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WINTER  
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A THRILLING  
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## **A GOD NAMED KROO**

*An Amazing Novel*  
By **HENRY KUTTNER**

**SPACE COMMAND**  
*An Interplanetary  
Novelet*  
By **ROBERT ARTHUR**

**THE INVISIBLE  
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*Title:* A God Named Kroo

*Date of first publication:* 1944

*Author:* Henry Kuttner (1914-1958)

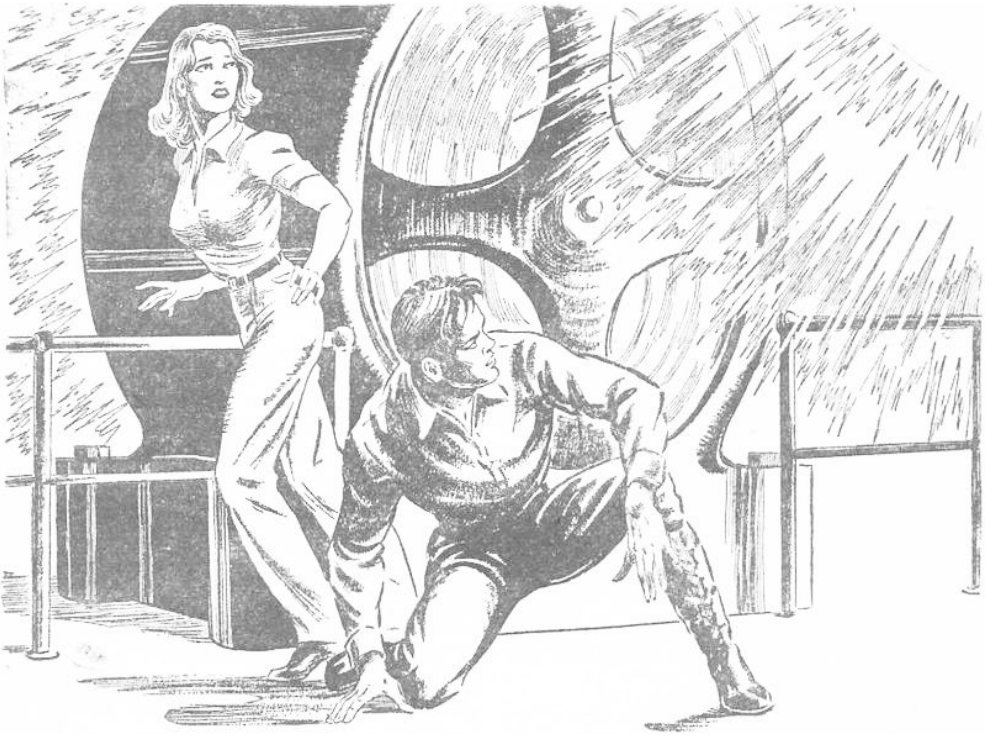
*Date first posted:* June 12, 2022

*Date last updated:* June 12, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220626

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Palms singed and tingling, Danton slid down to the floor

# A GOD NAMED KROO

By  
HENRY KUTTNER

First published *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, Winter 1944.

*When Dr. Horace Danton Is Transported to Burma and Made the High Priest of a Tibetan Deity, He Becomes the Startling Storm-Center of a Series of Fantastic Events!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Gods Can Die*

There were no temples, but sacred enclosures surrounding fetiches and images. All creatures living in these sacred precincts, or even straying into them by accident, were taboo and became the property of the god . . .

—Reinach: Orpheus

Kroo brooded over his yak.

After ten years, he had become attached to the creature, concentrating upon it all the paternal affection a greater god might have given his worshippers. But Kroo had no worshippers any more. The last of these had died half a century before, and his son had turned Buddhist. Thus Kroo was become a god without devotees—always a saddening thing.

It always happened, of course. Marduk, Allatu of Babylon, Ormazd, and Osiris died gracefully, and so did most of the forsaken gods who preferred limbo to forgetfulness. Yes, they had been wiser than Kroo, who was a minor tribal deity in the Himalayas, naive and untraveled.

Born of ignorant peasant minds, he took after his parents. Once blood sacrifices had been offered to him—now the villagers shunned the weedy temple yard on the outskirts of the town. They still held a slight fear of Kroo and the malignant powers he could use, so they did not molest his house. They ignored it, which was much worse. No one ever entered, no one had for years. That is, except the yak.

The yak knew no better. Wandering in search of forage one night, he had snapped his rope and burst into the court through the tumbledown fence. In the morning the natives found him there. Kroo still remembered the sly, cunning faces that had peered in at the yak.

“Call him, quick,” one had said. “Dho-ni will never know.”

Kroo shook with rage at that perfidy. The blasphemous little squirt! He’d steal the property of the gods, would he? Well—

About to do something drastic, Kroo paused as Dho-ni, the ancient lama, came on the scene, withered as a mummy in his coarse blue robe. He understood the situation at a glance.

“Back!” he croaked. “The yak belongs to Kroo now.” He entered the temple yard.

“But he is mine,” a sad-faced, gaunt native protested. “I need his strong back. How can I —”

“Be silent. It is your own fault for letting the beast wander. Now he is Kroo’s, and sacred.”

---

At this Kroo allowed himself to smile faintly as he remembered. Dho-ni was a bigot, of course, but he respected tradition. So the yak had remained, and just now it was lumbering about the yard like a shaggy bundle of brown straw looking for a good spot to lie down. Finally it stopped, lowered its fore-quarters with the utmost caution, let its colossal bulk drop slowly to the ground, and sighed. The yak ruminated. Kroo sneered.

Other gods might die—weak, milk-and-watery deities—but not Kroo. He came of good, sturdy peasant stock, with tenacity as one of his cardinal virtues. But it was not pleasant to think of the pomp and grandeur of the courts of Babylon and Nippur, the mighty temple of Karnak, the thousands of altars where other gods had been worshipped. Real altars—not a

chunk of weathered stone from which even the last trace of bloodstains had faded. Kroo felt weak from emotional reaction. He knew what that sign meant.

He was growing old. He was dying. For fifty years he had been slowly starving to death, lacking the necessary nutriment of prayers, sacrifices and belief. The villagers did not really believe in him any more. They were merely not quite sure, a little afraid, and unwilling to take a chance.

Unless Kroo got worshippers—and soon—he would die.

He was too young to die. He had never lived. For a second he was blind with jealous envy of the greater gods than he, whose miracles had filled thousands—millions—with terror. Kroo could work miracles too, but his audience was strictly limited. What he needed was an acolyte. A high priest. If only one of the natives would wander into the temple yard . . . but there was not the slightest chance of that.

Kroo lifted his shaggy, uncouth head and listened. There was argument outside the fence. A group of villagers were expostulating with a—a white man! The god's vision swept out. He saw a lean, hard, tight-mouthed face and cold blue eyes that were alight now with anger. Kroo listened.

"I need a yak," the white man snapped. "We lost two in an avalanche, and the other beasts are nearly exhausted."

"Why not leave behind some of your booty?" came the naive suggestion.

"My equipment? Mmpmph. It took me six months to collect, at the cost of chilblains and frostbite, and I'm taking it back with me—all of it. Why the devil won't you sell me that yak? Or rent the beast. I'll send him back once I reach the river."

"Dho-ni is away on a trip."

"When will he be back?"



The Japanese soldier seized Deborah by the wrist

“Who knows? Many moons, perhaps.”

Money clinked. There was a stir of movement among the villagers. Apprehensive glances were cast around as each man looked at his neighbor. After all, Dho-ni was away and gold was gold.

But tradition triumphed. “Nay Peling. We cannot sell.”

The white man threw a handful of coins on the ground. “I’m buying. I need that yak. And I intend to have it.” He turned and went toward the temple yard. The natives made no move.

And Kroo, leaning forward tensely on his hams, sucked in his breath and smiled as Dr. Horace Danton entered the fenced enclosure.

So the next day the white man and his party moved east and then south, toward India. Though Danton had never covered this territory before, he trusted implicitly in his native guide, who had come with high recommendations.

---

Jieng looked rather like an untrustworthy monkey, but he had been to Lhasa, the Forbidden City, and had guided parties into the interior and back for years. He wore little beside a leathery smock and a sharp-bladed *kukri* in a wooden scabbard, and his legs were hairy, though his face was not.

The towering ranges of the Himalayas guarded the travelers as they went on, crossing gorges, descending perilous paths, cursing the yak when it became recalcitrant, and not noticing that they were followed by a small, black thundercloud.

Danton's thoughts were occupied elsewhere. His expedition had kept him in exile for nearly two years, but now he could return to America, having fulfilled the commission the museum had given him. It would be interesting to see New York again. And to pause, for a week or so enroute, at Hawaii.

The uninformed Dr. Danton wondered how the European War was getting on. Well, he'd soon find out, at the nearest outpost that boasted a radio. The rumors that filtered into the interior of Tibet were few and distorted. Danton wondered vaguely whether Japan had given up hope of conquering China yet. He trusted so. As a logical man, he objected to long-winded futility. Well, the matter scarcely affected him, unless he passed through a war zone. He'd take good care not to do that, for his specimens were too valuable to be lost.

Under the circumstances, it came as a considerable shock to Danton when the yak inadvertently became the subject of a miracle.

The common yak—or as pedants call it, *poephagus grunniens*—is a gigantic, shaggy muscular creature which resembles a moving mountain. To see such a beast wallowing or walking is unsettling to one's equilibrium. And to see a yak levitated—!

The affair happened on a trail that wound dangerously down the side of a sheer, dangerous precipice. The party was proceeding in single file, feeling their way delicately, when a small white animal, probably a rabbit bounced up directly under the foremost yak's blunt nose. The yak emitted a hoarse, anguished cry, made clattering noises with its hoofs, and fell into the abyss, taking with it a good deal of shale, and the yak Danton had purchased at the Tibetan village. The dead silence of great altitude was broken by the roar of a minor avalanche.

Danton saw the whole thing as he instinctively flattened himself against the rock beside him. The first yak kept falling. So did the shale. But the other yak dropped only about a hundred feet and then paused. It hung in midair, a misshapen dark mass, and then slowly began to rise. Danton's eyes altered in size.

The yak rose until it was level with the path and slightly above it. The beast was upside-down, and looking at Danton with a glazed and singularly pathetic stare. It suddenly revolved in the air until its feet were underneath, slid sidewise, and dropped an inch or two so that it was once more safely upon the trail.

A faint splash heralded the doom of the yak that was not under Kroo's protection.

From the natives came an outburst of chattering. Jieng quieted them by waving his *kukri* and making it glitter in the sunlight. He peered at Danton out of bright little eyes and waited.



Danton gave the signal to continue. There wasn't anything to say, really. The impossible had happened. One can't readily comment on such things.

---

But Danton was more than usually alert after that. When they made camp at nightfall, he called Jieng to his small fire of dung-chips. The native squatted on his haunches and spoke in his own dialect, in which Danton was proficient.

"You saw what happened to the yak, Jieng?"

"*Pranam*," was the slightly irrelevant reply. "It was magic, of course."

"We of the west do not believe in magic."

"Many do not," said Jieng philosophically. "Even holy men who know a great many *mantras* are secretly skeptical. I had thought that the yak was a magician in disguise, or even a god, master. But when I put questions to him, he did not answer. Still . . ."

Danton pointed up to where a cloud obscured a few stars. "Have you—uh—noticed that?"

"Of course. A thundercloud, though not a large one. It has been following you ever since we left the village." Jieng shrugged. "I am an ignorant man, Peling. I know little of such things. Perhaps you have become a Living Buddha, or a *Gompo* Lama."

Danton made impolite and skeptical noises. "Rot."

"As you say, rot. But when a Living Buddha dies, his soul enters immediately into the body of a new-born babe."

"Well, I'm not a new-born babe. Incidentally, why have you set men on guard tonight, Jieng?"

"Hostile natives—they have been signaling about us since noon. I heard them."

Danton knew the keenness of Jieng's ears. "Think there's danger?"



Danton was left on the steps of the powerhouse beside Deborah and the yak

“Perhaps. I have armed the men. But they are cowards, master, and afraid to fight hill-people.”

“Well? Shall we break camp tonight and go on?”

“May the spirits forbid! The hillmen are waiting for that, so that they can pick us off one by one.” Jieng’s monkey face was impassive. He did not seem to care what happened. Dr. Danton mentioned this.

“Well, I worship Kali. Should I die, Kali would comfort me. She is a mighty goddess. A-i! What is that?”

Danton looked at the sky, cloudless save for a small black blot. “Thunder. Odd.”

Jieng hunched himself together over the fire, looking like a leathern, ragged bundle. “I shall not mention—*her*—again. There is another god present, I think, and may my ancestors bear witness I am a tolerant man.”

“All right. Let’s get back to the—to what happened today. What do the men think about it?”

“Who knows? Only they bow to the yak whenever they pass him. *Ow!* Get your gun, quick! The dogs are attacking!”

This seemed all too true. There were shouts from the darkness beyond the camp. The moonlight was too dim to be of much aid, but nevertheless Danton sprang up, whipping out his revolver. It was handier than a rifle in such a scrap as seemed to be forthcoming.

The intermittent yells were like the baying of wolves. Occasionally Danton could see a black jumping-jack spring up and vanish again, while a spear would shoot into the firelight. The small figure of Jieng was busy exhorting the natives, who milled around in a confused mass. Abruptly they flung down their guns and fell on their faces. No use to fight, they figured. It was fate, alas. They burrowed their pug noses into the dirt and repeated “*Om mani padme hum.*”

Jieng ran back to Dr. Danton. “They will not help. What now?”

For answer the white man lifted his revolver and fired at a half-seen silhouette, which dodged, seemingly unhurt. There was another outburst of yells, the pattering of feet, and a shower of spears. One blade cut Danton’s sleeve.

The black cloud overhead, which no one was noticing at the moment, quivered convulsively, as though in rage. It muttered low, ominous thunder. And then a lightning bolt streaked down from it.

Well-aimed, it found a hillman, outlining him in white radiance. The man flung up his arms, shrieked, and fell dead. Before he hit the ground another bolt flashed from the sky.

“What luck,” Danton whispered.

Jieng said: “I would not call it luck. *A-i!* Another!”

A third streak of lightning darted from the cloud and disposed of a third hillman. Then another—and still more. Danton was irresistibly reminded of a sniper sitting calmly on top of that incredible cloud, carefully aiming and firing. The hillmen gave up and ran away. The lightning pursued. The unfortunate wretches scattered across the plain, but could not escape. Danton and Jieng watched as their quondam enemies were disposed of, neatly and noisily.

## CHAPTER II

### *Kroo's Miracle*

Slowly the cloud came back. It hovered directly over Danton, muttering faintly. Jieng, with a foreboding sound, departed. The white man was suddenly lifted into the air.

Briefly he was blind. Then his vision cleared. He was looking down on the camp and the vague, moonlighted plain. The prostrate bodies of his native carriers were piled in a heap. Jieng was a huddled black blot. Danton discovered that he was about forty feet above the ground, sitting on the edge of a singularly solid cloud.

Vertigo assailed him. He rocked forward and back, clawing at his support in a baffled manner. The whole thing was quite impossible. Moreover, he was in immediate danger of falling.

“Jieng!” he yelled.

Jieng looked up and began to salaam. The other natives made temporary white blurs of their faces and then followed Jieng's example. Danton cursed them dispassionately.

He was sitting on a cloud. That, in itself, was unusual enough to be noteworthy. The texture of the cloud, he discovered with tentative fingers, was rubbery, somewhat like a sponge. It was comfortable, as far as that went. Even an electric chair might be comfortable for a brief time. Finally, something was licking Danton's neck.

He gingerly turned his head to confront the bland, friendly gaze of the yak. The huge creature was lying down just behind him, and the propinquity of that Minotaur-like face was distressing. The horns looked dangerous, even though they had the texture of crumbly wood.

Something—either the yak or the cloud—rumbled. Danton didn't know which.

He looked down and yelled at Jieng. “Get me down from here, you benighted fool.”

“How?” Jieng asked cogently, without ceasing his salaams.

The problem was solved at that point when both Danton and the yak were gently levitated back to the ground. Danton found himself sitting astride the beast. He hurriedly dismounted and burst into a cold sweat.

“Liquor,” he said, rummaging in a knapsack. “Oh confound Tibet anyway.” He drank whisky and barked sharp orders to Jieng. “We're getting out of here. Right away.”

“Soon,” said Jieng. “The carriers wish to thank the god who saved us from the hillmen. He must love you. The yak is probably sacred to him.”

“Rot,” Danton snarled, thinking of Gompo Lamas and Tibetan adepts. “It's hypnotism or something. Nay,” he went on, his voice suddenly thickening, “thou hast beheld the power of Kroo. Kroo the All-Wise! Kroo the Terrible! Bow down and worship Kroo!”

“*Ya!* Kroo is great!” the diplomatic Jieng remarked hastily, and prostrated himself, as did the other natives.

Danton, standing aghast, stared down at the salaaming group. Why in the dickens had he said that?

He hadn't. The words had come from his mouth without conscious volition of his own. He had listened as though someone else had been speaking.

“Get up!” he said irritably. “Don't—Kroo is great! Worship Kroo or die writhing and impaled.”

“*Ya!*”

Danton ground his teeth together. He felt slightly mad. With urgent haste he recovered the whisky bottle and gulped the stinging fluid.

---

His voice boomed out. “Go! Leave Kroo, who would speak privately with his High Priest!”

Instantly the natives, led in reverse by Jieng, began to wriggle away backwards, like crayfish. It was an unnerving spectacle. Danton didn’t move till the last writhing figure had vanished in the outer darkness. Then he drank more whisky.

“I’m going crazy,” he remarked. “Schizophrenic. Jekyll and Hyde. Two years in Tibet . . . ough!”

“Be not afraid,” his own voice broke in, deepened and roughened in tone. “Kroo speaks. Thou art dear to Kroo.”

“I said it and yet I didn’t say it,” Danton gasped. “It’s my voice, but—”

“Be not skeptical,” he interrupted himself, again in the deeper voice. “Gods may speak through their High Priests. Or so it was in the old days. And I—I know all tongues you do, and a great many more as well. Put that in your pipe and smoke it,” Danton finished, changing to English.

“I’m crazy!”

“No, but you’re getting tight—that is, the spirits of the wine have begun to—” Danton broke into a stream of searing, extremely vulgar oaths in an obscure Tibetan dialect. “Okay,” he went on at last. “So I’m a peasant god. What the blazes! If I’d been the god of a lot of super-civilized stuffed shirts, I could talk their lingo. But I wasn’t. Mud and blood conceived me. And what was good enough for my first worshippers is plenty good enough for these modern children of noseless mothers. *Vashang-yak!*” Danton didn’t recognize the word, but it sounded like an oath.

He finished the bottle and broke open another. The whole thing was quite unreal.

He was alone in a vast, cold emptiness lighted only by the tiny fire and the distant brilliance of the stars. The natives had disappeared. He was alone, and talking to himself.

“Jieng!” he yelled. “Come back. *Nay—return at your peril, verminous dogs!*”

Danton started in on the other bottle. It helped. It helped a good deal, especially when things lost their hard outlines and became a bit fuzzy. After that, it did not seem quite so strange to be sitting here conversing with . . . himself?

No—

“Are you still skeptical?” Danton asked.

“Gosh, yes,” he replied, briefly.

“Then you must be convinced.”

“How? It’s my own voice—”

“I use your throat and tongue as you would use a musical instrument. As I could use the yak—”

Danton fell suddenly silent. The yak lurched forward into the dim firelight.

“—Or any creature over which I had power,” the yak remarked. “The beast throat is harder to use, for it isn’t made to speak as humans do. Still, there it is. Are you convinced? If you are, we will talk further.”

“It’s hypnotism,” Danton said stubbornly. “Maybe Jieng’s doing it.”

“*Mm-m.*” The yak paused.

Abruptly Danton began to rise into the air. He dropped the bottle and yelped.

“Do you believe yet?” his voice inquired.

“No!” Danton gasped. “Hallucina—”

He shot up like a rocket. The air became perceptibly colder.

“Do you believe?”

“N-n—”

“I can’t transport you to the moon, but I can take you halfway there before my power weakens. When you find yourself believing in Kroo, say so.”

Danton gulped hard.

---

The ground dropped away, the mountain peaks, white with glaciers, looking like a relief map far below. Danton was rising fast. He experienced difficulty in breathing.

“Child of a wallowing ape!” his own voice demanded, painfully. “Will you speak—or die?”

Danton nodded. “I—believe—”

“You’re more skeptical than a Gnostic. But okay.” The upward rush was reversed. Presently Danton found himself hovering no more than five hundred feet above the encampment.

“Now,” he said, in Kroo’s voice, “we can talk.”

“Yeah,” Danton agreed weakly. “But I’d talk better if I had another drink.”

“Why not?” The bottle appeared, flying up like a bullet. It came easily to rest in Danton’s hand. “Drink! It’s a good brew—sturdy, savage stuff, like *kumiss*. I am pleased that you have no taste for the insipid wines of the hot countries. The men of my birthplace drank *kumiss*. Once they lived near my temple where you bought my sacred yak.”

A light broke over Danton. “Ah, then that was your temple?”

“How could you tell?” The voice was almost bitter. “A half-ruined hut! In a village of dead men—stupid fools. I was dying and in prison. I, whose worshippers have shouted and slain till the earth ran red—by Me. There’s hot blood in my veins! Or there was. And it stirs again. High Priest, I want a temple.”

“Oh? Well—”

“And I shall take one. I shall be great again. All men shall bow to me, and you are my High Priest.”

“But I don’t want to be your High Priest,” Danton said desperately. “You need a—a lama, or a shaman. I wouldn’t know what to do.”

“When there’s need, I’ll speak with your tongue, as an oracle.”

“Wait! Don’t—”

“Will not Carruthers be pleased?”

“Not by the yaks, certainly,” Danton said in a hopeless voice. “Look, can’t I get out of this somehow? I’ve got to get back to the States—”

“All right. Where are these States?”

Danton thought fast. Back in New York, he would at least be in familiar surroundings, and less at a loss. He might be able to cope with Kroo. He *might*—

In any case, he’d be back home. And not completely alone, with not a white man for hundreds of miles around. He wouldn’t be any worse off, certainly!

“East,” Danton said. “Due east till you hit St. Augustine. I’ll let you know.”

“East it is.”

Kroo's yak was levitated upward. Danton found himself sitting astride the beast. Below, the landscape slid away.

A thought struck him. "Hey, wait! I haven't paid the natives."

"Pay them, for serving my High Priest?" Kroo gave vent to an expletive that made Danton's lips feel soiled. The eastward progress continued.

## CHAPTER III

### *Japanese Ways*

Yes, they went fast—for Danton. Kroo did not use instant teleportation, because he wanted to examine the strange new world in which he found himself. Not for centuries had he been out of Tibet. Moderns—what vast cities and temples might they have reared?

In an hour they were passing over Bhutan. Before dawn they crossed the Brahmaputra, and fled on above the northern tip of Burma. Beyond Sadiya, where the railroad stops and the great jade deposits begin, Kroo noticed something of interest.

To tell the truth, he was a little tired. His vitality had run low through years of attrition, and, while he would not have admitted it to a human or even to another god, he was beginning to get cold feet. He was wondering about the new deities that had displaced Amon and Baal and Anubis.

Kroo had an inferiority complex.

It was not his fault. Kroo had not come of a sophisticated race. He was, as he had mentioned to Danton, mud and blood. In short, a peasant—a barbarian. Very often, centuries ago, he had writhed under the barbed taunts of more cosmopolitan gods who looked on him' as a clod. Even in the days of his greatest power, Isis had called him *nouveau riche*.

And that hurt. Kroo realized his limitations, of course. He had little education and less culture. True, he had power—but all gods had that. Suppose he emerged into a modern world, where new gods reigned, sleek and debonair, and announced that he was Kroo?

The new gods might raise their brows, shrug, and turn away. Their sophistication might make them feel that Kroo was not worth knowing.

The ancient, savage god shook his heavy shoulders angrily. He'd show 'em! He might be a minor deity, but—

He sighed. Too well Kroo knew his pettiness. To think otherwise would be like expecting to be permitted into Godsheim after he died. Only the truly great ones went there, certainly not the sick, weakened gods who died of faith-starvation.

But he was alive—had a new lease on life, in fact. Very well. He would rule. He would battle some small god and supplant him, reigning from the evicted one's temple and building up a new kingdom. Already he had a High Priest and a sacred yak. Next, a temple, and worshippers.

A temple—and here it was.

Myapur is a town in upper Burma, half native shacks, half more modern structures. A British engineer had done wonders in Myapur until circumstances had caused his death. The most notable structure was a well-built cement-and-metal powerhouse that had been the engineer's chief pride.

In the early dawn Kroo slanted down toward the powerhouse, sending an inaudible call before him. No answer came. The resident god was asleep, then, like Danton, who had relaxed comfortably on the yak's back Kroo's power supporting him.

Several men in uniforms were standing outside the powerhouse's doors. They jumped, startled, as the panels swung open. Kroo gave them a passing glance. They were short and stocky, with yellowish skins and dark hair and eyes. They had rifles.



Kroo sensed the danger of the weapons. He might have blasted the soldiers into ash, but just now he was on another god's threshold, and it behooved him to walk carefully. So, with foresighted courtesy, Kroo threw a veil of darkness around the powerhouse, and, in the blackness, swiftly transported Danton and the yak through the portal.

---

It was indeed a temple. The altars were somberly magnificent, great dynamos that, at present, were silent. Myapur had been blacked out all night, for fear of bombers. It was an especially strategic point to the invaders, so long as their occupation was not suspected by the British.

Kroo thought. The god wasn't here. Probably away, on a visit. Well, the best defence is a good offense. Kroo decided to go in search of his unsuspecting enemy, scouting the ground to discover whether the enemy god was dangerously powerful. If so, Kroo would hastily go away. Otherwise—

Kroo showed his yellow tushes in a nasty grin. He went away, lifting the dark veil as he did so, and leaving Danton in the powerhouse, atop the impassive yak.

Kroo would be back later.

Meanwhile, hands gripped Danton and pulled him off his shaggy steed. There was a crackle of outraged questions and commands. Footsteps pounded through the powerhouse. The guards rushed in from the portico and screamed for gas masks.

"Hello," Danton said, blinking around sleepily at the uniformed men who surrounded him. "I've been dreaming—, no I still am." He shook himself, and the hands tightened on his arms.

The yak burped.

"Who are you? How did you get here?" an officer demanded.

Danton recognized the dialect. His suspicions were confirmed by the realization that he was in a *bona fide* powerhouse. Kroo was real, then. The god must have veered northward during the night, landing in Japan instead of skimming the Amami Islands on his way to America.

Danton had been in the interior of Tibet for two years. The uninformed archeologist beamed, relieved at being among civilized people once more.

His Japanese was not too rusty. "My name's—"

"Shoot him," someone suggested.

"No, take him to Captain Yakuni. He has given strict orders."

"But he is a spy!"

"Then he must be questioned. The Captain—"

"Hey," Danton said. "I'm no spy."

"Silence. What shall be done with the yak?"

"Drive him out, child of a greater fool than yourself."

"Listen," Danton broke in uncomprehendingly. "Give me a chance to explain."

"Silence. Come."

"But—"

"Silence."

There was silence. Danton was escorted from the powerhouse, leaving the yak to the ministrations of the soldiers. The yellow light of dawn hurt his eyes. He blinked, staring.

The powerhouse, he saw, was camouflaged by a thick growth of *champac*, mixed with a few teak and mahogany giants. To his right the ground fell away sharply into a deep gorge, from which the muffled thunder of racing water emerged.

In the distance was a *zayat*, half ruined now, but unmistakably a Burmese rest-house for travelers.

Burma? A powerhouse? Japs?

Danton batted his eyes. He was escorted southward, along a well-worn path, and down a steep, forested slope. Beneath him lay a village.

Pagodas confirmed his suspicion that this was Burma.

He glanced back. The powerhouse was invisible now. Only the sharp eye of a god could have detected its presence from above.

“This way.”

---

This building had once been a temple, Danton saw. Now it was converted into something less esoteric. Guards at the door snapped a challenge. There was a brief interchange of remarks, terminated by the sound of a voice cursing dispassionately in Gaelic.

Danton was thrust forward.

A door opened. He found himself in a small room that had been efficiently furnished as an office. Seated at a table strewn with papers was a smiling, middle-aged Japanese who sported a beard. It was not much of a beard, thin, straggly, and looking vaguely moth-eaten, and it entirely failed to give the man an appearance of dignity. He looked up at Danton’s entrance and nodded briefly.

The Gaelic oaths continued. Seated near the table was a dark-haired girl, slim, remarkably pretty, and wearing slacks and a tight sweater that showed off her figure to advantage. She gave Danton a glance from under her long lashes, nodded, and continued her mystic profanity.

“Your pardon, Miss Hadley,” the Japanese said, rising. “Pleasant as your presence is, official business must come first. If you will excuse me?” He spoke in excellent English.

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Miss Hadley grunted. “Okay, handsome. I’ll stick around. Mind?”

The man waved a deprecating hand. “As you like. Now, Mr—?”

“Danton.”

“My men tell me a rather remarkable story. Where is your plane? Or did you use a parachute?”

“What about introductions?” Miss Hadley put in, producing a thin cheroot and deftly biting off the end. “Find out his name before you have him shot. Then you can mention it in your reports to Headquarters.”

“I apologize. Miss Deborah Hadley, may I present Mr. Danton—”

“Er— It’s Doctor. Horace Danton. Glad to know you, Miss Hadley.”

“Call me Debby,” the lady said. “In return, I won’t call you Horace. Never liked the name. This is Captain Yakuni, Dan. He’s the current dictator of Myapur.”

Yakuni bowed punctiliously. “Be seated, please. I have some questions.”

“So have I, Captain. And a request. I’d like transport to Myitkyina.”

“Oh? Not Mandalay? Or Rangoon?”

Danton chuckled. “I won’t trespass that far on your hospitality. Myitkyina’s far enough.”

“May I ask your plans?”

“Oh, I want to get back to the United States. I picked up some interesting data in the interior, and I’m anxious to hand it over to the right people.”

“Fine stuff,” Deborah remarked. “Next thing you’ll drag Pearl Harbor into the conversation.”

Danton looked at her blankly. "What's Pearl Harbor got to do with it?"  
"Look, Dan. Crazy people aren't sacred in Myapur. They just get shot."  
"One moment," Yakuni broke in. "Dr. Danton, why were you found in our powerhouse?"  
It was difficult to answer that question without mentioning Kroo. Danton hesitated.  
"I've been in Tibet for two years," he said at last. "I'm an ethnologist and archeologist. Connected with a New York museum. I've been collecting specimens and data."  
"Indeed. Where are these specimens?"  
"Uh—I sent them ahead. Now I've got a few questions. This is Burma, isn't it?"

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Yakuni nodded.  
"You are correct."  
"Well what are Japanese soldiers doing here? England hasn't ceded Burma to Japan, I'm sure."  
Yakuni fingered his beard in silence.  
"How did you reach Myapur?" he inquired, after a pause.  
"I flew."  
"From Tibet?"  
"That's right."  
"Where is your plane?"  
"Darned if I know," Danton said hopelessly. "You see, Captain Yakuni, I've been in a state of hypnosis for a while. I prefer to think that, anyway. If I told you the truth, as I saw it, you'd think I was crazy. I know I'm not. But I do believe I was hypnotized in Tibet, and only snapped out of it a few minutes ago, in your powerhouse."  
"Have him shot," Deborah suggested, waving her cheroot. "The loss would be small. He hasn't brains enough to be a spy."  
Danton gulped. "What sort of foolishness is this? Captain Yakuni, I'm an American citizen. Bear that in mind!"  
"I am," Yakuni said cryptically. He rose. "Would you care to inspect Myapur, Doctor? Miss Hadley will escort you."  
Two soldiers seized Danton and forcibly removed him from the office. Deborah followed, winking at Yakuni. "Farewell, offspring of a toad," she remarked in Gaelic.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Playing It Safe*

Outside, Danton stood helplessly, not knowing what to do next. Deborah linked his arm with hers familiarly.

“Come along, Dan,” she urged. “I want a drink. Never mind, Yakuni gave me a lot of occupation money. Down this way. I recommend a ginsling.”

“Sure you won’t poison it?” Danton asked, with a flash of wry humor.

Deborah shrugged.

“Yakuni’s smart. That’s why I told him to shoot you. He figures you may have important information, and you’re more valuable to him alive. Little Tojo doesn’t trust me any more than I trust him.”

Danton glanced over his shoulder at the two soldiers who followed. “What’s the idea?”

“They can’t talk or understand English. Wish you could speak Gaelic, though.”

“I can. I’m an ethnologist.”

“Well, blow me down,” Deborah said. “I thought an ethnologist told your fortune.” Danton explained. He was still elucidating when Deborah dragged him into a dim, cool structure where *punkahs* swayed from the ceiling.

“Okay. So you’re not a fortune teller. If I’d known that I mightn’t have put in a good word for you. I thought you’d been with a carnny.”

“Carnny?”

“Carnival. That’s my racket. Beetle-puss!” she cried suddenly and a native shuffled out of the shadows, bowing. Deborah made a significant grimace as the Burmese grinned. “Ginsling. Chop-chop. Pronto. *Raus!*”

“*Ai!*” Beetle-puss nodded, and went away. Deborah relaxed at a table, and gestured for Danton to sit down. The Japanese soldiers found seats some distance away, their eyes intent.

“Now we talk,” Deborah sighed. “First tell me all. No, let me. It’ll go faster. Meet Debby Hadley, the best dancer, singer, and shill in all Burma. Used to be with Hart’s Traveling Wondershow. It broke up here months ago. I landed a job singing in a dive. When the Nippies moved in, I headed for a *sampan*. Too late. I got caught. Yakuni didn’t have me shot. Probably because I called him everything I’d learned in eight years of carnny work. Yakuni just grinned at me. ‘You are free,’ he said, like that. ‘Myapur is yours. If you try to leave, you will be shot.’ Now he sits back and licks his chops, waiting for my nerve to break. Meanwhile, I slowly go nuts, and maintain my morale by cussing him out in Gaelic, which he doesn’t understand. End of story. Well?”

Danton gulped his ginsling. “Now wait a minute, Miss—”

“Debby.”

“Debby. Okay. You haven’t explained what Japanese are doing here in Burma. If Tokyo hears about Yakuni’s actions, he’ll be court-martialed.”

Deborah narrowed her eyes. “You’ve really been in Tibet for two years? Haven’t you heard?”

“I’ve heard nothing. Are England and Japan at war?”

“England and Japan!” Deborah said, clamping down on the cheroot. “Ha! MacArthur somewhere around Australia, Jap subs shelling California, Tokyo bombed—and he asks me

that. Brother Dan, settle back and listen.”

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She spoke cogently. When she had finished, Danton broke into a profuse sweat.

“Holy Mackerel, so we’re at war.”

“Just that. War.”

“I still don’t get the picture,” Danton said. “How come there’s a modern powerhouse in upper Burma? The only hydro-electric places are around Mandalay and Rangoon.”

“It was built by the English—secret military strategy. They paid the local *sawbwa* and went ahead. Commissioned an engineer to set up the works.”

“Then why don’t they bomb it, now the Japs have taken over?”

“Because they’d rather recapture the powerhouse as is. Look, mister, do you have any idea of the difficulty of getting machinery up the Chindwin? Dynamos and stuff? I don’t know what goes into a powerhouse, but if the British took Myapur again and bombed the works, they couldn’t set up more dynamos in a hurry. They’d rather wait. Besides, they don’t know the powerhouse has any military value.”

“Well, it hasn’t,” Danton said. “Unless there’s oil around here.”

“No oil. Jade, some rubies, that’s about all. But the powerhouse ought to be bombed. Myapur’s become a key point to the Japs. Yakuni makes eggs here, and sends ’em down the river to the Nippie flying fields scattered around.”

“Eggs?”

“Very, very nasty little bombs. Tokyo got the formula from Berlin. Super-powerful stuff, and it plays havoc with the Allied bases.”

Danton narrowed his eyes. “Liquid air?”

“Nope. Not nerve-gas, either. A pure explosive, with a secret formula. All I know is what Yakuni tells me. They load the eggs here, and they need electricity to make ’em work.”

“Electrolysis. I get it.”

“So the Allies don’t know Yakuni’s using Myapur as a manufacturing base to make those bombs. The Tojo flyers have been doing some nasty tricks with the stuff. Naturally, I’ve been doing my darndest to smuggle out word to the right parties.”

Danton cast a swift glance at the Japanese guards. “Not so loud.”

“The louder the better. They can’t understand English. Can you fly a plane, Dan?”

“No.”

“Well, I can. So that’s all right. We’ll see what we can work out. If we can get through, somehow, to the Allies, the bombers will come over Myapur and blow Yakuni’s dynamos into the Yellow Sea. And there aren’t any other dynamos near enough to help Tojo do what he wants.”

Danton sipped his ginsling. “Could we slip down river in a *sampan*?”

“That’s out. Yakuni isn’t dumb. You’re a scientist. Make a radio. Then we can send a message.”

“I’m not that sort of scientist,” Danton pointed out.

She scowled at him. “Well, what are you? You haven’t told me your yarn yet.”

“Well, it’s a bit hard. All I know is what I think happened to me. I’ve a hunch I was hypnotized.”

“Tell Debby. I’ve a swell shoulder to cry on.”

Danton sighed. “I suppose I might as well. You won’t believe a word of it. I don’t either. Still here goes.” He explained about Kroo.

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When he had finished, Deborah regarded him with a look of impassive gravity.

Danton moved uncomfortably. “That’s all. Say something.”

“Okay. Let’s have another drink.”

They drank silently. After a while Deborah crushed out her cheroot and narrowed her eyes at Danton.

“Better forget about Kroo. Take it from me, he won’t be back, unless you get the d. t’s. Now listen, Dan. As long as Yakuni thinks you’ve got valuable information he won’t kill you. He might try torture, but don’t mind that. Keep him wondering how you got here, and why. He’ll want to know whether the Allies suspect what he’s doing in Myapur—making bombs. Give Tojo the old psychological one-two. Keep the conversation polite. He’s nuts about modern culture. I made him plenty mad once when I called him an uncivilized rat. He didn’t object to the noun, either. Get it? Play along, take it easy, and we’ll watch our chance.”

Danton nodded. “I’ll do my best.”

“Fine. But remember, if we can’t get a message out, we ought to try and wreck the powerhouse ourselves, somehow. It sounds like a pipe-dream, but those dynamos supply the power for Yakuni’s bombs.”

“They convert the power, they don’t supply it.”

“So what? Put the bee on the dynamos, and where can Tojo get any more up here in Burma?”

“It’d be suicide.”

“Sure,” Deborah said. “Wouldn’t it? Well?”

Danton nodded. “Count me in.”

“Fine. Now let’s take a walk around Myapur. I’m hungry. There’s a leper by the river who sells swell *shishkabob*.”

Deborah had a peculiar sense of humor.

## CHAPTER V

### *Leave It to Kroo*

Grandly Kroo rode the winds above Burma. Invisible, brutal, cunning, wary, the god spied upon the new world he had entered, and found much to frighten him. He went far afield. In the Pacific the ironclads roared their thunder, and planes battled and fell in grim combat. From Yokohama to Hobart, from Midway to Peiping in Russia and China and Germany, in the Mediterranean and in the Atlantic, on the frozen peaks and in the blazing deserts, there was war.

It was no place for a little god.

Kroo fled back to Burma, his plans confirmed. He must play a waiting game, as Amon and so many others had done. First he must establish himself in a small kingdom, build up a monotheistic culture, and slowly expand by conquest. Since the days of the Old Men that had been the way. In the hour of the mammoth Kroo's people had warred on their neighbors, had triumphed, and had made new converts and spilled new blood on the basalt altars of Kroo.

A little kingdom—honest peasant stock, who would work hard and fight hard. The yellow-skinned, sturdy men Kroo had seen in Myapur seemed eligible. They reminded the god of the ancient Tartars and Kalmucks who had once worshipped him.

*Ya!* In Myapur Kroo would begin his rule. Already there was a temple built and ready. As for the god it had formerly housed—well, he was away. Perhaps dead. Kroo would take care that he was not permitted to return. Only strong prayers can summon a god, and no one would make such prayers in Myapur, if Kroo could prevent it.

Definitely he could prevent it.

Kroo's flat nose twitched. Already he could smell the smoke of his offerings.

He headed back toward Myapur, and soon was hovering over the heads of Danton and Deborah Hadley as they strolled through the town. Crafty Kroo had reduced the texture of his cloud until it would hardly be noticed as he sailed along over their heads.

"The place is disorganized," Danton was telling Deborah. "I expected that. Occupation always upsets routine. We're the only whites in Myapur, eh?"

"We are now. A month ago—" Deborah shrugged. "The natives haven't yet adjusted themselves to slavery." She pointed to the window. "That isn't a normal bazaar. No yelling, for one thing."

It was true. The stalls were depleted, instead of brimming with food and other merchandise, and the Burmese had little heart for chaffering. Always they were conscious of the invader, watching, waiting for them to step out of line.

The two Japanese guards conferred, and one went over to purchase some fruit. He carefully paid for it with occupation money, which was accepted emotionlessly. Danton made a wry face.

"Civic improvements, yeah. No garbage lying around the streets for example. But the purpose isn't civic. It's military. Behold the power of Kroo!"

"Huh?" Deborah jerked her head around to stare at the man. "What goes? Oh, dear! To think three ginslings could do that. Dan, snap out of it!"

Danton's eyes bulged. He was slowly rising in the air, without visible support, and a small, dark thundercloud hovered over his head, pulsating slightly.

“Dan, come down.”

“Kroo works a miracle,” the horrified Danton heard himself roar, drowning out a chorus of cries from the natives. “Lo! Behold!”

“Dan!”

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Danton continued to rise, his face expressing stark panic. “Debby,” he gasped. “It’s Kroo. I—I’m hypnotized again—Dogs and unbelievers, forsake your false and weakling gods ere Kroo is roused to wrath.”

“They’ll shoot you.”

Danton managed to turn his head. The Japanese guards, after conferring excitedly, had lifted their rifles and were taking steady aim.

“Don’t shoot!” Danton yelled. “I can’t help it!”

“Return or be shot,” one soldier snapped. “You are forbidden to leave Myapur.”

He spoke in Japanese, and Danton answered in the same tongue.

“Cast aside your weapons, lice, or be blasted to cinders. Kroo speaks!”

“Ha!” a soldier barked, and squeezed the trigger. Danton made a swift Immelmann that left him breathless. The thundercloud rumbled ominously.

“Look out,” he gasped.

Lightning shot from the cloud. The guard dropped his rifle just in time. It became a fused, useless pretzel of blasted metal.

Simultaneously the yak came sailing over the rooftops, grunting impassively, and Danton found himself astride the beast, still about twenty feet above the ground. The Burmese natives were salaaming like mechanical toys wound up to the limit. Deborah was looking up, her head tilted back and her eyes incredibly wide.

“Kroo demands a sacrifice,” Danton bellowed, and then found his tongue for a moment. “Debby! Grab that carcass in the stall behind you. Throw it out in the open somewhere. I’ve got a hunch.” Then through him, Kroo spoke again. “Delay not. Kroo hungers for a burnt offering.”

The Japanese soldiers were still hesitant. One of them shrilled something and scuttled off at a rapid pace, leaving the other holding his gun uncomfortably. “Come down or be shot,” he ordered finally. “You must stay in Myapur. It is an order.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Danton argued frantically. “Captain Yakuni didn’t say I had to stay on the ground, did he?”

“No, but—”

“I like it up here. The air’s better. Debby, quick! Kroo’s going to—*Lo! Fear Kroo’s wrath! Make haste!*”

Deborah, quite white, seized the skinned body of a kid and flung it away from her, in the general direction of Danton. There was a crackle of lightning, a crash from the thundercloud, and the kid vanished, leaving behind it an odor of roasted meat.

“I am pleased,” Danton shouted. “You have acknowledged the greatness of Kroo. Come now to his temple to worship. Follow my priest.”

With that, the yak, bearing Danton, was levitated gently to the ground. The cloud disappeared. Danton, sweating profusely, clambered off his steed and almost fell into Deborah’s arms.

“He—he’s gone. I can tell. Debby, I’m not crazy! I wasn’t hypnotized. You saw?”

“Y-yes. I saw what happened. This is awful. What are we going to do?”



“You will please come with me,” a cold voice requested. Danton looked across a sea of brown, salaaming backs at the Japanese officer who stood waiting, a file of soldiers behind him.

“All right,” Danton said weakly. “I suppose we’d better, Debby.”

“But—didn’t Kroo tell you to come to his temple? Do you suppose he meant the powerhouse?”

“I guess so. But how the blazes can I do that? See?” Danton jerked his head toward the soldiers.

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Deborah did not answer. She was still remarkably pale. Shivering a little she lit a cheroot and blew smoke through her nostrils.

“Come!”

Danton obeyed the officer. Deborah at his side, he was marched through Myapur toward the temple that housed Captain Yakuni. Behind the file followed a horde of natives, gabbling among themselves, and determined to follow Kroo’s priest despite the frequent orders of the Japanese that they disperse. They did not but they stayed at a respectful and safe distance.

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Yakuni did not rise from behind his improvised desk. His smile was obviously insincere.

“May I ask an explanation, Dr. Danton?” he suggested. “You need not be seated.”

“Look, it wasn’t his fault,” Deborah told Yakuni.

“Silence, please, Miss Hadley. Now, Doctor. In our previous conversation you mentioned hypnotism. And you say you have been in Tibet. I advise you not to try to impress the Burmese natives with trickery. They are unarmed, and you cannot foment a revolt.”

“I wasn’t,” Danton said. “I couldn’t help what happened.”

“Then you must be restrained, for your own protection. We need no *fakirs* in Myapur. I hesitate to have you shot. Imprisonment would be more effective. I am not satisfied with the story you have told me. Once again, Dr. Danton, how did you reach Myapur?”

“I flew. Or I thought I did. Captain—”

Yakuni held up his hand. “From what base did you fly?”

“Tibet. Near the Ghora Pass.”

“Why did you come to Myapur? Why the powerhouse?”

“Delay not the priest of Kroo,” Danton roared abruptly.

Yakuni jerked back with a startled gasp. The soldiers moved their rifles into position.

Deborah made a hopeless, inarticulate noise and gripped Danton’s arm.

“Dan, be careful,” she gasped. “Don’t take off again. They’ll shoot you sure this time.”

“*Ho*,” Danton bellowed at the astounded Yakuni. “Bow down and worship Kroo. He shall protect his chosen. Their nation will prosper above all others. Obey!”

“Dr. Danton,” the Captain said carefully, rising. “I must ask you to modulate your voice. I must also request an apology. As an officer and representative of my country, I cannot allow this insult to pass.”

“Waste not words,” Danton roared. “Your allegiance henceforth is to Kroo. He shall make you mighty.”

“Don’t mind him,” Deborah whispered faintly. “He’s really crazy. You mustn’t have him shot, Captain Yakuni. He doesn’t know what he’s saying.”

The officer slowly unholstered a pistol. “I have said that I am willing to accept an apology. I am a civilized man, Miss Hadley, but I am also a servant of the Son of Heaven.”

“A false god,” Danton broke in tactlessly. “He shall be overthrown by Kroo’s might. Never dare to refer to your petty god again in Myapur, henceforth the holy sanctum of Kroo. On your knees, dog!”

Yakuni’s eyes widened.

“You die!” he said in a shocked voice, lifting his gun.

Danton, quite helpless now in the grip of the god, went green as he heard his voice, harsh and sonorous, break into a string of incredibly vile oaths. The language was Japanese, but the genesis of the profanity was without time or race.

It went back to the days of the dolmens, when shaggy brutes first learn to grunt monosyllabic oaths, and it drew color from unknown ages of barbarism. Kroo was not a civilized god. His curses, therefore, were the curses of soldiers and peasants.

Danton was thankful that Deborah could not understand Japanese.

But Yakuni and his soldiers could. For the first time Danton saw a Japanese officer lose his studied impassivity. He was quite nonplussed.

Just as Yakuni, frothing with rage, pulled the trigger of his gun, Danton and Deborah vanished. For once Kroo had shown sound judgment.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Kroo Muscles in*

In the wink of an eye Deborah Hadley and Danton had been transported from the Burmese temple to the powerhouse. The girl gazed about her at the huge dynamos and transformers in a dazed fashion and blinked her eyes.

“Whizzing prayer-wheels!” she exclaimed. “How’d we get here?”

“Kroo,” Danton muttered. “He did it. See? He’s brought the yak, too.”

That was unmistakable. A yak looks singularly out of place in a powerhouse, but, on the other hand, the beast would seem out of place anywhere, except perhaps the Cretan Labyrinth. Aside from Kroo’s sacred animal and the two whites, the powerhouse was empty.

“Behold the house of Kroo,” Danton went on in a suddenly changed voice. “The interlopers have been removed. Henceforward it is a sacred place. Only Kroo’s priest may enter.”

Deborah gulped. “I can take a hint.”

“Debby! Don’t go—nay! Since you are here, here you stay. You were the first to sacrifice to Kroo. In reward, you shall be Kroo’s priestess.”

“Not if it makes me talk that way,” she said wanly. “Dan, how can I tell when it’s you and not—not—this Kroo?”

“My voice is different,” Danton told her. “When Kroo takes over, I roar. Look out. Here I go again . . . Prepare the temple and make ready the sacrifice! Kroo goes, but will return.”

There was silence. The yak lumbered forward a few steps, staring glumly at the concrete floor. Distantly came the sound of faint shouts.

Danton relaxed. “Okay. He’s gone. I—I can feel it. Whew!”

“Second the motion. Jumping jeepers, Dan, what sort of devil have you got yourself tied up with?”

“He’s not a devil. He’s a god. Tibetan or something. What he’s up to now only Heaven knows—I don’t.”

“Well, we’d better start thinking fast,” Deborah said practically. “When Yakuni finds us here, it’ll be blackout and quick curtain. This powerhouse is sacred, all right, but not to Kroo.”

“Wonder what happened to the men?” Danton brooded. “Kroo said he’d—removed them.”

“Don’t ask me. But you’ll notice I’m not stepping on any of these piles of cinders scattered around. What’s that?”

It was a whole cow, its throat cut, sprawled unpleasantly atop one of the silent dynamos. Danton hesitated.

“Sacrifice, I suppose. Kroo thinks that’s an altar.”

“Maybe it is to him, but to Yakuni it’s the *Ka’aba*. Do you realize, Dan, that men have been working since yesterday afternoon to repair one of these dynamos? Something went wrong and production on the bombs had to stop until it was fixed. Yakuni’s been threatening to shoot everybody unless they worked triple-fast.”

Danton went over and tried out the dead switches. “They don’t work, anyhow. I can’t repair ’em. I’m no technician.”

“Yakuni’s got technicians, and he’s got a firing-squad, too.”

Danton’s shrug expressed hopelessness. “So what can we do? Take to the jungle?”

"I wonder if Kroo hasn't done us a favor. If we can wreck these dynamos proper—"

"Uh-huh! I'd forgotten about that. What we need is a bomb. See any?"

Deborah grimaced. "They don't keep the bombs here, sap. Those dynamos are valuable. There's a sledge-hammer. Try that. I'll see what I can find."

Danton hefted the heavy hammer. "Maybe. Well, here's where I commit suicide, after Yakuni catches up with me." He swung mightily.

The weapon was ripped from his hands in a blaze of coruscating flame and sent sailing through the air to smash heavily against the yak, which grunted in a surprised way. Palms singed and tingling, Danton slid down to the floor, gasping for breath and choking inarticulately, conscious that Kroo was trying to make use of his tongue. Without sufficient breath that was impractical. The yak spoke.

"Traitorous priest, would you break the altar of Kroo?"

"I—*Ugh—uh—*"

"False priest and priestess! Prepare to die!"

Deborah hurried forward. She dropped beside the half-stunned Danton and faced the yak.

"Kroo! Wait a minute. You're all wrong. That was just part of the ceremony. We weren't trying to smash your altar."

"Lie not," the yak warned. "Kroo knows all."

"Then—uh—then Kroo knows that in this land altars are made of metal, so they'll ring when they're struck. Like temple gongs. It's always done."

"That's right," Danton seconded weakly. "We were just starting the ceremony."

"Oh. Well. You have sinned through ignorance, not wilfully. But remember in future that Kroo's altars must be treated with due reverence. Only my priest and priestess may approach them, and they must never be touched by human hands."

"We won't," Deborah murmured. "We'll remember, I mean."

"That is well. And if you should forget—should I find that you have broken my law, then you shall know the wrath of Kroo. Nay, you cannot touch my altars. I lay that *geas* upon you both. It is forbidden you to do sacrilege in this manner, either wilfully or by chance. I have spoken."

Danton managed to nod. "What do you want us to do?"

"You are Kroo's mouthpiece. My people approach the temple. None may enter, but you shall stand at the doors and accept their offerings. Tell them Kroo has decreed a holiday. There will be a festival. They must hold games in my honor, as in the ancient days, and all must praise the name of Kroo. Later, I shall show my people how to live. The men must hunt, and women till the soil. The strongest must be chieftain. That way is best."

"Look," Danton said desperately, "I'm willing to go out and tell the Japs what you want, but they won't listen. They'll just shoot me."

"They will listen," the yak promised. "Kroo can protect his priest."

"Here they come," Deborah whispered. "Feel okay, Dan?"

"Candidly, I feel terrible. Stay inside. Duck behind a dynamo where bullets won't reach you."

"I'm going with you."

"You're going to do what I say. Jump."

Deborah hesitated and then went toward a dynamo. A foot away she stopped, turning a white face back toward Danton.

"I can't. I can't get any closer to it."

“My *geas* is strong,” the yak remarked.

It was. Danton realized that he and Deborah had been forbidden to lay hands on any of the dynamos, and Kroo’s powers were by no means weak. He made an urgent gesture.

“You don’t have to touch it. Circle around behind it—that’s right. Now—”

Danton walked toward the doors, with an outward confidence he did not feel inwardly. The doors burst open at his approach, revealing a mob of Japanese soldiery outside, waiting, apparently, for Captain Yakuni, who was pushing his way through the group.

Yakuni saw Danton and flung up his arm. “Shoot that man,” he commanded.

Half a hundred hands moved—and were frozen in sudden stasis. The Japanese turned into statues. Kroo’s power held them motionless. Several men fell over with dull thumps.

Danton hesitated. A dozen feet away Captain Yakuni stood, trembling a little as he tried to move. The only perceptible result was a slight quivering of his whole body.

“Uh—I’ve got something to say. There’s no use trying to shoot me—you’re—I mean—” Danton stuck helplessly. Kroo, growing impatient, came to his rescue. The booming voice of the god spoke through Danton’s lips.

“You come empty handed, and that does not please me. Yet you have come to worship, and for that reason Kroo forgives you all. Hearken now—forsake your weak gods and remember only that Kroo rules Myapur, as he shall some day rule all the world. This is Kroo’s temple. None may enter under pain of death. Hearken again. This day is holy to Kroo. Feast and make merry and sacrifice. Drink mightily and fight mightily. The smell of *kumiss* is as pleasant as the odor of new-spilled blood.”

There was a pause. Kroo resumed.

“And break not my law,” he roared. “I shall watch, and my lightning will destroy those who show not their gladness at my rule. Go now and obey.”

Movement shook the ranks. A Burmese in the outer fringes cried out shrilly.

“Ai! He is a *nat*!”

“I am greater than any demon,” Kroo thundered. “Draw *kris* and *da*-knife. Grow drunk with rejoicing.”

Natives were straggling through the *champac* trees, few by few. Curiosity and fear brought them. They had heard Danton’s words as they hid among the undergrowth.

“Form ranks,” Captain Yakuni ordered brusquely, “Quick.” As the soldiers obeyed, he led them toward Danton, but only a few steps. Once again paralysis seized the Japanese.

“Dogs,” yelled Danton. “Would you enter Kroo’s sacred house? Stand where you are, till I give you word.” The white man’s hand lifted, pointing to a little knot of Burmese. “There is laughter on your faces. That is well. Rejoice.”

The natives instantly sobered, with wary glances at the Japanese. Kroo roared at them.

“Dance! Praise Kroo!”

They danced, unwillingly enough, continually watching Yakuni and his paralyzed cohorts. As it became evident that the Japanese were apparently conquered, the merriment became less strained. Other Burmese trickled out of the forest and joined in the capering.

Danton nodded benignantly. “You do well. Yet *kumiss* is needed. Feast and drink in Kroo’s honor.”

One of the natives mustered up enough courage. “There is but little to eat or drink, *sawbwa*,” he cried. “The conquerors have taken it all.”

“*Ya!*” said Danton, waving his arm, and instantly there appeared a huge pile of edibles on the ground near by, like the overflow from the horn of plenty. There were bottles, too. Danton,

staring at the seals and marks on the stuff, realized that Kuro had raided the stores in the Myapur Japanese commissariat. One look at Yakuni confirmed that supposition. The officer was a bright scarlet with impotent rage.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Doubting Japs*

The Burmans, half-starved wretches, did not hesitate long. They flung themselves upon the booty with shrieks of glee. In a minute Kroo had all the celebration he could possibly demand. The natives gorged, glutted, guzzled, and babbled praise to Kroo. Tomorrow they might die, but in the meantime, they ate, drank, and were exceptionally merry.

“Now,” said Kroo, via Danton, “hearken and obey.”

The spell of immobility that held the Japanese was broken. Captain Yakuni, pistol in hand, hesitated. His men were looking to him for their cue. Danton could almost follow the thoughts passing through the officer’s mind.

At last Yakuni muttered a few syllables to the soldiers nearest him. The latter formed into a compact file and marched straight toward the powerhouse doors. Their intention was obvious.

Before Danton could dodge back out of sight, a black thundercloud sprang into view above his head. Lightning forked from it.

The half-dozen Japanese soldiers were obliterated, to the sound of a thunderclap. The fused metal of their guns dropped amid a scattering of fine ashes.

“Dance.” Danton roared. “Obey or die.”

Yakuni’s lips twitched. “Dr. Danton,” he said suddenly. “I must ask you to halt this—this—nonsense.”

“Silence. Speak not to my priest without reverence.”

The cloud muttered ominously. Yakuni’s eyes narrowed. He snapped a quick command, and, in response, the Japanese joined the Burmese natives in their revelry. Puzzled glances were cast at the officer, but the instinct of obedience was too strong for doubt. Too strong, at present.

The Burmese had a tendency to shy away from the Japs. There was a noticeable lack of *camaraderie*. Nevertheless, the pagan ceremony of adoration proceeded to Kroo’s satisfaction. Even Yakuni found a bottle and drank from it. If he refrained from dancing, that fact apparently went unnoticed by Kroo, who was slightly intoxicated by the size of his group of devotees.

Deborah’s voice came from behind Danton. “Dan, what goes? Can I come out now?”

“Stay where you are,” he advised her over his shoulder. “I’ll let you know.” For Danton was conscious of a false note that the uncivilized, uneducated Kroo did not detect. He knew quite well that Yakuni had not given up. The Japanese mind didn’t work that way.

He was right. A number of the Japanese soldiers, in their solemn caperings—for none, unlike the Burmese, laughed—had drawn closer to the powerhouse steps. Without warning they closed in on Danton. The precision of the attack was rather admirable. Two of them seized his arms, a third pointed his sidearms at Danton’s head, the thundercloud bellowed, and the ethnologist was yanked vertically into the air, a bullet clipping his shoe-heel. Again there was the flare of lightning.

The three soldiers were abruptly cremated.

Kroo lost his temper. The thundercloud expanded tremendously. A drenching rain blasted down on natives and Japs alike, the theatrical effect considerably increased by an incessant

barrage of thunder and lightning. A soldier broke for the shelter of the trees, and was destroyed.

Yakuni was jerked upward as though lassoed. He sailed in a breathtaking arc toward Danton, coming to rest a few feet below the American. The thunder still rolled deafeningly, and Kroo's attempts to speak through Danton's human lips were drowned.

Both Danton and Yakuni were drawn up, until the cloud was small below them, a black, sparkling stain that lay like spilled ink on a tiny relief map.

"Now," Kroo said, through Danton to Captain Yakuni, "we can talk. I am displeased with you, yellow man. You are *sawbwa* here, I think. You would do well to obey me."

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Yakuni did not answer, nor did he look down. His face was frozen into impassivity.

"You will obey. Your men will obey. Else I shall blast them all to cinders, and rip you apart muscle by sinew. Is it understood?"

Yakuni was silent. Abruptly Kroo revolved the officer on his axis at such a speed that he was a mere blur to Danton's eyes.

"Is it understood?"

"Yes," Yakuni said, once more motionless. "I agree."

"*Ya!* Then go down to the village with your men and hold festival. Worship Kroo. Have trial by combat, so that blood may flow, and the strongest may be proved Old Man of Kroo's tribe."

"Yes."

"Fight with sharp stones, as is right, and with great clubs, and with tooth and nail. Kroo likes not these—er—guns that kill from a distance. A weak man may slay a strong with guns. Might is right, yellow *sawbwa!* I, Kroo, say that. I have no love for weakling civilizations. The strong should be served by the weak. Therefore find the strongest man in the village, and find him by combat."

"Yes."

"Then go."

At this moment Danton gave a gasp of consternation.

"Kroo—look!" he cried and pointed downward.

Panic-stricken by the nerve-shaking events which had occurred, Deborah Hadley had rushed out of the powerhouse, dodging toward a Burmese house for safety. She was promptly pursued by a Japanese soldier who, grinning nastily, had grasped her by the wrist and whirled her to the ground. Kroo rubbed his chin and looked perplexed until Danton nudged the god with an impatient elbow.

"She is your priestess, Great One," yelled Danton. "Don't you mean to protect her?"

"Aye, Kroo's priestess is sacred," nodded the god, coming to a decision. "Watch this. I'll show you how I can handle a lightning bolt. Furthermore the girl won't be harmed, either—see if she is'. This will really be artistic. Just watch."

Kroo raised his hairy arm and launched forth a jet of white-hot flame toward the soldier. There was a tremendous roar. Gobs of smoke and earth jumped high into the air. When the smoke and dust cleared away, Deborah was sitting up, dazedly, upon the ground and the soldier had vanished. Then Kroo gently lifted her up, propelled her lightly to the powerhouse and left her there on the steps.

Kroo now moved his thundercloud downward, driving natives and Japanese before it, in the direction of the village. Yakuni slanted away in pursuit. Danton was drawn back to the



powerhouse and left on the steps beside Deborah Hadley and the yak.

“I go to watch the games,” he heard himself say. “Stay here, with my priestess, and guard Kroo’s temple. I shall speak to my people through the sacred yak.”

The yak was levitated past Danton and went sailing off above the treetops. There was silence, broken by the murmuring of little rills that were trickling down toward the river gorge. From that distance came faint shouts.

Danton sat down. His muscles felt weak as water.

“Debby,” he called faintly. “You there?”

“Uh-huh.” She came out to join him, her eyes widening. With a sympathetic, soft sound she dropped beside Danton, putting an arm around his shoulders. “You look awful.”

“I don’t feel well,” he acknowledged. “Being a high priest is no joke.”

“Yeah.” Debby moistened her lips. “Wish I could offer you a drink, but I can’t. Have a cheroot.”

“No, thanks. *Whew!*”

“Be glad you’re not Yakuni,” Deborah said.

“He’s all right.”

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She looked doubtfully at Danton.

“Yeah? I saw part of what happened. Once a Jap has to knuckle under, he goes haywire.”

“No, Yakuni’s too intelligent. He’ll know enough to play possum. He’s not credulous, and he’s the guy who’ll use his brain. Right now Yakuni doesn’t believe in Kroo. I’ll bet a plugged *anna* that he thinks I’m a Yogi, and that I’ve been using mass hypnotism. My power’s too strong for him to meet in open battle, so he’ll try other methods. He’ll pretend to play along, but there’ll be plenty of Fifth Column work going on under cover.”

“But the Japs can’t use the dynamos,” the girl objected. “Kroo won’t let them.”

“Exactly. But I don’t know how long Kroo will be satisfied to keep things in *status quo*. I’m not a god. I can’t think like a god, even a savage one. If Kroo should go away—and he might—we’d be in a spot. Yakuni would get the powerhouse back.”

“You’re borrowing trouble.”

“Um. I’d like to sabotage the dynamos, just in case. We can’t touch ’em, but one of Yakuni’s bombs ought to do the trick.”

“Sure—for the dynamos and for us, too, after Kroo heard the explosion.”

“Not if we played innocent. I’ve a feeling I can talk Kroo into doing what I want. Or at least I can argue him out of killing us. He isn’t omniscient. I’ve got a hunch.”

“Okay. What’s the hunch?”

“We get a bomb. We can’t get close to a dynamo, but if a bomb goes off inside the powerhouse, that’ll do the trick.”

“I’ll do it. There!”

Danton grinned. “Good kid. Come along.”

As they slipped through the jungle down the slope, Deborah paused with a little gasp. “Dan. I just thought of something.”

“What?”

“The obvious. Can’t you guess?”

“You mean Yakuni’s sending for help? Paratroops and bombers? I thought of that. We’re safe, Debby. Yakuni doesn’t want to call attention to Gyapur. Mass troop movements heading

for here might tip off Allied air scouts. And of course he wouldn't want the powerhouse bombed. But there's a more important factor than that."

"What?"

"Loss of face. Can you imagine Yakuni wirelessly a message that Myapur had been captured by a hypnotist—an American girl and an American ethnologist? Nope. Yakuni's going to handle this business himself as long as he can."

There was no one on guard at the munition dump. Apparently Kroo had scoured Myapur in search of slackers. Danton monkeyed with the lock and finally forced it. Inside, he brooded over one of the bombs.

"Can you figure it out?" Deborah wanted to know.

"Guess so. Percussion—um. If these eggs are as powerful as you say, they'd be made to stand a lot of jouncing without going off. So—got it. Here," he showed her.

"Not now, for Pete's sake. Let's sneak back to the powerhouse."

"Okay. We'll need ropes."

## CHAPTER VIII

### *Kroo's Protection*

However they could not carry the bomb into the powerhouse. On the threshold they were stopped cold, by some intangible force. They just could not enter the powerhouse with the bomb.

"Confound it," Danton exploded. "I didn't expect this."

Deborah was pale. "Is—is Kroo watching?"

"I'm pretty sure he isn't. It's a conditioned reflex. He forbade us to do sacrilege."

"He told us we couldn't touch the dynamos."

"The part symbolizes the all. Our subconscious is using induction. As long as we have the conscious desire to wreck Kroo's altars, we're physically incapable of it. Hang the luck!" He scowled. "If we really thought the bomb was harmless, we could probably carry it inside. But I'll bet we couldn't set it off."

Deborah thought hard. "If you could disguise the bomb as something else and tell me to take it in we might do the trick."

"Uh-huh. I wish you hadn't mentioned that. Now we'll both be on our guard."

"We could get a native to carry a bomb in."

"A Burmese wouldn't, because he's been forbidden to enter the powerhouse. A Jap wouldn't either, for different reasons. Wonder if we could rig up some sort of pulley and slide the bomb inside?"

Experiment proved all other expedients to be impossible, also. Kroo was a master of post-hypnotic suggestion. At last they hid the bomb in the jungle and glumly sat down to wait.

"Yakuni can win if he waits long enough," Danton theorized, scratching himself. "That yak's got fleas. From the talks I've had with Kroo, I figure he won't be satisfied with Myapur. He'll want to expand. Right now we're fairly safe, because Kroo's able to supervise Myapur. But after he spreads out. Well, as I said, he isn't omniscient. He won't be able to keep his eye on all his temples. Yakuni can move in here."

"Until Kroo makes a round of inspection."

"Uh-huh. By that time we'll have been shot. And Kroo may be capricious. He may get tired of this particular temple and let the Japs have it back. There's no inevitable syllogism."

"Half the time I understand what you're talking about," Deborah said. "But only half the time."

Danton was pondering. "Our best bet is to sabotage the dynamos. We can't do that ourselves. Allied bombers can, if we can get word through. By radio. Let's try Yakuni's headquarters."

They did.

Captain Yakuni had foresightedly removed certain vital parts.

"Let me think." Danton rubbed his temples. "I've an idea that might work. But it'll take time. We can't spring psychology on Kroo too suddenly."

"Psychology?"

"Uh-huh. Kroo's got an inferiority complex. He wants to be a big shot. Now, what do we want?"

"You tell me."

“We want to get away from the Japs. Let’s go back to the powerhouse. I want to work this out.”

A few hours later the yak reappeared, garlanded with flowers, sailing in through the doors of Kroo’s temple.

“Kroo salutes his priest and priestess,” the beast remarked, coming to ground with a thump. “You have guarded the altars faithfully. Or have you?”

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Danton diplomatically salaamed. “We have. Great is Kroo.”

“Great indeed. My people worship in the village. They have turned from their false gods.”

“Poor Yakuni,” Deborah muttered.

“He’s doing all right,” Danton told her in a swift aside. “Just waiting for his chance.”

“What,” the yak inquired, “do you mean?”

“Great is Kroo,” Danton said hastily. “We’ve been talking—your priestess and I—about spreading your fame. Myapur’s a pretty small place, after all.”

“My name shall be known in all lands. But not right now.”

“The life-cycle of gods follows a pattern,” Kroo explained. “In all things this is so. Local storm-gods have become great. But there is always a beginning.”

“All gods have disciples,” Danton said. “Right?”

“True enough.”

“Well, why can’t we be your disciples? Let us go forth into the world and tell the people about you. Advertising pays.” As the yak did not speak, Danton went on hurriedly. “Why not transport us to some big city—in Australia or even America—where we could really go to town?”

“Australia and America have their own gods, I am sure,” Kroo countered shrewdly. “I must wait till I am more powerful before I expand. Burma will do for a beginning. If I should overreach myself, that might spell my doom. Other gods are jealous. Nay, high priest of Kroo, you shall remain here and, under me, rule Myapur.”

“Just like that,” Deborah said. “Mind if I burn some incense, Kroo?” She lit a cheroot rather shakily.

Danton pulled at his chin.

“Kroo. Great Kroo, may I speak quite frankly?”

“Temper your words with prudence.”

“Well, it’s this way. Suppose a priest of Kroo got killed by mortal weapons. Wouldn’t that be unfortunate?”

“Unfortunate for the assassins,” the yak rumbled. “They would die.”

“Still, that would be bad for your prestige. I represent you in human form. Isn’t that true?”

“I suppose so. Yes, that is true.”

“Then if I were killed the people’s faith in Kroo’s omnipotence might be shaken.”

“Who dares lift a spear against you? Point him out and he shall be slain.”

“The whole village, and you can’t slay everybody, or you’d be without worshippers. You know you’ve favored me specially. Isn’t it natural for the rest to be jealous?”

“It is human.” For the moment, Kroo overlooked his own obvious frailties.

“There it is,” Danton nodded. “You said the life-cycles of gods are parallel. What about invulnerability?”

“You mean Balder? But he was a god.”

“Achilles, then. He was human, but invulnerable, through the favor of his gods. They put the stamp of approval on him. Can’t you make your priestess and me invulnerable, to prove your power?”

“Very well,” Kroo said. “It is done.”

Kroo had spoken.

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Deborah gulped. “Just like that?”

“Yes. Only Balder was slain by the mistletoe, and Achilles was wounded in the heel. I must not vary from the pattern. There must be a chink in the armor. You two are safe from harm as long as you remain in Kroo’s temple.”

“Now wait a minute,” Danton said hurriedly. “Are you sure that’s what you want? If you should be called away from Myapur on business, wouldn’t you like us to keep things running, stamping out blasphemy and that sort of thing?”

“You speak sooth,” the yak nodded. “I see your point. You would not dare leave the temple, and my people might turn to false gods in my absence. Um, that’s true.”

“Why not make us invulnerable all the time?”

“Apollo’s son suffered through pride,” Kroo remarked cryptically. “Here is my edict. So long as you remain near my sacred yak, nothing can harm you. Now I return to my festival. *Ya!*”

“Don’t take the yak,” Deborah cried desperately. She was just in time. The beast described a graceful loop in midair and returned to its starting point.

“I need no human or earthly vessel to watch my worshippers,” the yak said.

A thundercloud appeared, crackled faintly, and swept out of the powerhouse.

Kroo was gone.

## CHAPTER IX

### *False Priest*

Complete establishment of Kroo's rule over Myapur was aided by the god's close supervision. He was an apparently all-seeing monitor against whose laws it was not safe to transgress. Kroo was invisible. The thundercloud did not always herald his presence. The erring were severely punished, usually by death. And Captain Yakuni did not wish his forces decimated.

The Japanese officer's equanimity was not greatly troubled, except by the obvious drawbacks of the situation. For, as Danton had suspected, Yakuni did not for a moment believe in Kroo. On the contrary, he attributed the affair to mass hypnotism. His cremated men, he decided, had not been struck by deific lightning, since lightning could not be controlled except in well-equipped laboratories. Rather, Danton had simply shot or stabbed the offending soldiers and hypnotized everybody into seeing a more impressive theatrical scene.

It was quite remarkable hypnotism. But Yakuni preferred to believe in that explanation rather than admit Kroo's existence. As a matter of fact, he could not believe in Kroo. He was not conditioned that way.

So Myapur was reorganized by mud and blood. The men hunted. No slacking was allowed. Nor were guns permitted. The yak spoke firmly on that point, mincing no words about cowardice. Kroo wanted his people to be courageous, perhaps through some obscure compensation-motive of his own. The Burmese were used to hand-weapons. They hunted tigers happily, hurling their spears with well-trained accuracy. The Japanese were less pleased.

The guns of the Japanese had all been collected by the natives and levitated into the powerhouse by Kroo.

But a few guns had not been discovered so there were occasional shots fired at Danton and Deborah. Since the latter pair never ventured far from the yak, they remained unharmed. And Kroo always took vengeance on the assassins, when he could find the right ones.

In a week another shipment of bombs would come down-river to Captain Yakuni, for the electrolytic treatment. The jig would be up then, and the Japanese Empire would know that an American hypnotist had captured Myapur and subjected the conquerors to indignities. Yakuni had no intention of waiting so long. His sharpshooters had failed to murder the Americans, true. But there were other methods.

Only Yakuni could not think of any.

Before the week ended, Kroo relaxed with a grunt of contentment. His people. Not a lot of lying, cowardly beings who gave him hypocritical lip-service, such as he had been accustomed to for so long. Kroo was pleased with the tribe, the Burmese especially.

No other god was so great. No other god had such a temple, or such giant altars. Well, not many, Kroo hoped.

He let himself dream. In the future—after many centuries, of course—Kroo might be as great as Moloch or red Ormazd, called the Flame. Yet that was too much to hope.

No, by the Greater than Gods, it was not! Even Ormazd had been a little god once. So had Osiris and Babylonian Allatu And Marduk as well. Now they dwelt in Godsheim, where no weakling god could enter.

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But if Kroo became great, and a warrior, and the lord of many races and temples—why, then the gates of Godsheim might some day open to him. He could wait. And in the meantime there would be temporal pleasures, and a tribe to rule and guide—one tribe now, a nation in the days to come.

Kroo the Warrior! How did that sound? It sounded fine—if he could only make it come true!

Kroo looked down at the powerhouse. A kid lay on one of his altars. The priestess was smoking her incense. Her prayer to Kroo!

Kroo slid down the airways, entering the yak. He fumbled an instant before possessing the awkward throat muscles of the beast.

“Kroo hears. Kroo accepts your sacrifice.”

Danton, looking rather haggard, glanced at Deborah and nodded imperceptibly.

“Great is Kroo. Have I your permission to speak?”

“You are dear to me, priest. Speak. Have I not given you the power of invulnerability?”

“Yeah,” Danton said grimly. “It’s come in blamed handy, too. But what I wanted to say—I’ve got an idea. You have to follow the life-patterns of the other gods, don’t you?”

“I follow no other gods. All gods follow the great matrix.”

“Well, that’s what I mean,” said Danton. “It seems to me you’ve skipped something, Kroo. The Solar myth. All the great gods have been killed and have risen. Horus of Egypt, Balder, Quetzlcoatl—the Irish, the American Indian—all races. Didn’t the Druids have a god named Mider who was reborn? At the spring equinox?”

“The vernal equinox. Aye. And at each eclipse. Priest, you are wise. Yet I do not know whether I am ready.”

“Why not? There’s no time like the present.”

“You are clever at pronouncing oracles, priest. It is a good saying. I have been remiss. Excellent, I shall die and be reborn. It will not take long—a lunar cycle—a month.”

“Good. Then what’s the program?”

Kroo explained. It was an interesting ceremony. For thirty days Kroo agreed to hibernate. This period would usher in for his worshippers a time of mourning and abstinence from all pleasures, till the god should wake from this catalepsy.

“Yes,” said the yak gloatingly. “Great is Kroo!”

Danton glanced significantly at Deborah.

“Well,” she said, “I guess I’ll go see how those floating temples are getting along.”

“Good,” said the credulous god. “It was a clever idea.” He fell to discussing details of the ceremony with Danton, while Deborah slipped out and headed for the village.

It had been Danton’s thought, a few days before, to create floating platforms on which Kroo could be worshipped. He had easily convinced the god of his apparent motives—the symbolic statement that Kroo was lord of the river as well as of the land. And the platforms were almost ready. One in particular had been made especially sturdy, at Danton’s order, buoyed by sealed petrol cans and equipped with a serviceable rudder. It was, in fact, built to carry a yak.

And that would be necessary, if Danton and Deborah were to escape alive. The presence of the yak provided their invulnerability. Nothing could harm them in their journey down river to the nearest Allied base. And, with Kroo hibernating, no safeguards they could take would be too many.

Everything went off without a hitch. The plan worked almost too satisfactorily. Danton could not help worrying a trifle. Kroo was unsuspecting as the ceremonial rite proceeded, and Captain Yakuni made no attempt to cause trouble. The ritual began at dawn, and lasted about two hours, culminating as usual in a drunken orgy.

All in all, the ceremony was a success. The thundercloud hovering overhead shrank and vanished, and Danton knew that Kroo was gone.

The god was hibernating. Presently he would rise again. But there was a lot to be done before that occurred.

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They headed for the river, Deborah astride the yak, Danton leading the beast. The natives followed in a capering procession. For all they knew, this was simply part of the ceremony. They did not even catch on when the yak was loaded aboard the floating platform and the Americans pushed off into midstream.

"I go to sacrifice to Kroo in a secret place," Danton announced to the crowd at the river-bank.

"Should I not return by tomorrow's sunrise, Myapur is a forbidden place. Find new homes and new villages. This is Kroo's order." Then he turned to Deborah. "This will save the townspeople, if Myapur should be bombed by airplanes."

The raft swept around a bend in the river. The last thing Danton saw was Captain Yakuni's face, puzzled, wary, thoughtful. There was no pursuit.

Danton examined the raft. Concealed under skins was a supply of food, as well as a gun or two and several *da*-knives which he had previously cached there.

"Now, grab that pole and fend us off from the bank if we swing too close," he told her. "This steering-rudder's hard as blazes to work. Lucky the river isn't fast, or we might capsize. When we come to the rapids, lower down, we'll leave the raft, take the yak, and portage."

Deborah shivered.

"I'm just wondering," she murmured. "Wondering what's going to happen to us when Kroo wakes up."

There was no pursuit from Yakuni as they drifted downstream. Crocs, lying like logs on the mud banks, watched the raft slide past on the brown, roiling flood. It was hot. The air was choking and stuffy, even on the river. The jungle walled them in with silence.

There was a pervading odor of rotten flowers. The wind did not cool even at sunset, when the sky turned green as Burmese jade. Deborah's cheroots were too soggy to smoke. The yak, used to a higher altitude, moaned and burred sadly, staring at the Americans with great, sad brown eyes.

Once they saw a plane, too far away for practical purposes, though Deborah thought it was an American P-40. And once an outburst of firing greeted them as they slid around a bend. The attackers kept hidden in the jungle, and their bullets did no harm.

The cobra struck at Danton and Deborah and their guardian beast. The carnivores trailed them. The crocodile charged them. Kroo's power was strong, though the god slept.

The raft floated on, until rapids blocked the river. After that they went afoot. The *da*-knives were useful then, to slash through tangled undergrowth and vines, and the yak could make an opening where none existed. But for the most part Danton followed a well-worn trail. There was nothing to fear except thirst and starvation. Even when a Japanese scouting party met them—that did not matter either.



But the journey took time. They went blindly south, following the river, for they did not know where they could find an Allied base. Often they saw planes. Twice Danton was prepared, and built a signal fire. The first time he was too late, and the ship was gone before its pilot saw the smoke. The second time Jap planes came and the dog-fight overhead passed away to the west.

The yak thrived on an abundance of food, though his coat grew ragged and mangy in the heat. Deborah never complained, but after the first week she began to grow thin. So did Danton. It did not matter, for too much flesh is an invitation to fever.

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Ragged, exhausted, gaunt, they went on. One week. Two. Three. And longer. They had not yet found an Allied base.

Then Kroo awoke.

An animal after hibernation is starved and weak. This is not true of a god. When Kroo roused, his first conscious emotion was joyous expectation. His dreams had been pleasant, of Myapur and his people and his future, and Kroo stretched his muscular body and shouted with laughter. The dawn sun was pearly above the jungle mists. It was the day of awakening. Now Myapur should cease mourning for the sleeping god and rejoice. Kroo had risen, and there would be laughter in Myapur.

But there was silence in the village on the river-bank. No smoke rose from the huts. There was no life.

“*Ya!*” cried Kroo as he rushed down the winds. “Wake! Wake, my people.”

Already the jungle had encroached on Myapur. Jackals roamed the streets, and rank weeds grew between the stones. The temple? The temple had been violated.

The altars of Kroo were gone.

Fallen was Myapur, as Babylon had fallen, as though a curse had blighted it. Blankly Kroo looked upon the wreckage.

He stood motionless, towering above Myapur. A kite dipped, crying shrilly. The river sent up muffled thunder.

“*Ai—and ai!* My people! My faithless priest and priestess!”

The surprise faded from Kroo’s face. His yellow tusks gleamed in the morning sunlight. Muffled thunder snarled.

“My great and shining altars! *Ah-h—*”

Lightning flickered. The sky was suddenly overcast.

Roaring, Kroo plunged southward. The gale paced him. Drumming of the thunder warned of his approach. The jungle bowed before the coming of Kroo.

He saw his quarry at last. There was no need to search blindly, for the intangible *rapport* between god and priest, between god and sacred animal, drew him unerringly. Kroo saw his quarry and reached down.

## CHAPTER X

### *Warrior's Reward*

A great rush of air wakened Danton. He gasped for breath, struggled, tried to sit up, and caught a sickening glimpse of the jungle dropping away below. Rising with him were Deborah and the yak.

"Dan," the girl reached out frantically, and Danton drew her close, white-faced. "Dan! It—it's Kroo!"

"Yeah. I know."

Half a mile above the earth they stopped. The yak shook its shaggy head. Kroo's voice came from the beast-throat.

"It is Kroo. You have broken faith with your god. Myapur lies empty, my temple desecrated and gutted. My altars are gone. My people are scattered. Faithless guardians—die!"

Danton's stomach lurched sickeningly. "Wait," he gasped. "Kroo, listen. Give us a chance."

"I have listened too long. You die."

Deborah spoke suddenly. "Kroo, we couldn't help it. The Japs broke into the temple and drove us away."

"You could have halted them."

"We tried. You were gone. They—they—"

"Why did you flee? You are invulnerable."

"We were trying to get help," Deborah said weakly, and folded up, unable to say any more. But she had given Danton a breathing-space. Now he took up the tale.

"What she says is true. We were driven out. The Burmese tried to help us, but the Japs were too strong. We were going to get help to recapture your altars."

"My altars. My great and shining altars, such as no other gods ever possessed. Where are they?"

Danton glanced at Deborah. "Yakuni dismantled the powerhouse. He knew we might get through to the Allies, and then Myapur would be bombed. He's probably set up the dynamos somewhere else."

"Where?" the yak roared. "Find my altars, priest, or you perish."

Danton gulped. "Well, I'll try. Can you take us back to Myapur?"

"Aye." This time Kroo did not travel slowly. Instantly he transported his prisoners to the Burmese village. "Lo! Look down and see the ruin of my temple."

"Blame the Japs for that," Danton said, licking his lips.

"Find my altars."

"I'll do my best. Can we—uh—fly down the river, about sixty miles per hour?"

Kroo made no answer, but Danton, Deborah and the yak began to move downstream, high in the air.

"Uh, a little less altitude would help. Thanks."

Deborah's lips were trembling. "Wish I was some place else. How are we going to do this?"

Danton squeezed her hand. "Buck up. I haven't any instruments, but I can guess where Yakuni went."

"Where?"

"Down the river. He had to transport the dynamos. Even dismantled they're plenty heavy, so he must have used rafts. Obviously he didn't go upstream."

"But we can't search the whole river, Dan."

"We won't have to. Dynamos convert energy. Yakuni needs water-power. He'll set up the dynamos near a fall. Remember, he's had more than a month to do the job."

"But—even a month—"

"You know how the Japs work. Yakuni had trained engineers in his gang. The Tokyo machine's efficient. Maybe the new powerhouse isn't quite finished yet, but Yakuni's certainly working on it. It'll be camouflaged, of course. He wouldn't move the dynamos out of Myapur to avoid our bombers without planning to hide 'em carefully. Keep your eyes open."

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But it was Kroo, in the end, who found their goal. As Danton had expected, it was near a falls, and concealed cement channels supplied the necessary pressure.

The group swooped down. For an instant leaves lashed their faces. Then they were in the impromptu powerhouse Yakuni had constructed. It was a rough job, but expert technicians had worked on it, laboring night and day under Yakuni's threats, and Kroo's altars had been installed.

More than that, they were in operation. The turbines roared with chained energy converted from the water-pressure of the river. Yes, Yakuni had worked fast.

One glimpse Danton had, and that was all. Gasping for breath, he found himself on the opposite bank above the falls. Deborah and the yak beside him. There was silence. Kroo said nothing.

"He's done it," Deborah gulped. "Tojo's making those devilish bombs again."

Before Danton could reply, the yak spoke.

"Priest, what is this? What thing dwells in my altars? What has happened to them?"

Suddenly Danton saw the way. He flashed Deborah a warning glance.

"The yellow-skinned men are faithless, Kroo. He drove away your faithful Burmese and cursed Myapur. He said—he said you were a weakling and would run away and hide when you woke."

"Dan," Deborah whispered.

"Do I speak the truth, priestess?" Danton glared at the girl.

"Y-yes. That's what happened."

"My altars!" groaned Kroo.

"Kroo." Danton's face was deathly pale. "Drive out this evil god. You're powerful. Fight him. Destroy him."

"Fight him?"

"He does evil. He makes the death that slays your people. Are you—afraid?"

"Wait," the yak said. "Remain here. Watch."

"You'll—fight the other god?"

"Wait," Kroo said, "and watch."

Kroo looked down on the dynamos. They throbbed with life. Their roar mounted to a monotonous threnody. Around them the yellow men scurried, serving and worshipping. Worshipping the new god, who had cursed Myapur.

"I am afraid," Kroo said to himself. "*A-i*, I'm afraid."

Suddenly he hated the new god.

The smell of incense rose to his nostrils. Danton was smoking Deborah's last cheroot, soggy as it was. And Danton was praying.

"Avenge your people, Kroo. Drive out the usurper. Challenge him to battle. Great is Kroo."

One worshiper, where there had been many. Only one—no, two, for Deborah was praying too. Kroo's yellow tusks gleamed. From his height he stared down at the powerhouse.

And then, softly at first, he began to curse. To human ears it sounded like the wind, a deep, throbbing gale. Kroo cursed the new god. He challenged the new god.

"Kroo is great. Kroo is greater than any usurper. You have stolen my altars. Will you fight to keep them? Will you fight? Will you battle Kroo? *Ya*—for I am a great god and I shall crush you."

The booming gusts crashed down from the cloudy sky. Within the powerhouse Yakuni looked up, puzzled. A storm?

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Abruptly he glanced at the dynamos. Was it his imagination, or was their tone changing? Were they actually roaring as though in harmony with the shouting wind—as though in answer?

As though the wind bellowed challenge? And the turbines replied!

The gale mounted to a crescendo. It became almost articulate. And the dynamos—

Yakuni's eyes widened. He swung around to the power switches, but his motion was never completed.

Down the winds came Kroo. Invisible, mighty, terrible, Kroo lowered his shaggy head and charged to do battle with the god of the dynamos.

The explosion rocked the jungle!

Above the falls, Danton picked himself up, blood trickling from ears and nostrils. He helped Deborah to her feet. Behind them the yak struggled up, grunting and moaning. It collapsed suddenly, to lie motionless, its mountainous bulk inert.

Deborah was crying.

"He's dead, Dan. Kroo, I mean. We—we—"

"How do you think I feel?" Danton asked hoarsely. "Sending that—that tremendous savage off to commit suicide. . . . But it was the only way out."

"I suppose so."

"Of course it was," Danton said, rubbing his forehead. "I—I didn't quite expect this. I thought either Kroo would destroy the dynamos, or be destroyed himself. This way is better. Yakuni and his men are dead, and the dynamos are scrap metal."

"The yak's dead, too."

"He died when Kroo died. Debby, are you sure about Kroo? That he—isn't here any more?"

She nodded slowly. "I'm sure, Dan. I can feel he's gone. Can't you?"

"Yes, I can feel it, too. He was a Neanderthaler at heart, but I hated to play such a trick on him." Danton managed to shrug, though the gesture was abortive.

The girl looked up at the clouds. "Dan, is that a plane?"

A speck grew in the western sky.

“It is,” Danton said after a while. “One of ours, too. Must have seen the explosion. No wonder, either.” He stripped off his shirt and began to wave it.

The plane dipped its wings in acknowledgement. It began to circle down, looking for a landing place.

Danton picked up his discarded cheroot and relighted it, with a glance at the sky. Deborah smiled at him shakily, understanding the gesture.

“The plane’s landed,” Danton said. “Let’s go, Debby.”

He flicked the cheroot into the river, and the fires died forever upon Kroo’s altar.

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The fog was thick. It clung dankly, choking in its chill moisture, but as Kroo rode onward upon the yak he saw that it was drifting apart into rags and tatters. And now four tall figures were visible through the mist, guarding a bridge. Beyond them an arched span led into infinity. Silently the giants waited.

Bull-thewed and terrible they stood. They greeted Kroo with strange, formal gestures of welcome.

They gave their names.

Marduk and Ormazd the Flame—Osiris and Allatu of Babylon. Ormazd shook his red head and grinned at Kroo.

“We greet you, Kroo the Warrior.”

But Kroo could not speak, for a little while.

“This could not be Godsheim,” he said. “I am a little god—”

“This is the bridge to Godsheim,” Marduk told him. “Dead gods pass this way, if they are not weaklings. There is a place for you.”

Kroo’s hairy hands went out in a gesture of disbelief. “Ormazd! Tall Osiris—Marduk and Allatu! But I am not great—I might have been, in a thousand years, but I died too soon.”

“You fell in battle,” Osiris said. “You challenged the mightiest entity in all the universes. None of us has dared to meet such an opponent as slew you. *Hai*—you are one of us, brother. Come!”

Marduk and Ormazd flanked him. Allatu went before. Osiris followed.

And Kroo the Warrior rode across the bridge to Godsheim.

[The end of *A God Named Kroo* by Henry Kuttner]