

THE MAN OF BRONZE

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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The MAN of BRONZE

. . . A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL . . .

of the exploits of Doc Savage and his five companions; a thrilling saga of a scrappy outfit hunting a treasure and being hunted in turn

By **KENNETH ROBESON**

Chapter I THE SINISTER ONE

THERE was death afoot in the darkness.

It crept furtively along a steel girder. Hundreds of feet below yawned glass-and-brick-walled cracks—New York streets. Down there, late workers scurried homeward.

Most of them carried umbrellas, and did not glance upward.

Even had they looked, they probably would have noticed nothing. The night was black as a cave bat. Rain thrashed down monotonously. The clammy sky was like an oppressive shroud wrapped around the tops of the tall buildings.

One skyscraper was under construction. It had been completed to the eightieth floor. Some offices were in use.

Above the eightieth floor, an ornamental observation tower jutted up a full hundred and fifty feet more. The metal work of this was in place, but no masonry had been laid. Girders lifted a gigantic steel skeleton. The naked beams were a sinister forest.

It was in this forest that Death prowled.

Death was a man.

He seemed to have the adroitness of a cat at finding his way in the dark. Upward, he crept. The girders were slick with rain, treacherous. The man's progress was gruesome in its vile purpose.

From time to time, he spat strange, clucking words. A gibberish of hate!

A master of languages would have been baffled trying to name the tongue the man spoke. A profound student might have identified the dialect. The knowledge would be hard to believe, for the words were of a lost race, the language of a civilization long vanished!

"He must die!" the man chanted hoarsely in his strange lingo. "It is decreed by the Son of the Feathered Serpent! Tonight! Tonight death shall strike!"

Each time he raved his paeon of hate, the man hugged an object he carried closer to his chest.

This object was a box, black, leather-covered. It was about four inches deep and four feet long.

"This shall bring death to him!" the man clucked, caressing the black case.

The rain beat him. Steel-fanged space gaped below. One slip would be his death. He climbed upward yard after yard.

Most of the chimneys which New Yorkers call office buildings had been emptied of their daily toilers. There were only occasional pale eyes of light gleaming from their sides.

The labyrinth of girders baffled the skulker a moment. He poked a flashlight beam inquisitively. The glow lasted a bare instant, but it disclosed a remarkable thing about the man's hands.

The finger tips were a brilliant red! They might have been dipped an inch of their length in a scarlet dye.

The red-fingered man scuttled onto a workmen's platform. The planks were thick. The platform was near the outside of the wilderness of steel.

The man lowered his black case. His inner pocket disgorged compact, powerful binoculars.

ON the lowermost floor of a skyscraper many blocks distant, the crimson-fingered man focused his glasses. He started counting stories upward.

The building was one of the tallest in New York. A gleaming spike of steel and brick, it rammed upward nearly a hundred stories.

At the eighty-sixth floor, the sinister man ceased to count. His glasses moved right and left until they found a lighted window. This was at the west corner of the building.

Only slightly blurred by the rain, the powerful binoculars disclosed what was in the room.

The broad, polished top of a massive and exquisitely inlaid table stood directly before the window.

Beyond it was the bronze figure!

This looked like the head and shoulders of a man, sculptured in hard bronze. It was a startling sight, that bronze bust. The lines of the features, the unusually high forehead, the mobile and muscular, but not too-full mouth, the lean cheeks, denoted a power of character seldom seen.

The bronze of the hair was a little darker than the bronze of the features. The hair was straight, and lay down tightly as a metal skullcap. A genius at sculpture might have made it.

Most marvelous of all were the eyes. They glittered like pools of flake gold when little lights from the table lamp played on them. Even from that distance they seemed to exert a hypnotic influence through the powerful binocular lenses, a quality that would cause the most rash individual to hesitate.

The man with the scarlet-tipped fingers shuddered.

"Death!" he croaked, as if seeking to overcome the unnerving quality of those strange, golden eyes. "The Son of the Feathered Serpent has commanded. It shall be death!"

He opened the black box. Faint metallic clickings sounded as he fitted together parts of the thing it held. After that, he ran his fingers lovingly over the object.

"The tool of the Son of the Feathered Serpent!" he chortled. "It shall deliver death!"

Once more, he pressed the binoculars to his eyes and focused them on the amazing bronze statue.

The bronze masterpiece opened its mouth, yawned—for it was no statue, but a living man!

THE bronze man showed wide, very strong-looking teeth, in yawning. Seated there by the immense desk, he did not seem to be a large man. An onlooker would have doubted his six feet height—and would have been astounded to learn he weighed every ounce of two hundred pounds.

The big bronze man was so well put together that the impression was not of size, but of power. The bulk of his great body was forgotten in the smooth symmetry of a build incredibly powerful.

This man was Clark Savage, Jr.

Doc Savage! The man whose name was becoming a byword in the odd corners of the world!

Apparently no sound had entered the room. But the big bronze man left his chair. He went to the door. The hand he opened the door with was long-fingered, supple. Yet its enormous tendons were like cables under a thin film of bronze lacquer.

Doc Savage's keenness of hearing was vindicated. Five men were getting out of the elevator cage, which had come up silently.

These men came toward Doc. There was wild delight in their manner. But for some sober reason, they did not shout boisterous greetings. It was as though Doc bore a great grief, and they sympathized deeply with him, but didn't know what to say.

The first of the five men was a giant who towered four inches over six feet. He weighed fully two fifty. His face was severe, his mouth thin and grim, and compressed tightly, as though he had just finished uttering a disapproving, "Tsk tsk!" sound. His features had a most puritanical look.

This was "Renny," or Colonel John Renwick. His arms were enormous, his fists bony monstrosities. His favorite act was to

slam his great fists through the solid panel of a heavy door. He was known throughout the world for his engineering accomplishments, also.

Behind Renny came William Harper Littlejohn. Very tall, very gaunt. Johnny wore glasses with a peculiarly thick lens over the left eye. He looked like a half-starved, studious scientist. He was probably one of the greatest living experts on geology and archaeology.

Next was Major Thomas J. Roberts, dubbed "Long Tom". Long Tom was the physical weakling of the crowd, thin, not very tall, and with a none-too-healthy-appearing skin. He was a wizard with electricity.

"Ham" trailed Long Tom. "Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks," Ham was designated on formal occasions. Slender, waspy, quick-moving, Ham looked what he was—a quick thinker and possibly the most astute lawyer Harvard ever turned out. He carried a plain black cane—never went anywhere without it. This was, among other things, a sword cane.

Last came the most remarkable character of all. Only a few inches over five feet tall, he weighed better than two hundred and sixty pounds. He had the build of a gorilla, arms six inches longer than his legs, a chest thicker than it was wide. His eyes were so surrounded by gristle as to resemble pleasant little stars twinkling in pits. He grinned with a mouth so very big it looked like an accident.

"Monk!" No other name could fit him!

He was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, but he heard the full name so seldom he had about forgotten what it sounded like.

THE men entered the sumptuously furnished reception room of the office suite. After the first greeting, they were silent, uncomfortable. They didn't know what to say.

Doc Savage's father had died from a weird cause since they last saw Doc.

The elder Savage had been known throughout the world for his dominant bearing and his good work. Early in life, he had amassed a tremendous fortune—for one purpose.

That purpose was to go here and there, from one end of the world to the other, looking for excitement and adventure, striving

to help those who needed help, punishing those who deserved it.

To that creed he had devoted his life.

His fortune had dwindled to practically nothing. But as it shrank, his influence had increased. It was unbelievably wide, a heritage befitting the man.

Greater even, though, was the heritage he had given his son. Not in wealth, but in training to take up his career of adventure and righting of wrongs where it left off.

Clark Savage, Jr., had been reared from the cradle to become the supreme adventurer.

Hardly had Doc learned to walk, when his father started him taking the routine of exercises to which he still adhered. Two hours each day, Doc exercised intensively all his muscles, senses, and his brain.

As a result of these exercises, Doc possessed a strength superhuman. There was no magic about it, though. Doc had simply built up muscle intensively all his life.

Doc's mental training had started with medicine and surgery. It had branched out to include all arts and sciences. Just as Doc could easily overpower the gorillalike Monk in spite of his great strength, so did Doc know more about chemistry. And that applied to Renny, the engineer; Long Tom, the electrical wizard; Johnny, the geologist and archaeologist; and Ham, the lawyer.

Doc had been well trained for his work.

Grief lay heavily upon Doc's five friends. The elder Savage had been close to their hearts.

"Your father's death—was three weeks ago," Renny said at last.

Doc nodded slowly. "So I learned from the newspapers—when I got back today."

Renny groped for words, said finally: "We tried to get you in every way. But you were gone—as if you had been off the face of the earth."

Doc looked at the window. There was grief in his gold eyes.

Chapter II A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD

FALLING rain strewed the outer side of the windowpane with water. Far below, very pallid in the soaking murk, were street lights. Over on the Hudson River, a steamer was tooting a foghorn. The frightened, moaning horn was hardly audible inside the room.

Some blocks away, the skyscraper under construction loomed a darksome pile, crowned with a spidery labyrinth of steel girders. Only the vaguest outlines of it were discernible.

Impossible, of course, to glimpse the strange, crimson-fingered servant of death in that wilderness of metal!

Doc Savage said slowly: "I was far away when my father died."

He did not explain where he had been, did not mention his "Fortress of Solitude," his rendezvous built on a rocky island deep in the arctic regions. He had been there.

It was to this spot that Doc retired periodically to brush up on the newest developments in science, psychology, medicine, engineering. This was the secret of his universal knowledge, for his periods of concentration there were long and intense.

The Fortress of Solitude had been his father's recommendation. And no one on earth knew the location of the retreat. Once there, nothing could interrupt Doc's studies and experiments.

Without taking his golden eyes from the wet window, Doc asked: "Was there anything strange about my father's death?"

"We're not certain," Renny muttered, and set his thin lips in an expression of ominousness.

"I, for one, am certain!" snapped Littlejohn. He settled more firmly on his nose the glasses which had the extremely thick left lens.

"What do you mean, Johnny?" Doc Savage asked.

"I am positive your father was murdered!" Johnny's gauntness, his studious scientist look, gave him a profoundly serious expression.

Doc Savage swung slowly from the window. His bronze face had not changed expression. But under his brown business

coat, tensing muscles had made his arms inches farther around.

"Why do you say that, Johnny?"

Johnny hesitated. His right eye narrowed, the left remaining wide and a little blank behind the thick spectacle lens. He shrugged.

"Only a hunch," he admitted, then added, almost shouting: "I'm right about it! I know I am!"

That was Johnny's way. He had absolute faith in what he called his hunches. And nearly always he was right. On occasions when he was wrong, though, he was very wrong indeed.

"Exactly what did the doctors say caused death?" Doc asked. Doc's voice was low, pleasant, but a voice capable of great volume and changing tone.

Renny answered that. Renny's voice was like thunder gobbling out of a cave. "The doctors didn't know. It was a new one on them. Your father broke out with queer circular red patches on his neck. And he lasted only a couple of days."

"I ran all kinds of chemical tests, trying to find if it was poison or germs or what it was caused the red spots," Monk interposed, slowly opening and closing his huge, red-furred fists. "I never found out a thing!"

Monk's looks were deceiving. His low forehead apparently didn't contain room for a spoonful of brains. Actually, Monk was in a way of being the most widely known chemist in America. He was a Houdini of the test tubes.

"We have no facts upon which to base suspicion!" clipped Ham, the waspish Harvard lawyer whose quick thinking had earned him a brigadier generalship in the World War. "But we're suspicious anyway."

Doc Savage moved abruptly across the room to a steel safe. The safe was huge, reaching above his shoulders. He swung it open.

It was instantly evident explosive had torn the lock out of the safe door.

A long, surprised gasp swished around the room.

"I found it broken into when I came back," Doc explained. "Maybe that has a connection with my father's death. Maybe not."

DOC'S movements were rhythmic as he swung over and perched on a corner of the big, inlaid table before the window. His eyes roved slowly over the beautifully furnished office. There was another office adjoining, larger, which contained a library of technical books that was priceless because of its completeness.

Adjoining that was the vast laboratory room, replete with apparatus for chemical and electrical experiments.

This was about all the worldly goods the elder Savage had left behind.

"What's eating you, Doc?" asked the giant Renny. "We all got the word from you to show up here tonight. Why?"

Doc Savage's strange golden eyes roved over the assembled men; from Renny, whose knowledge of engineering in all its branches was profound, to Long Tom, who was an electrical wizard, to Johnny, whose fund of information on the structure of the earth and ancient races which had inhabited it was extremely vast, to Ham, the clever Harvard lawyer and quick thinker, and finally to Monk, who, in spite of his resemblance to a gorilla, was a great chemist.

In these five men, Doc knew he had five of the greatest brains ever to assemble in one group. Each was surpassed in his field by only one human being—Doc Savage himself.

"I think you can guess why you are here," Doc said.

Monk rubbed his hairy hands together. Of the six men present, Monk's skin alone bore scars. The skin of the others held no marks of their adventurous past, thanks to Doc's uncanny skill in causing wounds to heal without leaving scars.

But not Monk. His tough, rusty iron hide was so marked with gray scars that it looked as if a flock of chickens with gray-chalk feet had paraded on him. This was because Monk refused to let Doc treat him. Monk gloried in his tough looks.

"Our big job is about to start, huh?" said Monk, vast satisfaction in his mild voice.

Doc nodded. "The work to which we shall devote the rest of our lives."

At that statement, great satisfaction appeared upon the face of every man present. They showed eagerness for what was to come.

Doc dangled a leg from the corner of the table. Unwittingly—for he knew nothing of

the red-fingered killer lurking in the distant skyscraper that was under construction—Doc had placed his back out of line with the window. In fact, since the men had entered, he had not once been aligned with the window.

"We first got together back in the War," he told the five slowly. "We all liked the big scrap. It got into our blood. When we came back, the humdrum life of an ordinary man was not suited to our natures. So we sought something else."

Doc held their absolute attention, as if he had them hypnotized. Undeniably this golden-eyed man was the leader of the group, as well as leader of anything he undertook. His very being denoted a calm knowledge of all things, and an ability to handle himself under any conditions.

"Moved by mutual admiration for my father," Doc continued, "we decided to take up his work of good wherever he was forced to leave off. We at once began training ourselves for that purpose. It is the cause for which I had been reared from the cradle, but you fellows, because of a love of excitement and adventure, wish to join me."

Doc Savage paused. He looked over his companions. One by one, in the soft light of the well-furnished office, one of the few remaining evidences of the wealth that once belonged to his father.

"Tonight," he went on soberly, "we begin carrying out the ideals of my father—to go here and there, from one end of the world to the other, looking for excitement and adventure, striving to help those who need help, and punishing those who deserve it."

THERE was a somber silence after that immense pronunciation.

It was Monk, matter-of-fact person that he was, who shattered the quiet.

"What flubdubs me is who broke into that safe, and why?" he grumbled. "Doc, could it have any connection with your father's death?"

"It could, of course," Doc explained. "The contents of the safe had been rifled. I do not know whether my father had anything of importance in it. But I suspect there was."

Doc drew a folded paper from inside his coat. The lower half of the paper had been burned away, it was evident from the charred edges. Doc continued speaking.

"Finding this in a corner of the safe leads me to that belief. The explosion which opened the safe obviously destroyed the lower part of the paper. And the robber probably overlooked the rest. Here, read it!"

He passed it to the five men. The paper was covered with the fine, almost engraving-perfect writing of Doc's father. They all recognized the penmanship instantly. They read:

CLARK: I have many things to tell you. In your whole lifetime, there never was an occasion when I desired you here so much as I do now. I need you, son, because many things have happened which indicate to me that my last journey is at hand. You will find that I have nothing much to leave you in the way of tangible wealth.

I have, however, the satisfaction of knowing that in you I shall live.

I have developed you from boyhood into the sort of man you have become, and I have spared no time or expense to make you just what I think you should be.

Everything I have done for you has been with the purpose that you should find yourself capable of carrying on the work which hopefully started, and which, in these last few years, has been almost impossible to carry on.

If I do not see you again before this letter is in your hands, I want to assure you that I appreciate the fact that you have lacked nothing in the way of filial devotion. That you have been absent so much of the time has been a secret source of gratification to me, for your absence has, I know, made you self-reliant and able. It was all that I hoped for you.

Now, as to the heritage which I am about to leave you:

What I am passing along to you may be a doubtful heritage. It may be a heritage of woe. It may even be a heritage of destruction to you if you attempt to capitalize on it. On the other hand, it may enable you to do many things for those who are not so fortunate as you yourself, and will, in that way, be a boon for you in carrying on your work of doing good to all.

Here is the general information concerning it:

Some twenty years ago, in company with Hubert Robertson, I went on an

expedition to Hidalgo, in Central America, to investigate the report of a prehistoric—

There the missive ended. Flames had consumed the rest.

"The thing to do is get hold of Hubert Robertson!" clipped the quick-thinking Ham. Waspish, rapid-moving, he swung over to the telephone, scooped it up. "I know Hubert Robertson's phone number. He is connected with the Museum of Natural History."

"You won't get him!" Doc said dryly.

"Why not?"

Doc got off the table and stood beside the giant Renny. It was only then that one realized what a big man Doc was. Alongside Renny, Doc was like dynamite alongside gunpowder.

"Hubert Robertson is dead," Doc explained. "He died from the same thing that killed my father—a weird malady that started with a breaking out of red spots. And he died at about the same time as my father."

WHAT IS THE LEGACY?

What is the doubtful heritage which is left to Doc Savage to secure? And will it bring him the woe that is foretold, or the success which is hoped for?

Take a scrapper like Doc, and a prize such as the message offers—and you've got the makings of a real he-man's story in this yarn.

Go through with Doc and his pals to the end. You'll like it.

RENNY'S thin mouth pinched even tighter at that. Gloom seemed to settle on his long face. He looked like a man disgusted enough with the evils of the world to cry.

Strangely enough, that somber look denoted that Renny was beginning to take interest. The tougher the going got, the better Renny functioned and—the more puritanical he looked.

"That flooys our chances of finding out more about this heritage your father left you!" he rumbled.

"Not entirely," Doc corrected. "Wait here a moment!"

He stepped through another door, crossed the room banked with the volumes of his father's great technical library. Through a second door, and he was in the laboratory.

Cases laden with chemicals stood thick as forest trees on the floor. There were electrical coils, vacuum tubes, ray apparatus, microscopes, retorts, electric furnaces, everything that could go into such a laboratory.

From a cabinet Doc lifted a metal box closely resembling an old-fashioned magic lantern. The lens, instead of being ordinary optical glass, was a very dark purple, almost black. There was a cord for plugging into an electric-light socket.

Doc carried this into the room where his five men waited, placed it on a stand, aiming the lens at the window. He plugged the cord into an electric outlet.

Before putting the thing in operation, he lifted the metal lid and beckoned to Long Tom, the electrical wizard.

"Know what this is?"

"Of course." Long Tom pulled absently at an ear that was too big, too thin and too pale. "That is a lamp for making ultra-violet rays, or what is commonly called black light. The rays are invisible to the human eye, since they are shorter than ordinary light, but many substances when placed in the black light will glow, or fluoresce after the fashion of luminous paint on a watch dial. Examples of such substances are ordinary vaseline, quinine—"

"That's plenty," interposed Doc. "Will you look at the window I've pointed this at. See anything unusual about it?"

Johnny, the gaunt archaeologist and geologist, advanced to the window, removing his glasses as he went. He held the thick-lensed left glass before his right eye, inspecting the window.

In reality, the left side of Johnny's glasses was an extremely powerful magnifying lens. His work often required a magnifier, so he wore one over his left eye, which was virtually useless because of an injury received in the World War.

"I can find nothing!" Johnny declared. "There's nothing unusual about the window!"

"I hope you're wrong," Doc said, sobriety in his wondrously modulated voice. "But you could not see the writing on that

window, should there be any. The substance my father perfected for leaving secret messages was absolutely invisible. But it glows under ultra-violet light."

"You mean—" hairy Monk rumbled.

"That my father and I often left each other notes written on that window," Doc explained. "Watch!"

Doc crossed the room, a big, dynamic man, light on his feet as a kitten for all his size, and turned out the lights. He came back to the black-light box. His hand, supple despite its enormous tendons, clicked the switch that shot current into the apparatus.

Instantly, written words sprang out on the darkened windowpane. Glowing with a dazzling, electric blue, the effect of their sudden appearance was uncanny.

A split second later came a terrific report! A bullet knocked the glass into hundreds of fragments, wiping out the sparkling blue message before they could read it. The bullet passed entirely through the steel-plate inner door of the safe! It embedded in the safe back.

THE room reeked silence. One second, two! Nobody had moved.

And then a new sound was heard. It was a low, mellow, trilling sound, like the song of some strange bird of the jungle, or the sound of the wind filtering through a jungled forest. It was melodious, though it had no tune; and it was inspiring, though it was not awesome.

The amazing sound had the peculiar quality of seeming to come from everywhere within the room rather than from a definite spot, as though permeated with an eerie essence of ventriloquism.

A purposeful calm settled over Doc Savage's five men as they heard that sound. Their breathing became less rapid, their brains more alert.

For this weird sound was part of Doc—a small, unconscious thing which he did in moments of utter concentration. To his friends it was both the cry of battle and the song of triumph. It would come upon his lips when a plan of action was being arranged, precursing a master stroke which made all things certain.

It would come again in the midst of some struggle, when the odds were all

against his men, when everything seemed lost. And with the sound, new strength would come to all, and the tide would always turn.

And again, it might come when some beleaguered member of the group, alone and attacked, had almost given up all hope of survival. Then that sound would filter through, some way, and the victim knew that help was at hand.

The whistling sound was a sign of Doc, and of safety, of victory.

"Who got it?" asked Johnny, and he could be heard settling his glasses more firmly on his bony nose.

"No one," said Doc. "Let us crawl, brothers, crawl. That was no ordinary rifle bullet, from the sound of it!"

At that instant, a second bullet crashed into the room. It came, not through the window, but through some inches of brick and mortar which comprised the wall! Plaster sprayed across the thick carpet.

Chapter III THE ENEMY

DOC SAVAGE was the last of the six to enter the adjoining room. But he was inside the room in less than ten seconds. They moved with amazing speed, these men.

Doc flashed across the big library. The speed with which he traversed the darkness, never disturbing an article of furniture, showed the marvelous development of his senses. No jungle cat could have done better.

Expensive binoculars reposed in a desk drawer, a highpower hunting rifle in a corner cabinet. In splits of seconds, Doc had these, and was at the window.

He watched, waited.

No more shots followed the first two.

Four minutes, five, Doc bored into the night with the binoculars. He peered into every office window within range, and there were hundreds. He scrutinized the spidery framework of the observation tower atop the skyscraper under construction. Darkness packed the labyrinth of girders, and he could discern no trace of the bushwhacker.

"He's gone!" Doc concluded aloud.

No sound of movement followed his words. Then the window shade ran down loudly in the room where they had been shot

at. The five men stiffened, then relaxed at Doc's low call, Doc had moved soundlessly to the shade and drawn it.

Doc was beside the safe, the lights turned on, when they entered.

The window glass had been clouted completely out of the sash. It lay in glistening chunks and spears on the luxuriant carpet.

The glowing message which had been on it seemed destroyed forever.

"Somebody was laying for me outside," Doc said, no worry at all in his well-developed voice. "They evidently couldn't get just the aim they wanted at me through the window. When we turned out the light to look at the writing on the window, they thought we were leaving the building. So they took a couple of shots for wild luck."

"Next time, Doc, suppose we have bulletproof glass in these windows!" Renny suggested, the humor in his voice belying his dour look.

"Sure," said Doc. "Next time! We're on the eighty-sixth floor, and it's quite common to be shot at here!"

Ham interposed a sarcastic snort. He bounced over, waspish, quick-moving, and nearly managed to thrust his slender arm through the hole the bullet had tunneled in the brick wall.

"Even if you put in bulletproof windows, you'd have to be blame careful to set in front of them!" he clipped dryly.

Doc was studying the hole in the safe door, noting particularly the angle at which the powerful bullet had entered. He opened the safe. The big bullet, almost intact, was embedded in the safe rear wall.

Renny ran a great arm into the safe, grasped the bullet with his fingers. His giant arm muscles corded as he tried to pull it out. The fist that could drive bodily through inch-thick planking with perfect ease was defied by the embedded metal slug.

"Whew!" snorted Renny. "That's a job for a drill and cold chisels."

Saying nothing, merely as if he wanted to see if the bullet was stuck as tightly as Renny said, Doc reached into the safe.

Great muscles popping up along his arm suddenly split his coat sleeve wide open. He glanced at the ruined sleeve ruefully, and brought his arm out of the safe. The bullet lay loosely in his palm.

RENNY could not have looked more astounded had a spike-tailed devil hopped out of the safe. The expression on his puritanical face was ludicrous.

Doc weighed the bullet in his palm. The lids were drawn over his golden eyes. He seemed to be giving his marvelous brain every chance to work—and he was. He was guessing the weight of that bullet within a few grains, almost as accurately as a chemist's scale could weigh it.

"Seven hundred and fifty grains," he decided, "That makes it a .577 caliber Nitro-Express rifle. Probably the gun that fired that shot was a double-barreled rifle."

"How d'you figure that?" asked Ham. Possibly the most astute of Doc's five friends, Doc's reasoning nevertheless got away from even Ham.

"There were only two shots," Doc clarified. "Also, cartridges of this tremendous size are usually fired from double-barreled elephant rifles."

"Let's do somethin' about this!" boomed Monk. "The bushwhacker may get away while we're jawin'!"

"He's probably fled already, since I could locate no trace of him with the binoculars," Doc replied. "But we'll do something about it, right enough!"

With exactly four terse sentences, one each directed at Renny, Long Tom, Johnny, and Monk, Doc gave all the orders he needed to. He did not explain in detail what they were to do. That wasn't necessary. He merely gave them the idea of what he wanted, and they set to work and got it in short order. They were clever, these men of Doc's.

Renny, the engineer, picked a slide rule from the drawer of a desk, a pair of dividers, some paper, a length of string. He probed the angle at which the bullet had passed through the inner safe door, calculated expertly the slight amount the window had probably deflected it. In less than a minute, he had his string aligned from the safe to a spot midway in the window, and was sighting down it.

"Snap out of it, Long Tom!" he called impatiently.

"Just keep your shirt on!" Long Tom complained. He was doing his own share as rapidly as the engineer.

Long Tom had made a swift swing into the library and laboratory, collecting odds and ends of electrical material. With a couple of powerful light bulbs he unscrewed from sockets, some tin, a pocket mirror he borrowed from—of all people—Monk, Long Tom rigged an apparatus to project a thin, extremely powerful beam of light. He added a flashlight lens, and borrowed the magnifying half of Johnny's glasses before he got just the effect he desired.

Long Tom sighted his light beam down Renny's string, thus locating precisely in the gloomy mass of skyscrapers, the spot from whence the shots had come.

In the meantime, Johnny, with fingers and eye made expert by years of assembling bits of pottery from ancient ruins, and the bones of prehistoric monsters, was fitting the shattered windowpane together. A task that would have taken a layman hours, Johnny accomplished in minutes.

Johnny turned the black-light apparatus on the glass. The message in glowing blue sprang out. Intact!

Monk came waddling in from the laboratory. In the big furry hands that swung below his knees, he carried several bottles, tightly corked. They held a fluid of villainous color.

Monk, from the wealth of chemical formulas within his head, had compounded a gas with which to fight their opponents, should they succeed in cornering whoever had fired that shot. It was a gas that would instantly paralyze any one who inhaled it, but the effects were only temporary, and not harmful.

THEY all gathered around the table on which Johnny had assembled the fragments of glass. All but Renny, who was still calculating his angles. And as Doc flashed the light upon the glass, they read the message written there:

Important papers back of the red brick—

Before the message could mean anything to their minds, Renny shouted his discovery.

"It's from the observation tower, on that unfinished skyscraper," he cried. "That's where the shot came from—and the

sharpshooter must still be somewhere up there!"

"Let's go!" Doc ordered, and the men surged out into the massive, shining corridor of the building, straight to the battery of elevators.

If they noticed that Doc tarried behind several seconds, none of them remarked the fact. Doc was always doing little things like that—little things that often turned out to have amazing consequences later.

The men piled into the opened elevator with a suddenness that startled the dozing operator. He wouldn't be able to sleep on the job the rest of the night!

With a whine like a lost pup, the cage sank.

Grimly silent, Doc and his five friends were a remarkable collection of men. They so impressed the elevator operator that he would have shot the lift past the first floor into the basement, had Doc not dropped a bronze, long-fingered hand on the control.

Doc led out through the lobby at a trot. A taxi was cocked in at the curb, driver dreaming over the wheel. Four of the six men piled into the machine. Doc and Renny rode the running board.

"Do a Barney Oldfield!" Doc directed the cab driver.

The hack jumped away from the curb as if stung.

Rain sheeted against Doc's strong, bronzed face, and his straight, close-lying bronze hair. An unusual fact was at once evident. Doc's bronze skin and bronze hair had the strange quality of seeming impervious to water. They didn't get appreciably wet; he shed water like the proverbial duck's back.

The streets were virtually deserted in this shopping region. Over toward the theater district, perhaps, there would be a crowd.

Brakes giving one long squawk, the taxi skidded sidewise to the curb and stopped. Doc and Renny were instantly running for the entrance of the new skyscraper. The four passengers came out of the cab door as if blown out. Ham still carried his plain black cane.

"My pay!" howled the taxi driver.

"Wait for us!" Doc flung back at him.

In the recently finished building lobby, Doc yelled for the watchman. He got

no answer. He was puzzled. There should be one around.

They entered an elevator, sent it upward to the topmost floor. Still no watchman! They sprang up a staircase to where all construction but steel work ceased. There they found the watchmen.

The man, a big Irishman with cheeks so plump and red they looked like the halves of Christmas apples, was bound and gagged. He was indeed grateful when Doc turned him loose—but quite astounded. For Doc, not bothering with the knots, simply freed the Irishman by snapping the stout ropes with his fingers as easily as he would cords.

"Begorra, man!" muttered the Irishman. "'Tis not human yez can be, with a strength like that!"

"Who tied you up?" Doc asked compellingly. "What did he look like?"

"Faith, I dunno!" declared the son of Erin. "'Twas not a single look or a smell I got of him, except for one thing. The fingers of the man were red on the ends. Like he had dipped 'em in blood!"

ON up into the wilderness of steel girders, the six men climbed. They left the Irishman behind, rubbing spots where the ropes had hurt him, and mumbling to himself about a man who broke ropes with his fingers, and another man who had red finger tips.

"This is about the right height!" said the gaunt Johnny, bounding at Doc's heels. "He was shooting from about here."

Johnny was hardly breathing rapidly. A tall, poorly looking man, Johnny nevertheless exceeded all the others, excepting Doc, in endurance. He had been known to go for three days and three nights steadily with only a slice of bread and a canteen of water.

Doc veered right. He had taken a flashlight from an inside pocket.

It was not like other flashlights, that one of Doc's. It employed no battery. A tiny, powerful generator, built into the handle and driven by a stout spring and clockwork, supplied the current. One twist of the flash handle would wind the spring and furnish light current for some minutes. A special receptacle held spare bulbs. There was not much chance of Doc's light playing out.

The flash spiked a white rod of luminance ahead. It picked up a workman's platform of heavy planks.

"The shot came from there!" Doc vouchsafed.

A steel girder, a few inches wide, slippery with moisture, offered a short cut to the platform. Doc ran along it, surefooted as a bronze spider on a web thread. His five men, knowing they would be flirting with death among the steel beams hundreds of feet below, decided to go around, and did it very carefully.

Doc had picked two empty cartridges off the platform, and was scrutinizing them when his five friends put relieved feet on the planks.

"A cannon!" Monk gulped, after one look at the great size of the cartridges.

"Not quite," Doc replied. "They are cartridges for the elephant rifle I told you about. And it was a double-barreled rifle the sniper used."

"What makes you so sure, Doc?" asked big, sober-faced Renny.

Doc pointed at the plank surface of the platform. Barely visible were two tiny marks, side by side. Now that Doc had called their attention to the marks, the others knew they had been made by the muzzle of a double-barreled elephant rifle rested for a moment on the boards.

"He was a short man," Doc added. "Shorter, even, than Long Tom, here. And much wider."

"Huh?" This was beyond even quick-thinking Ham.

Seemingly unaware of their great height, and the certain death the slightest misstep would bring, Doc swung around the group and back the easy route they had come. He pointed to a girder which, because of the roof effect of another girder above, was dry on one side. But there was a damp smear on the dry steel.

"The sniper rubbed it with his shoulder in passing," Doc explained. "That shows how tall he is. It also shows he has wide shoulders, because only a wide-shouldered man would rub the girder. Now—"

Doc fell suddenly silent. As rigid as if he were the hard bronze he so resembled, he poised against the girder. His glittering golden eyes seemed to grow luminous in the darkness.

"What is it, Doc?" asked Renny.

"Some one just struck a match—up there in the room where we were shot at!" He interrupted himself with an explosive sound. "There! He's lighted another!"

Doc instantly whipped the binoculars—he had brought them along from the office—from his pocket. He aimed them at the window.

He got but a fragmentary glimpse. The match was about burned out. Only the tips of the prowler's fingers were clearly lighted.

"His fingers—the ends are red!" Doc voiced what he had seen.

Chapter IV THE RED DEATH PROMISE

AN interval of a dozen seconds, Doc waited.

"Let's go!" he breathed then. "You fellows make for that room, quick!"

The five men spun, began descending from the platform as swiftly as they dared. But it would take then minutes in the darkness, and the jumble of girders, to reach the spot where the elevators could carry them on.

"Where's Doc?" Monk rumbled when they were down a couple of stories.

Doc was not with them, they now noted.

"He stayed behind!" snapped waspish Ham. Then, as Monk accidentally nudged him in the dangerous murk: "Listen, Monk, do you want me to kick you off here?"

Doc, however, had not exactly remained behind. He had, with the uncanny nimbleness of a forest-dwelling monkey, flashed across a precarious path of girders, until he reached the supply elevators, erected by the workmen on the outside of the building for fetching up materials.

The cages were hundreds of feet below, on the ground, and there was no one to operate the controls. But Doc knew that.

On the lip of the elevator shaft, balanced by the grip of his powerful knees, he shucked off his coat. He made it into a bundle in his hands.

The stout wire cables which lifted the elevator cab were barely discernible. A full eight feet out over space they hung. But with

a gentle leap, Doc launched out and seized them. Using his coat to protect his palms from the friction heat sure to be generated, he let himself slide down the cables.

Air swished past his ears, plucked at his trouser legs and shirt sleeves. The coat smoked, began to leave a trail of sparks. Halfway down, Doc braked to a stop by tightening his powerful hands, and changed to a fresh spot in the coat.

So it was that Doc had reached the street even while thin, waspish Ham was threatening to kick the gigantic Monk off the girder if Monk shoved him again.

It was imperative to get to the office before the departure of the prowler who had lighted the match. Doc plunged into the taxi he had left standing in front, rapped an order.

Doc's voice had a magical quality of compelling sudden obedience to an order. With a squawl of clashing gears and a whine of spinning tires, the taxi doubled around in the street. It covered the several blocks in a fraction of a minute.

A bronze streak, Doc was out of the cab and in the skyscraper lobby. He confronted the elevator operator.

"What sort of a looking man did you take up to eighty-six a few minutes ago?"

"There ain't a soul come in this building since you left!" said the elevator operator positively.

DOC'S brain fought the problem an instant. He had naturally supposed the sniper had invaded the room above. It seemed not.

"Get this!" he clipped at the operator. "You wait here and be ready to sic my five men on anybody who comes out of this building. My men will be here in a minute. I'm taking your cage up!"

In the cage with the last word, Doc sent it sighing upward a couple of city blocks. He stopped it one floor below the eighty-sixth, quitted it there, crept furtively up the stairs and to the suite of offices which had been his father's, but which was now Doc's own.

The suite door gaped ajar. Inside was sepia blackness that might hold anything.

Doc popped the corridor lights off as a matter of safety. He feared no encounter in the dark. He had trained his ears by a system of scientific sound exercises which was a

part of the two hours of intensive physical and mental drill Doc gave himself daily. So powerful and sensitive had his hearing become that he could detect sounds absolutely inaudible to other people. And ears were all important in a scrimmage in the dark.

But a quick round of the three rooms, a moment of listening in each, convinced Doc the quarry had fled.

His men arrived in the corridor with a great deal of racket. Doc lighted the offices, and watched them come in. Monk was absent.

"Monk remained downstairs on guard," Renny explained.

Doc nodded, his golden eyes flickering at the table. On that table, where none had been before, was propped a blood-red envelope!

Crossing over quickly, Doc picked up a book, opened it and used it like pincers to pick up the strange scarlet missive. He carried it into the laboratory, and dunked it in a bath of concentrated disinfectant fluid, stuff calculated to destroy every possible germ.

"I've heard of murderers leaving their victims an envelope full of the germs of some rare disease," he told the others dryly. "And remember, it was a strange malady that seized my father."

Carefully, he picked the crimson envelope apart until he had disclosed the missive it held. Words were lettered on scarlet paper with an odious black ink. They read:

SAVAGE: Turn back from your quest, lest the red death strike once again.

There was no signature.

A silent group, they went back to the room where they had found the vermilion missive.

IT was Long Tom who gave voice to a new discovery. He leveled a rather pale hand at the box which held the ultra-violet light apparatus.

"That isn't sitting where we left it!" he declared.

Doc nodded. He had already noticed that, but he did not say so. He made it a policy never to disillusion one of his men who thought he had been first to notice something

or get an idea, although Doc himself might have discovered it far earlier. It was this modesty of Doc's which helped endear him to everybody he was associated with.

"The prowler who came in and left the red note used the black-light apparatus," he told Long Tom. "It's a safe guess that he inspected the window Johnny put together."

"Then he read the invisible writing on the glass!" Renny rumbled.

"Very likely."

"Could he make heads or tails of it?"

"I hope he could," Doc said dryly.

They all betrayed surprise at that, but Doc, turning away, indicated he wasn't ready to amplify on his strange statement. Doc borrowed the magnifying glass Johnny wore in his left spectacle lens, and inspected the door for finger prints.

"We'll get whoever it was!" Ham decided. The waspish lawyer made a wry smile. "One look at Monk's ugly phiz and nobody would try to get out of here."

But at that instant the elevator doors rolled back, out in the corridor.

Monk waddled from the lift like a huge anthropoid.

"What d'you want?" he asked them.

They stared at him, puzzled.

Monk's big mouth crooked a gigantic scowl. "Didn't one of you phone downstairs for me to come right up?"

Doc shook his bronze head slowly.

"No."

Monk let out a bellow that would have shamed the beast he resembled. He stamped up and down. He waved his huge, corded arms that were inches longer than his legs.

"Somebody run a whizzer on me!" he howled. "Whoever it was, I'll wring his neck! I'll pull off his ears! I'll give—"

"You'll be in a cage at the zoo if you don't learn the manners of a man!" waspish Ham said biting.

Monk promptly stopped his apelike prancing and bellowing. He looked steadily at Ham, starting with Ham's distinguished shock of prematurely gray hair, and running his little eyes slowly down Ham's well-cared-for face, perfect business suit, and small shoes.

Suddenly Monk began to laugh. His mirth was a loud, hearty roar.

At the gusty laughter, Ham stiffened. His face became very red with embarrassment.

For all Monk had to do to get Ham's goat was laugh at him. It had all started back in the war, when Ham was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks. The brigadier general had been the moving spirit in a little scheme to teach Monk certain French words which had a meaning entirely different than Monk thought. As a result, Monk had spent a session in the guardhouse for some things he had innocently called a French general.

A few days after that, though, Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks was suddenly hauled up before a court-martial, accused of stealing hams. And convicted! Somebody had expertly planted plenty of evidence.

Ham got his name right there. And to this day he had not been able to prove it was the homely Monk who framed him. That rankled Ham's lawyer soul.

Unnoticed, Doc Savage had reached over and turned on the ultra-violet-light apparatus. He focused it on the pieced-together window, then called to the others: "Take a look!"

The message on the glass had been changed!

THERE now glowed with an eerie blue luminance exactly eight more words than had been in the original message. The communication now read:

Important papers back of the red brick house at corner of Mountainair and Farmwell Streets

"Hey!" exploded the giant Renny. "How—"

With a lifted hand, a nod at the door, Doc silenced Renny and sent them all piling into the corridor.

As the elevator rushed them downward, Doc explained: "Somebody decoyed you upstairs so they could get away, Monk."

"Don't I know it!" Monk mumbled. "But what I can't savvy is who added words to that message?"

"That was my doing," Doc admitted. "I had a hunch the sniper might have seen us working with the ultra-violet-light apparatus, and be smart enough to see what it was. I hoped he'd try to read the message. So I changed it to lead him into a trap."

Monk popped the knuckles in hands that were near as big as gallon pails. "Trap is right! Wait'll I get my lunch shovels on that guy!"

Their taxi was still waiting outside. The driver began a wailing: "Say—when am I gonna get paid? You gotta pay for the time I been waitin'—"

Doc handed the man a bill that not only silenced him, but nearly made his eyes jump out.

North on Fifth Avenue, the taxi raced. Water whipped the windshield and washed the windows. Doc and Renny, riding outside once more, were pelted with the moisture drops. Renny bent his face away from the stinging drops, but Doc seemed no more affected than had he really been of bronze. His hair and skin showed not the least wetness.

"This red brick house at the corner of Mountainair and Farmwell Streets is deserted," Doc called once. "That's why I gave that address in the addition to the note."

Inside the cab, Monk rumbled about what he would do to whoever had tricked him.

A motorcycle cop fell in behind them, opened his siren, and came up rapidly. But when he caught sight of Doc, like a striking figure of bronze on the side of the taxi, the officer waved his hand respectfully. Doc didn't even know the man. The officer must have been one who knew and revered the elder Savage.

The cab reeled into a less frequented street, slanting around corners. Rows of unlighted houses made the thoroughfare like a black, ominous tunnel.

"Here we are!" Doc told their driver at last.

GHOSTLY described the neighborhood. The streets were narrow, the sidewalks narrower; the cement of both was cracked and rutted and gone entirely in places. Chugholes filled with water reached half to their knees.

"You each have one of Monk's gas bombs?" Doc asked, just to be sure.

They had.

Doc breathed terse orders of campaign. "Monk in front, Long Tom and Johnny on the right, Renny on the left. I'll take the back. Ham, you stay off to one side

as a sort of reserve if some quick thinking and moving has to be done."

Doc gave them half a minute to place themselves. Not long, but all the time they needed. He went forward himself.

The red brick house on the corner had two ramshackle stories. It had been deserted a long time. Two of the three porch posts canted crazily. Shingles still clung to the roof only in scabs. The windows were planked up solid. And the brick looked rotten and soft.

The street lamp at the corner cast light so pale as to be near nonexistent.

Doc encountered brush, eased into it with a peculiar twisting, worming movement of his powerful, supple frame. He had seen great jungle cats slide through dense leafage in that strangely noiseless fashion, and had copied it himself. He made absolutely no sound.

And in a moment, he had raised his quarry.

The man was at the rear of the house, going over the back yard a foot at a time, lighting matches in succession.

He was short, but perfectly formed, with a smooth yellow skin, and a seeming plumpness that probably meant great muscular development. His nose was curving, slightly hooked, his lips full, his chin not particularly large. A man of a strange race.

The ends of his fingers were dyed a brilliant scarlet.

Doc did not reveal himself at once, but watched curiously.

The stocky, golden-skinned man seemed very puzzled, as indeed he had reason to be, for what he sought was not there. He muttered disgustedly in some strange clucking language.

Doc, when he heard the words, held back even longer. He was astounded. He had never expected to hear a man speaking that language as though it were his native tongue. For it was the lingo of a lost civilization!

The stocky man showed signs of giving up his search. He lit one more match, putting his box away as though he didn't intend to ignite more. Then he stiffened.

Into the soaking night had permeated a low, mellow, trilling sound like the song of some exotic bird. It seemed to emanate from underfoot, overhead, to the sides,

everywhere—and nowhere. The stocky man was bewildered. The sound was startling, but not awesome.

Doc was telling his men to beware. There might be more of the enemy about than this one fellow.

The stocky man half turned, searching the darkness. He took a step toward a big, double-barreled elephant rifle that leaned against a pile of scrap wood near him. It was of huge caliber, that rifle, fitted with telescopic sights. The man's hand started to close over the gun—

And Doc had him! Doc's leap was more expert even than the lunge of a jungle prowler, for the victim gave not even a single bleat before he was pinned, helpless in arms that banded him like steel, and a hand that cut off his wind as though his throat had been poured full of lead.

SWIFTLY, the others came up. They had found no one else about.

"I'd be glad to hold him for you!" Monk suggested hopefully to Doc. His furry fingers opened and shut.

Doc shook his head and released the prisoner. The man instantly started to run. But Doc's hand, floating out with incredible speed, stopped the man with a snap that made his teeth pop together like clapped hands.

"Why did you shoot at us?" Doc demanded in English.

The stocky man spewed clucking gutturals, highly excited.

Doc looked swiftly aside, at Johnny.

The gaunt archaeologist, who knew a great deal about ancient races, was scratching his head with thick fingers. He took off the glasses with the magnifying lens on the left side, then nervously put them back on again.

"It's incredible!" he muttered. "The language that fellow speaks—I think it is ancient Mayan. The lingo of the tribe that built the great pyramids at Chichen Itza, then vanished. I probably know as much about that language as anybody on earth. Wait a minute, and I'll think of a few words."

But Doc was not waiting. To the squat man, he spoke in ancient Mayan! Slowly, halting, having difficulty with the syllables, it was true, but he spoke understandably.

And the squat man, more excited than ever, spouted more gutturals.

Doc asked a question.

The man made a stubborn answer.

"He won't talk," Doc complained. "All he will say is a lot of stuff about having to kill me to save his people from something he calls the Red Death!"

Chapter V THE FLY THAT JUMPED

ASTOUNDED silence gripped the group.

"You mean!" Johnny muttered, blinking through his glasses, "You mean this fellow really speaks the tongue of ancient Maya?"

Doc nodded. "He sure does."

"It's fantastic!" Johnny grumbled. "Those people vanished hundreds of years ago. At least, all those that comprised the highest civilization did. A few ignorant peons were probably left. Even those survive to this day. But as for the higher-class Mayan—he made a gesture of something disappearing—*"Pouf!"* Nobody knows for sure what became of them."

"They were a wonderful people," Doc said thoughtfully. "They had a civilization that probably surpassed ancient Egypt."

"Ask him why he paints his fingers red?" Monk requested, unfazed by talk of lost civilizations.

Doc put the query in the tongue-flapping Mayan tongue.

The stocky man gave a surly answer.

"He says he's one of the warrior sect," Doc translated. "Only members of the warrior sect sport red finger tips."

"Well, I'll be dag-gone!" Monk snorted.

"He won't talk any more," Doc advised. Then he added grimly: "We'll take him down to the office, and see if he won't change his mind!"

Searching the prisoner, Doc dug up a remarkable knife. It had a blade of obsidian, a darksome, glasslike volcanic rock, and the edge rivaled a razor in cutting qualities. The handle was simply a leather thong wrapped around and around the upper end of the obsidian shaft.

This knife Doc appropriated. He picked up the prisoner's double-barreled elephant rifle. The marvelous weapon was manufactured by the Webley & Scott firm, of England.

Monk eagerly took charge of the captive, booting him ungently out to the street and to their taxi.

Swishing downtown through the rain, Doc, speaking through the taxi window, tried again to persuade the stocky prisoner to talk.

The fellow disclosed only one fact—and Doc had already guessed that.

"He says he's really a Mayan!" Doc translated for the others.

"Tell him I'll pull his ears off an' feed 'em to him if he don't come clean!" Monk suggested.

Doc, anxious himself to note the effect of torture threats on the Mayan, repeated Monk's remarks.

The Mayan shrugged, clucked in his native tongue.

"He says," Doc explained, "that the trees in his country are full of them like you, only smaller. He means monkeys."

Ham let out a howl of laughter at that, and Monk subsided.

RAIN was threshing down less vigorously when they pulled up before the gleaming office building that spiked up nearly a hundred stories. Entering, they rode the elevator to the eighty-sixth floor.

The Mayan again refused to talk.

"If we just had some truth serum!" suggested Long Tom, running pale fingers through his blond, Nordic hair.

Renny held up a monster fist. "This is all the truth serum we need! I'll show you how it works!"

Big, with sloping mountains of gristle for shoulders, and long kegs of bone and tendon for arms, Renny slid over to the library door. His fist came up.

Wham! Completely through the stout panel Renny's fist pistoned. It seemed more than bone and tendon could stand. But when Renny drew his knuckles out of the wreckage and blew off the splinters, they were unmarked.

Renny, having demonstrated what he could do, came back and towered threateningly over their captive.

"Talk to him in that gobble he calls a language, Doc! Tell him he's in for the same thing that door got if he don't tell us whether your father was murdered, and if he was, who did it. And we want to know why he tried to shoot us."

The prisoner only sat in stoical silence. He was scared—but determined to suffer any violence rather than talk.

"Wait, Renny," Doc suggested. "Let's try something more subtle."

"For instance?" Renny inquired.

"Hypnotism," said Doc. "If this man is of a savage race, his mind is probably susceptible to hypnotic influence. It's no secret that many savages hypnotize themselves to such an extent that they think they see their pagan gods come and talk to them."

Positioned directly before the stocky Mayan, Doc began to exert the power of his amazing golden eyes. They seemed to turn into shifting, gleaming piles of the flaked yellow metal, holding the prisoner's gaze inexorably, exerting a compelling, authoritative influence.

For a minute the squat Mayan was quiet, except for his bulging eyes. He swayed a little in his chair. Then, with a piercing yell in his native tongue, the prisoner lunged backward out of his chair.

The Mayan's plunge carried him toward Renny. But the big-fisted giant had been watching Doc so intently he must have been a little hypnotized himself. He was slow breaking the spell. Reaching for the Mayan, he missed.

Straight to the window, the squat Mayan sped. A wild jump, and he shot head-first through it—to his death!

AWED silence was in the room for a while.

"He realized he was going to be made to talk," Ham clipped, whipping his waspish frame over to the window to look callously down. "So he killed himself."

"Wonder what can be behind all this!" Long Tom puzzled, absently inspecting his unhealthy-looking features as reflected by the polished table top.

"Let's see if the message my father left written on the window won't help," Doc suggested.

They followed Doc to the library in a group. "Important papers back of the red brick," read the message in invisible ink which could only be detected by ultra-violet light. They were all curious to know where the papers were, anxious to see that they were intact. Above all, they wanted to know the nature of these "important papers."

Doc had the box which manufactured ultra-violet rays, under his arm. On into the laboratory, he led the cavalcade.

Every one noticed instantly that the laboratory floor was of brick, with a rubber matting scattered here and there.

Monk looked like he understood, then his jaw fell. "Huh!"

The floor bricks were *all* red!

Doc plugged the ultra-violet apparatus into a light socket. He switched off the laboratory lights. Deliberately, he played the black-light rays across the brick floor. The darkness was intense.

And suddenly one brick was shining with an unholy red luminance. The brick was the lid of a secret little cavity in the floor, and the elder Savage had treated it with some substance that had the property of glowing red under the black-light beams.

From the secret cavity, Doc lifted a packet of papers wrapped securely in an oilskin cloth that looked like a fragment of slicker. Ham clicked on the lights. They gathered around, eagerly waiting.

Doc opened the papers. They were very official looking, replete with gaudy seals. And they were printed in Spanish.

One at a time, as he finished glancing over them, Doc passed the papers to Ham. The astute lawyer studied them with great interest. At last Doc was completely through the papers. He looked at Ham.

"These papers are a concession from the government of Hidalgo," Ham declared. "They give to you several hundred square miles of land in Hidalgo, providing you pay the government of Hidalgo one hundred thousand dollars yearly and one fifth of everything you remove from this land. And the concession holds for a period of ninety-nine years."

Doc nodded. "Notice something else, Ham! Those papers are made out to me. *Me*, mind you! Yet they were executed twenty years ago. I was only a kid then."

"You know what I think?" Ham demanded.

"Same thing I do, I'll bet!" Doc replied. "These papers are the title to the legacy my father left me. The legacy is something he discovered twenty years ago."

"But what *is* the legacy?" Monk wanted to know.

Doc shrugged. "I haven't the slightest idea, brothers. But you can bet it's something well worth while. My father was never mixed up in piker deals. I have heard him treat a million-dollar transaction as casually as though he were buying a cigar."

Pausing, Doc looked steadily at each of his men in turn. The flaky gold of his eyes shimmered strange lights. He seemed to read the thoughts of each.

"I'm going after this heritage my father left," he said at length. "I don't need to ask—you fellows are with me!"

"And how!" grinned Renny. And the others echoed his sentiment.

PLANTING the papers securely in a chamois money belt about his powerful waist, Doc walked back into the library, thence into the other room.

"Did the Mayan race hang out in Hidalgo?" Renny asked abruptly, eyeing his enormous fist.

Johnny, fiddling with his glasses that had the magnifying lens, took it upon himself to answer.

"The Mayans were scattered over a large part of Central America," he said. "But the Itzans, the clan whose dialect our late prisoner spoke, were situated in Yucatan during the height of their civilization. However, the republic of Hidalgo is not far away, being situated among the rugged mountains farther inland."

"I'm betting this Mayan and Doc's heritage are tied up somewhere," declared Long Tom, the electrical wizard.

Doc stood facing the window. With his back to the light, his strong bronze face was not sharply outlined except when he turned slightly to the right or left to speak. Then the light play seemed to accentuate its remarkable qualities of character.

"The thing for us to do now is corner the man who was giving the Mayan orders," he said slowly.

"Huh—you think there's more of your enemies?" Renny demanded.

"The Mayan showed no signs of understanding the English language," Doc elaborated. "Whoever left the warning in this room wrote it in English, and was educated enough to understand the ultra-violet apparatus. That man was in the building when the shot was fired, because the elevator operator said no one came in between the time we left and got back. Yes, brothers, I don't think we're out of the woods yet."

Doc went over to the double-barreled elephant rifle which had been in possession of the Mayan. He inspected the manufacturer's number. He grasped the telephone.

"Get me the firearms manufacturing firm of Webley & Scott, Birmingham, England," he told the phone operator. "Yes, of course—England! Where the Prince of Wales lives."

To his friends, Doc explained: "Perhaps the firm that made the rifle will know to whom they sold it."

"Somebody will cuss over in England when he's called out of bed by long-distance phone from America," Renny chuckled.

"You forget the five hours' time difference," clipped waspish Ham. "It is now early morning in England! They'll just be getting up."

Doc was facing the window again, apparently lost in thought. Actually, while standing there a moment before, he had felt vaguely that something was out of place about the window.

Then he got it! The mortar at one end of the granite slab which formed the window sill was fresher than on the other side. The strip of mortar was no wider than a pencil mark, yet Doc noticed it. He leaned out the window.

A fine wire, escaping from the room through the mortared crack, ran downward! It entered a window below.

Doc flashed back into the room. His supple, sensitive, but steel-strong hands explored. He brought to light a tiny microphone of the type radio announcers call lapel mikes.

"Somebody has been listening!" His powerful voice throbbed through the room. "In the room below! Let's look into that!"

NO puff of wind could have gone out of the room and down the stairs more speedily than Doc made it. The distance was sixty feet, and Doc had covered it all before his men were out of the upstairs room. And they had moved as quickly as they could.

Whipping over where the wall could shelter him from ordinary bullets, Doc tried the doorknob. Locked! He exerted what for him was a mild pressure. Wood splintered, brass mechanism of the lock gritted and tore—and the door hopped ajar.

A pistol crashed in the room. The bullet came close enough to Doc's bronzed features that he felt the cold stir of air. A second lead missile followed. The powder noise was a great bawl of sound. Both bullets chopped plaster off the elaborately decorated corridor wall.

Within the room, a door slammed.

Doc instantly slid inside. Sure enough, his quarry had retreated to a connecting office.

All this had taken flash parts of a second—Doc's men were only now clamoring at the door.

"Keep back!" Doc directed. He liked to fight his own battles. And there seemed to be only one man opposing him.

Doc crossed the office, treading new-looking cheap carpet. He circled a second-hand oak desk with edges blackened where cigarette stubs had been placed carelessly. He tried the connecting door.

It was also locked—but gave like wet cardboard before his powerful shove. Alert, almost certain a bullet would meet him, he doubled down close to the floor. He knew he could bob into view and back before the man inside could pull trigger.

But the place was empty!

Once, twice, three times, Doc counted his own heartbeats. Then he saw the explanation.

A stout silken cord, with hardwood rods about the size of fountain pens tied every foot or so for handholds, draped out of the open window. The end of the cord was tied to a stout radiator leg. And a tense jerking showed a man was going down it.

With a single leap, Doc was at the window. He looked down.

Of the man descending the cord, little could be told. In the streaming darkness he was no more than a black lump.

Doc drew back, whipped out his flashlight. When he played it down the cord, the man was gone!

The fellow had ducked into a window.

The flash went into Doc's pocket. Doc himself clambered over the window sill. Grasping the silken cord, he descended. Thanks to the coordination of his great muscles, Doc negotiated the cord just about as fast as a man could run.

He passed the first window. It was closed, the office beyond darkened and deserted-looking.

Doc went on down. He had not seen what window the quarry had disappeared into. The second window was also closed. And the third! Doc knew then that he had passed the right window. The man could not have gone this far down the cord.

It was typical of Doc that he did not give even a glance to what was below—a sheer fall of hundreds of feet. So far downward did the brick-and-glass wall extend that it seemed to narrow with distance until it was only a yard or so across. And the street was wedge-shaped at the bottom, as though cut with a great, sharp knife.

Doc had climbed a yard upward when the silk cord gave a violent jerk. He looked up.

A window had opened. A man had shoved a chair through it, and was pushing on the cord so as to swing Doc out away from the building. The murk of the night hid the man's face. But it was obvious he was Doc's quarry.

Like a rock on the end of the silken rope, Doc was swung out several feet from the building. He would have to chance to grab a window sill.

The man above flashed a hand for the cord. A long knife glistened in the hand.

Chapter VI WORKING PLANS

AT no time had Doc Savage ever put his ability to think like chain lightning to better use than he did now. In the fractional split of time that it took his golden eyes to register the deadly menace of that knife, he formulated a plan of action.

He simply let go completely of the silken cord!

This, in spite of the sheer fall of more than eighty stories directly below him—with not a possible chance of saving himself by clutching a projecting piece of masonry. This building was of the modernistic architecture which does not go in for trick balconies and carved ledges.

But Doc knew what he was doing. And it was a thing that called for iron nerve and stupendous strength and quickness of movement.

The silken cord, going abruptly slack before the chair the man above pushed against it, nearly caused the would-be murderer to pitch headlong out of the window. The fellow dropped both the chair and his knife and by a wild grab, saved himself from the fall he had meant for Doc.

Doc, with a maneuver little short of marvelous, caught the end of the silken cord as it snaked past. A drop of a few feet, which his remarkable arm muscles easily cushioned, and he was swinging close to a window sill, none the worse for his narrow escape.

Doc stepped easily to the window ledge.

Not a moment too soon! The man above had recovered and, desperate, had employed a small penknife to cut the silken line. It slithered down past Doc, writhing and twisting into fantastic shapes as it dropped those eighty stories to the street.

The window on the ledge of which Doc found himself was locked. He popped the pane inward, and sprang into the office. He lunged across the room.

The door literally jumped out of its casing, lock and all, when he took hold of it. He halted in the corridor, stumped.

His attuned ear could detect the windy noise of an elevator dropping downward. He knew it was his quarry in flight!

A couple of floors above, Renny was yelling, his voice more than ever like thunder deep in a cave. "Doc! What's become of you?"

Doc paid no attention. He ran across the corridor to the elevator doors. So quickly that he seemed to spring directly to it, he found the cage shaft that was in operation. His fist came back, jumped forward so swiftly as to defy the eye.

The sound as Doc's knuckles hit the sheet-steel elevator door was like the boom of a hard-swung sledge. An onlooker would have sworn the blow would shatter every bone in his fist. But Doc had learned how to tighten the muscles and tendons in his hands until they were like cushioned steel, capable of withstanding the most violent shock.

As a matter of fact, it was part of Doc's daily two-hour routine of exercises to subject all parts of his great body to terrific blows in order that he might be able always to steel himself against them.

The sheet-metal elevator door caved in like a kicked tin can. In a moment Doc had thrown the safety switch which the door, closing, ordinarily operated. Such safety switches are a part of all elevator doors, so the cage cannot move up or down and leave a door open for some child or careless person to fall through into the shaft. They controlled the motor current.

Many floors below, the elevator car halted, motor circuit broken.

Doc thrust his head in and looked down the shaft. He was disappointed. The elevator car was nearly at the street level.

Five minutes elapsed before the lackadaisical elevator operator got a cage up and ferried Doc and his friends down to the street.

By that time, their quarry was hopelessly gone.

The indifferent elevator chauffeur could not even give them a description of the would-be killer who had fled the building.

THERE was considerable uproar around to the side of the skyscraper, when a sleepy pedestrian got the shock of his life by falling over the body of the Mayan who had jumped from the window.

Doc Savage told a straightforward story to the police, explaining exactly how the Mayan had come to his death. And such was the power of Doc, and the esteem in which his departed father was held, that the New York police commissioner gave instant orders that Doc be not molested, and, moreover, that his connection with the suicide be not revealed to the newspapers.

Doc was thus left free to depart for the Central American republic of Hidalgo to investigate the mysterious legacy his father had left him.

Back up in the eighty-sixth-floor lair, Doc made plans and gave orders looking to their execution.

To waspish, quick-thinking Ham, he gave certain of the papers which had been under the brick in the laboratory.

"Your career as a lawyer has given you a wide acquaintance in Washington, Ham," Doc told him. "You're intimate with all the high government officials. So you take care of the legal angle of our trip to Hidalgo."

Ham picked back a cuff to look at an expensive platinum wrist watch. "A passenger plane leaves New York for Washington in four hours. I'll be on it." He twirled his black, innocent-looking sword cane.

"Too long to wait," Doc told him. "Take my autogyro. Fly it down yourself. We'll join you at about nine this morning."

Ham nodded. He was an expert airplane pilot. So were Renny, Long Tom, Johnny, and Monk. Doc Savage had taught them, managing to imbue them with some of his own genius at the controls.

"Where is your autogyro?" Ham inquired.

"At North Beach airport, out on Long Island," Doc retorted.

Ham whipped out, in a hurry to get his share done.

"Renny," Doc directed, "whatever instruments you need, take them. Dig up maps. You're our navigator. We are going to fly down, of course."

"Righto, Doc," said Renny, his utterly somber, puritanical look showing just how pleased he was.

For this thing promised action. Excitement and adventure aplenty! And how these remarkable men were enamored of that!

"Long Tom," said Doc Savage, "yours is the electrical end. You know what we might need."

"Sure!" Long Tom's pale face was flaming red with excitement.

Long Tom wasn't as unhealthy as he looked. None of the others could remember his suffering a day of illness. Unless the periodic rages, the wild tantrums of temper into which he flew, could be called illness. Long Tom sometimes went months without a flare-up, but when he did explode, he certainly made up for lost time.

His unhealthy look probably came from the gloomy laboratory in which he conducted his endless electrical experiments. The enormous gold tooth he sported directly in front helped, too.

Long Tom, like Ham, had earned his nickname In France. In a certain French village there had been ensconced in the town park an old-fashioned cannon of the type used centuries ago by rovers of the Spanish Main. In the heat of an enemy attack, Major Thomas J. Roberts had loaded this ancient relic with a sackful of kitchen cutlery and broken wine bottles, and wrought genuine havoc. And from that day, he was Long Tom Roberts.

"Chemicals," Doc told Monk.

"Oke," grinned Monk. He sidled out. It was remarkable that a man so homely could be one of the world's leading chemists. But it was true. Monk had a great chemical laboratory of his own in a penthouse atop an office building far downtown, only a short distance from Wall Street. He was headed there now.

Only Johnny, the geologist and archaeologist, remained with Doc.

"Johnny, your work is possibly the most important." Doc's golden eyes were thoughtful as he looked out the window. "Dig into your library for dope on Hidalgo. Also on the ancient Mayan race."

"You think the Mayan angle is important, Doc?"

"I sure do, Johnny."

The telephone bell jangled.

"That's my long-distance call to England," Doc guessed. "They took their time getting it through!"

Lifting the phone, he spoke, got an answer, then rapidly gave the model of the double-barreled elephant rifle, and the number of the weapon.

"Who was it sold to?" he asked.

In a few minutes, he got his answer.

Doc rung off. His bronze face was inscrutable; golden gleamings were in his eyes.

"The English factory says they sold that gun to the government of Hidalgo," Doc said thoughtfully. "It was a part of a large lot of weapons sold to Hidalgo some months ago."

Johnny adjusted his glasses which had the magnifying lens.

"We've got to be careful, Doc," he said. "If this enemy of ours persists in making trouble, he may try to tamper with our plane."

"I have a scheme that will prevent danger from that angle," Doc assured him.

Johnny blinked, then started to ask what the scheme was. But he was too slow. Doc had already quitted the office.

With a grin, Johnny went about his own part of the preparations. He felt supreme confidence in Doc Savage.

Whatever villainous moves the enemy made against them, Doc was capable of checkmating. Already, Doc was undoubtedly putting into operation some plan which would guarantee them safety in their flight southward.

The plan to protect their plane would be one worthy of Doc's vast ingenuity.

Chapter VII DANGER TRAIL

THE rain had stopped.

A bilious dawn, full of fog, shot through with a chill wind, was crawling along the north shore of Long Island. The big hangars at North Beach airport, just within the boundary line of New York City, were like pale-gray, roundbacked boxes in the mist. Electric lights made a futile effort to dispel the sodden gloom.

A giant tri-motored, all-metal plane stood on the tarmac of the flying field near by. On the fuselage, just back of the bow engine, was emblazoned in firm black letters:

Clark Savage, Jr.

One of Doc's crates!

Airport attendants, in uniforms made very untidy by mud, grease, and dampness, were busy transferring boxes from a truck to the interior of the big plane. These boxes were of light, but stout, construction, and on each was imprinted, after the manner of exploration expeditions, the words:

Clark Savage, Jr., Hidalgo Expedition.

"What's a Hidalgo?" a thick-necked mechanic wanted to know.

"Dunno—a country, I reckon," a companion greaseball told him.

The conversation was unimportant, except in that it showed what a little-known country Hidalgo was. Yet the Central American republic was of no inconsiderable size.

The last box was finally in the plane. An airport worker closed the plane door. Because of the murky dawn and moisture on the windows, it was impossible to see into the pilot's compartment of the great tri-motor plane.

A mechanic climbed atop the tin pants over the big wheels, and standing there, cranked the inertia starter of first one motor, then the other. All three big radial engines thundered into life. More than a thousand throbbing horsepower.

The big plane trembled to the tune of the hammering exhaust stacks. It was not an especially new ship, being about five years old.

Perhaps one or two attendants about the tarmac heard the sound of another plane which had arrived overhead. Looking up, maybe they saw a huge gray bat of a shape go slicing through the mist. But that was all, and the noise of its great, muffled exhaust was hardly audible above the bawl of the stacks of the old-fashioned tri-motor.

The tri-motor was moving now. The tail was up, preliminary to taking off. Faster and faster it raced across the tarmac. It slowly took the air.

Without banking to either side, climbing gently, the big all-metal plane flew possibly a mile.

An astounding thing happened then.

The tri-motor ship seemed to turn instantaneously into a gigantic sheet of white-hot flame. This resolved into a monster ball of villainous smoke. Then ripped fragments of the plane and its contents rained downward upon the roofs of Jackson Heights, a conservative residential suburb of New York City.

So terrific was the explosion that windows were broken in the houses underneath, and shingles even torn off roofs.

No piece more than a few yards in area remained of the great plane. Indeed, the authorities could never have identified it, had not the airport men known it had just taken off from there.

No human life could have survived aboard the tri-motor aircraft.

DOC SAVAGE merely blinked his golden eyes once after the blinding flash which marked the blast that annihilated the tri-motor ship.

"That was what I was afraid of!" he said dryly.

The rush of air thrown by the explosion caused his plane to reel. Doc stirred the controls expertly to right it.

For Doc and his men had not been in the ill-fated tri-motor plane. They were in the other craft which had flown over the airport a moment before the tri-motor took off. Indeed, Doc himself had maneuvered the take-up of the tri-motor, using remote radio control to direct it.

Doc's radio remote control apparatus was exactly the same type used by the army and navy in extensive experiments, employing changing frequencies and sensitive relays for its operation.

Doc did not know how their mysterious enemy had managed to blow up the tri-motor. But thanks to his foresight, Doc's men had escaped the devilish blast. Doc had used the tri-motor plane for a decoy. It was one of his old ships, almost ready to be discarded, anyway.

"They must have managed to slip high explosive into one of our boxes," Doc concluded aloud. "It is too bad we lost the equipment in the destroyed plane. But we can get along without it."

"What dizzies me," Renny muttered, "is how they fixed their bomb to explode in the air, and not on the ground."

Doc banked his plane, set a course directly for the city of Washington, using not only the gyroscopic compass with which the craft was fitted, but calculating wind drift expertly.

"How they made the bomb explode in the air can be simply explained," he told Renny at last. "They probably put an altimeter or barometer in the bomb. The altimeter would register a change in height. All they had to do was fix an electrical contact to be closed at a given height, and—*bang!*"

"*Bang*, is right!" Monk put in, grinning.

Their plane flashed past the upraised arm of the Statue of Liberty, and sang its song of speed southward over the Jersey marshes.

Unlike the tri-motor which had been destroyed, this plane was of the latest design. It was a tri-motor craft also, but the great engines were in eggs built directly into the wings. It was what pilots call a low-wing job, with the wings attached well down on the fuselage, instead of at the top. The landing gear was retractable—folded up into the wings so as not to offer a trace of wind resistance.

It was the ultra in an airman's stead, this supercraft. And two hundred miles an hour was only its cruising speed.

No small point was the fact that the cabin was soundproof, enabling Doc and his friends to converse in ordinary tones.

The really essential portion of their equipment was loaded into the rear of the speed-ship cabin. Packed compactly in light metal containers, an alloy metal that was lighter even than wood, each carton was fitted with straps for carrying.

In a surprisingly short time they picked up the clustered buildings of Philadelphia. Doc whipped the plane past a little east of the city hall, the center of the downtown business districts.

Onward they swept, to zoom down on an airport at the outskirts of Washington.

THE landing Doc made was feather-light, a sample of his wizardry with the controls. He tailed the plane about with sharp whirls of the nose motor, and taxied for the little airport administration office.

In vain did he look about for his autogyro. Ham should have left the windmill plane here, had he already arrived. But the whirligig ship was not in evidence.

An attendant, a spick-and-span dude in a white uniform, ran out to meet them.

"Didn't Ham show up here?" Monk demanded of the man.

"Who?"

"Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks!" Monk explained.

The airport attendant registered shock, then great embarrassment at the words. He opened his mouth to speak, but instead, excitement made him merely stutter.

"What has happened?" Doc asked in a gentle but powerful tone that compelled an instant answer.

"The airport manager is holding a man over in the field office who says his

name is Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks," the attendant explained.

"Holding him—why?"

"The manager is also a deputy sheriff. We got a call that this fellow had stolen an autogyro from a man named Clark Savage. So we arrested him."

Doc nodded absently. He was clever, this unknown enemy of theirs. He had decoyed Ham by a neat ruse.

"Where is the autogyro?" Doc asked.

"Why, this Clark Savage who telephoned the plane had been stolen asked us to send a man with it to bring him here and confront the thief!"

Monk let out a loud snort. "You dumb dude! You're talkin' to Clark Savage!"

The attendant stuttered again. "I don't understand—"

"Some one foxed you," Doc said without noticeable malice. "The pilot who flew that plane to get the fake Clark Savage may be in danger. Do you know where he went?"

"The manager knows."

They hurried over to the administration building. They found a Ham who was burning up. Ham could ordinarily talk himself out of almost any situation, given a little time. But he hadn't made an impression on the blond, bullet-headed airport manager.

Doc handed Ham a phone. "Get the nearest army flying field, Ham. See if you can raise me a pursuit ship fitted with machine guns. It's against regulations, but—"

"Hang regulations!" Ham snapped, and seized the instrument.

From the blond airport manager Doc learned where the autogyro had gone to meet the man who had put over the trick. The spot was in New Jersey.

Doc located it on the map. It was in the mountainous, or, rather, hilly, western portion of Jersey.

Ham cracked the telephone receiver onto its hook. "They're warming up a pursuit job for you, Doc."

It required less than ten minutes for Doc to ferry over to the army drome, plug his powerful frame into a cockpit, saw the throttle back, and take off. He had a regulation war plane now.

FLYING northward, Doc had a fair idea of the purpose of their enemy in

decoying the autogyro. The place was within motor distance of New York, so the villainous unknown one would probably be on hand. He would destroy the autogyro, thus hampering Doc and his friends all possible.

"Whoever it is, they're willing to do anything to keep us from getting to that legacy of mine in Hidalgo!" Doc concluded.

Over the Delaware River, Doc dived and tested his machine guns by shooting at the shadow of his plane on the water.

Knobby green hills sprang up underneath. Doc used a pair of binoculars to scrutinize the terrain.

Farmhouses were scattering, ramshackle. Very few of the roads were paved.

Doc discovered his autogyro at last.

The windmill plane sat in a clearing. Near by ran a paved road.

In the clearing with the plane was a green coupé and two men. One of the men was holding a gun upon the other.

The gun wielder, Doc perceived when he came nearer, was masked. The man discovered Doc's army pursuit plane, diving with motor cans a-thunder. The fellow took flight.

Deserting the other man, who must be the autogyro pilot, the masked fellow raced to the windmill plane. The gun in his fist spat a bullet into the fuel tank of the plane. Gasoline ran out in two pale strings. The masked man struck a match and tossed it into the fuel. Instantly the autogyro was bundled in hot flame.

One thing Doc noted about the masked man—the fellow's fingers were a deep scarlet hue for an inch of their length!

The man was also squat and wide. He ran with shortlegged, pegging steps for the green coupé, dived into it. The green car ran out of the field like a frightened bug.

Doc's cowl machine guns released a spray of lead that forked up dust behind the coupé. The car skewered onto the road and turned north.

Again Doc's Browning guns tore off their ripping cackle of death. After the army fashion, every fifth bullet in the ammo cans was a phosphorous-filled tracer. These burst with hot red blots directly behind the green coupé.

Slowly, inexorably, the gray cobwebs of tracer smoke climbed into the rear of the automobile.

With a wild swing, the green car suddenly left the pavement. It vaulted a ditch, miraculously remaining upright, and skewered to a stop amid tall brush that practically hid it.

Doc distinctly saw the passenger quit the car and take to the concealment of the timber.

A couple of times Doc dived and let the Browning guns spew their twelve hundred shots a minute into the timber. He did it more to give the masked man one last scare than from any hope of bagging the fellow. The timber offered perfect concealment.

Not a little disgusted, Doc landed and launched a hunt afoot for the masked man. But it was too late.

The airport attendant who had flown the autogyro here could give no worthwhile description of the masked man when Doc consulted him. The fellow had merely sprung out of the green car with a gun.

Doc telephoned the authorities and had a net spread for the masked man before he took off again for Washington. But he was pretty certain the fellow would evade the Jersey officers. The man was smart, as well as very dangerous.

Doc took the chagrined airport attendant with him in the army pursuit plane back to Washington.

HAM and the others were waiting when Doc arrived, after restoring the pursuit plane to the army field.

"Have any trouble getting our papers up?" Doc asked.

Ham tightened his mobile, orator's mouth. "I did have a little trouble, Doc. It was strange, too. The Hidalgo consul seemed very reluctant to O. K. our papers. At first he wasn't going to do it. In fact, I had to have our own secretary of state make some things very clear to Mr. Consul before he gave us the official high sign."

"What's your guess, Ham?" Doc asked. "Was the official directly interested in keeping us out of Hidalgo, or had some one paid him money to make it tough for us?"

"He was paid!" Ham smiled tightly. "He gave himself away when I accused him of accepting money to refuse his O. K. on our papers. But I was not able to learn who had put the cash on the line."

"Somebody!" Renny rumbled, his puritanical face very long. "Somebody is taking a lot of trouble to keep us out of Hidalgo! Now, I wonder why?"

"I have a hunch!" Ham declared. "Doc's mysterious heritage must be of fabulous value. Men are not killed and diplomatic agents bribed without good reasons. That concession of several hundred square miles of mountainous territory in Hidalgo is the explanation, of course. Some one is trying to keep us away from it!"

"Does anybody know what they raise down in that neck of the woods?" Monk inquired.

Long Tom hazarded a couple of guesses, "Bananas, chicle for making chewing gum—"

"No plantations in the region Doc seems to own," Johnny, the geologist, put in sharply. "I soaked up all I could find on the precise region. And you'd be surprised how little it was!"

"You mean there was not much information available about it?" Ham prompted.

"You said it! To be exact—the whole region is unexplored!"

"Unexplored!"

"Oh, the district is filled with mountains on most maps," Johnny explained. "But on the really accurate charts the truth comes out. There's a considerable stretch of country no white men have penetrated. And Doc's strange heritage is located slap-dab in the middle of it!"

"So we gotta play Columbus!" Monk snorted.

"You'll think Columbus's trip across the briny was a pipe when you see this Hidalgo country!" Johnny informed him. "That region is unexplored for only one reason—white men can't get into it!"

Doc had been standing by during the exchange of words. But now his calm, powerful voice commanded quick attention.

"Is there any reason we can't be on our way?" he asked dryly.

They took off at once in the monster, low-wing speed plane. But before their departure, Doc telephoned long distance to Miami, Florida, where he got in touch with an airplane-supplies concern. He ordered pontoons for his plane, after determining the company kept them in stock.

THE approximately nine-hundred-mile flight to Miami they made in something more than five hours, thanks to the tremendous cruising speed of Doc's superplane.

Working swiftly, with lifting cranes and tools and mechanics supplied by the plane-parts concern, they installed the pontoons before darkness flung its pall over the lower end of Florida.

Doc taxied the low-wing speed ship out over Biscayne Bay a short distance, making sure the pontoons were seaworthy. Back at the seaplane base he took on fuel and oil from a seagoing filling station built on a barge.

To Cuba was not quite another three hundred miles. They were circling over Havana before the night was many hours old. Another landing for fuel, and off again.

Doc flew. He was tireless. Renny, huge and elephantine, but without equal when it came to angles and maps and navigation, checked their course periodically. Between times he slept.

Long Tom, Johnny, Monk, and Ham were sleeping as soundly among the boxed supplies as they would have in sumptuous hotel beds. A faint grin was on every slumbering face. This was the sort of thing they considered real living. Action! Adventure!

Across the Caribbean to Belize, their destination on the Central American mainland, was somewhat over five hundred miles. It was an all-water hop.

To avoid a head wind for a while, Doc flew quite near the sea, low enough that at times he sighted barracudas and sharks. There was an island or two, flat, white beaches bared to the lambent glory of a tropical moon that was like a huge disk of rich platinum.

So stunningly beautiful was the southern sea that he awoke the others to observe the play of phosphorescent fire and the manner in which the waves creamed in the moonlight, or were blown into faintly jeweled spindrift.

They thundered across Ambergris Cay at a thousand feet, and in no time at all were swinging wide over the flat, narrow streets of Belize.

Chapter VIII PERSISTANT FOES

THE sun was up, blazing with a wild revelry. Away inland, the jungle was lost in a horizon infinitely blue.

Doc slanted the big plane down and patted the pontoons against the small waves. Spray fanned up and roared against the idling propellers. He taxied in toward the mud beach.

Renny stretched, yawned. The yawn gave his extremely puritanical face a ludicrous aspect.

"I believe that in the old pirate days they actually built a foundation for part of this town out of rum bottles," Renny offered. "Ain't that right, Johnny?"

"I believe so," Johnny corroborated from his wealth of historical lore.

Plink!

The sound was exactly like a boy shooting at a tin can with a small air rifle.

Plink! It came again.

Then—*bur-r-r-rip!* One long roar!

"Well, for—" Monk swallowed the rest and sat down heavily as Doc slammed the engine throttles wide open.

Engines thundering, props scooping up water and turning it into a great funnel of mist behind the tail, the plane lunged ahead—straight for the mud beach.

"What happened?" demanded Ham.

"Machine gun putting bullets through our floats!" Doc said in a low voice. "Watch the shore! See if you can get a glimpse of whoever it was!"

"For the love of mud!" muttered Monk. "Ain't we never gonna get that red-fingered guy out of our hair?"

"No doubt he radioed ahead to some one he knows here!" Doc offered.

Distinctly audible over the bawl of the motors came two more metallic *plinks*, then a series. The unseen marksman was doing his best to perforate the pontoons and sink the craft.

All five of Doc's men were staring through the cabin windows, seeking trace of the one who was shooting.

Abruptly bullets began to whiz through the plane fuselage itself. Renny clapped a hand to his monster left arm. But the wound was no more than a shallow scrape. Another blob of lead wrought minor

havoc in the box that held Long Tom's electrical equipment.

It was Doc who saw the sniper ahead of all the others, thanks to an eye of matchless keenness.

"Over behind that fallen palm!" he said.

Then the rest perceived. The sharpshooter's weapon projected over the bole of a fallen royal palm that was like a pillar of dull silver.

Rifles leaped magically into the hands of Doc's five men. A whistling salvo of lead pelted the palm log, preventing the sniper from releasing further shots.

The plane dug its pontoons into the mud beach at this point. It was not a moment too soon, either. They were filling rapidly with water, for some of the bullets, striking slantwise, had opened sizable rips. Indeed, the floats were hopelessly ruined!

SWIFTLY, grim with purpose, three men bounded out of the plane. They were Doc, Renny, and Monk. The other three, Johnny, Long Tom, and Ham, all excellent marksmen, continued to put a barrage of rifle lead against the palm log.

The log lay on a finger of land which reached out toward a very small cay, or island. Between cay and the land finger stretched about fifty yards of water.

The sniper tried to reach the mainland, only to shriek and drop flat as a bullet from the plane creased him. Meantime Doc, Renny, and Monk had floundered to solid ground and doubled down in the scrawny tropical growth. The smell of the beach was strong in their nostrils—sea water, wet logs, soft-shell crabs, fish, kelp, and decaying vegetation making a conglomerate odor.

To the right of the friends lay Belize, with scraggly, narrow streets and romantic houses with protruding balconies, brightly painted doorways, and every window as becrossed with iron bars as if it were a jail.

The sniper knew they were coming upon him. He tried again to escape. But he had not reckoned with the kind of shooting that was coming from the plane. He couldn't make it to the mainland.

Desperately, the fellow worked out toward the end of the land finger. Stunted

mangroves offered puny shelter there. The man shrieked again as he was creased.

In his circle of acquaintances, it must have been customary to shoot prisoners—give no quarter—because he didn't offer to surrender. Evidently he was out of ammunition.

Wild with terror, he leaped up and plunged into the water. He was going to try to swim to the little island.

"Sharks!" grunted Renny. "These waters are full of the things!"

But Doc Savage was already a dozen yards ahead, leaping out on the land finger.

The sniper was a squat, dark-skinned fellow—but his features did not resemble those of the Mayan who had committed suicide in New York. He was a low specimen of the Central American half-breed.

He was not a good swimmer, either. He splashed a great deal. Suddenly he let out a piercing squawl of terror. He had seen a dark, sinister triangle of fin sizzling through the water toward him. He tried to turn and come back. But so frightened was he that he hardly moved for all his slamming of the water with his arms.

The shark was a gigantic man-eater. It came straight for its prospective meal, not even circling to investigate. The mouth of the monster thing was open, revealing the horrible array of teeth.

The unfortunate sniper let out a weak, ghastly bleat.

It seemed too late for anything to help the fellow. Renny, in discussing the affair later, maintained Doc purposely waited until the last minute so that terror would teach the sniper a lesson—show the man the fate of an evil-doer. If true, Doc's lesson was mightily effective.

With a tremendous spring, Doc shot outward and cleaved head-first into the water.

THE dive was perfectly executed. And Doc, curving his powerful bronze body at the instant of impact with the water, seemed to hardly sink beneath the surface.

It looked like an impossible thing to do, but Doc was beside the unfortunate man even as the big shark shot in with a last burst

of speed. Doc put himself between the shark's teeth and the sniper!

But the bronzed, powerful body was not there when the needled teeth slashed. Doc was alongside the shark. His left arm flipped with electric speed around the head of the thing, securing what a wrestler would call a strangle hold.

Doc's legs kicked powerfully. For a fractional moment he was able to lift the shark's head out of the water. In that interval his free right fist traveled a terrific arc—and found the one spot where his vast knowledge told him it was possible to stun the man-eater.

The shark became slack as a kayoed boxer.

Doc shoved the sniper ashore. The breed's swarthy face was a study. He looked like some one had jerked the cover off hell and let him see what awaited men of his ilk.

Now that the shark was atop the water, where rifle bullets could reach it, Renny and Monk put the finishing touch to the ugly monster.

"Why did you fire upon us?" Doc asked the breed, couching the words in Spanish. Doc spoke Spanish fluently, as he did many other tongues.

Almost eagerly, so grateful was he for what Doc had done, the breed made answer:

"I was hired to do it, señor. Hired by a man in Blanco Grande, the capital of Hidalgo. This man rushed me here during the night in a blue airplane."

"What was your employer's name?" Doc questioned.

"That I do not know, señor."

"Don't lie!"

"I am not lying to you, señor! Not after what you did for me a while ago. Truly, I do not know this man." The breed squirmed uneasily. "I have been a low *mozo*, hiring out for evil work to whoever pays me, and asking no questions. I shall desert that manner of living. I can take you to the spot where the blue airplane is hidden."

"Do that!" Doc directed.

They started off, reached the outskirts of town. Doc prepared to hail a *fotingo*, or dilapidated flivver taxi. Then he lifted his golden eyes to the heavens.

An airplane was droning in the hot copper sky. It came into view, a brilliant blue, single-motor monoplane.

"That is the plane of the man who hired me to shoot at you!" gasped the breed prisoner.

The gaudy blue craft whipped overhead, engine stacks bawling, and sped directly for the mud beach.

Without a word, Doc spun and ran with tremendous speed for the beach where Johnny, Long Tom, and Ham waited with his own plane.

HALF-NAKED children gaped at the blur of bronze Doc made in passing them. And women muffled in *rebozos*, a combination shawl and scarf, scampered out and yanked them clear of the thundering charge of Renny and Monk and the prisoner, coming in Doc's wake.

On the beach a machine gun suddenly cackled. Doc knew by the particularly rapid rate of its fire that it was one he had brought along. His friends had set it up, were firing at the blue monoplane.

The blue plane dipped back of the tufted top of a royal palm, going down in a whistling dive. Then came a loud explosion. A bomb!

Up above the palm fronds the blue plane climbed. It was behaving erratically now. The pilot or some part of his azure ship was hit.

Straight inland it flew. And it did not come back.

Doc, reaching the beach, saw the bomb had been so badly aimed as to miss his plane fully fifty yards. His three men were sitting on the wing with the machine gun, grinning widely.

"We sure knocked the feathers off that bluebird!" Long Tom chuckled.

"He won't be back!" Ham decided, after squinting at the distant blue dot that was the receding aircraft. "Who was it?"

"Obviously one of the gang trying to prevent us reaching that land of mine in Hidalgo." Doc replied. "The member of the gang in New York radioed to Blanco Grande, the capital of Hidalgo that we were coming by plane. Right here is the logical place for us to refuel after a flight across the Caribbean. So they set a trap here. They hired this breed to machine-gun us, and when that didn't work, the pilot tried to bomb us."

At that moment Renny and Monk came up. They were both so big the breed looked like a little brown boy between them.

"What do we do with his nibs?" Monk asked, shaking the breed.

Doc replied without hesitation: "Free him."

The swarthy breed nearly broke down with gratitude. Tears stood in his eyes. He blubbered profuse thanks. And before he would depart, he came close to Doc and murmured an earnest question. The others could not hear the breed's words.

"What did he ask you?" Monk inquired after the breed had departed, with a strange new confidence in his walk.

"Believe it or not," Doc smiled, "he wanted to know how one went about entering a monastery. I think there is one chap who will walk the straight and narrow in the future."

"We better catch a shark and take him along if a close look at one reforms our enemies like that!" Monk laughed.

With ropes from a local warehouse, and long, thin palms which Doc hired willing natives to cut, the plane was snaked to dry land.

The news was bad. The floats were badly torn. They didn't have material for patching. Nor was there any in Belize. To save a great deal of work, Doc radioed to Miami for a fresh set. A transport plane brought the pontoons down.

Altogether, four days were lost before they got in shape for the air again.

NOT A morning did Doc miss his exercises. From his youth, he had not neglected the two-hour routine a single time. He did them, although he might have been on the go for many hours previously.

His muscular exercises were similar to ordinary setting-up movements, but infinitely harder, more violent. He took them without apparatus. For instance, he would make certain muscles attempt to lift his arm, while the other muscles strove to hold it down. That way he furthered not only muscular tissue, but control over individual muscles as well. Every part of his great, bronzed body he exercised in this manner.

From the case which held his equipment, Doc took a pad and pencil and wrote a number of several figures. Eyes

closed, he extracted the square and cube root of this number in his head, carrying the figures to many decimal places. He multiplied and divided and subtracted the number with various figures. Next he did the same thing with a number of an even dozen figures. This disciplined him in concentration.

Out of the case came an apparatus which made sound waves of all tones, some of a wave length so short or so long as to be inaudible to the normal ear. For several minutes Doc strained to detect these waves inaudible to ordinary people. Years of this had enabled him to hear many of these customarily unheard sounds.

His eyes shut, Doc rapidly identified by the sense of smell several score of different odors, all very vague, each contained in a small vial racked in the case.

The full two hours Doc worked at these and other more intricate exercises.

THE morning of the fifth day after arriving in Belize, they took the air for Blanco Grande, capital of Hidalgo.

It was jungle country they flew over, luxuriant, unhealthily rank trees in near solid masses. Lianas and grotesque aerial roots tied these into a solid carpet.

Confident of his motors, Doc flew low enough that they could see tiny parakeets and pairs of yellow-headed parrots feeding off *chichem* berries that grew in abundance.

Some hours later they were over the border of Hidalgo. It was a typical country of the southern republics. Wedged in between two mighty mountains, traversed in its own right by a half dozen smaller but even more rugged ranges, it was a perfect spot for those whose minds run to revolutions and banditry.

In such localities governments are unstable not so much because of their own lack of equilibrium, but more because of the opportunities offered others to gather in revolt.

Half of the little valleys of Hidalgo were lost even to the bandits and revolutionists who were most familiar with the terrain. The interior was inhabited by fierce tribes, remnants of once powerful nations, each still a power in its own right, and often engaging in conflict with its neighbors. Woe betide the defenseless white man who found himself wandering about in the wilder part of Hidalgo.

The warlike tribes, the utter inaccessibility of some of the rocky fastnesses, probably explained the large unexplored area Renny had noted on the best maps of Hidalgo.

The capital city itself was a concoction of little, crooked streets, balconied-and-barrred houses, ramshackle mud huts, and myriads of colored tile roofs, with the inevitable park for parading in the center of town.

In this case the park was also occupied by the presidential palace and administration buildings. They were imposing structures which showed past governments had been free with the taxpayers' money.

There was a small, shallow lake to the north of town.

On this Doc Savage landed his plane.

Chapter IX DOC'S WHISTLE

DOC gave some necessary instructions at once. The work fell to Ham, whose understanding of law made him eminently capable.

"Ham, you pay the local secretary of state a visit and check up our rights in this land grant of mine," Doc directed.

"Maybe somebody had better go along to see he don't steal some hams, or something," Monk couldn't resist putting in.

Ham bristled instantly.

"Why should I want a ham when I associate with a crowd of them all the time?" he demanded.

"Monk, you'd better accompany Ham as bodyguard," Doc suggested. "You two love each other so!"

As a matter of fact, despite the mutual ribbing they were always handing each other, Monk and Ham made a good team of quick thinking and brawn, and they got along perfectly, regardless of the fact that to hear them talk, one would think violence was always impending.

Ham shaved and changed to a natty suit of white flannels before departing. He was sartorial perfection in his white shoes, panama, and innocent-looking black sword cane.

Monk, more to aggravate Ham than anything else, didn't even wash his homely face. He cocked a battered hat over one eye, and with pants seemingly on the point of dropping off his tapering hips, he swaggered behind Ham.

It was later afternoon when they were ushered into the presence of Don Rubio Gorro, Secretary of State of Hidalgo.

Don Rubio was rather short, well knit. His face was entirely too handsome for a man's. His complexion was olive, his lips thin, his nose straight and a bit too sharp. His eyes were dark and limpid as a señorita's.

Don Rubio had ears exactly like those artists put on pictures of the devil. They were very pointed.

Extreme politeness characterized the welcome Don Rubio gave Ham, after the Latin fashion. Monk remained in the background. He didn't think Don Rubio was so hot, taking snap judgment.

And Don Rubio lived up to Monk's impression as soon as Ham made his business known.

"But my dear Señor Brooks," said Don Rubio smugly, "our official records contain nothing concerning any concession giving any one named Clark Savage, Jr., even an acre of Hidalgo land, much less some hundreds of square miles. I am very sorry, but that is the fact."

Ham executed a twirl with his cane. "Was the present government in power twenty years ago?"

"No. This government came into being two years ago."

"The gang before you probably made the concession grant."

Don Rubio flushed slightly at the subtle inference he was one of a gang.

"In that case!" he said snappishly, "we have nothing to do with it. You're just out of luck."

"You mean we have no rights to this land?"

"You most certainly have not!"

HAM'S cane suddenly leveled at a spot directly between Don Rubio Gorro's devil-like ears. "You've got another guess coming, my friend!"

Don Rubio began: "There is nothing that—"

"Oh, yes, there is!" Ham poked his cane for emphasis. "When this government came into power, it was recognized by the United States only on condition that the new regime respect property rights of American citizens in Hidalgo! That right?"

"Well—"

"You bet it's right! And do you know what will happen if you don't live up to that agreement? The U. S. government will sever relations and class you as a plain crowd of bandits. You couldn't obtain credit to buy arms and machinery and other things you need to keep your political opponents in check. Your export trade would be hurt. You would— But you know all that would happen as well as I do. In six months your government would be out, and a new one in.

"That's what it would mean if you refuse to respect American property. And if this land concession isn't American property, I'm a string on Nero's fiddle."

Don Rubio's swarthy face was flushed a smudgy purple, even to his pointed ears. His hands trembled with rage—and worry. He knew all Ham was telling him was true. Uncle Sam was not somebody to be fooled with. He seized desperately at a straw.

"We cannot recognize your right because there is no record in our archives!" he said wildly.

Ham slapped Doc's papers on the desk. "These are record enough. Somebody has destroyed the others. I'll tell you something else—there are some people who will go to any length to keep us away from this land. They've made attacks on us—no doubt they destroyed the papers."

As he made that statement, Ham watched Don Rubio intently. He felt there was something behind Don Rubio's attitude, had felt that from the first. Ham believed Don Rubio was either one of the gang trying to keep Doc from his heritage, or had been hired by the gang. And Don Rubio's agitation tended to corroborate Ham's suspicion.

"It's going to be just too bad for whoever is causing the trouble!" Ham stated. "We'll get them in the end."

Various emotions played on Don Rubio's too-handsome, swarthy face. He was scared, worried. But gradually a desperate determination came uppermost. He clipped his lips together, shot out his jaw, and offered his final word.

"There is nothing more to be said! You have no claim to that land. That's final!"

Ham twiddled his cane and smiled ominously. "It will take me just about one hour to get a radio message to Washington," he promised grimly. "Then, my friend, you'll see more diplomatic lightning strike around you than you ever saw before!"

LEAVING the government building, Ham and Monk ascertained the location of the radio station and set a course for it. Darkness had arrived while they were talking to Don Rubio. The city, quiet during the heat of the afternoon when they had entered, was awakening. Carriages occupied by staid Castilians, the blue blood of these southern republics, clattered over the rough streets. Here and there was an American car.

"You talked kinda tough to that Don Rubio gink, didn't you?" Monk suggested. "I thought you was always supposed to be polite to these Spaniards. Maybe if you'd handled him with gloves on, you'd have got somewhere."

"*Hur-r-rump!*" said Ham in his best courtroom manner. "I know how to handle men! That fellow Don Rubio has no principles. I give politeness where politeness is due. And it is never due a crook!"

"You said a mouthful!" rumbled Monk, for once forgetting himself and agreeing with Ham.

They soon found the anglings and meanderings of Blanco Grande streets most bewildering. They had been told the radio station and message office was but a few hundred yards' walk. But when they had covered that distance, there was no sign of any radio station.

"Fooley—we're lost!" Monk grunted, and looked about for some one to accost regarding directions.

There was only one man in the street, a shabby side thoroughfare in what, as they only now perceived, was a none-too-savory-looking part of Blanco Grande. The sole pedestrian was ahead of them, loitering along as though he had no place to go, and plenty of time to reach there.

He was a broad-backed fellow with a short body and a block of a head. He wore dungarees, a bright-green calico shirt, and no shoes. His head, ludicrously enough, was topped with a rusty black derby.

He had his hands in his pockets. Ham and Monk overhauled the loafer.

"Can you direct us to the radio station?" Ham asked in Spanish.

"*Si, señor!*" replied the loafer. "Better yet, for a half a peso I will guide you there myself."

Ham, baffled by the crookedness of the Blanco Grande streets, thought it cheap at the price. He hired the native on the spot.

Not once did the stocky, ill-clad fellow take his hands out of his pockets. But Ham and Monk thought nothing of that, passing it up as laziness on their guide's part.

If anything, the streets which they now traversed became more offensive to the eye and nostril. Stale fruit odors came from the darkened mud houses, mingling with the far from weak smell of unwashed humanity.

"Strange district for a radio station," Monk muttered, beginning at last to get suspicious.

"Only a little distance now, señor!" murmured their guide.

Monk, studying the man's plumpness, his curving nose, his prominent lips, was struck by something vaguely familiar. It was as though he had known the guide, or one of his relatives. Monk cudgeled his brains, trying to place the fellow.

And then the whole thing became unpleasantly clear!

Their guide halted suddenly. He pulled his hands from his pockets. The finger tips were stained red for an inch of their length!

The fellow released a loud shout. Instantly from every doorway and darkened cranny for yards around, shadowy forms sprang.

They had been trapped!

MONK emitted a great howl. Monk's fights were always noisy, unless there was reason for them being quiet. Like a gladiator of old, Monk fought best when the racket was loudest.

Knives glittered in the dark. Sandals, made of tapir hide and held on with coarse henequin rope, slammed the cobbles.

Monk lunged and got the man who had been their guide by the nape and the seat of his dungaree pants. As though he were a straw, Monk whirled the man up and

back, let him fly. The victim screamed in a strange tongue. A clot of the attackers went down like ten-pins before his hurtling body.

The scream, the ex-guide's red finger tips, told Monk something. The man was a Mayan! The same race as the fellow who had committed suicide in New York! That was why he seemed familiar.

Like the gigantic anthropoid he resembled, Monk went into action. His first fist blow jammed a ratty, dark-skinned man's jaw back under his ear. The fellow dropped, convulsively throwing his knife high in the air.

Ham, dancing like a fencer, tapped a swarthy skull with his sword cane. The cane looked very light, but the tubelike case over the long, keen blade of steel was heavy. The blade itself was by no means light.

As the first assailant went over backward, Ham unsheathed his sword cane. He expertly skewered a fellow who tried to stab him.

But where one besieger went down, a half dozen took his place. The street was full of snarling, vicious devils. None of these had red finger tips, or even resembled Mayans.

The one who was a Mayan, their late guide, had regained his feet, dazed.

Men were clinging like leeches to Monk. One sailed fully ten feet straight up when Monk threw him off. But suddenly, weighted by hopeless odds, Monk was borne down.

Ham with his sword in another unlucky one, was overcome an instant later.

A resounding blow delivered on the head of each one rendered Monk and Ham senseless.

MONK'S awakening was one long blaze of pain. He rolled his eyes. He was in a mud-walled, mud-floored room. There was not a single window, and the one door was low and narrow. Monk tried to sit up and found himself tied hand and foot—not with rope, but with heavy wire.

Ham sprawled near by on his back. Ham was also wired.

The red-fingered Mayan was bending over Ham. He had just appropriated Ham's papers—Doc's sole documentary proof to his ownership of the tract of land in interior Hidalgo.

Evidently he had been after these. He hissed a number of words in Mayan, which neither Ham nor Monk understood. It didn't sound complimentary, whatever it was.

The Mayan whipped a knife from inside his bright-green shirt.

But even as his knife started up, he seemed to get a more satisfactory thought. From within the capacious green shirt he drew an evil-looking little statuette. The features carved on this faintly resembled those of a human being, a tremendously long nose being most notable. It was artfully sculptured out of a dark obsidian rock.

The Mayan mumbled words, and there had suddenly come into his voice a religious fervor. Monk caught the name "Kukulcan" a time or two, and recognized it as the name of an ancient Mayan deity. The fellow was going to offer them as a sacrifice to his hideous little idol!

Monk heaved against the wires, but only bruised his huge muscles and started crimson running from torn skin. Numberless turns of the wire held him.

The Mayan concluded his paean to the idol. A wild light inflamed his nigrescent eyes. He was slavering like an idiot.

Faint light scintillated from the knife as it uplifted once more.

Monk shut his eyes. He opened them instantly—it was all he could do to stem a yell of utter joy.

For into that unsavory room had penetrated a low, mellow sound that trilled up and down the scale like the song of some rare bird. It seemed to filter everywhere. The sound was strengthening, inspiring.

The sound of Doc!

The Mayan was puzzled. He looked about, saw nothing. The idol-worshipping fervor seized him again. The knife poised.

The blade rushed down.

But no more than a foot did it travel. Out of the narrow black doorway flashed a gigantic figure of bronze. A Nemesis of power and speed, Doc Savage descended upon the devilish but luckless Mayan.

Doc's hand seemed hardly to touch the Mayan's knife arm before the bone snapped loudly and the knife gyrated away.

The Mayan twisted. With surprising alacrity, his other hand darted inside his green shirt and came out with a shiny pistol. He aimed at Ham, not Doc. Ham was handiest.

There was only one thing Doc could do to save Ham. He did it—chopped a blow with the edge of his hand that snapped the Mayan's neck instantly. The fellow died before he could pull trigger.

It took only a moment for Doc to free Ham and Monk of the wires.

A swarthy native—one of the Mayan's hirelings—popped through the door with a long-bladed knife that resembled nothing so much as an ordinary corn knife. In fact, it *was* a corn knife, with "Made in U.S. A." on the handle. But the native would have called it a *machete*.

His precipitous arrival was just his hard luck. A leap, a blow so swift the native probably never saw it, and the fellow was flying head over heels back the way he came.

Doc guided Ham and Monk outside. They turned left. Doc seized Ham and gave him a toss that lifted him to a low roof. Monk managed the jump unassisted, and Doc followed. They leaped to another roof, another.

On that one lay the silken folds of a parachute.

"That's how I got here," Doc explained. "News of that fight you had spread fast. I heard it and took off in the plane. Two thousand feet up I touched off a parachute flare. That lighted the whole town. I was lucky enough to see the gang haul you into that joint. So I simply jumped down to help you."

"Sure!" Monk grinned. "There wasn't nothin' to it, was there, Doc?"

Chapter X TROUBLE TRAIL

DOC, Ham, and Monk strolled through the moonlight to the spot on the lake shore where they had pitched camp. A crowd of curious natives were there inspecting the plane, talking among themselves. Aircraft were still a novelty in this out-of-the-way spot.

Doc, a bronze giant nearly twice as tall as some of the swarthy fellows, mingled among them and asked questions in the mixture of Spanish and Indian lingo they spoke. He wanted to know about the blue plane which had attacked him at Belize.

The blue plane had been seen a few times by the natives. But they did not know from whence it came or where it went.

Doc noticed some of the swarthy little men were very superstitious about the blue plane. These would give him little information. In each case the features of such men showed they were of Mayan ancestry.

Doc recalled then that blue was the sacred color of the ancient Mayans. It only added to this mysterious thing confronting him.

Renny and the others had erected a silken tent. But they had also dug inside the tent a deep hole, sort of a dugout in which to sleep. From the outside, the excavation would escape detection. They were taking no chance on a sudden machine-gun burst in the night.

Monk and Ham, completely recovered from their narrow brush with death, decided to sleep in the plane cabin, alternating on keeping guard.

Doc himself set off alone through the night. Thanks to the marvelous faculties he had developed by years of intensive drill, he had little fear of his enemies attacking him successfully.

He went to the presidential palace. To the servant who admitted him, Doc gave simply his name and a request to see the President of Hidalgo.

In a surprisingly brief interval, the flunky was back. Carlos Avispa, President of Hidalgo, would see Doc at once.

Doc was ushered into a great, sumptuously fitted room. The chamber was in twilight, and a small motion-picture projector was throwing shifting images onto a white screen. However, the film being run off was one concerning military tactics instead of a mushy love drama.

Carlos Avispa came forward with a warmly outstretched hand. He was a powerful man, a few inches shorter than Doc. His upstanding shock of white hair lent him a distinguished aspect. His face was lined with care, but intelligent and pleasant. He was near fifty.

"It is a great honor indeed to meet the son of the great Señor Clark Savage," he said with genuine heartiness.

That surprised Doc. He was not aware his father had known Carlos Avispa.

But Doc's father had many friends of whom Doc was not aware.

"You knew my father?" Doc inquired.

Carlos Avispa bowed. There was genuine esteem in his voice as he replied: "Your father saved my life with his wonderful medical skill. That was twenty years ago, when I was but an unimportant revolutionist hiding out in the mountains. You, I believe, are also a great doctor and surgeon?"

Here was a break, Doc reflected. He nodded that he was a doctor and surgeon. For that was the thing he knew more about than all others.

In the course of a few minutes Doc had told his story and mentioned that Don Rubio Gorro, the Secretary of State, had refused to honor his grant to the territory in interior Hidalgo.

"I shall remedy that at once, Señor Savage," declared President Carlos Avispa. "Anything I have, any power I control, is yours."

AFTER he had thanked the elderly, likable man properly, Doc inquired whether President Avispa had any idea what made the tract of land so valuable that many men were anxious to do murder to prevent him reaching it.

"I cannot imagine," was the reply. "I do not know what your father found there. He was bound for the interior of Hidalgo when he came upon me ill in camp twenty years ago. He saved my life. And I never saw him again. As for the region, it is very near impregnable, and the natives are so troublesome I have given up trying to send soldiers to explore."

President Carlos Avispa reflected deeply, then went on.

"It worries me, this action of my Secretary of State, Don Rubio Gorro," he said. "Some sneak has destroyed the records of this heritage your father left you. They should be in our archives. But I cannot understand why Don Rubio should act as he did. Your papers were enough, even though ours had vanished. He shall be punished for his impertinence."

Doc was silent. The moving-picture machine was still running off the reel of military maneuvers—the type of picture shown at war colleges.

With a smile, President Avispa indicated the cinema machine. "I must keep

myself advised of the latest fighting methods. It is indeed regrettable. But it seems we can never have peace here in the south. There is always a revolution brewing.

"Just recently I have heard strong rumors that an attempt is to be made to assassinate me and seize power. Many of my people of Mayan ancestry are involved. But I do not know the ringleaders. I understand they await only money to buy arms before making the attempt."

There came into the elderly chief executive's eyes a fiery, warlike glint. "If I could but find from what source their money is expected to come, I would soon put a quietus on them. And, best of all, it would be done without bloodshed!"

Doc conversed for a considerable time, mostly about his great father. Politely declining an invitation to spend the night at the presidential palace, he departed at a late hour.

Striding through Blanco Grande's sleepy streets, Doc was thoughtful. Could it be that the money for the revolution against President Carlos Avispa was tied up directly with his heritage? The fact that Mayans were involved in both pointed that way. Maybe his enemies were trying to rob him of his legacy, and use it to finance a revolution to overthrow President Avispa!

The enemies had tried hard enough from the first to prevent him even finding out about the legacy. Strange—the whole thing!

Then Doc stopped suddenly.

Before him on the dimly moonlit cobbles lay a knife. It had an obsidian stone blade, a hilt of wound leather—exactly such a knife as the Mayan in New York had carried.

SOME fifteen minutes later, there was a curious meeting in a top-floor room of Blanco Grande's one hotel modern enough to be fitted with running water and a radio in every room. The hotel happened to be the pride of all Hidalgo. Three stories high!

But the gentry meeting in the top-floor room were easily the scourge of Hidalgo. They were the ringleaders of the latest crop of revolutionists. These men were motivated by no high ideals of freedom. If so, they wouldn't have been here, because no kinder or more upright official ever administered a nation than elderly President Carlos Avispa.

Greed was behind every act of these men. They wanted to overthrow President Avispa's honest, low-cost government, so they could loot the public treasury, tax the citizens to bankruptcy for a year or two, then skip to Paris and the fleshpots of Europe for a life of luxury on the proceeds.

Eleven outlaws from the hills were congregated on one side of the room. Shaggy, vicious fellows, every one of them was a murderer many times over.

Before them was a curtain. Behind the curtain was a door into an adjoining room. This door opened, and the assembled bandits could hear a man enter. They grew tense, wary. But when the man spoke, they relaxed.

For the man was their boss! The brains behind the revolution! *He* was going to fill their pockets from the Hidalgo treasury.

"I am late!" said the ringleader whom none of them could see—and, indeed, whom none of them even knew! "I lost my sacred knife, and had to go back and hunt it."

"Did you find it?" interrupted one of the bandits. "That thing is important. You need it to impress those Mayans. They think only members of their warrior sect can have one and live. If an ordinary man gets one, they think he will die. So you need it to make them think you're the son of that god of theirs they call the Feathered Serpent."

"I found it," said the man behind the curtain. "Now, let's get down to business. This Savage person has proved to be more of a menace than we ever dreamed."

The speaker paused, and when he continued, there was a distinct twinge of fear in his voice. "Savage visited President Avispa tonight, and Avispa O. K.'d everything. The old fool! We shall soon be shut of him! But we must stop Savage! We must wipe him out, and those five fighting devils with him!"

"Agreed," muttered a hairy cutthroat. "They must not reach the Valley of the Vanished!"

"Why not let them go ahead into the Valley of the Vanished?" growled another bandit. "That would be the end of them. They'd never get out!"

Greater became the fear in the voice of the revolution master mind. "You idiot! You do not know Savage! The man is uncanny. I went to New York, but I failed to stop him. And I had with me two members of that fanatical sect of warriors among the

inhabitants of the Valley of the Vanished. Those men are accomplished fighters. Their own people are in terror of them. But Savage escaped!"

UNEASY was the silence that impregnated the room.

"What if the members of this warrior sect should find you are not one of them?" asked an outlaw. "You've led them to believe you are the flesh-and-blood son of one of their old deities. They worship you. But suppose they get wise that you are a faker?"

"They won't!" snapped the man behind the curtain. "They won't, because I control the Red Death!"

"The Red Death!" gulped one man.

Another breathed: "The Red Death—what is it?"

Loud, ugly laughter came from the man back of the curtain. "A drunken genius of a scientist sold the secret of causing the Red Death, and curing it. He sold it to me! And then I killed him so no one would ever get it—or, rather, the cure for it."

A nervous shifting passed over the assembled bandits.

"If we could just solve the mystery of that gold that comes out of the Valley of the Vanished," one mumbled. "If we could find where they get it, we could forget this revolution."

"We can't!" declared the man back of the curtain. "I've tried and tried. Morning Breeze, the chief of the warrior sect of which I have made myself head, does not know where it comes from. Only old King Chaac, ruler of the Valley of the Vanished, knows. And you couldn't torture it out of him."

"I'd like to take my men in there with machine guns!" a bandit chieftain muttered angrily.

"You tried that once, didn't you?" snapped the curtain speaker. "And you were nearly wiped out for your pains. The Valley of the Vanished is impregnable. The best we can do is get enough gold as offerings to finance this revolt."

"How do you get the gold?" asked a robber, evidently not as well posted as the others.

Again the man laughed back of the curtain. "I simply turn the Red Death loose on the tribe. Then they make a big offering of gold which reaches my hands. Then I give

them the cure for the Red Death." He snorted mirthfully. "The ignorant dupes think their deity sends the Red Death, and the gold offering appeases his wrath."

"Well, you had better turn the Red Death loose soon," suggested a man. "We need an offering bad. If we don't get it, we can't pay for those guns we must have to put over the revolt."

"I will, very shortly. I have been sending my blue plane over the Valley of the Vanished. That's a new idea of mine. It impresses the inhabitants of the Valley a lot. Blue is their sacred color. And they think the plane is a big winged god flying around."

There was a lot of evil laughter in appreciation of their leader's cleverness.

"That Red Death is great stuff!" grated the man behind the curtain. "It put old man Savage out—"

The speaker suddenly emitted a frenzied scream and sprang forward, taking the curtain with him. He plunged head over heels across the floor.

The stunned bandits saw, towering in the door back of the curtain, a great bronze, frightsome figure of a man.

"Doc Savage!" one squawked.

DOC SAVAGE it was, right enough. Doc, when he had seen that knife in the street, had a moment later heard footsteps approaching. He had followed the man who had picked up the knife to this hotel room.

Doc had heard the whole vile plot!

And for probably the first time in his career, Doc had failed to get his man. Rage at the leader of the revolutionists, the murderer of his father, had momentarily blinded Doc. A tiny gasp had escaped from his great chest—and the man had heard.

A bandit drew a pistol. Another doused the lights. Guns roared deafeningly. Blows smacked. Terrific blows that tore flesh and bone! Blows such as only Doc Savage could deliver!

The window burst with a glassy rattle as somebody leaped through, heedless of the fact that it was three floors to the earth. A second man took the same leap.

The fight within the room was over in a matter of thundering seconds.

Doc Savage turned on the lights. Ten bandits in various stages of stupor and unconsciousness and even death, were

strewed on the floor. Three of them would never murder again. And the Blanco Grande police, already clamoring in the corridor outside, would make short shift of the rest.



The speaker sprang forward . . . taking the curtain with him . . .

To the window, Doc swept. Poising a moment easily, he took the three-story drop as lightly as if he were leaping off a table.

Under the window, he found another cutthroat. The man had broken his neck in the plunge.

There was no trace of the leader. The man had survived the jump and escaped.

Doc stood there, rage tingling all through his powerful bronze frame. The murderer of his father! And he didn't even know who the man was!

For Doc, in following the fellow to the hotel, had not once been able to glimpse the master villain's face. Up there in the room, the curtain had enveloped the fiend until the lights went out.

Doc slowly quitted the vicinity of the hotel with its holocaust of death. In that hostelry room, he had left something that would become a legend in Hidalgo. A dozen men whipped in a matter of seconds!

For days, the Blanco Grande police puzzled over what manner of fighter had overpowered these worst of Hidalgo's bandits in a hand-to-hand fray.

Every cutthroat had a reward on his unkempt head. The reward went unclaimed. Finally, by decree of President Avispa, it was turned over to charity.

Doc Savage, with hardly a thought about what he had done, had gone to his camp and to bed.

Chapter XI VALLEY OF THE VANISHED

BY the time the sun had crawled off one of Hidalgo's spike like mountaintops, Doc and his men were ready for departure.

Doc had taken his usual two-hour exercise long before dawn, while the others still slept.

After that, Doc had awakened his men, and they had all seized brushes and quick-drying blue paint, and gone over their entire plane. The ship was now blue, the sacred color of the Mayans!

"If the inhabitants of this mysterious Valley of the Vanished think we're riding in a holy chariot," Doc had commented, "they may let us hang around long enough to make friends."

Ham, waspish and debonair, carrying his inevitable sword cane—for he had several of them—offered jocosely: "And if they believe in evolution, we can arouse their interest by passing Monk off as the missing link."

"Oh, yeah?" Monk grinned. "Some day you're gonna find yourself in a pile that will pass for hamburger steak, and you won't know any more about who done it than you do about who framed that ham-stealing charge on you."

Red-necked, Ham twiddled his cane and had nothing more to say.

Gasoline for twenty hours' flying reposed in the tanks of the big tri-motor speed plane.

Doc, in the control bucket, turned the radial motors over with the electro-inertia starting mechanism. He let the cylinders warm so there would be no such unpleasantness as a cold motor stopping at a critical moment in the take-off.

Out across the lake, Doc ruddered the plane. He rocked the deperdussin-type control wheel. The floats went on step—skimming the lake surface. Then they were off. Doc banked about and headed directly for the most rugged interior region of Hidalgo.

It was Doc's own idea, borne out by Johnny's intensive study of the country's topography, to use pontoons instead of landing wheels on the plane. Due to the wildly rank jungle and the unbelievably craggy nature of the region, chances were one in a thousand of finding a clearing large enough for a set-down.

On the other hand, Hidalgo was in a sphere of great rainfall, of tropical downpours. The streams were small rivers, and here and there in a mountain chasm lay a tiny lake. Hence the floats on the plane.

While Doc lifted the plane to ten thousand feet to find a favorable air current, and thus cut gasoline consumption, his five friends used binoculars through the cabin windows.

They hoped to find trace of their enemy, the blue monoplane. But not a glimpse of its hangar did they catch in the nodular, verdurous carpet of jungle. It must be concealed, they reasoned, somewhere very near the capital city of Blanco Grande. But they didn't sight it.

Below was an occasional patch of *milpa*, or native corn, growing in jungle clearings. Through the glasses, they could see natives carrying burdens in *macapals*, or netting bags suspended by a strap about the forehead. These became scarcer. Where had once been *milpa* patches was only a thick growth of *uamil* bushes ten to twenty feet high. They were leaving civilization behind. Hours passed.

Great *barrancas*, or gorges, began to split the terrain. The earth seemed to tumble and writhe and pile atop itself in inconceivable derangement. Mountains lurched up, gigantic, made black and ominous by the jungle growth. From above, the flyers could look down into canyons so deep their floors were nothing but gloomy space.

"There's not a level place down there big enough to stick a stamp on!" Renny declared in an awed voice.

Johnny laughed. "I told Monk that Columbus tackling the Atlantic Ocean had a pipe compared to this."

Monk snorted. "You're crazy. Us settin' in comfortable seats in this plane, and you call it somethin' hard! I don't see nothin' dangerous about it."

"You wouldn't!" Ham said dryly. "If we should be forced down, *you* could take to the trees. The rest of us would have to walk. And a half mile a day is good walking in that country under us!"

Renny, up in the pilot's well with Doc, called: "Heads up, you eggs! We're getting close!"

RENNY had checked their course figures again and again. He had calculated angles and inscribed lines on the map. And they were nearing their destination, the tract of land that was Doc's legacy! It lay directly ahead.

And ahead was a mountain range more nodular and sheer than any they had sighted yet. Its foothill peaks were like stone needles. To the rampant sides of the mountains clung stringy patches of jungle, fighting for existence.

The great speed plane bucked like a plains cayuse as it encountered the tremendous air currents set up by the precipitous wastes of stone below. This in spite of Doc's masterful hand at the controls. An ordinary pilot would have succumbed to such treacherous currents, or prudently turned back.

It was as though they were flying the tumultuous heart of a vast cyclone.

Monk, hanging tightly to a wicker seat, which was in turn strapped with metal to the plane fuselage, had become somewhat green under his ruddy brick complexion. Plainly, he had changed his ideas about the ease of their exploration method. Not that he was scared. But he was about as seasick as man ever became.

"These devilish air currents explain why this region has not been mapped by plane," Doc offered.

Four or five minutes later, he leveled an arm. "Look! That canyon should lead to the center of this tract of land we're hunting!"

The eyes, all of them, followed Doc's pointing arm.

A narrow-walled gash that seemed to sink a limitless depth into the mountain met their gaze. This cut was of bare stone, too steep and too flintlike in hardness to support even a trace of green growth.

The plane careened closer.

So deep was the gash of a canyon that twilight swathed the lower recesses. Renny, keen of eye and using binoculars, advised: "There is quite a stream of water running in the bottom of the canyon."

Fearlessly, Doc nosed the plane down. Another pilot would have banked away in terror from those malicious air currents. Doc, however, knew just how much his plane could stand. Although the craft might be tossed about a great deal, they were all as yet quite safe—as long as Doc's hand was on the controls.

Into the monster slash of a chasm, the plane rumbled its way. The motor thunder was tossed back in waves from the frowning walls. Suddenly air, cooled by the small river rushing through the cut and thus contracting and forming a down current, seemed to suck the plane into the depths. Wheeling, twisting, the speed ship plummeted among murky shadows.

Monk was now a striking example of the contention that sudden danger will cure seasickness—for he was entirely normal again.

Doc had the throttles against the wide-open pins. The three radial motors moaned and labored, and the exhaust pipes lipped blue flame.

The progress of the craft along the chasm was a procession of leaps and drops and side-whippings, as though they were riding an amusement-park jack rabbit, or roller coaster.

"It'll be a long old day before another gang of white explorers penetrate into this place!" Renny prophesied.

Doc's arm suddenly leveled like a bronze bar.

"*The Valley of the Vanished!*" he cried.

QUITE suddenly, it had appeared before them—the Valley of the Vanished!

A widening in the strange, devilish chasm formed it. The valley had roughly the

shape of an egg. The floor was sloping, of such a steepness that to land a wheel-equipped plane on it would be an impossibility.

There was only one spot of comparative levelness, and that was no greater than an acre or two in area.

It was on this level spot that the eyes of Doc and his five men instantly focused. They stared, unbelieving.

"Good Heaven!" gasped Johnny, the archaeologist.

From the little flat towered a pyramid! It adhered in a general way to the architecture of the Egyptian type of pyramids, but there were differences.

For one thing, the sides, instead of drawing inward in a series of steplike shelves, were smoothed as glass from top to bottom. Only in the front was there a flight of steps. Not more than twenty feet wide was this flight, and the steps were less high and deep than those in an American home. The stairway was like a ribbon up the glittering, sleek side of the pyramid.

The top of the structure was flat, and on this stood a sort of temple, a flat stone roof supported by square, wondrously carved pillars. Except for the pillars, this was open at the sides, permitting glimpses of fantastically wrought idols of stone.

Strangest of all, perhaps, was the color of the pyramid. Of a grayish-brownstone, yet it glowed all over with a strange yellow, metallic aurora of tiny lights caught and cast back.

"Priceless!" murmured Johnny, the archaeologist.

"You said it!" grunted Renny, the engineer.

"From a historical standpoint, I mean!" corrected Johnny.

"I meant from a pocketbook standpoint!" Renny snorted. "If I ever saw quartz absolutely full of wire gold, I see it now. I'll bet the stone that pyramid is made of would mill fifty thousand dollars to the ton in free gold!"

"Forget the gold!" snapped Johnny. "Don't you realize you're looking at a rare sample of ancient Mayan architecture? Something any archaeologist would give both hands and a leg to inspect!"

As the plane dived closer, another thing about the pyramid became noticeable. This was a sizable volume of water which

poured steadily down the pyramid side, coursing in a deep trough inlaid near the steps.

This water came out of the pyramid top by some artesian effect. Continuing away from the structure, it fed a long, narrow lake. This body of water in turn emptied into the stream that ran down the chasm up which Doc and his friends had flown.

Upon the sides of the egg-shaped valley, not far from the pyramid, stood rows of impressive stone houses. These were lavishly carved, strange of architecture. It was as though the flyers had slipped back into an age before history.

There were people—many of them. They were garbed weirdly.

Doc dropped the plane pontoons on the narrow lake surface.

IT was an awed group of men who peered from the plane as it grounded floats on the clean white sand of the tiny beach.

The natives of this Valley of the Vanished were running down the steep sides to meet them. It was difficult to tell whether their reception was going to be warlike or not.

"Maybe we'd better unlimber a machine gun?" Renny suggested. "I don't like the looks of that gang getting together in front!"

"No!" Doc shook his head. "After all, we haven't any moral right here. And I'll get out rather than massacre some of them!"

"But this land is all yours."

"In the eyes of civilized law, probably so," Doc agreed. "But there's another way of looking at it. It's a lousy trick for a government to take some poor savage's land away from him and give it to a white man to exploit. Our own American Indians got that kind of a deal, you know. Not that these people look so savage, though."

"They've got a pretty high type of civilization, if you ask me!" Renny declared. "That's the cleanest little city I ever saw!"

The men fell to watching the oncoming natives.

"They're every one a pure Mayan!" Johnny declared. "No outside races have intermarried with these people!"

The approaching Mayans were going through a strange maneuver. The bulk of the populace was holding back to let a group of

men, all of whom were garbed alike, come ahead.

These men were slightly larger in stature, more brutelike, of a thickness of shoulder and chest advertising powerful muscles. They wore a short mantle over the shoulders, a network of leather which had projecting ends rather like modern epaulets. They wore broad girdles of a dark blue, the ends of these forming aprons to the front and rear. Each man wore leggings not unlike football shin guards, and sandals which had extremely high backs.

They carried spears and short clubs of wood into which vicious-looking, razor-edged flakes of stone were fitted in the manner of saw teeth. In addition, each had a knife with an obsidian blade, and a hilt of wound leather.

Every one of these men also had his finger tips dyed scarlet for an inch of their length! None of the other tribesmen seemed to have the red fingers.

Suddenly the man who led this group halted. Turning, he lifted his hands above his head and harangued his followers in a voice of vast emotion and volume. This man was more stocky than the others. Indeed, he had Monk's anthropoid build without Monk's gigantic size. His face was dark and evil.

Doc listened with interest to the Mayan dialect as shouted by the speaker.

"That fellow is Morning Breeze, and the gang he is talking to are the sect of warriors, his followers!" Doc translated for his men, giving his own accurate deductions rather than the gist of Morning Breeze's speech.

"He looks more like an alley wind at midnight to me!" Monk muttered. "What's he ribbin' 'em up to do, Doc?"

Angry little lights danced in Doc Savage's golden eyes. "He is telling them the blue plane is a holy bird."

"That's what we wanted them to think!" said Renny. "So it's all right if—"

"It's not as right as you think," Doc interposed. "Morning Breeze is telling his warriors we are a human offering the holy blue bird has brought to be sacrificed."

"You mean—"

"They're going to kill us—if Morning Breeze has his way!"

Chapter XII THE LEGACY

MONK instantly whirled for the plane, rumbling: "I'm gonna meet 'em with a machine gun in each hand!"

But Doc's low voice stopped him.

"Wait," Doc suggested. "Morning Breeze's warriors haven't worked up their nerve yet. I have a scheme to try."

Doc stepped forward, advancing alone to meet the belligerent fighting sect of this lost clan of the ancient Mayans. There were fully a hundred red-fingered men in the conclave, every one armed to the teeth.

Seized with the insane fervor which comes upon addicts of exotic religions, they would be vicious customers in a fight. But Doc stepped up to them as calmly as he would go before a chamber of commerce luncheon gathering.

Morning Breeze stopped shouting at his followers to watch Doc. The chief warrior's features were even less likeable at close range. They were tattooed in colored designs, making them quite repulsive. His little black eyes glittered like a pig's.

Doc dropped his right hand into his coat pocket. Here reposed the obsidian knife he had taken from the Mayan who had killed himself in New York. Doc knew, from what he had heard in the Blanco Grande hotel room, that great significance attached to these knives.

With dignity, Doc elevated both bronze hands high above his head. In doing so, he carefully kept the sacred obsidian knife hidden from the Mayans. He had palmed it like a magician.

"Greetings, my children!" he said in the best Mayan he could manage.

Then, with a quick flirt of his wrist, he brought the knife into view. With such expert sleight-of-hand did he accomplish this that it looked to the Mayans like the obsidian blade had materialized in thin air.

The effect was noticeable. Red-fingered hands moved uncertainly. Feet shod in high-backed sandals shifted about. A low murmur arose.

While the time was opportune, Doc's powerful voice vibrated over the group.

"Myself and my friends come to speak with King Chaac, your ruler!" he said.

Morning Breeze didn't like this at all. A variety of emotions played on his unlovely face.

Watching the warrior chief, Doc catalogued the man's character accurately. Morning Breeze was hungry for power and glory. He wanted to be supreme among his people. And for that reason, he was an enemy of King Chaac, the ruler. The darkening of Morning Breeze's countenance at mention of King Chaac apprised Doc of this last state of affairs.

"Tell me your business here!" commanded Morning Breeze in substance, seeking to give his coarse voice a ring of overbearing authority.

Doc, knowing that if he gave Morning Breeze an inch of rope, the fellow would take the whole lasso, made his tone more commanding.

"My business is not with underlings, but with King Chaac himself!" he thundered.

This also had its effect. Both on Morning Breeze, who turned purple with humiliation and rage, and on the other warriors, who were plainly impressed. Doc could see they were of a mind to postpone the sacrificing and take the white strangers to King Chaac.

Putting a volume of dignity and command in his voice which few other men could have managed, Doc directed: "Do not delay longer!"

Doc's sleight-of-hand with the knife, his knowledge of their language, his dominant bearing, all worked triumphantly to his advantage.

The phalanx of red-fingered men melted away in the middle, forming an encircling group to escort Doc and his men to King Chaac.

"That is what I call runnin' a whizzer!" Monk grinned admiringly.

"Here's something to remember!" Doc told him. "Anything that smacks of magic impresses these red-fingered fighters. That's the principal thing that saved us a lot of trouble."

They left the plane on the narrow sand beach, depending on superstitious fear to keep the Mayan populace away. The yellow-skinned folk would hardly be irreligious enough to finger the holy blue bird.

JUDGING from their physical appearance, the other Mayans were an entirely sociable people. They were not hard on the eyes, either, especially some of the young women. Their clothing showed expert weaving and dyeing, and in some of it, fine wire gold had been interwoven with luxuriant effect.

Their skins were a beautiful golden color; absolutely without blemish.

"I don't believe I ever saw better complexions in a race of people," Ham declared.

The young women and some of the younger men wore high headdresses of gorgeous tropical flowers. Some had trains that fell in graceful manner about their shoulders.

Monk remarked on the uniform beauty of the Mayans, with the exception of the red-fingered warriors.

"Looks like they pick out the ugly ducklings and make fighters of them!" he chuckled.

And they later found this very thing was true. To become a warrior, a Mayan had to attain a certain degree of ugliness, both physically and of mind. The Mayans had no prison system. When one of their number committed a minor crime, he was sentenced, not to exile or prison, but to become a fighting man—a protector of the tribe.

These red-fingered warriors fought off invaders, and kept the Valley of the Vanished for the Mayans alone. Thus, many of them were slain in battle, and hence actually punished.

They were the most ignorant and superstitious in the Valley of the Vanished, these crimson-fingered fighting men.

The cavalcade trod the streets of the little Mayan city.

Johnny, with the excitement of a born archaeologist making new discoveries of stupendous interest, could hardly be kept in line.

"These buildings!" he gasped. "They are erected exactly as in the great ruined city of Chichen Itza and elsewhere. See, they never use the arch in construction of roofs or doorways!"

One peculiarity about the buildings struck the others, who, with the exception of Doc, did not know a great deal about the Mayan type of architecture. The structures were replete with carvings of animals,

grotesque human figures and birds. Not a square inch but was sculptured in some likeness. The Mayans seemed to dislike leaving even a tiny bit of unadorned space.

They came finally to a stone house larger than the rest. It was lifted slightly above the others upon a foundation of masonry.

They were ushered inside, into the presence of King Chaac.

KING CHAAC was a distinct shock. But a pleasant one.

He was a tall, solid man, only a little stooped with age. His hair was a snowy white, and his features were nearly as perfect as Doc's own! Dressed in an evening suit, Chaac would have been a distinct credit to any banquet table in New York. He wore a *maxtli*, or broad girdle, of red, with the ends forming an apron in front and back.

He was stationed in the middle of a large room.

Beside him stood a young woman. She was by a long stretch the most attractive of the Mayan girls they had seen. The perfection of her features revealed instantly that she was King Chaac's daughter. She was nearly as tall as her father. The exquisite fineness of her beauty was like the work of some masterly craftsman in gold.

"A pippin!" gasped Monk.

"Not bad," admitted Renny, his long, tight-lipped face losing a bit of its puritanical look.

Doc, in a low voice only the pair discussing the girl could hear, said sharply: "Dry up, you gorillas! Can't you see she understands English?"

Monk and Renny looked sharply at the girl—and both instantly became red as well-cooked beets.

For it was evident the ravishing young Mayan lady had heard their remarks and understood them. Her features were flushed, and she was distinctly embarrassed.

Doc, in his halting Mayan, began to greet King Chaac.

"You may speak your own language," interposed King Chaac.

He spoke English that was fair enough!

For once, Doc was taken with surprise. It was a long twenty seconds before he thought of something to say. Then he

waved an arm slowly to take in all his surroundings.

"I don't quite understand all this," he murmured. "Here you are, obviously descendants of an ancient civilization. You are in a valley practically impregnable to outsiders. The rest of the world does not even dream you are here. You live exactly as your ancestors did, hundreds of years ago. Yet you greet me in excellent English!"

King Chaac bowed easily. "I can dispel your curiosity, Mr. Clark Savage, Jr."

Had Doc been less of a man than he was, that would have knocked him over.

He was known here!

"Your esteemed father taught me the English tongue," smiled King Chaac. "I recognize you as his son. You resemble him."

Doc nodded slowly. He should have guessed that. And it was very good to know his great father had been here. For wherever Savage, Sr., had gone, he had made friends among all people who were worthy of friendship.

The next few words exchanged had to do with introductions. The ravishing young Mayan lady's name was Monja. She was, as they had surmised, a princess; King Chaac's daughter.

The squat, surly chief of the red-fingered warriors, Morning Breeze, was ordered outside by King Chaac. His going was slinky, reluctant. And he paused in the door for a final, avid look at Princess Monja.

That glance told Doc something else. Morning Breeze had a crush on Monja. And judging from Monja's uplifted nose, she didn't think much of the chief of fighting men.

"I don't blame her, either," Monk whispered to Ham, making very sure his voice was so low nobody else heard. "Imagine having to stare at that phiz of his across the breakfast table every morning!"

Ham looked at Monk—and released a loud laugh. Monk's face was fully as homely as Morning Breeze's, although in a more likable way.

DOC SAVAGE put the query that was uppermost in his mind. "How does it happen your people are here—like this—as they lived hundreds of years ago?"

King Chaac smiled benignly. "Because we are satisfied with our way of

living. We lead an ideal existence here. True, we must fight to keep invaders away. But the warlike tribes surrounding this mountain do most of that for us. They are our friends. It is only every year or two that our red-fingered warriors must drive off some especially persistent invader. Thanks to the impregnable nature of this valley, that is not difficult."

"How long have you been here—when did you settle here, I mean?" Doc asked.

"Hundreds of years ago—at the time of the Spanish conquest of Mexico," explained the old Mayan. "My ancestors who settled the valley were a clan of the highest class Mayans, the royalty. They fled from the Spanish soldiers to this valley. We have been here since, satisfied, as I said, to exist without the rest of the world."

Doc, reflecting on the turmoil and bloodshed and greed that had racked the rest of the world in the interim, could not but agree that the course these people had taken had its merits. They might be without a few conveniences of modern homes, but they probably didn't miss them.

Elderly King Chaac spoke up unexpectedly: "I know why you are here, Mr. Savage."

"Eh?"

"Your father sent you. It was agreed that upon the passage of twenty years, you were to come to me. And I was to be the judge of whether or not to give you access to the gold which is of no value to we of the Valley of the Vanished."

Lights of understanding flickered in Doc's golden eyes. So this had been the text of the remainder of that letter, the burned first portion of which he had found in his father's robbed safe!

It was all plain now. His father had discovered this lost valley with its strange inhabitants and its fabulous hoard of gold. He had decided to leave it as a legacy to his son. He had secured possession of the land inclosing the Valley of the Vanished. And he had made some arrangement with King Chaac. The thing to do was to find out what kind of arrangements!

Doc put the inquiry: "What sort of an agreement did my father have with you?"

"He did not tell you?" the old Mayan asked in surprise.

Doc lowered his head. Slowly, he explained his father had died suddenly. The elderly Mayan maintained a reverent silence for a time after he heard the sad news. Then he outlined the business aspects of the gold deal.

"You will necessarily give a certain portion to the government of Hidalgo," he said.

Doc nodded. "The agreement is one fifth to the government of Hidalgo. That is eminently fair. The President of Hidalgo, Carlos Avispa, is a fine old gentleman."

"A third of all gold removed is to be placed in a trust fund in the name of my people," explained King Chaac. "You are to establish that fund and see that suitable honest administrators are appointed. The other two thirds you are to have, not to build up a personal fortune, but to spend as you see fit in furthering the work in which your father was engaged—in righting wrongs, relieving the oppressed, in benefiting mankind in every way possible."

"A third to your people don't seem like a very big percentage," Doc suggested.

King Chaac smiled. "You will be surprised at the sum it will come to. And we may never need it. This Valley of the Vanished, you understand, remains just as it is—unknown to the world. And the source of this gold will also be unknown to the world."

JOHNNY, twiddling his glasses which had the magnifying lens on the left side, had been an interested listener to all this. Now he broke in with a puzzled query.

"I noticed the nature of the rock about here," he said. "And, although the pyramid is made of high-grade gold ore, there is no sign of quantities of the rock near by. If you're figuring on giving us the pyramid, will your people stand for it?"

"The pyramid remains untouched!" There was a sharpness in King Chaac's voice. "That is our shrine! It shall stand always!"

"Then where is the gold?"

King Chaac turned to Doc. "You will be shown to it within thirty days—or sooner, if I decide it is time. But until then, you will know no more."

"Why this condition?" Doc inquired.

There seemed the slightest of twinkles in the old Mayan's eyes as he retorted: "That I do not care to disclose."

Throughout the entire confab, pretty Princess Monja had been standing to one side. And almost the whole time, she had been watching Doc, a strange, veiled expression in her eyes.

"I wish she'd look at me like that!" Monk confided to Ham.

King Chaac's declaration of the thirty-day moratorium on all information concluded the interview. He gave orders to his followers that Doc and his men should be treated with the best.

Doc and his men spent the remainder of the day making friends with the Mayans. They did little tricks of magic that highly entertained the simple people. Long Tom with an electrical shocking apparatus he rigged up, and Monk with some chemical displays, were the favorites.

Morning Breeze and his warriors, however, kept severely aloof. They were often seen chatting in surly groups.

"They're gonna give us trouble," Renny declared, playfully cracking soft rocks with his ironlike fists to awe and amuse a young Mayan.

Doc agreed. "They're more ignorant than the others. And this devil who is behind the Hidalgo revolution is a nabob in the sect of fighting men. He's going to send the Red Death on the tribe before long."

"Can't we stop it? That infernal Red Death, I mean?"

"We can try," Doc said seriously. "But I'm doubtful that we can do much until it strikes. We don't even know how they spread it, much less what the cure is."

"Maybe if we got them the gold in the form of a bribe so they wouldn't inflict this Red Death—"

"That would mean the success of the Hidalgo revolt, and hundreds of people killed, Renny!"

"That's right," Renny muttered soberly.

For sleeping quarters, they were allotted a many-room house not a great distance from the gleaming golden pyramid.

They turned in early. The night gave promise of not being as chilly as they had expected it to be up here in the mountains.

Chapter XIII DEATH STALKS

THE following day was devoted to nothing more glorious than killing time. Exhibiting little tricks soon palled. So Doc and Renny set out to explore the Valley of the Vanished.

They found it as much a prison as a fortress. The narrowest of paths chiseled into the sheer gorge side was the only route out, afoot. And by air, nothing except a seaplane could land. No dirigible could withstand those terrific air currents.

The sides of the valley were in cultivation, growing vegetables and many *milpa* patches. There was cotton, and domesticated, long-haired goats, for clothing. Jungle growth was rank everywhere else.

"They're pretty well fixed," Doc remarked. "Not fancy. But you couldn't want more."

Strolling back to the little city beside the golden pyramid, Doc and Renny encountered the attractive Princess Monja. Obviously, she had maneuvered this meeting. She was, it could plainly be seen, greatly taken with the handsome Doc.

This embarrassed Doc no little. He had long ago made up his mind that women were to play no part in his career. Anyway, his was not a nature to easily lend itself to domestication. So he answered Princess Monja's eager patter in monosyllables, and carefully avoided being led into discussions about how pretty American girls were in comparison to, well—Monja, for instance.

It was not an easy course to take. Monja was one of the most ravishing young women Doc had ever encountered.

Back at the city, they could not help but notice a subtle change in the attitude of many of the Mayans. Even those who were not of the red-fingered sect now looked at Doc and his friends with unfriendly eyes.

The red-fingered warriors were mingling with the populace, doing a lot of talking.

Doc chanced to overhear one of these conversations. It told him what was happening. The red-fingered men were poisoning the minds of the other Mayans against the whites. Doc and his men, the warriors claimed, were pale-skinned devils that had ridden here like worms in the

innards of the great blue bird that landed on the water. And so, as worms, they should be destroyed.

It was clever work on the part of the red-fingered ones. Doc went away thoughtful.

That night, Doc and his five friends turned in early again, largely because the Mayans seemed to go to roost with the chickens. Whether it was the hardness of the stone benches that served these golden-skinned folk for beds, or because of nervous excitement over their position here in the Valley of the Vanished, they didn't sleep well.

LONG TOM, occupying a large room with Johnny and Ham, stuck it out on his stone slab exactly one hour. Then insomnia got the best of him. He yanked on his trousers and took a stroll in the moonlight that penetrated faintly to the floor of the great chasm of which the valley was a part.

For no particular reason, Long Tom's footsteps took him toward the pyramid. The thing fascinated him. So rich was the ore of which it was built that it was literally a mound of gold. What a fabulous value it must have!

Long Tom hoped looking at such wealth would make him sleepy.

It didn't. It cost him dearly.

For while he was having his first eye-filling look at the golden pyramid with the stream of water running steadily out of its top, a man sprang onto his back. A vile hand clapped over Long Tom's mouth.

Long Tom might look none too healthy, but under his sallow hide were some very ropy, powerful muscles. He couldn't have stood the gaff with Doc's bunch without them. He could probably whip ninety-nine out of every hundred men you meet on the street, and not shown fatigue in doing it.

He angled both fists around, drove them behind him. He hit nobody. He bit the unclean fingers that held his mouth. The fingers jerked away. Long Tom started a yell. A hand, thoroughly protected by cloth this time, stoppered his jaws.

Other attackers rushed in. They were bounding dervishes in the moon glow. The red-fingered warriors!

Long Tom kicked mightily backward. He peeled a shin. He and his assailants toppled among round rocks and soft dirt.

One of Long Tom's clawlike hands found a rock. He popped it against a skull—

knew by the feel of the blow that one of the red-fingered fiends was through with this world.

Sheer weight of numbers mashed Long Tom out before he could do more damage. He was securely bound at wrist and ankle with stout cotton cords, then drawn into a helpless knot as his wrists and ankles were tied in a single wad.

A red-fingered Mayan who had kept well away from the fight, now came up. Long Tom recognized Morning Breeze, chief of the fighting men.

Morning Breeze clucked a command in the Mayan tongue, which Long Tom did not understand.

Lifting Long Tom, they bore him around to the rear of the pyramid. They shoved through a high growth of brush, coming then to a circular flooring of stone blocks. In the center of this gaped a sinister, black, round aperture.

Long Tom was left in doubt as to what this was for only a moment.

Morning Breeze picked up a pebble, smirked evilly at Long Tom, then tossed the rock into the round opening.

One second dragged, another! The pebble must have fallen two hundred feet! There was a loud clatter as it struck a rock bottom. Then out of the ghastly hole came a bedlam of hissings and grisly, slithering noises!

The hole was a sacrificial well! Long Tom recalled reading how the ancient Mayans had tossed human offerings into such wells. And the hissings and slitherings were snakes! Poisonous, beyond a doubt. There must be hundreds of them in the well bottom!

Morning Breeze callously gave a command.

Long Tom suffered unutterable tortures as he was lifted and tossed bodily into the awful black opening.

Morning Breeze listened. A moment later came a horrible thump from the well bottom. The poisonous serpents hissed and slithered.

Morning Breeze and his evil followers turned away, highly pleased.

UNKNOWN to Long Tom when he left the sleeping quarters, Ham had not been sleeping soundly. One eye drowsily open,

Ham had watched Long Tom pull on his trousers and go out.

Ham drowsed a while after that. But Long Tom's departure had done something to what little desire he had for sleep, so it was not long before Ham also got up and pulled on his trousers. Thanks to the balmy night, no more clothing was needed.

Ham took his sword cane along, although for no particular reason. He just liked the feel of it in his hands.

Outside, he saw no sign of Long Tom. But a little use of his keen brain told Ham where the electrical wizard would be likely to stroll; the most fascinating spot in the Valley of the Vanished, if one disregarded the really entrancing Mayan girls. The golden pyramid, of course! Long Tom, like the rest of Doc's men, would not be wooing a Mayan damsel at this hour. They were not interested in women, these supreme adventurers.

Ham ambled toward the pyramid, breathing in deeply of the lambent night air. He heard no sound, certainly nothing to alarm him. He clipped the gaudy flower off a tropical vine with a jaunty swing of his cane.

A split second later, Ham was buried under an avalanche of red-fingered men!

No gallant of old ever bared his steel quicker than Ham unsheathed his sword cane. He got it out in time to skewer two of the devils who piled atop him!

Outnumbered hopelessly, Ham was bound and gagged.

They carried Ham to the sacrificial well, and without a word, threw him in.

Morning Breeze, poised on the well rim, listened until he heard the loud smash come up from the pit floor two hundred feet below. The snakes, disturbed, made enraged noises.

Morning Breeze nodded and clucked to himself. Two of them gone! He gave another command.

The three red-fingered warriors who had been killed by Long Tom and Ham were hauled up. One after the other, the dead forms were pitched into the sacrificial well. Three loud thumps and snake sounds arose.

Very elated indeed, Morning Breeze led his followers to get further victims.

MONK had been sleeping soundly, but the stone bed was hard, and Monk got a nightmare. In the nightmare, he was fighting

a million clawing, crimson-tipped fingers while a beautiful Mayan princess looked on. Monk whipped all the red fingers in his dream, but as he started toward the entrancing princess to claim his reward, a man who looked suspiciously like Doc came up and took her away. That woke Monk up.

He sat erect, then stood on his feet to stretch. Looking about, he made a discovery that surprised him. Both Doc and Renny should have been slumbering in this same room.

But their stone couches were unoccupied!

Monk thought a bit, concluded they were out talking somewhere, and decided to join them. He started to put on his trousers, then changed his mind. He had noted a *maxtli*, one of the broad girdles the Mayan gentlemen wore. Evidently it had belonged to whoever gave up the house for their comfort, since it hung on the wall.

Monk whipped the *maxtli* twice about his middle in lieu of pants, and sauntered out. He had an idea he'd go swimming if nothing better turned up.

Unable to locate either Doc or Renny, Monk made for the lake shore. He was not worried about his two friends. That anything could happen to them without an alarm being raised was hardly likely.

The lake was an appealing blue. Away from the shore a few yards, were large rocks. Monk wended his good-natured way through these.

Suddenly he got a tremendous start by encountering pretty Princess Monja face to face. She was evidently out strolling in the moonlight. Alone, too.

Monk felt a great deal of confusion. He made a move to go back hastily the way he had been coming.

But Princess Monja smiled sweetly at Monk's pleasantly ugly face, and requested: "Do not leave so quickly, please! I wish to ask you a question."

Monk hesitated. He asked bluntly, "What's the question?"

Princess Monja blushed prettily. For a moment it looked like she was going to be too bashful to put the query. Then, out it came.

It was: "What is there about myself that your leader finds undesirable?"

"Huh?" Monk stuttered, at a loss for an answer. "Oh, Doc likes you all right. He likes everybody."

"I do not believe so," said the entrancing Mayan. "He remains aloof."

"Well," floundered Monk, "I guess that's just Doc's way."

"There is a girl—he is—?"

"In love with anybody?" Monk snorted. "Heck no! There ain't a girl livin' who could make Doc's heart—"

Monk abruptly swallowed the rest. But it was too late. He had said the wrong thing.

Princess Monja spun on her heel and vanished among the large rocks. The trace of a sob lingered behind her.

MONK stood there in the moonlight a while. Then he went back to his sleeping quarters. Doc and Renny were still missing.

Just to ascertain that things were all right, Monk stepped into the adjoining room where Johnny, Long Tom, and Ham were supposed to be slumbering.

All three were gone!

Monk's huge fingers curled and uncurled. He knew something was wrong now! All five of his friends would not be out taking the night air at once!

A giant, animallike figure, Monk sprang outside. His keen ears strained. They detected faint noises. To the right! He made for them, his leaps enormous, bounding.

Quite a number of men seemed to be receding furtively through the night. Monk put on a burst of speed to overhaul them.

The golden pyramid came in view.

On the left of it, Monk discerned the men he was following. Fully a dozen of them! They carried a limp, bound form in their midst.

Monk had a technique for running in the dark. His unnaturally long arms played an important part. He simply doubled over and traveled by great bounds, balancing himself with his long arms when he stumbled. He could make unbelievable speed.

He raced his best now. He tried repeatedly to see who it was the men—they were red-fingered warriors—were carrying.

Johnny! They had Johnny!

Monk did not know Long Tom and Ham had already gone into the sacrificial

well, or he would have been even more horrified than he was.

The red-fingered men had seen him now. They quickened their own pace, shedding caution. They ran out on the stone pavement around the sacrificial well.

Still fifty feet from them, Monk saw them lift Johnny's bound and gagged frame and toss him into the fiendish pit!

Monk heard the loud, heavy thump come up from the well bottom!

That turned Monk into such a fighting devil as he seldom became. His great hands scooped up two rocks. He hurled them with the velocity of cannon balls.

Both rocks downed their men.

So sudden was the attack, so fearsome a figure did Monk present that the red-fingered group turned to a man and fled wildly into the brush. Monk overhauled one before they got away. He heaved the loathsome creature up like a feather and dashed him against a tree. The lifeless body bounced back almost to his feet, so terrific was the impact.

Into the undergrowth Monk dived. He searched like a terrier after rats. But the warriors knew the vegetation. They evaded him.

It was high tribute to the fright Monk inspired that they did not even dare throw a knife or a spear at him, but crept away like sneaking coyotes into the night.

Slowly, with his heart the heaviest it had ever been, Monk went back to the sacrificial well. He had heard that thump come up from the bottom—he knew the well must be at least two hundred feet deep.

Poor Johnny! To meet a fate like that! One of the most brilliant living geologists and archaeologists snuffed out at the dawn of his career. It was awful.

Nearing the well, Monk could hear the gruesome hissing and swishing of serpent bodies deep in the black Gehenna of a pit. He recognized the noises for what they were. Johnny didn't stand a chance of being alive! Salty tears came to Monk's eyes.

With an effort, he brought himself to look over the rim of the sacrificial well.

Out of the pit came Ham's sarcastic drawl.

"I ask you, brothers, did you ever see an uglier face than that?"

Chapter XIV DOC PULLS A RESURRECTION

SO astounded was Monk that he came within a hair of toppling head-first into the sacrificial well. He hastily got away from the brink.

A sibilant "Sh-h-h!" came out of the hole, warning silence.

Johnny then appeared, shoved from behind. Johnny was a little scuffed and pale, but otherwise none the worse for his grisly encounter. He kept low, behind the screen of bushes that surrounded the sacrificial well.

Long Tom was helped out next. Then Ham. They, too, were unharmed. And finally Renny.

At last, Doc himself appeared.

"You wait here," Doc whispered. "I'm going to the plane to get some materials."

He vanished like a bronze ghost in the moonlight.

"What happened to you birds?" Monk demanded.

"The red-fingered rascals got us, one at a time, bound and gagged us, and threw us in the well," Long Tom explained.

"Aw-w-w! I mean, what saved you?"

"Doc."

"How?"

"It beat anything you ever saw," Long Tom murmured admiringly. "Doc and Renny were out prowling, and saw the warriors grab me. Doc ran to the plane and got a stout silk rope, or, rather, two of them." Long Tom pointed. "There they are!"

Monk looked, and perceived what he had not before noted in the moonlight. The two ropes, thin but extremely strong, were tied to a couple of the stout shrubs surrounding the paved circle. The ends of the ropes dangled in the well. The Mayans, too, had missed seeing them.

"Doc and Renny slid down into the well before the warriors got here," Long Tom continued. "Renny held a big rock in his arms. He tied the rope end around his waist to support him."

Long Tom laughed softly—but not very heartily. "When the red-fingered men tossed me in, Renny dropped the rock to make it sound like I had hit bottom. And—"

"And Doc simply swung out and caught them, one at a time, as they came down," Renny chimed in. "Then they clung to

the sides of the well. That was not much of a job, because the sides are very rough, some blocks sticking out enough for a man to sit on in comfort."

"You looked like you were crying when you stuck your mug into the pit," Johnny chided Monk. "Did you really hate to see me go that much?"

"Aw-w, foey on you!" Monk grinned.

Doc came back, appearing with the silent unexpectedness of an apparition.

"Why didn't you and Renny pitch in and clean up on the warriors when you saw them grab Long Tom?" Monk asked.

"Because I reasoned he'd be thrown into the sacrificial well alive," Doc replied. "That is the customary manner of sacrificing offerings. And I wanted the red-fingered devils to think Long Tom, Johnny, and Ham are dead. I've got an idea to pull."

"What?"

"The warriors are our immediate trouble here," Doc explained. "If we can convince them we are really supernatural beings, we'll have half the battle won. Then we can concentrate on trapping this man who is behind the Hidalgo revolution scheme."

"Sure," Monk agreed. "But how to convince them is the catch." He rubbed his big knuckles. "I'm in favor of glomming onto Morning Breeze and the rest of them, and have an old-fashioned lynching party. That'd fix it."

"And have the rest of the Mayans on top of us," Doc pointed out. "No. I'm going to convince those superstitious fighters I am an extra sort of a guy. I'll run such a whizzer on them that they won't dare to listen to Morning Breeze telling them we're ordinary men!"

Doc paused dramatically, then revealed his plan. "I'm going to bring Long Tom, Johnny, and Ham to life for the warrior sect's benefit!"

Monk digested that. "How?"

"Watch us," Doc suggested, "and you'll catch on."

WORKING rapidly, Doc pried up paving stones in a line to the thickest part of the surrounding jungle. In the soft earth beneath, he dug a narrow trench.

He had brought with him from the plane a coil of stout piano wire. No greater in diameter than a match, it had a strength sufficient to support several men. This he laid

in the trench, afterward replacing the paving stones, careful no evidence remained of their having been disturbed.

The end of the piano wire he ran into the sacrificial well, and straight across and out the other side. To a dead-man-stick anchor some yards beyond he secured the end, uprooting other paving blocks and replacing them so the whole work would go unnoticed.

Directly below the well mouth he rigged a sort of saddle on the wire.

"Catch on?" he asked.

Monk did. "Sure. I hide out there in the brush and give the wire a big pull when you pass the word. Long Tom, Johnny, and Ham take turns sitting in that saddle arrangement. When I pull the wire tight, they will be tossed out of the well. Just like an arrow is thrown from a bow."

"Or a rock from a kid's bean shooter," Doc agreed. "One more little detail."

Inside the well, close to the anchored end, Doc cut the wire. He tied the end in a loop. The other end he secured to that in such a manner that, by yanking on an ordinary twine string which Doc attached, the last man thrown out by the ingenious catapult could separate the wire.

"And you pull in the end, saddle and all," Doc pointed out to Monk. "That gets rid of the evidence, in case anybody is suspicious enough to look into the well."

Johnny, Long Tom, and Ham climbed down into the well, to spend the rest of the night roosting on the jutting ends of the huge rocks which formed the masonry wall.

"Don't get drowsy and fall off!" Monk chided.

"Not much danger!" Long Tom shuddered. "Just you don't let the end of that wire slip out of your hands while I'm in the saddle!"

Monk leered delightedly at his old roasting mate, Ham. "Now, there *is* an idea!" he chuckled with mock threat. "I've got the ugliest face in the world, have I?"

To which Ham grinned: "You're a raving beauty until I get out of that saddle, Monk!"

A FAIR degree of daylight came long before the sun actually could be seen from the floor of the Valley of the Vanished, due to the tremendous depth of the chasm.

With the first flush of luminance, Doc was in conference with old King Chaac, benign sovereign of the lost clan of Maya.

The elderly ruler was very enraged when he heard Morning Breeze and his red-fingered men had consigned three of Doc's friends to the sacrificial well during the night.

Doc had neglected to mention that his three men were still quite alive.

"The time has come for a firm hand!" the Mayan chief said in his surprisingly good English. "In the past the people have put the warrior sect in its place when their depredations became unbearable.

"Morning Breeze has been working for a long time, slowly undermining my authority. Not satisfied with being chief of the fighting men, which is not such an honorable post, he desires to rule. It is also no secret that he wishes my daughter in marriage! I shall call together men and seize Morning Breeze and those next him in authority. They shall follow your men into the sacrificial well!"

Likable old King Chaac, Doc reflected, had waited a little too long before putting a firm hand upon Morning Breeze.

"Your people are under the spell of Morning Breeze's eloquence," Doc pointed out. "To lay hands on him would cause an uprising."

The Mayan winced a little at the blunt statement that his power had ebbed. Reluctantly he agreed.

"I have let Morning Breeze go too far, hoping to avert violence," he admitted. Then he looked wryly at Doc. "I should have been more alert. Our warriors have never been considered members of an honorable profession. It is not like your country, where soldiers are fine men. We Mayans are by nature a peaceable folk. To us war is a low thing."

He shrugged. "Those of our men who are inclined to violence naturally turn to the warrior sect. Many lazy men join the fighting group because the warriors do no labor. Too, petty criminals are sentenced to join the red-fingered ones. The fighting guild are a class apart. No upstanding Mayan would think of taking one of them into his home."

"But they seem to have more influence than that now," Doc smiled.

"They do," King Chaac admitted. "The red-fingered men fight off invaders from the Valley of the Vanished. Otherwise their

sect would have been abolished hundreds of years ago."

Doc now broached the subject of his visit. "I have a plan which will dwarf the influence of the red-fingered sect."

Renewed energy flowed into the elderly Mayan sovereign at Doc's statement. He looked at this bronze Apollo of a man before him, and seemed to gather confidence.

"What is your plan?"

"I am going to bring my three friends who were thrown in the sacrificial well back to life," Doc disclosed.

This brought varied expressions to the staid Mayan's face. Uppermost was skepticism.

"Your father spent some months in this Valley of the Vanished," he told Doc. "He taught me many things—the fallacy of belief in evil spirits and heathen deities. And along with the rest he taught me that what you have just promised to do is impossible. If your men were hurled into the sacrificial well, they are dead until judgment day."

A faint smile warped Doc's strong bronze lips; appreciation glowed in his flaky golden eyes. The Mayan sovereign was as free of superstitious, heathen beliefs as any American. Probably more so than many.

So Doc explained how he had caught his friends as they were thrown into the fiendish sacrificial pit. A bystander would have marveled how insignificant Doc made his feat sound.

Elderly King Chaac fell in heartily with the resurrection scheme.

EVERY community of human beings has certain individuals who are more addicted to talking than others. These gossips no sooner get a morsel of news than they start imparting it to every one they meet.

King Chaac, using his deep understanding of his Mayan subjects, selected about fifty of these walking newspapers to witness the reanimation of Johnny, Long Tom, and Ham. There was not room for the whole tribe, which would have been the best audience. They would have overflowed the stone paving about the sacrificial well and surely discovered Monk hidden in the luxuriant tropical growth. And the whole resurrection depended on Monk's tremendous strength to jerk the wire, the

tightening of which would fling Johnny, Long Tom, and Ham out of the well mouth.

Doc, since his knowledge of the Mayan language was not sufficient to make a public speech, left the oratory to King Chaac. The elderly Mayan was an eloquent speaker, his mellow voice making the clattering gutturals of the language pleasantly liquid.

King Chaac told of the fate of Doc's three friends during the night. He gave the impression, of course, they had perished among the sharp rocks and poisonous serpents in the depths of the sacrificial well.

Finally he announced Doc's act.

Truly impressive was the figure Doc Savage presented as he made dignified progress to the gaping, evil mouth of the sacrificial well. His face was serious; not the slightest humor flickered in his golden eyes.

The situation had little comedy. If his trick failed, there would be serious consequences indeed. The crimson-fingered warriors would brand him a faker, set upon him. The other Mayans wouldn't object.

He glanced at the warriors. The entire clique of fighting men stood to one side, varying expressions on their unlovely faces—from frank unbelief to fear. They were all curious. And Morning Breeze glared surly hate.

Doc brought his bronze arms out rigidly before him. His fists were closed tightly, dramatically. In his left hand was a quantity of ordinary flash powder, such as photographers use. In his right was a cigarette lighter.

After what he considered the proper amount of incantations and mysterious rigmarole, Doc stooped at the well mouth. So none could see, he poured out a little pile of the flash powder. He touched a lighter spark to it.

There was a flash, a great bloom of white smoke. And when the smoke blew away a loud howl of surprise went up from the red-fingered men.

For Long Tom stood upon the well lip!

The trick had worked perfectly.

Doc followed exactly the same procedure and got Ham out of the sacrificial pit.

Immediately Morning Breeze tried to dash up and look into the well. But Doc, with an ominous thunder in his voice, informed Morning Breeze that powerful invisible spirits,

great enemies of his, were congregated about the sacrificial well mouth. And Morning Breeze retreated, scared in spite of himself.

Johnny was resurrected next. As Johnny came out of the pit, he jerked the trip string which separated the wire. And Monk, concealed in the brush, drew wire and saddle out of the well.

When Doc turned after the last reanimation and saw the effect on the red-fingered men, it was difficult not to show his satisfaction. For every warrior was on his knees, arms upstretched. Only Morning Breeze alone stood. And, after a compelling, hypnotic look from Doc's golden eyes, even Morning Breeze slouched reluctantly to his knees along with the rest.

It was a perfect victory. The lay tribesmen present were as impressed as the red-fingered men. The news would spread as though broadcast by radio. And to Doc would come the type of superstitious power, but an infinitely greater amount, that Morning Breeze had held.

Hearts were light as Doc and his five friends and King Chaac and entrancing Princess Monja turned away.

BUT their jubilation was short-lived.

With a piercing howl, Morning Breeze was on his feet. He urged his satellites erect, even kicking some of the less willing.

Shouting again in dramatic fashion, Morning Breeze pointed at the lake shore.

All eyes followed his arm.

Doc's low-wing speed plane had floated into view around a rocky headland. It was being pushed by a number of red-fingered warriors who had not attended the session at the sacrificial well.

The plane was no longer blue!

It was daubed with a bilious, motley assortment of grays and pallid yellows. And prominent upon the fuselage sides were large red spots.

"The Red Death!" The words rose in a low moan from the Mayans!

Morning Breeze was quick to seize his advantage.

"Our gods are angered!" he shrieked. "They have sent the Red Death upon the blue bird which brought these white-skinned devils!"

Renny knotted and unknotted his gigantic, steel-hard fists.

"The whelp is clever! He repainted our plane last night."

Doc spoke in a voice so low it carried only to his five friends. "Morning Breeze did not have the intelligence to think that up, if I am any judge. Somebody is prompting him. And that somebody can only be the murderer of my father, the fiend who is planning the Hidalgo revolution."

"But how could that devil get in touch with Morning Breeze so soon?"

"You forget the blue monoplane," Doc pointed out. "The craft could have dropped him by parachute in the Valley of the Vanished."

They ceased speaking to listen to Morning Breeze harangue his uncertain followers.

"The gods are wroth that we permit these white heretics in our midst!" was the gist of his exhorting. "We must wipe them out!"

He was rapidly undoing the good work Doc had accomplished.

King Chaac addressed Doc in a voice that was strained but full of violent resolve. "I have never executed one of my subjects during my entire reign, but I am going to execute one now—Morning Breeze!"

But before things could progress further, there came a new and startling interruption.

Chapter XV THE BLUE BIRD BATTLE

MORNING BREEZE it was who called attention to the new development. And it was evident from the way he did it that the whole thing was planned. More of the scheme to discredit Doc which had started with the painting of Doc's plane!

Straight above his head Morning Breeze pointed.

"Behold!" he shouted. "The genuine holy blue bird has returned! The same holy blue bird of which we obtained glimpses before these impostors arrived!"

Every one stared upward.

Perhaps five thousand feet above, a blue plane was circling slowly. Doc's keen eyes ascertained instantly that it was the

monoplane which had attacked his expedition in Belize. The plane the instigator of the Hidalgo revolt was using to impress the superstitious Mayans!

Loud gasps came from the assembled people. The scarlet-fingered warriors recovered their punctured dignity and cast ominous glances at Doc and his friends. It was plain the tide was turning against the adventurers.

High overhead, the blue plane continued to spiral. Its presence had a ghostly quality, for no sound of its motor reached their ears. Doc, with all his keenness of hearing, could detect but the faintest drone of the motor. But he knew the explanation. The terrific winds that comprised the air currents over the chasm were sweeping the sound waves aside.

"I am worried!" benign King Chac confided in shaky tones. "My people and the warriors are being whipped into a religious frenzy by Morning Breeze. I fear they will attack you."

Doc nodded. He could see that very thing impending. There was certain to be violence unless he did something to prevent it.

"The blue bird you see above is supreme!" Morning Breeze was shrieking. "It is all-powerful. It is the chosen of your gods! It has no white-skinned worms inside it! Therefore, destroy these white worms in your midst!"

Doc reached a decision.

"Stand by your guns!" he directed his men. "If you have to, shoot a few red-fingered men. But try holding them off a while. Renny, you come with me!"

Doc's friends' whipped out automatic pistols, which they had kept under their clothing. These automatics were fed by sixty-cartridge magazines, curled in the shape of compact rams' horns below the grips. The guns were what is known as continuously automatic in operation—they fired steadily as long as the trigger was held back. Both guns and magazines were of Doc's invention, infinitely more compact than ordinary submachine guns.

At the display of firearms, excited cries arose from the populace. Ample proof, this, that they understood what guns were.

Doc and Renny sprinted for their plane.

AMID a great splashing, Doc and Renny waded out to the low-wing craft and hoisted themselves into the cabin. Doc planted his powerful frame in the pilot's bucket.

"Now if the engines haven't been tampered with!" Renny grated, anxiety on his long, puritanical face.

Doc stepped on the electro-inertia starter buttons. The port motor popped black smoke out of the stacks, then started turning over. Nose engine, starboard—both functioned.

Vastly relieved, Renny lunged back in the cabin. His monster, flinty hands tore the top from a metal case as another man would open a cigarette pack. Out of the case came the latest model of Browning machine gun, airplane type. An ammo box gave way to his iron fingers. The cartridges were already in long snakes of metal link belt.

The low-wing speed plane was going down the narrow lake now. Renny threaded a belt into the Browning. The gun was fitted with a riflelike stock.

At the lake end, Doc jacked the ship about with sharp bloop of the engines. The craft gathered speed, a run of the whole lake length ahead of it. On step, it went. Then into the air.

With a touch little short of wizardry, Doc banked the speedy plane before it shattered itself against the sheer stone sides of the chasm. In tight, corkscrew turns, climbing, using all the power of the motors, Doc mounted out of the great cut.

Overhead the blue monoplane still lurked.

The treacherous air currents seized Doc's plane, worried it like a Kansas whirlwind would a piece of paper. Once, despite his expertness, Doc found himself doing a complete wingover. He recovered, continued to climb out of the Valley of the Vanished.

The air currents, after an interminable battle, became less violent. Doc pointed the great ship's nose up more steeply.

Suddenly the blue monoplane came hoicking down the sky lanes to the attack. Grayish wisps like spectral ropes suddenly streaked past Doc's ship. Tracer bullets! The monoplane was evidently fitted with a

machine gun synchronized to shoot through the propeller blades!

Doc had not expected that—the blue plane had not possessed such armament when it attacked him in Belize. But he was not greatly perturbed. At his back was Renny, whose equal with a machine gun would be hard to find. Renny knew just how to lean into the firing weapon so as to withstand the recoil and still maintain an accurate aim.

Renny's Browning abruptly released a long, ripping burst.

The blue monoplane rolled wildly to get clear of the slugs that searched horribly for its vitals.

"Good work!" Doc complimented Renny.

Then it was Doc's turn to sideslip—skid his ship out of the procession of slugs that were eating vicious holes in the left wing end. The pilot of the blue plane was no tyro.

WARILY the ships jockeyed. Doc's plane was infinitely the larger, but that was certainly no advantage. And its control surfaces were not designed for combat flying. The two crafts were nearly evenly matched, with Doc having the great edge in speed on a straightaway. But this was no straightaway.

Lead from the other ship chewed at the fuselage, well to the rear.

"Now, Renny!" Doc breathed—and stood his ship on one wing tip.

Renny's Browning hammered and forked one long tongue of red from the barrel.

The burst punctured the pilot of the blue plane! The ship careened over, motor full on. It bored in a howling, unguided dive for the craggy mountaintop.

Its antics were even wilder as the air currents gripped it. Far to one side it skittered, then back. A gigantic suction drew it down into the Valley of the Vanished.

Striking in the deeper part of the lake, it raised a great geyser of foam.

By the time Doc had battled the rigorous air down to the lake surface, not a trace of the blue monoplane was to be seen.

Doc taxied over to the beach below the pyramid. He sprang ashore and ran up the sloping floor of the valley. Directly for Morning Breeze Doc raced. Now was the time for slam-bang stuff!

Long Tom, Johnny, Ham, and Monk had not been harmed as yet. But they were ringed around with agitated Mayans. The Mayans seemed to want to attack the white men as Morning Breeze advised, but at the same time were afraid of Doc's wrath. For the resurrection had given them the idea Doc was a superior being. He had killed the blue bird, too.

Morning Breeze saw Doc bearing down on him. Terror seized the squat, ugly-faced culprit. He shouted for his fellow warriors to protect him. Four of these advanced. Two had short spears. Two had the terrible clubs with razor-sharp flakes of obsidian embedded in the heads. Emboldened by Morning Breeze's shrieked orders, they rushed Doc. And fully fifteen more warriors, all armed, joined the attack.

What followed went into Mayan history.

Doc's bronzed body seemed to make a single move—forward. His great, powerful arms did things with a blurred, unbelievable speed.

The two spearsmen reeled away without making a thrust. One had a face knocked almost flat by Doc's fist; the other's right arm was broken and nearly jerked from his body.

The two club wielders found themselves suddenly pushed forcibly together by two hands which apparently possessed the power of a hundred ordinary hands. Their heads banged; they saw stars—and nothing else.

Doc grasped each of these unconscious warriors by the woven leather mantles they wore secured about their necks. He slung them, blue girdles flopping, into the midst of the other attackers. A full half dozen of these went down, mightily bruised and bewildered. The others milled, all tangled up with each other.

Suddenly Doc was among them! Not satisfied with overpowering the four, he pitched into the whole crew. Terrific blows came from his flashing fists. Red-fingered men began to drop in the milling, fighting mob. Piercing yells of pain arose.

As one, the mob of warriors fled! They couldn't fight this bronze being who moved too quickly for them to land a single blow.



Fully fifteen warriors, all armed, joined the attack . . .

Morning Breeze, tremendously chagrined, spun to flee with his satellites. One leap, two, he took. Then Doc, with a great spring, had him by the neck.

Doc took Morning Breeze's sacred knife, his only weapon, away from him.

"Have you some place we can lock him up so he won't give more trouble?" Doc asked King Chaac. Doc was not even breathing heavily.

The Mayan sovereign was both amazed and highly elated. "I have!" he declared.

To one side, entrancing Princess Monja of the Mayans had been an admiring observer. Her dark eyes, as she watched Doc, radiated a great deal of feeling.

MORNING BREEZE was cast into a dark, windowless stone dungeon of a room, the only access to which was through a hole in the ceiling. Over this was fitted a stone lid of a door which required the combined strength of four squat Mayans to lift.

King Chaac was all for expelling the troublesome chief warrior from the Valley of the Vanished. He saw the undesirability of this, though, when Doc pointed out that Morning Breeze would only disclose to the world the existence of the golden pyramid.

"Give him a chance to cool off there in the cell," Doc suggested. "A chance to think over the error of his way has done wonders for many a criminal."

The Mayan sovereign concluded to follow that course.

Such was the simple temperament of these golden-skinned Mayans that Doc and his friends now found themselves generally accepted in defiance to the red-fingered men's solemn warnings. The influence of the latter was deflated to such a degree that the other Mayans refused to even listen to their sinister propaganda—for the warriors quickly tried to talk themselves into power again.

"We're sitting pretty!" Monk declared, rubbing his big, furry hands together.

"Knock on wood, you lunk!" Ham muttered somberly.

Monk grinned and tried to knock on Ham's head. "I wonder why his nibs, the king, is making us wait a month before he concludes arrangements about this gold?"

"I have no idea," Ham admitted. "But you recall he mentioned it might not be thirty days."

Monk stretched and yawned tremendously.

"Well, this ain't a bad place to spend a month's vacation," he decided. "It'll probably be quiet around here now."

Chapter XVI CURSE OF THE GODS

THAT night, in the Valley of the Vanished, darkness lay everywhere with the black intensity of drawing ink. Impenetrable clouds massed above the great chasm caused this. The air was a bit sultry. Even a novice forecaster could have told one of the tropical downpours common to Hidalgo was on its way.

Doc and his friends took the precaution of posting a guard and keeping a light burning. They alternated on guard, but nothing eventful came to their notice.

At the stone hut where Morning Breeze was incarcerated, two Mayan citizens kept alert vigil. From time to time the surly Morning Breeze called them uncomplimentary names and promised them the wrath of the gods if they didn't release him at once. But the watchmen had been promised the wrath of Doc Savage if they let Morning Breeze escape, and they feared that the greater. To them, also, the night gave nothing portentous.

In one spot in the Valley of the Vanished, however, a devil's cauldron of evil simmered and stewed.

This was near the lower end of the egg-shaped valley, where the stream cut through the great chasm. In a tiny pock of a hole among the boulders had congregated most of the red-fingered warriors. There they lighted a fire and offered a chant to the fire god, one of their principal deities. There were also prayers to Quetzalcoatl, the Sky God; and to Kukulcan, the Feathered Serpent.

They seemed to be waiting for something, these villainous ones, and killing the ensuing time with chants calculated to redeem their sadly depreciated standing. They launched into a ritual devoted to the Earth Monster, another pagan deity.

This was interrupted by a low rustling of the leafage that edged the recess where the red-fingered men had gathered. An amazing figure clambered down and joined them.

A man it was, but he wore a remarkable masquerade. The body of the garment consisted of an enormous snakeskin, the hide of a giant boa constrictor. The head of the reptile had been carefully skinned out, and probably enlarged by some stretching process until it formed a fantastic hood and mask for the one who wore it.

The man's arms and legs, projecting from the masquerade garment, were painted a gaudy blue, the Mayan holy color. Starting on the forehead and down the middle of the back, and nearly to the dragging end of the snake tail, were feathers. They resembled the trains on the feather headdress of an American Indian.

The newcomer was obviously made up in some weird likeness of the Mayan god, Kukulcan, the Feathered Serpent.

The gathering of red-fingered warriors were greatly impressed. To a man they sank upon their knees and kowtowed to

the hideous apparition in snakeskin and feathers. They undoubtedly knew there was a man inside the rigmarole, but they were overawed anyway, such superstitious souls did they possess.

HALTINGLY, with the greatest of difficulty, the snake man began to speak Mayan. A large proportion of his words were so poorly uttered as to convey no meaning to his listeners. At such times the blank expression of the warriors warned him to go back and repeat. The snake man was plainly an outsider.

But the red-fingered men were completely under his sway.

"I am the son of Kukulcan, blood of his blood, flesh of his flesh," the serpent one told his awed audience. "Did you seize such of the white invaders as you could and throw them into the sacrificial well? Did you change the color of the white devils' blue plane, painting marks of the Red Death upon it? This I commanded. Did you do it?"

"We did," muttered a warrior.

The brain back of the snake mask sensed something wrong. The hideous head jerked, surveying the assembled Mayans. "Where is your commander, Morning Breeze?"

"He is imprisoned." The information came reluctantly.

A great rage shook the masked figure. "Then Savage and his men are still in the good graces of your people?" he grated.

Slowly the serpent one extracted the story of what had happened from the humiliated gathering. The information seemed to stun him. He sat in morose silence, thinking.

A warrior, bolder than the rest, inquired: "What, O master, became of the two of our number we sent with you into the outer world to slay this Savage and his father?"

That disclosed who the snake man was. The murderer of Doc Savage's father! The master of the Red Death! The brains behind the Hidalgo revolution movement!

Words of answer were slow coming from the evil mask. The fiendish brain was racing. It would not do to let these red-fingered men know their two fellows had succumbed to the power of that supreme adventurer, Doc Savage. It might wipe out

some of their faith in the impostor who was pretending to be the son of the sacred Feathered Serpent.

He needed all his power now, did the snake man. His plane and pilot destroyed by Doc Savage! This was a blow! He had intended to use that machine-gun-equipped plane in his revolution against President Carlos Avispa's government of Hidalgo.

And Savage and his friends were soundly intrenched in the Valley of the Vanished. Soon all chance to secure the vast sum needed to finance the revolution would be gone.

"Has Savage gained access to the gold?" asked the snake man.

"No," replied a well-posted Mayan. "He does not know but what the pyramid contains all the yellow metal in the Valley of the Vanished. King Chaac has not told him the truth yet."

None of the red-fingered ones heard the words next breathed into the serpent mask. They were: "Thank Heaven for that!"

The collected warriors began to stir uneasily. This son of the Feathered Serpent had been full of egoism and orders on other occasions. Now he was silent. And he had not explained what had happened to their two comrades. One Mayan repeated the question about their two fellows.

"They are alive and well!" lied the snake man. "Listen! Hear me well, my children, for here are my words of wisdom."

The warriors came under the spell again.

"The Red Death shall strike very soon!" rumbled the voice back of the serpent mask.

GENUINE terror now seized upon the Mayans. They shuddered and drew together as if for protection. Not a one voiced a word.

"The Red Death strikes soon!" repeated the snake man. "It is the way of Kukulcan, the Feathered Serpent, my father, to show you he will not have these white men in your midst. You have sinned grievously in letting them stay. You were warned to destroy them. I, the voice of my father, the Feathered Serpent, warned you."

A warrior began: "We tried—"

"No excuses!" commanded the voice from the mask. "By doing two things only can

you avert the Red Death, or stop its progress after it has descended upon you. First, you must destroy Savage and his men. Second, you must deliver to me, son of the Feathered Serpent, as much gold as ten men can carry. I will see the gold gets to the Feathered Serpent."

The Mayans muttered, squirmed, shuddered.

"Destroy Savage—and bring me all the gold ten men can carry!" repeated the one they feared. "Only that will cause the Feathered Serpent to take back his Red Death. I have spoken. Go."

With steps driven to haste by their terror of this feathered snake of a thing, the red-fingered men took their departure. They would sit in their huts and talk about it the rest of the night. And the more they talked, the more likely they would be to do as they had been commanded. For it is a strange fact that a crowd of men are less brave in the face of threat than a single individual. They add to each other's fear.

The snake man did not linger after they had gone. He quitted the rendezvous, walking furtively, wincing as his bare feet were mauled by the sharp rocks.

Reaching a low bush, he drew from under it two ordinary gallon fruit jars. One of these was filled with a red, viscous fluid. The other contained a much thinner, paler fluid.

On one jar was written:

Germ culture which causes Red Death.

On the other was inscribed:

Cure for Red Death.

These the man in the serpent masquerade carried most carefully as he made his way in stealth toward the gilded pyramid.

WITHOUT being observed or arousing any slumbering Mayans, the snake man reached the pyramid. As he came near the monster pile of fabulously rich gold ore, he could not control his breathing, so strong was his lust for the yellow metal. The noisy purling of the stream of water down the pyramid side eliminated any chance of his being heard, though.

Up the steps the man felt his way in the intense darkness. The water raced by at his side. He reached the flattened top of the structure. There he felt about in the sepia murk until he found what he sought—a small, tanklike pool.

It was this pool that fed the racing brook down the pyramid side. Just how the pool was kept continuously supplied with water, in spite of its position high atop the pyramid, the man did not know or care.

He furtively lit a match.

The contents of the jar labeled *Germ culture which causes Red Death*, he emptied into the pool.

From experience, the fiend in the serpent mask knew the deadly germs would be fed down the pyramid water stream for about two days. And the entire clan of Mayans obtained their drinking water from that stream!

Two days and every person in the valley would be a victim of the gruesome Red Death. Only one thing could save them—treatment with the stuff in the other jar. Previously—for he had obtained many offerings of gold from this valley—the man in the snake mask had administered the cure exactly as he had the disease, by dumping it into the Mayan water supply.

It was because he saw the end of the golden offerings once Doc Savage appeared on the scene that the man had sought to keep Doc from reaching the Valley of the Vanished.

Carrying the empty jar, and the full jar of the cure, the man retreated down the pyramid. He made his way in silence to the remote end of the valley, where he had his hiding place. It was here he had concealed himself after his plane pilot had dropped him by parachute into the valley the previous night.

En route, the man paused to smash the empty jar.

The clatter of the breaking glass instilled an ugly thought in his brain. He toyed with it.

"I will never learn the source of this gold from old Chaac," he growled. "And no one else knows the secret. So why should I trouble with curing them after they get sick?"

He made angry noises with his teeth. "If all in the valley were dead, I could take my time hunting the gold. And there is a fortune in that pyramid for the taking."

A mean grin crooked the lips back of the snake-head mask. "They will make many gold offerings before they find out I am not going to cure them!"

He had reached a decision that showed how evil and cruel he was. He had no regard at all for human life.

He crashed the bottle of Red Death cure against a rock, destroying it.

He intended to let the Mayans perish!

Chapter XVII THE BATTLE OF MERCY

DOC SAVAGE, up ahead of the sun, spent the usual time at the exercises which kept his amazing bronze body the wonderful mental and physical thing it was. From force of habit he liked to go through his ritual while alone. Bystanders were always asking questions as to what this and that was intended to do, pestering him.

Morning Breeze was still a prisoner. Doc paid the cell hut a visit to be sure. The guards on duty eyed Doc's bronze form in open wonder, marveling at its perfection. Doc had not as yet donned his shirt.

Doc's bared arms looked like those of an Atlas. The muscles, in repose, were not knotty. They were more like bundled piano wires on which a thin bronze skin had been painted. And across his chest and back great, supple cables of tendon lay layer upon layer. It was a rare sight, that body of Doc's. The Mayans' eyes popped.

Some of the morning Doc spent in conversation with King Chaac, considering the elderly sovereign had never heard of a modern university, he had some remarkably accurate knowledge about the universe.

Pretty Princess Monja, Doc discovered also, would pass in any society as a well-educated young woman. All she lacked was a course in the history of the rest of the world. It was amazing.

"We lead a life of leisure here in the Valley of the Vanished," King Chaac explained. "We have much time to think, to reason things out."

A little later King Chaac made an unexpected—and pleasant—revelation.

"You may have wondered why I said I would delay thirty days or possibly less

before I disclosed to you the location of the gold supply?" he asked.

Doc admitted he had.

"It was my agreement with your father," smiled King Chaac. "I was to satisfy myself you were a man of sufficient character to put this fabulous wealth to the use to which it should be put."

"That was not a bad idea," Doc agreed.

"I am satisfied," said King Chaac in a pleased tone. "Tomorrow I show you the gold. But first, tomorrow morning you must be adopted into our Mayan clan. You and your men. That is necessary. For centuries the word has come down that none but a Mayan should ever remove the gold. Your adoption into the tribe will fulfill that command."

Doc expressed the proper appreciation. The conversation came around to how the gold was to be transported to civilization.

"We can hardly take it in the plane, due to the terrific air currents," Doc pointed out.

The elderly Mayan sovereign smiled. "We have donkeys here in the Valley of the Vanished. I will simply have a number of them loaded with gold and dispatched to your banker at Blanco Grande."

Doc was surprised at the simplicity of the scheme. "But the warlike natives in the surrounding mountains—they will never let a pack train through."

"In that you are mistaken," chuckled King Chaac. "The natives are of Mayan ancestry. They know we are here; they know why. And for centuries it has been their fighting which has kept this valley lost to white men. Oh, yes, they will let the pack train through. And no white man will ever know from whence it came. And they will let others through as the years pass."

"Is there that much gold?" Doc inquired.

But King Chaac only smiled secretly and gave no other answer.

THE Red Death struck in the middle of that afternoon.

A cluster of excited Mayans about a stone house drew Monk's curious attention. Monk looked inside.

A Mayan was sprawled on a stone bench. His yellow skin was mottled, feverish, and he was calling for water.

On his neck were vile red patches.

"The Red Death!" Monk muttered in a horror-filled voice. He ran for Doc, and found him politely listening to attractive Princess Monja. The young lady had finally cornered Doc alone.

Doc raced to the plane, got his instrument case.

Entering the Mayan's stone dwelling, Doc became at once the thing for which he was eminently fitted above all others—a great doctor and surgeon. From the highest credited medical universities and the greatest hospitals in America, from the best that Europe had to offer, Doc garnered his fabulous fund of knowledge of medicine and surgery. He had studied with the master surgeons in the costliest clinics in the world. And he had conducted unnumbered experiments of his own when he had advanced beyond the greatest master's ability to teach.

With his instruments, his supersensitive ear, his feather-light touch; Doc examined the Mayan.

"What ails him?" Monk wanted to know.

"It escapes me as yet," Doc was forced to admit. "Obviously it is the same thing that seized my father. That means it was administered to this man in some fashion by that devil who is behind all our troubles. Whoever he is, the fiend must be in the valley now. Probably the blue airplane brought him and dropped him by parachute at night."

In that Doc's reasoning could not have been more accurate had he witnessed the arrival of the enemy.

At this juncture Long Tom ran up.

"The Red Death!" he puffed. "They're collapsing with it all over the city!"

Doc administered an opiate to the first Mayan to be stricken to ease his pain, then visited a second sufferer. He questioned each closely on where he had been, what he had eaten. Four more Mayans he asked the same thing.

Deduction then told him how the Red Death was being spread!

"The water supply!" he guessed with exactness.

He showed Long Tom, Johnny, Ham, and Renny how to administer the opiates that lessened suffering.

"Monk, your knowledge of chemistry is going to be in need," he declared. "Come on."

Securing test tubes for obtaining samples of the water, Doc and Monk hurried toward the gleaming yellow pyramid.

Although the epidemic of Red Death had been under way less than an hour, the cult of red-fingered warriors had been making full use of the panic it engendered. They were falling over themselves to spread word that the disease was a punishment inflicted upon the Mayans for permitting Doc and his friends to remain in the Valley of the Vanished.

Ominous mutterings were arising. Blue-girdled men everywhere harangued madly, seeking to fan the flames of hatred.

"And just when things were sailing smooth for us!" Monk muttered.

DOC and Monk reached the golden pyramid and started up. Instantly a loud roar of anger lifted from a crowd of Mayans who had followed them. The crowd was composed of about half red-fingered fighting men.

They made threatening gestures, indicating Doc and Monk should not ascend the pyramid. It was an altar, inviolate to their gods, they screamed. Only Mayans could ascend without bringing bad luck.

It was the red-fingered men who howled the loudest.

"We're going to have a fight on our hands if we go up," Monk whispered.

It was Doc who solved the delicate situation. He did it simply. He beckoned to attractive Princess Monja, gave her the test tubes, and told her to dip water from whatever sort of a tank or pool was on top of the pyramid.

The confidence the young woman showed Doc did its bit to allay the anger of the Mayans.

Back at the stone house assigned himself and his friends, Doc set to work.

He had brought a compact quantity of apparatus. And Monk had his tiny, wonderfully efficient chemical laboratory. Doc combined the two, went to work analyzing the water.

He had trouble with the Mayans before he had hardly started. Two of the homeliest of the ugly, red-fingered gentry came dancing and screaming into the place. They had rubbed some evil-smelling lotion on themselves, and the odor angered Doc, who depended a great deal on his sense of smell in his analyzing.

Doc kicked both warriors bodily outdoors. For a moment it looked like the house was going into a state of siege. Hundreds of Mayans shrieked and waved arms and weapons outside. It was astounding the number of spears and terrible clubs they had unearthed.

But memory of what had happened to the gang of warriors who had attacked Doc the day before made them hesitate.

"Monk," Doc questioned, "did you bring that gas you made up in my laboratory in New York? The stuff that paralyzes without harming, I mean."

"I sure did," Monk assured him. "I'll go get it."

Doc heaved the heavy stone door shut and continued his analyzing.

Rocks began to bounce against the stone walls and the flat stone roof. A couple whizzed in the square window.

The yelling had risen to a bedlam.

Suddenly the note of the howling changed from rage to fear. It diminished greatly in volume. Doc looked out the window.

Monk had broken a bottle of his gas where the wind carried it over the besieging Mayans. Fully half of the malefactors were stiff and helpless on the earth. They would be thus for possibly two hours, then the effects would wear off.

This eased the tension for a time, enabling Doc to continue his work undisturbed.

Test after test he ran on the water. He had very early isolated a tiny quantity of red, viscous fluid which he had determined was some sort of germ culture. The question was to find out what kind of germs.

There was not much time. His father had succumbed less than three days after being stricken. Probably that was about the time required for the ghastly disease to prove fatal.

An hour dragged past. Another. Doc worked tirelessly, with every ounce of his enormous concentration.

The humor of the Mayans rapidly became worse. Johnny, Ham, and Renny were driven to the stone house where Doc worked. They were joined by elderly King Chaac and entrancing Princess Monja. Of all the Mayans, the faith of these two in Doc remained utterly unshaken.

However, there were other Mayans who remained aloft from the turmoil—people who would probably side with Doc when the show-down came.

Doc worked without hardly lifting his head all that afternoon. He labored the night straight through, his experiments lighted by electric bulbs Long Tom fixed up.

ANOTHER dawn had come before Doc straightened from the stone bench where he had placed his apparatus.

"Long Tom!" he called.

Long Tom sprang to Doc's side and listened to Doc explain what was wanted.

It was an intricate apparatus Long Tom was to rig, a mechanism to create one of the newest and most marvelous healing rays known to medical science. Long Tom, electrical wizard that he was, knew pretty much how it should be made. Doc supplied such details as Long Tom was not familiar with.

Then Doc quitted the stone building.

His friends flocked to the doors and windows, armed with machine guns, Monk with his gas bombs. They were certain Doc would be attacked by the Mayans, who had kept vigil outside all night.

But they witnessed something little short of a miracle. Doc walked through the crowd untouched! Not a warrior dared lay a hand upon him, such a hypnotic quality did his golden eyes contain. No doubt his reputation of a superman in a fight helped.

Fifty or so Mayans trailed Doc. Afraid to attack him, they nevertheless followed him. But not for far.

Doc reached the jungle-carpeted lower end of the little valley. With a bound he lifted high from the earth and seized a limb. A monkey-like flip put him atop it. He ran along it, balancing perfectly, and sprang to another bough.

Then he was gone, silent as a bronze owl flitting along the jungle lanes.

The Mayans milled a while, then returned to their city.

They were met by a group of red-fingered fellows who upbraided them fiendishly for permitting Doc to walk through their hands. The white man, they screamed, must be slaughtered.

Somebody had freed squat, tattooed, ugly Morning Breeze from his dungeon. He was rapidly whipping the Mayans into a frenzy. He herded them toward the stone house where Doc's friends were barricaded. Exerting all his powers of persuasion, Morning Breeze got them to attack.

Monk promptly expended all his gas on the assailants. They fled, such of them as could, repulsed. But they reunited at a short distance, a great mob, and listened to the red-fingered men talk.

Now and then a Mayan would stumble off to his stone home, seized with the horrible Red Death. Perhaps a fourth of the tribe were already prostrate from the malady.

HALF the morning had gone when Doc returned. He came via the roofs of the closely spaced houses, crossing the narrow streets with gigantic leaps only he could manage. He was inside the stone house with his besieged friends before the Mayans even awakened to his nearness.

The natives sent up a rumble of anger, but did not advance.

Doc had brought, tied with roots in a great bundle, many types of jungle herbs.

With these he set to work. He boiled some, cooked others, treated some with acids. Slowly he refined the product.

Noon came. The fourth of stricken Mayans had risen to a third. And with the increased rate of collapse, the temper of the besiegers was getting shorter. The red-fingered warriors had them believing that the death of the white men would solve their problem, vanquish the malady.

"I think I've got it!" Doc said at last. "The cure!"

"I'm out of gas," Monk muttered. "How are we going to get out of here to treat them?"

For answer, Doc pocketed vials of the thin pale fluid he had concocted. "Wait here," he directed.

He shoved the stone door ajar suddenly, stepped inside. The Mayans saw him, rumbled. A couple of spears sped

through the air. But long before the obsidian spear tips shattered against the stone house, Doc had vaulted to the roof and was gone.

Furtively he prowled through the strange city. He found a Mayan who had been stricken and forcibly administered some of the pale medicine. At another home he repeated the operation on an entire family.

When molested by armed Mayans, he simply evaded them. His bronzed form would flash around a corner—and all trace would be gone when the Mayans reached the spot. Once, about mid-afternoon, he did show resistance to three red-fingered men who happened upon him treating a household of five Mayans. When Doc left the vicinity, all three warriors were still unconscious from the blows he had delivered.

Thus, as furtively as though he were a criminal instead of the angel of mercy he was in reality, he was forced to skulk and give by main strength the treatment he had devised.

By nightfall, however, his persistence began to tell. Word spread that the bronze god of a white man was *curing the Red Death!*

Doc's concoction, thanks to his unique medical skill, was proving effective.

By nine o'clock Long Tom could venture forth without danger and treat unfortunates with his health-ray apparatus. This had remarkable properties for healing tissue burned out by the ravages of the Red Death.

"Doc says the Red Death is a rare tropical fever," Long Tom explained to the greatly interested Princess Monja. "Originally it must have been the malady of some jungle bird. Probably similar to an epidemic known as 'parrot fever' which swept the United States a year or two ago."

"Mr. Savage is a remarkable man!" the young Mayan woman murmured.

Long Tom nodded soberly. "There is not a thing he can't do, I reckon."

Chapter XVIII FRIENDSHIP

A WEEK passed. During that time, Doc Savage's position among the Mayans not only returned to what it had been before

the epidemic of the Red Death, but it far surpassed that.

As man after man of the yellow-skinned people recovered, a complete change of feeling came about. Doc was the hero of every stone home. They followed him about in droves, admiring his tremendous physique, imitating his little manners.

They even spied upon him taking his inevitable exercise in the mornings. By the end of the week, half the Mayans in the city were also taking exercises.

Renny, who never took any exercise except to knock things to pieces with his great fists, thought it very funny.

"Exercise never hurt anybody, unless they overdid it," Doc told him.

The red-fingered warriors were a chagrined lot. In fact, Morning Breeze lost a large part of his following. His erstwhile satellites scrubbed the red stain off their fingers, threw their blue *maxtlis*, or girdles, away, and forsook the fighting sect, with King Chaac's consent.

Less than fifty of the most villainous remained in Morning Breeze's fold. These were careful not to make themselves noticed too much, because there was some talk among the upright Mayan citizens of seeing if there wasn't enough warriors to fill the sacrificial well.

Things seemed to have come to an ideal pass.

Except, possibly, in the case of pretty Princess Monja. She was plainly infatuated with Doc, but making no headway. She was, of course, well bred enough not to show her feelings too openly. But all of Doc's friends could see how it was.

Doc removed all firearms to their stone headquarters house. He locked the weapons in a room. Long Tom installed a simple electrical burglar alarm. Monk made up more of his paralyzing gas. He stored this with the arms. In the face of the peace, such preparations seemed unnecessary, though.

Every one noted Doc was inexplicably missing from the city at times. These absences lasted several hours. Then Doc would reappear. He offered no explanation. Actually, he had been ranging the jungle sections of the Valley of the Vanished. He was seeking his father's murderer. He traveled, apeline, among the trees, or silent as a bronze shadow on the ground.

Near the lower end of the valley he found what his keen senses told him was the camp of his quarry. But it was a cold trail. The camp had been deserted some time. Doc tracked the killer a considerable distance. The scent ended at the trail out of the valley.

THERE came the day when elderly King Chaac decided things were normal enough to adopt Doc and his men into the tribe. There was to be a great ceremony.

After they would be shown the gold source.

The ceremony got under way at the pyramid.

Since Doc and his friends were to become honorary Mayans, it was needful that they don Mayan costume for the festivities. King Chaac furnished the attire.

The garb consisted of short mantles of stout fiber interwoven with wire gold, brilliant girdles, and high-backed sandals. Each had a headdress to denote some animal. These towered high, and interwoven trams of flowers fell down their backs.

Ham took one look at Monk in this paraphernalia and burst into laughter. "If I just had a grind organ to go with you!" he chuckled.

Because pistols did not harmonize with this garb, they left them behind. No danger seemed to threaten, anyway.

The entire populace assembled at the pyramid for the ceremony. The Mayan men wore the same costume as Doc and his friends. In addition, some wore a cotton padlike armor, stuffed with sand. These resembled baseball chest protectors. Those attired in the armor also carried ceremonial spears and clubs.

Doc noted one thing a little off color.

Morning Breeze and his red-fingered followers were nowhere about!

Doc gave some thought to that. But there seemed no serious harm Morning Breeze could do. His fifty men were hopelessly outnumbered in case they started trouble.

The rituals got under way.

Doc and his men first had their faces daubed with sacred blue. Mystic designs in other colors were painted on their arms.

They were next offered various viands to which ceremonial significance was

attached. They each drank honey—honey by the strange bees of Central America which store it in liquid in the hive, not in combs. Next was *atole*, a drink made from maize, and kept in most elaborate and beautiful jars.

Atop the pyramid, native incense was now burning in an immense *quiche*, or ceremonial burner. The fumes, sweeping down the great golden pyramid in the calm, bracing air, were quite pleasant.

Seated in orderly rows about the pyramid base, the entire Mayan populace kept up a low chanting. The sound was rhythmic, certain musical words repeated over and over. There were a few musical instruments, well handled.

The affair moved rapidly toward the climax. This would be when Doc and his friends were led up the long flight of steps bearing offerings of incense for the great burner and little stone images of the god Kukulcan to place at the feet of the larger statue.

It was necessary, King Chaac had explained, to mount the steps only on their knees. To do otherwise would not be according to Hoyle.

The Mayan women were taking an equal part in the ritual with the men. Most of these were very attractive in their shoulder mantles and knee-length girdles.

The time came when Doc and his friends started up the long line of steps. It was tricky business balancing on their knees. Around them, the Mayan chanting pulsed and throbbed with an exciting, exotic quality.

Yard after yard the adventurers ascended.

Suddenly Morning Breeze appeared. Shrieking, he sprang through the hundreds of Mayans ringed about the pyramid base.

THAT halted everything.

It was an unheard-of thing. The ritual was sacred. For one to interrupt was highest sacrilege.

Hundreds of angry Mayan eyes bore upon the chief of the red-fingered fighting guild.

Morning Breeze commanded attention with uplifted arms.

"O children!" he shrilled. "You cannot do this thing! The gods forbid! They do not want these white men!"

At this juncture some Mayan muttered loudly that the Mayans didn't want Morning Breeze, either.

Ignoring the hostility, the warrior leader continued:

"Fearsome will be the fate to fall upon you if you make these outsiders Mayans. It is forbidden!"

Doc Savage made no move. He saw in this dramatic interruption a last wild bid by Morning Breeze. The fellow was desperate. His hotly blazing eyes, the shaking in his arms, showed that.

Anyhow, Doc wanted to see just how deeply the golden-skinned Mayans loved him. He had confidence in them. They wouldn't listen to Morning Breeze lampoon the white men for long.

And they didn't!

Dignified King Chaac called a sharp command. Mayans—the fellows who wore the quilted armor and carried the weapons—surged for Morning Breeze.

The warrior chief took flight. Like a jack rabbit in spite of his short legs, the ugly fellow bounded away. At the crowd skirts he halted.

He screamed: "You fools! For this you must come to Morning Breeze with your noses in the dirt and beg his mercy! Otherwise you die! All of you!"

With that proclamation he spun and fled. Four or five well-cast javelins lent wings to his big, ungainly feet.

The dissenter disappeared in the jungle.

Doc was very thoughtful. He had learned to judge by men's voices when they were bluffing. Morning Breeze sounded like a man who had an ace in the hole.

What could it be? Doc pondered. He became more uneasy. The fiend who had murdered the elder Savage was still at large. That man was clever, capable of anything. Doc wished his men had their guns.

The ceremonials resumed where they had left off. For four or five minutes the chanting continued. Bodies swayed rhythmically. The savage cadence had a quality to arouse, incite strange feelings.

Again Doc and his friends advanced up the pyramid stairs, keeping balanced on their knees. The bundles of incense, and the stone images they carried were getting burdensome.

All eyes were on Doc's magnificent frame. Truly, thought the yellow-skinned people, here was a worthy addition to the clan of Maya.

Doc and his five men were almost at the top. King Chaac was before them, showing where the incense should be placed.

The final words of ritual were about to be spoken by the sovereign of the Valley of the Vanished.

Then the holocaust broke.

SUDDEN staccato reports rattled. Shots! They were so closely spaced as to be almost one loud roar. Their noise beat against the great yellow pyramid in terrible waves.

"Machine guns!" Renny barked.

Piercing screams, moans of agony, arose from the assembled Mayans. Several had dropped from the murderous leaden hail!

There had apparently been four rapid-fire guns. They were situated on the four sides of the pyramid. So well screened were the weapons that no trace of them or the operators could be seen.

Doc shoved his friends, as well as King Chaac and the Princess Monja, down in the shelter of the large images on the pyramid top.

Not a moment too soon! Lead stormed the spot where they had been. Rock chips showered off the images. One big, long-nosed likeness even toppled over. Flattened bullets fell about them.

Doc picked up one of those lead blobs, studied it. His brain, replete with ballistics lore, instantly catalogued the bullet.

"This is not the caliber of our guns!" he declared. "That means they haven't seized our weapons. So some one has brought in machine guns from the outside!"

The adventurers looked at each other. They knew the answer to the question. The murderer of Doc's father had brought in the guns!

The hail of lead ceased.

To the right, on a low knoll backed by brush, Morning Breeze made his appearance.

"You behold the fulfilling of my prophecy!" he shouted. "Destroy these white men! Crawl to me and beg for your lives!

Acknowledge me as your ruler! Otherwise you shall all die!"

Even from that distance they could see Morning Breeze's wild look.

"He's insane," Monk muttered. "Plumb dingy!"

A flight of spears gave Morning Breeze's answer. With wild yells of anger, a group of the Mayan citizens attired in quilted armor charged the warrior chief. A machine gun forced them back, slaying several.

Then elderly King Chaac raised a great shout. He called some command at his people. So rapidly did he speak that Doc's knowledge of Mayan was not sufficient to follow him.

The Mayan people began to run up the pyramid steps. They came with orderly speed, in a column the full twenty feet wide.

Doc stared at them, not realizing what they were intent on. The first of the yellow-skinned people passed him.

Doc now observed King Chaac had exerted pressure on the large Kukulcan idol beside the water tank that was always flowing. The idol had levered back. Revealed was a large cavity! Well-worn stone steps stretched downward into darkness!

Into this opening the column of Mayans dived. Like well-trained soldiers they sped up the side of the pyramid. But they seemed as surprised as the white men at sight of the opening.

Doc glanced askance at the elderly Mayan sovereign.

"Of all my people, only I knew of this hidden door," explained King Chaac.

The machine guns of the red-fingered warriors were silent. The orderly retreat up the pyramid side must have them puzzled. And no doubt they thought they had wrought enough havoc with their weapons to bring the Mayans to terms.

Doc watched the gun emplacements closely—his sharp eye had located each one. He saw the red-fingered devils show themselves.

He saw one other man—a fellow masquerading in a repulsive snakeskin costume. Colored feathers were arrayed down the back of the hideous serpent outfit.

This revolting figure seemed to be directing the whole thing. He even gave Morning Breeze orders. Doc, catching the man's voice faintly, knew by the accent he was no Mayan.

Suddenly the machine guns went into operation again.

But they had waited too long. Practically all the Mayans were inside the pyramid. Even as the hail of metal started anew, the last of the golden-skinned people ducked into the wide, secret door.

King Chaac and Princess Monja now descended. Doc and his five friends followed.

The Mayan ruler showed them slits in the masonry. Through these, it was possible to observe whether any one was coming up the steps.

Even as they looked, some of the red-fingered warriors ran to the foot of the pyramid and started up the stairs.

"If we just had our guns!" Renny groaned, his puritanical face genuinely forlorn. But Doc and his men had left their weapons in their store house.

"Watch!" commanded King Chaac. He called a low order to some of his men far down the darkened passage into the depths of the pyramid.

Great, round rocks were passed up and chucked outside. The dornicks bounded down the steps. The warriors were battered back. They picked themselves up and fled.

"They cannot get to us here," said King Chaac.

DOC SAVAGE listened to the shouting voice of the man in the snake masquerade. The tones reached them faintly.

Doc identified the coarse voice! The snake man was the slayer of the elder Savage, and the prime mover in the planned Hidalgo revolution. It was the voice Doc had heard in that hotel room in the Hidalgo capital city, Blanco Grande.

Doc knew now why he had found no trace of the killer during the past week. The man had been away from the Valley of the Vanished, getting the machine guns.

"How about food supplies?" Doc asked.

Reluctantly, King Chaac admitted: "There is no food."

"Then we're penned up," Doc pointed out. "There is plenty of water, I presume?"

"Plenty. The stream that supplies the pool atop the pyramid—we have access to it."

"That helps," Doc admitted. "Your people may be able to hold out a few days.

My men and myself, accustomed to hardship, might beat that. But we've got to do something."

Suddenly Doc bounded upward to the lip of the opening in the pyramid top. He glanced quickly about. He decided to take a chance. It was a chance so slim only a man of Doc's unique powers could wrench success from it.

"No one shall try to follow me!" he warned.

Then, with a swift spring, he was out of the passage that dived down into the innards of the golden pyramid.

So unexpected was Doc's appearance that a moment elapsed before the clumsy red-fingered machine gunners could turn a stream of lead on the pyramid top and the tiny temple there. By the time metal did storm, Doc had bounded off the top.

He did not select the stairs. He had a better means of descent. The steep, glass-smooth side of the pyramid! The gold-bearing ore of which the great structure was made was hard. The ages it had stood there had not weathered away enough of the soft gold to roughen the original sleekness much.

Leaning well back, Doc coasted downward on his heels. His leap had given him great momentum.

Twenty feet, and he spun over and over expertly. Thus, he flashed to one side several yards. It was well he did. Machine-gun bullets clouted into the course he had been following, and screamed off into space.

Rich gold ore, broken loose, clattered down the pyramid. But Doc left it far behind. Mere sliding speed was not enough. He jumped outward, did it again, until he traveled faster than a falling object.

He hit the foot of the pyramid at a speed that would have shattered the body of an ordinary man. Tremendous muscles of sprung steel cushioned Doc's landing. He never as much as lost his balance. Like a whippet, he was away.

Into a low depression, he sank. Hungry lead slugs rattled like hail—but always a yard or two behind Doc. The speed of his movements was too tremendous for inexperienced marksmen. Even an expert shot at moving objects would have had trouble getting a bead on that bronze, corded form.

The depression let Doc into low bushes. And from that moment he was lost to the murderers with the machine guns.

To the red-fingered warriors, it was incredible! They clucked among themselves, and looked about wildly for the flashing thing of bronze that was Doc. They did not find it.

Their leader, the repulsive figure masqueraded in snakeskin and feathers, was more perturbed than the others. He cowered among them. He kept very close to a machine gun, as though he expected that great, bronzed Nemesis of his kind to spring upon him from thin air.

Great was the snake man's terror of Doc Savage.

Chapter XIX THE BRONZE MASTER

DOC SAVAGE sped for the stone city. It lay only a few rods away. He haunted low tropical vegetation to the first stone-paved street. Among the houses he glided.

So quiet was his going that wild tropical birds perched on the projecting stone roofs of the houses were unfrightened by his passage; no more scared than had he been the bronze reflection of some cloud overhead.

Doc was making for the building which had been his headquarters. In it, he had left his machine guns, rifles, pistols, and the remarkable gas that was Monk's invention.

He wanted those weapons. With them, the fifty or so warriors could be defeated in short order. Armed equally, the men of Morning Breeze could not stand against Doc and his five veteran fighters. So Doc had taken tremendous chances to get guns.

The headquarters house appeared ahead. Low, replete with stone carving, it was no more elaborate than the other Mayan homes. It seemed deserted.

The door, which could be closed solidly with a pivoted stone slab, but which was ordinarily only curtained, gaped invitingly. Doc paused and listened.

Back toward the pyramid, a machine gun snarled out a dozen shots. He heard nothing else.

Doc pushed back the curtain and slid into the stone house.

No enemies were there.

Doc went across the room, seeming to glide on ice, so effortlessly did he move. He tried the door of the room in which they had placed their arms.

He perceived suddenly that Long Tom's electric burglar alarm had been expertly put out of commission.

No Mayan knew enough to do that!

"The man in the snakeskin!" Doc decided. "He did it!"

The room door gave before a shove by a great bronze arm. Doc had expected what he saw when he looked in.

The weapons were gone!

A faint sound came from the street.

Doc spun. Across the room he flashed—not to the door, but to the window. His keen senses told him a trap was closing upon him.

Before he reached the window, an object flashed into it, thrown from the outside. The object—a bottle—broke on the stone wall. It was filled with a vile-looking fluid. This sprayed over most of the room.

Doc surmised what the stuff was. Monk's gas!

His bronze features set with determination, Doc continued for the window. But a gun muzzle snaked in. It spat flame. Doc ducked clear of the screaming lead. Gas was everywhere in the room.

There was no escape that way. He whirled on the door. But the muzzles of two automatic pistols met him. They were the guns he had invented. He knew just how fast they could deal death.

Then, slowly, Doc Savage collapsed.

He made a great bronze figure on the stone floor.

"THE gas got him!" snarled the man in the snake masquerade, appearing from a haven of safety behind several red-fingered fighters.

Then, realizing he had spoken in a language the Mayans could not understand, the man translated: "The all-powerful breath of the Son of the Feathered Serpent has vanquished the chief of our enemies."

"Indeed, your magic breath is powerful!" muttered the warriors in great awe.

"Retreat from the doorway and windows until the wind has time to sweep my magic breath away," commanded the snake man.

A gentle breeze had sprung up, slightly stronger in the streets of the Mayan city than elsewhere. In ten minutes, the serpent man decided all the gas had been swept out of the stone house.

"Go in!" he directed. "Seize the bronze devil and drag him to the street!"

His orders were complied with. It was, however, with the greatest fear that the red-fingered ones laid hands upon the magnificent bronze form of Doc Savage. Even though the great figure was still and limp, they feared it.

In the street, they dropped the bronze giant hastily.

"Cowards!" sneered the snake man. He was quite brave now. "Can you not see he has succumbed to my magic? He is helpless! Never again will he defy the son of Kukulcan, the Feathered Serpent!"

The red-fingered Mayans did not look as relieved as they might. All too well, they remembered an occasion when Doc had brought three of his white companions out of the sacrificial well, very much alive, when they should have been dead. Doc might do the same for himself, they reasoned.

"Fetch tapir-hide thongs!" commanded the snake man. "Bind him. Not with a few turns, but with many! Tie him until he is a great bundle of tapir thongs!"

The warriors hurried to obey. They returned, bearing long strings of the tough hide.

"Fear him not!" said the serpent man. "My magic breath has stricken him, so that he will lie helpless for two hours."

The fellow had profited by talking to the victim of Monk's gas. He had learned about how long its effects lasted.

"I shall go now to send my magic breath into the interior of the pyramid!" snarled the snake man. "Six of you remain here and bind the bronze devil. Bind him well! Death shall strike all six of you if he escapes! He is to be sacrificed to the Feathered Serpent."

With that warning, the fellow departed, the long, feather-studded snake tail scraping behind him. He was even more sinister than the reptilian monster after which he was disguised.

He moved from view.

The six evil Mayans seized their festoons of tapir-hide thongs and leaned over to lay violent hands on Doc. They got the shock of their lives.

STEEL talons seemed to trap the throats of two. Another pair bounced away, driven by pistoning bronze legs.

At no time had Doc Savage been unconscious.

Monk's remarkable gas depended for its action upon inhalation. Unless some of it penetrated to the lungs, the stuff was quite ineffective.

Because of his conscientious exercises, Doc had lungs of tremendous capacity. An ordinary man can, by straining himself, usually hold his breath about a minute. Several minutes is not uncommon for pearl divers in the South Seas. And Doc Savage, thanks to years of practice, could hold his breath fully twice as long as the most expert pearl diver.

He had held his breath all the while the snake man was waiting for the gas fumes to blow from the stone house.

By this ruse, which only he could manage, Doc had escaped being shot on the spot.

Doc shook the two Mayans whose throats he held. He brought their heads together, knocking their senses out. The other two were tangled in the tapir-hide strands, trying to reach their obsidian knives.

Using the two men in his hands as human clubs, Doc beat the others down. The two his powerful legs had knocked away had collapsed where they fell.

A single piercing squawl of agony, one warrior managed to emit. Then all six were sprawled unconscious in the stone-paved street.

Doc straightened. Into the stone house he leaped. He would only have a moment. That yell of the red-fingered man would spread an alarm.

The metal case which contained Monk's chemicals was not behind the stone bench where Monk had kept it.

Doc was disappointed. He had hoped to get enough chemicals to rig up gas masks effective against Monk's remarkable vapor. But the snake man had evidently appropriated the chemicals.

Out of the building, Doc ran. A machine gun blasted at him from down the narrow street. But it was poorly aimed. The slugs went wide.

Before the serpent-skin-clad man—it was he who had fired—could correct his aim, Doc's metallic form had vanished like smoke. It seemed to float to a building top.

To another roof, Doc leaped, thence onward. Dropping down into a street, he ran several hundred feet.

There, he purposefully let the red-fingered crew glimpse him. He disappeared with lightning speed before they could fire. Howling like a wolf pack, they rushed the spot.

Dozens of them quitted the siege of the pyramid to aid in the chase.

That was what Doc had maneuvered for. It was imperative that he get back into the pyramid and devise something to defend the Mayans against the gas now in the possession of the fiendish warrior sect.

Unseen by any, Doc raced for the pyramid. So silently did he come, and so swiftly, that he was gliding up the steps before they saw him. And then it was too late.

A machine gun cackled angrily. Lead ricocheted off the steps, or splattered like raindrops.

But Doc was already up the stairs and inside the pyramid.

EVEN Renny and the others were a little startled at the suddenness of his appearance. They were awed, too. It was near unbelievable that even Doc could go and come as he had, with four alert machine guns emplaced about the pyramid.

"They have secured Monk's gas," Doc explained. "They'll try to toss bottles of it into the secret doorway exposed by moving the idol."

"Then we'll move the idol back!" Monk grunted.

Straightway, exerting his enormous strength, Monk shifted the massive stone image of Kukulcan back.

A light sprang up below. One of the Mayans had lighted a torch. This was composed of a bowl filled with animal oils and equipped with a wick, not unlike an ordinary lamp. Evidently it had been placed

in this weird place for just such an emergency.

"Chink the cracks with mud," Doc directed. "They'll break the glass bottles of the liquid that makes the gas, hoping it will seep inside."

"But what about our peepholes!" Renny objected. "We can't see them if they start up the stairs!"

For answer, Doc reached over and took off Johnny's glasses which had the powerful magnifying lens on the left side.

"Use the right glass—the one that does not magnify," he suggested. "Pack mud around it, and where could you find a better porthole. It will keep the gas out."

"Dag-gone!" Monk grinned. "I don't believe anything will ever stump Doc!"

The Mayans were stirring about below. Hundreds of them had gone into the pyramid, Doc reflected. There must be something in the nature of an underground room, or perhaps passages below.

"If they throw the gas bottles," Doc told Renny, "they won't rush the steps until they know the fumes have blown away. So when you see them coming, you'll know it is safe to open the secret door and roll rocks down the stairs. You can tell the Mayans to pass up rocks, using sign talk."

"Where you goin'?" Renny wanted to know.

"To explore. I am very curious about this place!"

Chapter XX GOLDEN VAULTS

DOC SAVAGE took Johnny and Monk with him as he wended into the depths of the golden pyramid.

He was surprised at the amount of wear the steps underfoot showed. In spots, they were pitted to half their depth. It must have taken thousands of human feet to do that.

The sovereign of the Mayans, King Chaac, had said only he knew of the existence of this place. That meant it had not been used extensively for generations—possibly not for hundreds of years. For information about a place such as this would be handed down from father to son for ages.

At a spot which Doc's expert sense of distance told him was several feet below the surface of the surrounding ground, they entered a large room.

Doc noted a cleverly constructed stone pipe which bore the water that fed the pool on top of the pyramid. This crossed the room and vanished into another, larger chamber beyond.

This latter was a gigantic hallway, narrow and low of roof, but of unfathomable length. In fact, it was more of a tremendous tunnel. It stretched some hundreds of yards, then was lost in a turn upward.

Down the middle of it ran the finely constructed stone conduit carrying water.

In this subterranean corridor, King Chaac and pretty Princess Monja waited with their subjects.

The entrancing young Mayan princess had retained her nerve remarkably well during the attack. Her golden skin was a trifle pale, but there was no nervousness in her manner.

King Chaac was maintaining a mien befitting a ruler.

Doc drew the aged Mayan sovereign aside.

"Would you care to guide Johnny and Monk and myself into the depths of this cavern?"

The Mayan hesitated. "I would, gladly! But my people—they might think I had deserted them in their need."

That was good reasoning, Doc admitted. He had about decided to go on alone with Monk and Johnny when King Chaac spoke again.

"My daughter, Princess Monja, knows as much of these underground passages as I do. She can guide you."

That was agreeable to Doc. It seemed very welcome to Princess Monja, too.

They set off at once.

"This has the appearance of having been built and used centuries ago," Doc offered.

Princess Monja nodded. "It was. When the Mayan race was in its glory, rulers of all this great region, they built this tunnel and the pyramid outside. A hundred thousand men were kept working steadily through the span of many lifetimes, according to the history handed down to my father and myself."

Johnny murmured wonderingly. Johnny had been taking notes on bits of little-known Mayan lore, intending to write a book if he ever got time. He probably never would.

Princess Monja continued. "This has been a guarded secret for centuries. It has been handed down through the rulers of the Mayans in the Valley of the Vanished. Only the rulers! Until a few minutes ago, when the attack came, only my father and myself knew of it."

"But why all the secrecy?" Johnny inquired.

"Because word of its existence might reach the outer world."

"Huh?" Johnny was puzzled.

Princess Monja smiled slyly. "Wait. I will show you why knowledge that this existed would inflame the outside world."

They had reached the upswing in the tunnel, having covered many hundred yards. Doc knew they were far under the walls of the chasm that hid the Valley of the Vanished.

Suddenly Princess Monja halted. She pointed and spoke in a voice low and husky.

"There is the reason! There is the gold you are to have, Mr. Savage. The gold you are to expend in doing good throughout the world!"

Johnny and Monk were staring. Their eyes protruded. They were stunned until they could not even voice astonishment.

DOC SAVAGE himself, in spite of his marvelous self-control, felt his head swim.

It was unbelievable!

Before them, the corridor had widened. It became a vast room. Solid rock made walls, floor, roof.

The rock showed veinings of gold! It was the same kind of rock of which the pyramid was made!

But it was not this that stunned them.

It was the row after row of deep niches cut into the walls. Literally hundreds of thousands of the cupboardlike recesses!

In each was stacked golden vessels, plaques, goblets, amulets. Everything the ancient Mayans had made of the precious yellow metal could be seen.

"This is the storeroom," said Princess Monja in a low voice. "Legend has it forty thousand artisans were continuously

employed making the articles, which were then stored here."

Doc, Monk, and Johnny hardly heard her. Sight of this fabulous wealth had knocked them blind, deaf, and dumb to everything else.

For the niches held only a fraction of the hoard here! It lay on the floor in heaps. Great stacks of the raw, rich gold! And the treasure cavern stretched far beyond the limits to which their wick-in-a-bowl lamp projected light.

Doc shut his eyes tightly. His bronze lips worked. He was experiencing one of the great moments of his life.

Here was wealth beyond dream. The ransom of kings! But no king could ever pay a ransom such as this! It was enough to buy and sell realms.

Doc's brain raced. This was the legacy his father had left him. He was to use it in the cause to which his life was dedicated—to go here and there, from one end of the world to the other, looking for excitement and adventure; striving to help those who need help; punishing those who deserve it.

To what better use could it be put?

Pretty Princess Monja, in whose life here in the Valley of the Vanished, gold meant not a thing, spoke.

"The metal was taken from deeper within the mountain. Much yet remains. Much more, indeed, than you see stacked here."

Gradually, the three adventurers snapped the trance which had seized them. They moved forward.

Ahead of them ran the stone pipe which fed water to the pyramid pool.

Monk started to count his steps the length of the treasure vault. He got to three hundred and lost track, his faculties upset by looking at so much gold. The piles seemed to get higher.

Their route narrowed abruptly. The tunnel floor slanted upward steeply. A couple of hundred feet, they nearly crawled. Then they came to a tiny lake, where the stone pipe ended. This was in a small room.

The walls of this room had been but partially hewn by human hands. Water had excavated a great deal. The stream ran on the floor.

Ahead stretched the cavern. It seemed to go on infinitely.

Doc now realized the cavern was partially the work of the underground stream. It probably extended for miles. Originally, the Mayans had found gold in the stream mouth. They had ventured into the cavern, knowing it must have washed out of there.

And they had found this fabulous lode.

PRINCESS MONJA put a query. "Do you wish to go on?"

"Of course," Doc replied. "We are seeking an outlet. Some manner in which the Mayans can escape starvation or surrender."

They continued into the depths. The air was quite cool. There was a wide path, hewn by human hands.

Sizable stalagmites, like icicles of stone growing upward from the path's middle, showed convincingly that ages had passed since feet had last trod here.

Often, great rocks near blocked the trail. They had fallen from the ceiling. And everywhere, gold inlaid the stone in an ore of fantastic richness.

Doc and his friends had lost interest in the ore. After the vast riches in the storage cavern, nothing could excite them much.

Upward wound the underground stream.

Two hours, they toiled ahead. By then, they had gotten beyond the area of gold ore. There was no path now. No gold glistened in the stone.

The way grew more tortuous. The character of the rock walls changed. Johnny stopped often to examine the formations. Monk ranged off into every cranny they came to, hoping to find an exit.

"There is one, somewhere!" Doc declared. "Not far off, either."

"How can you tell?" Princess Monja wanted to know.

Doc indicated the flame of their torch. It was blowing about in a manner that showed a distinct breeze.

Johnny dropped behind as far as he could, and still kept them in sight. In darkness as he was, he knew he would be more liable to discover an opening into the outer sunlight.

For the same reason, Monk went ahead. The hairy anthropoid of a fellow had more confidence in his ability to get over unknown ground.

Doc was himself an interested observer of the formations of rock through which they were now passing. A villainous, yellowish-gray deposit attracted him. He scratched it with a thumbnail, and burned a little in the torch flame. It was a sulphur deposit.

"Sulphur," he repeated aloud. But no solution to their troubles presented.

They came soon to a rather large side cavern. The formation was mostly limestone here.

While they waited, Johnny ventured up the side cavern to explore for an opening. Five minutes passed. Ten.

Johnny returned, shaking his head.

"No luck!" He shrugged.

He was juggling a white, crystalline bit of substance in a hand.

Doc looked at this. "Let me inspect that, Johnny!"

Johnny passed it over. Doc touched the end to his tongue. It had a saline taste.

"Saltpeter," he said. "Not pure, but pure enough."

"I don't understand," Johnny murmured.

Doc recited a formula: "Saltpeter, charcoal, and sulphur! I noticed the sulphur back a short distance. We can burn wood and get the charcoal. What does that add up to?"

Johnny got it. "Gun powder!"

Even as he exclaimed the word, they received fresh cause for elation.

Monk had gone ahead a hundred yards, exploring. His howl of delight came to them.

"I see a hole—"

MONK'S hole proved to be a rip in solid rock of considerable size. Sunlight blazed through.

Doc, Princess Monja, Johnny, and Monk clambered up to it. They found crude steps, proof the ancient Mayans had known of this exit. They sidled cautiously outside, squinting in the sun glare.

They stood on a shelf. Above, to each side, and below, stretched a sheer wall of rock. It looked almost vertical.

But a close inspection showed a procession of steps leading downward. Only from close range could these be discovered.

They offered a way to safety, precarious though it might be.

Doc addressed his companions:

"Monk, you go back inside and start work on that sulphur deposit. Get it out as rapidly as you can. Select the purest stuff." He told Monk where he had noticed the sulphur.

"Johnny, you harvest a supply of the saltpeter. Was there much of it?"

"Quite a little," Johnny admitted.

"Dig it out. I think it is pure enough for our purpose. Maybe we can refine it a little."

Doc turned to pretty Princess Monja. He hesitated, then said: "Monja, you've been a brick."

"What's that?" she asked. Evidently her supply of English slang was limited.

"A wonderful girl," Doc grinned.

"Now, will you do something else. It'll save time."

She smiled. "I will do anything you say."

The unmistakable adoration in her voice escaped Doc's notice.

He directed: "Return to the Mayans gathered under the pyramid. Select the most powerful and active among the men, and send them here, along with Long Tom, Renny, and Ham."

"I understand," she nodded.

"One thing more—send along a number of those gold vases. Select those with thick walls, very heavy. Say about fifty of them. Tell Renny, Long Tom, and Ham I want to make bombs out of them. They will know which ones will serve best."

"Bombs of gold!" Monk gulped.

"The only thing handy," Doc pointed out. "And when the men reach you fellows, load them up with the saltpeter and sulphur."

Before departing, Johnny asked a question. "Know where we are?"

Doc smiled and pointed. There was another wall of rock opposite them a few hundred yards. A thousand feet or so below poured a rushing stream.

"We're in the chasm. The Valley of the Vanished is somewhere upstream. And it can't be very far."

"The entrance to the valley is through the chasm, isn't it?" Monk queried.

"It is. Unless you count the new entrance we've just found."

Johnny, impatient, said: "Come on, Princess. Come on, Monk. Let's get going!"

WHEN the three had left him, Doc made his way along the precarious steps to more level footing. He found a patch of jungle. Gathering the proper woods, he selected a spot for making his charcoal where the smoke would not be noticed.

The charcoal oven he built of stone and mortar. Two rocks flinty enough to spark a fire could not be located. So, with a leather string from his mantle, and a curved stick, he made a fire bow. This twirled a stick until friction started a tiny glow. In a moment he had a fire.

The charcoal-manufacturing process was well under way when his friends appeared. They had about a hundred of the most manly Mayan men. And from the way they were laden with golden jars, they might have thought they would not have another chance at the fabulous wealth.

The making of the charcoal was tedious. Work on the saltpeter and sulphur called for a great deal of Doc's vast ingenuity and knowledge.

All that afternoon and through the night, they prepared and mixed.

"We won't rush it," Doc explained. "This time we want to settle this red-fingered warrior menace for once and all."

He was ominously silent a bit, then added: "And one in special—the man in the snake suit."

From time to time, runners dispatched back through the long reaches of the cavern of treasure to its termination beneath the Mayan pyramid reported the defenders holding out successfully.

"They have repulsed several attacks," one messenger brought notice. "One of the fire-spitting snakes the red-fingered men are using brought hurt to our ruler, King Chaac, though."

"Is he hurt bad?" Doc demanded.

"In the leg only. He cannot walk about. But otherwise, he is not in bad shape."

"Who has charge of the defense?" Doc wanted to know.

"Princess Monja."

Monk, who had overheard, grinned from ear to ear. "Now there *is* a girl!"

The bombs were rapidly pushed to completion. Obsidian, glasslike rock flakes

were placed in the gold jars. A quantity of the powder was poured in to form a core. The gold, being pure and soft, permitted the jars to be pounded together at the top. The pounding was done carefully.

Fuses offered a problem. Doc solved that by selecting lengths of a tough tropical vine which had a soft core. Using long, hardwood twigs, he poked out the core, leaving a hollow tube. One of these he left extending down into the powder of each bomb.

Making use of his vast fund of knowledge, Doc concocted a slow-burning variety of the gunpowder. He filled the improvised fuses with this, after experiments to see what lengths were proper.

With the first silvery glow of dawn, Doc led the attacking party on the march.

Some of the Mayans were familiar with the trail into the Valley of the Vanished. It seemed these men had been outside a time or two to further friendly relations with surrounding natives, who, though not pure Mayans after the passage of these centuries, were of Mayan ancestry. Hence the friendship with the lost clan.

Through the treacherous entrance to the valley, the grim little cavalcade worked. There was no lookout posted at the chasm path—the first time that had happened in centuries, a Mayan muttered.

Since the lookouts were usually red-fingered warriors, Doc understood how the snake man had been able to come and go, unnoticed.

Without revealing themselves to the besieging warriors, they closed in. The Mayans understood how to light the bombs. They carried smoldering pieces of punklike wood.

At Doc's signal, an even dozen bombs rained upon the red-fingered killers.

Chapter XXI THE GOLDEN DEATH

THUNDEROUS explosion of those twelve bombs was the first warning those of the warrior sect had of the attack.

Doc had apportioned three explosive missiles to each of the four emplaced machine guns. He had instructed his Mayan

followers in the art of hurling grenades. Just how well was instantly evident.

All four rapid-fire guns went out of commission at once!

The devilish warriors, rent and torn by the obsidian shrapnel, were tossed high into the air. Many perished instantly, paying in a full measure for their murderous attack on the Mayan citizenry during the ceremonials.

But plenty remained to put up a fierce fight.

And some had the guns which had belonged to Doc and his friends!

With piercing howls, the Mayans fell upon the surviving rascals. They bombed them wherever four or five were together.

Monk had picked up two stout clubs en route. One in either hand, he laid about with terrific results.

Renny needed no more than his great iron fists. Long Tom, Ham, and Johnny stood off and pitched bombs wherever opportunity presented.

Doc, his golden eyes throwing glances seemingly everywhere at once, moved back and forth through the combat. Time after time, red-fingered fiends dropped before his skill and strength without even knowing what manner of blow had downed them.

The great stone likeness of Kukulcan atop the pyramid gave a sudden lurch to one side, uncovering the secret entrance to the mammoth treasure vault of ancient Maya.

Tribesmen poured out. Roaring for vengeance on the red-fingered ones, they flooded down the pyramid stairs. Some fell in their excitement. They bounded up unhurt. Rocks, sticks, anything handy, they seized for the fray.

A spike of steel poked furtively out of a clump of jungle shrubs. It was the snout of a machine gun. It snarled two shots, four—

A bronze hand closed on the warming barrel. A hand with the strength of alloy steel. It jerked. The gunman, a finger unluckily hung in the trigger guard, was hauled out of the tropical foliage.

A warrior! The man probably never saw for sure it was Doc Savage who had seized the weapon. A block of bronze knuckles belted the man's temple. He went to his spirit hunting grounds as suddenly as Mayan man ever did.

Doc was disappointed. He had hoped to get the snake man or Morning Breeze. The machine gun was one of Doc's own weapons. He tossed it to Renny.

Rapidly, Doc glided among the combatants. His attitude was detached, disinterested. He showed fight only when tackled. Then the consequences were invariably disastrous.

Doc was hunting the man masquerading in the serpent skin. He wanted Morning Breeze, too. Both had warranted his wrath.

DOC perceived shortly that the snake man and Morning Breeze were not taking part in the battle.

With this discovery, Doc slid over and was swallowed by the luxuriant tropical leafage. He had an idea the two leaders were skulking somewhere until they saw the outcome of the battle. Around the scene of the engagement, Doc skirted. No one saw him.

Fully half of the red-fingered men had now perished. The Mayan populace, terribly incensed, were giving no quarter. The sect of warriors was being wiped out forever.

Nowhere about the battlefield could Doc find the two he sought.

He began a second search—and found the trail. The tracks of two men! The mark left by the dragging serpent tail identified them with certainty.

Like a hound on a scent, Doc followed the spoor. Most of the time the tracks were lost to the eye of an ordinary observer. The snake man and Morning Breeze had taken the greatest care to conceal them. They went down rocky gullies. They even waded a distance in the lake edge.

It was plain the pair had fled the moment they saw their cause was lost.

They were seeking to fly from the Valley of the Vanished! Their course was set directly for the entrance trail in the chasm.

Doc suddenly abandoned the tracking process. He had been moving swiftly, but it was like the wind he now traveled. He knew whence they were bound. Straight for the chasm exit, he sped.

The snake man and Morning Breeze beat him there!

The villainous pair had been running. They had perspired. They had left the smell of sweat on rocks they touched with their hands. So precarious was the route that they were continually clutching handholds.

Into the chasm, Doc swung. He traversed fifty yards, then stopped to kick off his high-backed Mayan sandals. He needed a delicate touch on this fearsome trail. The way slanted upward.

A few hundred feet below, the little stream threshed and plunged. So tortuous was his channel that the water became a great, snarling rope of white foam.

Doc caught sight of his quarry. The pair were ahead. They looked back—discovered Doc about the same time he saw them.

Over the bawl of the water through the chasm, Morning Breeze's scream of terror penetrated. It was a piping wail of fear.

The snake man still wore his paraphernalia. Probably there had not been time to take it off. He wheeled at Morning Breeze's shriek.

Evidently they thought Doc had a gun.

Morning Breeze, cowardly soul that he was, sought madly to get past the snake man. There was not room on the trail for that.

Angered, the snake man slugged Morning Breeze with his fist. The Mayan warrior chief fought back. The fellow in the serpent garb struck again.

Morning Breeze was knocked off the trail.

OVER and over spun the squat, vicious Mayan's body. It struck a rock spur. Morning Breeze probably died then. If he did, he was saved the terror of watching the rock-fanged bottom of the abyss reach for him. The foaming river was like slaver on those ravenous stone teeth.

Thus, indirectly, did mere terror of Doc bring death to Morning Breeze.

The snake man continued onward. He had one of Doc's pistol like machine guns. It could be seen hanging at his belt. But he did not try to use it. No doubt he thought he would let Doc get closer.

The chase resumed. Doc did not go as swiftly now. He was unarmed. Wily, he was biding his time. His great brain sought a plan.

A mile was traversed. Better than two more! The chasm walls became a vague bit less steep. The stone was crisscrossed with tiny weather cracks. Most of these were no wider than pencils.

Doc suddenly quitted the trail. He had another plan.

Upward, he worked. Where seemingly no possible foothold offered, he clung like a fly. His steel fingers, his mobile and powerful feet, materialized solid support where the eye said there was none.

Doc could make the barest projection support his weight, thanks to his highly developed sense of balance.

The speed he made was astounding. Nearly a thousand feet above the snake man, Doc passed the fellow. He went on. His course was now downward, so as to intercept his quarry.

Doc found the sort of a spot he sought. The trail rounded a sharp angle. A thousand feet below, hundreds above, was almost vertical stone. Doc waited around the angle.

Before long, he heard the hard, rattling breath of the snake man. The fellow was nearly exhausted.

The man was looking back as he came around the angle in the trail, wondering if Doc had come closer.

Doc reached out a great, bronzed steel hand. The long, powerful fingers closed over the snake man's gun belt. They jerked downward. Like an aged string, the gun belt snapped before that tremendous strength. Doc tossed gun and belt into the abyss.

Only when he felt the terrific wrench about his middle did the snake man turn his head and discover Doc. He had thought his Nemesis was behind him.

The man had removed his serpent-head mask. His features were disclosed.

THERE was a terrible silence for a moment.

Then, coming from everywhere, and yet nowhere, arose a low trilling sound. Like the song of some exotic bird it was, or the sound of wind filtering through pinnacles of ice. It had an amazing quality of ventriloquism.

Even looking directly at Doc's lips, one would not realize from whence the sound emanated.

It was doubtful if Doc even knew he was making the sound. For it was the small, unconscious thing he did in moments of utter concentration. It could mean many things. Just now it was a sign of victory.

The very calmness of the terrible quality in that whistling sound made the snake man tremble from head to foot. The fellow's mouth worked. But words would not come. He took a backward step.

Doc did not move. But his inexorable golden eyes seemed to project themselves toward his quarry. They were merciless. They chilled. They shriveled. They promised awful things.

Those eyes, far better than words could have, told the snake man what he could expect.

He tried to speak again. He tried to make his nerveless legs carry him in flight. He couldn't.

Finally, by a tremendous effort, he did the one thing that could get him away from those terrifying eyes of Doc's.

The snake man jumped off the trail!

Slowly, his body spun on its way to death. The face was a pale, grotesque mask.

It was the face of Don Rubio Gorro, secretary of state of the republic of Hidalgo.

Chapter XXII TREASURE-TROVE

GREAT was the jubilation when Doc Savage returned to his Mayan friends in the Valley of the Vanished. Doc's five men gave him a tumultuous welcome. King Chaac's wound proved to be minor.

"We cleaned the slate!" Monk grinned. "Not a red-fingered warrior survived."

Elderly King Chaac put in with a firm declaration. "The sect of red-fingered men will never be permitted to revive. Henceforth, we shall punish minor criminals by making them mine the gold. The most manly of our men will do whatever fighting has to be done."

So jovial did the Mayans feel that they insisted the ceremony of inducting Doc and his friends into the clan be picked up at once where it had been interrupted.

The rituals went through without a hitch.

"This makes us members of the lodge," Ham chuckled, eyeing the gaudy Mayan trappings they wore. Fresh clothing had been supplied.

Renny, whom Doc had dispatched to check over their plane, returned.

"The ship is O. K.," he reported. "And thanks to the big supply of gasoline we started out with, there's plenty left to take us to Blanco Grande."

"You are not leaving so soon?" King Chaac inquired sorrowfully.

And entrancing Princess Monja, standing near, looked as disappointed as a pretty young lady could.

Doc did not answer immediately. It was with genuine unwillingness that he had resolved to depart at once. This Valley of the Vanished was an idyllic spot in which to tarry. One could not desire more comforts than it offered.

"I would like to remain—always," he smiled at the Mayan sovereign. "But there is the work to which my life and the lives of my friends are dedicated. We must carry on, regardless of personal desires."

"That is true," King Chaac admitted slowly. "It is the cause to which goes the gold from the treasure-trove of ancient Maya. Have you any further instructions about how the wealth should be moved? We will send it by burro train to Blanco Grande, to whoever you designate as your agent—"

"To Carlos Avispa, President of Hidalgo," Doc supplied. "It would be difficult to find a more honorable man than he. I shall designate him my agent."

"Very well," nodded the Mayan.

Doc repeated the other details. "A third of the gold I shall use to establish a gigantic trust fund in America. It shall be for the Mayan people, to be used should they ever have need of it. One fifth goes to the government of Hidalgo. The rest is for my cause."

Preparations for departure now got under way.

Long Tom, the electrical wizard, at Doc's command, rigged a radio receiving set in the palace of the Mayan sovereign. The current for this was supplied by a small generator and water wheel which Long Tom installed beside the stream flowing from the pyramid top. He made the work very solid. The set should function perfectly for years. He left spare tubes.

With long-lasting ink, Doc made a mark on the radio dial. This designated a certain wave length.

"Tune in at that spot every seventh day," Doc commanded King Chaac. "Do so at the hour when the sun stands directly above the Valley of the Vanished. You will hear my voice sometimes. But not always, by any means. I shall broadcast to you at that hour—but only when we are in need of more gold. Then you are to send a burro train of the precious metal to me."

"It shall be done," agreed the Mayan ruler.

PRETTY PRINCESS MONJA was a sensible girl. She saw bronze, handsome Doc Savage was not for her. So she made the best of it. Bravely, she hid her disappointment within her bosom.

She even discussed it philosophically with homely Monk.

"I suppose he will find some American girl," she finished, with a catch.

"Now you listen," Monk said seriously. "There won't be any women in Doc's life. If there was, you'd be the one. Doc has come nearer falling for you than for any other girl. And some pippins have tried to snare Doc."

"Is that the truth?" Princess Monja demanded coyly.

"So help my Aunt Hannah if it ain't!" Monk declared.

Then Monk got the shock of his eventful life. Princess Monja suddenly kissed him. Then she fled.

Monk stared after her, grinning from ear to ear, carefully tasting the young Mayan princess's kiss on his lips.

"Gosh! What Doc is passin' up!" he ejaculated.

Two days later, Doc Savage and his five men took their departure. Their sturdy plane battled the air currents up out of the Valley of the Vanished.

Their regret at leaving the idyllic paradise was assuaged by the thought of what was ahead of them. The yearning for adventure and excitement warmed them. Wealth untold was in their hands. It was ample for even their great purpose in life.

Many parts of the world would see the coming of this bronze man and his five friends of iron. Many a human fiend would rue the day he pitted himself against them. Countless rightful causes would receive help from their powerful hands and superbly trained minds.

Indeed, these men were destined hardly to reach New York before new trouble struck them like lightning bolts. They were to meet Kar—with his horrible schemes and a fighting weapon such as civilization never saw!

The giant bronze man and his five friends would confront undreamed perils as the very depths of hell itself crashed upon their heads.

They would spend terrible days and ghastly nights in a lost land infested by ferocious prehistoric reptilian monsters and flying horrors. A land which they found exactly as it had been countless ages ago! A fearsome, bloodcurdling land where survival of the fiercest was the only law!

And through all that, the work of Savage would go on!

THE END

NEXT MONTH—

Doc Savage, scrapper supreme, with his five companions, comes into a new, weird conflict with man and nature—and an evil mind.

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