and I frequently travel to remote parts of the world. You're liable to run into me inside the Arctic Circle hunting unusual sealskins, or you might find me in the Andes Mountains dickering for a catch of special

chinchilla. I was simply coming to St. Louis on business, and this fellow attacked me."

"According to the plane company records, the other man's name was Wilmer Fancife," the policeman explained. "You say you never knew a Wilmer Fancife before?"

Chris Columbus lied without batting an eye.

"Never heard of the cuss," he said.

The policeman thought it all over and came to a conclusion. "Thank you very much. Will you kindly keep in touch with us, in case something should develop?"

Chris Columbus grinned pleasantly and said, "I take it that I can leave now?"

"Yes. Where do you intend to stay?"

"The Ritz Hotel."

"Thank you."

Chris left the airport in a taxicab and did not go near the Ritz Hotel, visiting instead a tobacco shop which was open at this late hour. He examined the telephone directory for Gerald Evan Two Wink Danton's address. Having found the address, he rode to within two blocks of the spot in a taxicab, then alighted.

Chris told the taxi driver Two Wink Danton's address. He also gave the driver a five-dollar banknote.

"I want you to do me a favor," Chris explained. "A friend of mine lives there, and he is very sociable indeed and he also likes his liquid refreshment, so I suspect he may be somewhat pixilated. If he is oiled, I doubtless will have trouble getting away from him without hurting his feelings, and there is where you come in. If I do not return in half an hour, say, you come to the door and knock and explain to whoever answers that there is a policeman downstairs and he is going to come up and get me if I don't come down. I will tell my friend that I was pinched for speeding, and the cop is taking me to the bastille, but merely let me stop off to see my friend as a great favor."

Chris Columbus was sometimes rather proud of his ability as a liar.

"It sounds kind of complicated," said the taxi driver.

"But you'll do it? There's some more bucks in it for you."

"Oh, sure. In half an hour."

CHRIS COLUMBUS listened intently outside Two Wink Danton's door and heard a

radio playing softly, and no other sound, so he knocked. The door soon opened.

"Hello, Mr. Two Wink Danton," said Chris. "You alone?"

"Why, yes, by myself." Two Wink stood back hospitably. "Come on in. I didn't expect you to arrive so soon. I only sent my telegram slightly after noon today."

"It doesn't take much over six hours to come from New York to St. Louis by plane," Chris said.

He walked in unsuspectingly, not realizing his mistake until Two Wink slammed the door and disclosed that Fancife had been standing behind the panel with a cocked gun ready in his right hand, and his left hand gripping a pillow with which to muffle noise of the gun, should it be necessary.

The glare Chris gave Fancife held such desperate fury and hate that the craggy fat man clapped the pillow over the muzzle of the gun, ready to fire.

"No!" Two Wink barked wildly. "Somebody'll hear the shot, sure!"

Fancife snarled, "Get your hands up!"

Chris Columbus lifted his arms. His fists were clenched, his face drained of color, his mouth hate-twisted. He hated Fancife, it was obvious, more than anything else in the world.

Fancife added, "You tie him, Two Wink."

Two Wink secured a cotton clothesline—he was such a skinflint, and cared so little for his personal appearance that he did his own laundry in the apartment—and bound the prisoner, showing an extensive knowledge of knots.

"Now a gag," Fancife suggested.

Two Wink rammed a dishrag into Chris Columbus' mouth, and over this tied a bath towel.

Then suddenly Two Wink looked at Fancife, exclaimed, "I just thought of something. That damned dog—and I've got some of the stuff left."

"What has a dog got to do with it?"

"One of the neighbors had a dog, and the blasted thing always barked at me and kept me awake at night with howling. Once it bit me. So I got some chloroform, and one night I caught the dog."

"And you have some of the chloroform left?"

"Yes."

"Get it."

guests had included shaggy trappers from Alaska and black lion hunters from Africa—was a hostelry that was somewhat agog. Decimo Tercio, with his buckskin suit and his metal shoes, was something different.

Two Wink and Fancife used a simple ruse.

"Will you advise Mr. Tercio," said Two Wink, "that two fur buyers wish to see him. Two buyers who are perfectly willing to pay him five thousand dollars apiece for his skins, and take the whole lot."

This admitted them to the fourth-floor room where Decimo Tercio had established himself.

Tercio was standing in the middle of the room—he merely called, "Come in," and they entered—naked except for a towel which he had wrapped around his middle. They could not help but stare at him. He had a body of remarkable muscular development, and a skin marked by numerous scars. The scars were irregularly shaped, some much larger than others. As if the man had been torn and mauled by animals, Two Wink reflected.

A new suit of ordinary clothing was lying on the bed, so it was evident Tercio was just preparing to change to civilized garb. The buckskin suit, together with the metal shoes, lay on the floor.

Fancife closed the door, then produced his gun.

"You know what this is?" he asked threateningly.

Tercio knew; he put up his arms.

"Look the place over," Fancife ordered Two Wink. "We might find maps, which would make our job simple."

Two Wink conducted an enthusiastic search. He was probably much more interested in finding something than his new partner, Fancife.

It had occurred to Two Wink that he really knew very little about the whole affair, and it made him uneasy. He had thrown his lot with Fancife, a comparative stranger, and had immediately taken part in a murder. He wondered if that didn't make him a profound damn fool.

There were some pockets in Tercio's skin garments, but they contained nothing.

"What kind of hide are these things made of?" Two Wink asked, puzzled.

"You'll find out later," Fancife said enigmatically.

Two Wink scowled and hefted the metal shoes. He found them very light, noticed also that the soles were scarred.

"What kind of metal is this?" he asked. "Never saw stuff like it before."

"Hurry up the search," Fancife said shortly.

In a bad humor, Two Wink completed his hunt, ending up with empty hands.

"Nothing," he reported.

Fancife now addressed their prisoner, Tercio, in a tone that left nothing in doubt.

"You can get shot here," Fancife said, "or you can do what you're told, and live through it. You will put on your clothes. Those Street clothes there, and not that rig you wore when you came out of . . . er . . . came to St. Louis. And you will come with us to a place where we can talk privately."

Tercio, who had been scowling at them, asked, "Just who are you two gentlemen, anyhow?"

Fancife countered, "Do you know Lanta?"

Tercio didn't need to answer. His surprised start was sufficient affirmative.

At which Fancife grinned and said: "That should give you some idea. Now are you coming with us, or are you going to stay here and get buried?"

"That doesn't give me much choice," Tercio said in his strangely difficult English. He began dressing.

After a while, they walked out of the hotel, Tercio presenting a much more normal appearance in his civilian clothing, and not making any move toward resistance.

Two Wink said, "I don't see the object of this."

Fancife snorted. "We're simply going to make our friend here, Tercio, take us back to where he came from."

They drove away in Two Wink's car.

Chapter IV THE DESPERATE MAN

CHRIS COLUMBUS rolled over and managed to sit up, after which he made a throat-clearing noise that had nothing of pleasantness in it.

"Feeling better?" the taxi driver asked.

Chris tried three times before he could say a coherent, "No," after which he lay down on the floor again to be punished by sickness. The illness itself wouldn't have been so bad, if it wasn't for the frantic condition of his mind. It was, really, a battle between the two, his body wanting to lie there and sleep for a long time, his mind a raging tiger of anxiety.

Finally he rolled over and tried to get up again, and this time he made it, although after he was on his feet he had to walk sidewise for a short distance to keep from falling again.

"Whew!" he said.

The taxi driver said, "You remember me now? I'm the guy who hauled you around in a hack. The guy you gave five dollars to come here after half an hour and get you away from an intoxicated friend."

Chris Columbus peered at him blearily and muttered, "Yes, I know. Thank God for you!"

"What happened to you?"

"I had a fainting spell," Chris explained, "and it must have embarrassed my friend greatly, because when I faint, I thresh around violently and utter embarrassing cries. I presume that is why my friend tied me and gagged me. I presume also that my friend has merely dashed out for a doctor, which leads me to suggest that we depart rapidly, a doctor under the circumstances being inclined to commit me to the goon house, which I would dislike."

The taxi driver grinned and said: "You may not be the best liar, but you're a long-winded one."

"You doubt me?"

"Now and before. I had strong doubts when you first began telling me about the friend, and it didn't sound right, either, when you told me to say a policeman was waiting downstairs. It looked as if you wanted to give somebody a cop scare."

"Did you wait a half hour before coming?"

"Not quite."

"Probably a good thing." Chris massaged his head briskly, hoping to get some of the fog out of it. "Or maybe I would have survived. He had used that chloroform on a dog, then let the bottle stand with a rag cork for a long time. The stuff must have evaporated and gotten weak."

The taxi driver walked over and picked up the telephone.

Chris said, "What are you going to do?"

"Call the law."

Chris felt of his hip pocket and discovered he had not been robbed. There were four ten-dollar banknotes in his billfold. He presented the taxi driver with three of them.

"Suppose you have a lapse of memory," he suggested.

The hackman hesitated, grinned, said, "Sold—one lapse of memory," and took the three tens.

THE fur market opened at nine o'clock the following morning, with Chris Columbus the first man inside. He knew a number of fur men in the place, having bought skins in St. Louis on a number of occasions in the past, and being employed by one of the most reputable quality houses in the business. Chris became a fountain of questions.

"Sure," he was told. "There was a guy walked in here yesterday with a pack of furs of the kind you describe."

"Where are the furs?"

"Locked in the vaults, I suppose. He rented a vault, I heard."

"What'd he look like?"

They described Decimo Tercio, dwelling in particular upon the peculiarity of his garb of buckskin trousers and coat, and his one-piece metal shoes.

At this Chris Columbus practically jumped up and down in his excitement.

"This is marvelous!" he exploded. "The man obviously came straight from . . . uh . . . that is, I've got to find him. Where is he?"

Tercio had made it generally known that he was going to the Black Fox Hotel, desiring that prospective buyers of his furs call him there.

"He seemed mighty anxious to sell those skins," a fur man explained, "even if he did persist in holding out for the ungodly price of five thousand dollars a piece."

Chris broke speed records to the Black Fox Hotel.

"Mr. Tercio has not appeared this morning," he was told.

Chris found the hotel manager and said, "I want a look at Tercio's room, and it's important enough to me that I'm going to be blunt about it. Either you go up there now

appearance at the Ritz Hotel in St. Louis, where Columbus was staying.

“That’s bad,” Two Wink said thoughtfully.

“I call it good,” Fancife retorted. “Suppose we hadn’t laid hands on this damned letter? Suppose it had gotten to this Doc Savage?”

“How bad would that have been? I’ve only heard rumors about an adventurer, or soldier of fortune or something of the sort, named Doc Savage.”

Fancife frowned at his associate. “You don’t travel much, do you? Never go out in the field—Alaska and Siberia and Ecuador and places like that—buying furs?”

“No.”

“Well, you hear about Doc Savage in those places. The man must have been everywhere, and wherever he’s been, they don’t seem to forget him. He’s not an adventurer or soldier of fortune, like you said. He’s—well, a damn fool, it seems. He chases crooks—for the fun of it.”

“No profit in that.”

“I’m not explaining the man—I’m telling you what I’ve heard. You can’t hire him, and if a thing doesn’t appeal to him, he won’t touch it. I don’t know where he gets his dough, and neither does anybody else. He always has plenty.”

Two Wink frowned at his partner in crime, finally said, “I take it you don’t want any part of Savage?”

“That’s right.”

“In which case we’d better put the bingo on Chris Columbus. If we don’t, he’ll send this Savage another message.”

Fancife nodded, asked grimly: “Can you get hold of a good rifle with a silencer?”

Two Wink, confronted by the approach of a second murder attempt, turned the approximate color of a peeled potato.

“I can try,” he gulped finally.

Chapter V THE STRANGE FACTS

DOC SAVAGE—or Clark Savage, Jr., to give him his correct name, which practically nobody knew—was a man of mystery as far as the newspapers and the general public were concerned. It was known that he was a remarkable individual who made a business of helping other people out of trouble, and who did not charge fees; it

was no secret, either, that his headquarters were located on the eighty-sixth floor of one of mid-town New York’s tallest buildings—but beyond this, Doc Savage was a rather puzzling enigma, a mystifying sort of legend about whom all kinds of fantastic things were told.

The fact that Doc Savage helped people without charging them was naturally a magnet that drew many persons who had the wrong idea. Many a bum and no-account, worthless moocher and tramp in search of a handout—they came wanting every sum from fifty cents to fifty thousand dollars—had migrated to the place at one time or another. There were some deserving individuals, of course, and these got understanding treatment and help—but no money. They got jobs, not jobs with big salaries and short hours, but jobs with hard work and possibilities for betterment. The out-and-out moochers caught hell at the hands of a staff of expert hell-dishers-out.

To handle the problems of these people who really required nothing extraordinary in the line of a solution, Doc Savage maintained on the ground floor the reception staff which arranged jobs for the needy, or dished out the hell to the undeserving.

Any matter important or particularly fantastic was passed on upstairs where it got attention from one or another of Doc’s group of five close associates.

These preliminary reception committees served a double purpose, both of which were defensive. They defended Doc from what could easily become a twenty-four-hour-a-day job of interviewing persons with piddling problems—not a few of them merely curiosity lookers come to get a look at a famous person. They also defended against very real enemies who frequently concocted some ingenious schemes for killing Doc Savage.

This morning, one of Doc’s group of five aids was on duty in the reception room of the eighty-sixth floor headquarters. The reception room was sparsely furnished with a great inlaid table, a few comfortable leather chairs and a safe so large that it looked out of place.

The aid on duty was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Monk Mayfair, one of the world’s leading industrial chemists, and also probably one of the world’s homeliest men. Reasons for the nickname Monk were

The clerk was a filing case of information, once he was unlocked with a five-dollar bill.

He told them that Two Wink Danton and Wilmer Fancife—he did not name the men, but identified them by description—had come to see Decimo Tercio. Later, Tercio had gone away with the pair.

Still later, Chris Columbus had arrived in a futile hunt for Tercio.

Monk ventured: “It looks as if Columbus, as well as Two Wink and Fancife, were hunting Tercio. And Two Wink and Fancife got him first.”

Renny contemplated his large fists. “It strikes me,” he said, “that we’ve traced this thing about as far as we can. What do we do now?”

They went up to Decimo Tercio’s room and examined the place.

Doc Savage looked at Tercio’s strange all-metal shoes for a time, then handed the shoes to Monk, the chemist.

“What do you make of that metal?” he asked.

Monk scrutinized the shoes. He even peered through a small magnifying glass which Doc Savage produced. Monk shook his head slowly.

“Not aluminum. I’ll swear I don’t know what it is without a chemical analysis.”

The skin garments which Tercio had worn provided a further puzzle. Doc Savage was a little more specific.

“The skin,” he said, “seems definitely to be that of an animal—an animal which was covered with both feathers and hair.”

“But what kind of animal could that possibly be?” Monk interjected.

Doc Savage did not elaborate on his analysis of the skin garments. He showed a marked lack of desire to discuss it further—as if he had ventured his first opinion on the spur of the moment, and further consideration had shown him the impossibility of the thing.

They looked at the gun catalogues.

The largest-caliber guns in each catalogue—elephant and tiger guns in every case except one, when the weapon marked was a new type of super-powered automatic rifle—had been designated with a pencil mark.

“If he planned to buy those rifles,” Ham suggested, “it looks as if he was going in for darned big game.”

They had been working on the mystery about four hours, and all they had done was further confuse themselves. They had not found Decimo Tercio, the mysterious man with strange furs to sell. There was no trace of Columbus or Two Wink or Fancife.

“We might,” Doc Savage suggested, “try to backtrack Decimo Tercio, and find out where he came from.”

Chapter VI TERCIO’S TRAIL

“A MAN dressed as strangely as Tercio was when he came to this hotel,” Doc Savage said, “would have been noticed.”

They got on telephones and called taxicab companies and cab drivers—with no results.

“Try the railroads and the bus concerns and the drive-it-yourself companies,” Doc directed.

The bronze man himself kept telephoning taxicab concerns in the small towns near St. Louis, and three hours later, he was successful.

A jitney driver from a small farming town in the Mississippi River bottoms about thirty miles from St. Louis had hauled Decimo Tercio to town.

Doc and his men drove out to talk to the driver, whose tongue was also easily keyed with a five-dollar bill.

“That funny dressed guy? He come into town here and hired me. Paid me in big bills.” The driver chewed tobacco and grinned.

“What do you mean by big bills?” Doc asked.

“The old kind. You remember, our dollar bills used to be bigger than now. That was a lot of years ago.”

“May we see them?”

The driver exhibited the money Tercio had given him. Large-sized bills.

“The government quit printing these things ten years or more ago,” Ham said thoughtfully.

The village hackman took a fresh chew of tobacco and volunteered: “You know, I figure the feller might have been a hermit, maybe.”

“Because he had the large-sized bills, you thought he might have hoarded them?”

"Not only that. It was the way he talked. Questions he asked me." The taxi driver chuckled. "Why, that feller had never even heard of Hitler. He didn't know about Roosevelt being president. He was way behind on the news."

Doc Savage's flake-gold eyes betrayed the bronze man's inner excitement slightly; the eyes seemed to take on a whirling alertness.

"Was the man interested in any particular phase of the news?" he asked.

"Well, he wanted to know a lot about Stalin and Russia," the taxi driver admitted. "Matter of fact, we was of some political difference, and once I thought one of us was gonna get a bust on the nose. I ain't no Communist, and I guess he was. Anyhow, I didn't know much about Russia to tell him, except that them and the Japanese have been makin' faces at each other."

"Any idea where the man came from?" Doc asked.

"Nope. Just walked into town, like I said."

Doc Savage went to the telephone office, where he parted with some more money. As a result, he got all the country lines radiating out of that exchange hooked together, and a "general ring" given. The "general ring" was a succession of ten short rings, a sort of summons that would draw all country subscribers to their phones.

He made a short speech in which he offered fifty dollars reward for any information concerning Decimo Tercio. He described Tercio.

Almost instantly, he got results.

"That feller," said a farmer's voice, "landed his airplane in my oat field, and killed one of my bulls with a spear. Said he'd be back, but he hasn't."

Doc got the farmer's name and the location of the farm, and they headed for the place, using a car which they had rented.

RENNY, who was the engineer of the group and knew much about things mechanical, took one look at the plane and rumbled an opinion. "A Russian plane!" he exclaimed. "And at least ten years old."

Doc Savage examined the plane, and in particular made mental note of the identification numbers on the ship. The plane, for its age, was in remarkably good condition, showing very little wear. The

fuselage and wing surfaces within range of the two big engines, however, were stained with oil as if from a recent long flight. There were no maps in the craft.

Having inserted a stick in the gas tanks to measure the fuel—the tanks were almost empty—Doc called Monk's attention, asking: "You've conducted some chemical experiments in oil-cracking processes. What do you make of this fuel?"

Monk sniffed, tasted, squinted.

"The equivalent of raw casing-head stuff. Maybe a little alcohol, or something."

Ham asked: "What do you mean—casing-head stuff?"

"I mean," Monk explained, "that when you condense some types of natural gas, you get stuff like this."

"Then it's not regular aviation gasoline?"

"It's not even regular automobile gasoline. The fellow must have done a lot of tinkering with his motor to get it to run on juice like this."

The farmer, who watched them closely enough to see that they were rather puzzled, stepped forward to contribute his bit to the mystery. He produced a stick and a spear, said, "What do you make of these?"

Monk took the weapons, squinted at them, and decided, "They look kind of prehistoric to me."

Doc said, "Atlatl."

He was looking at the short stick that accompanied the spear.

"Huh?" Monk said.

"Atlatl. A throwing stick for propelling spears. Used by a number of prehistoric races. As a weapon, it preceded the bow and arrow."

The bronze man demonstrated by grasping the throwing stick, inserting fingers through the finger loops, placing the spear in the gripping notch.

"That's the way the feller throwed it at my bull," the farmer said.

"It takes some experience to use one of these weapons," Doc suggested.

At this point, the farmer's wife came running across the oat stubble to them.

"The man who owns the airplane just telephoned," she said. "Him and two other men are going to be out right away with some gasoline for the thing."

ordinarily the chemical did the rest. In this case, the mercy bullets splattered harmlessly on the tank-truck cab.

The tank truck went out of the oat-stubble field sounding like a frightened red hog, pulling a funnel of dust after it.

A dark, loose-jointed object tumbled from the speeding truck. The regular driver. They had thrown him out.

Chris Columbus, beside himself with rage, squalled, "They're gettin' away!" He sprang out of the plane and ran after the truck in a hopeless and somewhat silly chase.

Renny and Ham raced for Doc's rented car, which they had parked in the farmer's orchard.

Doc himself lunged to the plane controls, made an effort to start the engines. It was hopeless, as he had suspected. The motors would never start on the low-grade fuel that was in the tanks; it was a miracle that they had operated on the stuff, even after they were hot.

Monk was rolling over and over on the ground, holding his stomach with both arms.

"They shot me!" Monk howled. "They shot me in the stomach!"

Doc flung out of the plane, shouted, "They're escaping in the truck!"

Monk got to his feet and began to run toward their rented car. He traveled in an awkward spraddle-legged lope, squalling things that were angry and violent.

While he ran, Monk tried to pull up the front of his shirt to see if the rifle bullets had really penetrated the bulletproof mesh undergarment he was wearing. The undershirt was made of an alloy on which Monk had expended his best chemical skill, but he was doubting the efficiency of the thing.

Ham and Renny had some difficulty starting the rented car, so that all of them reached the machine in time to pile aboard.

The man who had been thrown out of the truck—his uniform showed that he was the driver for the local oil company—had gotten to his feet. He was standing still and swearing at the top of his voice, the last they saw or heard of him.

At all speeds above fifty, the rented car had a knock that sounded as though a blacksmith was at work on the motor with a hammer.

Doc shouted, "You saw the other man in the truck, Columbus?"

"Yes."

"Was it the mystery man, Decimo Tercio?"

"That was him. Two Wink and Fancife are holding him prisoner. They made him bring them out here. I think they were going to use his plane."

"How did you happen to show up?"

"I've been watching them, trying to get Tercio away from them. I didn't get a chance. They had rifles, and they were also looking for me to bump me off. I found their hideout, listened outside the window, overheard Tercio finally tell them where his plane was. I beat them out there. I intended to wait in the plane and waylay them. Wasn't far enough ahead of 'em, dammit!"

"Why didn't you go to the police with this?"

"And have the cops lock me up for crazy after they heard my story?"

It was a dirt road. The truck ahead sucked up an incredible amount of dust. Doc nosed into it; they coughed and gagged. The bronze man was forced to slow. There was not car-length visibility.

Doc Savage drove far out on the edge of the road to avoid as much of the dust as possible—which was fortunate.

Suddenly a blackness loomed ahead. The bronze man stamped the brake, wrenched the wheel. The car eased over in the grader ditch, but there was not enough room. Came a big gnashing sound of metal. Their off wheel and fender dug into the grader bank. The car slowly upended on its radiator, turned over, and they were an aching tangle inside.

Monk forgot his midriff pain and shouted: "They broad-sided the truck! Figured we'd crash into it in the dust!"

A RIFLE bullet went in one side of the car and out the other, the double impact sounding almost like one report.

Doc said, "Out and into the ditch!"

The doors were jammed. Doc kicked one; it gave, and they crawled out into the swirling pall of dust.

Renny stood up, fired four short bursts from his machine pistol in four different directions. Then he dropped and listened, hoping the rifle would discharge

again and give him an idea of the direction of their foes.

Instead, they heard men running away.

Doc said, "We should be near the paved highway."

"Holy cow! That explains it. They figured on killin' us off with a smashup, then stopping a faster car on the highway. Knew they couldn't outrun us."

They scrambled out of the dust and out of the ditch—but got back into the ditch suddenly when rifle slugs made violent breaking-violin-string noises close to them. The capsized rented car had been making frying and creaking sounds. Suddenly gasoline vapor under the hood exploded; shorted wires or something of the sort had set it off. Flame climbed over the car and smoke spiraled upward.

Ham had crawled back into the dust to hunt for something—his sword-cane, for now he scrambled out again with the weapon. He unlimbered his machine pistol, fired a burst. Renny also shot. Both bursts missed, for Two Wink and Fancife had doubled behind a high bank at the intersection of the dirt road with the paved highway.

There was brief silence.

Doc said, "If we can separate and encircle them—" He did not finish the statement.

Automobile tires were squalling on the paved highway.

Two Wink and Fancife were standing in the road, blocking it, holding rifles menacingly. The mysterious man, Decimo Tercio, stood between them, waving his coat as a stop flag.

A motorist in a black sedan was just stopping his machine as Doc's party got sight of the tableau.

Doc said, "Try to get them with mercy bullets!"

Renny and Ham aimed their unusual weapons, put pressure on the firing levers, and the guns gobbled.

Two Wink threw up his arms and began doing bullfrog jumps.

"Got 'im!" Renny boomed.

Then to their disgust they saw Fancife seize Two Wink and drag him into the sedan which the pair had stopped.

Decimo Tercio now broke and ran. They realized, the moment the strange fellow put his head down and began sprinting, that

he was making a break for liberty. He had luck; Fancife did not notice his flight for a moment.

When Fancife did see Tercio running, his howl of profanity reached their ears loudly. Fancife was inside the sedan, and they could see him struggling to get his rifle pointed at Tercio.

Chris Columbus realized the danger of Tercio and gave a frantic yell.

"Don't let him shoot Tercio!" Chris bleated. "Tercio is the only man who knows what we've got to learn!"

Ham and Renny unlimbered their machine pistols again. At that range—they wouldn't be point-blank range either, for that matter—the mercy bullets would not penetrate the defense of car body and windows. But the splattering rattle of the slugs on the car frightened Fancife.

Fancife decided to forget Tercio and save his own skin.

He drove away at high speed in the sedan, after forcing out the motorist who owned the machine. The motorist, wanting no part of any of it, took shelter in the grader ditch. Tercio and Two Wink vanished around a curve in the sedan.

Monk held his stomach and galloped forward, shouting, "Why don't you guys do something? Everything is goin' wrong!"

There were two other cars on the highway, but both of them had been close enough to see the excitement and hear the shots, so that both drivers, instead of stopping when they were hailed, stamped accelerator pedals to the floor boards and moaned away, paying no attention to urgent shouts from Doc's men.

"Get Tercio!" Chris Columbus urged frantically.

Tercio had no intention of being got. Enough bad luck had beset him thus far to make him a wary fellow. He was crossing a pasture, legs a churning blur.

Renny shouted, "Tercio! This is Doc Savage's party. We're your friends."

This had no visible effect on Decimo Tercio, except to speed him a little, if anything. There was no question but that he heard, because Renny's shouting voice was a tremendous thing that rivaled the twin foghorns on the forward funnel of the *Queen Mary*.

"Chris Columbus is here!" Renny bellowed after Tercio.

Chris said, "That won't faze him. He may not know me from Adam's ox."

Tercio kept going. On the far side of the pasture, several horses were prancing about nervously.

Doc said, "We will have to outrun him."

They sprinted forward, Monk losing ground with his ungainly lope. They passed the motorist owner of the car Two Wink and Fancife had seized for their getaway; the fellow lay in his ditch and shouted, "I'm not in on this! I'm an innocent bystander!"

They piled over the pasture fence, barbed wire and staples squawking complaint.

Tercio had reached the horses. They were saddle animals, spirited, apparently none of them gentle. Tercio plunged into the tangle of horses bunched in the fence corner at the far side of the pasture.

"He'll get his brains kicked out!" Ham exploded.

Tercio gave an exhibition of harsh, but highly skilled horsemanship. He managed—that feat was remarkable in itself—to grasp a mane, swing and get astride a horse. The animal he had picked was long-legged, racy. It began bucking. Tercio used his heels, his fists—and controlled the horse perfectly.

A long wild whoop scattered the startled animals out of the pasture corner. Tercio then rode furiously toward a fence. The horse jumped, cleared the wire. Wild rider and mount vanished into a woods.

Monk stopped, looked at Ham and asked angrily, "Why didn't you use your gatling?"

"My machine pistol," Ham snapped, "is empty."

"Mine, too," Renny boomed.

The remainder of the horses had their tails up and were going around and around the pasture. Nothing short of a pony, a lasso rope and considerable cowboy dexterity would trap one of the animals. Doc tried to outsprint a large roan gelding and get the horse in a corner, but the roan won.

Decimo Tercio was no longer in sight.

Two Wink and Fancife had long since vanished down the road.

Chapter VIII RADIO TRAIL

THEY stood in the Missouri sunlight getting breathing back to normal and feeling too disgusted over the situation to venture comment upon it. Comparative quiet had fallen, the only animated object now being the motorist whose car had been stolen, and who had gotten out of the grader ditch and was going in a long-legged run for the farmer's house, probably with the idea of using a telephone to contact the State troopers. Elsewhere there was stillness and a return of the rural peace, with birds that had been frightened coming out of the bushes to which they had fled, and the horses standing at the far side of the pasture, instinctively bunched together in their nervousness, heads up and nostrils distended.

Doc Savage said: "Monk and Ham, you trail Tercio as best you can. Report to us through the police in St. Louis. Renny and Chris Columbus and myself will see what we can do about finding Two Wink and Fancife."

Monk and Ham called their pets. The two animals had been investigating the farmer's barnyard, and had missed all the excitement. They came running, now, and Monk and Ham set off with them into the woods where they had last seen Tercio.

The paved highway had become quiet and empty, and since the wrecked rented car and the truck were out of sight down the dirt side road, there was no indication that anything unusual had happened recently.

Doc Savage had no trouble stopping the first St. Louis-bound car that passed. The driver was alone in the machine; when shown money, he readily agreed to take them into the city.

Doc, Renny and Chris Columbus rode three together in the back seat. Silently for a time. Then Renny spoke.

"Holy cow!" rumbled the big-fisted engineer. "That Tercio rode a horse like—well, a Cossack."

"Matter of fact," Doc said in a low voice, "he was once a Cossack."

"Huh?"

"Decimo Tercio isn't the man's name. In fact, *decimo tercio* are the Spanish words for the number thirteen. So the fellow might have selected the name Decimo Tercio as a sly practical joke."

"How do you figure the Cossack part?"

"Identification numbers on his plane. The plane itself— Renny, if you will remember back about ten years you will recall an epidemic of transatlantic airplane flights."

"I remember. Majority of them weren't successful."

"Exactly. Among those that were not successful was one of the first Russian trials to span the pole, an attempt that did not get much publicity at the time both because the Russian government was not too popular in the American newspapers at the time, and because the Russians made no effort to publish the flight widely. However, it was no great secret that a flier named Veselich Vengarinotskovi took off alone across the north pole, and was not heard from again."

"You say his name was Ven . . . Ven—" Renny grimaced. "Never mind. I'll take Decimo Tercio."

"Veselich Vengarinotskovi is now Decimo Tercio, by my guessing," Doc said, "because that Russian plane standing back there in the oat stubble bears the same identification numbers and name as the plane used by the Russian aviator who started over the pole some ten years ago, and was lost."

The bronze man glanced at Chris Columbus, asked, "What about it?"

"Could be. The facts check," Chris Columbus said.

"You can not tell us for sure?"

"I can't give you any facts about this fellow Tercio."

Big-fisted Renny leaned over to stare at Chris Columbus. "But maybe there are some facts you could give us?"

"A lot of them." Chris looked meaningfully at their driver. "But not just now."

THEY rode in silence, Chris Columbus holding his chin cupped in a palm, deep in thought, until finally he looked sidewise at Doc Savage and asked, "Where in the devil did you dig up that data about the Russian aviator you just gave us?"

"Happened to remember there was such a flight," Doc explained.

"Yes, but you even knew the plane identification numbers!"

Renny interjected a rumble. "Doc's got a filing cabinet for a brain. That, and an encyclopedia. You'll get used to it after a while."

Chris Columbus sighed and settled back on the seat. "I heard a friend of mine talking about you. That was a month or so ago. He had met you. Name of Sam Taft."

"Sam Taft, the explorer and authority on early Mexican art?"

"Yeah, that's Sam. He told me a lot about you. So much, to tell the truth, that at the time I was on the verge of calling you and asking you to help me with this mystery we're mixed up in now."

"Why didn't you?"

Chris Columbus grinned. "Didn't want to make a fool out of myself. I figured you wouldn't believe the story. I know I wouldn't if I was told the yarn by some young fellow who looked as if he ran more to muscle than brains."

Their driver proved to be timid in traffic, so that after they reached the outskirts of the city their progress was slow. They paid him off and changed to a taxicab.

"Police headquarters," Doc directed.

Time was required—more than an hour—in getting the police and State troopers to broadcast a pickup order for Two Wink, Fancife and Decimo Tercio. Two Wink and Fancife were charged with kidnapping. Apprehension of Decimo Tercio was directed on the ground that he was the kidnap victim, hence a material witness.

"Call for you, Mr. Savage," an officer said.

It was Monk. Disgusted.

"You know what this Decimo Tercio did?" Monk demanded. "He turned the horse loose in the river bottoms for us to follow. We finally figured it out that Tercio got to another highway, and must have hailed a car. That means Tercio has had time to get back to St. Louis, and no telling what else."

"Come back into town," Doc directed. "Watch Tercio's hotel."

The bronze man, looking disgusted with himself, hurriedly dialed another number on the telephone. He spoke for a short time, hung up with a deepened expression of self-disapproval.

"We muffed this nicely," he said in a grim voice.

Renny stared at him. "Meaning?"

"Decimo Tercio got back into town, sold his furs for four thousand dollars a pelt, took the money in cash and left."

RENNY sprang up and started for the door.

Doc stopped him with the query, "Where you going?"

"To hunt that Tercio."

"Where?"

Renny threw up his hands and sat down. "You've got me. What would we use for a clue?"

"The gun catalogues," Doc suggested.

"Eh?"

The bronze man slapped a telephone book down on the desk and began calling the sporting goods houses which had issued the gun catalogues they had noticed in Decimo Tercio's hotel room. First try was a blank, but the second one got a surprised grunt.

"The gentleman you're inquiring about just left," the gun firm manager explained.

"What did he buy?" Doc asked.

"Can you give me a good reason why I should furnish you with such information?"

Doc identified himself and added that he was a Federal investigator, and that the man could call the police if he didn't believe it.

"All right, all right," the gun house manager said. "This man—Tercio, you called him, didn't you?—bought a number of our most high-powered rifles and a very large amount of ammunition. An extraordinary amount of ammunition, I might say."

"And then—?"

"Then he loaded everything into one of our delivery trucks, got in with the driver himself, and they headed for the Lambert airport."

"How long ago?"

"Why—fifteen minutes, I should say."

Doc Savage hung up and explained to Renny and Chris Columbus: "Decimo Tercio sold his furs and bought the highest-powered rifles he could get, and ammunition. Now he is headed for Lambert flying field."

Renny boomed, "That's where we've got *our* ship!"

Chris yelled, "We may be able to head him off!"

He started for the door. Renny caught him.

"Hold it," Renny advised. "Doc seems to have an idea."

THE bronze man was using the telephone again, getting a connection to the flying field.

Chris Columbus grinned, said, "That's a better idea. We can have them grab him out there."

Doc Savage was speaking into the telephone, addressing the field manager, whom he happened to know.

"Does a man named Decimo Tercio have a plane there? . . . No? Well, possibly he did not use that name, so here is his description." Doc drew a word picture of Tercio, waited while the man spoke at the other end of the wire, then corroborated what he had been told, saying: "He just bought the plane by telephone, did he? Promised to pay cash and take immediate delivery. What kind of a ship did he buy?"

The room was still enough that Renny and Chris Columbus could hear the voice of the distant airport manager.

"It was a big ship, one of those jobs that have a lot of fuel capacity," the man explained. "It's a used crate. Fellow had it fixed up for a round-the-world try, then got cold feet. This man—Tercio, if that's his name—got the job for twenty-eight thousand, which is dirt for that bus."

Doc said: "Do me a favor, will you? My plane is out at your field now. Go to the crate, and back in the cabin you will find a number of alloy metal cases. The cases fit in racks along the cabin wall, and they're numbered. Open case number nine. You got it?"

"Open nine. Right."

"Take out the green metal box you will find inside on top. There is only one green metal box in that case, so you can't make a mistake. There is a switch on the box. Only one. Turn it to the *on* position. Got that?"

"Switch to *on* position. Got it."

"Then hide the box on this plane that Decimo Tercio just bought. Hide it in the back of the fuselage, or some place where it will not be found."

"It's not a bomb or something?"

"No."

"Well, I'll hide the thing in his plane."

DOC SAVAGE pulled the plane level and flew at an altitude of not much more than five hundred feet. At this height, he was hardly above the highest of the fantastic tree-growth below. He stared downward, his scientific interest racing.

When the plane came to a level clearing which was more than half a mile in each dimension, the bronze man suddenly pointed the craft downward.

"We will land," he said. "It doesn't seem possible this place can be real."

The wheels swished through foot-high grass, and eventually stopped. Doc climbed out. The grass was incredibly coarse, each blade about the size and shape of a segment of a palm frond.

"What we gonna do with the prisoners?" Chris asked.

Reluctantly, Doc postponed examining their surroundings. The bronze man had devoted a great deal of his life to science. And no scientist, in a place like this, could think of much else.

They found some bundles of supplies in the plane which were tied with quarter-inch manila rope; they used this line to securely bind Fancife and Two Wink.

"What about Tercio?" Chris queried.

Doc frowned at Tercio. The man had not been very co-operative at any time.

"We will tie him, too."

They finished roping Tercio without anything happening. The air was warm and moist, much like a tropical jungle. The light was bright, but since it did not come from overhead, it was more like sunlight of late afternoon, except that now that their eyes had become accustomed to it, they realized there was a definite bluish quality to the luminance.

Chris Columbus looked all around, obviously trying to find words to express what he thought of the spot. He grinned foolishly, because he could think of nothing adequate.

"Isn't this the damndest place?" he muttered finally.

There was no sky overhead; only a somber darkness, almost indistinguishable in the mists of distance, showed them where there must be the arching stone of the ceiling.

"What keeps the ceiling from falling down?" Chris asked hollowly.

Instead of answering, Doc Savage took several tentative steps. He had noticed that he felt remarkably light on his feet. He jumped. The little leap sent him sailing several feet, although he did not put forth much effort.

"Try jumping," he suggested.

Chris leaped—and managed to jump fully as high as his own head from a flat-footed start. "For the love of a kangaroo!" he exploded.

"Gravity probably keeps the ceiling up," Doc Savage said slowly. "Science, to tell the truth, has very few proven theories about gravity. One of the theories that gravity is the attraction of mass—in other words, you get a sufficiently large body of matter together, and you have gravity. Once the theory was even advanced that if the world was hollow, you could walk around on the inside of the shell, due to gravity being a mass attraction."

"In other words, the mass of stone over the ceiling is sufficient to create its own gravity and become self-supporting?"

"To a certain extent."

Decimo Tercio grunted, said: "That probably explains it. You can climb up the walls, and even crawl around on the ceiling, if you have handholds that will support you. Some of the animals do that, and I've watched them. If they come loose, they barely fall for a time, then fall faster as they get away from the mass attraction of the ceiling."

"How big is this place?" Doc asked.

"It's another world, almost." Tercio frowned. "You can believe that, or not, as you wish."

Doc Savage looked at Tercio. "We might as well straighten out your part in this. You have been here before, haven't you?"

Tercio hesitated.

"Yes," he said finally. "I see no need of keeping the existence of the place secret."

"How did you get here?"

"I was attempting a trans-polar flight from Russia to the United States ten years or so ago," Tercio advised, "and I got into that canyon which is the entrance to this place. My plane wings had iced up and I couldn't lift the crate out of the canyon. I flew around in there, the wings icing up, and finally knew I would have to land on what I thought was the bottom of the canyon."

Tercio looked at them and grinned.

"I had several very powerful flares for making an emergency landing at night," he

The bronze man shook his head incredulously. "But they have almost no brains at all! Why do you submit to being prisoners?"

Lanta was a little offended. "We are outnumbered," she snapped. "And one person does not venture alone into the jungle to return to my people."

Doc Savage studied the others for a while and formed his own private opinion that their spirit had been broken, that they were shy on courage. The girl, Lanta, seemed to be an exception, however.

THE bronze man got up and tugged the torch from its niche and made a search of the prison. Except for the darkness, the place was not unpleasant, although by no stretch of the imagination could it be called luxurious. If there was any escape, it would have to be through the ceiling hole.

Doc questioned Lanta, learning much that interested him. Primarily, he discovered that the girl and the other prisoners belonged to a tribe of much more advanced caliber which resided to the right and toward the Light. The people lived in a valley, it seemed, which they had barricaded against the prehistoric monsters that inhabited this strange world.

They lived by farming, and by raising certain animals which they had domesticated, their existence being idyllic and comfortable, untroubled by danger except from occasional huge pterodactyls which came prowling singly or in groups. Safety from the pterodactyls was secured by dashing under shelters that were erected conveniently. The stupidity of the flying monsters made them easily avoided.

Doc had an archaeologist's interest in the origin of the two races—how Lanta's people came to differ so greatly in intelligence from the stupid cavemen who now held them prisoners. Questioning evolved a theory in his mind.

Legends of Lanta's tribe had it that their ancestors had been sent by a deity, the name of which roughly translated to the Frozen Lord of All that is Elsewhere, sent as a peace offering to the deity of the Light.

It took no great stretch of imagination to surmise that Lanta's ancestors had wandered in from the arctic wilderness.

As for the apish fellows who held them prisoner, they were true natives of the

place. They were ancestors of the human race who had reached caveman status, and advanced no further, due to the fact that conditions in which they lived had never changed.

The altering condition of the world, evolutionists agreed—the passing of the warm age and the coming of the ice age, the end of the ice age and the ensuing cycles of climatic change—were largely responsible for the change in animal and plant life which occupied the surface of the planet.

Doc asked Lanta abruptly, "Do you know Chris Columbus?"

"I—yes," the girl said. Then suddenly she was gripping the bronze man's arm. "Where is he? He isn't here?"

Chapter XV THE FIGHT

LANTA'S intense interest, the tight emotion in her voice, was disturbing. Doc hesitated, uncertain just what he should say.

"Where is he?" Lanta asked tensely.

"Then you know him?" Doc parried.

Lanta nodded. Her eyes were bright. There was joy back of her excitement.

"A long time ago"—she paused and the movement of her lips indicated she was estimating the time measured in English terms—"it must have been nearly two years ago, I was made a prisoner by these cavemen. I escaped, and tried to make my way through the jungle. I had a terrible time, and finally was forced to flee. I fled for a long distance, and finally came to where the air was very cold, and there was a great crevasse. I climbed up this. I climbed for a long time, until my food and the water I had brought were almost exhausted. And finally I was out in a different world." She gazed at the bronze man. "Your own world."

"Tercio—the Russian flier—must have told you of such an outer world," Doc suggested.

"Yes. That is why I kept going up the crevasse. It was hard climbing, but I wanted to reach the other world of which he had told us."

"And what happened?"

"I did not like it. The air was very cold. And there was—what you call it?—snow. White frozen water—snow. And the animals for food—they were very hard to

catch. I was very discouraged. And . . . and then I met two men.”

“Two?”

“One was Chris Columbus.” Lanta’s voice softened and her eyes were gentle as she spoke Chris’ name.

“And the other?”

“One named Wilmer Fancife.” A coldness and an utter hate came into the girl’s manner. “He was a terrible man, this Fancife. He was worse than . . . than Aulf, the bully of this tribe of cavern men.”

Doc had reached some conclusions by now. And thereby a great many things were made clear.

“You fell in love with Chris Columbus,” he suggested.

Lanta nodded gently. “I am not ashamed of it. He was very good, and nice.” She put up her chin. “And he loved me. I am sure of it.”

Doc said quietly: “Yes, he loves you. He has been trying to find this place ever since, that he might return to you. He has risked his life in doing so.”

The girl, deeply moved, murmured, “I am glad.”

“But what happened? What separated you?”

“Fancife,” Lanta said grimly.

“He wanted the furs?”

“The furs I was wearing—yes, the whole trouble was over those. Fancife seemed to think furs such as those would be terribly valuable in your world. So he asked me to tell him where he could find more of the furs. He suggested that we murder Chris, and together have the furs to ourselves. He—he was hideous.”

The girl was silent for a moment. She shuddered at the memory.

“I told Chris, and the two men fought. I thought Fancife had killed Chris, so I fled. I came back into the crevasse, and descended, and tried to reach my people. But I was seized by these cavern men, and I have been a slave since.”

DOC nodded slowly. The girl’s story explained Chris Columbus’ part in the fantastic affair, and explained also the deadly enmity between Chris and Wilmer Fancife.

Both Fancife and Chris had known of the existence of this fantastic world, but had not been able to locate the entrance. Both had been searching for it, and they had left

word at the leading fur markets of the world to be notified at the appearance of a fur such as Lanta had worn. When such a fur had come on the market in St. Louis, both had rushed to the spot. Naturally, they had fought on sight.

Only their motivations differed. Fancife wanted the rare fur for what it was worth, which would be considerable if he could bring out breeding pairs of the animals.

Chris had been seeking Lanta, whom he loved.

“You understand everything?” Lanta asked softly.

“Everything,” Doc admitted dryly, “except how we are going to get out of here.”

“You plan escape?”

“Naturally.”

Lanta nodded at her fellow tribesmen. “Many of them have tried. Usually those who attempt it die. They have decided it is better to go on being slaves.”

The bronze man said nothing, but stretched out on the dusty floor. It was not comfortable, but he was tired and needed rest. He was asleep shortly.

His sleep was troubled, which was something out of the ordinary, for he had succeeded in accomplishing one of the most difficult feats with which man is confronted—he had mastered the ability to attain complete nervous placidity in the face of most circumstances. He could keep excitement from arousing him, for excitement and tension were an exhausting force upon his nerves. To express it simply, nothing worried him—if he could help it. He had managed to accomplish this control of nerve placidity, and at the same time retain his ambition and drive, which was a difficult separation in itself, the two being different qualities, but so closely associated that few succeeded in making the division.

He awakened refreshed, very hungry. The hunger was not important, because he had not yet gone without food for any serious length of time.

Investigation showed him that the roof hole was too high to reach, even standing on tiptoes. Moreover, it was closed with the rock, and atop this rested the heavy log which Aulf had been so proud to be able to move.

“Come here,” Doc directed some of the others. “We will form a pyramid, and by standing on your shoulders, I can possibly move the rock.”

communication halfway around the world—Monk's voice was remarkably faint through the earphones.

"Blazes, Doc!" Monk exploded. "What's happened to you? We found pieces of your plane scattered all over the country up here. Looked as if it had been blown up. And we found that Tercio's plane, deserted. What's up?"

"Everything all right with you fellows?" Doc asked.

"Sure. Where are you? You sound as if you were in China."

"Hold your hat."

"Eh?"

"Hold your hat," Doc Savage said, "because you're going to hear something that'll be a little hard to believe."

Chapter XVI THE DISASTER

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANDREW BLODGETT MONK MAYFAIR was furred over with a remarkable growth of red hair that was perpetually erect—hence his hair was not actually standing on end when he stepped out of Doc Savage's plane. But all of his emotions were, figuratively, on end.

Big-fisted Renny Renwick, the engineer, got out of the plane and peered around and muttered, "Holy cow!"

Ham alighted looking rather dapper and dubious, twirling his sword cane in a self-conscious fashion. He had nothing to say.

Johnny Littlejohn, the archaeologist and geologist, made an immediate dive for rock specimens underfoot and began inspecting them, and peering in a baffled fashion at the surrounding strange-looking flora and fauna.

"Doc," he gulped, "this can't be real! This is the world as it was sixty million years ago!"

"Don't make the mistake," the bronze man suggested dryly, "of treating any of these animals around here as if they weren't real."

Long Tom Roberts, the electrical wizard, was the last man out of the plane. He was quite calm about it. "There's a devil of a lot of static in here," he said. Nothing ever perturbed Long Tom at the right time.

Doc asked: "You fellows have any trouble getting down that crevasse?"

"Lots of it," Renny rumbled.

The two pets—Habeas Corpus, the pet pig; Chemistry, the pet chimpanzee—now climbed out of the plane. They looked around. Evidently they did not approve of the place. They turned around suddenly and climbed back into the plane.

Monk also peered about.

"Habeas has the right idea, if you ask me," the homely chemist muttered. "Say, how do you get out of this place?"

Johnny said excitedly: "Doc, we saw pterodactyls when we came in. And a dozen different types of dinosaurs. Why, this place is an archaeologist's dream. A dream, I tell you!"

"Nightmare is more like it," Renny boomed.

At this point, Ham suddenly broke into an exaggerated howl, began to jump around and clutch at his eyes.

"What's the matter with *you*?" Long Tom asked.

Ham pointed.

"I'm seeing a whole tribe of Monks!" he yelled.

The cavern men had come and were standing at a safe distance, fearfully eyeing the plane. What Ham had said was true. Monk could have removed most of his clothing and gone over and stood among them and distinctly become one of them.

Monk did not appreciate the comparison. He scowled at Ham.

Doc Savage, sensing an imminent and lusty quarrel, interrupted hastily.

"We are going to do some ferry duty," he explained.

"Ferry duty?"

The bronze man explained the situation, and finished, "The slaves are free, and we're taking them back to their tribe."

RENNY blocked out his big fists and scrutinized them thoughtfully. "You say that Fancife and Two Wink are flying around in here somewhere?"

"Yes."

"They may give us trouble."

"That is very possible," Doc admitted.

"On the other hand, they may capture some of the fur animals and be satisfied to leave the place."

"In that case—what about Chris Columbus?"

Doc Savage glanced about to be sure Lanta was not in earshot. She wasn't.

As a matter of fact, the others hadn't met Lanta yet.

"The only chance Chris has to keep alive," the bronze man surmised grimly, "is to refuse to tell Fancife and Two Wink whether he left any documents back in St. Louis or New York that would incriminate them. Oh, if he is clever, he may tell them that the documents are in a safe-deposit box which he has to open himself, and which will be opened if he does not return in a prescribed length of time. That might save his life."

"What gets me," Monk said, "is why Chris Columbus was so anxious to get here in the first place. He didn't seem much concerned about that strange fur."

Doc said, "Here comes the reason now."

Lanta approached. She was smiling, and self-possessed, not afraid of the plane because she had seen planes before the one flown into the lost world by the Russian flier, Tercio.

"Lanta," Doc introduced.

The girl produced the customary effect upon Monk and Ham, both of whom were susceptible to feminine pulchritude. Lanta's effect was somewhat more explosive than ordinary, rendering them practically speechless for several moments—after which they began to talk like phonographs which had lost their governors.

The young woman, being entirely feminine, was not averse to the kind of flattery which Monk and Ham could produce with flowery abandon.

"Those two mashers!" big-fisted Renny said disgustedly. "Some day they're gonna get hooked. Wouldn't either one of them know what to do with a wife?"

The situation seemed to worry Renny, who was a professed woman hater. He got Monk aside. "Holy cow! Didn't you hear Doc say she was Chris' girl?"

"What of it?" Monk grinned. "Chris isn't here, is he? Anyway, the girl's too nice for that clunk."

Doc Savage was watching Aulf. The big fellow had regained his senses, and had approached to a spot much nearer to the plane and Doc's group than the others had dared to venture. At least, he had courage.

Aulf also had, it was soon apparent, admiration for the bronze man. He shouted something in his strange gobbling, barking tongue.

"He sounds like a dog fight," Monk suggested.

Lanta translated for them.

"Aulf says," she told Doc, "that he understands you are an evil spirit, and he has a great admiration for you. It seems that Aulf considered he was somewhat of an evil spirit himself, but that he now sees he has a great deal to learn. He wants to join you and become your student, I take it."

Monk snorted mirth, said, "Since when did you become a tutor in evil-spiriting, Doc?"

"Tell Aulf," Doc instructed Lanta, "that we will leave him here in charge of the slaves until we return later for them."

"You aren't going to take the slaves with you now?" Lanta asked.

"We couldn't haul them all at once," Doc reminded her. "We will have to make several trips, and it would not be sensible to start until we have located a landing field close to the place where your tribe lives."

"That's true."

"Can you guide us from the air?"

"It may be difficult. I'll do my best."

As the plane raced across the level clearing at the edge of the jungle where it had landed, the coarse primitive grass made a rasping roar against the wheels. The ship climbed slowly.

"That way," Lanta said, and pointed.

Long Tom came forward to the cockpit. He was interested in knowing what effect the surroundings were having upon the magnetic compass. He had his own theories to advance, and he collared Renny, the engineer, as a listener. Renny proved to be a reluctant auditor, being more interested in the physical wonders of the lost world than in any of the more obtuse phenomena to be encountered there.

Monk craned his head out of a window. Suddenly he yanked it back.

"Blazes!" he yelled. "There's an animal down there with a neck a mile long!"

Ham peered. "Exaggerated a little, didn't you? The thing doesn't look to me as if its neck was over forty feet long."

"Brontosaurus," lengthy Johnny said.

"Now look here," Monk snapped. "This is no time to start pulling them jawbreaker words of yours that nobody knows. Be reasonable. Say something somebody can understand."

"Brontosaurus," Johnny said with dignity, "is the name of the type of animal you

see down there. It was a fairly prevalent variety of prehistoric dinosaur, and one of the largest. Its size made it impressive, but the monster is comparatively harmless, being herbivorous by nature. The word herbivorous," Johnny finished severely, "means simply that it is a plant eater. It consumes grass and leaves, like a cow."

Long Tom—he had realized Renny was not listening to him—came back into the cabin. He poked Monk excitedly.

"Listen!" barked the electrical wizard. "I've got the sun all figured out. I mean—this sun they've got in here."

"Yes?"

"It's a result of subterranean, or volcanic activity," Long Tom explained. "Gases are created under terrific pressure, and they escape through the top of the crater yonder, bursting into flame as they do so. The result is like a blazing gas well, only the heat is of enormously greater intensity. The stuff is really incandescent gas—and you know they claim our sun is nothing but a ball of incandescently hot gas."

"Very simple," Monk said, "except for one slight chemical drawback."

"What's that?"

"To have a fire, you gotta have oxygen. Where would the enormous amount of oxygen used by this flaming sun of yours come from?"

Long Tom answered that.

"The flame theory is correct," he said. "And as for oxygen—it is very scarce near the crater. And there are terrific winds that rush upward all the time, making life near the crater impossible, even if it were not for the heat."

The plane droned on through the strangely luminous air. They encountered a rainstorm which was very much like earthly storms, except for the lack of lightning and thunder. Their plane was pummeled around by gale and rain until they finally found their way out of it.

Later, Lanta touched the bronze man's arm.

"It seems incredible," she said, "that we have covered in so short a time a distance that it would have taken us days and days to travel afoot. My country. Yonder."

IT was a great rocky canyon—or, rather, a labyrinth of canyons, all running into

one central gorge which was astoundingly narrow. They could see, after the plane drifted lower, the gigantic gates of wooden timbers which closed the outer mouth of the canyon. Gates so huge that it was unbelievable that human hands could have constructed them.

Moreover, for at least a mile in front of the gates, the thicker jungle had been cut down, and there were sharpened poles sticking in the ground in a slanting fashion so that the points offered a formidable handicap to any huge prehistoric animal which tried to approach.

"Can we land inside the canyons?" Doc asked.

"No. There is no room."

"Then where—"

The girl pointed at the defensive array of pointed poles. Before them, and more than a mile from the gate, there was cleared ground which extended to a great trench with steep-walled sides that was evidently another portion of the defenses against the dinosaurs.

"You can land there," she said.

Doc put the plane down without difficulty. They alighted. The surroundings were not nearly as visible as they had been from the air, due to the deceptive size of the jungle brush.

Doc said: "Renny and I will return and ferry the slaves here. I would suggest that Lanta and Monk and Ham proceed to the gates and make sure we're welcome."

"Swell idea," said Monk, looking forward to the walk with Lanta with pleasure.

Lanta, Monk and Ham departed in the direction of the gates, working their way through the wilderness of pointed stakes, most of them larger than telephone poles.

Renny, Long Tom and Johnny remained at the landing spot, equipped with supermachine pistols, plenty of ammunition, and an acute knowledge that they had better keep a sharp lookout.

Doc took the plane into the air.

He had no difficulty flying back to the village of the cavern men, and picking up part of the slaves. Due to the size of the plane, the bronze man calculated that it would be possible to carry the entire group of slaves in two trips. He loaded half of them, took off carefully, and flew high and fast to shorten the trip and lessen its danger.

Long Tom met the plane. He was excited.

"What if they turn on us?" Two Wink blurted. "There's hundreds of 'em—and only two of us."

"We got 'em bluffed," Fancife snapped. "Act like you was confident. That's half the business."

Big-fisted Renny got the idea, and suddenly lifted his big voice. "These fellows are thieves!" Renny pointed at Fancife. "That man is as big a rascal as ever walked! He came here to rob you—"

Fancife leaped at Renny, struck with his rifle barrel. Renny's arms were pinned by his captors, and he failed to dodge; his big frame became loose, his head dropped forward and scarlet dripped from his nostrils.

Fancife scowled at the others, said: "You guys get funny and you won't live to see the final fireworks."

Johnny and Long Tom, maddened by the cold-blooded attack upon Renny, were plainly tempted to forget discretion.

"He means it," Doc warned. "Do as he says."

Fancife showed his teeth unpleasantly. "Now you're being smart."

The procession proceeded. Soon after they were inside the gate, canyon walls shoved up alongside them, so sheer that to gaze upward was to get the impression that the walls came together far above, except for a narrow knife of light. It was gloomy, although not dark, for it now became apparent that a great deal of light was reflected down from the stone sky of this fantastic world.

The pinnacles, in fact, were bathed in glaring light, and what must be intense heat, for nothing whatever grew on the heights. Down here, however, it was cool, with a distinct breeze.

"This place," Johnny vouchsafed, "is probably close enough to that volcano thing where they get their heat and light that the stone peaks are too hot even for those pterodactyls, which seem to be the most dangerous form of flying life here. But down here in the valleys, it's cool, due to the cold air moving in close to the ground, drawn by the heat from their volcanic sun."

"I would feel better," Long Tom interjected, "if you were using that great brain of yours to figure a way out of this."

They turned off into another canyon, which was wider, and so low on one side that much of the floor was bathed in direct rays from the Light. Here there were intensely

cultivated fields, most of the growing plants being of an entirely unfamiliar variety.

Long Tom, after looking over the crops dubiously, said: "Not a watermelon in sight. And brothers, am I thirsty!"

They were taken to a high stockade. The gate of this was swung open, and they were shoved inside.

Johnny took one gap-eyed look at the other occupants of the pen, and lit out running.

Johnny was hardly moving before one of the enormous animals in the pen went lumbering after him. The thing weighed at least four or five tons. It was apparent, too, that it would soon tire Johnny and overtake him.

DOC SAVAGE, greatly alarmed, seized Renny, who was still unconscious. With the big engineer balanced across his shoulders, he was about to take flight when a howl of mirth from Monk stopped him. The thing couldn't be very serious if Monk was laughing.

"Run, Johnny, run!" Monk yelled. "It's right after you!"

Johnny did not need the advice. He was traveling with amazing long-legged speed around the inside of the inclosure, the monster in immediate pursuit.

The animal had a long neck and a longer tail, and remarkably short legs for the pace it was traveling. Its weight was indicated by the way it shook the earth with its pounding feet.

Monk, Ham, Chris Columbus and Decimo Tercio were standing in the center of the stockade, and the huge animals—there were several of the things in the inclosure—were paying no attention to them.

Ham began trying to help the frightened Johnny.

"Stand still, Johnny!" Ham shouted.

"What do you mean—stand still?" puffed the fast-traveling Johnny. "That's what I feel like I'm doing."

"Stop and let the thing catch you," Ham explained. "It thinks you are here to feed it."

"That's what I'm afraid it thinks!"

"No, no, it won't eat a man. These things are vegetarians. Tercio, here, explained that to us."

Johnny reluctantly slowed up—he was very dubious about the idea—and let the

dinosaur overtake him. The monster muzzled Johnny hopefully until it concluded Johnny was not an animated vegetable, after which it halted. Johnny stopped, puffed, wiped off rivers of perspiration, mumbled, "I'll be superamalgamated!"

Decimo Tercio explained: "These dinosaurs are work animals. They have been domesticated for centuries, I presume."

"How do they manage the beasts?" Doc asked. "They surely haven't sufficient brain capacity to be trained."

Tercio smiled. "It is very simple. Someone merely walks ahead of them with food. They will follow a bag of food all day, providing they are fed a bite from time to time."

Doc Savage turned his attention back to more important aspects of the situation.

"Fancife and Two Wink seem to have control of the situation," the bronze man said. "How did they manage?"

"They landed the plane in one of these canyons," Tercio explained, "after flying around and frightening the people. Being primitive, the people think that anyone who flies is some kind of supernatural being."

Tercio grimaced distastefully.

"After they landed," he continued, "Fancife and Two Wink immediately shot down two of the chiefs. They explained to the people that they had come to take the chiefs' place. They made it stick."

"You mean they're running the tribe?"

"Exactly."

"That doesn't make me very happy," Monk said gloomily.

At this point, there was an interruption. It was foreshadowed by much loud talk outside the stockade—angry talk, it appeared—following which the gates were jerked open and a slender figure was shoved sprawling inside.

"Lanta!" Monk exclaimed.

The girl got up from where she had sprawled and said something not very complimentary while the gate was being closed. Then she turned and saw Chris Columbus.

The girl lost color and stood very still. Then her lips parted and she said something, but it was not audible. She became quite rigid, and the exultation flowing through her was almost visible.

At last, "Chris!" she gasped.

Chris' face was strangely gentle and completely joyful. He said something, words that they could not understand, but which must be some phrase of love that Lanta had taught him.

And after that, suddenly, they were in each other's arms, not kissing but just holding each other tightly, with tears in their eyes.

Monk, abruptly realizing what small chance he had with this girl, uttered under his breath, "Blast the luck! Some other guy always beats me to the prettiest ones!"

Lanta and Chris moved to one side of the stockade, away from the others. For long moments, they seemed to have nothing much to say to each other, but abruptly they were talking, each with more to say than they could find words to express, seized with delighted ecstasy over their reunion.

Later, Lanta approached Doc Savage.

"I did all I could for you," she said apologetically. "But those men, Fancife and Two Wink, have my people terrified. We have no weapon as effective as rifles, you know. The upshot of my argument was that I was thrown in here with you. Did you hear the quarreling outside? Many of my people did not like it." She hesitated, added: "I'm very sorry."

Ham said gallantly: "You've done so much for us already that we're embarrassed."

"What are their plans?" Doc asked.

"About us, you mean?"

"Yes."

"They haven't said so," Lanta explained, "but at the first opportunity, I think they are going to execute all of us."

NO one was particularly surprised, but that did not make it a prospect to induce anything but long faces. Conversation seemed to die of its own weight. The stockade piles cast a shadow, and they gathered there, sitting in almost complete silence. There was not the slightest doubt that everyone was thinking of the same thing—how to escape. They could peer through the small gaps between the stockade piling and see guards pacing.

Farther off, Two Wink was standing on a hillock with two loaded rifles at hand. He hardly took his eyes off the stockade. Later, Fancife replaced him.

Two Wink was on duty with the rifle at the moment. He had positioned himself some distance away, the better to cover all sides of the stockade. He raced forward.

Doc rapped: "Quick! Frighten the things with fire!"

He scooped up, with sticks, a mass of blazing fragments, rushed at the dinosaurs, pitched the stuff in the air. The dinosaurs made their noise, went completely hysterical with fright.

They hit the stockade, and a great section of the thing went down. The pack of working dinosaurs charged through.

"After them!" Doc yelled.

Johnny had demonstrated earlier that it was possible for a man to outrun the ponderous short-legged monsters.

"Keep among the things," Doc warned. "Make it harder for Two Wink to hit us with the rifle."

Chapter XVIII DEATH AND A RACE

THERE was shooting—Two Wink had an automatic rifle and he emptied it as fast as he could trigger out the shots and insert new ammo clips. The bullets made no sound that was audible over the thunder of flight, but several of the dinosaurs squalled in a way that showed they were hit.

The stampede reached an area of rank grasslike growth that was higher than a man's head. Doc and his party veered off and stopped, letting the fright-crazed dinosaurs go on.

Chris Columbus said: "We gotta do somethin' fast. They'll have a hunt organized in a few minutes!"

The statement was hardly needed.

Doc grasped Lanta's arm. "They searched Monk and the others. Do you know where they put the stuff?"

"Probably in the house which Fancife and Two Wink appropriated for themselves."

"Do you know where it is?"

"I'll take you there. I think I may be able to do it without our being seen."

They circled through fields of rankly growing crops. At frequent intervals, they passed stoutly constructed canopies fashioned of poles, after the manner of big grapevines that had been erected as defense against the giant flying pterodactyls, only dangerous type of prehistoric life that could

penetrate past the ponderous defensive gates into the valleys.

"This way," Lanta breathed.

They had reached the houses of her people. These were of stone masonry, built in neat rows well away from the cliff face with its menace of falling rocks. Above both houses and streets was a great trellis construction of stout poles—defense against the pterodactyls, the same as in the fields.

Lanta stopped suddenly.

"Look!" she gasped. "Guards!"

Monk and Renny had picked up clubs somewhere. They flourished these. "Only four guys!" Renny rumbled. "We can bust through easy enough!"

They looked at Doc. The bronze man nodded, led them in the dash into the open.

The guards were armed with short spears and atlals, or throwing sticks. There was no time to fit the throwing sticks. They set themselves with the spears.

Renny and Monk hurled their clubs, got two of the guards down. Doc Savage raced for a third man. Apparently he was going to deliberately impale himself on a spear point. But he twisted coming in, and in a maneuver that was so fast it was a little blurred to the eye, had the short spear.

The fourth guard lunged and jabbed, and Doc fenced with him a moment. Then the bronze man cracked him across the wrists, made him drop the spear. Long Tom, Ham, Johnny, Decimo Tercio and Chris Columbus fell onto the four, began using their fists to make the guards unconscious.

The guards screeched at the full pitch of their lungs.

Inside the square house, they found the stuff that had been removed from their pockets when they were searched. The articles included the machine pistols and assorted ammo drums.

Outside in the street, there was yelling. Monk and the others backed hastily inside.

"If you was figurin' on goin' some place else, better change your mind," Renny rumbled. "Holy cow! The street is full of people. You got no idea how fast they showed up after them guards yelled."

"Two Wink out there?"

"No. Fancife neither. But they'll be here."

Monk scooped up a machine pistol, clipped in an ammo drum, said: "If them guys

thought a rifle was magic, wait until they see one of these gadgets talk.”

Doc stopped him. “Wait.”

“Eh?”

There was an ordinary automatic rifle leaning against the wall, and Doc picked this up to make sure it was loaded.

Next, he loaded three of the machine pistols with different types of ammunition. He thrust the weapons inside his belt—he still wore the shorts, which was the only garment Fancife and Two Wink had left him when they stripped him out in the arctic waste at the base of Target Mountain. The shorts were of elastic silk stuff, were really swim trunks.

“Let me use your coat,” he requested of Renny.

Renny was the only one of the group whose clothing came near being large enough for the bronze man. Doc used the coat to conceal presence of the machine pistols.

“Your handkerchief,” he asked Monk.

Monk’s handkerchiefs were colored horrors. This one was flaming red in hue. Doc rolled it into a tight ball, pocketed it.

The bronze man walked out into the street carrying the rifle.

At least a hundred of Lanta’s people were in the street. To a man, they stopped when they saw the rifle. They understood what the weapon could do.

Lanta came out behind the bronze man to translate for him. They worked fast. Doc first went through a pantomime.

He flourished the rifle, handled it until every eye was drawn to the weapon.

Then, with a contemptuous gesture, he threw the rifle aside.

“Tell them,” he said, “that the rifle is the tool of those who are evil.”

Lanta translated this.

The bronze man then stepped forward, showed both his hands apparently empty, then produced Monk’s red handkerchief. The effect—it was as if the handkerchief came out of the empty air—was a simple manipulation familiar to all magicians and consisted of keeping the tightly balled handkerchief concealed behind one hand or the other while making confusing passes designed to show the hand empty.

“Tell them,” Doc continued, “that their deities are disgusted with them and have sent a flame to aid us against them.”

While Lanta was putting that in the native language, Doc made more passes with the handkerchief, and contrived to get one of the machine pistols wrapped inside it.

“What next?” Lanta asked.

“Suggest that they watch the work of the flame.”

The machine pistol he held was charged with explosive bullets, tiny things of unearthly power. Doc aimed at a house, fired.

There was a terrible blast, and most of one wall and the roof of the house climbed into the air.

As soon as the echoes—they came gobbling back from the canyon walls in salvo after salvo—died down, the bronze man demolished another house.

During the confusion of that blast, he managed to change the machine pistol loaded with explosives for one which would fire tear-gas capsules.

“Now inform them,” he told Lanta, “that the flame will breathe the angry breath of its wrath upon them.”

The machine pistol made a bull-fiddle moan that, once it was mixing with the echoes, was a sound that might have been mistaken for anything. Doc swung the muzzle as he sprayed tear-gas capsules that struck and burst in the crowd.

Doc said, “Tell them—” then leaped suddenly, seized Lanta and flung her into the house where they had found the machine pistols. A rifle smashed out twice before they got under cover, but neither bullet touched them.

“Fancife got here!” Monk yelled.

THERE was uproar and confusion in the street.

Doc said, “Out the back way,” and they rushed into a pleasant little garden. They scrambled over a long stone wall, found themselves in a maze of other gardens and houses.

Fancife’s rifle snapped again. Renny rumbled: “Holy cow!” and turned completely around, then got himself organized and roared, “My arm! Hit me in the arm! Go on and get ‘im!”

Doc leaped, seized one of the poles that formed the protective grille against pterodactyls, and swung atop this. The poles were not far apart; he could travel from one to the other.

Two Wink was crawling to Fancife's aid, working through a garden, all his attention riveted ahead. Apparently it had never occurred to him that danger would be above.

He made a sound like a stepped-on frog when Doc dropped atop him. Then, after the bronze man hit him, Two Wink's legs twitched, and kept on twitching all the time that he was unconscious, making the same kind of involuntary movements as a nervous sleeping dog.

Fancife—he was off to the right—suddenly yelled out. His howl was angry, threatening. Then his voice was frightened. And then he was emptying his rifle. Five times the gun whipped lead. After that, Fancife got up and ran.

The inhabitants of the strange lost-world valleys had turned upon him.

Fancife used a system in his flight. He would spring until winded. Then he would stop, reload his rifle and empty the weapon.

His pursuers did not press him too hard. He was fleeing toward the great gates. They were satisfied to let him go.

Doc said: "We may be able to head him off from the gate."

They failed to do it. Fancife had forced the gate guards to twist the giant windlass devices that opened the panels, and he was sprinting through the comparatively open area that was set with the sharpened timbers that formed the outer defense against dinosaurs.

Doc waited for Monk and the others.

"Careful!" the bronze man warned. "He will take shelter in the jungle and use that rifle on us."

They got down—there was a croppped weedy growth about two feet high that concealed them—and crawled forward with infinite care until they heard Fancife's rifle begin smashing as rapidly as the mechanism would function.

No bullets came near them, however.

"I wonder what he's shootin' at?" gaunt Johnny pondered. He raised his head cautiously, then erected his whole considerable length. "I'll be superamalgamated!"

They could see Fancife, and what was wrong with him.

Johnny muttered, "I'll be superamal—"

"You'll be more than that if we don't travel," Monk interjected. "Here come some of the things this way! Come on!"

They put their chins up and tucked their elbows close to their sides and ran. The gates, fortunately, were still ajar. They piled through, worked frantically with the big winches.

A few of the animals—weasel-like, except that they were near two feet in length—got through before the gates could be closed. Long Tom and Renny disposed of them with clubs. They were the same type of bloodthirsty little terrors that had given Doc Savage such trouble earlier.

Renny came up, holding his arm, grimacing. "You know what happened back at the village?"

"What?"

"Two Wink—those people found him and somebody—well, Two Wink is dead!"

Out at the edge of the jungle, Fancife had stopped screaming. Renny took a look through the gates, then stepped back swiftly and looked as if he was going to be a little sick.

It was a long time before anything more was said.

"He came here looking for those animals," Monk muttered finally, "and they found him."

IT took four days for a rather pleasant fact to dawn upon them; at least the interval was four days according to their watches, there being no other convenient method of judging the elapse of time. Not that a time measurement was needed—because life in the canyons was almost completely idyllic. Chris Columbus expressed it most briefly.

"I'm not going back," he said.

"Why not?" asked the astonished Monk.

Chris said: "I like the place. I've got a swell girl. Why should I go back?"

Decimo Tercio used somewhat more words, but it amounted to the same thing.

"Long ago, I have figure it out," Tercio explained. "When I first get here, it is not because I want to come, and I am very impatient, because I do not know many things. I do not know that there is no disease here, and no war, because there is nobody much to fight, except an occasional stupid band of cave dwellers, and they never raid

the guard house. Soon after, a supply of hams was missed, and all the evidence led to Ham, who denied his guilt. It gave him the name, and the cause for the continual battle between the two. Yet, when it comes to a showdown, they would gladly give their lives for each other.

Renny, or Colonel John Renwick, is a leading engineer. And his huge fists enjoy knocking through wooden panels. He likes a fight better than a slide rule. Long Tom, the electrical wizard, and Johnny, the geologist and archaeologist, complete the group. Johnny is William Harper Littlejohn; Long Tom is Major Thomas J. Roberts.



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