

MURDER MELODY

A Doc Savage Adventure

#15

Kenneth Robeson
[Lawrence Donovan]

1935

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DOC SAVAGE'S AMAZING CREW

William Harper Littlejohn, the bespectacled scientist who was the world's greatest living expert on geology and archæology.

Colonel John Renwick, "Renny," his favorite sport was pounding his massive fists through heavy, paneled doors.

Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, "Monk," only a few inches over five feet tall, and yet over 260 pounds. His brutish exterior concealed the mind of a great scientist.

Major Thomas J. Roberts, "Long Tom," was the physical weakling of the crowd, but a genius at electricity.

Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, slender and waspy, he was never without his ominous, black sword cane.

TOGETHER WITH THEIR LEADER, THEY WOULD GO ANYWHERE, FIGHT ANYONE, DARE EVERYTHING—SEEKING EXCITEMENT AND PERILOUS ADVENTURE!

Books by Kenneth Robeson

THE THOUSAND-HEADED MAN

THE MAN OF BRONZE

METEOR MENACE

THE POLAR TREASURE

THE LOST OASIS

BRAND OF THE WEREWOLF

THE LAND OF TERROR

THE MYSTIC MULLAH

THE MONSTERS

THE PHANTOM CITY

FEAR CAY

QUEST OF QUI

THE FANTASTIC ISLAND

LAND OF ALWAYS-NIGHT

MURDER MELODY

A DOC SAVAGE ADVENTURE

BY KENNETH ROBESON

MURDER MELODY

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MURDER MELODY

Chapter 1

DEAD MAN'S MESSAGE

THE earth shook. Tall fir trees swayed. Brittle branches snapped. Loosened stones clattered from a lighted tower. These bounded and plummeted several hundred feet. They splashed in a turmoil of white-slashed blue water.

The tower was a government lookout station. It was concreted at the peak of a rocky wall. Lights of red and white knifed alternately into the misted darkness. Their timed luminance guided shipping into and out of Burrard Inlet, the canyon-deep harbor of Vancouver. Their radiance could be picked up far out over the Bay of Georgia.

On a trail hewn through the firs back of the lookout tower a tall man staggered, holding his balance. His compactly knitted figure seemed to have been poured into his garments. Small bulbs of incandescence were haloed by the fog. These were spaced at intervals of perhaps a hundred yards along the woodland trail.

This dim illumination revealed the passage of some inner pain across the man's regularly molded features. His face was of the smoothest texture. He might have been an actor grease-painted with a silvery mixture. Even in this misted gloom it glowed strangely.

Under the man's feet the ground trembled. The earth jerked spasmodically. The motion was both lateral and forward. The man stumbled as he walked toward an iron bench placed in a secluded niche.

Dried cones from a lone pine tree pelted about the bench. The quivering earth rumbled as if some monster of tremendous size and weight were stalking past. Though he was apparently the only person in the many square miles of Vancouver's wilderness park, the man on the bench began talking. He spoke rapidly, but not loudly.

As the terse, clear words tumbled from his twitching lips, the man fumbled with the buttons set in a double row along a tuniclike garment. Except for unusual looseness and length, the garment might have been a vest.

One hand found a button. The fingers lingered upon it. They pressed inward and turned the button slightly. Immediately there was another voice. This was faint, but its enunciation was clear.

"Three Zoromen have departed. Andro, Namos and Lamo. Beware! Write quickly the message as instructed."

The word Zoromen was spoken as if this was the name of a clan. The speech had that perfection which a well-educated foreigner gives to a new language. The man on the bench spoke only three words in reply to the mysterious voice.

"Lanta is understood."

Through the rumbling of the apparent earthquake a weird melody had been permeating the misty night. This was low but shrill, as if played upon a flute. Its cadence became higher. The mystic music was drifting nearer.

WITH the three final words, the man quickly pulled a roll of dull yellow substance from under his coat. He next produced what might have been a stylographic pencil. This gleamed in the misty light. A section of the yellowish roll was removed.

The man already was sagging forward. But the parchmentlike scrap was on his knee. He wrote rapidly with the stylographic instrument. The yellowish roll fell among the rotting leaves at his feet.

The shrill, piercing melody increased in volume. Shadowy figures flitted among the still-shaking bushes in the vicinity of the bench in the isolated niche. The man upon it was no longer sitting erect. He was doubled over in a silent contortion of agony. The stylographic instrument dropped to the ground. The man's feet shuffled it into the loose gravel.

Under a repetition of the earth shock of a minute before, one towering tree snapped near its base and came crashing down. The tree was an ancient spruce. The supporting ground had betrayed it after two centuries of growth.

The man of the shining face clapped both hands to his ears as if to exclude the weird melody. His body crumpled on the bench. He writhed as if he were being tortured. One hand came slowly downward.

He thrust a small yellow roll into his mouth.

"It is done, Lanta," he gasped.

As if the little roll of yellow parchment had cut off his breath, the man stiffened and died. The eerie melody ceased abruptly. The bushes behind the bench, rustling as the ground trembled, closed like a green wall upon the shadows that had been near.

THE mysterious earthquake, which apparently had made Stanley Park, on the Bay of Georgia front of Vancouver, one of its damaging centers, was recorded on the seismograph at the University of British Columbia. The first awakened savant to reach the observatory of the provincial university saw the recording stylograph had fixed the time of the first shock at four and a half seconds after two a. m.

From the sharply defined inclination of the lines, the center of the tremor seemed to have been under the barrier mountains to the northward. This serrated range of peaks and canyons extended from back of North Vancouver, across Burrard Inlet, past The Narrows for several miles to the lighthouse promontory in the Bay of Georgia.

Other members of the university faculty were awakening to find telephone inquiries and reports pouring in.

Chimneys had been shaken down in North Vancouver.

Rocks were still rolling from the heights and blocking the highway along the northern shore through the suburban section of West Bay.

White Cliff reported windows broken, dishes rattled and the summer residents fleeing to boats.

After the second mysterious temblor, which followed at an interval of one and three-quarter minutes, Nanaimo and Victoria on Vancouver Island, reported lesser effects from the quake. Port Angeles on the American side, and much of the Olympic Peninsula, had experienced slight tremors.

Much slighter recording on the seismograph at Washington University in Seattle brought the quick deduction that the earthquake was unusually localized.

“This is a strange coincidence,” remarked one of the professors at the University of British Columbia. “The two American coasts have had similar tremors within forty-eight hours.”

His fellow savants recalled the newspaper accounts of only the previous day. These had been, briefly:

Fishing villages and towns in the vicinity of Provincetown, Mass., at an early hour to-day, were visited by slight but distinct earthquake shocks. The seismograph at the University of Harvard recorded the center of the disturbance 77½ miles from Harvard—at Provincetown. Audiences fled from motion picture theaters and apartment buildings, but none has been reported injured. A Coast Guard station reported the shock was such as might have been caused by some ship being blown up at sea.

SELDOM is an earthquake so accurately anticipated as to have a recording close to its point of origin. Such was the case with this mysterious double tremor in the British Columbia mountains.

A tall, bony man was standing with two others near the cement reservoir topping the main trail above the zoological gardens in Vancouver’s Stanley Park. At the moment the trembling earth and the weird wailing melody sent the man staggering to die on the bench below the lookout station, the skeletonish figure placed a leather, boxlike case on the ground.

The lid of the case was opened. There was a low whirring sound from the leather-covered box. A stylographic needle moved so sharply it jumped from the recording roll. The only light was a finger as thin as a pencil playing upon the portable seismograph.

“This prearranged phenomenon might well be merely some combustible manifestation,” spoke the dry voice of the bony man. “We are at considerable distance from the identified geological fault from which a major temblor might be promulgated.”

“It don’t seem possible,” piped up a thin voice, all the more remarkable because the childish tone was emitted from a barrel chest set between shoulders a jungle gorilla might have envied. “You think, Johnny, that’s what’s doin’ it?”

The first speaker, “Johnny,” or world-noted as William Harper Littlejohn, eminent geologist and archæologist, never employed words of only one or two syllables when multi-syllables would serve.

The second speaker was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, a quite impressive and dignified name for his quite undignified person. For his long, dangling arms, his sloping forehead and general anthropoidal contour had given him the name of “Monk.” Though Johnny’s high flights in the English language often went far over his head, Monk was one of the world’s greatest industrial chemists.

The seismograph needle continued its abrupt gyrations. Johnny steadied the case by holding it in his long, thin hands.

The third man, the one holding the flashlight with its steady pencil ray, swayed easily to the movement of the jumping ground. He was in darkness like the others, but the slight reflection from the pencil ray showed a face of smooth, golden bronze. His eyes, too, were of a flaky golden hue.

Just now, as he watched the demonstration being given by Johnny, the bronze man's eyes were stirred by whirlwinds of motion, as if they were pools suddenly rippled. His voice seemed low when he spoke, but it was possessed of a carrying, penetrating quality that made each calm, unhurried word distinct.

"Perhaps our friend will arrive with the demonstration," he stated. "It was exactly two o'clock."

As if his words had signaled it, an eerie, flutelike melody quivered through the grumble of the complaining ground.

"Whatcha hear, Doc?" questioned Monk instantly.

Johnny shifted the recording seismograph and peered intently into the gloomy tunnel of the main trail under the canopy of firs.

"Is some one approaching? I haven't heard anything but the underground rifting of strata."

Both men then shifted their gaze to Doc.

The eerie melody, though it was faint, was similar in its musical running of the scale to the weird whistling emanation which always came from Doc Savage in periods of deep concentration or at the moment of some impending happening. The companions of the bronze man always took it to mean that danger; swift action might be expected in such a moment.

The weird music really was coming from up the main trail.

Doc snapped off the generator flashlight. For seconds he stood as motionless as a carved rock. The heaving of the ground did not disturb the bronze man's balance. His massively corded legs were immovable as pillars of granite.

When Doc Savage spoke, the weird wailing in the distance continued.

"The woman has spoken the truth," he said quietly. "There is danger. We shall investigate."

JOHNNY and Monk knew the bronze man referred to the mysterious message which had brought the world's most amazing adventurer and his five companions to the British Columbia coast. This message had required much extra postage because of its weight, though it had been contained in an envelope of ordinary size.

The letter had been addressed simply to "Clark Savage Jr., New York City." Such general address was sufficient. The postal authorities of the big city knew of only one such man. His regular address was the eighty-sixth floor of Manhattan's most impressive skyscraper.

The message had been sent by registered mail from Seattle. It was unique in that the "paper" on which it was written was not paper at all. It was thinner than the average onionskin parchment, but it was very heavy.

For it was, amazingly enough, of rolled gold leaf, virgin gold.

The writing upon this was stylographic, couched in perfect English. The words seemed to have been etched into the gold leaf with what might have been “silver ink,” or some similar chemical.

Doc had known instantly a woman had written it. A young woman. The letters were firmly formed. The style was gracefully flowing.

The bronze man had read the character of the writer. He knew she was a girl of determined and extraordinary personality.

The message read:

Clark Savage, Jr.—Your safety is threatened. Watch Aleutian Islands. Come to Stanley Park, Vancouver, B. C., at 2 a. m. on the 16th. Be at old reservoir above zoological gardens. Perhaps slight earth shaking will precede my messenger. You will learn more.

This message had been unsigned. The uncanny intuition of Doc Savage made him know when one of the countless communications he received was of great importance. Then he had received the letter the previous day. About that time came the inexplicable temblor in the New England coastal region.

Doc and his five companions had arrived on Burrard Inlet in two of his special airplanes only this evening. One of the planes had immediately taken off for the north, at Doc’s order.

As always, when the bronze man said, “We shall investigate,” he was already many yards in advance of Johnny and Monk. The three followed the gloomy tunnel of the main trail in the direction from which the queer melody had come.

Doc’s swift gliding movement always was soundless. Johnny was likewise jungle trained to catlike progress. Monk’s feet scuffed some in the trail gravel. The hands at the ends of his long arms swung below his knees.

The occasionally spaced light bulbs gave them little illumination. Doc’s ultrasensitive ears, however, were guiding him directly to the secluded bench on which a man was in the final throes of death. The bronze man’s auditory nerves were several times as selective as those of an ordinary man.

Doc surprised the others by suddenly placing his finger tips in his ears. For some reason, he was not surprised when this did not seem to lessen the impact of the music. It had a knifelike piercing quality.

“Sounds like a whole hive of giant bees,” stated Johnny. “And I can almost feel them stinging.”

“Nothin’ but some dag-goned mosquitoes buzzin’ around,” complained Monk, slapping at his small ears buried in tufts of gristly hair.

“Keep your ears plugged,” advised Doc. “This is strange to me.”

Johnny and Monk hastily followed their leader’s example. Anything which might be strange to the bronze man must be strange indeed.

Even with his ears thus stopped by his fingers, Doc heard the final, faint scuffling of a man’s feet in the dead leaves and gravel just off the main trail.

The earth shook again. The weird music ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The rumbling crash of the dead tree obliterated all other sound.

Doc had led the way around the trunk of a massive fir tree.

Here the yellowish, misty glow of the string of trail lights played into a niche where sat a bench. The bench was of carved iron. It was painted green.

“Some guy’s sleepin’ on it,” whispered Monk. “Gosh! You’d think all them trees jumpin’ and crackin’ woulda waked him up!”

Doc had glided to the bench. His flashlight was held down close, its presence nearly obscured by his corded bronze hands.

“This one will never awaken,” he said quietly.

He was lifting the man’s head.

“Looks like he has been strangled,” said Johnny. “Say, he’s wearing some kind of make-up!”

Doc said nothing. He lifted the dead man’s head gently. The mouth of the corpse was gaping open. The man had every appearance of having been choked.

But there was total absence of any discoloration such as would appear from strangulation. The man’s thin throat bore no marks of any character.

The face was smooth, even calm. It had a silvery glowing texture, which had caused Johnny to remark the make-up effect. The skin seemed poreless, as if encased in a layer of tinfoil, only of a much finer color.

Outwardly, the man was normally clad. A tan raincoat was pulled around his body. Doc lifted the man’s chin. The mouth gaped open with ghastly effect. The raincoat fell open.

“Lookit!” exclaimed Monk. “He’s the fella was playin’ that crazy tune, Doc!”

THEY could see the dead man apparently carried no weapon. Under his coat was a curious, tightly woven shirt of some silken substance. It came down like a tunic. Glass buttons of an obsidian character ornamented the front of the garment, but they were irregularly spaced. They were not employed to fasten the garment.

Monk pushed forward. A slender metal tube was sticking under what seemed to be the loose belt of the tunic. Doc said nothing as Monk removed the instrument. The bronze man’s fingers had moved so rapidly the eyes of his companions had not followed them.

He had removed a small roll of papery gold from the throat of the corpse.

Johnny took the slender tube from Monk. He fiddled it over his long, thin fingers. He tested it experimentally with a thumbnail. The weight of it was obtained by delicately balancing it over his finger tips.

“This is an example of remarkable metallurgical craftsmanship,” concluded Johnny. “This has one-fifth the specific gravity of aluminum with a carboniferous molecular density. I have never before encountered such an alloy.”

“Huh?” piped up Monk’s childish treble. “It ain’t nothin’ but one of them flutes what the fella plays marchin’ in that picture of Washington crossin’ the Delaware in the Revolutionary War.”

Monk's knowledge of chemistry was vast, but history was mostly an unexplored region to him.

"That dead man's the fella was playin' it, I'll betcha," Monk added. "I used to know how to blow a horn. Lemme show yuh."

One of his hairy paws extracted the flutelike instrument from Johnny's hands. Monk placed it to his lips.

Doc hardly seemed to move. But the "flute" did not reach Monk's mouth for him to demonstrate how he had once blown a horn.

"It was death music," stated Doc. "But this man was not playing it."

Chapter 2

THE FLYING CORPSE

JOHNNY and Monk stared at Doc Savage. The bronze man was testing the metal of the slender instrument taken from the dead man's belt. He had seen the metal was of a hitherto unknown alloy before Johnny had announced his long-worded conclusion.

"It is not only of a strange alloy," Doc stated, "but the texture of the grain indicates it contains at least two elements never before employed in a metallic combination. The tunic this man is wearing also is of woven metal of the fineness of sheerest silk."

"Well, I'll be dag-goned!" squealed Monk. "Some kind of a new bulletproof vest?"

"Perhaps that is it," assented Doc, but he did not tell quite all his perceptive hands had revealed.

Under the silken, metallic tunic he had touched a dozen or more compact devices. These were so made as to fit the contour of the dead man's ribs. Not the slightest bulge appeared. But one of these devices Doc had instantly identified as a new form of radio communication diaphragm.

The other devices would have to await closer examination. They were constructed mostly in the forms of coils wound like springs of watches.

"But how did you know it was not this man playing that thing?" questioned Johnny. "It seems as if it might have made that sort of weird music."

Johnny's scholarly interest had been aroused. He had placed a monocle in his eye and was bending close to examine the texture of the dead man's tunic.

Johnny's monocle was in reality a powerful magnifying glass.

Doc replied to Johnny's question.

"This man was seeking us. He died too quickly to have been playing this instrument. He could not have replaced it in his belt. The metal shows no trace of moist lips having touched it. The surface still retains a recent polish."

Johnny arose from examining the metallic tunic.

"This is also a new alloy, but it is different," he said. "But both have a strange, almost unbelievable, carboniferous texture. Look, Doc, here is blood on the man's neck. It must have come from his ears."

"So I had observed," Doc smiled. "You may have noticed something peculiar about these glassy buttons."

He cast the ray of his flashlight upon the tunic close to the dead man's belt. One bronze hand touched one of the buttons experimentally.

Johnny was standing beside the bronze man. Monk was peering between them.

Doc's metal flashlight was apparently snatched from his hand. He had been holding it loosely. Monk emitted a squawking grunt. He had been carrying one of Doc's supermachine automatic pistols loosely in his side pocket, hoping for trouble.

The pistol flew through the air. Monk's frantic grab for the weapon missed it altogether.

Johnny's monocle with its metal rim suddenly started dancing at the end of its cord. Only this prevented him from losing the glass.

"Holy calamities!" howled Monk. "The corpse has grabbed my gun! I'll——"

THE pistol and Doc's flashlight plunked against the belted section of the dead man's tunic. They remained suspended there. Monk caught the pistol with one hand. His effort only pulled the corpse toward him, almost upsetting it onto the gravel.

Doc again touched the button which had caused the seeming magic. He caught his flashlight as it fell. Monk's pistol came free so suddenly the big chemist tottered backward on his heels. His lower jaw dropped loosely. He looked more than ever like some ancestral ape man.

Johnny's monocle ceased to snap on its cord.

"I've never before heard of a magnet like that, without tremendous electrical force back of it," said Johnny.

"I've sometimes believed this might be done," stated Doc, unperturbed. "Tons of steel are lifted by such force as you mention."

His bronze hands rippled lightly over the other buttons on the tunic. He turned one slightly. Monk was standing beside the corpse. He had pushed one hairy hand against the dead man's shoulder.

As Doc turned the second button, Monk sprang back, staring at his hand. He had hardly more than flicked his thumb. The body had left the bench. But it had not fallen to the ground.

Instead, the corpse seemed suddenly to become weightless. It was as light as a child's toy balloon. The dead man was floating clear of the ground, the head bobbing with ghostly nods on the raglike neck.

Doc was still close enough to reverse the turn on the button he had touched. The dead man instantly plumped back onto the bench.

"I've thought some day there might be something would overcome all specific gravity——" Johnny was saying.

A blinding light shot from among the trees. Johnny stopped speaking as the wide ray enveloped them, throwing their figures into relief against the shadowy background of the bushes.

Three men stepped quickly into view. One man, a little ahead of the others, was operating a flashlight which seemed to play from the front of his body rather than his hand. The other two men had slender metal flutes like that on the body of the corpse.

Doc's own flashlight whipped across the three faces. The men's skin was of the same silvery color as the dead man's.

THE leader operating the light spoke quickly, but in a controlled tone of voice. It was much the same as the bronze man's own voice, having a carrying, penetrating quality without the speaker making extra effort.

“You are the great Doc Savage,” stated this leader. “We have come for you. You will do as I command and no harm will come to you. Make any resistance and you shall hear the death song.”

Doc’s pencil light played over the ears of the three men. He noted these were filled with thick blobs of yellow wax. The men were of normal size. Raincoats swathed their forms, but through the folds gleamed metallic garments close to their bodies.

In the direct light, the men’s eyes showed a curious black-and-white quality, as if the pupils were greatly enlarged.

“And who do you fellas think you are?” squealed Monk. “Doc, will I take them and their little tin flutes apart an’ see what it’s all about?”

Doc glanced swiftly sidewise at the face of the dead man. The blood from the corpse’s ears had formed distinct scarlet threads along the silvery skin of his throat. There was no other evidence of violence which might have been responsible for death.

“Perhaps we should obey, brothers,” Doc remarked calmly.

One of his hands was touching the roll of gold leaf he had taken from the dead man’s mouth. The movement with which he sent it into the mat of bushes behind him was too fast for the human eye.

The three men twisted their heads, glancing at each other with startled question. Perhaps each thought one of the others had started playing his instrument. For all around them was weird melody.

The exotic, vibrant music touched the notes of the scale. Yet it was something like a wind wailing in the distance through the trees of a leafless forest.

Johnny and Monk knew what it was. Doc’s face was in plain view of his three threatening foes. They could see that his lips were not moving. But Johnny and Monk knew the sound came from Doc. They were fully aware what he meant.

Again Doc’s hand had moved. There was a faint tinkling on the gravel trail.

“You think then to trick us?” said the man with the light. “I have warned you——”

The three men started toward Doc and his companions. One man lifted his flute. It touched his lips, but no sound came. This man’s eyes suddenly became dull, as if he were seeing nothing.

The leader hesitated. He spoke a few words with an apparent great effort. They were in a tongue which neither Doc nor his men had ever before heard. This was surprising. For Doc could understand nearly all of the world’s languages.

In fact, when Doc and his men wanted to converse in the presence of others, they employed a language that once was believed to have been lost with an ancient Mayan people. However, the survivors of this lost race had been discovered by the bronze man and his companions.

But Doc and his two men were instantly aware this language spoken by their three assailants was unknown to them. They had little time to study the words or phrases. The leader’s warning was cut off.

MONK and Johnny were holding their breaths. Doc also had ceased to breathe. The tinkle on the gravel had been the shattering of capsules containing a powerful

anæsthetic gas. It would clear away in less than a minute, but during that space of seconds, any one breathing it would be overcome. The victim would remain unconscious for more than an hour.

Doc was instantly aware the three attackers were no ordinary persons. The leader especially was smart. Somehow, he had seen or sensed what was happening. He had breathed less than his two men. The pair holding flutes were toppling forward. They were in the throes of being overcome.

The leader was between them. With an effort he got a hand on the tunic of each man. He himself was staggering, but he had pulled at two buttons. Then his hands fell away and he fumbled at a button attached to his own belt.

The men had given themselves a final push with their toes as they were falling. From across the Bay of Georgia a stiff wind had sprung up. It had seemed to come as an aftermath of the mysterious shakings of the earth. Now it was whining through the needles of the spruce and firs in the park. It lifted the three men into the air.

Johnny sprang ahead, closely followed by Monk. Monk had drawn his mercy pistol.

“Lemme at ’em!” he squealed. “I don’t know what it is, but they can’t pull any fast one like that!”

Doc’s fingers clamped firmly on Monk’s wrist.

“You cannot bring them back with bullets,” said the bronze man. “It is just as well. Soon we shall follow them.”

Monk stared at Doc.

“Dag-gonit! Follow them!”

The apelike chemist saw no possibility of doing as the bronze man had so calmly suggested. His open mouth indicated he had no such inclination, even if it had been possible.

THERE was no doubt but that their three late attackers were unconscious now. Doc’s pencil light followed their floating bodies. One man was blocked for a few seconds by the gaunt limb of a fir, but the wind caught him and his figure floated away. All three disappeared, dancing and bobbing with the vagaries of the wind.

The stiff breeze was carrying them in the night out over The Narrows. This dangerous bottle-neck of water connected the harbor of Vancouver and nearly a hundred miles of deep tidal waters in the mountains with the outside Bay of Georgia.

Except at full flood or lowest ebb, the rush of the sea through The Narrows made it one of the most perilous spots on the coast for shipping of all classes. Doc judged if anything happened to restore the three bodies to the force of gravity, the men were in an extremely ticklish position.

Monk was still muttering.

“I didn’t see it, for it couldn’t happen,” were his words.

Johnny turned his monocle reflectively between his long fingers. His long, scholarly countenance indicated he was seeking the proper words in which to couch his opinion. He never used a short word where a longer one would serve.

He said solemnly, "We have witnessed a manifestation of practical ethereality, or the dissociation of gravitational impulse from the humanized inert mass."

"That ain't so!" howled Monk, who, with Doc's direction, had composed the gas of which the stupefying capsules were made. "There ain't any ether in that anæsthetic because I helped make it myself!"

Doc had returned to the side of the corpse.

"All three were unconscious before they departed, or immediately thereafter," he reflected aloud.

He retrieved the roll of gold leaf from the bushes. Johnny and Monk stared at it. They had not even seen Doc take it from the dead man's mouth.

When it was unrolled, the gold leaf bore the same silvery writing as the message that had summoned Doc Savage to the coast:

Be on Canadian-Pacific dock at foot of Georgia Street in Vancouver at 5 a. m. to-day. I but follow Lanta's instructions in event I am pursued. Lanta has matter of vital importance to confide. Tell Lanta I hear the music of death. Watch Aleutians.

The message bore a signature. It was in beautiful, perfect English script of the old style. The name was "Turlos."

"So he knew he was being murdered and he carried out the order he had been given," said the bronze man.

He studied the gold leaf more closely.

"Perhaps this is a trap," he said. "It may have been intended the messenger should die in this manner. Johnny, the perfection of styloscript is amazing. We are opposed by individuals of exceedingly advanced development. Perhaps it is best we should know much more before the police authorities discover too much."

DOC was drawing a metal cylinder from under his coat. This was apparently of soft tin, about a foot in length. A short fuse was attached. The bronze man cut it even shorter. He touched a match to the fuse and dropped the cylinder near the feet of the dead man on the bench.

In a few seconds the wilderness spot was briefly illuminated by a weird blue flame. The cylinder had burst with a mushy sound. As the flame died, a thick grayish vapor enveloped the corpse.

The brisk southwest wind was dispelling this artificial mist. When the vapor was completely dissipated there was no apparent change in the body.

"Now if we could only have had time to give our departed ones the same treatment, this might have become easier," reflected Doc.

Johnny and Monk were fully aware of the qualities of the vapor which had just passed away. They watched Doc closely.

Again there was a quick, faint trembling of the earth. It was a rolling, rumbling convulsion, but this time there was no acute shock. Johnny swiftly placed the portable seismograph. The needle fluctuated only a little.

After a minute, or possibly a minute and a half, the trembling ceased. The seismograph needle became stationary. Johnny studied the record. He ran a finger across his eyes.

“I believe the larger instruments will locate the center of this disturbance as being somewhere in the northern Pacific, or perhaps in the Bering Sea,” he stated. “That would be more on the fault where such a temblor might be expected. That is the strata crossing from lower and middle California to the vicinity of Japan.”

“Might it not be somewhere adjacent to the Aleutian Islands?” suggested Doc.

“It might be anywhere there,” admitted Johnny.

Doc again gave his attention to the corpse.

“There are some devices here which would be of greatest value to us,” he stated. “But I think we will have plenty of opportunity to study them later. In the meantime, if the Canadian police know nothing of this murder, we will be much less hampered.”

Monk drew in his breath with a great gasp. Johnny never showed surprise at Doc’s reasoned action. He understood fully.

The bronze man had buttoned the raincoat around the corpse. Turlos, if that was his name, had fulfilled his mission, though his life had paid. Doc now was adopting a plan whereby the dead Turlos might still be a valuable aid to his mistress, this Lanta whom the bronze man had yet to meet.

Doc turned the middle button on the tunic under the raincoat. He lifted the weightless body. The dead man was caught by the southwest wind. He followed his unconscious murderers in the direction of the frothing Narrows and the barrier rim of mountains.

Chapter 3

LANTA IS SEIZED

FROM behind a small flat island the twin motors of an amphibian plane burst into the dawn. However, the word dawn in this case was a clear misnomer.

Dawn might have been arriving to the eastward, northward or southward. But in the bowl of Burrard Inlet under the barrier of the ragged mountains to the north of Vancouver harbor, there was no change from the blackness of the night.

As a matter of fact, with the approach of daylight time, the murk over the harbor thickened. It had settled into a combination of thick ocean mist and thicker bituminous coal smoke.

London boasts some of its famous fogs are dense enough to be cut with a knife. Vancouver is the one city on the North American continent where a similar condition often prevails.

At times, the mingling of mist and smoke is so opaque and dirty, it has been termed by the inhabitants a "smog." This smog obliterates every object at the distance of a few feet.

So it was on the early morning following the mysterious earthquakes. The curtain blanketed all of the inner harbor. It spread its greasy denseness through The Narrows and far out over the Bay of Georgia.

Whistles of ferries hooted their warnings. Moving ocean vessels boomed with menace. Bells clanged in many tones aboard anchored ships.

At the regular municipal airport, the early morning passenger planes were cancelled. The hardiest pilots had no desire to tempt fate by trying to feel their way out over the encircling mountains.

Doc Savage was not held by any such timidity. He was making ready to lift his streamlined amphibian from the hidden bay behind the island where he had landed the previous evening. This choice of anchorage had kept him free from the annoying queries of newspapermen. He was free for a few hours from registering with the Provincial authorities and detailing the purpose of his visit.

Doc could not yet have explained his purpose. The startling events of the past few hours had not made it any clearer.

"I don't quite see how we're going to land anywhere near the Canadian-Pacific wharf," observed Johnny, as the plane skimmed around the shadowy island and gathered speed.

"Perhaps it will not be necessary," advised Doc. "It is possible we shall find what we are seeking while in the air. When we get up, Johnny, keep the lantern turned on."

"You think then we may find the body up there, Doc?"

"If I have judged the air currents correctly, this southwest wind creates a whirl and a dead spot this side of the mountains," said Doc. "We probably will find it comparatively calm at only about a thousand feet."

A FEW minutes later, the bronze man's judgment was justified. Banking over the bay, flying solely by special radio amplified sound-finder, the streamlined amphibian had ceased pitching. Doc held the plane at this height. The sound-finder gave back the echo of their own vibrating motors from the mountains surrounding them.

From the city airport came occasional reports:

"All pilots use emergencies—Nanaimo field clear—we have no ceiling here—warning—no ceiling."

Which was sufficient assurance no other plane would be playing about over Vancouver harbor this morning. Yet their amphibian had been in the air less than five minutes when Doc's keen ears picked up a distinct and peculiar vibration.

This was not the definite sound of an airplane's motor. Rather there came an intermittent interference with their radio directional finder. This cut into the sound amplifier until even Doc became unsure of his distances from the mountains.

At the same time the compasses and altimeter were visibly affected. Compass needles took on a peculiar tendency to wander off at impossible tangents.

Had Doc Savage been any less than the amazing flier he was, the amphibian might have plunged into the high promontory above The Narrows or into the sheer mountains across Burrard Inlet. The gyro compass was off by many points.

Faults in the instruments extended to the motors. Each of the roaring twins took turns in coughing protest. Doc's quick sense for the unusual traced the trouble instantly! The gas lines were clear. The failure was in the ignition system.

Several times, the amphibian swooped down. It dived dangerously close to the surface of the harbor. Here the smog was the densest.

The bronze man moved a lever. This operated two special walls. These were slatted much the same as the heating shutters on an automobile engine. With the walls closed, the motors settled down to a steady rhythm. These walls completely insulated the engines.

The cabin was as nearly soundproof as any plane could be made. Doc's usual quiet voice carried distinctly.

"We are combating something like Hertzian waves," he said to Johnny, who was sitting beside him. "We may be accidentally in the path of some powerful magnetic ray, but I am inclined to believe the interference is intentional."

"Then this message about the Canadian-Pacific wharf must be a trap," commented Johnny. "You've never seen this woman who seems to be called Lanta. Perhaps she is only the tool of some powerful organization that has set out to get you, Doc."

Doc slowly shook his head, saying nothing audibly. His knowledge of character as evinced in writing had never failed. He was convinced the writer of the golden message calling him to the Pacific coast had been sincere.

The melody murder in Stanley Park indicated opposing forces. The dead messenger who had been loyal to the last gasp represented one of these forces. It was clear he had been loyal to Lanta.

Johnny was grasping a contrivance which resembled an oldtime magic lantern. This had a round projector with a switch on the side. It was this device Doc had referred to as the "lantern."

Johnny moved the switch and played it from side to side. He could have held it immovable and covered much territory with the swinging of the amphibian plane. His effort might have appeared to be useless.

No light proceeded from the lantern lens. Yet there was one of the most powerful rays known to science sweeping the smoggy space all about the plane. This was an ultra-violet light. Because of its invisibility it was known as "black light."

Doc held the plane in rising and descending spirals in what he knew to be the area of slowly whirling dead air under the mountains. For a time nothing appeared. Then the three men saw what they had been seeking.

"Gosh!" gasped Monk in an awed voice which indicated the furry hair with which his body was covered must be rising on end. "Lookit! There's the dead man!"

"I had hoped we would be able to trace it," stated Doc.

MONK could well be excused for his feeling of awe. The black light lantern had revealed what appeared to be a flying green ghost. Only the apparition had no movement of its own. Rather the inert form of the corpse floated slowly past the plane, with its arms and legs projecting with grotesque stiffness.

Rigor mortis had set in. Every feature and contour of the dead man glowed with vivid green. This was the effect of the ultra-violet ray from Johnny's lantern. The black light had the quality of thus creating fluorescent reaction on certain chemicals. These chemical combinations were to be found in common vaseline or aspirin. It was used by Doc Savage in two chief forms.

One of these was a chalk with which his men could write invisibly. Only the black light would bring out such writing. The other form was the grayish vapor with which he had bathed the corpse on the bench in Stanley Park.

These chemical particles now adhered to the floating dead man. Johnny's lantern revealed this, even in the smog, while the body was close.

"Well I'll be superamalgamated!" exclaimed Johnny. "Now that we see it, what can we do about it, Doc?"

The bronze man smiled a little.

"It being obvious we have no means of picking it out of the air, we'll continue to watch it as far as possible," he advised. "I judge there are those who will be interested in removing the corpse. It would create much speculation and inquiry if it happened to be still floating around when this murk clears up."

Though Doc had a wizard's hands on the controls, keeping the corpse within the black light was difficult. They lost view of it several times. The fourth time it floated slowly past the circling plane, the southwest wind stiffened over the harbor.

Immediately the smog began lifting. The rising sun displayed its warming rays. These produced some surface vision across Burrard Inlet. The calm water of the harbor

smoked with dissipating mist. Hooting ferries and booming ocean vessels could be seen.

All boats were moving at slow speed. Squat, awkward ferries with double-end propellers were crossing between North Vancouver, a popular residence suburb, and the business city of Vancouver.

“Something’s wrong down there besides the fog,” announced Johnny. “Those ferries are apparently having trouble with their steering apparatus.”

“Yeah,” chimed in Monk. “Looks like a couple of them got stuck in the mud.”

“The depth of Burrard Inlet varies from one hundred to three hundred feet,” said Doc. “It has an all rock bottom. They are having engine trouble.”

THE whistles of the ferries hooted wildly. They seemed like human voices in a panic. Doc and his men could see clearly down along a strip covering the dangerous Narrows. The southwest wind blowing against a swiftly ebbing tide was piling up high white waves in the bottle-neck.

A small ferry propelled by gasoline motors was floundering in the rough water of The Narrows. Its motors had stopped. As Doc and his men glimpsed it, the small craft was caught in the suck of the vicious tide rip. Bobbing like a cork, it danced out toward the Bay of Georgia.

Far out in English Bay, beyond the other watery expanse, the hoarse, booming whistles of laboring freighters were sounding.

Doc lifted the amphibian again into the higher smog. The space all around was filled with trembling vibration. It might have been another plane, but none appeared. Doc reached over and clicked a switch.

This switch was on what seemed to be an elongated black box with a window of dark glass. Blurred figures appeared instantly in this darkened square. The bronze man increased the power of the light.

This device was Doc’s special television receiver. It was capable of picking up the scene where any televisior, or vision broadcaster, might be in operation. The man of bronze had made a quick deduction.

If the strange force now opposing him was so far advanced as to have conquered magnetic and gravitational elements, then television must also be present. His theory was instantly confirmed. It was an amazing scene which leaped into the television receiver.

This receiver was operated on a cathode ray tube which reproduced a surface similar to the retina of the human eye.

The scene which for seconds held Johnny and Monk speechless, was accompanied by a liquid voice. In the center of the glass appeared the slim figure of a girl. She was of average size, but the perfection of her form and the fitting of her clinging garments gave her the appearance of a miniature woman.

The face was delicately patrician. Her nose was small and straight. Even in the television, the skin had an alabaster texture. Widely spaced eyes seemed to be appealing to the men in Doc’s plane.

“Howlin’ calamities!” shrilled Monk. “It’s a girl an’ she can see us!”

Certainly it was indicated the girl was either staring at them, or some freakish force of television made it appear that way. The girl’s eyes were large. The pupils were round and black.

At the instant she appeared the girl’s lips moved in speech:

“Clark Savage, look out for the Zoromen. I have been betrayed by spies among my own crew. You are in danger from Zoro. He wants to take you alive.”

Suddenly the girl’s face filled the whole space of the television window. It was as if she were floating directly into their plane. Monk made a choking noise in his throat. Then the girl’s voice cried:

“They are coming! I am Lanta of the——”

The television glass blurred in a tangle of figures. The hard, shining faces of men replaced that of the girl. Hoarse voices were scrambled in the radio receiver. Doc’s window went black.

“Gosh!” squealed Monk. “He’s back again! Lookit!”

JOHNNY’S lantern, forgotten during the interval of the girl’s dramatic appearance before them, had picked up the floating corpse. Visibility was better now in the higher smog. The dead man was not floating so steadily. He was slowly falling toward the harbor.

All space around the amphibian became filled with a throbbing pulsation. It was as if an earthquake had moved its locality from the ground to the air. That was it. The space of the smog was being shaken. Doc knew this could not come from any airplane motor.

The higher sun broke the greasy mist into fragmented clouds.

“There they are, Doc!” exclaimed Johnny. “The others! Look! They’re dropping, too!”

Out of one of the smoggy clouds appeared three raincoated men. Their bodies were rigidly upright, as if they were walking through some gummy element instead of being supported by only the insubstantial air. But they were swiftly descending toward the surface of the harbor above the rushing wave-tossed water of The Narrows.

The corpse of the murdered Turlos, if that was his name, was not far from the other suspended figures. The body still glowed a ghastly green under Johnny’s swinging black light. What effect these apparently supernatural men were having on persons who might be observing them from the boats below could only be conjectured.

But at this moment, the passengers of the ferries had their own worries. Two of the North Vancouver boats drifted into each other. There was a grinding collision.

Doc was scanning every inch of the smoggy clouds as he kept the streamlined amphibian on half throttle and seemed to be lazily circling around the harbor. But though the pulsation continued with an increasing beat, nothing visible rewarded his keen vision.

All four floating figures were being drawn to the surface of The Narrows. The force doing this was invisible. The vibrations affecting the plane abruptly ceased. Doc and

his men saw the bodies disappear. Then where they had been was nothing tangible.

A mighty geyser spouted. This was almost in the middle of The Narrows. Here the tide was a treacherous, swirling trap. It offered no clearness for observation from above. The sudden fountain leaped more than a hundred feet into the air. A powerful side rush of the waters made mere ripples of the usual waves of The Narrows.

“Howlin’ calamities!” piped Monk. “I don’t believe in them sea serpents! But somethin’ got ’em!”

Doc interposed calmly. He was holding the amphibian in a tight spiral over the turmoil of the sea below.

“This is astounding,” he said. “It seemed as if there must have been something in the air. But the waves move as if from another quake.”

The blue water continued to be disturbed. It was like some giant hand might have slapped the surface repeatedly. Doc was watching the jutting rocks of the high cliff. These did not appear to be shaken.

The waves continued their wild lashing.

Doc was forced to bank the plane sharply and take on altitude. As he returned, the corpse and the three live men who had been in the air close to The Narrows had disappeared. Johnny looked at the slash of still-dancing currents ripping under the promontory point of Stanley Park.

“I believe we have just looked upon what is commonly known as retributive justice,” he remarked solemnly. “The killers wouldn’t have a chance in that whirlpool.”

“Perhaps,” Doc stated, “but I would say retribution has been somewhat delayed. Watch those fishing boats.”

Doc was bringing the nose of the amphibian down. He pointed for a quiet space of water near an old abandoned lumber mill. This was safely out of the tidal channel, but close to The Narrows on the harbor side.

JOHNNY and Monk followed Doc’s direction. Directly opposite Stanley Park Point on The Narrows was the broad sand-and-gravel bar marking the mouth of a creek. This stream was known as Capilano Creek, emerging from a deep mountain canyon of the same name.

Though in the dry summer season there was little water in this creek, it was one of the favorite spawning streams for spring salmon. The big fish came in from the ocean in schools of thousands. Until the rains came to flood the creek in Capilano Canyon, the salmon played in English Bay and The Narrows. Instinct brought them to their birthplace. They waited for the rains.

At the side of The Narrows next to the canyon creek bar, many fishermen had anchored their small boats just beyond the dangerous channel. They caught the salmon by trailing flash spoons down the current.

Johnny and Monk saw a score of these small boats being tossed aside. They seemed to be lifted by a giant hand. Fishermen spilled into the shallow water. Johnny was trying to fix the origin of the disaster. The first great waves had subsided.

Then he noted this was a new disturbance. As the fishermen floundered toward the shore, a new earthquake started. Rocks were bounding from the side walls of the canyon. The bar extending into The Narrows heaved and cracked. Doc's plane was slapped by a succession of choppy waves that threatened to capsize it. Only its clever streamlining prevented the amphibian from overturning.

On the highway paralleling the shore an automobile hurtled into the air and turned over three times. The new quake was splitting the road concrete into uprearing slabs.

Chapter 4

THE GREAT DIAMOND

DOC SAVAGE ran the amphibian pontoon on a shelving beach. The ground still quivered as he led Johnny and Monk toward the highway. Huge boulders bounded and boomed in Capilano Canyon.

A woman screamed. She was crawling from the wrecked automobile. A man with a limp, dangling arm was trying to pull her from one of the crushed doors.

The bronze man was quickly beside the man with the broken arm, giving him assistance. This help was invaluable. Doc's bronzed and corded hands simply grasped the metal sides of the shattered doorway. His muscles flexed without apparent strain.

The door of the smashed car was torn loose. Doc lifted the woman to her feet. He saw there was another man in the automobile. The bronze man knew it was useless to bring him out until an ambulance could arrive.

Above the echoing fall of rocks boomed an explosion. It was repeated with sharp concussion. Doc whirled, and led his men swiftly toward the shore of The Narrows. He made for the place where the fishermen's boats had been whipped from their moorings.

In The Narrows a long blue vessel was tossing about. The British ensign, the Union Jack, flowed from its flagstaff. A bright brass one-pounder was mounted on its foredeck. The slim-snouted cannon spouted and boomed again. The shot skipped into the middle of The Narrows.

"Canadian coast guard," announced Doc. "The shots are by way of informing us explanations of our plane are in order."

They did not have long to wait. Officers of the coast guard boat had seen the landing of the amphibian plane. They had seen the bodies of men floating in the air. Then the bodies had mysteriously disappeared.

A small boat was dancing toward shore. Upright in the bow was a man of short stature. Insignia on his arm and cap marked him as an officer. When he stepped out he was belligerent, and possessed a cockney accent.

"H'I s'y, you chaps!" he hailed Doc and the others. "Wot th' bloomin' blyzes you Yankees think you're doin'? Fillin' the h'air with floatin' blighters an' shykin' h'up everything around! H'I'm arrestin' you blokes h'in the nyme of the king!"

THOUGH he was impressed with his own importance and more than a little shaken and puzzled by the recent happenings, the cockney officer had one long look at Doc Savage. Apparently he was impressed in another way. The bronze man's flaky gold eyes were fixed upon the cockney's pale blue orbs.

"H'I'm meanin' as 'ow you've got some explynin' to do," the bantam officer sputtered in a greatly modulated tone. "H'even h'if you are Doc Savage 'isself, some'ns gotta tyke the blyme for——"

"I *am* Doc Savage," stated the bronze man calmly. "I assure you we shall be able to explain to the proper authorities. We know as little as you of the phenomenon you have just witnessed. Perhaps you saw more than we have."

"Doc Savage 'issel," repeated the cockney officer. "H'I can see that's 'oo you h'are. H'an' H'I'm h'only a doin' my juty, sir. H'if you s'y as 'ow you'll be reportin' what you've seen, H'I'll tyke h'it as a gryte favor."

"I shall report to the nearest police inspector shortly," said Doc. "If you saw nothing, we can add little to your account."

"H'I thought h'as 'ow H'I seen dead men tumblin' from the plyne, sir," replied the cockney. "They cyme fallin' h'unnatural h'outta the 'eavens. H'if they was livin' 'umans they'd 'ave no chance h'among them whirlpools h'in The Narrows. Your plyne was the h'only one h'as was h'up, sir."

Doc made no comment on this doubtless vaguely taken observation of the much-subdued coast guard officer, except to thank him for his courtesy.

"Yessiree!" proffered one of the several dripping salmon fishermen. "The whole middle of them danged Narrows reared right up! Then the bottom poked clear to the top of the water between my boat and another one. Y' can see where there was a whole chunk tore out of the bar. It was the bottom moved clear out into the bay!"

"And you saw some men in the air?" suggested Doc.

The wet fisherman grinned sheepishly.

"I wasn't wantin' to admit that right off, mister," he explained. "The fish wasn't hittin' so good an' it was cold, so I had almost reached the bottom of a crock of Scotch. I'm dog-goned glad somebody else mentioned them. 'Cause I'd have sworn I saw some dead men floatin' around in the air. An' then they went right down into that boil, after the quake or whatever it was."

Doc led his men swiftly back to the broken highway. An ambulance and two constables from the Provincial Police headquarters on the North Shore had arrived. One of the constables immediately accosted the bronze man.

"You're Doc Savage," he stated, his keen Scottish blue eyes straying over the bronze man's magnificent physique. "The inspector has been phoned you were here with one of your planes, sir. He asked me to request you to accompany us to his office."

Doc walked a little way up the canyon as the victims were being removed from the wrecked automobile. Johnny accompanied him. In many places portions of the steep cliffs had been torn loose. Small avalanches had fallen.

The highway they had just left had been badly split. Fissures had opened at several places.

"What is your opinion, Johnny?" Doc inquired.

The scholarly geologist shook his head slowly, as if he disliked admitting he was puzzled.

"Nothing less than an earthquake could have done all of that damage," he observed. "But I still say no geological fault occurs in this region. The disturbance is purely local. I can only explain it by the theory that some powerful force has caused convolutions of

the quartz and silica deposits to be found anywhere in a mountainous region. We have met with something like that before.”

“Yes, Johnny,” said Doc. “The earth-shaker in Chile. That was caused by application of electrical power. In this case, there seems no evidence of the phenomenon being identical. I would judge these quakes come from a different source.”

As they were en route to the North Shore Provincial Police headquarters, the bronze man stopped to use a telephone. When he returned to the constables’ car his flaky gold eyes were stirring whirlpools.

“As I thought,” he remarked to Johnny. “The University of British Columbia seismograph recorded something, but this time the geologists are having an argument. One believes the disturbance was the result of an explosion.”

“Maybe them dead man blowed up,” suggested Monk.

“They were subject to unknown forces,” said Johnny. “But I would scarcely believe these included violent combustibility.”

“Any supposition might be right or wrong as yet,” stated Doc. “We know only that some powerful new force is at work. Those controlling it desire to destroy us. To-night we start north over the mountains.”

As the bronze man volunteered no additional information, Monk and Johnny were silent. But both knew Doc Savage had come to some definite conclusion regarding the mystery, which he would divulge only when he obtained complete proof.

THE PROVINCIAL POLICE car was being driven by the constable with the Scottish blue eyes. His own and his companion’s admiration for the famous Doc Savage had been apparent in their attitude from the first. Not that Canadian policemen are ever discourteous, but these men were distinctly respectful in tone.

The police car glided into the environs of North Vancouver. A sudden crackling came from the car’s radio. It was but one of many radios that at the moment recorded the same mysterious message. That is, the message was inexplicable to every one but Doc Savage and his men.

The remarkable part of the communication was that the wave on which it came seemed capable of cutting through all other kilocycle lengths. The constable driving slowed the car with an exclamation. After a few seconds of sputtering and ominous crackings, the speaker produced a liquid, husky voice:

“Clark Savage—Zoro—Benicia Island—warn ships—watch Aleutians—Lanta will _____”

Then there came a little choking scream. The harsher voices of men cut into the mysterious broadcast. The police radio cracked as if every tube had been shattered. One of the constables muttered in amazement and pulled open the shutter of the radio.

The final cracking had not been deceptive. Every tube had gone out of commission. Radio owners throughout the whole area were in high indignation over the same occurrence.

“Apparently our flute-blowing friends have not drowned,” remarked Doc.

“I thought you knew nothing of all this crazy stuff this morning,” accused the blue-eyed constable.

“You know now almost exactly as much as myself,” stated the bronze man quietly. “I shall gladly talk it over with the inspector.”

TALKING it over with the Provincial Police inspector proved to be far more complicated than it had appeared. This official proved to be one of those Scotchmen with one-way ideas. Moreover, as Doc and his men entered the sparsely furnished office the inspector was burring his R’s and profanely walking around a table.

Nevertheless, he calmed down to extend his hand and say in his broad accent he was very pleased to meet Doc Savage in person. He also mentioned having heard of several of the bronze adventurer’s exploits.

This over, he switched abruptly to an object occupying the middle of the long table.

“An’ noo, Meester-r Savage, dinna ye ken this?” he burred.

This was obviously a container composed of a glassy surfaced metal. Doc and Johnny instantly identified the substance as similar to the strange alloy in the flutes of the silvery faced men they had encountered in Stanley Park.

“I know nothing of it,” replied Doc quietly. “I see my name inscribed across the end, that is all. It appears to have been cut or etched into the metal. How did it come here?”

“Ye’d be askin’,” barked the inspector shrewdly. “An’ ye’re sur-r-r-e ye wud na ha’ seen it afor-re noo?”

Doc smiled slightly, but said nothing. He ran one powerful bronze hand along the container’s surface. The vessel had the general shape of a miniature coffin or casket. A lid slid back in smooth grooves.

Doc was looking at the contents of the casket, but he gave no sign as to that.

Instead he said, “It is of solid metal, but I gather that it was picked up floating somewhere in the harbor.”

“Ye admit thot noo!” barked the inspector. “I we-r-re thinkin’ ye wud ken the same!”

“Merely supposition,” smiled the bronze man. “The metal shows it has been in water. It was one of your reasons for sending for me. And it is a metal that is so light it floats with probably less specific gravity than cork.”

The Scotch inspector nodded emphatically. His tight lips indicated he believed Doc had convicted himself of knowing all about the strange casket. But his manner showed clearly he had no conception whatever of what the casket contained.

Across the top of the container were etched only three words:

TO CLARK SAVAGE

The etching was in the same beautiful, flowing old style English script of the message written on gold leaf.

The inspector was talking rapidly. His R's burred with the rapidity of a vocal machine gun mechanism. His theme was his disbelief in reports of men floating over the harbor and causing an earthquake.

Doc listened patiently as the inspector reached the accusation that he believed the bronze man to have been playing some kind of a trick with balloons shaped like humans. When the bronze man finally spoke, he ignored the excited words.

"Inspector, would you grant me a favor, one that will perhaps redound somewhat to your credit when some of this mystery has been cleared up?" he suggested.

The Scotchman cooled speedily. Something that might come his way was a horse of a more profitable color. There still was some suspicion in his voice, however, as he replied, "An' thot I wud noo. A' the same, ther-re wud be some question——"

JOHNNY had remained with Monk to one side, talking with the constable. Doc indicated to the inspector; it might be best to remove the small casket to an inner office. He motioned Johnny, Monk and the inspector to accompany him, then he closed the door.

"Johnny, I seem to have received a gift or a token of some considerable value, which I am planning to have the inspector here place in his own private safe for me until later," said Doc. "Now will you have a look at what this vessel contains."

Johnny had not before been close enough to peer into the casket. He walked over. Seldom did his serious, scholarly face betray surprise. But now his first words were almost gasped.

"Well I'll be superamalgamated! It isn't possible, Doc!"

Johnny was looking down at a clear, glasslike block nearly a foot in length and perhaps four inches square.

Doc's reply was extraordinary.

"I fear very much it is exactly what you think it is, Johnny. Which may mean one of the greatest experiments that has engaged the world since the substance first was discovered has at last been successful."

Johnny hardly seemed to be listening. He was bending over the casket closely, inspecting the glasslike block through his powerful magnifying monocle.

"It's true, Doc," he murmured in a low voice. He did not want the Scotch inspector to catch his words. "But I don't believe it is artificial. It is even more astounding. The frayed grain indicates this has been separated, by some medium of which we know nothing, from a natural silicon dioxide strata deeper than man has ever penetrated. I would say some hitherto unknown mountain region has erupted this strata near the surface."

Johnny spoke with the authority of a geologist who could not be deceived. Except for Doc Savage himself, Johnny was probably the greatest living student of geological formations. His authority on this was equalled only by his knowledge of archæology and the races and living forms of antiquity.

Stepping close to Doc, he said in hardly more than an awed whisper, "If this should ever become known, it would be disastrous. This block is in its natural state, as you've

undoubtedly already judged. I see evidence of a bit of jasper in one corner. That means it has been removed from a deposit where carbon originally was combined with oxygen and other elements. It is grayish in character now because of its natural state. It might have been found in an area where chalcedony, flint and jasper are common. Why, faulty as it might be, it could still be cut into a diamond of many, many thousands of carats _____”

“Howlin’ calamities!” squealed Monk. “You mean that’s a diamond? Then it would be worth——”

“The world’s finest collection of jewels wouldn’t be worth a dime a dozen, if this were known,” interrupted Johnny.

The Scotch inspector’s face had been red and white by turns.

“Ye’re intimatin’,” he gasped, “thot glass br-r-ick’s a dee-mun?”

His one-idea brain was struggling desperately with a computation of values.

“That is it, inspector,” said Doc quietly. “And that is why I am asking the favor of putting this away in your private vault and saying nothing. We must find its source. Possibly we may discover a plot to unbalance all the values of the world’s gems.”

The inspector readily gave his almost reverent promise that the brick of carbonate and its secret would be safe with him. Doc was sure he could depend upon this assurance.

Chapter 5

SNATCHED INTO SPACE

DOC SAVAGE avoided the deep shadows as he walked rapidly along the highway leading to the place where he had purchased a small boat to reach his amphibian plane. This was not for the purpose of evading possible attack. In fact, the bronze man was deliberately making his movements conspicuous.

As Doc turned from a lighted section of North Vancouver into the darker shore road, two other men also passed from the illuminated area. Apparently these two sailors were feeling the effects of an evening of jubilation. One long arm of the taller sailor was laid affectionately across the broad shoulders of his short companion.

The two sang loudly and with bibulous lack of harmony. At an intersection they turned into the same road Doc Savage had taken. In the darkness their singing ceased. They weaved from side to side, but remarkably maintained about the same distance behind the bronze man.

Doc reached the small wharf where his launch was tied up. From this dockage he had about a mile of water along the harbor shore to reach the beached amphibian. The purpose of his visit was to make radio contact with his three other companions. He judged they now should be in the vicinity of Juneau, Alaska.

The two sailors halted about two hundred yards from the wharf. Their apparent intoxication vanished as two shadowy figures darted from bushes near the highway. The latter pair came under one of the infrequent lamp bulbs in this sparsely settled section.

Nothing about either of the pair would have aroused the suspicion of any resident of the neighborhood. Somewhat dirty turbans enwrapped their greasy black hair. Their faces were the dull mahogany hue of the Hindu.

Hindus, being British subjects, perform much of the labor in British Columbia. These two dark-skinned men had come from the vicinity of a lumber mill.

The two sailors cast aside all pretense of intoxication. They sprang aside into the shadows and ran forward. The two Hindus were hiding in the brush just above the wharf where Doc Savage had got his launch motor coughing. They remained motionless until the bronze man cast off and the small launch moved away.

THE HINDUS started sliding down the shore. One was untying the rope of another launch when the tall and short sailors plunged down through the bushes.

“Grab that one in the boat, Monk!” commanded the tall sailor.

“O. K., Johnny!” squeaked the pleased chemist. “It ain’t much, but it’s somethin’!”

By that Monk meant the size of the Hindus promised little excitement. The apelike chemist was sure he could take care of a couple dozen of such natives of India. Monk whisked past the Hindu still untying the short rope and landed with an agile jump in the middle of the launch.

Johnny was close to the man on shore. Now he could see that even the mahogany make-up could not quite obliterate the fine texture of the man's skin. The Hindu's face possessed that same silvery fineness of features of the attackers they had met in the park.

Then Johnny became aware of something else. He had reached a long arm to seize the man. A hissing laugh of mockery greeted his effort. The bogus Hindu moved with the speed of a cat. Johnny heard a solid thump in the launch. That would be Monk knocking the other man down.

Johnny sprang again upon the Hindu who had eluded him. The man laughed again and Johnny identified the voice as that of the leader of the three killers of the previous night. Johnny was quick. He had dropped one of the gas capsules and was holding his breath.

The bogus Hindu squirmed away like an eel. He was speaking.

"The trick of the great Doc Savage will not work again," he mocked. "I speak but I do not breathe. You will fail."

Monk had flattened the other fake Hindu. He was scrambling from the launch to help Johnny. From the boat behind him floated a shrill, ear-piercing series of notes. The man on the floor of the launch had not moved, but a gleaming flute showed in his hands.

Monk pivoted to leap back upon him. His legs seemed to become weak. A dizzying sensation surrounded his brain. It felt as if his skull was swelling suddenly to enormous size.

Johnny had succeeded in getting a grip on the other Hindu. The man appeared to have ceased resistance. He was going to his knees under Johnny's steellike grasp.

Monk went to one knee. From his side pocket he pulled his supermachine pistol with its mercy bullets. He realized this was the only way he could end the eerie wailing music that was robbing him of his strength.

As if the hand of a monster had seized it, the pistol was torn from Monk's grasp. It flew through the air toward the tunic belt of the man in Johnny's grip. At the same instant Johnny's monocle jerked on its cord. It smashed with a tinkling of glass on the same belt where Monk's pistol now hung.

Johnny tried to get his own pistol. His fingers tightened inexorably on the Hindu's throat. The other man seemed to be clawing feebly at the buttons of his tunic. Johnny decided the man was nearly out, and he wanted to keep him alive. That had been Doc's order if they surprised any one following him.

Johnny relaxed his hold. Sinewy arms as powerful as metal rods swiftly pinioned him around the waist. Johnny felt his feet leaving the ground. He attempted to renew his hold, but his arms abruptly had no weight. He was being carried into the air.

MONK was almost unconscious when the flute ceased playing. As his senses returned he could see Johnny and the other Hindu floating near by. In the first moment the big chemist's dazed brain told him they must have fallen into the harbor. Johnny's bony face and the mahogany countenance of the Hindu holding him danced before Monk's uncertain vision.

Monk attempted to direct Johnny.

“Push the greasy Indian under!” he shrieked. “Drown ’im, Johnny!”

He made a supreme effort to give the geologist an example of how to drown a Hindu. His big hands were upon his own opponent’s shoulders. Fighting the numbness in his brain and the terrific agonizing ringing in his ears, Monk tried to gather strength to shove the smaller man under water.

Then he discovered his arms had no weight. His stringy, corded muscles had become powerless. The Hindu was still tightly bound to his body by the clasp of persistent hands he could not loosen. Monk gasped chokingly as Johnny and the other Hindu arose from what the chemist had mistaken for water.

The big chemist realized for the first time they were in the air. Lights of vessels on Burrard Inlet strung out like rows of moving beads. The glow of the city illumination was under their dangling feet.

“Howlin’ calamities!” squealed Monk. “You greasy heathen, I’ll pull you apart!”

Monk’s intention was laudable enough. But his muscles lacked all pull. Another glance at Johnny showed the geologist’s head rolling limply on a raggy neck. The white teeth of the Hindu claspng Johnny flashed at Monk.

“The great gorilla will become quiet,” spoke Johnny’s captor. “Below are many rocks. They are hard. We have only to touch a thumb to the gravity button and both of you will die quickly.”

Monk retained just enough of his senses to hear. He ceased all attempt to struggle.

Now he could feel the Hindu’s arms being loosened. The grip of the other men had no feeling of tightness. Monk felt as if he were about to take a long parachute jump without any parachute. Some mysterious attraction held him close to the Hindu.

The man bearing Johnny’s relaxed body vanished in the darkness. But this Hindu spoke again.

“Lamo, turn on the directional finder,” it commanded. “If necessary, play the music; a very little of the music will be sufficient. Andro is keeping the ray upon us.”

Monk gasped as one of his captor’s arms was withdrawn. The distance to the ground had become greater. The lights of North Vancouver were only a faint haze. Higher up, the wind from the southwest was stiff. It was carrying the four bodies upward and over the mountain barrier.

Beyond that barrier, Monk knew, were only hundreds of square miles of wilderness. Range upon range of the coastal mountains were separated by deep canyons. Some of the world’s greatest glacial fields had made exploration of much of this country impossible.

A voice spoke as from a radio. It seemed to emanate from a spot between Monk and the Hindu’s body:

“Keep on the beam—this is Lamo.”

“You danged greasy heathen!” gritted Monk. “I’ll take you down with me!”

Close to his small, hairy ears a shrill melody started. Monk could feel the cold, gleaming tube of the flutelike instrument. He tried to seize it with one hand. His hand

became inert. His ears began ringing dizzily. The glow of the city's lights faded out as Monk went to sleep.

DOC SAVAGE ran his small launch only a short distance out in Burrard Inlet. He throttled the little motor and listened. From the shore darkness came a muffled thump. There were further sounds of struggling.

The bronze man opened the throttle of the motor. The launch engine was not yet heated. The cylinders flooded with gas and the carburetor overflowed. An ignition wire suddenly sputtered and sizzled. The motor had been tampered with.

Escaping fumes burst into flame under the engine cover. There was a minor explosion. The blaze swiftly enveloped the fore part of the boat. Doc heard Monk's shrill voice. The calmer penetrating tones of a Zoroman reached him.

The bronze man, like Johnny, instantly identified this as the voice of the leader in the Stanley Park attack. Without hesitation, Doc dived overboard. The burning launch drifted rapidly away on the tide.

The man of bronze moved through the water with as great speed as the slow launch could have made. But three or four minutes had passed since the sound of the attack had come. When he reached the small wharf and climbed out, he could see no one.

The outline of another launch was near by. Doc covered the intervening distance in great gliding strides. No one was there. Even the wall of bushes between the shore and the highway was motionless and silent.

The ray of Doc's generator flashlight shot out. The bronze man used the spreading lens. All of the space around the idly floating launch was illuminated. Doc's keen eyes missed not a single mark in the mud and gravel at the water's edge.

Within a few seconds he had read all the signs correctly. Monk and Johnny had followed two shadows to the other launch. They had thrown themselves upon the pair. Scuffled furrows showed where one man had struggled with Johnny. Tiny bits of fragile glass from one of the gas capsules had been ground into the earth.

On the floor of the launch cockpit was a small scarlet stain. A soiled Hindu turban had unwound. Some of the blood was upon it. Doc flashed the light along the water's edge. No person had entered the water. Not a single track in the mushy mud and gravel indicated that any one had passed up or down the shore. No one had moved toward the highway.

Doc flicked off the light. He stood for a few seconds pondering deeply. His bronzed head slowly nodded in confirmation of the thought in his mind. Then a voice spoke.

Again it was the voice of the Zoroman who had led the attack in the park. The words were faint but clear:

“Lamo, turn on the directional finder. Andro is keeping the ray upon us——”

Before the voice had ceased speaking Doc Savage was yards away along the shore. He was moving swiftly in the direction of the beached amphibian plane. The bronze man covered the distance almost as quickly as it had been traveled earlier by the Provincial Police car.

DOC used perhaps a minute to make sure the motors and other mechanism had not been tampered with. He did this even though two constables had been assigned by the Scotch inspector to guard the plane. These constables spoke to Doc with deepest respect. The inspector had given them their orders.

Though he held in trust the mysterious casket with the great uncut diamond, the Scotchman was not a man to take chances. When Doc had finished his quick inspection of the twin motors from the outside and started to enter the cabin, one of the constables barred his way.

“Inspector’s orders, sir, you are not to enter or move the plane without his special permission,” the policeman said, “Sorry, but that’s the way it is.”

The two constables were fine, upstanding specimens. The Provincial force enlists the best. The two men’s service revolvers were slung from their shoulders with the usual cords. They stood apparently at ease, but they were tensely alert.

Doc had required no time to decide the situation of Johnny and Monk afforded the police no opportunity to assist. Nor could he admit these constables to the amphibian. Doc spoke calmly.

“Your inspector is a cautious man. He probably is acting for the best.”

For the fraction of a second both constables relaxed. Doc had no desire to resist the law. Nor had he any intention to injure the representatives of authority. But, temporarily, they must be removed. There was not time to explain.

The hands of both constables darted to their guns as the bronze man flashed between them. They had trained quickness in drawing their guns. But Doc’s bronze hands were so incredibly fast neither of the service weapons came from its holster.

The man of bronze had shot a hand to each constable’s throat. But it was not with the intention of choking them. His corded tendons played smoothly under the golden skin of his wrists. His thumbs slid along the knobs of their spinal bones just above their shoulders.

Doc prevented the constables from cracking their heads together as they plunged toward each other. When he released the grip of his fingers, both men slumped to the gravel beach with faint sighing breaths. They rolled over and lay still.

THE encounter had been soundless. Doc sprang into the cabin of the plane. He left the two men as they were. His thumbs had found and pressed great nerves. The pair would be unconscious for more than an hour. Afterward, there would be no ill effect.

The bronze man’s intimate knowledge of surgery and anatomy had taught him a variety of means for subduing an opponent without endangering his life. The constables, later, would awaken on the beach of the harbor. They would be a long time deciding what had happened to them.

Then probably they would be wrong.

Doc started the motors. He kept them thrumming on a low key for warming. Each of his special planes was equipped with the most powerful short-wave radiophones. These were equipped with “voice scramblers.”

This special device made it impossible for any except his own men or himself to pick up the conversation in inter-plane communications. It distorted speech at the transmitters and clarified it at the receiving end.

The bronze man switched the radio-phone into service. Within two minutes he had contacted a distant point. This was over the Pacific Ocean between Prince Rupert, B. C., and Juneau, Alaska. Doc had expected his three other companions would be awaiting orders or emergency action at Juneau.

Apparently the emergency already had arisen. The voice replying to Doc was clear and precise:

“We have you, Doc. This is Ham.”

“Ham” was Brig. Gen. Theodore Marley Brooks. Ham was one of the shrewdest and cleverest of lawyers ever to be graduated from Harvard.

With Ham were “Renny,” who was Colonel John Renwick, noted engineer whose knowledge was exceeded only by that of Doc Savage himself, and “Long Tom,” who was Major Thomas J. Roberts, a wizard of the electrical juice. They had been sent on to Juneau by Doc.

The first message from Lanta had mentioned possible action near the Aleutian Islands. Doc always took the precaution of having his men on the spot where trouble might be expected to break.

And now the location of the plane over the Pacific indicated something already had broken. At Doc’s reply, Ham detailed quickly and comprehensively their situation and the reason for their action. Doc listened, asking no questions. He never wasted words.

“We are replying to S O S call from vicinity of Aleutians,” said Ham’s voice. “Steamship *Narwhal* reported in distress. Call says ship under charter to Homer Pearson Caulkins, the economist, and Salvatore Umbrogia Cassalano, the mineralogist. Revenue cutter on way from Juneau and tug from Prince Rupert. We expect to locate position of ship and help. Could this have anything to do with message?”

Before Ham had finished speaking, Doc had recalled all the facts of the Caulkins-Cassalano Expedition into the Bering Sea. Each of the men named was famous in his line. Caulkins and Cassalano, Doc remembered, had recently been associated in the service of a South American republic.

News reports said the economist had been successful in establishing a governmental budgetary system of a new order. Cassalano had discovered valuable deposits of minerals that had added to the republic’s financial security. Little had been published concerning their expedition into the north. It had been regarded as a vacation whim of the learned gentlemen.

“Probably this has nothing to do with the message,” Doc replied to Ham’s question. “But you have acted wisely in giving such aid as you can. Remember instructions. Watch the Aleutians.”

“We will do that,” came Ham’s voice. “We had a considerable earthquake at Juneau last night. Shall we call as soon as we sight the——”

Ham’s broadcast was abruptly interrupted. His voice wavered, as if the “scrambler” had suddenly been changed from the transmitter to the receiver. Before Doc could act

in an attempt to clear the transmission, Ham was speaking again excitedly.

“We see lights of steamship—one of the island peaks has lighted up—looks like volcano—believe there must be earthquake—the ship is pitching badly—part of island peak is now breaking off—— It’s one of Aleutians—— Wait!”

Static crackled in the short-wave instrument. It was as if a roll of thunder had broken the invisible transmission. Ham’s voice resumed in distorted words.

“Motors missing—falling in air pockets—looks like part of peak splitting into sea—Renny can’t pull out—our position is——”

Ham’s speech ended in what seemed to be a distant crackling explosion.

Doc could hear only what undoubtedly was the S O S distress call of a ship.

Chapter 6

THE GIRL ON THE ICE

DOC SAVAGE closed the walls insulating his motors. His flaky gold eyes stirred in little whirlpools. Though he was alone, an eerie, exotic trilling filled the space of the amphibian cabin. It did not seem to emanate from the bronze man's lips. His mouth was unusually set in one firm line.

The trilling had no especial harmony. It was like the whistling of a low wind through the deep passages of some cavern.

The bronze man's concentration was intense. All of his five devoted companions were in perhaps the greatest peril of their many adventures together. Seldom did it happen that Doc was not in position to give immediate assistance to any of his men.

If he felt in the least perturbed, his calm action did not betray it.

With his motors shielded from possible interference, Doc climbed out and pushed the pontoon from the beach. Above him the propellers of special alloy were gleaming disks. The two constables on the ground had not stirred.

Perhaps no other man in the world could have moved the amphibian from its grounded location. When it was accomplished with one mighty heave of his shoulders, Doc waded out and swung into the cabin.

The Scotch inspector of Provincial Police was walking up and down his office and swearing wildly three minutes later. There was no other plane in the province that could be mistaken for Doc's. The inspector sent a police car hooting toward the beach near The Narrows.

DOC had kept in mind the voice of the Zoroman in the air. He knew, unbelievable as it seemed, the floating men were carrying Johnny and Monk over the high mountain barrier. And they were being guided in their flight by a radio beam. This class of ray, or wave, was common enough. It is used for the guidance of planes on their proper routes.

Doc switched on his directional radio finder. Instantly it was proved some unusual magnetic beam was coming from north of the mountains which formed the barrier between Vancouver and the wilderness beyond. It was much more than an ordinary beam.

The compass needles started playing queer pranks. The polar instrument seemed to lose its proper sense of direction. After weird swaying, the needle that should have maintained the correct north and south directions, remained pulled over.

The bronze man could tell this from the position of the brilliant North Star. This he sighted clearly in proper alignment with two lower stars of the Great Dipper. Doc, however, was following the mysterious beam.

He knew of only a few places in the world where physical composition of the earth deflected magnetic compasses. One of these was in the direction he was flying. But it was in Yukon Territory, much too distant to have been effective here.

In the Yukon, one great mountain had been named the Magnetic Mountain because of its highly sensitized elements.

With his directional finder holding the amphibian on the strange beam, Doc discovered he did not have to waste time gaining altitude to rise above the ragged peaks to the northward. His plane was being directed straight into the wide cleft of Capilano Canyon.

The bronze man had been pondering deeply. Glancing down into the abysmal darkness of the canyon cleft, the magnificent bronze head nodded slowly. It was thus he confirmed some of his own conclusions when alone.

Blasts of wind from side canyons tore at the wings of the plane. Only its streamlining prevented the amphibian being hurled from its course. The sheer walls of Capilano Canyon loomed higher. Doc discovered blind flying had become perilous. At any instant some jutting shoulder might trap a wing. The side sway of the wind currents could crash the ship into one of the cliffs.

Doc slipped a leather headgear over his sleek bronze hair. It much resembled a headguard worn by a football player. But what appeared to be clumsily constructed binoculars were attached. Before he pulled these over his eyes, Doc moved a switch in a half arc on the instrument board.

This switched on a searchlight set in the streamlined mounting of the plane. The human eye, unaided, would have seen nothing. The canyon darkness would have remained as opaque as ever. But now Doc was able to watch far ahead.

Each jagged corner of the canyon was clearly etched. The light shooting ahead of the plane was intensely brilliant, almost like the clear illumination of the sun. Every part of the canyon and peaks ahead appeared as photographs. They were without color, except those of a photographic negative of black and white.

The searchlight operated on a filament which produced a profusion of rays in infra-red wave bands. The lens was a filter which shut off all visible light, but which had the quality of passing the infra-red ray, invisible to the naked eye.

The clumsy appearing binoculars brought out the objects ahead as clearly as in some movie scene.

Doc flew by this illumination, invisible to others, for the purpose of preventing possible enemies ahead from detecting the coming of the plane. The motors themselves were silenced to the lowest possible vibration.

FOR the space of perhaps fifteen minutes after Doc had taken off from Burrard Inlet, the directional radio beam of mysterious origin remained steadily on. A few times Doc lost it in the curves of Capilano Canyon, but new swings picked it up again.

Miles up the canyon loomed two saw-edged peaks. Doc viewed them with startling distinctness by the infra-red ray. Now it seemed the directional beam was coming from between these.

Mountain distances are deceptive. Suddenly Doc's echo amplifier, which gave back the sound of the motors from vertical obstacles, warned him that he was too close to the peaks to attempt lifting the amphibian over them.

The plane zoomed from the final cleft of the canyon. Then the strange radio beam failed altogether. There was other evidence that the unusual magnetic force had been cut off. The compasses swung back to normal positions.

Doc banked the amphibian. Through the binoculars he sought for the most convenient outlet. The peaks looked as if they provided a trap. Each loomed more than a mile toward the starry sky. Between them ran a ragged line. Under the infra-red wave the space under this line suddenly glistened brilliantly.

A chill crept into the plane's cabin. Doc identified one of the great glaciers. The line between the peaks marked a spiny glacial wall. There seemed no alternative but to bank the plane and return through the canyon.

Suddenly the bronze man's attention was drawn to the apparently flatter space directly under the plane. He had pulled into a slowing spiral. What appeared to be a cylinder with pointed ends was partly upreared in a field of broken ice directly below. Doc's first glimpse proved it to be something more than a hundred feet long.

Holding the plane in a tight spiral, Doc whipped off the binocular goggles. He switched off the infra-red ray. Next he directed the high-powered landing light carried by the amphibian upon the mysterious object.

The bronze man had discovered that the material of which the weird-looking craft was composed did not respond to the infra-red waves.

The piercing beam of the landing light revealed a most remarkable fact. The illumination passed directly through the long cylinder. The mysterious craft was entirely transparent, or at least its outer walls were of a translucency which enabled the bronze man to see the darker, moving shadows of persons inside.

Intricate machinery of a darker composition showed in virtually half of the cylinder. The first passing of the plane's light indicated the craft might have been wrecked. A portion of one end seemingly had plowed into the ice. Fragmented slabs of the glacial field had reared up and fallen over.

As DOC brought the plane around on the second spiral, there still was no evidence of movement that might be hostile to the amphibian. Yet he could see the figures inside the cylinder were moving about. He wondered then from what source he might expect attack.

If an effort was contemplated to bring down the plane, it was being unaccountably delayed. Had he wished merely to escape, Doc could have swung back into the gap of Capilano Canyon. The bronze man had no such idea.

He was convinced that Johnny and Monk were now prisoners. They undoubtedly were being held either within the glassy cylinder or by men who had come from it. Moreover, the bronze man now had confirmation of an earlier theory.

The plane's landing light swept the spiny wall of the glacial field between the peaks. Doc concentrated on discovering a possible landing spot. As he held the amphibian on its course, with one hand he swiftly equipped himself with several devices which might be needed for defense.

Doc decided his television receiver might reveal more of the interior of the glass cylinder. Perhaps the television broadcaster would be turned on, or the voice transmitter

would be in service. He switched on his receiver. The window remained dark, but instantly a liquid voice cried out:

“Clark Savage—Clark Savage! Can’t you hear me? Help quickly! I have one of your strange weapons. It has a circular metal filled with golden cylinders. How can I use it? Clark Savage, can’t you hear me?”

Doc whipped the plane over so suddenly the wings shrilled with the strain. The searchlight again pointed upon the glasslike cylinder. He could not distinguish figures clearly inside. The bronze man knew instantly Johnny and Monk were down there.

It would be one of their pistols the girl Lanta was speaking about. Doc decided instantly. He did not know whether his voice could reach the girl. But he spoke quietly into the radio transmitter.

“Push down catch on right side of gun and start drum revolving with thumb on button at top. *This will not kill*—it uses only mercy bullets.”

The answer came back: “Oh, you hear me! I understand. Look up—here on the wall. I am Lanta.”

Doc again whipped the plane over. The searchlight beam shot across the shining glacial cliff. So small at the distance they seemed to be only large insects, half a dozen figures were outlined against the ice. One small dot was far above the others.

But as the bronze man risked crashing and roared directly toward them, he could see the lower figures were rising rapidly. They apparently were men equipped with the magnetic-gravitational belts.

Though their hands touched the glacial wall here and there, this was only for the purpose of guiding their course upward. Doc caught the wicked gleam of several death music tubes.

Apparently the girl lacked a magnetic belt. The bronze man had a flashing view of her slender figure flattened against the wall, high up. He could see the treacherous fault in the ice by which she had climbed to this point. Her radio communication had come from the same portable device Doc had encountered on the body of the man murdered in the park.

RISKING a head-on crash, the man of bronze shot the plane at the ice wall. His keen eyes brought the girl’s delicate features into focus. Her large eyes, straight nose and patrician cast of countenance made her more beautiful than she had seemed in the television window the night before.

A garment of golden cloth was molded to her slim, curving form. Her hair of lustrous black was bound with a single, broad band of the same golden material. Her eyes were of enormous size, shining in the reflection of the searchlight ray.

And in her hands the girl clutched one of Doc’s own huge and clumsy-looking mercy pistols.

Doc pulled the amphibian into a nose stall just in time to avoid crashing into the ice. As he did, he saw that three of the girl’s pursuers were closing in on her. Apparently she had reached the highest point to which she could climb. Doc glimpsed the shining of the murder flutes.

Compact as it was, the tail assembly of the bronze man's plane cracked a warning so abruptly, he brought the ship around. His own supermachine pistol was in his hand. He saw the girl had not mastered the mechanism of the weapon she held. She was completely cornered.

Doc snapped open the window beside the controls. One wing tip was but a few feet from brushing the ice, as the plane swooped past the glacial wall. Doc's mercy pistol erupted with rattling speed.

The weapon was capable of discharging sixty drugged mercy bullets faster than the most efficient machine gun. As the plane went by, the three closest figures seemed to lose interest in Lanta. Their death flutes flew from their hands.

The bronze man had aimed directly at these weird murder weapons. Not only were the closest men robbed of these, but the mercy bullets slapped into their hands and arms. Almost instantly, they were floating away from the wall. All the strength to hold themselves in position had been taken from them.

The mercy bullets would not kill. But for perhaps two hours the victims would be unconscious. Doc employed this means of overcoming criminal enemies. Usually, when they recovered, they discovered themselves on the way to an institution in upper New York State, where their sick brains would be treated.

After having been cared for by medical specialists employed by Doc Savage, those of criminal tendencies forgot all of their past. They had a new start in life, with their minds made well.

Again Doc banked and pulled the plane around. This time he cut off the motors. Within the cabin sounded the eerie, exotic trilling that came to the bronze man in moments of stress, or of intense concentration and decision. Sometimes he was unconscious of this weird sounding of notes.

And now, as silence fell inside the plane's cabin except for this trilling, Doc's exotic melody mingled with another weird, but slightly shriller, wailing. The girl's other pursuers were close upon her. Two or three were blowing upon the death flutes.

DOC saw the girl shrink back. Still holding the mercy pistol, she attempted to stop her ears. She seemed to be slowly slipping from her perilous hold on the high ice wall.

The bronze man was compelled to bank the plane and come around before he could again employ his own mercy pistol. He throttled the motors into power once more. And as he did, he heard the rippling staccato of a gun.

The plane's light picked out the girl. She was still clinging to the wall. All of the men who had pursued her were floating helplessly close to the ice. The death music had ceased to play. The girl waved one hand, as if directing Doc's attention to the ice field below.

The bronze man slanted the nose of the plane. From the glasslike cylinder two dark figures were running across the flat ice field. Doc identified the tall, angular Johnny and the curiously loping apelike Monk. They were apparently making a dash for the wall on which the girl was clinging.

But Lanta was no longer there. Risking a bad crash, Doc dropped the plane swiftly upon the glacial field. It was not nearly as smooth as it had seemed from the air. Rough

hummocks wiped out both retractable landing wheels. The pontoon slid along for many yards. Then one wing tip caught an uneven break in the ice and the amphibian went nosing over, shattering both propellers.

Doc seemed to bound from the plane as if he had been thrown from a catapult. As he alighted on his feet, his cabled muscles cushioned the impact. He slid along, but remained erect. Monk cried out in a high, squeaking voice.

Johnny and the big chemist were halfway from the cylinder to the glacial wall. Looking up, Doc saw the girl Lanta plunge outward. She was falling into more than two hundred feet of space. Then one of the strangest things Doc and his men had ever witnessed happened.

One of the girl's enemies was floating near by and close to the wall. Lack of gravity made him appear like a small, stuffed sausage drifting in mid-air. One of the girl's slender hands had caught his tunic. Her plunging weight started the body downward.

The gravity belt of the unconscious man compensated for the strong downward pull. Doc could hear Monk's amazed gasp.

The unconscious man had saved the girl Lanta as efficiently as if she had been equipped with an open parachute. Her golden curving figure was coming toward them. At this instant, the weird wailing of flutes again broke out.

UNOBSERVED, half a dozen men had been creeping from the glassy cylinder. They had approached within a few yards of Johnny and Monk, concealing themselves in fissures of the glacial field. Doc saw his two companions start a new dash toward the wall. Their pursuers seemed fleet of foot.

Without warning, the girl Lanta swung up the clumsy mercy pistol. It was aimed at Johnny and Monk. The weapon started spouting bullets. Johnny and Monk were wearing bulletproof vests of overlapping fine scales, invented by Doc. Strangely, the girl seemed to know this.

Monk squealed, "Howlin' calamities, don't——"

One hand slapped at his leg. He pitched to his face, unable to finish his exclamation. Johnny also had fallen. The girl had aimed the mercy bullets at their knees.

The girl Lanta started toward Doc. His own mercy pistol was in his hands. With triumphant cries, the men with the death flutes ran toward them. The bronze man received the full impact of the weird melody. It was dizzying, but his great resistance kept him on his feet.

He brought up the supermachine pistol. One burst and the players of the deadly music would be removed. The girl Lanta had stopped abruptly. She was staring at Doc as he swayed a little on his feet. Her pistol erupted bullets.

The bronze man felt a sting in one leg from a bullet of his own devising. Even then, he had resistance enough to have shot the girl.

But the bronze man lapsed into unconsciousness without having fired the bullet that would have rendered Lanta helpless.

Chapter 7

THE BEWITCHED SHIP

RENNY's great hands looked like small hams on the controls of the plane. At the moment Ham had been informing Doc they were falling, the motors picked up again.

The streamlined amphibian, similar to that in which Doc Savage crashed on the ice field above Capilano Canyon, was twitched from a near plunge into icy waters. In the blackness of the night the cold gray sea which washed the rocky, forbidding Aleutian Islands, had been only a white-toothed space far below.

Doc's three companions, daringly following the directions given by the SOS calls of the S.S. *Narwhal*, had seen the peaked shadows of sudden mountains rushing past. Though the plane was equipped with special heating and oxygen devices, the chill of the Arctic crept in.

Renny's booming voice had been the first to announce sighting the distressed ship. The lights of the little steamer had showed as merely a blob of dancing illumination. At times, the ship vanished in vagrant fields of fog which drifted perpetually around the barren rocky chain of the Aleutians.

Then had come Doc's radio call. Ham's announcement they were out of control had only been uttered when their radio reception was blanked out. A vast roaring filled the space around them. Renny's success in snatching the plane from the very tops of the rough and hungry waves left them speechless until the motors were working in smooth rhythm.

Ham jimmied around with the radio broadcaster. All of its elements seemed to be dead. As Renny pulled the plane into a wide circle, they were looking almost directly down upon a cone-shaped island. In the heart of this cone glowed a dull fire.

For the second time in a few minutes the volcanic peak burst into eruption. One side of the small mountain seemed to crumble into the sea. On the resultant tidal wave the small steamship rolled wildly and danced. For a few seconds it appeared as if the ship had been overwhelmed in a rushing wall of water.

Long Tom had been watching the island peak closely. He was an undersized man compared to Doc and the others, and his face had an unhealthy bilious cast. Usually slow of speech he was almost the equal of Doc himself in being sure before he spoke.

Long Tom said suddenly, "Something came out of that crater on that second eruption."

Ham, who was inclined to some sarcasm at all times, most of which he employed to bedevil the now absent Monk, replied.

"Sure, something came out of it. And it's still coming! I would say it's molten lava and it's plenty hot."

"That isn't what I mean," said Long Tom. "There was something else. It was long and shiny and it went into the sea."

“Holy cow!” bellowed Renny, his big frame shaking with an inward chuckle. “Next we’ll be seeing——”

RENNY did not complete this sentence. The three companions were all seeing the same thing at the same time. Reflection of the volcanic fire against the low-scudding clouds had cast an eerie light over the ocean swells for a mile or more. The Steamship *Narwhal* was like some toy craft in the middle of this light, as viewed from the plane above.

Renny ceased speaking through amazement.

“Well, maybe you did see something,” murmured Ham. “And now I’m seeing something else. Is that ship moving backward in a circle, or are my eyes deceiving me?”

“The ship is moving backward in a circle,” said Long Tom solemnly. “And look! I’ll bet it never moved that fast before!”

True enough. The *Narwhal* seemed to have been suddenly bewitched. Stern first, it was whirling into a motion that slapped great waves high over its single smokestack and the two wireless masts. The motion became so rapid the vessel was almost submerged from view, several times.

“If we could only get the radio working,” complained Ham. “Now that we’re out here we can’t even direct that revenue cutter or the tug. That ship looks as if it were getting ready to blow up or tear itself to pieces.”

“Say!” exclaimed Long Tom. “This Caulkins and Cassalano! You don’t suppose they’ve been trying some experiments and they went haywire? Ever since we’ve been within miles of the *Narwhal*, our compasses have been away off. Now it’s the radio, and there was no reason for the motors to conk out like they did.”

“That’s an idea,” admitted Ham. “But if Caulkins and the other fellow are responsible, why don’t they stop it?”

“Well, maybe they can’t,” supplied Renny. “And that isn’t so good either.”

His last words were brought forth by a renewed sputtering of the twin motors. A string of blue sparks ran from the framework of the television-and-radio receiving set to the instrument board. Suddenly the television receiver went into service.

Against the dark glass of the window appeared a face. The features were those of a man with a glowing, silvery skin. The surface had an extremely fine texture, but the face itself was of a heavy, prognathous type.

There was no evidence of there having been any beard. The man’s eyes were big, all black and white, as if the pupils were enlarged. The vision remained for only two or three seconds. Then a slow voice spoke.

“You will land carefully your sky ship close to the boat,” it commanded. “Make no effort to escape. I would look upon the strange weapons of Doc Savage. Refuse, and I shall bring you down.”

“Holy cow!” rumbled Renny. “Land carefully in that stuff down there! Either I’m crazy or we’re all hearin’ things!”

To the amazement of the three, the slow, deep voice replied instantly.

“You are not crazy or hearing things, as you express it. Bring the plane down. You can expect no assistance from your great chief. Doc Savage is in the hands of Zoromen.”

“I’ll bet that’s coming from the ship itself,” declared Ham. “Perhaps you’re right, Long Tom. Those crazy scientists have been making some experiments. It looks as if they’re a couple up on us on radio communication. Look at the *Narwhal!*”

The small ship had ceased sailing stern first, but it was still moving. It appeared to be spinning as if placed upon a pivot. Swells of the gray sea were being lashed into mountainous waves.

“I’m for getting away from here,” muttered Renny. “We couldn’t land if we wanted to and if we——”

“You will land,” again came the slow, mysterious voice.

THE radio receiver crackled as if it had exploded. The twin motors ceased their revolutions without so much as a preliminary cough. Dead-sticked, wholly out of control, the amphibian plunged downward. Only by the quickest effort was Renny able to level off partly before the plane ripped off the high top of a comber and buried its pontoon in the following swell.

Battering water poured through a smashed window. The cabin was filling rapidly. Ham was pulling down their special life preserver coats. Before the three men had fitted into them, the plane seemed to be sinking.

Incredibly, the sea seemed to calm considerably. The *Narwhal* had ceased its peculiar spinning. This confirmed the belief that the inexplicable attack had come from the vessel.

An officer was bellowing orders. Heavy oil poured from the *Narwhal’s* side, smoothing off the break of the waves. A small boat was being put down.

The black oil continued to spout from the ship. But something more potent than this was leveling the rough water. For the circumference of a quarter of a mile around the vessel the sea became like a mill pond.

Renny and Long Tom were floating easily in their inflated preserver coats. The usually dapper Ham was having more difficulty. He paddled with one hand. Renny looked at him and bellowed:

“I’ll bet he’ll want to wear that cane to his own funeral!”

Ham was carrying his cane. The sporty black stick was hampering his progress. However, this was more than a dandified gesture. The cane was of metal. It was really a hollow sheath for one of the finest of sword blades. Though Ham also was armed with one of Doc’s mercy pistols, the pointed rapier was all he customarily used.

In the weird calmness a voice boomed. The chunky ship captain was built like a barrel. He was rotund, round and red of face.

“By the great hornspoon!” was his shout. “Get them fellas h’isted on board where we can look ’em over! Nobody can be makin’ crazy shenanigans with my ship! Haul ’em out an’ we’ll see what the devil it’s all about!”

The rough hands of sailors were dragging them into the small boat. The members of the boat crew looked pale around their mouths. Sailors are a superstitious lot. They had just been taken for a ride. If they could have dared the trackless waste of the Arctic seas in the vicinity of the Aleutians, it is likely they would have kept on rowing away in the small boat.

This had been their first experience on such a ship. Even the fabulous tale of the old Flying Dutchman, the ghost vessel, could not compare with it. Their sturdy craft had sailed stern foremost. At the time, its great propeller had been driving in the opposite direction.

They had heard the blades of the propeller bend and break. Then their bewitched ship had gone into its spin. They had been dizzy and sick when they had launched the lifeboat from its davits. The sailors eyed the giant proportions of Renny with awe.

They stared longer at the waspish figure of Ham.

“Gorblimie!” squealed the little boatswain, of cockney English extraction. “ ‘E’s a-carryin’ of ’is walkin’ stick an’ ’e goes out for a swim!”

Ham’s sword cane was still firmly gripped in his hand.

THE oarsmen put zeal in getting back to the ship. It was clear they had no fancy for the company of the three they had rescued. The ship’s boat bumped the side of the small steel steamship.

“We’ve got to keep the plane from sinking,” said Ham. “There are some things on board we may need.”

“Yeah,” drawled Long Tom. “He’s forgotten his wardrobe.”

Ham could maintain a certain sartorial elegance under the most trying circumstances. He habitually carried a suitcase of emergency raiment. Ham, however, was not thinking of this now. There were many special devices on the plane. These, Doc had judged, might become valuable in emergencies.

“H’ist ’em on board!” boomed the irate, red-faced captain. “You can take off whatever is wanted if the plane stays afloat!”

A rope ladder was dropped. The three companions were boosted toward the deck.

The streamlined plane had not yet sunk. With the inexplicable calming of the sea by the heavy oil, and by some other mysterious element, only the pontoon of the amphibian had filled. Buoyancy of its wings and tanks were holding it on the surface.

With profane mutterings, the boat crew started rowing back toward the plane.

“Bring back everything that’s loose!” commanded the chunky captain. “I’m thinkin’ there’s what we’ll be wantin’ to be lookin’ into!”

The eerie illumination from the erupting volcanic island was dying down. Still there was light enough to see the plane distinctly. The sailors bent to their oars.

But as the small boat moved, Renny let out a yell.

“Holy cow, Ham! Look! The plane’s runnin’ away!”

Ham and Long Tom stared at the phenomenon. The streamlined amphibian no longer floated placidly. It was jerking from side to side. A wounded pelican of enormous size might have made the same motions. The water boiled around the wings.

“The thing’s got it!” exploded one of the sailors in the small boat. “Hey! Stop rowin’!”

The oars of the crew hung in mid-air. Then they dipped violently. The small boat swung around and made back for the ship.

“By the great hornspoon!” raged the red-faced captain to Doc’s men. “I’m puttin’ you lubbers in irons ’til we can see what this is all about!”

The half-sunken plane had picked up speed. It swung away in a half arc, moving swiftly. Some monster of the deep apparently had it firmly in its grip. The speed became so great one of the wings tore off.

The plane disappeared in a foaming smother beyond the rim of the light cast by the dying volcano.

“I wish Doc could see this,” muttered Long Tom. “Maybe he’d be able to figure out something.”

“I take it you mean the illustrious Doc Savage?” stated a cool, brittle voice. “Then you are three of his men.”

A MAN almost as tall and as bony as Johnny, the geologist, came toward them. He emerged from a small group of shivering, white-faced men. The members of this group looked as if they were in an alien place. About a dozen altogether, their countenances retained an indoor pallor, except for the roughening by climate and weather.

“I’m Caulkins—Homer Pearson Caulkins,” stated the man who had stepped from the group. “Perhaps you have heard of me?”

“You’re the economist,” said Ham promptly. “Lately of South America. Let me congratulate you on your work down there.”

The lean, ascetic face of Homer Pearson Caulkins lighted with apparent pleasure. His gray eyes gleamed frostily alongside his beaklike nose.

The red-faced captain grunted, “By the—well, of all the cool lubbers! You know ’em, Mr. Caulkins?”

“I would vouch for the companions of Doc Savage anywhere,” came the dry, brittle voice of the economist. “Perhaps they have been trying some of their many scientific devices. That would explain the strange behavior of our ship.”

“Holy cow!” exploded Renny. “That’s the same thing we were sayin’ when things began to bust! We thought you fellows on the ship were doin’ some experimentin’!”

The red-faced captain snorted. Another man came across the deck from the group. He was of average height, but so fat and pudgy he had the appearance of being short. His small eyes twinkled in a rotund face that had a double chin. His mouth was small, but smiling.

“So you thought we might be experimenting?” he questioned pleasantly. “You’re sure Doc Savage hadn’t equipped your plane with some new apparatus that took it away suddenly? I have heard Savage is capable of many strange demonstrations.”

“We know as little about all this as you seem to know,” stated Ham. “If I’m not mistaken, you’re Cassalano, the mineralogist.”

The fat man bowed. "It is a compliment to be so readily recognized. But perhaps you knew of our ship?"

"Yes, we know of your ship," replied Ham. "We were responding to your S O S calls. Two boats are coming out."

Salvatore Umbrogia Cassalano spread his pudgy hands.

"That's very good," he said. "When the volcano broke loose on the island, our steering apparatus refused to work. Until only a few moments ago, we were being pulled toward the rocks. It looked as if we would be smashed. Captain Jarnagin had lost control."

The red-faced captain *h'rumped* indignantly.

"By the great hornspoon!" he bellowed. "And why did we lose steerage way, I ask you, Mr. Cassalano? Maybe I wasn't handlin' my ship as right as any man could. Maybe you think I could have——"

"It's all right, captain," interrupted Caulkins's brittle voice. "We fully realize you were doing your best. No man can be expected to cope with the supernatural."

Ham and his companions were dripping. Long Tom's anæmic-looking figure shivered. Cassalano's unctuous tone broke in.

"But we shouldn't be keeping these men here on deck freezing," he said. "If you'll come on down to our cabin, we'll have out some dry clothing for you. We'll——"

SALVATORE UMBROGIA CASSALANO never completed his kindly meant suggestion. Members of the *Narwhal* crew had remained huddled in a muttering group near the forward hatch. Though the chill of the Arctic night was biting, they were loath to descend to their cramped quarters.

One man shouted. Others joined in a chorus. There were two score of the sailors. Suddenly they were rushing toward the captain and the group near the waist of the ship.

"By the great horn——" Captain Jarnagin started to roar, his hand dragging a snub-nosed revolver from under his coat.

The captain apparently believed his men's nerves had broken. He thought he was facing a mutiny. He waved the revolver.

"The thing's got us!" squawked a sailor. "It's grabbed us by the bow! Take to the boats, mates!"

The members of the crew divided. In their panic they ignored the menace of the captain's weapon. Ropes loosened and davit chocks squealed. A lifeboat went tumbling down, with men piling into it. Some men were spilled into the sea. Others jumped in terror.

Captain Jarnagin bellowed with rage. His snub-nosed revolver spat vicious fire. A sailor fell to the deck, screaming. One of his legs was broken. The bony figure of Caulkins interposed. He seized the wrist of the red-faced captain.

"We don't want bloodshed, captain!" he said peremptorily. "Myself and my colleagues are paying for the ship! I'll try and calm the men!"

Caulkins strode forward.

"He's a cool one," commented Long Tom. "But what do you suppose——"

The *Narwhal* quivered. All the air around it was crackling with some form of frosty static. Another piece of the volcano rim sheered off and fell into the sea.

“Holy cow!” rumbled Renny. “Look down there!”

With a slight grating sound a long glasslike body had attached itself to the steel side of the ship. No grappling hooks appeared. The submerged shape seemed to be holding onto the steamer by some sort of suction.

“Electromagnets!” exclaimed Long Tom. “It’s one of them subs! That’s what took the plane!”

“Look out! This way, quick!”

This was Ham’s voice. Every one had been staring forward where the sailors were still milling in confusion. The lowered small boat with half a load of panicky men of the crew was pulling away.

Coming up behind the captain and the others, moving on soundless feet, were a dozen figures. Others were emerging from a small open hatch in the top of the glasslike submarine.

“It ain’t human!” growled Renny. “But come on!”

The giant engineer’s enormous fists were doubled. His face was long and solemn. Renny always had that expression when he was pleased. He was now pleasantly anticipating the smashing of a few heads. The fact that the stream of men coming from the submarine was apparently clad in some sort of silvery armor, did not deter him.

“Look, Ham, at them coming up,” breathed Long Tom, in an amazed voice.

HAM needed no urging to see what Long Tom meant. The men issuing from the glassy submarine reached the ship’s deck without much effort. In fact, they seemed to give only a little push with their toes and floated upward. Yet when they were on the steel plates they walked forward in a normal manner.

There were now more than a score of the strange visitors. All were of medium height. They were clad in close-fitting tunics with what seemed to be loosely woven metallic belts. More amazing than this, none appeared to be armed in any manner. Their hands swung free at their sides.

“By the great hornspoon!” thundered Captain Jarnagin. “What the devil do you think you are? Get off my ship! No pirates are goin’ to board me!”

The foremost of the boarding men halted abruptly.

“Holy cow!” exclaimed Renny. “If he wasn’t so tall an’ didn’t have that funny color, you’d think it was Monk himself!”

The leader did have a considerable resemblance to Doc’s apelike chemist partner. His arms were long. His shoulders were wide. His lower jaw stuck forward prognathously. His large-pupiled eyes were set deep under jutting bones. His forehead was sloping.

“It’s the fellow who jumped into our television,” said Ham.

The leader of the boarders raised his hand. Surprisingly, he spoke in excellent English.

“We have not come to fight,” he said in a slow, precise voice. “We want only this inferior craft of iron you call a ship.”

Captain Jarnagin whipped up his revolver and fired.

Chapter 8

PRISON JACKETS

“WHAT, CAPTAIN JARNAGIN!” commanded Caulkins’s brittle voice. “We can’t be too hasty!”

The economist’s long bony fingers had gripped the irate captain’s wrist just as he had pulled the trigger of his snub-nosed weapon. The bullet intended for the leader of the metallic-clad boarders was deflected. It whined off the steel plates of the deck.

At the same time, Caulkins had drawn a more modern automatic pistol from a pocket of the heavy mackinaw he was wearing against the Arctic cold. Apparently he meant what he said. He was himself ready to fight, but it was a part of his training to try diplomacy first.

“I take it,” the economist went on quickly, “you and your men from this strange submarine are unarmed. Your statement that you want our ship is too preposterous to be considered. If you are responsible in any way for the disabling of this steamer, you will be liable for heavy damages, perhaps criminal prosecution.”

The leader of the boarders had not moved. Ham, peering closely at the halted men, observed, “Their skins aren’t natural, or they’re heavily made up.”

It was true. The faces and hands of the visitors were of a fine, silvery texture. The skin seemed to have no pores. All of the men’s chins were hairless. Though the skull bones of the leader jutted over his strange black-and-white eyes, there were no brows.

This leader appeared not to be at all disturbed by the captain’s hastily fired bullet. Something approaching a smile gave his countenance macabre scornfulness.

“We shall take this ship,” he said slowly, without raising his voice. “It shall be returned to you undamaged. You and your men will be set ashore on an island until we return. I am Zoro. I am planning to entertain a distinguished guest. The world’s greatest scientist is soon to be a visitor.”

He glanced at Ham, Renny and Long Tom.

“Already we have three of his adherents with us,” he went on with cool assurance. “Two others are accompanying him to this place. I am merely satisfying a whim to meet the man supposed to be the world’s greatest scientist. I am speaking of Doc Savage.”

Renny’s broad shoulders had been twitching. His hamlike fists had been twisting oddly on his corded wrists. The name of Doc Savage acted like a match applied to powder.

“Zoro, huh?” he bellowed. “Well, I’ll Zoro all of you!”

THE enraged engineer sprang forward, both fists swinging. The leader, Zoro, evaded him with a movement incredibly fast. The next man in line was not so quick. The blow aimed at the leader caught this man and another. It happened so suddenly they were smashed like mere wooden tenpins into the deck housing.

Their long tunics rustled metallicly as they sank to the deck. Captain Jarnagin wrenched his wrist free from Caulkins's grip. He aimed the snub-nosed revolver again at Zoro.

Then from Zoro came his first hastily spoken word. He barked a command in a language none of Doc's companions had ever heard. Ham, who was whipping his blade from the cane, saw the hands of silver-skinned boarders jump to their loosely fitted belts.

The captain's revolver was not exploded. Neither was the automatic which Caulkins had started to raise. These weapons were snatched from their hands by some invisible force. One, flying through the air, grazed Ham's skull and staggered him.

Renny at the minute was swinging his great fists with devastating effect. Three more men had gone down. Long Tom was pulling his supermachine pistol. It was jerked from his grip and followed the weapon of Caulkins and the captain.

Ham and Long Tom gasped with amazement.

The pistols had flown through the air. They now were adhering to the belts of three of the invaders. These men plucked them loose. They stuffed them inside their tunics.

A galvanized scrub bucket skidded ringingly along the steel plates of the deck. It was followed by a couple of iron belaying pins. Some smaller metal objects bounced and bounded along. These, too, landed on the raiders' belts. They were freed with ease and tossed overboard.

Suddenly there was a weird wailing series of notes. They had an eerie, ghostly cadence as of distant windblown music. Renny, the engineer, stopped one swinging fist in mid-air.

"It's Doc!" he yelled. "It can't be, but it's Doc!"

To Renny, as to Ham and Long Tom, the flutelike music had remarkable similarity to the exotic melody that came to their bronze leader in moments of greatest stress. Renny's big body swung around. His solemn, puritanical face was greatly puzzled.

For a moment, Ham and Long Tom were no less bewildered. But each of the three, and the other men closest to the silvery-skinned invaders, were swiftly becoming dizzy. Captain Jarnagin swore loudly and staggered against the rail.

Ham had somehow managed to hang onto his one weapon, the sword blade. Though his ears were ringing and his brain suddenly seemed on fire, the fast-moving lawyer leaped toward Zoro. His blade was flashing. It was tipped with the same drug used in the anæsthetic capsules.

Ham figured if he could put the raiders' leader out of business, the others could be controlled. Their seemingly unarmed state was encouraging.

Zoro saw the point of the sword blade whipping toward his stomach. But he did not even step aside. Inside, one hand moved with the speed of light to his loose belt. There was a whining snap of metal.

Ham stood for a second looking ruefully at his blade. It had slapped across Zoro's metallic tunic. The drugged point had broken off.

Renny, who had until this time depended upon his fists, pulled his supermachine pistol from under his bulletproof vest.

His big hand gripped it too tightly for the mysterious force arrayed against them to tear it loose. He operated the mechanism. The pistol was pointed directly at Zoro. An amazing thing happened.

Zoro spoke quietly. "It is entirely useless."

This was the truth. The metal drum of mercy bullets was immovable. It was as if the weapon had been frozen into one solid piece.

HAM and Long Tom were hanging onto the rail. Renny shifted queerly on his massive legs and sat down. Captain Jarnagin had slumped to the deck. Caulkins and Cassalano were stuffing fingers into their ears.

Another boatload of panicky sailors tumbled from the davits. It splashed into the sea and overturned. The lesser members of the scientific group were retreating with stumbling steps. All acted as if they had been imbibing some intoxicant.

Zoro raised his hand and uttered another command.

Then he said, "It was necessary to prove that you are powerless."

The weird wailing music had suddenly ceased. Ham's head throbbed with pain. He saw two of the invaders restoring flutelike instruments to their belts. The eerie sound had come from these.

Zoro continued coolly. "We could as easily have played death music. We have been merciful. We merely want this worthless ship for our own purposes. The captain will be repaid well."

Homer Pearson Caulkins pushed forward. His lean, ascetic face was lined with apparent pain. His words surprised Ham.

"You call yourself Zoro," the economist said. "Your demonstration has been most remarkable. It will be even more astounding if Doc Savage is to be your guest, as you say. You know three of his famous companions are here?"

"Zoro knows many things," stated the raiding leader calmly, and named each one of Doc's three aids aboard the *Narwhal*.

Caulkins turned to Cassalano.

"Rather amazing," he remarked. "Perhaps Doc Savage knows more of this than we think. It could hardly be sheer coincidence that his men should be here. So, Zoro, suppose you explain something of all this? Why do you want our ship?"

Ham was looking at Cassalano. The mineralogist's double chins were trembling. The twinkle had gone from his shrewd small eyes.

"Doc Savage is a dangerous man with whom to fool," stated Cassalano. "You and your men are wearing strange garments, Zoro. I have never seen that composition before, and I know my metals."

Zoro spoke again. A slow smile overspread the ugly smoothness of his face. It seemed to mock any knowledge Cassalano might possess.

"True, you know much of some things," he stated. "But you cannot even surmise why all of you are helpless before us. Possibly this wonderful Doc Savage can find out. It is my purpose to see that he does not."

“Doc Savage has the strange faculty of knowing all before he is told,” said Cassalano. “I warn you. And by some remarkable intuition, you seem to believe Doc Savage will come to this place?”

“This Doc Savage will arrive in a very few minutes,” said Zoro confidently. “By mischance, some of my plans went wrong. But this bronze man is being delivered into my hands.”

“You’re crazy!” ejaculated Renny, who was beginning to recover. “Less than two hours ago, Doc Savage was talking to us from the harbor at Vancouver, British Columbia. That is more than two thousand miles from this spot. You may be some sort of a magician, Zoro, as you call yourself, but you’ve guessed wrong.”

“I never misjudge,” said Zoro mockingly. “Even now, your chief of the bronze skin is coming.”

“Just another bedtime story,” drawled Ham. “If that sword blade hadn’t broken _____”

THEN the air shook. The strangely calm area of sea around the *Narwhal* danced with choppy waves. Thunder racketed along the gray shores of the Aleutians.

A new fracture appeared in the side of the dying island volcano. Another portion of the cliff split off. A mighty splash was heard.

“*Aroon da spurz!*” rapped out Zoro, or the words sounded like that to Ham.

Before any one could move, the silvery-skinned men had swarmed upon them. Renny’s fists started slashing a swath through his attackers.

The shrill melody broke from half a dozen flutes at once. Ham was first to feel himself enveloped in what felt like a metallic net. Vainly he sought to free his hands. He saw his companions also had been enmeshed.

The nets had been cast over their heads. They slid down like long jackets and tightened around their legs. In the space of seconds every man of the nearest group was clad in the imprisoning affairs.

Ham’s hands were loose inside a blouselike affair, but his legs were held so tightly he fell over. And when he moved his arms it had the effect of tightening a metallic band around his throat. The least pressure of his hands shut off his breath.

Ham rolled over. Renny and Long Tom were lying beside him on the deck. Caulkins and Cassalano were similarly jacketed. Captain Jarnagin was swearing with all of a seagoing master’s fluency. But each time the captain moved his hands, his round, red face grew redder.

The metallic jackets were infernally clever in their design.

The sea around the ship glowed more brightly. Evidently another part of the volcanic cap had been blown off.

Zoro stood with folded arms, looking down at his prisoners.

“Doc Savage has arrived,” he announced, without raising his voice.

Something grated along the side of the *Narwhal*. It was on the opposite side from which Zoro’s raiders had come.

Chapter 9

A SHIP IN THE NIGHT

DOC SAVAGE awoke. His return to consciousness was like the snapping of a camera shutter. Every nerve and instinct was instantly alert. The bronze man did not move. His inner eardrums ached. They rang with twinging pain. He opened his eyes slowly.

Doc had experienced many strange transitions. But, of all, this had him the most deeply puzzled. His last conscious memory had been seeing the mysterious, beautiful, golden-clad Lanta shoot down Monk, Johnny and himself with one of his own supermachine pistols.

Doc reflected that before his senses went blank he could have brought the girl down with one of the mercy bullets. The bronze man's swift, intuitive reasoning had stayed his hand. Now he reflected further that he had known the girl had a deep, intelligent purpose in firing those bullets.

Yet this did not account for his present position. Just now he decided that his highly trained olfactory sense was hardly an asset. His nose was assailed by the sour, rotten, salty odor of bilge water. By that alone, he would have known he was in a ship.

But being shot down on a mountain glacier and wakening in a ship, was somewhat of a new experience. Doc, at the moment, could only surmise the vessel might be somewhere in the vicinity of Vancouver. He was lying on an iron grating. The bars were uncomfortable. His muscles, though impervious to most outer shock, were aching a little.

Within a few seconds, he had discovered he was not on a ship near Vancouver. Not by many hundreds of miles. For the bronze man had that keen sense of knowing by feeling and smell, many parts of the world. At this moment, he judged he was not far from the Arctic Circle.

Freezing, bitter chill filled the space about him.

The ship was moving. The rushing suck of water along near-by plates told him that. And it was moving swiftly. Its speed was greater than he had ever known even the most modern vessel to have.

More amazing than its mere speed, this ship was traveling stern foremost. A dim light bulb revealed this. Close by was a quivering rudder post. The blade of a broken propeller slapped viciously against steel plates. The rudder cables did not move. Apparently the rudder itself had been snapped off.

Doc hitched his body over. Until now, he had seemed to be only partly bound. His massive legs were immovable. But his hands had seemed to be free. At least he was able to move them about. But he discovered his arms were shrouded by a cold, loose garment. It was cold because it was of metallic texture. The temperature of the ship's hold could not have been much above zero.

Near him another body moved. Doc attempted to lift his hands. This action was abruptly terminated. The movement had brought choking pressure around his throat. He

was held within a new form of jacket. By some mechanical contrivance, the pushing of his hands tightened a band around his neck.

Some one's heels kicked on the grating. A voice moaned. It was Monk. He was lying close to Doc. Beyond him Doc's vision took in the four other bound figures of Johnny, Renny, Long Tom and Ham. Still other prisoners lay beyond them in the darkness.

Monk's moan changed to complaining conversation.

"Dag-gonit!" he grunted through chattering teeth. "Nothing makes any sense! First I'm some kind of a bird! Next I wake up in a glass ship an' try to save that pretty girl callin' herself Lanta! An' danged if that cute, poisonous female don't shoot me with my own pistol! Now I must be on an ocean ship, an' I'm beginnin' to get sick of the ways things are turnin' out!"

Apparently many things had been happening too fast for the still-dazed brain of the chemist.

Doc's other companions were regaining their senses. Johnny replied to Monk's complaint. Even in this predicament he found a few long words.

"Being susceptible to feminine wiles always brings its own disillusionment," he said solemnly. "A concatenation is taking place upon my tympanum."

"Good gosh!" exploded Monk. "Did that happen, too?"

"I also have a ringing in my ears," came the calm voice of Ham. "And every time I wake up out of a bad dream I find I've been sleeping close to one of the ape family."

Monk snorted. "This place does smell something like a dag-goned hog wallow. Now I know what it is."

This verbal feud between the chemist and the lawyer had become perpetual. Never was their predicament too serious to permit of overlooking a chance to lambast each other.

For the first time Doc Savage spoke.

"It would seem, brothers, some mysterious force has brought us together. Monk and Long Tom and I were on a glacier near Vancouver. Apparently we have been unconscious a long time, yet I feel as if it had been only an hour or two."

"Holy cow!" rapped out Renny. "That's all it's been, Doc! A fellow in bulletproof clothes that called himself Zoro said he was expectin' you!"

"And," remarked Ham dryly, "it seems as if he were speaking the truth. How it was done is among the mysteries, but the time could not have been more than two hours."

"Zoro seems to have known his means of transportation," said Doc. "We were shot down, as Monk has told you, by one of our own pistols in the hands of a girl. But the ringing in our ears comes from the instruments resembling flutes."

"Then you ran up against some of the same gang," declared Renny. "And now we are on the steamer *Narwhal* and it's running tail first, at high speed, without any power."

Monk emitted a soulful groan.

“Howlin’ calamities!” he moaned. “Johnny an’ me fly like nice little birdies with a couple of greasy Hindus! Then we’re spirited a few thousand miles in an hour! Next time I wake up I suppose I’ll be an angle-worm or maybe a fish!”

Ham let out a laugh of delighted glee.

“Even that might be an improvement,” he stated solemnly. “But seeing you’ve got as far as the trees in the scale of evolution, it seems impossible.”

“If I could only get my hands loose!” howled Monk. “Ouch!”

His sudden effort had tightened the metallic choker.

“You dag-goned shyster, you made me do that!”

Ham chuckled, then he said seriously, “What have you discovered about this Zoro, Doc?”

THE bronze man said nothing. The space of the hold was suddenly filled with an eerie exotic trilling. Though his companions were aware this emanated from Doc, all instinctively rolled their heads. The weird music of the flutes was still an acute memory.

Doc had sensed the slowing of the ship. The *Narwhal* had been shooting through the water at tremendous speed. Its slowing was so abrupt it shifted the bodies of the men on the grating. Two figures in the metallic jackets rolled from the darkness.

They were Caulkins and Cassalano. Doc identified them without speaking. He was listening intently. The *Narwhal* had been stopped as quickly as if it had been grounded. But it had not. There was no impact. Now there was a slight grating sound. Apparently their floating prison had been brought close to a rocky shore.

On the deck overhead feet scuffled along the steel plates. One heavy voice boomed out.

“By the great hornspoon! You shiny faced devils can’t steal my ship out from under me! It’s nothin’ but danged piracy, that’s what it is! You’ve busted off the rudder an’ the propeller! Lemme outta this infernal steel shirt an’ I’ll wring your scrawny necks!”

“Evidently our friend the captain is also wearing an especially tailored suit,” commented Ham. “They must be putting the others ashore.”

A slow, unperturbed voice instantly confirmed Ham’s conjecture.

“You will have your ship returned, my good captain. We have use for it only a short time. Your men have been left plenty of food. When we return you shall be paid in virgin gold more valuable than several inferior iron vessels such as this would be worth. Your own men can easily free you from the tunic when we have departed.”

Captain Jarnagin’s protesting voice roared once more. But the scuffling feet passed overside. In a few minutes the ship moved again. Now its speed seemed even greater than before.

DOC rolled his giant body closer to Monk, who lay nearest on the grating. At a glance, he had solved the device by which the imprisoning jackets were fastened.

But he saw this was of such ingenious construction that only the human hand could unlock it. He had hoped it might be possible to gain their freedom by using their teeth.

Homer Pearson Caulkins contrived to squirm his body over to Doc. The economist's lean face was blue with cold, but his courage seemed unshaken.

"I had always looked forward to the pleasure of meeting you, Clark Savage," he stated, "but the circumstances are somewhat strange. However, I know of no other living human I would rather have beside me in the present emergency. This man who calls himself Zoro seems to have some greatly advanced scientific weapons."

"Your work in the South has been good," Doc stated. "Both of us apparently chose an unfortunate time in which to meet Zoro."

Caulkins seemed somewhat surprised by the bronze man's words.

"Surely, Savage, you would not put it that it was by choice you are here?" he said quickly. "I certainly never would choose to meet any one like this Zoro."

"It was by choice," advised Doc calmly. "Only I have not yet had the opportunity to see him. That will soon be granted, I hope."

"He can only be some sort of a madman," declared Caulkins. "By the way, Savage, you know Cassalano, the mineralogist?"

"I have been greatly impressed by his wide knowledge," said the bronze man.

"Thank you," spoke up the bound professor of minerals. "Did you hear this Zoro telling the captain he would pay for the ship in virgin gold?"

"Huh!" snorted Monk. "An' they write their messages on paper made outta pure gold!"

Not often did one of Doc's men disclose so much, but Monk often let his enthusiasm betray him.

"Messages?" put in Caulkins quickly. "Then you have had some messages from this Zoro? I thought it was more than mere coincidence three of your men happened to be in the vicinity of our ship."

There was no doubt but that his tone was filled with suspicion. Doc made no answer.

THEIR floating prison had resumed its voyage with hissing speed. The rush of the passing water filled the hold with a rumbling roar. The craft, though moving backward, was slicking through ocean swells as if the ocean were smooth as glass. The thick steel plates could be seen to tremble and weave under the strain.

Doc and his men became quickly aware of a rising temperature in their prison. It seemed impossible in the short space of time, but Doc knew they had entered the Japan Current. This is the great river in the Pacific Ocean which makes California a winter resort, and gives Oregon, Washington and British Columbia coasts much higher temperatures than places of the same latitude on the Atlantic.

Caulkins had not spoken again to Doc or his men. He had shifted to one side and was conversing in a low tone with Cassalano.

"Looks like they think we're in cahoots with this Zoro," remarked Long Tom in a subdued voice.

Doc ignored this statement. He had maneuvered himself to a position where he had been watching the sky from a small porthole. The breeze wafted in suddenly had a

changed odor. The bronze man breathed deeply.

“We’re proceeding dangerously near the lower Washington coast,” he stated. “At the terrific speed we are traveling, we are not many minutes from the Columbia River bar.”

“Dag-gonit, Doc!” exclaimed Monk. “How could you know that?”

“There could be no mistaking the whale rendering plant below Gray’s Harbor with this offshore breeze,” obliged the bronze man. “The harbor is the next above the Columbia River entrance. We have been pulled through the sea at a speed never before attained by any craft on land, or sea, or in the air.”

Doc Savage had spoken the truth. While its irate master was cooling his heels on an isolated island off the lower British Columbia coast, his *Narwhal* had fled through the night with the speed of a ghost ship. Though it was not yet dawn, the vessel was indeed approaching the great bar across the mouth of the wide Columbia River.

SINCE his awakening, Doc had been working steadily with his hands. Tensing his corded muscles against the tightening choker of the metallic jacket, he had discovered one surprising fact.

Though he had been rendered temporarily helpless, the Zoromen had overlooked several of the small devices which Doc carried in concealed pockets over his bulletproof vest. Or perhaps they had regarded certain small vials as inconsequential. Clearly Zoro had vast faith in his own weapons and thorough scorn for those he had chosen to make his enemies.

The bronze man’s groping fingers encountered a new object. It was a round, flat disk. This was close to his breast. The bulletproof vest overlaid it. Innumerable as were his inventions, Doc knew always where to place his hands upon them.

This contrivance had not been there when he was on the glacier. It had been placed upon him during the two-hour interval of his unconsciousness. Doc might have suspected a trick. It could have been some deadly infernal machine.

But the bronze man’s memory was as perfect as a recording disk. Once he had seen or touched anything, its details remained etched in his brain. And once before he had come in contact with just such a contrivance. It had been under the tunic of the murdered man in Stanley Park.

Some one had equipped Doc with a radio broadcaster-and-receiver of a miniature variety. His experience of the past night proved this to be far superior to any other he had ever encountered. But who had placed it there?

Lanta had shot him down with his own mercy pistol. At the time, she had been hedged in by those she had said were her enemies. She had named Zoro as her foe. Zoromen, she had said, were among her crew. Then she must have gained access to Doc while he was unconscious. But what use did she expect him to make of the portable radio set?

Each movement of Doc’s sensitive hands caused him to tense his neck muscles against the devilish choker. Working out the intricacies of the broadcaster was an involved problem. If he could make use of it, would it connect by short-wave with police radios?

The rushing speed of the *Narwhal* had lessened somewhat. The hull of the vessel seemed mashing through some substance more resistant than water.

“Brothers,” announced Doc, “we are passing over the shallow Columbia River bar. We must devise some plan to reach one of the portholes.”

“Dag-gonit!” exploded Monk. “I wish we could see somethin’! I’m beginnin’ to feel like some kind of a mole!”

“Our present means of transportation apparently has been adopted with reason,” observed Doc. “I surmise we are visiting one of the Columbia River ports for some definite purpose. Zoro told the ship captain he only wanted to borrow this steamer. He has a cargo of something he plans to take aboard.”

“What makes you think that, Savage?” came the voice of Cassalano. “I’m inclined to believe you do know much more of this crazy submarine commander than you have admitted.”

“The deduction is only obvious,” said Doc calmly.

The bronze man betrayed no resentment at the open suspicion in the economist’s voice.

“Very apparently he has a means of transportation of his own much superior to this iron ship,” he continued. “For some as yet obscure reason, he wants this vessel to be seen. Perhaps there are other circumstances he desires to be made public.”

“Just what do you mean by that, Savage?” Caulkins said, with more snappishness in his tone than he had previously used.

THE bronze man said nothing. He was suddenly engaged in a queer contortion of his body. The one porthole in the lower hold was open. The iron lid swung free on the clamping dogs. Doc had fixed his attention upon this.

The imprisoning metallic jacket kept his legs stiff. It did not permit his knees to bend. Only his hands and arms were slightly free. Now he had shifted until the back of his head touched the steel plates at the side. His feet were twisted over and his toes were working.

The bronze man turned over. His face now was against the steel hull. Propelled by his toes alone, he was working himself erect. The skin was rasped from his bronzed jaw. His hands were useless. Only his feet were free to work up and down. His chin came to the porthole.

Hooking his lower jawbone over the rough steel, Doc was in position to see the outside. So fast was the *Narwhal* moving, the green water was only a foot or so below the porthole.

“Holy cow, Doc!” exclaimed Renny. “Where are we?”

Before the bronze man could reply there was a soft whirring. Its vibration was close to his chest. Electrical waves ran through his muscles. Whispered words began to penetrate.

Doc knew these were not audible to his companions or to the other prisoners. The progress of the *Narwhal* was a great hissing sound.

“Clark Savage,” spoke the vibration. “I am close—can you speak to me? Press the second and fourth knobs to transmit—you can use this to—*oh!*”

The words died on a choking sound. They had been in the liquid voice of Lanta. She had been trying to impart some new message. Doc pressed the designated buttons on the strange portable radio broadcaster. He spoke in a low tone.

“Where are you? What is it you want me to do?”

He could tell the words were being transmitted. But no reply was received. He tried three times. Still no answer. Something had happened to the girl while she was speaking. She had said she was close.

Doc conjectured if that meant the glasslike cylinder was following the *Narwhal*. Perhaps the girl had managed her freedom only long enough to attempt a communication.

Chapter 10

THE “NARWHAL” ANCHORS

DOC left the porthole, and suddenly started rolling across the iron grating. Without a word to his companions he was making for the darkened area beyond range of the single light bulb.

His amazed men heard him speak:

“I was sure you were somewhere near by. Your men lost their battle.”

A liquid, resonant voice replied:

“Of that, I am not sure. I was overcome and taken away by Zoro. Unless we can escape the metallic tunics, our cause is hopeless. Zoro will keep you alive. He will destroy your men. They cannot aid him.”

FROM the darkness, beside Doc, appeared a slim form. One of the metallic jackets bound the girl’s body securely. Only the gold of her other tight-fitting garment and the golden band around her lustrous black hair were showing.

When she rolled under the light, her face appeared. Ham gasped with amazement. The lawyer was not immune to the impression of a beautiful face. Never had he seen features more perfect. The girl’s small, straight nose and her large, dark-pupiled eyes completed a lovely oval of patrician cast.

“So that is the girl Lanta?” Ham questioned softly. “Well, she is some looker.”

“Huh!” grunted Monk, for once apparently unimpressed. “An’ goes around shootin’ people with their own guns! She’s the one that shot me an’ Doc an’ Johnny.”

“It’s really too bad she didn’t make it a more complete job on one of you,” stated Ham. “An’ you don’t have to guess twice to know which one I mean.”

Caulkins and Cassalano were staring at the girl. As she looked at them, Lanta murmured in a low tone to Doc, “Are these other two of your company? I thought there were but five?”

Doc made no answer, however.

He rolled nearer to the hull of the ship. His hands had been exploring as far as they could the inside of the metallic jacket. By twisting the garment he was now able to reach another of his concealed pockets.

The *Narwhal* was moving slower. The bronze man became too intent to note the direction the ship was taking. His agile fingers had succeeded in extracting a flat, little vial inside the metallic jacket.

With infinite caution, Doc tested the looseness of his prison. His hands could move only a few inches without causing the collar to tighten with choking effect. Between his body and the outside jacket was the scalelike, bulletproof vest. The metal of this was perhaps the most impervious material ever invented by the bronze man, or any other person.

Doc pondered grimly. If he failed in what he was about to attempt, he was threatened by torturing, terrible death—such a death as might make any man hesitate. It would be like having a hot iron pushed slowly into his vital organs.

THE bronze man glanced at his captive companions. He did not delay longer. He rolled carefully over. His back was toward the others. One hand pushed the metallic jacket as far from his body as he could hold it. To do this he was compelled to lie on his stomach, arching himself on his toes and chin.

No other man could have remained in that position for more than a few seconds. The bronze man's body became as rigid as a steel bar. With his thumb he cautiously worked the stopper from the small glass vial. He could only guess when he had permitted a few drops to spill upon the loose outer fold of the metallic jacket.

A vile liquid was trickling slowly from the bottle. Doc's stomach muscles contracted until nearly all of his vital organs were forced into the cavity of his upper ribs.

After some of the liquid had oozed out, Doc replaced the stopper of the bottle and managed to get it back into its protective pocket. Balanced on chin and toes, he waited. He scarcely breathed as a noxious vapor permeated the loose weaving of the metallic jacket.

Even then, the bronze man was not sure he would succeed. Perhaps the alloy of which the jacket was composed would be too resistant. If so, Doc knew he had trapped himself horribly.

Nearly a minute passed. The *Narwhal* was sailing at a much more normal speed than it had moved previously. Odors of pine and spruce indicated the vessel was being piloted close along some shore.

Doc judged that Zoro was now approaching some goal where he did not wish to be detected. The bronze man pushed experimentally with one hand. His arm suddenly emerged outside the jacket.

The liquid he had used had been a deadly, cutting acid. Often it had been employed to remove steel bars. Had any of it touched Doc's body before it evaporated, no remedy could have been found to prevent it eating inward.

Doc relaxed and rolled over. Ham was now lying close to him. Just beyond was the slim body of the girl Lanta. The bronze man whispered a caution.

"Don't move, any of you, until I give the word. I shall loosen the jackets. Wait until all are freed before you cast them off."

Lanta's wide eyes stared at the bronze man unbelievably. His capable hands already were loosening the automatic bindings back of her throat.

"None ever has accomplished that," she whispered. "I had begun to lose all hope. Now I am sure it was no mistake when I made contact with you."

There was much more being uttered by her expressive eyes. The bronze man ignored this. Lanta was as lovely a woman as he had ever seen. It was no conceit on his part to believe he had made a great impression upon her.

But Doc Savage was not interested in making any conquest. Women had no part in his life. He didn't even pretend that he understood them.

The bronze man had devoted his life to aiding those who were oppressed, wherever they might be. His allegiance was to all the world. He helped the distressed. Their oppressors he punished, but with the idea of correcting their mistakes.

CAULKINS and Cassalano apparently had not seen Doc was free. The mineralogist spoke. He showed the strain of their imprisonment.

"For heaven's sake, Savage!" he pleaded. "You are reputed to be ingenious beyond all others. Can we not in some way escape this trap? I can't stand much more of this. I am in terrible pain."

Caulkins added his voice. He was calmer than his colleague.

"Yes, Savage, if anything can be done, it seems to me the time has arrived," he stated. "I have a feeling this Zoro has been only playing with us. Perhaps he only wants to use us as hostages in whatever evil deed he is contemplating, to prevent the authorities from destroying the ship."

"I have no doubt that your theory is partly correct," Doc replied. "We shall all be free of the jackets quickly. But I think we should wait a good opportunity for a surprise attack."

The girl Lanta stood erect. Murmured expressions came from the men still on the iron grating.

"She's a regular knockout," remarked Ham. He had always been susceptible to the beauty of women.

Doc was loosening the contrivance holding Monk's jacket. The apelike chemist let out a shrill hoot of disgust.

"You bet she's a knockout," he proclaimed. "She'd probably knock you out with your own pig-sticker, if you hadn't lost it. I'm keeping an eye on her."

Monk kept his eye upon her. It was not as baleful as his talk. All the men could see this slender, lovely girl was something above the average. Zoro's announcement she was a princess seemed to be proved.

Lanta had calm dignity. Her head was held regally.

Caulkins briefly praised Doc's resourcefulness when his own jacket was loosened. The bronze man's hand unhooked the garment imprisoning Cassalano. The collar seemed to catch at the mineralogist's throat.

Cassalano let out a sudden shrill squawk of pain. The ship was moving in utter silence. The hissing rush of its former speed was absent. Feet scuffled on the deck above. Doc promptly clamped a firm hand over his mouth. The bronze man said nothing.

The single light bulb winked out. Cassalano gulped and sputtered. Caulkins uttered a short oath.

"What are you trying to do?" he snapped.

Cassalano's tongue was freed by Doc. His low tone was now abject.

"The contrivance pinched my neck," he mumbled. "I'm sorry."

DOC SAVAGE had come to his feet. His fingers searched. He discovered he still had some of the small gas capsules. Also he found a pair of the tiny explosive grenades in a hidden recess. These were small as large pills. Little levers were on the sides.

Yet one of these would have been sufficient to tear out the side of the ship. Doc held a grenade between thumb and fingers.

“Remain quiet, every one,” he cautioned. “Perhaps the light was put out for some other reason. I don’t believe the cry was heard. We are in the Columbia River. The ship is creeping along the north shore on the State of Washington side.”

The bronze man had not even glanced toward the porthole.

“How could you know that?” questioned Caulkins. “Everything seems the same to me. It’s like we were in a big coffin.”

“The wind is from the south,” advised Doc. “It brings the odors of the salmon canneries at Old Astoria. The ship had scraped muddy bottom on tide flats. These are on the north shore. We are nearing the sloughs and marshes in the vicinity of the lumber cities of Longview and Kelso.”

“What are we waiting for?” growled Renny. He had arisen. His oaken arms were flexed. His enormous fists were clenched. The giant engineer had several scores he wanted to settle. Given the word, he would have swung to the upper deck alone.

“Yeah!” chimed in Monk. “I wanta find out what them heathens’s made out of! Just lemme get my hands on half a dozen of ’em!”

“It would be wiser to wait,” advised Doc. “Perhaps it would be best for us to hide for a time in another part of the ship.”

The bronze man had a clear idea. The mysterious Zoro must have a definite objective. The Columbia River region had been his goal. Doc reasoned the stealing of Captain Jarnagin’s ship was connected with this. Zoro must have the intention of loading the vessel with some sort of cargo.

Perhaps his own glasslike cylinder had little cargo space. If this were true, Zoro needed the *Narwhal*. Doc judged his intention was to convey whatever the load might be to some more remote place. Then it could be stored and removed at Zoro’s convenience.

Doc’s theory later proved to be correct. And for the moment, the bronze man deliberately delayed escape or attack. He desired to know more.

“Keep all of the jackets in place,” Doc suggested. “But be prepared to drop them instantly. The ship is about to land.”

Caulkins and Cassalano followed this advice. Doc’s own men heeded the suggestion, but reluctantly. All were aching for an opportunity to even things up with Zoro.

Again the hull of the ship scraped. It was sandy bottom. The vessel was pulled through this by invisible force.

The dim light bulb flashed on again. Zoro’s men had made no movement toward the lower hold. Apparently they had not heard Cassalano’s cry. In comparison with the reeking darkness, the light now seemed brilliant.

Monk was the first to exclaim. Doc had noticed the same thing. He had said nothing. His only sign had been the whirlpool of light in his flaky gold eyes.

“Dag-gonit!” Monk squealed. “I told you! I don’t trust any woman, ’specially that one! Now she’s doublecrossed us! We’d better be gettin’ outta here, Doc!”

LANTA had disappeared. In the darkness they had heard no movement. But the girl was gone. A swift exploration of the cramped space of the after hold revealed nothing.

Doc Savage was smiling slightly. He said nothing.

With noiseless movement he was beside the open porthole. Miles away across the broad Columbia the lights of Old Astoria twinkled. The riding lamps of vessels showed where they were anchored in midstream.

The *Narwhal* ceased to move. The mushy docking indicated the ship was on a marshy shore. The air reeked with the stale, rancid odors of barren tide flats. The lighthouse on the point at the mouth of the wide river winked intermittently.

Doc had a fair view of the shore line from the porthole. Something gleamed dully in the darkness a quarter of a mile below the ship. Eyes less keen than Doc’s would not have noticed it.

The bronze man saw figures arriving on shore. They were coming directly from the river below the ship. In single file they moved toward the *Narwhal*. They numbered at least two score.

Doc retreated from the porthole. He spoke in a low voice.

“Zoro has arrived at his destination,” he advised. “We are about to have visitors. Remain quiet. Every one be sure the jackets appear untouched.”

The bronze man concealed his hands in the acid-rended folds of his own metallic garment. The deck hatchway had opened. Zoro’s voice could be heard directing his men. He was speaking now in the obscure language.

“It might be ancient Tibetan, or even something of the old Egyptian,” murmured Johnny. His knowledge of extinct races and languages was vast. Yet now he was uncertain.

Doc and his men had flattened themselves on the grating. As the men of Zoro swarmed around them, the bronze man complained.

“How much longer are we to be kept fastened like this?” he inquired. “My men and these others have had no food.”

It was like Doc not to mention his own possible hunger. Often he had gone for days without eating.

The Zoromen made no reply. Apparently they were in great awe of their leader. Several Zoromen seized Caulkins and Cassalano roughly. The metallic jackets were apparently still locked. The economist and mineralogist were hustled up through the hatchway.

Almost before the Zoromen had reached the deck, Doc was on his feet.

“Free yourselves quickly and hide,” he advised. “I believe you will find a door through the bulkhead to the boiler room. That probably will be the best place. Wait word from me.”

The bronze man was climbing the steel plates of the hull. Though these were smooth except for the rivet heads, Doc's fingers found holds. Another small hatchway gave access to the deck. Doc discovered this to be unlocked.

The bronze man glided into the deep shadows along the housing.

ZORO was standing beside the gangplank. This had been pushed to a high spot on the shore. Two of his men brought Caulkins and Cassalano to him. Their metallic jackets had fallen from their shoulders without having been touched by the Zoromen.

Zoro betrayed no great surprise.

"Reports of this Doc Savage have been confirmed," he said calmly. "Return and seize all of them quickly."

Half a dozen Zoromen disappeared through the hatchway. Shortly they returned. They reported the bronze man and his companions had vanished.

"We will find them later," announced Zoro. "They cannot escape. Place a guard around all of the deck. Watch the shore. We cannot be delayed."

More than two score Zoromen were available after the guard had been placed. So close had the watch been set, no person could have left the *Narwhal*.

Lights played upon three concrete buildings. These were windowless and set low in the ground. Evidently they were mere excavations roofed over.

While Zoro had been setting the guard, half a dozen of his men had vanished ashore. For a brief interval the weird music of the death flutes enveloped the small structure. The figure of a man, evidently a watchman, leaped into view from one of the buildings.

Another man followed closely. Each held a revolver in his hand. The first man lifted his weapon and fired at a shadowy form. The bullet went wild. It impinged ringingly on the hull of the ship.

The eerie music continued. The watchman ran only a few more steps. The revolver flew from his hand. He slid on his face in the mud of the marsh. The second man apparently had not the strength to use his weapon. He sat down suddenly on the runway constructed between the buildings and the shore. Then he wilted limply.

The isolated location of the low concrete buildings was quickly explained. Lights from the ship flared upon small signs on each structure. These were of red paint on white boards:

DANGER! HIGH EXPLOSIVES!
KEEP AWAY!

Trinitromite Chemical Corporation.

Keys taken from the watchmen quickly opened the doors sunken in pitted spaces. Zoro ordered the bodies of the watchmen dumped into the marsh. They sank immediately into the oozy mud.

Clearly the weird music of the flutes on this occasion had been of the lethal variety. The two watchmen had died quickly.

Two score or more Zoromen formed a double row. Small, compact cases passed from hand to hand. These were being placed in upper cabins of the *Narwhal*.

Doc Savage observed the taking aboard of this cargo from various points about the deck. The bronze man eluded Zoro's guard with ease. He could have left the ship at any time. Instead, he darted from cabin to cabin.

He spent several minutes in a double stateroom that apparently had been occupied by Caulkins and Cassalano. The economist and the mineralogist were being held on the deck while the cargo was being brought aboard.

But the girl Lanta had not come to the scientists' cabin. Nor was she to be found in any of the other staterooms. Doc had left no cranny of the upper portion of the vessel unsearched. His hunt was accomplished though Zoro's guard was as alert as men might be in fear of the quarry they were set to watch.

The bronze man made no effort to interfere with Zoro's purpose. Though this was one objective, Doc believed the silvery-skinned chief had another.

Only the whereabouts of Lanta had him mystified.

Chapter 11

CAPTIVES OF LANTA

MONK growled from the grimy depths of a coal bin. His sloping forehead and hairy face appeared briefly. The black smudges of dust only added to his homeliness.

“Leave it to that dag-goned shyster to pick out a place like this,” he grumbled. “I’m danged near strangled!”

Ham himself grinned at Monk through a black mask. The lawyer had followed Doc’s directions. The five men were concealed in the half-filled coal bins of the boiler room. Though the *Narwhal* had made an amazing voyage, its fire had died down.

“How much longer have we gotta wait to smash them fellows?” was Renny’s complaint. A rime of coal dust also coated his lugubrious face. It made him appear more solemn than ever.

“Anyway, the ship’s on her way again,” observed Long Tom. “Now I wouldn’t be surprised if we paid a visit to the equator. I could use some food myself.”

“Dag-gonit!” groaned Monk. “I was tryin’ to forget that!”

Zoro had seemed supremely confident that Doc Savage was powerless to combat him. His setting of the guard had been plainly only for the purpose of preventing escape. Apparently he thought that all of the bronze man’s weapons had been removed.

Doc and his men were not aware of it, but some of the devices that had been aboard the plane near the Aleutians were in Zoro’s hands. As the *Narwhal* moved away from shore into the Columbia, the earth near by trembled slightly. The shock was communicated to the hull of the ship.

Johnny spoke disgustedly. “Ever since this expedition was promulgated we have been the subject of subterranean manifestations. It has been just one earthquake after another.”

As the ship left the shore, Doc Savage was in perhaps the most secure place he could possibly have been. From this he could clearly see all of the space of the *Narwhal*’s upper decks. Apparently Caulkins and Cassalano had been placed in one of the cabins. Perhaps they had been returned to the lower hold.

Zoro called his guard. The majority of the Zoromen who had aided in loading the cargo of trinitromite had vanished when the earth had trembled. They were not aboard the ship. Zoro issued instructions. His voice carried clearly to Doc.

“Seize Doc Savage,” instructed the silvery-skinned leader. “When you have him, for the others you can play the death music. Find Princess Lanta and bring her to me. There is no reason for our playing a double game any longer. Once we have obtained the explosive weapons to accompany this new force, we shall return immediately to our own country.”

Half a dozen Zoromen flitted through the hatchway into the hold of the ship. The *Narwhal* was making its way toward the mouth of the Columbia. Its speed was greater

now than during its arrival. The ship was beginning to make hissing progress through the calm inner river.

The bronze man was looking down upon the deck. Zoro had a few of his men drawn into a group. They were conversing in the unknown tongue. Doc fingered one of the tiny grenades. He replaced it in its pocket.

Too well he knew the destructive force of trinitromite. The world had not yet been given this new and ultrapowerful explosive. With the boxes of the trinitromite had been loaded two score smaller cases. Doc knew these contained the special concussion caps required to set off the new chemical element.

If he had attempted to wreck the ship in the river with the tiny grenade, the resultant explosion would have blown it to atoms. Only by the concussion caps could the trinitromite be set off. The main chemical composition was impervious to heat. Even the shock of an explosion would not have set it off.

But the grenade would have touched off the concussion caps. And these in turn would have released the greater force.

While the Zoromen with their death flutes were searching the lower hold, Doc pondered the recent strange words of Zoro. The leader had said it was time to end the double game between himself and Lanta. The complete disappearance of the girl hinted at some form of connivance. Surely she would have been apprehended. The bronze man himself had been unable to discover her hiding place.

DOC was concealed in a lookout crow's nest placed near the top of the forward radio mast. This was a boxlike affair. It had been put there, without doubt, for observations to be made by scientists in the Arctic seas.

The *Narwhal's* speed again was approximating that with which it had first come to the Columbia River. Lights of Old Astoria moved past. Almost immediately, the staunch steel vessel was leaving the river. Other, ordinary ships would have required an hour for the passage to the inner bar.

Though the south wind was light, it became a tearing blast. The terrific force swayed the radio mast. The *Narwhal* rode evenly. Doc now could see that the bow of the ship was drawn deep in the sea. It was as if a powerful cable had been attached to some invisible monster of the deeper ocean.

Spray lashed the forward deck. Its briny drops were flung over the radio mast in the darkness. They had the impact of small pebbles. Doc shielded his flaky gold eyes. The ship now had crossed the outer bar. The polar star showed the bronze man the ship was bearing directly into the north.

Neither sight nor hearing told Doc he was not alone on the radio mast. Though the space below him was shrouded in darkness and thickly strung with ropes and wires, the bronze man could feel the approach of a stealthy climber.

Suddenly the climber was talking. The rush of the wind was high and shrill. The voice was only an indistinct murmur. Doc had an idea. He touched the second and third buttons of the radio receiver close to his body. Some mishap had occurred. The device failed to respond.

Doc produced one of the anæsthetic capsules and waited. His position was such he could not see below the crow's nest in which he had crouched. His only view was over the edge to the deck below. The voice close under him ceased talking.

At this instant a cry resounded in the wind. Zoromen were rushing along the deck. They were coming toward the radio mast. Doc produced a second gas capsule and waited. In order to subdue the climber, he judged he had best crush the gas capsule against the mast. The other he held ready to drop to the deck.

Lights flashed around the base of the mast. One of the Zoromen lay huddled motionless. His silver skin glowed oddly. He had been stripped of his loose magnetic belt with all of its devices.

"Doc Savage got him," announced Zoro. "I know now where he is. Swing the light upward."

The bronze man was looking directly into the beam. His bronzed features were plainly revealed to Zoro. The light also enabled Doc to get the first glimpse of his stalker.

The girl Lanta was clinging to the mast. In one slender hand she was gripping the handle of a long-pointed knife. This seemed to be of some obsidian substance. It had the shine of some great dull gem in the light beam. It was almost the same character of weapon as used by the ancient Mayans.

Doc swung lithely over the edge of the crow's nest. Below the climbing girl supporting ropes were stretched toward the deck. The bronze man released his body as if he were falling. The girl's eyes were looking at him. They held a terrified, desperate light.

Zoromen cried out. The giant body of the bronze man was hurtling down upon them from the high mast. The speed of the ship had given Doc greater impetus. Apparently he was about to be crushed.

One bronze hand flashed out. Doc's fingers touched one of the ropes. To have gripped it tightly would have exerted strain enough to have torn an arm from its socket. The man of bronze performed an amazing feat. The palm of his hand acted as a brake along the slanting rope.

The hempen cord actually smoked for a few feet. Then Doc was swinging over the deck supported by the one hand. From below immediately floated the weird strains of the death flutes.

DOC saw the gleaming obsidian knife flash in Lanta's hand.

In an instant the death music had ceased abruptly. Minute fragments of thin glass were sprayed about the deck where Zoromen had been grouped. Some with flutes still in their hands appeared to suddenly fall asleep.

The anæsthetic gas had taken quick effect. The place where the Zoromen had stood was sheltered by the high prow of the *Narwhal* from the rush of the wind. Doc had no need to hold his own breath. The air around him was swaying his body. None of the gas could reach him or the girl on the radio mast.

The bronze man loosened his hand and dropped to the deck. The mighty sinews of his legs cushioned the impact. He saw that three of the Zoromen had escaped the gas.

Doc was upon them with a single leap.

One man he gripped, but the two others eluded him with light movement. They were using their belts. The quick pressure of Doc's thumb on the spinal nerve was sufficient to render the first man unconscious.

The girl Lanta had descended the mast. Doc caught a glimpse of her swiftly moving figure behind him. He whipped around. Lanta was wearing the belt of the Zoroman he had first seen crumbled on the deck. Her great black-and-white eyes held an intense gleam.

Doc would have seized the girl, but he saw she was not looking at him. She was past him so swiftly and lightly she appeared to be gliding without weight. Then the bronze man saw her objective.

Caulkins, the economist, and Cassalano, the mineralogist, lay inert close to the deckhouse. They had been taken out of the metallic jackets. It was apparent the anæsthetic gas had overcome them but they had been some distance from where the capsules had fallen.

As Doc noticed them, both men began moving slightly. Cassalano was attempting to regain his feet. The pudgy man was on his knees. His small, bright eyes were blinking. His double chin trembled.

"Don't let her——" he was moaning.

Lanta had hurled herself upon him. The pointed obsidian knife struck downward at the mineralogist's throat. It seemed nothing could stop its descent. The eyes of Cassalano closed and he shrieked wildly.

The human eye could not have followed the movement of the bronze man's hand. He had lifted the girl from the deck. His fingers were meshed in the loose belt of the Zoroman she was wearing. The obsidian blade sheered across Cassalano's throat. A red trace sprang out in the soft, shrinking flesh. But only the skin had been scraped.

The girl cried out frantically, "You do not understand! All of them must die! It has been decreed!"

It was the first time the beautiful, mystic woman had displayed any violent emotion. Her calmness under great stress had been a source that had drawn the confidence of Doc Savage. Now she seemed more than mad.

From a companionway five men were rushing out. The massive figure of Renny and the queerly loping bulk of Monk led in the attack.

"Howlin' calamities!" squealed Monk. "I told you that female couldn't be trusted! Take them other devils apart!"

But the only two conscious Zoromen eluded them maddeningly.

DOC was still holding the quivering form of the girl. She stared at him. A sob fluttered from her red lips. Renny was bellowing with rage. He had almost trapped one of the Zoromen. The silvery-skinned man floated away from him. Renny's smashing fist cracked one whole panel out of the deck housing.

Doc was releasing the girl. She had let him take the obsidian knife without resisting. Her wide eyes turned from him out to the sea. She had the expression of one

who is listening intently.

The rushing speed of the *Narwhal* suddenly ceased. The ship was rolling only to the impulse of the ocean swells. Its much-abused hull swung broadside to the waves. With a sickening lurch, it went into the trough of the sea.

Lanta stood motionless. She was as beautiful as a carved statue. A figure in silver and gold. The metallic belt covered her curving shoulders and hung to her waist. The remainder of her garb was of the golden cloth. This did not seem to have suffered any from the treatment it had been given. It, too, was of metallic stuff.

Now the *Narwhal* moved again. But it had changed direction. The bow was turned and pointed to the south. The girl's liquid voice cried out triumphantly.

“Crado has won! At last they've heard!”

The *Narwhal* slowed. The hull trembled. A jarring, grating sound swept the vessel from bow to stern. From two points, forward and aft, silvery-skinned men flooded onto the deck.

“Howlin' calamities!” squawked Monk. “I told you not to trust any woman!”

The big chemist was in the midst of the first arriving stream. His long arms reached. His shoulders hunched and snapped. Two heads cracked violently together. The silvery-skinned men dropped. Monk was reaching for two more.

Renny's coal-blackened face was as solemn as an undertaker's. His deep voice bellowed with joy. The big engineer was the most morose in appearance when he was happiest. He was happiest when his fists were swinging. And these oversize attachments were in fast action.

Half of the forward group of new arrivals were lying on the deck or attempting to regain their feet. Ham, Long Tom and Johnny were moving to meet the tide of attackers flowing from the after part of the deck.

Doc Savage alone had remained motionless. This was so unusual as to afford bewilderment to Ham who was the first to glance in his direction. The bronze man was watching the girl intently.

Suddenly two oversize pistols with drums appeared in the hands of the new raiders of the *Narwhal*. They were Doc's own supermachine pistols. The bronze man whipped toward these men. It was for this he apparently had been waiting.

Lanta's voice rang out peremptorily.

“Shoot for their legs! Their tunics are bulletproof!”

The two pistols erupted. Mercy bullets streamed across the deck. Doc knocked one weapon flying into the sea. But as he accomplished this, the corded legs collapsed under him. Three or four of the slugs had penetrated his skin.

Doc remained conscious only long enough to see his five men going down before the fusillade from the other pistol. He heard Monk's high complaint.

“Dag-gonit! I told you never to do that——”

The bronze man heard no more. His body seemed to have been lifted on an invisible wave.

Chapter 12

THE DEEPEST OCEAN

WHEN DOC slowly opened his eyes, his vision was greeted by a strange spectacle. He could see queer fish swimming around him. The walls between him and the amphibian creatures seemed to have no more substance than air.

Doc and his men were lying on some comfortable, cushioned substance. They were in a moving craft. But its walls were so transparent, all had the sense of being transported by magic.

“If you’ll drink this, Clark Savage, it will revive you quickly.”

The liquid voice of Lanta was speaking. She was holding a clear glass. This contained a white, milky liquor. The bronze man tasted it. It was pleasant and he swallowed some of it.

The effect was almost instantaneous. His head cleared. His companions had been similarly treated. All were half crouching on what seemed to be springy robes of metallic cloth. They were staring at the sloping walls around them.

Lanta’s beautiful features were now composed. Her lips smiled slightly.

“I regret exceedingly the methods, but I was forced to employ them,” she said calmly. “There was no other way. You are now aboard my own ship, or submarine as you probably would call it.”

Along the walls the translucent green of the ocean flowed by at terrific speed. Deep-sea fish and other denizens passed so swiftly they were merely distorted figures.

Doc Savage glanced about. They were in what seemed to be a middle compartment of a long, glassy cylinder. Whatever its motive power, the vessel glided without throbbing or vibration. Through transparent divisions, Doc could see multiple metal coils. There were a great number of what might have been magnified clock springs.

In the forward portion, many men could be seen moving about. Only two or three seemed to be engaged with the business of operating the peculiar craft. The operators were stationed in cubicles nearest the needlelike nose. A multiplicity of dials and levers were near these.

Doc discovered the air was pure, energizing. He heard the very faint hissing of escaping vapor. The craft was equipped with oxygen tanks of pipelike construction.

While the bronze man was looking at these, two silvery-skinned men appeared bringing food in glasslike vessels. The food seemed to be composed of a variety of roots and sprouts, all vegetables, but the odor was appetizing.

Monk viewed it with hungry, but suspicious eyes. Doc had not replied to Lanta’s statement. She stood waiting. His silence plainly was disturbing. The bronze man’s companions were not surprised at his delay in speaking.

They had long been accustomed to Doc’s habit of clearly envisioning any new situation before he voiced any opinion.

Monk accepted a vessel of the food with muttered complaint.

“Wouldn’t be surprised but what she’d poison us next,” he said. “Every time she gets a chance, she shoots us.”

But his hunger was greater than his doubt.

“I surmise we are your prisoners,” stated Doc at last. “You have left us free because you believe us to be powerless to escape. Perhaps you wouldn’t mind enlightening us now as to your purpose and as to where you are taking us?”

Lanta smiled slightly.

“Temporarily, you are prisoners—because of circumstance, but not in the sense your companions seem to imagine,” she said quietly. “It is only that I must have your help or many of my people will perish. When all have eaten, I shall return.”

WITH a swift, little movement she was gone. But in this queer, speeding cylinder her slender figure could still be seen moving among the men in the forward compartments. The girl had spoken to one of the men at the controls. Immediately the speed of the cylinder was lessened and passing objects became clearer.

Johnny lost all interest in the palatable food. The scholarly geologist had fixed his eyes on the passing scene. Even his long words were forgotten. The reason for this was partly that he was looking upon a life hitherto unseen by man.

Johnny was gasping mentally. Rarely had he ever seen anything for which he could not supply offhand the proper scientific name.

“We are at a greater depth than man has ever penetrated,” Johnny stated. “Very little of the fauna is recognizable. The very few I know have only been brought up by the deepest sea machinery. The pressure down here must be terrific. If this thing we’re in were to collapse we would be instantly crushed to jelly.”

Monster fish with broad heads appeared in schools. Only the light from the cylinder revealed them. The fish had no eyes. Others of grotesque shapes pressed close to the gliding wall. They had eyes set on knobs that retracted as they touched the vessel. These eyes glowed with phosphorescent illumination.

What appeared to be monster squid extended their tentacles. These were like long, curving tubes filled with purple neon light.

“If this crazy submarine fails us, I’d rather be crushed to jelly than be out there,” observed Long Tom. “Doc, there are electrical generators somewhere in this thing, but I can’t locate them.”

“I had noted currents of both high and low frequency,” stated Doc. “But the impulse is being drawn from some outside source rather than being generated within this craft.”

The cylinder was passing through what appeared to be a veritable undersea forest. The trees or plants waved gigantic fronds. In these were myriads of small fish of every color. Each of these fish had illuminated eyes.

Johnny had been looking around for some sort of depth recorder. There was none.

“We have no means of knowing how far down we are,” he observed. “But we must be as deep as the spot near the Friendly Islands. That has been sounded to a depth of more than six miles. No diving apparatus ever devised could resist the pressure.”

Doc had been making an inventory. Though he and his companions were under no physical restraint, his gas capsules, tiny grenades and other devices had been left intact.

Lanta suddenly reappeared. The craft again moved with great speed.

“I HAD CRADO slow down to enable you to look about,” the girl explained. “Now we must be hastening to our destination. I am choosing a passage which I hope will frustrate Zoro’s pursuit.”

The calm statement was a surprise even to Doc Savage. Lanta seemed to read a question in the silence.

“The iron ship called the *Narwhal* is unharmed,” the girl said. Then she added, “If I had possessed the means, it would have been destroyed; but my enemies pressed me too closely. Those who are now with me are my own adherents, the loyal subjects of my father, King Lumos. We were forced to flee to the greatest depths. We escaped only because Zoro would not abandon the explosive force on the iron ship.”

“And of what use would this cargo of trinitromite be among the advanced developments of science very apparent in your kingdom?” inquired Doc Savage. “Your radio and television and the death flutes prove your land has in some manner outstripped investigation in other parts of the world. You have a language of your own we have never heard. Yet all of your people employ English as if you were born to speak it.”

Lanta smiled. “You are a most wonderful person, Clark Savage. All these things shall be explained. Explosive force is all that our kingdom has lacked. Rather it has been the force from which our land has been preserved. We have no such weapons, and my father, the king, has wanted none.”

“Holy cow!” ejaculated Renny. “You hear that!”

“Howlin’ calamities!” shrilled Monk. “She keeps shootin’ us all the time, then she tells us her people don’t want guns! If they’re like her they’d go around shootin’ each other up!”

Except for that one outburst when she had tried to knife Cassalano aboard the *Narwhal*, Lanta had proved herself a calm person. She smiled sweetly upon Monk. The homely chemist looked away and twisted his ungainly, hairy hands.

“I’m telling you the truth, Clark Savage,” she said. “My land wants none of these explosive weapons with which terrible wars are made. Zoro now has them. My father, King Lumos, needs your help. And you are right, your man with the funny face I like, but I found it necessary to have you shot with the mercy bullets to save your lives. You will find my land much different from your own. It lacks many things you have.”

“Ah,” spoke up Ham, with a pleased eye upon the princess. “If your land only has trees, it will be all right with Monk. He will be able perhaps to meet some of his immediate ancestors.”

“There are no trees, learned one,” spoke Lanta, “inside the world.”

“Did you mean inside the world?” Ham gasped.

“Hooley!” exploded Renny. “Doc, can’t we have this crazy sub reversed? Nobody could ever get inside the world!”

As they were speaking, the progress of the strange craft had changed. While its speed did not seem lessened, a jarring vibration was running along the glasslike cylinder. It was much the same as the earth trembling which had been puzzling all geologists.

Lanta spoke quietly. "We have not discovered a means of making trees grow inside the world as yet. Perhaps some day we shall."

"Inside the world?" howled Monk. "Doc, whassay we call it a day and go home! I've been sure all the time you couldn't trust a woman who——"

Johnny interrupted. "The observation of the princess is indubitably correct," he said quietly. "Through hitherto unachieved translucency, I am enabled to deduce that we have already unaccountably arrived in the midst of the tertiary period of time. It is more clearly elucidated as Cenozoic time or the era when mammals first appeared on the surface of the earth. Among these were the mastodonic group, the anthropoid and——"

"Some of Monk's closest relatives," put in Ham, but his heart wasn't in the statement.

That now flowing by the vibrating cylinder was no longer water. The craft was being drawn downward under the floor of the ocean. It did not appear to be progressing by any power of its own.

"I have suspected this for some time," stated Doc Savage. "But it seemed too incredible to be believed. I knew this, or another craft like it, passed through the earth to reach the glacier back of Vancouver. It also was true we passed under the mountains to reach the sea near the Aleutians."

Chapter 13

THROUGH THE EARTH

“HOLY cow!” exploded Renny. “We’ll be roasted alive! Doc, can’t we do something?”

Doc said nothing. He was looking intently at the construction of what undoubtedly was being proved to be a craft that would penetrate the earth. Any person would have expected such a machine to be some form of gigantic boring instrument. This was only a cylinder of the smoothest glassy material.

“The big one need have no fear,” spoke Lanta. The calmness of the princess almost matched that of the bronze man. Her little smile was reassuring. It was more than that to the susceptible Ham.

“The Kingdom of Subterranea is in possession of many secrets of which the outer world knows nothing,” Lanta continued. “I cannot reveal most of these. Only the Society of Planners may know them in each generation. Among these are maps of passages which avoid both the intense fires and the strata of unbreakable stones.”

The pointed cylinder was literally flowing through solid rock. Some emanation from the craft seemed to liquefy the hardest layers. Through the walls the passing view was like choppy waves of many colors. Johnny’s magnifying monocle was tightly held in his eye. He always carried a couple of spares.

“Brothers, I am devastatingly flabbergasted!” he exclaimed. “We already have passed through the tertiary period, which was next to the appearance of man. We have entered Mesozoic time!”

Long Tom was not given to humor. He drawled solemnly, “As for me, if I ever get back to Daylight Saving time it’ll be plenty good enough for me.”

Johnny paid no attention. His geologist’s soul forgot all peril.

“We are in the second age revealed by mountain strata and excavation,” he continued. “If we were proceeding more slowly doubtless we would see the buried skeletons of great reptiles. This was the age when Gymnosperms predominated in all vegetable life. It was the period when reptiles had wings and could fly.”

Monk was looking at Princess Lanta from under his gristly, jutting brows. He tried to make his face strongly disapproving of that self-possessed young woman. But since she had remarked he was the funny-looking man she liked, his demeanor had softened.

“Dag-gonit, I’d like to have a pair of wings!” he muttered. “An’ all of us are going to have some we can’t use. I told you never to trust——”

“Are you forbidden to disclose the character of power with which we are being propelled?” inquired Doc Savage. “Perhaps I have already guessed much.”

“DOUBTLESS my father will impart all of our secrets to you, Clark Savage,” replied Princess Lanta. Her liquid voice had a different note when she spoke to the bronze man.

Her gaze lingered on his clear-cut, handsome face. His flaky gold eyes seemed to hypnotize her. They had this effect on every one.

“I can tell you,” she added, “that we are employing natural magnetic power. The inside world has deposits of magnetic substance perhaps ten thousand times greater in force than the magnetism of the outer earth. The inner deposits are closest to the surface at what you call the polar points. This creates a slight attraction by which you operate compasses and other instruments.”

Doc’s slow nod affirmed her explanation and his own deduction.

“Then,” he said, “you have some remarkably produced electrical energy. I have not determined how it is applied, but it is evident in the waves it is causing in the firmer strata. And it has been this force striking deposits of quartz and silicon which has caused what we have believed to be earthquakes.”

Princess Lanta showed open admiration for the bronze man’s profound conclusions.

“That is correct,” agreed Princess Lanta. “Probably my father, King Lumos, will need to inform you of little. Your companions are astounded. They do not understand what we are able to command. This should not disturb them. After all, you control vast electrical force on the earth’s surface. You have learned to apply it in many wonderful ways. Yet your most learned scientists have never been able to define exactly what electricity consists of.”

Doc Savage nodded. He said nothing. Never before had he encountered a woman who could think so clearly.

“Neither do we know the substance of either electricity or its companion force magnetism,” continued Princess Lanta. “But where you must generate, or rather collect such power by machinery, we have been given it in another form in the Kingdom of Subterranae.”

“In what form, if that is not one of the secrets?” inquired Doc. Then he smiled slightly. “Suppose I say you have electrical energy stored in mineral deposits of a substance which serves as vast storage batteries? Billions of volts of electricity are constantly being discharged from the outer atmosphere in the earth. Possibly this terrific force is naturally harnessed in these inner strata. Your people have found the means of releasing and applying it.”

Princess Lanta’s slim, silvery hands waved.

“Your deduction is both amazing and correct, Clark Savage,” she exclaimed. “The scholarly one is absorbed.” She gestured toward Johnny. “I will have Crado reduce our speed so that he may observe more closely. Only I have the earth detector set to avert the near approach of Zoro’s Universal Ship, if he should be pursuing us.”

The man called Crado was summoned by Princess Lanta. He was a match for Doc Savage and Renny in size. His black-and-white eyes were widely set under a high forehead. He held himself proudly.

“Clark Savage, this is Crado,” spoke Princess Lanta. “He is the chief of the Society of Planners. Also he is the commander of my father’s loyal forces.”

Crado inclined his head slightly. At Lanta’s direction, he issued a command through his tunic radio. The glassy cylinder slowed instantly. It continued to move as if the

hardest rock strata were of no resistance.

JOHNNY took a position closer to the glassy wall. Outside, the earth was revealed in definite layers. These were much the same as are to be seen in the broken strata of the highest mountains. In mountainous regions where upheavals have occurred, the strata is tilted and much broken. Here it remained intact.

Johnny shortened a word, which proved his absorption.

“The Uni-Ship,” he called it, “now has entered Paleozoic time.”

“The Uni-Ship,” repeated Princess Lanta. “That is a better and shorter name in your language. We have in our tongue a word for each object, which also is short. The Kingdom of Subterranae had perfected radio communication years before it became known on the surface. With it, we learned of your language and customs. Our people made a study of it. My father believed that some time our peoples should meet. So all of our kingdom uses the English and some of your other languages.”

“Your father, the king, must have great wisdom,” suggested Doc Savage. “He has passed along his inheritance of knowledge.”

Princess Lanta said, “King Lumos is very old in your measurement of time in years. He and my mother, Queen Salano, are very near what you would term two hundred.”

Renny grunted in plain unbelief. Johnny was talking again.

“It is clearly disclosed,” he said. “There are evidences of the Paleozoic era. There is nothing to indicate the presence of birds, mammals or angiosperms. This was the first age of insects, fishes and amphibians. Deep as we are, this was once the ocean bed.”

Outside seemed to appear a wall of glittering beauty. The eyes of Doc’s companions were dazzled.

“A region of opals,” pointed Johnny. “And we are several miles beneath the surface. Yet we have encountered no great heat.”

“This passage avoids the molten fire,” said Princess Lanta. “But we have passed through intense heat. The Universal Ship is impervious to temperature changes.”

Johnny was showing great interest in the ease with which the Uni-Ship proceeded.

“Brothers,” he said, “it doesn’t seem possible. We are traveling through a strata of the carbonates. The hardest of all substances except pure carbon. Chalcedony, flint and jasper are present in abundance. From something like this came the great diamond we _____”

Doc interrupted. “You sent us the carbon in the casket, Princess Lanta. For what purpose?”

“That you might understand something of what Zoro is planning to give to the world outside,” said Princess Lanta. “He would—but Zoro has discovered the passage! We are being pursued! Crado, more speed!”

DOC and his companions followed the direction of Princess Lanta’s gaze. A small silver ball which hung suspended inside a transparent globe was oscillating rapidly. The movement was up and down.

Crado's order started the Uni-Ship into faster motion. Johnny grunted disgustedly, but he could still catch glimpses which enabled him to define their surroundings.

The Uni-Ship sliced through beds of mica, a silicate of aluminum and potash. This passed by in huge, unfolding leaves. Lanta spoke quickly to Crado.

"Leave the passage," she directed. "Perhaps Zoro will be unable to deflect his course to follow."

The Uni-Ship immediately took on a more lateral direction. The sharp point was now smashing through a brittle strata. Johnny identified this as hornblende and pyrozone, composed of calcium, magnesium and iron.

This area was succeeded by walls of what appeared as green glass against the moving wall of the Uni-Ship.

"Chrysolite," Johnny informed the others. "Silicate of magnesium, talc or serpentine. It's hydrous and easy to penetrate."

The Uni-Ship was indeed passing through as if it were a submarine in the depths of the sea.

"Look at this, Doc," Johnny suddenly exclaimed. "We must be a few hundred miles down, but the rocks are calcareous. And they are like those discovered in only two places on the surface. They are in the Travertine of Tivoli, near Rome, and in Gardiners River, in the region of Yellowstone Park."

"I had noted it," said Doc Savage. "It would seem the oceans must have gradually built the land from great depths. It might even somewhat upset the theory that the earth was originally a molten ball of fire. It indicates shellfish and coral have been buried in seas hundreds of miles deep. Scientists have been able to study only about eight thousand feet of the earth's crust. And this strata is composed of the minute shellfish known as rhizopods."

Before the bronze man had ceased speaking, the Uni-Ship was completely shrouded in a flowing black substance. The strata was vast. The Uni-Ship was making great speed. But the black substance surrounded it for several minutes.

"If some of the oil companies only had access to this!" exclaimed Johnny. "We are in the greatest reservoir of graphite, coal and oil ever remaining undiscovered. The supply is inexhaustible. If only we could——"

Beside the earth detector a radio diaphragm suspended on a single metal cord started hissing. Princess Lanta spoke a few words into Crado's ear. The king's command issued an order.

The Uni-Ship began dropping at such speed the outside earth became only a blur. Princess Lanta was watching another row of indicators set in the middle of a transparent tube.

"Seven points over, Crado!" she commanded. Her voice had become crisp. Her composure was gone.

The Uni-Ship ceased its smooth penetration. For several seconds it vibrated as if it had at last encountered a strata which even its strangely stored electrical waves could not shatter.

“Look, Doc!” Johnny shouted. “There’s the answer! That’s carbon, hundreds of feet of it! The earth never saw a diamond!”

The strata beyond the wall gave forth glistening light reflected from the illumination of the Uni-Ship.

“You are right, scholarly one,” calmly announced Princess Lanta. “It is of what you call diamonds. It is carbon. It is the only mineral the Universal Ships cannot break through. Our passages are mapped around these. Zoro is closely pursuing.”

DOC SAVAGE looked intently at Princess Lanta. His flaky gold eyes stirred with little whirlwinds.

“You believe he would have aboard his Uni-Ship some or all of the trinitromite,” he stated calmly. “You say he does not know the mapped passages well.”

Princess Lanta smiled faintly.

“Generations were required by the Society of Planners to map passages around the fields of carbonite which lie very close to the surface of the Kingdom of Subterranae,” she replied. “I believe Zoro would bring the explosive force with him. If he should strike the carbon, it would end the menace of the Land of Beyond.”

It was the first mention Lanta had made of a Land of Beyond.

“Howlin’ calamities!” shrilled Monk. “I told you a woman like her would be the _____”

“Listen,” admonished Doc. “I would say Zoro is rapidly overtaking our Uni-Ship.”

The vibration of the earth around them became a distinct hissing noise. Almost abruptly, the speed of Lanta’s Uni-Ship diminished. It was apparent Zoro was coming very near.

“Had you considered, Princess Lanta, the possibility of Zoro striking the diamond field and causing a tremendous explosion?” inquired Doc. “The setting off of the concussion caps and the trinitromite possibly would wreck your own Uni-Ship.”

“That is possible,” replied Lanta calmly. “I could hope that even this might happen. It would be better that Zoro and the few of us should be destroyed than that he reach the Kingdom of Subterranae.”

“Good gosh!” gasped Monk. “And she said she liked my funny face! What a nice, friendly sort of a woman!”

Chapter 14

IN SUBTERRANAE

“HOLY cow!” ejaculated Renny. “We’re goin’ down an’ we come up!”

The giant engineer’s understanding of physics was topsy-turvy. The Uni-Ship of Princess Lanta had, of course, entered the earth’s crust in a downward direction. This had been quickly lost. All pull of gravitation had been absent from the interior of the Uni-Ship.

So suddenly it had brought gasps of amazement from Doc’s companions, the Uni-Ship had emerged from underground. Kenny’s phrase had been descriptive of what had happened. At the instant the walls of the magnetic craft were suffused with a brilliant purple light, Lanta had herself flitted into the forward compartment.

New controls had been swung. One second the Uni-Ship was boring through the earth. The next it was rising from the ground.

“We have arrived in the Kingdom of Subterranae,” announced Crado calmly. “You will discover here that gravitation applies the same as on the world’s surface. We have thousands of square miles of space. Perhaps our gravity is more centrifugal force, but you will find it much the same as outer atmospheric pressure.”

“Dag-gonit!” moaned Monk. “How’s a fellow to know whether he’s standin’ on his head or his feet?”

“There would hardly be any appreciable difference, even if you were swinging by a tail,” replied Ham.

“You crazy shyster!” howled Monk. “If they raise any pigs down here, I’ll warn them to lock ’em up!”

The verbal feud of Monk and Ham had originated in an incident in the World War which had involved the framing upon Ham of the theft of some army hams.

Princess Lanta returned from the forward compartment. They had escaped catastrophe when she had attempted to trick Zoro into crashing into the field of carbonite. Whether she had succeeded, they had no means of knowing.

“Welcome, Clark Savage, to the Kingdom of Subterranae!” exclaimed Princess Lanta. “May the visit of you and your learned companions be pleasant and profitable!”

The bronze man smiled and inclined his head. He said nothing.

“An’ when does the shootin’ begin?” Monk muttered almost inaudibly.

THE UNI-SHIP flashed into the air over the visible expanse of Subterranae. For several minutes, Doc and the others were intrigued by this strange inner world.

In many respects the land resembled any countryside of the outer earth. Rounded patches of green dotted the region for many miles. Beside these apparent patches of vegetables and grain were glistening reservoirs.

One reservoir bubbled constantly. It was being fed by some underground stream. Ditches ran between the rows of plants.

“Your food is produced by irrigation,” stated Doc.

“Yes, as we have no rain,” replied Princess Lanta. “Our water comes from what you would call artesian wells. Lacking sunlight, there is no evaporation of moisture. The air is wholly dry. Our people have poreless skins. Because of that, we suffered some while we were in the outer world. Perhaps we could not survive in your warmer climates.”

The Uni-Ship floated. Crado cruised slowly. Doc observed two columns hundreds of feet in height. They resembled immense tubes filled with neon light. This produced a purplish glow.

In this light the faces of Crado and Lanta no longer had the sheen of silver. They seemed to have become of a normal whiteness. This only added to the girl’s beauty.

“Great gosh!” ejaculated Renny. “You fellows look like ghosts!”

He was staring at his companions. Their faces had taken on a ghastly, corpselike pallor. Only the features of Doc Savage were different.

Doc noticed that his bronze hands were like glowing copper. His face had taken the same hue. The sleek hair was like beaten gold.

“I had been wondering what we were going to use for breathing when we arrived,” commented Johnny. “Yet the plant life indicates the presence of the same elements as in our own atmosphere.”

“It is our solar system, scholarly one,” said Princess Lanta. “Your outer atmosphere creates gravity. We also have the same character of air. Contrary to the belief of many of your scientists, the earth’s crust is only a few hundred miles in thickness. Here our vegetable and other life has set up the same oxygen renewal and the nitrogen and hydrogen gases to be found in the outside world.”

“And Crado tells us,” observed Doc, “that what answers for gravity on the earth’s surface may be supplied by centrifugal force on the inside.”

“Anyway, you couldn’t fall out of the inside of a ball,” put in the practical Renny. “I’m going to get a line on this solar system.”

He figured he would add to his far-reaching knowledge of engineering. Renny had built many bridges, tunnels and other achievements to his credit. But a solar system was a new one.

THE UNI-SHIP quickly arrived over a city that glistened with many towers and turrets in the purple light of the tall columns. The buildings were on a smaller scale, but much resembled the architecture in the more modern sections of the outer world’s greatest cities.

Doc judged the city must house more than a million inhabitants. This was confirmed by Lanta. This, she said was the governing city of Manyon. The place of the palace where King Lumos and Queen Salano ruled over the Kingdom of Subterranea.

“And there is the king’s palace,” directed Princess Lanta.

Doc Savage had already guessed it. The palace was a series of low towers constructed in the form of octagons. They were dazzling with glasslike mica and with inset plaques that shone like burnished gold.

From the center of the palace arose a spikelike tower. The reflected light from this was equal to that streaming from the solar towers.

“Looks as if the king had a sun all his own,” commented Long Tom. “Of what material is the tower, would you say, Doc?”

“I’ll leave it to Johnny to tell you,” remarked the bronze man.

Johnny’s face was a study in bewilderment.

“It couldn’t be, Doc—honestly,” he said breathlessly. “I was ready to swallow that one you left with the Scotch inspector, but a tower—a whole tower, Doc? That’s too incredible.”

“I fear your disbelief avails nothing,” said the bronze man. “I would say we are looking on a tower of the purest carbonite. In other words, a diamond in substance that would make more than all the diamonds of the outer world combined.”

“Howlin’ calamities!” squeaked Monk. “I wish we hadn’t come! Ain’t anything natural down here?”

The Uni-Ship hovered in an almost stationary position. Citizens of the inner world swarmed into the streets. Their silvery tunics contrasted vividly with the glittering buildings all seemed to occupy. The streets were paved with octagonal blocks, and even these had been inlaid with what appeared to be the commonest metal, pure gold.

“The Kingdom of Subterranea could upset every value the world has ever known,” observed Doc. “And this Zoro——”

The Uni-Ship of Princess Lanta had begun a slow descent. It was perhaps a thousand feet over the palace of King Lumos. Doc could see the great enclosed square among the towers where other Uni-Ships were housed. It had the appearance of a mammoth patio set within the guarding walls of the rulers’ dominating residence.

Suddenly the air was filled with rushing vibration. Below in the streets the white faces of the people were turned upward. The Uni-Ship trembled as if from some outward pressure. A long shadow crossed one of the towers of purple light.

With rushing speed the shadow resolved itself into another Uni-Ship. It had emerged from the ground miles away. But its arrival was as swift as an arrow shot from a bow. Before the controls of Lanta’s Uni-Ship could be swung, the glassy craft of Zoro had circled into position between it and the king’s palace.

THE thousands below were disappearing like moles fleeing into burrows underground. Lanta darted into the forward compartment. Her Uni-Ship started dropping faster.

A voice broke over one of the inter-communicating radio receivers.

“You will surrender Doc Savage and his men at once!” commanded Zoro. “Otherwise, the city of Manyon will be destroyed!”

The voice of Princess Lanta was replying calmly.

“Return, Zoro, to the Land of Beyond, at once, or I shall crash you and your cargo. All of us will perish, but the Kingdom of Subterranea will be spared.”

Lanta’s Uni-Ship was pointed directly at Zoro’s flying craft. Both had drifted away from over the palace. Doc moved with incredible speed into the compartment beside

Lanta.

“We shall find other means,” he stated quietly. “The trinitromite would kill thousands.”

One of the bronze man’s hands had slipped quickly along the control knobs. Though Princess Lanta would hardly have believed it, Doc Savage had learned much of the operation of the Uni-Ship.

“Howlin’ calamities!” squealed Monk. “I told you! Now she’s gone an’ done it like she said she would! We’ll all be busted to pieces!”

The Uni-Ship had apparently lost its gravity suspension. It started crashing downward. The pointed nose was aimed directly toward the spiked tower of carbonite. The Uni-Ship lost its position. The long cylinder started whirling. The gyrating motion hurled Doc’s companions into a confused heap.

Crado cried out something they could not understand.

Princess Lanta’s crew was leaving. The men had snapped open two hatchways. Their bodies were flying out through these. Each had used his gravity belt. The air above the Uni-Ship was filled with the floating bodies.

“Well I’ll be dag-goned!” howled Monk, pushing Ham’s waspish body off his thick neck. “The silvery devils! Now we haven’t got a chance!”

The Uni-Ship spun him over. His hard head crashed into Ham’s stomach. The lawyer for once had no retort he could make.

Doc was attempting to solve their situation. His bronze hands played over various controls. The towers of the palace were leaping toward them. Princess Lanta had been tossed to the end of the compartment.

She was speaking. In the rushing descent, Doc could not catch her words. But Princess Lanta was smiling. Her slender body was near a metallic cylinder attached to the wall. This cylinder was much like an enlarged air pump used in the world for inflating tires.

The tip of the spiked diamond tower flashed past. The bronze man braced his massive legs. Then Princess Lanta swiftly pushed the plunger into the cylinder.

Doc Savage and his companions were reminded of the manner in which the bronze man’s own special elevator in Manhattan was cushioned. The falling Uni-Ship was within a few feet of one of the towers.

Then its descent was abruptly checked. As if gentle hands had been pushed out from the tower, the Uni-Ship was shoved aside. It rolled from the sloping roof into the esplanade. Though it landed upside down, further entangling Doc’s companions, there was no concussion.

Princess Lanta smiled at Doc Savage.

“I have you to thank, Clark Savage, for saving all of us,” she stated. “It is only my great fear of Zoro that makes me sometimes forget all others. The people of our kingdom always come first.”

“I’m not sure about the saving part of it,” smiled Doc. “Anyway, we have landed.”

Doc's five companions were scrambling toward one of the still-open hatchways. Before they reached it, the air was pulsating. Three other Uni-Ships were rising from the palace. They went upward with flashing speed to the attack.

Zoro's Uni-Ship poised in mid-air. It was like some striking vulture suddenly balked of fastening claws upon its prey. From an amplifier came Zoro's voice.

"You will regret having failed to heed my warning!" the voice proclaimed. "I say to you now, all of the people of Manyon, you will be destroyed unless this Doc Savage and his men are turned over to me without delay!"

The three rising Uni-Ships were coming close to Zoro. His own craft turned with a speed almost too great to be followed. But the king's Uni-Ships had the advantage of driving toward him. Their momentum was so great the air trembled with their passage.

"Holy cow!" roared Renny. "The king's got something! They've got that fellow Zoro this time!"

Princess Lanta was watching the chase with parted lips. Ham was observing her instead of the aerial pursuit. The lawyer didn't believe he had ever met so beautiful a woman in the outer world. He was already beginning to speculate on their ultimate fate. Would Doc Savage be able to return them to the upper earth?

Ham wasn't so sure just then whether he would be missing much if this became their permanent home. Doc's quiet, but penetrating voice snapped him out of his dream.

"I feared perhaps that would happen," said the bronze man. "Your enemy, Zoro, has learned very quickly."

"Oh, what could they be?" breathed Princess Lanta.

What appeared to be half a dozen balloons floated from Zoro's Uni-Ship. These were of small dimensions. They were weighted by black, oblong packages. From each balloon trailed a thread of blue smoke. It could be clearly seen against the purplish light.

"Can you signal the men in the other Uni-Ships to drop quickly?" asked the bronze man.

Princess Lanta was instant of perception. She started speaking into her breast radio broadcaster. One of the king's Uni-Ships was dropping. The other two were close to the balloons.

One of the balloons dissolved. The air around the palace took the impact of a mighty slapping blow. Two other balloons exploded. Though Zoro's Uni-Ship had flashed far ahead, it was heeled off its course. The recurrent blasts of the balloons seemed to rock the solar towers.

The purplish light became somewhat blurred. On the floor of the esplanade the Uni-Ship of Princess Lanta was rolled over. The princess and Doc's companions were toppled to the tiled floor. Only the bronze man remained standing on his widely braced legs. He had been prepared for the terrific shock.

Two of the king's Uni-Ships were directly in the zone of the explosion. For a minute or two, they were submerged in billowing gray smoke. Then both came tumbling out.

The rigid cylinders had resisted even the terrific blast of trinitromite. But it was apparent the controlling mechanism had been disrupted. The Uni-Ship started turning end over end.

“Oh! They’ve lost gravity control!” exclaimed Lanta. “Why don’t they use the belts?”

THE king’s men inside the Uni-Ships never would use belts. The long cylinders were now just so much dead weight. Possibly the men inside had been killed instantly by the roaring blasts.

The impact of the two ships shook the ground. The carbonated metallic walls did not shatter. The Uni-Ships lay half buried in the furrows they had dug for themselves.

Princess Lanta started running to the side of the esplanade. She stood there staring. The street below was empty of inhabitants. The people of Subterranae were cringing in their towerlike homes of mica and gold.

They had been given their first demonstration of explosives. It was to them a force of destruction beyond imagination. Their own advanced powers seemed puny in comparison.

The third Uni-Ship pursuing Zoro took on queer circling gyrations. It had been farther from the exploding balloons. But some of its controlling mechanism had been crippled. However, it retained its gravity control.

Like a wounded bird, the Uni-Ship fell. Its landing was cushioned. A score of men came from the hatchway of the craft. They darted over to the other fallen ships. From the two Uni-Ships came no movement. All of their crews had perished.

Inside one of the wrecked ships played vivid fire. It glowed strangely under the purple solar rays.

“All have died,” spoke Princess Lanta gravely. “This, Clark Savage, is what we have feared so greatly. It was why I came to seek you. It is the first time this murdering force of your world has ever been used in the Kingdom of Subterranae. Zoro has learned much. We have now no means of combating those in the Land of Beyond.”

Doc Savage was watching the princess closely. There was sadness in her voice; grief for the men who had died. There was something more.

“Now I can only give myself,” said Princess Lanta suddenly, as if she had come to a decision. “What am I compared to the safety of my people—if I will be sufficient.”

“What is the Land of Beyond?” inquired Doc quietly.

“I forgot you didn’t know,” said Princess Lanta. “It is our place of banishment. It is removed from our peaceful people. Those of the Land of Beyond are dominated by Zoro. They are those who would live only by the work and suffering of others.”

“A place of imprisonment for what we would call crooks in our world,” stated the man of bronze.

“I suppose that would be it,” admitted Princess Lanta.

“Where then is this Land of Beyond?” said Doc. “I must go there soon, very soon. Zoro himself could not in this time have learned to manufacture such bombs of trinitromite as were carried by the balloons.”

“Zoro did not learn?” said Princess Lanta. “Then you suspect——”

“I have from the first,” stated the amazing bronze man.

“If you go to the Land of Beyond, you will only be slain,” the princess said.

Doc smiled and made no reply.

“Perhaps we should now meet your father, the king,” he suggested. “We have had many weary hours. My men should have some rest. I see where a great task is laid before us.”

Doc Savage never suggested fatigue as applying to himself. The bronze giant seemed not to know the meaning of the word.

NONE but kind and gracious rulers could have had the placid faces of King Lumos and his queen. They received Doc Savage and his companions in what for their world possibly was regarded as a very plain, undecorated room.

The chairs of a slightly raised dais answered for a throne. These were cushioned with shining metallic cloth. The woven cloth itself was regarded by King Lumos and his subjects as being more valuable than the throne chairs themselves.

The latter were of plain, molded gold, inset with plaques of carbon bearing a few inscriptions. In the outer world the chairs would have been worth several of the largest combined fortunes.

King Lumos and the queen wore tunics and plain-banded crowns, if they could have been called that. Like the apparel of Princess Lanta, the garments differed from those of their subjects only in that they were of a golden color.

One long tube of the purple solar light served to illumine the vaulted throne room. The walls were divided into scores of boxlike compartments. These were more like metal filing cases on a big scale than the library of the kingdom’s parchments of gold, which they were later revealed to be.

“We deeply regret the circumstances and the tragedy accompanying your arrival,” said King Lumos in a rich, mellow voice. “But we more than welcome you, Clark Savage, and all of you.”

King Lumos was a tall, mild-mannered man of apparent middle age. The smooth, unwrinkled countenance and the alert, intelligent eyes with their large black pupils seemed to belie the statement made by Princess Lanta.

“Dag-gonit!” muttered Monk to Renny. “That woman told us they were more than a hundred years old. It couldn’t be possible!”

“Huh!” grunted the engineer. “After what I’ve seen, a moon made of edible green cheese wouldn’t surprise me!”

Though she, too, had been represented to have reached an age far beyond the average expectancy of the outer world, the queen had hair of a glossy sheen. Among all of those who had come into the throne room, none of the advisors of the kingdom had so much as a single gray hair.

“We are happy and honored to be here,” stated Doc Savage. “The amazing inventions, alone, of your advanced people would compensate for any slight inconvenience we experienced.”

“You hear that?” Monk murmured to Renny. “We get all shot up with our own guns, an’ floated around by a couple of heathens, an’ bored right through the middle of the earth, an’ nearly bumped off arrivin’, an’ Doc calls it a slight inconvenience.”

King Lumos bowed, and immediately descended from the formal throne. When they were seated in an inner room, Doc Savage questioned the appearance of the people.

“YOU seem to have suffered with none of the ills of our own world,” said the man of bronze. “The secret of your mode of living seems more valuable to me than the astounding supply of gold and diamonds in the inner earth.”

“The reports we have received of you,” replied King Lumos, “have not been exaggerated. I see you are a man more interested in the welfare of humanity than any of the artificial values.”

The king added, “It is true we live to a greater age and have comparatively none of the afflictions of the outer earth. Our utterly dry atmosphere is partly responsible. Our solar system lacks the violet and other rays emanating from the sun of the universe. Thus we attain great age and keep the appearance of youth.”

He bowed toward the queen.

“After all, we are what you would call very old people.”

A radio spoke suddenly. It was the mocking voice of Zoro.

Chapter 15

NIGHT WITHOUT A SKY

THE radio loudspeaker was in the palace of King Lumos. Other amplifiers at street corners informed the people of all transpiring in the Kingdom of Subterranae.

“Unlike your world, we have no state secrets,” smiled King Lumos. “Our subjects are immediately informed of our problems.”

“Such a system would be of incalculable advantage in the outer world,” agreed Doc Savage. “Much senseless intrigue would be abolished if the peoples of all nations were similarly informed.”

In this case though there was some doubt as to the populace of Subterranae knowing too much. Zoro was playing upon it.

“Doc Savage and his company must be surrendered,” came the radio pronouncement of Zoro. “Otherwise I have the means to destroy the city of Manyon. All my enemies shall die! Manyon shall fall! When I have claimed Princess Lanta to be my queen, I shall restore the city!”

“So this Zoro has a deep personal motive,” said Ham. “I can’t say that I blame him for his ambition.”

The lawyer was again observing the beauty of the girl. Zoro’s words had a marked effect. The whiteness of her lovely oval face was accentuated. She was a very pallid princess at this moment.

“So that was what you meant when you said you would give yourself?” said Doc Savage.

Princess Lanta inclined her head.

“With this explosive force he has brought from the world, there seems no other way.”

Twice Princess Lanta had signified her willingness to sacrifice her own life and others for her people. Now she was prepared to offer herself alive.

“Dag-gonit!” exploded Monk, surprisingly. “You won’t do nothin’ of the kind! If I ever get my hands on that dirty heathen!”

Monk’s immense hairy paws worked convulsively. They were expressively eloquent of what would happen to Zoro if Monk once got him in his crushing strength.

“I like very much the man with the funny face,” said Princess Lanta.

There was suspicion of tears close to her large eyes.

Immediately following Zoro’s radio pronouncement the ground of the city trembled. Walls and floors of the king’s palace were shaken. King Lumos issued a quick order:

“Cut in the super-magnetic towers!”

THE command was transmitted by radio. The miniature earthquake ceased at once.

“It is the time of night,” proclaimed King Lumos. “We have a few hours to plan.”

“Your super-magnetic towers?” questioned Doc Savage. “Those would be the apparent citadels we noted at the four corners of the city as we descended?”

“You are extraordinarily observant, Clark Savage,” said the king. “As you have learned, our Uni-Ships are operated by intense magnetic attraction, which we have been able to control. To protect the city we have established a system of super-magnetism. It has been concentrated as a safeguard for the city.”

“And when the super-magnetic towers are tuned in,” said Doc, “none of the Uni-Ships can operate. Is that it?”

“That is their purpose. We are safe from attack from Zoro in the air or underground with the super-magnetic towers in operation. Likewise, our own Uni-Ships are kept inactive.”

“It is very good protection,” stated the man of bronze. “That gives us opportunity to prepare to combat Zoro’s forces. One question, King Lumos. You already have told us much. Of what offense is Zoro accused?”

The king explained briefly. Zoro was the leader of a marauding band. His henchmen numbered several hundred. All had been banished to the Land of Beyond.

The Kingdom of Subterranae operated on a Tallying System. Each inhabitant of the inner land contributed his or her share to the general welfare and support of the nation. As in the upper world, a few sought to prey upon the production of others. Such ones were banished to the Land of Beyond more than a thousand miles away.

“There they are compelled to support themselves,” said King Lumos. “They have their own minor solar system. Reservoirs irrigate their gardens. But they are denied all that is in the city of Manyon. They have been permitted to have three Uni-Ships.”

“So Zoro decided to seek outside force to bring about his own ascension to the throne,” commented Doc.

“That is it,” said King Lumos. “His own weapons alone were insufficient. But he has developed the music of death and inertia.”

“What we have been calling the death flutes,” stated Doc. “A chemical, or two chemicals, affecting the auditory nerves. One kills, and the other is merely an anaesthetic. But the warriors armed with these have their own ears protected.”

“That feature has baffled us,” admitted King Lumos. “Zoro not only has developed this means of close attack, but he also has discovered an element unknown to us whereby the players of death are immune from their own music.”

NIGHT over the city of Manyon was without a sky.

Doc’s five companions gazed into the blank space of darkness.

The atmosphere of Subterranae was cloudless. It had no rising mists. Except for faint lights in the city’s towerlike homes, there was no illumination.

The solar columns had been turned off. The kingdom controlled its own day and night. But in the sky there were no stars. No drifting clouds were illuminated by a rising moon.

The Stygian gloom was minus strips of blue sky.

“It feels as if we were at the bottom of a deep well,” shivered Renny. “When I was a kid I was told a bedtime story of the sun being taken in at night. I never believed it until now.”

“It would be great stuff to use on old Broadway,” injected Ham. “Trouble is, we don’t have night enough outside.”

Princess Lanta had accompanied the six adventurers into the place where the king’s Uni-Ships were housed.

From outside in the streets there had come a sinister murmuring. This increased in volume until it was a deep, muttering menace.

A few voices arose more stridently than the others. They were close to the walls of the king’s palace. The more threatening voices were employing the language of Subterranae. Some shouted. Though the tongue was strange, Doc Savage read its inflections.

“Your people demand we be given up to Zoro,” said the man of bronze quietly. “That could be expected.”

The face of Princess Lanta was very pale in the faint light of the Uni-Ship housing space. There were a dozen of the glasslike cylinders about them.

“Have no fear,” said the princess quickly. “That will not happen. My father did not tell you his greatest source of anxiety. We know there are many Zoro spies within the city. They are fomenting trouble. Some of our people are much frightened. We have always been at peace. So we have not been prepared to combat intrigue. Never have we needed what you call soldiers or police.”

This information was disturbing to Doc Savage. But his voice did not betray it.

“It is much better that way,” he said calmly. “If you will show us something of the mechanism of the Uni-Ships, we may be able to devise some effective counterattack.”

Doc, with Long Tom, the electrical wizard, and Monk, with his vast knowledge of chemicals, were in the control room of one of the Uni-Ships. Long Tom’s sober face suddenly lighted.

“That gravity control, Doc,” he said slowly, “might be easily put out of business from a distance.”

The bronze man smiled.

“I had thought of that, seeing that we have available the resource of stored electricity without the need of building generators,” he stated. “As soon as we have opportunity, I’ll show you what I had in mind.”

Princess Lanta led them to the Uni-Ship in which they had landed.

“I had some thought for what you might require,” she said. “See, I brought the many boxes and other things from your sky ship when it was wrecked on the glacier in the mountains.”

Monk emitted a squeak of delight. He pounced at once upon the compact container that was his own property. It was a small, but complete, laboratory. In a few minutes he was experimenting with various chemicals. His hairy hands kneaded a yellowish, puttylike wax.

Their activities were suddenly interrupted. Smashing blows came from the front of the palace. The strident voices were sharply raised. The calm voice of King Lumos spoke in English.

“I shall not surrender Clark Savage or any of his men,” said the king.

Above the muttering of voices shrilled weird music. It apparently was only a brief demonstration.

“Then the Princess Lanta must become the queen of Zoro!” rapped a voice. “Otherwise, the city shall be invaded! All our enemies will perish! Give Princess Lanta to Zoro!”

Princess Lanta faced Doc Savage and his men.

“Zoro’s killers have penetrated the city,” she said quietly. “It has become the only way. I shall go.”

Doc Savage sought to prevent Lanta’s movement. But the slender princess apparently had been prepared. Her form floated elusively from his quick hands. She vanished toward the front of the palace.

DOC’s companions were compelled to follow an intricate passage. In their rush to accompany or detain Princess Lanta, the five eager men lost themselves for a brief moment. The bronze man had not joined them.

Doc whipped over to the apparently smooth palace wall. One of the towers of glassy mica was directly before him. The man of bronze sprang from his toes. He was many feet from the ground when his fingers gripped for support.

The human eye showed the tower of gold and mica to be as evenly surfaced as tranquil water. Vision indicated no hold whatever. But the cabled wrists of the bronze man made steellike claws of his fingers. The gold and mica sank under their pressure.

Doc was a human fly ascending a wall without a single projection. At the top of the wall the man of bronze poised for an instant.

Princess Lanta’s figure was to be discerned in the street below the palace gallery. Her slim form had great dignity. Many shrank to one side. But half a dozen tunic-clad figures suddenly surrounded her.

Doc observed this only by the dim light from the palace entrance. With almost blinding effect, the solar columns were lighted. Apparently King Lumos had abolished the night of Subterranae in this crisis.

The man of bronze reached the street with what seemed tremendous bounds down the sheer wall of the palace tower. Lanta was being seized by the grasping hands of Zoro’s emissaries.

The penetrating voice of Crado cried out a command. Doc hit the pavement of the street. He saw Crado’s tall form leading a compact wedge of the king’s loyalists. More of Zoro’s spies formed a ring around Crado’s illy-armed fighters.

Crado’s men were armed only with short clubs. With these they were attempting to clear a way to Princess Lanta. They were having little effect.

Apparently a whirlwind swept the outside of the ring of Zoromen. Two bronze fists accounted for half a dozen of the enemy before the arrival of Doc Savage was realized.

Zoromen lunged toward the man of bronze. These did not see Doc's hands move. They were swift as light.

Nerves in the backs of the Zoromen's silvery-skinned necks suddenly sent black waves to their brains. The bronze man was quickly surrounded by a heap of his unconscious foes. Crado cried out triumphantly. His attack was heartened.

In the midst of this battle, Princess Lanta cried out.

"Clark Savage! Crado! All of you stay back! Look out! It is the music of death!"

THE weird, unearthly music wailed from several points.

"Come on, Monk!" exploded a booming voice. "Hit 'em hard!"

The towering bulk of Renny was projected from the gallery of the palace. The engineer's somber face was solemn. His big fists swung like miniature battering-rams. Zoromen, and some who were not, went down before him.

Monk was fighting his way toward the shining, golden figure of Princess Lanta. He took no time to employ his fists. His long arms merely reached. Each time, two silvery-skinned heads cracked together. Monk made no especial selection. Zoromen and others all looked alike to him.

Ham came through the edge of the Zoromen. From Lanta's stores he had taken one of his spare sword canes. The drugged blade played like a circle of gleaming light.

Long Tom and Johnny were attacking from the outside. Though neither had the appearance of hefty fighting men, those they encountered went down like ripe wheat in a cyclone.

Doc had taken no time to arm himself with one of the supermachine pistols. He believed none of his men had these weapons. Yet as the weird music of the flutes impinged on his ultrasensitive ears and waves of dizziness began flooding his brain, he heard the staccato explosions of one of the mercy guns. Through a haze he saw the Zoromen, ringing in Princess Lanta, melting down.

The bronze man's hand whipped to his bulletproof vest. He had no opportunity to warn his scattered, battling companions. Two of the anæsthetic gas capsules tinkled on the pavement. Doc fought the dizzying effect of the Zoro flutes.

Unfortunately, Crado and his loyal fighters fell with the nearest Zoromen around Doc. The vapor that would keep them unconscious for more than an hour had affected all. The bronze man was left for a few seconds standing alone.

Doc had held his breath. But the inertia chemical of the Zoro flutes was paralyzing his nerves. He fought to stay on his feet, but his giant body swayed.

The erupting mercy pistol mowed a swath. But the weird music was taking its toll of all but Zoromen. Having less resistance than Doc, Ham, Renny, Long Tom and Johnny were stretched in the street.

Monk alone was on his feet. His great hairy hands tore apart the circle of Zoromen nearest Princess Lanta. With squeals of rage, the apelike chemist was among the closest of Lanta's assailants.

Doc noted vaguely the mercy pistol was held by Princess Lanta. The girl had cleared a space around her. The weapon, capable of discharging sixty mercy bullets

with the speed of the most rapid machine gun, had reaped a harvest. But Zoro apparently had planned a coup with a greater force than had been expected.

“Howlin’ calamities!” exploded Monk. “You’re doin’ great, princess! I’ll take ’em _____”

But the big chemist did not complete his sentence. Neither did he carry out his threat. He leaped suddenly into the air. One hairy hand was clapped to his face as if he had been stung.

Just below the gristly, apish ear through which already was one bullet hole, appeared a scarlet furrow. While for a reason known only to himself, Monk had not succumbed to the music of the Zoro flutes, he now staggered. He fell almost at the feet of Princess Lanta.

This was the last scene Doc Savage witnessed. Surrounded by a score of Zoromen who had felt his mighty fists, and others who had been swiftly anaesthetized by the gas capsules, the bronze giant collapsed.

His ears were filled with stabbing pain. His brain burned and went out.

THE subjects of King Lumos had been defeated. Though Zoromen were lying in the street before the palace, the city’s residents had taken flight.

Zoro’s attack with the flutes, Doc Savage’s gas capsules and the mystery of men falling from no apparent cause had been too much for their understanding.

The purple light from the solar columns illuminated a scene of havoc. King Lumos himself and some of his closest advisors lay on the gallery of the palace. They were slowly reviving from the effect of Zoro’s weird music.

Doc Savage regained consciousness more quickly than the others of his men. Coming to his feet, he sought vainly for Princess Lanta. His thought was that perhaps she had found refuge in the palace.

All around the streets were deserted. The bronze man produced a small hypodermic needle. Within a minute the injections had revived his own men. The needle pierced Crado’s skin and he was freed from the gas capsule drug.

Doc made his way quickly to King Lumos.

Monk came trailing up the steps to the gallery. His long arms dangled pathetically. His squeaky voice was sad and bewildered.

“Dag-gonit!” he moaned. “Just when I thought that woman had got to likin’ me, she ups an’ shoots me again! I told you that——”

One of Princess Lanta’s mercy bullets had accidentally scored Monk’s hairy neck. It had been the drug that had put him out. He had been unaffected by the music of the Zoro flutes.

King Lumos stared bleakly at Doc Savage.

“They have taken the princess, I believe. I last saw her there on the esplanade.”

“I think perhaps she has gone into the palace,” reassured Doc.

Crado said quietly, “She would not have left us. All of the Zoromen are gone, except those still lying in the street.”

The purple illumination of the solar columns showed there were many inanimate figures left as battle toll.

With a suddenness that left those in the palace speechless, the solar columns went black. All of the city and palace disappeared as if in a cloud of thickest soot. Then only one small ray of light pierced the gloom. It was the pencil of a generator flashlight Doc had brought from the Uni-Ship.

King Lumos spoke now. His voice was calm, but it had a note of deepest anxiety.

“I had feared that would happen,” he stated. “And all of the house lights of the city have likewise been extinguished.”

There was no doubt of this. From near-by towers arose the wailing cries of frightened people.

Through this the voice of Zoro sounded over the radio speakers.

“Princess Lanta is in my hands! I have obliterated the solar system of Manyon! Tomorrow at this same time King Lumos must surrender the city—he must give up Doc Savage and his men! Only the Land of Beyond will have the solar light that gives life—all other inhabitants shall perish—King Zoro and Queen Lanta shall rule!”

Chapter 16

SCIENTIST FUGITIVES

PRINCESS LANTA had vanished. Whether she had been seized and carried off by Zoromen, or had offered herself at the last minute as a sacrifice in the hope of saving her people, could only be conjectured.

“She’s a girl in a million,” proclaimed Ham, the lawyer. “She put up a great fight, but they captured her.”

Monk glared at Ham belligerently.

“They didn’t do anything of the kind!” he squealed. “She probably gave herself up to save your worthless skin!”

Though Monk seemed to be a target every time the princess had a weapon in her hands, the big chemist would disagree with Ham on any subject.

“Yes, the princess has departed to the Land of Beyond,” said King Lumos, his voice striving to conceal the grief he felt. “And we are practically helpless before Zoro’s power. Undoubtedly he has gained possession of the origin of our solar system. Without the light, we could not exist many days. It has been preserved to us through many thousands of years.”

Doc Savage said nothing. Calling Long Tom aside, he proceeded to the Uni-Ship in which their devices had been brought to Subterranae. Princess Lanta had revealed to the bronze man the means of controlling the craft’s gravitation.

“I’ve seen some strange substitutes for electrical wiring, but I never expected to live to see such as this,” remarked Long Tom. He had been studying the intricate system of metal coils. “Look, Doc, the wires are an alloy of gold!”

This was amazingly true. As Doc and Long Tom set to work experimenting with an opposing force to destroy the gravitational efficiency of Zoro’s Uni-Ships, they were making tests with wires of gold.

For gold was the most malleable and abundant real metal in the Kingdom of Subterranae. With it Doc was fashioning a springlike contrivance. This he tested in various places, attaching it to the controls of gravity.

King Lumos appeared at the hatchway of the Uni-Ship.

“Crado has learned,” he announced, “that two of the men of the outer world you know as Caulkins and Cassalano are in the hands of Zoro.”

Doc evinced no surprise. He had been certain from the first that the economist and mineralogist had been brought to Subterranae. It was hardly to have been expected Zoro would free these valuable hostages.

“And Princess Lanta told us Zoro possessed no maps of the passages to the outer world,” stated Doc. “That might make it decidedly interesting for Zoro’s prisoners.”

“That is right,” said King Lumos. “Zoro has no map. These are kept in our own archives. Before they ever fall into his hands, they are now so placed that they will be destroyed by loyal subjects. His visit to the outer world was accomplished with great

peril. The princess reported Zoro made attempts to emerge at various places, which caused what the world believed to be earthquakes. He was extremely lucky to chance upon the Aleutian volcanic strata.”

“You think then Zoro would not return to the outside?” said Doc.

“He would hardly risk it again without a map,” said King Lumos. “He has accomplished what he intended. Returning, he followed the Uni-Ship of the princess through the passage of the Friendly Islands. Many of our past explorers have perished in the great fires raging at intervals in the earth’s crust. Others have been wrecked on hidden carbon strata. These are the same to our Uni-Ships as rocks would be to the vessels of your oceans.”

“So Caulkins and Cassalano are trapped in Subterranae,” mused the man of bronze. “Long Tom, is the degravity box complete?”

“I believe it will be effective,” said Long Tom.

King Lumos and several of his accompanying guard were suddenly startled. Instinctively they clapped their hands over their ears.

The space about the Uni-Ship was filled with eerie trilling. It so much resembled the death music of the Zoro flutes that the king’s advisors, standing near by, started to flee. Too well they knew the effect of the weird notes. Death or inertia followed the flutes.

But Long Tom was not disturbed. His methodical, bony hands continued the rapid fashioning of the device the bronze man had directed. This had yet to be tested to determine its effect upon the gravity controls of the Uni-Ships.

Long Tom knew the exotic trilling emanated from Doc Savage. It was a musical sound that came almost unconsciously from the man of bronze during periods of deep concentration. King Lumos now realized the trilling was not the music of flutes. The king had great perception.

“You have perhaps arrived at some possible solution of our predicament,” he said calmly. “If there is anything I can do, or that my kingdom commands, it is at your service, Clark Savage.”

“Within the hour, have the super-magnetic towers cut off,” instructed Doc. “I will have use for the Uni-Ship.”

“That shall be done,” announced King Lumos. “Of course, you will require my men for operation of the Uni-Ship.”

“That will hardly be necessary,” smiled the man of bronze. “The operation really is most simple. Much less complicated than the piloting of one of our upper world airplanes.”

King Lumos and his advisors stared at Doc Savage. Their expressions plainly said, “What manner of man is this?”

Months of training were held necessary for Subterranae operators of Uni-Ships before they could be trusted at the controls.

DOME-SHAPED masses of mica covered a wide, flat plain. The area much resembled the barren Rocky Mountain plateau in the United States. The mica domes apparently

were dwelling places. Though on a larger scale, they were similar to Eskimo ice huts. Low doorways gave access to the interiors.

From a few of the domes, a vague light showed. Near the middle of the dwellings reared a tall solar column. Just now, it was without light. Only the dim illumination and liquid gabbling of voices indicated life was to be found in the strange community.

For this was the Land of Beyond. The mica huts were the homes of the banished. Here Zoro ruled. Within these humble surroundings his rebellious spirit had festered. It had come to the bursting point of ambition.

For had not Zoro dreamed of becoming king of all Subterranae? And had he not achieved the terrible weapon with which to bring forth wide destruction?

The solar column was lightless as a precaution. Zoro had little fear of attack by the loyal guards of King Lumos. The banished leader held only the greatest contempt for their puny weapons. King Lumos had not even solved the mystery Zoro held in his death-and-inertia music, nor of the protective chemical wax. The king had devised no destructive force of his own.

But there was Doc Savage.

Zoro's brief experience with the amazing bronze adventurer had shaken his confidence. Never before had any man escaped from one of the choking metallic jackets. These garments had been devised by the powerful Society of Planners in the city of Manyon. Zoro had merely made use of them to bind what he believed to be weaker men of the upper world.

Yet these weaker ones, led by Doc Savage, had escaped. By some alchemy of his own, the bronze man had rendered Zoro and his men powerless on the deck of the iron ship *Narwhal*. So Zoro was taking no chances. He would not feel safe until Doc Savage was delivered into his hands.

JUST now, Zoro and a few of his men were jubilating. Word had come to him of Princess Lanta. She was in the hands of his faithful followers. The party of captors had fled from the city of Manyon. The princess would be delivered to Zoro as soon as King Lumos cut off the super-magnetic towers and released the Uni-Ships.

More than a thousand miles lay between Manyon and the Land of Beyond. Many days would have been required to traverse this with the individual gravity belts. There was scarcely any stirring of wind in the Kingdom of Subterranae. But a Uni-Ship would cover the distance like an arrow shot from a bow.

In one of the domelike huts, two voices spoke in whispers. There was no light emanating from the low doorway. The men speaking were without doubt fearful their words might be heard.

"But Zoro has no map and his men have said the maps will be destroyed before he could take the king's city," trembled one voice. "It means we would be permanently trapped. We never could return to the upper world."

"That is true, Cassalano," came the second whisper. "Perhaps if we could escape and succeed in hiding, Doc Savage or one of the king's ships might soon pick us up. If we are again trapped by Zoro, we could assert we were only exploring and got lost."

Almost immediately, two shadowy figures crept from the doorway of the hut. The pudgy, fattish figure of Cassalano was accompanied by the thinner shadow of Caulkins's bony form. Without words they made their way past the hut in which Zoro was jubilating with his men.

Presently they passed the final lines of domes. They had been unobserved. The black plain stretched before them like a vast pool of ink. They were forced to touch each other to prevent separation. On its rainiest and darkest night, the outer world never had darkness comparable to this Stygian space.

Caulkins, the economist, and Cassalano spoke but little as they fled into the gloom of Subterranae. The pudgy mineralogist wheezed loudly. The pace set by his leaner companion taxed his soft flesh.

"There seems no place we could hide if the solar light came on," complained Cassalano. "Zoro would find us very quickly."

"Should that happen, we shall at once lie down and pretend we wandered, then fell asleep," said the more resourceful Caulkins. "Anything is better than being marooned with these people on the inside of the world. Here our knowledge of science avails us nothing. If we only had the diversified wisdom of Doc Savage, we might find a way out. But even the famous bronze man will be helpless without the maps of the proper passages. Zoro admitted he was compelled to follow the princess."

"And he has heard the princess has been captured," wheezed Cassalano. "This king he is fighting may even surrender to save his subjects."

"Which wouldn't get us back to our own world," snapped Caulkins. "We must find a place to hide before the solar light is flashed."

THEY were favored in this desire. The flat plain abruptly dipped. The surface was broken by a series of irrigation ditches.

Following a dry depression, the two scientists made good progress for more than an hour. Suddenly Caulkins, whose ears were keen, halted abruptly.

"Listen!" he barked. "Hear that? Zoro has discovered our absence! It's one of the Uni-Ships!"

"You think we ought to lie down, to try and hide, or what?" came Cassalano's quavering voice.

Clearly the mineralogist was gifted with little courage.

Before Caulkins could reply the vibration of the Uni-Ship ceased. The two men shrank low in the ditch. They would have been amazed to know that even in the opaque darkness eyes had searched them out.

The pursuing Uni-Ship was invisible. Apparently the men giving chase had doused all illumination to avert warning their quarry. The fugitives had no means of knowing the Uni-Ship was drifting rapidly down upon them.

Finding partial cover in the ditch, Caulkins pulled the trembling Cassalano under some dry vegetation.

At that instant weird wailing notes cascaded around them.

Caulkins groaned. “We can’t escape the death music,” he said. “It is best we surrender. Remember, Cassalano, we were merely out for a stroll and became lost.”

“Ye-yes, w-we’ll do that,” stammered Cassalano.

But their opportunity for explanation was cut short. Powerful hands were thrust out of the darkness. Gagging fingers gripped their jaws simultaneously. The brief cry of Cassalano was choked off. The economist and mineralogist once more were prisoners.

GUIDED by the solar light, a hunching, grotesque figure seemed to make its way over the ground with a hopping motion. Long arms swung knobs of fists to within inches of the rough ground. The figure was following a rather plain trail through one of the many great gardens of the city of Manyon.

The trail was a veritable pathway. Many pairs of feet had trampled across the lush vegetation. Only in some spots the marks disappeared. The hunching figure would grope along until the trail was resumed.

The explanation for the queerly intermittent trail was logically simple. It had been made by a party equipped with gravity belts. Occasionally they had used this lifting force. Due to the absence of any breeze to help carry them along, the men had returned to the ground.

When the trail took the most time to find, the long-armed shadow emitted squeaky exclamations of disgust.

“Dag-gone ’em!” he squealed once. “Wisht I only had me one of them jumpin’ bean belts! I’d show ’em!”

The queerly chivalrous, homely Monk had set out alone in the hope of trailing and rescuing Princess Lanta. For reasons which none but his illogical reasoning could have explained, the ape-shaped chemist greatly desired to appear heroic in the eyes of the beautiful young woman. Even if her chief aim in life seemed to be shooting him.

Regretfully, Monk judged he was uttering his exclamations in a subdued voice that none could hear. His exclamations were much louder than he calculated. For Monk had fortified himself against being overcome by the death-and-inertia flutes. His very defense was his own downfall.

Safely beyond range of the city of Manyon, the captors of Princess Lanta had encamped in a selected spot. With them they had a number of what seemed to be small balloons.

“If any of the Manyon Uni-Ships arrive first, we’ll be ready for them,” said one silvery-skinned man, who seemed to be the leader.

Monk could not hear the voice. Though the purple light streamed from the solar columns some distance away, this section of the city’s vast gardens was deeply shadowed.

But Monk’s inner senses were attuned for the liquid voice which came from close by. It was so near the big chemist dropped on all-fours. If Ham could have seen him then, he resembled a gorilla more than ever before.

“Release me and I shall not attempt to escape,” came the voice of Princess Lanta. “I will go voluntarily to Zoro. It is the only way.”

“Dag-gone that woman!” squeaked Monk. “Betcha I’ll have to carry her back home!”

A wide grin spread over his homely, hairy face.

“Now that wouldn’t be so bad,” he murmured. “Hope she makes me do it.”

Shadowy figures leaped toward him. He had been heard. Some of the Zoromen had flanked him by the simple expedient of hopping over him with their gravity belts. Now they were coming at Monk from all directions.

The gleaming flutes appeared in several hands. The weird music swept over the garden. Monk reared to his short legs.

“G’wan an’ blow your heads off!” he squawked, “an’ see what it gets you!”

It got the nearest pair of Zoromen with all the violence Monk could put into his reaching arms. Neither music nor chemicals could have had as instant effect. The skulls of the two Zoromen collided with a cracking crunch. Monk leaped upon two others.

The flute blowers stared at him in astonishment. The gorilla of Doc’s company must have a new kind of ears. The Zoromen saw they were very small and covered with bristly hair. Through one of the ears was a hole through which a finger could have been punched. It looked like a bullet had made the puncture.

Disposing of two more of his enemies, Monk freed himself from another pair by using his arms like a catapult. The two men flew into the air, turning over and over. Monk flicked two small globes from his pocket.

The chemist drew in a long breath and waited. The Zoromen nearest him toppled over. They went to sleep. The space around Monk was clear. The anæsthetic gas would evaporate in less than a minute.

Monk caught the shimmering of Princess Lanta’s golden garment.

“I’ll getcha, princess!” he squealed, and sprang forward.

Zoromen leaped upon him from every side. By the sheer weight of numbers his flailing, contorting body was forced to the earth. A chunk of metallic rock drove down upon his skull.

Chapter 17

DOC'S SHIP CRASHES

THREE disgusted companions of Doc Savage paced the inner room of King Lumos's palace. They were listening intently for some word of the bronze man. King Lumos himself, and the queen, together with many of their staff, had remained awake.

Outside, Crado and some of his men were cruising in a Uni-Ship. While the super-magnetic towers were cut off, they were keeping close watch. They were aware Zoro might discover the chance of using his own Uni-Ships.

Search for Princess Lanta had failed. It had been widespread, but none had suspected the Zoromen of hiding so close by in the city gardens. Two hours had passed and no word had come from Doc and Long Tom, who had accompanied him. The bronze man had said he wanted to scout over Zoro's Land of Beyond.

"And what's become of that big gorilla?" rasped Ham at the others. "Why couldn't he have stayed put? Where do you think he went? You don't suppose he wandered off and was caught?"

"Monk can take care of himself," declared Renny. "Why are you always so worried about him? If he were here, you'd only be roasting him."

"Maybe that's what I miss," snapped Ham. "If he had any brains he might be trusted out alone."

But Ham's anxiety was for Monk's safety. And Monk had been absent nearly two hours. Still nothing had come over the radio speaker from Doc and Long Tom in the Uni-Ship.

"Perhaps I should have insisted on one of my own operators going with Clark Savage," said King Lumos. "It seems unbelievable he could know so much about our Uni-Ships."

"Don't worry about that angle of it," said Johnny. "Doc can always take care of himself."

Johnny's faith in the man of bronze was abruptly disputed.

"Calling King Lumos"—came from the radio speaker. "This is Doc Savage—Uni-Ship in trouble—Lost gravity control—Uni-Ship entered ground—Escape will take time—Cut in super-magnetic towers—Believe Zoro Uni-Ship in air outside—Wait—Cut in super-magnetic towers as requested—Uni-Ship electrified—See no escape—cut in towers—can't give position——"

Doc's flowing voice was abruptly cut off. The radio buzzed and was silent. Then a new voice came suddenly.

"It's Lanta!" exclaimed the queen. "Oh, Lanta——"

"She's talking over the portable," said King Lumos. "Listen!"

"This is Lanta—Hope you hear me— They've got the one of the funny face I like—got him and—we're——"

Harsher voices buzzed and confused the speech of Princess Lanta.

For the second time the radio speaker was silent. King Lumos sadly ordered the super-magnetic towers cut in. If Doc Savage and Long Tom survived, he said, this would prevent Zoro operating Uni-Ships to find them.

“It’s a good idea, for the time being,” stated Ham. “But as soon as we can get organized, we’ll have to ask you to cut the super-magnetic towers off again.”

Ham whipped through the doorway in the direction of the Uni-Ship place of housing.

“You can cut off the towers,” he added, “because we’re going to find Doc and Long Tom. Maybe we’ll even look for Monk.”

“ZORO could have picked up Doc’s message as well as we could in the palace,” declared Johnny. “I’ve been wondering about his call. Doc seldom ever lets any one know when he’s in trouble.”

“Does seem queer,” admitted Ham, “but these Uni-Ships can play some funny tricks. It would be the only thing he could do.”

Johnny and Ham, with Renny accompanying them, were in another Uni-Ship. Crado, the king’s commander, was in charge. They were speeding toward the Land of Beyond. The skyless night was opaque. King Lumos had again turned off the solar columns.

“I fear your bronze chief is really in trouble,” commented Crado. “He is most remarkable, but the Uni-Ships are tricky. A touch on the wrong controls and it would be burrowing into the earth so fast none could prevent it.”

“Have you any means of detecting approximately where a wrecked ship might be?” inquired Renny. “How do we know we’re headed in the direction taken by Doc?”

Crado shook his head negatively.

“I’ve been trying radio contact, but receive no response,” said Crado. “Our detectors will reveal only a live, moving ship.”

Doc’s three companions showed glum faces. They feared their bronze chief had been trapped by his own great courage.

“Anyway,” said Ham, “Doc was headed for the Land of Beyond.”

“We shall be over Zoro’s dominion in a few minutes,” advised Crado. “We should be prepared for trouble. Zoro’s plan is to wreck the solar system of Manyon. He will stop at nothing.”

“I haven’t quite understood how that is possible?” questioned Renny. His engineering interest had been keenly aroused. “The king has told us the solar system operates by deposits that act as vast storage batteries. They are kept charged by the constant discharge of electrical current into the earth in the form of lightning.”

“That is true,” said Crado. “The power of our solar system is derived from highly magnetized strata in large deposits. Each stratum opposes the other. One has been given the effect of a direct current and the other of an alternating frequency. These operate like giant generators.”

“Then how can Zoro interfere with such a natural system?” insisted Renny. “No cable contacts exist to be disrupted.”

“No,” said Crado. “But each stratum available to our city is reached by tunnels constructed many generations ago. With his new explosive force Zoro could blow up one of the magnetized beds.”

The Uni-Ship had arrowed through the inner world night for more than a thousand miles. Within the long cylinder there seemed no vibration. Now Crado terminated his explanation of Zoro’s menace.

The tall commander leaped to the Uni-Ship detector. The colored balls suspended in the tube were dancing.

“There is another Uni-Ship in the air,” announced Crado. “It is coming close. As none other of our ships are out, except that of Doc Savage, it must be one of Zoro’s.”

AHEAD glowed a spreading purple light. This was the single column of the solar system in the Land of Beyond. This operated from separate and much smaller magnetized deposits. If he smashed the system of King Lumos, Zoro would have to depend upon this alone until he had carried out his threat to take over the Kingdom of Subterranae.

Close by, the long, luminous cylinder of a Uni-Ship appeared. It was driving directly toward Crado’s craft. For several seconds it appeared as if a collision could not be avoided. Crado’s white face was a grim mask.

“Zoro!” he rapped out. “Put on these gravity belts! We may be wrecked!”

But the Zoro Uni-Ship flashed past. Within it could be seen the silhouetted figures of many Zoromen. Undoubtedly the chief of the Land of Beyond had caught Doc’s call to the palace.

“Get ready to spring out!” warned Crado. “I’m dropping! See!”

Renny, Ham and Johnny could see. They were struggling into the gravity belts. Their attempt to escape was too late. Several small balloons appeared. Crado’s Uni-Ship was descending with the speed of a flung rock. But the descent was not rapid enough.

The first balloon dissolved into a spreading mushroom of grayish smoke. This could be seen the fraction of a second before the hurricane of the explosion struck the Uni-Ship. Zoro’s own craft already was miles away.

Crado’s Uni-Ship quivered and jumped as if it had been struck by a mammoth hammer. The blow rattled the teeth of Renny and the others. Johnny’s long, bony form turned a complete somersault. Ham was flung sidewise. His waspish body hit the vibration detector. The lawyer went down among fragments of sprinkling glass.

The first blast was almost instantly followed by a second. Crado and his men were working feverishly at the controls. The Uni-Ship did not respond. It plunged groundward. The gravitational machinery had been shattered.

The dive of the Uni-Ship to the ground was short. Crado’s quick dropping of the craft saved the crew and passengers from suffering the fate of the first King Lumos men to meet the exploding balloons. But the shock of contact was severe.

Every one in the Uni-Ship was stunned. They were only vaguely conscious of their hatchways being opened and of Zoromen pouring into the ship. There came a swift

sounding of the weird music of the flutes.

HAM believed he was the first to recover his senses. But a voice bellowing protest had aroused him to consciousness.

“Holy cow!” Renny was thundering. “They’ve got us in them danged iron shirts again!”

Ham moved his hands a little. Immediately he was nearly choked. The elongated figure of Johnny was near him. Renny was complaining and gasping between outbursts. The giant engineer was fighting the imprisoning shirt. All he succeeded in doing was half throttling himself.

Ham saw Crado and the men of his crew. The supply of metallic shirts seemed unlimited. All were securely trussed up. Zoromen came about them in a swarm. Ham felt himself lifted. With the others they were being borne into a gaping entrance of what appeared to be the side of a precipitous hill. The Zoromen carried them easily. They accomplished this by operating the belt knobs governing gravity.

The faint purple light of Subterranea’s solar system vanished. It was replaced by a weird illumination. This came from a myriad of crystalline icicles. Or they looked to Ham as if they were frozen drippings from the vaulted roof of a tunnel.

These were stalactites. Johnny’s geological interest was alive even now.

“They’re chalcedony,” he gasped. “Some have a mixture of carbonite. If we ever get out of here, I’m going to write a book.”

His chance of preparing a thesis on the inner earth was remote. The glittering stalactites were blinding, though the light did not seem to glare. When the prisoners were deposited on a glassy floor, Ham could only peer about through slitted eyes.

The air around them was charged with electrical energy. Ham was rolled close to Renny and Johnny. Two metallic shirts touched. Immediately blue sparks flashed. Ham’s skin prickled. His spinal column reacted as if it had been struck a blow.

This was one of the magnetic chambers. Coils of metal indicated this mineral deposit, extending for hundreds of yards into the hollowed caverns, was one of the hook-ups with the kingdom’s major solar system. Ham scrooched away from further direct contact with his companions. He judged he had missed being electrocuted by only a scant margin.

For a moment Doc’s companions judged they were the only prisoners, along with Crado and his men. But the squeak of an enraged voice enlightened them of another presence. None could mistake the complaining voice of Monk.

“Dag-gonit!” he squealed. “Just when I was thinkin’ that danged shyster would be comin’ along with one of his pig-stickers to maybe punch holes in these heathen, here he is all trussed up like a pig for market!”

“Well, as I live and breathe,” exclaimed Ham. “If it isn’t the gorilla himself. Perhaps the princess couldn’t be resisted.”

Monk squawked incoherently. Ham had hit upon the truth.

“Unless something happens fast, we’re in a mighty tough spot,” spoke the low voice of Johnny. “Look what they’re doing.”

JOHNNY'S instant recognition of a tough spot was apparent. The Zoromen had dumped their prisoners to one side. Now they were engaged in carrying many small square cases into the tunnel. Ham did not need to read the labels to identify these as trinitromite.

Scores of cases of the outer world's latest and most terrible explosive were being laid in hollowed trenches. These formed a square around the solar system machinery. They enclosed one end of the big bed of magnetized mineral. This deposit had the appearance of a stratum of obsidian rock. But it was shot through with brownish veins that might have been either a form of iron ore or of greenish gold.

"Dag-gonit!" piped Monk. "Whatcha think's goin' to happen?"

"Holy cow!" barked Renny. "I'm tryin' *not* to think!"

The slanting forehead, jutting brows and prognathous jaws of Zoro himself loomed over them.

"It will not be necessary to ponder deeply upon what you are witnessing," Zoro announced. "Your wonderful Doc Savage and the one who knew of the devices of electricity can no longer aid you. Zoro has command of the Kingdom of Subterranea. When the explosive force from your world has been turned loose, there will be no further need of thinking."

By this time several hundred cases of trinitromite had been placed only a few yards away.

"Anyway," remarked Ham calmly, "we won't know what happens."

Ham's quiet stoicism enraged the chief of the Land of Beyond. He drove one foot viciously into the lawyer's ribs. The pain was agonizing, but Ham continued to smile mockingly.

"In our world you'd be nothing but an alley thug, Zoro," Ham said tauntingly.

From behind Zoro a voice spoke quickly in the language of the inner world. It was liquidly musical. None having ever heard Princess Lanta could have mistaken it. The girl's lovely face came close to Zoro's shoulder.

Zoro's ugly countenance immediately lightened. Having volunteered herself as a sacrifice to save her people, the princess apparently was making the best of the situation. Her words must have been pleasing.

Zoro replied with a boastful gesture toward the preparation for the mighty blast of trinitromite. Ham closed his eyes and opened them again. He hadn't made a mistake.

Princess Lanta was smiling. She laid a hand lightly on Zoro's arm. It seemed an act of propitiation. Almost like a caress.

"Howlin' calamities!" squawked Monk. "I told you a woman wasn't to be trusted! Lookit!"

Princess Lanta glanced at the chemist's bound form.

"The one with the funny face would do well not to talk with too much freedom," she stated quietly.

This time she had not said the "funny face she liked." Monk almost choked himself with a frenzied effort of his long arms to tear the unbreakable metallic jacket.

Ham was observing the princess closely. Her beautiful black-and-white eyes didn't even flicker.

"Could it be possible," Ham whispered to Johnny, "that she's just another woman, after all? With Zoro she will be seated as queen."

"Monk only pretends he doesn't, but I've never trusted a woman—much," replied the scholarly Johnny.

Renny hunched himself closer to Ham. With unintelligible grunts he indicated something unusual in the procession of Zoromen carrying the explosive boxes.

"That's been certain from the first," hissed Ham. "All that stuff on the *Narwhal* was just a cover-up."

THE attenuated figure of Caulkins, the economist, and the pudgy, fattish form of Cassalano, the mineralogist, passed toward the hollowed trenches where the trinitromite was being placed. Each of the doubtlessly treacherous scientists of the upper world bore small containers and coils of wire. The coils sparkled. They were of the gold alloy of Subterranae.

The lean, ascetic features of Caulkins were turned toward the prisoners. His dry voice whipped across the cavern.

"It must be disheartening to discover you have no Doc Savage to solve your present predicament," Caulkins commented. "Well, in the affairs of men there always comes a last time."

Cassalano laughed with a wheezing croak. His small blue eyes glinted like those of some rodent.

"You have spoken truly," he added to Caulkins's words. "There always comes a final black-out. I heard you remark, William Harper Littlejohn, of your laudable ambition to write a thesis upon your recent discoveries. You may compose your mind. The book shall be written. It will make the name of Salvatore Umbrogia Cassalano famous."

"Why, you worthless hunk of grease!" shouted Johnny. "You'll never live to tell anything you've seen!"

From the usually self-contained Johnny the outburst was amazing. The scholarly geologist had been stirred to wrath by more than Cassalano's malevolent jeering. He was thinking of Doc Savage and Long Tom.

Caulkins and Cassalano laughed together. They proceeded to the setting of the trinitromite. Caulkins directed their operation. Apparently the noted economist was a versatile individual. His bony hands worked rapidly with the placing of the coils of wire.

From the containers the pair of scoundrels took the special concussion caps required to explode the trinitromite. Wires were swiftly looped and attached. These golden, slender cables were then run close along the wall on the opposite side of the cavern.

"Slip them well into the crevices," suggested the biting voice of Caulkins. "One of our worthy friends might attempt to reach them."

Undoubtedly the wires were being laid well beyond any possibility of the prisoners making their way to them. Loose chunks of crystal rock were laid as covers near the magnetic deposit. Further along the wires were lifted and attached well up under the stalactites.

Bound by their metallic jackets, the captives would have found it physically impossible to disrupt the connection.

Monk moaned with complaint. Renny growled deep in his throat. He was testing every possible inch of the inside of the metallic jacket. No spot had been discovered which failed to operate the choking device.

“It seems impossible to believe,” gritted Ham to Johnny. “Perhaps it will be best if King Lumos and the queen never discover her treachery.”

PRINCESS LANTA had continued conversing with Zoro. Her slender white hands fluttered about the ugly chieftain of the murderous rebels. Ham had seen her speak to Cassalano. It was almost unbelievable. She had directed him to place some of the wire in a more inaccessible spot.

“You are remarkably clever,” the princess said to Cassalano. She made no attempt to disguise open admiration. “With your exploding balloons, the Uni-Ships of the kingdom have no chance.”

So it had been Cassalano who had devised the balloons. And the undependable princess was openly praising him, patting him on the back for murdering her father’s subjects.

Cassalano wheezed his appreciation. His small eyes gleamed. His double chins quivered.

“I can only hope,” he said, “that Cassalano can further assist the cause of Zoro and his beautiful queen.”

Monk promised squeakingly what would happen to “a tub of lard” if he succeeded in escaping from his “iron shirt.”

“Don’t seem a chance,” groaned Renny. “Maybe King Lumos would send out more of those ships.”

Crado’s black-and-white eyes glinted suddenly with warning. His lips tightened and he shook his head slowly at the others. The king’s commander at the last instant of their plunge had contacted the palace by radio. It was Crado’s hope King Lumos might rally enough of a force to attempt an assault.

Caulkins and Cassalano vanished, running the detonating wires toward the outer end of the solar tunnel. Princess Lanta remained in apparent intimate conversation with Zoro. Occasionally her white hands touched the ugly chief with affectionate movements.

Now only the princess and Zoro remained in the cavern. They were moving slowly toward the outer tunnel.

Within Renny, the giant engineer, anger had become a flood. As with Doc and the others, he had great admiration and respect for King Lumos. The apparent treachery of the princess was like a match applied to powder.

Renny's massive, corded arms were applied to the metallic jacket with a burst of superhuman strength. The collar throttled him. His face became bluish purple. But one side of the jacket tore out.

Zoro and Princess Lanta had just disappeared in the tunnel. The prisoners were alone. With silent speed, Renny began freeing Ham and Johnny.

Ham whipped over to the wire connecting the trinitromite.

Chapter 18

ALL THE KING'S MEN FAIL

RENNY continued freeing the other prisoners. Monk came to his feet. Crado and his men crouched, watching Ham.

On Ham's middle finger of the right hand was a massive ring. Its setting was in the form of a signet. The lawyer's idea of attack and defense seemed to run to blades of one kind and another.

Now he pressed the inner side of the heavy ring. A gleaming tongue leaped across the palm of his hand. Operated on a powerful spring, this was a razor-edged blade. Ham sought the concealed wires attached to the detonating concussion caps.

Only these caps would explode the trinitromite. The chemical blasting force was impervious to heat. It could not be set off by mere shock as ordinary dynamite could have been. Ham figured first of all to prevent the annihilating explosion.

The golden wire eluded him. He ran toward the trenches.

It was the wheezy voice of Cassalano that sounded an alarm. Apparently the mineralogist had been returning to make doubly sure the charge of trinitromite had been properly placed.

"Zoro!" he squawked. "Our prisoners! They've broken loose!"

Renny's giant bulk hurled upon the pudgy figure. Cassalano was knocked to the floor of the cavern. But something strange happened to the powerful Renny. His rush seemed to throw him into a double somersault over the mineralogist's fattish figure. The engineer struck with stunning force on his shoulders.

"Why, I'll take you apart!" squealed Monk.

His long arms reached for Cassalano. The mineralogist apparently was terrified. He scuttled to one side so quickly Monk did not even touch him. From the tunnel came the rushing flood of Zoromen. They were headed by Caulkins and Zoro himself.

Cassalano regained his feet.

"Give them the death music!" commanded the cold voice of Zoro.

"The bombs!" came a sharp order in the liquid voice of Princess Lanta.

Monk squealed with rage.

"The dirty double-crosser!" bellowed Renny. He was slowly getting to his feet after the stunning fall.

Cassalano's pudgy hands flew outward. Zoromen had produced flutes. Ham observed Caulkins and Cassalano had blobs of yellow wax in their ears. Similar wads marred the perfection of Princess Lanta's beauty.

"Get back out of here, all of you!" rapped out Cassalano.

"Hold your breaths!" shouted Ham, but his warning was too late.

The manner of the attack was unexpected, coming from Cassalano. The mineralogist himself was moving back toward the tunnel. Crado and his men were

tottering. They went to sleep on their feet. Monk, Renny and Johnny had been unprepared. They collapsed. Ham's own lungs had been emptied by his attempt to warn the others.

Within five seconds all were stretched again on the floor of the cavern. The things in the hands of Cassalano had been gas capsules. They had been almost instantly effective. The Zoromen had found it unnecessary to play the death music.

HAM and the others returned slowly to consciousness. Again they were encased in the metallic jackets. Renny discovered two of the jackets had been placed upon him. Zoro was taking no more chance on the giant engineer bursting from his prison.

Apparently the Zoromen had lingered to enjoy their enemies' discomfiture. Cassalano and Caulkins were adding some final touches to their wiring. Cassalano looked at the reviving captives and laughed gloatingly.

"We have waited to make sure you fully appreciate the power of Zoro before you perish," stated the rebel chief. "The princess so desired."

Princess Lanta was smiling upon Zoro. Ham groaned as their captors moved out through the tunnel.

Where the Princess Lanta was concerned, Monk at last was beyond speech. The prisoners could hear the final, faint sounds of Zoro and the others making their way to the outside.

"There can be no doubt but that Caulkins and that other fat swine were working with Zoro from the beginning," gritted Ham. "I believe Doc thought that, too. That was why he was anxious to get to the Land of Beyond. But there's something cockeyed about the way the princess is acting."

"Don't seem to make much difference," groaned Renny. "Looks as if the jig's all up with us now. Anyway, we won't have very long to wait now. We'll——"

From the outside tunnel voices shouted angrily. There came the sound of crashing blows. Above the others rang the voice of King Lumos himself.

"Get the death flutes first!" was the king's command.

Bodies clashed. A man screamed. The liquid tones of Princess Lanta rang out.

"Look out! They'll get all of you!"

Ham exclaimed hopefully. "Perhaps the princess was only playing a part. Now she's——"

But the faint strains of the flutes drifted into the cavern. The music evidently was too distant for the auditory chemicals to affect the jacketed prisoners. The sounds of battle were coming closer.

"Maybe they're drivin' them heathen back in here!" exploded Monk. "If I could only bust this iron shirt!"

But when the first figures appeared, it was disconcerting. King Lumos and perhaps a score of his loyal followers were being forced back along the tunnel. Some were stumbling, falling. The flutes had got in their deadly work.

King Lumos shouted, "Make a stand! Help Princess Lanta!"

His rapped out order was lost in a crackling explosion. Ham's whole waspish body shrank inside the metallic jacket. He had expected when the explosion came to be demolished instantly. To his surprise he was still alive.

BUT KING LUMOS and his few loyal men were blown off their feet. Some hurtled the width of the cavern. They fell among the prisoners lying upon the floor. The king was stunned. His tall figure wavered. He dropped to his knees and went slowly forward on his face.

From the tunnel came the crashing impact of a second explosion. This seemed to split the crystalline roof of the tunnel. Stalactites smashed like shattered plate glass windows.

King Lumos's men were sprawled about the floor. Two lay under the wall where the wiring had been run. Above them a whole section of the cavern roof separated. Tons of it dropped. The two king's men disappeared. Life had been crushed out.

Two of the king's adherents staggered to their feet. They caught the ruler's body and pulled it toward the jacketed prisoners.

Ham saw the caved-in roof had completely covered the transmission machinery at the end of the magnetic bed. Under this was the trinitromite, packed ready for the explosion.

Tons of the crystalline rocks buried everything in the back of the cavern. Renny groaned in desperation.

"We're blocked in. We can't get at those wires. The tunnel's filled. Zoro's men are outside."

King Lumos was recovering. In the peculiar light his smooth face looked drawn and gray. For the first time since knowing him, Ham observed the monarch of Subterranea had lost his calm demeanor. His tragic eyes suddenly showed his advanced age.

"I don't understand," said King Lumos in a stricken voice. "It is too incredible. The princess—my daughter—she was aiding the enemy. She might have warned us, but _____"

The king seemed to realize what he was saying. He cried out.

"Don't heed what I have been saying! I was mistaken! I did not see aright! Princess Lanta could never be other than loyal!"

Though the father's faith had been shaken, he was regretting he had spoken so quickly.

"Come, men," he said more calmly. "Release the prisoners. We must find a way out. Otherwise the air soon may be exhausted. The ventilating system is cut off."

Doc's four men realized then the king did not know of the more fearsome death threatening all of them—a death that might strike at any instant.

Released, Ham led the others in a swift attempt to reach the wiring or the detonating charges near the magnetic bed.

"What is it there?" inquired King Lumos.

Crado informed him, "All of us face appalling death, your majesty. Zoro has attached wires to the explosive force of the upper world. Unless we can escape from

this chamber quickly, all of us must perish. The solar system of Subterranae will be destroyed.”

MONK, RENNY and Johnny had joined Ham as soon as they were freed. Renny and Monk lifted mammoth fragments of the crystal rock. Their hands were speedily sliced into bloody meat. But no word of complaint came from them.

Johnny and Ham were less effective, but they did not spare their softer palms. Though Crado and the others of the king’s force speedily gave their assistance, the tons of piled rock made their task a seemingly hopeless one.

King Lumos himself flung aside a royal robe of gold cloth. In a moment his own hands streamed with blood.

Doc’s men were bathed in sweat. Even in this crisis, Johnny observed the men of Subterranae showed no such glistening perspiration. Their poreless skins were smooth as beaten silver.

Ham, who had been leading the others, stopped suddenly with a swift exclamation. He held up his hands resignedly.

“One solid sheet of the roof has fallen across the magnetic machinery,” he announced. “Our only hope is digging out through the tunnel. We cannot get at the wires.”

Some of the king’s men were near exhaustion. They showed plainly their lack of training in violent pursuits. They were of a peaceful and sedentary people. Monk and Renny led the attack upon the broken fragments of the roof in the tunnel.

These were not so closely packed. All of them now were breathless with suspense. Why was Zoro delaying? Surely he had King Lumos and the principals among his other enemies at his mercy.

Could it be the chief of the Land of Beyond was merely holding off the explosion to torture them? They were like rats in a trap about to be drowned.

“I can see light outside!” suddenly cried Monk. “But there’s a lot of stuff to be pulled down before we can reach it!”

His long arms worked with great effectiveness. Beside him, Renny seemed to be moving whole tons of the brittle rock. Their arms were bleeding to the elbows. King Lumos had sunk down from exhaustion.

Ham forced his waspish body as far as possible into the aperture. He saw the way to escape was so blocked that many hours might be required to move all of the caved rock.

Then the lawyer slipped slowly back among his companions. His hands hung at his sides. Without speaking he walked slowly across the cavern. His thought was that it might be as well if the others did not know.

He had been able to get a brief glimpse of Zoro’s men outside. Detonating boxes already had been placed.

Zoro and Cassalano were at this moment stepping away to set off the mighty blast of trinitromite.

Ham looked once at the powerful Monk and Renny. They were still heaving whole blocks of crystal back into the cavern.

“Dag-gonit!” squealed Monk. “When I get my hands on that dirty heathen I’ll unwind him from his head!”

Ham groaned aloud.

“The big, ugly ape,” he muttered. “He’d do it, too.”

Chapter 19

THE MISPLACED BLAST

ZORO's three Uni-Ships sat a short distance from the entrance to the solar system tunnel. Zoro's entire force encircled the space. The Uni-Ships had been placed at what seemed a safe distance from any disaster.

"Better be very sure about the ships," advised Caulkins. "That trinitromite is liable to lift the whole hill. Its explosive effect is upward and outward, not downward like dynamite."

Cassalano surveyed the Uni-Ships from his small, glittering eyes. His double chins quivered. A short laugh wheezed from his throat.

"The ships are safe enough," he remarked, "but we can't take any chances on being too close ourselves. If we'd had more wire, I'd put those detonating boxes farther away. However, I've fixed them so a couple of bullets from Doc Savage's pistols will make the contact."

Two square black boxes had been placed about one hundred yards from the blocked tunnel. Here the supply of wire had given out. Zoro had become abusive. He blamed some of his men for the shortage of wire.

"We had a much greater amount than this," he declared. "But we have no time to search for it. I can hear them digging their way out. You are sure, Cassalano, you have fixed these strange boxes so the bullets will set off the explosive force?"

Cassalano smiled placatingly.

"Do you doubt that I understand these instruments?" he barked. "The charged plates are so fixed in the detonators that the impact of a bullet cannot miss driving them together. The contact of the plates sends the spark to the concussion caps. When you fire the pistol, you may see half of the magnetic hill dissolve before your eyes. You will then be fortunate to be at a distance. I judge the boxes will be buried."

Princess Lanta remained close beside Zoro. The beautiful girl apparently had forgotten all allegiance to her kingdom and all filial respect and affection. She made a request that strengthened the appearance of unnatural emotion.

"If I am to become the queen, then should I not discharge one of the weapons?"

Her liquid voice was cold, colorless. She had directed the inquiry at Cassalano. That fat-faced conspirator smirked at her openly.

"Indeed, that would be fitting to the occasion, princess," he agreed.

ZORO's ugly face scowled, but his piercing eyes lightened as he gazed upon Princess Lanta's lovely figure. In his great conceit, he could understand her apparent abject surrender to his will.

Zoro covered the moment with a sharp order.

"Remove the Uni-Ships to a safer distance. We must take no risk with them. They will be needed for an immediate attack upon the city of Manyon."

His men immediately changed the location of the Uni-Ships by a slightly wider margin. Two of the supermachine pistols were produced. One of these had been carried by Princess Lanta when she was captured. Others had been taken from the prisoners in the death tunnel.

Princess Lanta herself instructed Zoro in the operation of the drum loaded with mercy bullets. These were of sufficient force to penetrate the thin walls of the detonating boxes. These were at a distance of nearly a hundred yards.

Standing side by side, Zoro and Princess Lanta lifted the pistols.

“You don’t have to aim carefully,” advised Cassalano. “Just point them toward the boxes. You couldn’t miss them with all of the bullets.”

At the moment when Ham, inside the cavern of doom, groaned in despairing submission to the inevitable, Princess Lanta and Zoro pulled the triggers of the supermachine weapons. The pistols jumped and vibrated in their hands.

Two smoking streams of bullets furrowed the ground near the detonating boxes. The princess and Zoro corrected their aims. The hissing line of slugs was lifted. Simultaneously the bullets crashed into the pair of sinister black boxes.

For an instant it seemed as if the whole side of the magnetic hill had lifted. The air cracked with the detonation. Fragments of rock and earth showered around Zoro and his group. Princess Lanta’s slim figure swayed far to one side.

The bulky, fat Cassalano sprang toward the girl and Zoro, as if to catch the princess before she fell. Zoromen around them were jarred from their feet. A mushroom of gray smoke obscured all of the magnetic hill.

Then an incredible thing happened.

Princess Lanta had swung about. The mercy pistol in her hand was still erupting. But the remainder of the stream of bullets was pouring into the nearest Zoromen. A dozen went down like tenpins in a direct strike.

THE fat Cassalano had not attempted to assist the princess, as it had appeared. One pudgy hand had twisted the supermachine pistol from Zoro’s grasp. The surprised Zoro was caught unprepared. He started to shout a command.

Cassalano’s fist did not seem at all cushioned by fat as it lashed out. In fact, the blow was faster than the human eye could have followed. Zoro was lifted from his feet and overturned yards away.

Cassalano’s weapon joined its staccato output of mercy bullets to that of the princess. Three or four Zoromen put their murder flutes to their lips. But they dropped them without blowing death music.

They had remembered the protective yellow wax in the ears of Princess Lanta, Cassalano and Caulkins.

For Caulkins also was armed with one of the supermachine pistols. The lean, bony economist had slyly moved away from the remainder of the group. He was closer to the Uni-Ships. Bullets erupted from his vibrating weapon into the Zoromen around the ships.

Though the surprise attack had wrought wide havoc, Zoro's band was numerous. First, the majority had gaped at the apparent dissolution of the hillside under the force of the blast. Then they were seeking to escape the sweeping stream of drugged bullets that had caught their companions.

Zoro, knocked to the ground, himself had escaped the mercy slugs. He came to his feet shouting commands. Some fifty or more of his men rallied. The mercy pistol of the fat Cassalano was emptied. So was the weapon the princess held.

Zoro led a group in a massed rush. For a fat man, Cassalano moved with blinding speed. The pudgy fists operated like electrically driven pistons. A queer circumstance accompanied these blows that accounted for an enemy with each whiplike snapping of the man's arms. The pudgy aspect of the fists themselves was undergoing a change. It was as if the heat of combat were melting the fat from Cassalano's hands.

A dozen Zoromen were piled around him. But the massed weight bore him to the ground. Zoromen were now using death flutes in dagger fashion. They were striking at Cassalano's eyes. The end of one instrument ripped across the double chins.

Astoundingly, the lower chin was torn off by the force of the blow. But no blood appeared. Cassalano rolled over and away from the wedged attack. As he did, he glimpsed the gaunt figure of Caulkins surrounded by Zoromen. Caulkins's pistol had ceased exploding. He was fighting desperately, but was being overwhelmed.

The now one-chinned Cassalano thrust his hand under the tunic loosely enveloping his body. His fingers came into contact with a small flat case attached to straps over his shoulders. This case had numerals on a dial. The finger tips read them as if they had been the Braille system used for blind persons.

A knob twisted. A pointer moved from "Off" to the first number. Close to the group around Caulkins sounded two loud, mushy explosions. Zoromen began screaming. They fell to the ground, writhing. Quickly they became motionless.

As they toppled over, their silvery skins looked as if they had been pierced by thousands of tiny needles. Drops of blood appeared. They were surrounded by an acrid haze of powder.

The knob turned again to the second number on the dial. Another mushy explosion tore up the earth in front of a stream of Zoromen running toward the Uni-Ships. They staggered and toppled.

Caulkins looked at his companion, Cassalano, with an aggrieved expression on his lean, ascetic countenance.

"Did you have to do——" he started to say. He did not finish.

For he had toppled across the body of a Zoroman.

ONLY ZORO and about a score of his henchmen remained on their feet. Zoro cried out desperately and led them toward the Uni-Ships. Cassalano made no effort to prevent their flight. He smiled queerly. His face was strangely contorted.

Not only had one of his chins been cut off, but his puffed cheeks had disappeared. With a quick movement he was removing ridges of wax from the gums about both upper and lower teeth. With a thumbnail he flicked away two shelllike coverings from his eyeballs.

The flaky gold eyes of Doc Savage were looking at Princess Lanta. His orbs stirred in little whirlpools of light.

“You gave a remarkable performance, Princess Lanta,” stated the bronze man. “Your father will be grateful indeed.”

“My poor father,” sighed Princess Lanta. “If only he hasn’t been hurt. I’ll never forgive myself for deceiving him, but I know it was the only way. Zoro would have overwhelmed all of us in the tunnel.”

“That is true, so do not accuse yourself,” advised Doc. “We could not have acted sooner with any hope of success.”

Where the mushy blasts had occurred lay many of the Zoromen. Near the one group the bony figure of the apparent Caulkins still reposed. Doc went to his side. He slipped a hypodermic needle under the skin. Within a minute the pseudo Caulkins opened his eyes.

“Good gosh, Doc!” exploded the voice of Long Tom. “I feel like I’d been stung by a million bees!”

Like those around him, he had been peppered with particles of a solidified drug. It was the same anæsthetic Ham used on the tip of his sword blade.

Doc had employed minute portions of the trinitromite to manufacture the small boxes buried in strategic spots. The explosions had been caused by remote radio control.

Overhead, Zoro’s three Uni-Ships were circling. Doc led Long Tom and Princess Lanta toward the tunnel of the magnetic cavern.

HAM, for the moment hopeless, had heard the rippling explosions of the supermachine pistols in the hands of Zoro and Princess Lanta. Instantly there was a terrific blast. The walls of the crystal cavern quivered. New fragments of loosened roof rained down.

Monk, Renny and the others rolled out of the tunnel just in time to miss a deluge of stalactites. Ham was on his feet. His hands went carefully over his own waspish figure.

“I’m all right,” he muttered. “We’re all O. K. What could have happened?”

The buried trinitromite remained safely under the entombing rocks. The great blast had been outside.

Ham was electrified with new hope. He sprung lightly toward the entombing downfall of crystal. His slender hands tore at the obstruction.

“Holy cow!” thundered Renny. “Something blew up outside! Let’s steam-shovel this stuff!”

With Monk beside him, the big engineer tried to emulate the device he had named. The loose rock rolled behind the sinewed pair. King Lumos stared at them bleakly. Perhaps even death would have been preferred by the ruler of Subterranea to the supposed knowledge of Lanta’s treachery.

A staccato of shooting slapped on the ears of the imprisoned men. Through it Ham detected a voice of smooth command. The tones were not excited, but they penetrated into the tunnel.

“Doc himself!” shouted Ham. “Everybody hit the stuff!”

A fainter voice buzzed inside the cavern. It was emanating from the portable radio receiver of King Lumos. It was assurance being uttered by Princess Lanta, even as she was engaged in battling beside the man of bronze.

King Lumos dropped at least half a century of his more than one hundred years. Youth flowed back into his veins. Again he was a young man leading his loyal followers.

“We must save ourselves, Crado!” he commanded. “Follow me!”

Like a monarch of ancient times who led his broadswordsmen to an attack, the king shouldered his way between Renny and Monk. His aged arms were imbued with new strength.

In front of Ham the small opening widened. Renny and Monk heaved the last and largest fragment of crystal to one side.

Monk loped toward the exit. Ham interposed his waspish figure.

“Keep back, you clumsy gorilla!” barked the lawyer. “Even an ape ought to know the rights of kings! The place of King Lumos is at the head of his men!”

For once, Monk had no reply ready. The big chemist’s hands and forearms were sliced to ribbons by the sharp rock he had handled. He mopped at his sweating face. With the hair matted on his sloping countenance he achieved the ugliest moment of his career.

THE released men burst into the open. Acrid smoke of an explosion lay in wisps about them. Overhead floated the three Uni-Ships of Zoro. From one of these a dark object shot down. It struck the ground and split asunder. A wide crevasse opened only a few yards from King Lumos and his men.

Earth and rocks pelted around the escaping prisoners.

Two of the ships circled. Ham and the others saw the pair they had believed to be Caulkins and Cassalano. Princess Lanta was beside them. The princess cried out joyfully. She ran toward her father.

Another bomb flashed down. The ground was furrowed by its ripping impact. Several of Zoro’s unconscious men were blown to bits. The rebel chief had become desperately ruthless. His Uni-Ship came over King Lumos and Doc’s three companions.

“Back into the cavern!” came the voice of Doc Savage.

Doc was pulling a small, flat box from Long Tom’s shirt. On this glistened a number of dials. Coiled wires enwrapped the outside. Doc twisted one of the dials. The others could feel the air crackling on a static wave.

Up above, the three Uni-Ships of Zoro suddenly ceased to move. They remained suspended as if hung on cables. Within one of the ships there was abrupt commotion. The members of the crew were apparently fighting among themselves.

One of the Uni-Ship’s hatchways was opened. A bulky figure was propelled into space. The ship was several hundred feet in the air. The body of a man started falling. Arms and legs sprawled grotesquely.

It was Zoro.

In a panic over their defeat and the loss of both power and gravity control, the Zoromen had thrown out their chief. By this evidently they hoped to win some leniency from King Lumos.

Zoro's belt had been pulled from him. If his henchmen had realized it, his gravity control would have been useless.

The chief of the Land of Beyond struck the ground. The pretender to the throne of King Lumos became only a gruesome blot. Princess Lanta turned her eyes away.

Monk was close to the princess and her father. He was a bloody, grimy spectacle. Princess Lanta looked at him and smiled. Ham was in the act of restoring his rumpled raiment. Even in the face of greatest stress, the lawyer seemed a dapper figure. He moved carefully to be sure the princess had noticed him.

Princess Lanta put one white hand on Monk's bulletlike head. She gently wiped the blood from his blinking eyes.

"I thank you, man with the funny face I like, for saving my father," she said softly. "And for your bravery in coming to my rescue in the garden."

Ham moved disgustedly away.

"It just goes to show there isn't any justice," he muttered.

King Lumos was looking at Doc and Long Tom. The man of bronze had only about half of his disguise removed. His hands and face were once more a golden hue. His hair was still an indeterminate color.

"But it seems impossible, Doc Savage," said the king. "What became of the two scientists?"

Doc strode to a spot not far from the cavern entrance. Again he turned a knob on the box he had taken from Long Tom. The ground immediately trembled with a minor quake.

A Uni-Ship bored into view. Doc's remote control box stopped it directly before the king. A hatchway opened.

The grim, desperate faces of Homer Pearson Caulkins, the economist, and Salvatore Umbrogia Cassalano, the mineralogist, appeared. The disheveled, chagrined scientists stumbled to the ground.

"The buried Uni-Ship made a very secure prison," smiled the man of bronze.

Chapter 20

LAND OF TO-MORROW

“BUT we believed you to have been imprisoned in the wrecked Uni-Ship?” exclaimed King Lumos. “Your message seemed to spell disaster for all of our hopes.”

“We radioed only because it was necessary,” stated Doc Savage. “We were sure Zoro would hear that call. It was the only manner in which Long Tom and I could take over the roles of Caulkins and Cassalano. These two tell me they were seeking to escape when we found them fleeing from the Land of Beyond.”

“But how could you have found them with the Uni-Ship?” questioned Princess Lanta. “In the place where they were, it must have been utterly dark.”

“It was plenty dark,” put in Long Tom. “But Doc had brought along the searchlight that creates the infra-red rays. With the ray invisible to the human eye without aid, we used the binoculars that made the surface below us brilliant as daylight. We saw Caulkins and Cassalano hiding. Doc landed the Uni-Ship and we seized them.”

“They imagined we were Zoromen,” said Doc. “They made the mistake of trying to explain in the darkness. They said they had merely gone out for a walk and became lost. Before they identified us, they were pledging themselves to carry out the plot to destroy the solar system of Manyon.”

“So Doc took them into the Uni-Ship and locked them up,” stated Long Tom. “Then he sent it for a dive underground.”

“I don’t understand how that could have been done,” declared King Lumos. “In Subterranae we have been much more advanced in our discoveries and inventions than those of the upper world. Yet, within a few hours, you have developed our own forces until they accomplish unheard-of feats.”

The man of bronze smiled a little.

“We merely employed remote control,” he stated. “It is the same force with which we now have suspended the Uni-Ships of Zoro. Reversed, it brought out the Uni-Ship containing Caulkins and Cassalano. It is one of the devices I hope to leave with the Kingdom of Subterranae.”

“Leave with us?” said King Lumos.

“That is our purpose,” smiled the bronze man. “With the light of the infra-red ray, you have the means of observing the movement of any future enemies in the darkness. You can turn off your solar system, yet you will be able to see what your foes are doing.”

“And this other you call remote control?” said the king.

“Perhaps it will serve with more elastic power than your super-magnetic towers,” said Doc. “You will be able to so adjust it that you could at any time interfere with the controls of your enemies’ Uni-Ships. But at the same time you could have your own controls out of tune with the radio beam.”

Crado cried out from a little distance.

“We must not forget the buried explosive force inside the magnetic cavern! If something should cause it to let go, all of our transmission generators would be wrecked!”

Doc Savage shook his head slowly.

“You need never fear the trinitromite,” he stated. “The explosive force of our world is now lacking any means of concussion. Still it might be best to have it removed and destroyed as soon as possible.”

“You mean,” said King Lumos, “the explosive force now is inactive.”

“That is it,” said Doc. “Only the detonating caps especially designed for it will set it off. None of the caps have been placed with the charge in the cavern. When Long Tom and I had succeeded in misleading Zoro into the belief we were Caulkins and Cassalano, we substituted harmless dummy caps for the real ones without Zoro’s knowledge.”

“And the real concussion caps were packed in the detonating boxes, which Zoro and I exploded with the weapons of the metallic drums,” said Princess Lanta. “Clark Savage made himself known to me. When the boxes were torn to pieces, all of the caps were destroyed.”

She indicated the deep excavation where the detonating boxes had been set. The blast had appeared to tear open the side of the hill containing the magnetic bed.

In the air, a thousand feet up, the helpless ships filled with Zoromen were drifting. The remote control machine devised by Doc and Long Tom made their descent impossible. The ring-leaders of the revolution, who intended to place Zoro on the throne, were imprisoned in the strangest possible manner.

In the inner room of the palace King Lumos reported a clamoring of his people for the execution of all those of the Land of Beyond.

“Among your subjects you have perhaps one of surgical skill,” suggested Doc Savage. “From among those we have brought from the Land of Beyond we will select two for a demonstration. To your surgeon will be imparted the power to bring about a new form of banishment for the discontented and those of warped mind.”

“Yes, Clark Savage, we have learned of your treatment of crooks in the upper world,” said Princess Lanta. “We can inform our people we are carrying out an execution. The brains that are ill will die, and the rebellious ones will be banished to the Land of Forgetfulness. We need no longer maintain the Land of Beyond.”

“What a girl, what a girl!” exclaimed Ham. “Now if she only can find a king fit to occupy the same throne.”

Monk had wrought a remarkable transformation in his appearance. So far as possible he had shaved his homely face.

“Dag-gonit!” he grunted. “I’ve been thinkin’ the same thing!”

“Imagine a kingdom of apes without any trees,” grinned Ham.

King Lumos quickly agreed to the surgical experiment which would dispense with the need for a land of banishment.

“And now, Doc Savage,” he said, “you have brought to us valuable gifts which will be of greatest benefit to the Kingdom of Subterranae. In return, we are prepared to

repay you for this and your saving of our people. Gold and diamonds, which will exceed those of all your upper world, shall be conveyed to the surface in our Uni-Ships. We would keep you and your men with us, but we are aware the earth needs your wisdom and courage.”

The man of bronze shook his head gravely.

“We have of our own gold all we shall ever require to aid those who are oppressed,” he stated. “This is the bequest of my father through a king of an ancient race. This ruler is very like you in kindness and in the hearts of his people. We can accept nothing.”

King Lumos was amazed; but Princess Lanta said, “I had told my father the offer should not have been made. Now I think he understands.”

“Perhaps with your new knowledge of the world outside, some of your people might want to come among us,” suggested Doc Savage.

“No,” agreed King Lumos and the princess.

They said that except for Zoro and his machinations, their land had been peaceful. It had few of the ills afflicting society in the upper world. They would remain as they were, but arrange a means by which Doc Savage could sometimes communicate with them.

“And how shall we dispose of the scientists?” questioned King Lumos.

“They have had their lesson,” stated Doc. “Zoro had in some manner communicated with them before he made contact with their ship. He had promised them quantities of diamonds and gold to make them powerful in the upper world. In exchange, they were to provide the explosives with which Zoro could overthrow the kingdom of the inner world. I believe if they escape to our own world, Caulkins and Cassalano will find their own sphere of effort sufficient to occupy them in the future.”

Princess Lanta’s lovely black-and-white eyes had lingered long on the man of bronze. She sighed deeply. She realized Doc Savage was of another race. More, he had mapped a plan of life in which he would always stand alone.

SOME hours later the earth shook. In the vicinity of the Friendly Islands the ground swayed. Branches of brittle dead trees crackled and snapped.

This was the last of the series of inexplicable earthquakes.

Wise geologists explained them as a shrinking of the earth’s crust over the raging fires in the interior of the world.

Doc Savage and his five companions read these explanations and smiled.

Perhaps their smiles would have been a bit grim if they could have looked thousands of miles southward, below the equator, and seen *The Fantastic Island*. There, in a remote island of the Galapagos, was to be the scene of their next struggle, against odds that taxed Doc Savage’s ingenuity to the uttermost!

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

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[The end of *Murder Melody* by Lawrence Donovan (as Kenneth Robeson)]