

# **THE MUNITIONS MASTER**

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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# THE MUNITIONS MASTER

## A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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### Chapter I. PUPPETS FALL

THE little man did not look dangerous. Certainly those about him had no suspicion of the part he was to play in the almost unbelievable horror that within a few minutes would transform a gay, merry-making throng into a panic-stricken, fear-crazed mob.

He was a small man, with a thin face and wide mouth. His features were sullen, his cap pulled low over his head. He appeared insignificant.

And if he did not appear worthy of a second glance, neither did the burden he carried.

He was having difficulty getting that burden through the crowd. It consisted of three loaves of French bread, three or four feet long. The staff of life, not the symbol of horror and death.

In some countries it would have been uncommon to see bread carried in such a manner. In Paris, such a burden was taken for granted. Long loaves of bread are carried through the streets as a matter of course.

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The little man twisted from side to side. His sole desire seemed to be to protect the bread. He apparently paid little attention otherwise to the crowds.

But to protect the bread was a hard enough task. Paris was in a holiday mood. The gay tricolor of France hung from almost every window. Gay throngs packed the tables of the sidewalk cafés. The stirring sound of martial music came from the distance. Troops would soon march in review.

The man with the bread was not as unconcerned as he appeared. Occasionally he would dart his head around, peer over his shoulder, as if fearful that he was being trailed.

Intelligence officers were in the crowd, but they were paying no attention to the little man. In fact, they did not know just what they feared, just what they were to watch for.

But there had been rumors. Strange rumors. Tense pervaded the foreign departments of several governments. Orders had been given to be constantly on the alert whenever crowds gathered.

Certain statesmen might have been forewarned. There had been queer activities in certain parts of the world. In fact, the horror had struck twice before.

The first time was in China. But the story was not believed — so many strange stories come out of China. The second time was in Russia. The world did not hear of that. The report was suppressed.

Once more the little man's head jerked around. He swung his bread out of the way of an overenthusiastic celebrator, swore at him fiercely, while the palms of his hands were damp suddenly.

No one paid any attention. That is, no one human did.

THE peculiar-appearing creature could hardly have been called human, even if it was clad conventionally. Its hairy face indicated it was of simian, not human descent.

A tall hat was perched grotesquely on the creature's head. Long arms, half crooked, fell below the knees. It moved erect, but with a gliding motion.

It saw the bread, and its tiny eyes lighted. It slid resolutely after the thin man. A long arm reached out. A paw opened.

The little man's head turned. He saw, just in time. He gave a frightened scream, snatched the bread away.

There was a sudden commotion. Two figures plowed through the crowd.

"Chemistry!" shouted one. "Daggonit, ain't you got better sense than to try and steal food?"

The little man's eyes goggled. His head jerked forward like a turtle's. And from around him came a roar of good-natured amusement. The little man's amazement was justified.

For the man who had called out startlingly resembled the ape who had reached for the bread. He was a little thicker, but he was also wearing a tall hat. His arms, likewise, fell below the knees. And his eyes appeared buried in gristle until they were as tiny as those of the ape.

Behind him, a tall, slender man, immaculately dressed, doubled up in laughter.

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"He thinks he's seeing double!" he roared. "And I don't blame him!"

A gasp of recognition came from the crowd. "Les assistants de Doc Savage!" came an incredulous whisper. "Doc Savage's men!"

The little man heard. He seemed to shrink back; his eyes filled with a mixture of fear and hate.

The two men facing him did not notice. The tall, fashion-plate appearing man was apologizing in his best French. The other, who looked like an ape himself, was holding onto the simian, complaining plaintively.

"Daggonit, Ham," he bleated, "I told you to leave this ape at the hotel."

"Ham," otherwise known as Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, Harvard's gift to the legal profession, snickered delightedly.

"And deprive Parisians of the pleasure of seeing twins, Monk?" he asked, with exaggerated politeness.

"Monk," known to the scientific world as Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, an outstanding chemist, swallowed hard.

Ham had dressed Chemistry, his pet ape, to resemble Monk as nearly as possible. And for once, in good-natured ribbing that had been going on for years, Monk knew Ham had the edge. And as Habeas Corpus, Monk's pet pig, was homesick, the hairy chemist, worried, was behind in his digs.

The little man with the bread disappeared in the throng. Neither Monk nor Ham saw him go.

IN an office on the third floor of the building across the street, a man was removing binoculars from his eyes. He had witnessed the little man's narrow escape at losing part of one loaf of bread.

A sign on the office door said, "Carloff Traniv, Avocat." But the office was a queer one for a lawyer to use. And the man himself did not appear to fall into that category.

Carloff Traniv stood almost six feet four. His frame was that of a soldier, more than an attorney. His shoulders were squared, his stomach lean. His morning clothes fitted him as if he had been poured into them, but he gave them the effect of a military uniform, not a civilian dress.

But his face was his most compelling feature. It had an air of command. His jaw was square, his eyes hard under long, thick black eyelashes. Heavy, almost curly black hair bushed forward over his forehead.

"Doc Savage," he sneered. "The master adventurer. The man who always blocks evil."

Two men slid close to him, peered out the window. "Almost time, boss?" one asked. He spoke with a Brooklyn accent, which was peculiar. For both he and his companion were dressed in the blue uniforms of French gendarmes.

The big man nodded. There was a sudden roar from the crowd outside. The sound of martial music was very loud sounds of cheering reechoed.

"Go!" Traniv rasped. "You have your instructions. Do not fail! If you do -- "

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A quick rippling of nerves passed over the two men in gendarme uniforms. Their eyes darted fearfully over strange, weird-appearing appliances about the office. Then they sped for the door.

Across the street in an alleyway, the little man wet dry lips with a nervous tongue. His eyes were burning feverishly.

Attention was centered on a reviewing stand, almost directly below Traniv's office.

"Doc Savage!" came the roar. "Doc Savage!"

A tall, bronze giant was making his way toward a seat directly in the center of the reviewing stand. Despite his size, the symmetry of his development was such that it was difficult for the crowd to realize his true stature. His features were regular, almost classic. Now he was smiling slightly in acknowledgment of the applause.

His straight hair was a slightly darker bronze than that of his skin. His eyes were like hypnotic pools of flake gold, compelling, attractive eyes. Muscles rippled smoothly.

Monk and Ham chuckled delightedly. They knew part of the enthusiasm was due to newspaper reports of Doc's errand in France.

For Doc Savage, known formally as Clark Savage, Jr., was one of the world's foremost medical authorities, even as he was an outstanding leader in such widely separated subjects as astronomy, undersea navigation and electrical research.

The newspapers had hailed the bronze man widely. Doc Savage had discovered a new type of cell development that led him to believe it might be possible to restore the health of many war cripples, might even restore the sight of many thought hopelessly blind. He had come to Paris to work with French specialists.

Doc lifted one hand, then took his seat. The lifting of that hand quieted the crowd. It showed in what reverence the bronze man was held.

At that moment, two men in gendarme uniforms ducked out an entrance of the Metro, or Paris subway, moved until they were close to the reviewing stand.

Across the street, the small, thin man with his loaves of bread, suddenly pushed his way to the front of the crowd.

A band blared. Those in the reviewing stand rose to their feet. The military men saluted. There was a moment of silence as long ranks of young, tanned, physically perfect appearing soldiers started to march by.

Then it happened!

THERE was an unbelieving gasp. Then came the terrible, almost animal-sounding screams. The screams came from the soldiers.

But only for a moment. Then noise burst from the crowd. Panic seized the multitude. The crowd became a seething mass of motion in which men fought blindly in wild panic, in which women were trampled underfoot. Those at the rear fought to get near the street to learn what had happened.

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In the street itself there was a strange sight. The ranks of soldiers had disappeared. In their place were rows of fallen figures that twisted and squirmed, and from which groans and horrible noises came constantly.

A youth who had been at the edge of the sidewalk suddenly turned, fought to get away.

"I can't stand it! I can't stand it!" he shrieked. "They were marching along! Then their legs melted! They can't march without legs!"

### Chapter II. A MOB'S FURY

DOC SAVAGE leaped from the reviewing stand and fought his way to the stricken figures in the street. He did not seem to use much force, but he eased through the crowd where another would have found progress impossible.

Several hundred soldiers had fallen. They lay huddled, still in some semblance of the straight, well-ordered lines in which they had been marching.

But they would never march again. They had been crippled forever, had been left with shattered bodies.

It was as if their legs had been melted away, halfway to their knees. Their feet and the lower part of their legs had disappeared. There was a peculiar, sickening smell in the air.

Doc Savage dropped beside the body of the closest soldier, an officer.

A low, strange sound came suddenly. It was a trilling sound that apparently came from everywhere, but yet from no particular point. It was a sound the bronze man always made either when he was surprised or when he was warning of danger.

And he was surprised now.

There was nothing to indicate how the soldiers had been crippled. The stubs of their legs were seared as if from white-hot fire. That alone kept the men from bleeding to death. Had a sheet of intensely strong flame swept the street, it would have produced such a result; but there had been no such sheet of flame.

It was easy to understand, though, why the soldiers were silent. They were suffering from shock, dazed and half unconscious from pain.

There was excited calls from gendarmes. Ambulances were trying to force their way through the mob, and having little Success.

The soldiers were in danger of being trampled to death beneath the feet of their crazed countrymen. A troop of cavalry was trying to take care of that problem, officers leading their men directly into the twisting, swirling mass.

The mob was fighting back, senselessly. The situation was tense, filled with danger.

Doc Savage alone was cool.

THE bronze man came to his feet. His face did not change expression, but his gold-flecked eyes swept the swarming mob with calm deliberation.

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Monk and Ham, with Chemistry, had also fought their way toward the stricken soldiers. They realized, as quickly as did Doc, that there was nothing to be done.

The soldiers were crippled. Their wounds had been cauterized. A majority would live, but for many it would mean lives as crippled as their bodies.

"But if there ain't no war, what caused it?" Monk wailed ungrammatically.

Ham did not answer. The lawyer's features were set; he was peering over the heads of the crowd, trying to locate Doc.

The bronze man's eyes flashed. They had found what they were seeking.

A small, thin-faced man was boring furtively through the crowd. No longer was he carrying loaves of bread under his arm.

Doc's aids knew the bronze man had a photographic mind. He could see and remember small incidents that others would have overlooked.

Just before the horror struck, the little man with the bread had been at the curb, along the line of march. As the soldiers had reached a spot in front of the reviewing stand, he had done a strange thing.

He had reached out, had knocked off the ends of each of the loaves of bread he carried. Then he had dropped the bread.

Doc dived forward.

The thin-faced man saw him. He gave a startled cheep, and was engulfed in a wave of struggling forms. He was not far from Monk and Ham.

Strange words came from Doc's lips.

Heads turned toward him suspiciously. The words were in a weird language, certainly not French.

Monk and Ham understood. Doc had spoken in Mayan, the tongue the bronze man used when he wished to direct his aids without others knowing what he said.

Instantly the hairy chemist and the dapper lawyer dived after the little man.

The little man's face was working strangely now. Saliva drooled from his mouth. He was trapped!

Two men in the uniforms of gendarmes smiled grimly. Their uniforms were making a path for them.

"Now!" one of them said shortly.

The other nodded. They leaped forward.

One appeared on either side of the bronze man. They grabbed Doc by the arms.

"Halte!" they cried.



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Those in the crowd near by stopped their yelling to listen. Here was the famous Doc Savage being stopped by gendarmes!

"Doc Savage, you are under arrest!" one of the men shouted.

He appeared to shout even louder than should have been necessary. His voice carried a long way. Many heard him.

We know you plotted this. We saw you give the signal for this horror to start. Even now, you shouted to your conspirators in a foreign tongue."

There was a moment of stunned silence. Monk and Ham stopped in their tracks, mouths wide, eyes unbelieving.

"There must be some mistake, messieurs," Doc said quietly.

One of the gendarmes made a darting gesture toward Doc's pocket. He held up his hand and waved a small vial. The cork in the vial was knocked out. A thin liquid poured to the ground.

The liquid had a penetrating, sickening smell. It was a smell such as surrounded the fallen soldiers.

"Here is proof!" the man shrieked.

A SAVAGE roar of almost unutterable ferocity came from the crowd. Suspicion had been turned toward the bronze man. Suspicion was all the mob needed.

"Tear him limb from limb!"

"Kill the monster!"

"Murder him! Slay him!"

"Death! Death!"

The yells came from scores of throats.

There was an eruption of humanity. The gendarmes were torn from the side of the bronze man.

Monk and Ham had listened, scarcely able to credit their ears. They knew the gendarmes had lied. And knew, as a consequence, that they must be fakes. But they could see the unstoppable consequences of the shrewd play that had been made.

Small, squalling sounds came from Monk. Doc Savage had gone down! The hairy chemist went berserk!

Ham's face was more serious than it had ever been before in his life. Side by side, the two fought to reach the place where the bronze man had vanished under a sea of figures.

But if the scene had been one of almost indescribable confusion before, now it was worse.

Word of the accusation swept through the throngs. The cavalymen, trying hard to protect their injured comrades, were swept from their horses. The horses themselves were knocked to the pavement.

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Soldiers who had been only crippled before, were now pounded to death beneath plunging feet.

Sheer animal cries of savagery came from those closest to Doc Savage. Tattered pieces of clothing floated up in the air, as if hurled there by a seething cauldron.

Across the street, Carloff Traniv watched. His hand was steady as he held the binoculars to his eyes.

"The famous Doc Savage!" he muttered sardonically. "But then, he won his fame before he encountered Carloff Traniv."

His lips split in a grin as he saw Monk and Ham forced back by the crowd they sought to get through. He saw a hairy figure — Chemistry — fighting hopelessly beside Doc's aids. Ham was using his sword cane, but lost it in the fight finally.

Traniv grunted with satisfaction as the glasses picked up the scurrying figure of a small, thin-faced man. He appeared pleased, too, when he saw two men in tattered gendarme uniforms fight their way to one side.

"And if Doc Savage is the man they say he is, he also will contrive to escape," he said softly. "If he does —"

His eyes caught the figures of a girl and a man, pressed back on the outskirts of the crowd, and his grin broadened.

The faces of the girl and the man were grim. The girl was slender, scarcely over five feet tall, and had been called beautiful. Her figure was one that had drawn raves from all who had seen it. And since she displayed that figure at a night club every evening, many had seen it.

It might have been only coincidence that the night club where she danced was frequented mostly by army officers and government employees.

The man beside her supposedly was her dancing partner. He was tall and lithe, but there were lines about his eyes that made him appear older than he was.

The girl had her pocketbook half opened. One hand was inside. Her fist was wrapped tight about a small, very efficient automatic.

The man's gun was in his side coat pocket. His fingers also were firm about the butt of the weapon.

Their eyes were glued on the struggling heap where Doc Savage had last been seen.

And at that moment, radios in many countries were blaring their shocking message.

"We have additional information to add to our short item of a few moments ago, describing the horrible occurrence in France, an occurrence similar to one recently reported from China," the clipped voice of a British broadcaster was saying.

"The crime cannot be laid at our door, no matter how much our neighbor may wish to do so," was the statement of a guttural-voiced German announcer.

"It's terrible. It's beyond belief. But the news seems to be authentic," came the sorrowful tones of an American news commentator. He paused a moment:

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"The horror — and we do not know yet what that horror was, except that it took the legs from men without warning, and, so far as could be seen, without use of weapons — has been laid at the door of an American we all have revered.

"That American is known to us as an inventive genius, an adventurer and a hero, a man without a peer. But something must have slipped, must have affected that great man. At any rate, ladies and gentlemen, I regret to inform you that the French believe they know the perpetrator of that fantastic tragedy across the seas. Many witnesses attest to it.

"That man is Clark Savage, Jr., known to his friends as Doc Savage.

"He is believed to have been torn to pieces by the mob. Rioting, however, is still going on and definite information is impossible to obtain.

"If Doc Savage was responsible, then he deserved to be torn to pieces. But let us suspend judgment if we can. Certainly, evil forces are at work on a scale never before dreamed of. We must remain calm, although the entire world is jittery; although nations are arming feverishly — "

### Chapter III. THE WORLD IS WARNED

DOC SAVAGE probably should have been torn to pieces. As the mob rushed him, the bronze man dropped. He was not knocked down. He dived forward, breaking free from the grip of the false gendarmes.

As the crowd swept over him, he broke several small capsules on the pavement.

A thin powder seemed to fill the air, directly in the center of the mob. From the outside, it appeared merely dust stirred up from the pavement. It enveloped those nearest the bronze man.

Some minutes later, a man appeared on the outskirts of the rioting mob. His shoulders were stooped, his hair gray. His clothes were tattered, and his head sagged.

He did not look anything at all like Doc Savage.

He moved after two men in the torn uniform of gendarmes.

Those men were making their way to the Metro entrance. The two would be safe as soon as they got rid of the uniforms they wore.

They did not see the old man who trailed them. But others did. Carloff Traniv grinned evilly. Monk grabbed Ham's arm, pulled him out of a struggling mass. Chemistry, for once, appeared willing to stop fighting. Monk did not speak, he merely pointed. Ham's breath came out in a relieved sigh.

"I knew he'd do it, but I must confess I feel better now that I can see he did get away," the lawyer admitted. With the ape between them, they started after Doc. The bronze man darted down the Metro entrance. The women he was trailing were using an old New York trick of going in one subway entrance, then across and out another in order to cross a crowded street.

Doc made no attempt to overhaul them; he appeared content to trail along. Monk and Ham lost track of him momentarily.

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But there were two others who didn't.

As the bronze man emerged from the subway entrance on the opposite side of the street, two figures pressed against him. Guns bored into his ribs.

"You will come with us," said a girl's voice. It was the girl who had been watching the street fighting.

"We think you will prove very valuable to us," her dancing partner drawled. "But don't attempt to escape, or we will shoot."

BOTH spoke excellent English. Doc's expression did not change. He walked along without protest.

"How did you get away from that mob?" the girl asked. Frank wonderment was in her voice.

"It really was quite easy," Doc explained conversationally. "I merely released a powder that momentarily deprived those closest to me of the power of sight. As well as hampering their powers of locomotion. Before they recovered, I altered my appearance and moved away."

"Cute," the girl said shortly. "Clever, aren't you?"

Doc made no reply. He permitted himself to be ushered into a taxi on a side street. The man spoke rapidly in French.

Monk and Ham burst into view just as the cab sped away at a neck-breaking pace.

"They got Doc!" Ham said incredulously.

"Got him, nothing," Monk protested loyally. "If Doc went along, you know it was because he wanted to. He thinks they'll lead him to who really is behind this."

The hairy chemist sighed deeply. "I hope that girl ain't mixed up in it. S—she's too beautiful."

The girl really was beautiful, but the gun she held was steady as a rock. Her companion's eyes showed that he would not hesitate to shoot if it should be necessary.

Neither knew that Doc wore bulletproof underclothing, that he was not in the least impressed by their guns.

The girl and her companion showed no disposition to talk. Doc surveyed them in silence.

The cab stopped before a ramshackle building in the Latin quarter on the left bank of the Seine.

Both the girl and her companion had been watching out the rear window of the cab for some moments. Now they looked at each other anxiously. The man nodded.

Doc was ushered out, taken inside the place. He was pushed into a small room, far back in the building.

The girl sighed. "Made it," she said.

Doc suddenly went into action. One hand shot out with such speed that it was only a blur. Before the man opposite him knew what had happened, his gun had been transferred to Doc's fist.

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A faint squeal came from the girl. She tried to bring her automatic up, squeeze the trigger. Her gun also appeared to move into Doc's hand without effort.

"Now you will tell me who you are, and what this is all about," the bronze man said quietly.

THE girl's face was sullen. Her companion appeared disgusted.

"Your names?" Doc repeated softly.

The tall young man took a desperate chance. He hurled himself directly at Doc.

The two guns disappeared in Doc's pockets. He faded back. As the man lunged by, one of Doc's hands floated out. His fingers appeared to caress the back of the fellow's neck.

The young man halted, jerked erect, then stood absolutely motionless. His eyes had a queer, vacant look. The girl stared, amazed.

"Your names?" Doc repeated.

"John Marsh and Mary Standish," the other said. His voice was dull, lifeless, without emotion.

A scream came from the girl "Don't, John! Don't talk!" she shrieked.

Doc turned toward her. Her gaze riveted on his hypnotic eyes. A faint shiver passed through her body. She quieted.

The man who called himself John Marsh had not moved. Doc's fingers had struck nerves in the back of Marsh's neck.

He was semiconscious, but did not know what was going on. In a comatose state, he would answer any question truthfully.

"Who are you, what do you do?" Doc went on quietly. "We are dancers. We appear at the Trempe Café," John Marsh replied.

"And your other job, the one that caused you to attempt to kidnap me?"

"We would kill you, if necessary. We are —"

Heavy footsteps pounded in the hall outside. The sound appeared to penetrate John Marsh's mental fog. He broke off. A frightened expression crossed the girl's face. She darted toward a small radio, turned the dial.

Outside, fists pounded on the door.

The radio made queer noises. Then words came from it. "— so Doc Savage evidently escaped," an announcer said in French. "Members of the Surete have taken up the trail. The archfiend cannot escape. One incredible rumor is that the man we had thought our friend was assisted in getting away by a girl and a man. It is believed the girl can be identified

A startled gasp came from the girl. Fists pounded more heavily on the door.

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Doc Savage did not move did not speak.

"Open the door, Mary!" a voice shouted.

The girl dived toward a closet in a far corner of the room. With frantic haste she yanked open the door. She moved a suitcase and lifted a concealed trap door underneath. A short ladder led downward.

Doc Savage remained quiet.

The girl shot down the ladder. John Marsh's eyes suddenly regained intelligence. He fled after her.

Voices were raised louder in the hallway outside.

John Marsh pulled down the trap door. The bronze man walked forward, replaced the suitcase over the hidden exit, and closed the closet door. He turned toward the entrance to the hall — and halted.

Strange sounds were coming from the radio. At first it seemed as if a tremendous belt of static had been unloosed, completely drowning out the words of the French announcer.

Then there was a piercing whistle that could only mean a stronger station had come on the air on the same wave band, or else it was a huge spark set that was blanketing the entire dial.

Words blared from the loud-speaker.

"This is Doc Savage speaking," a voice said. The voice was more than a credible imitation of the bronze man's tones. No one — not even his aids — could have detected that an impostor, not Doc Savage, was talking.

MONK and Ham heard the announcement from a radio in their hotel.

Monk gave a satisfied grunt, and relaxed on the bed. "I knew Doc would pull one out of the hat," he said in satisfied tones. "Now he'll be able to convince this bunch he had nothing to do with the crippling of those soldiers."

"And we'll go find who really was responsible," Ham said.

Then they both sat up suddenly. "Holy Moses!" Monk ejaculated. Ham, facile lawyer as he was, for once was speechless. For the radio went on, in the voice of Doc Savage:

"Let me repeat, this is Doc Savage. You all have heard of me. You know that at various times I have invented many strange things.

"The crippling of your soldiers today was the result of one of my inventions!"

There was a dramatic pause. Then the voice continued:

"You heard, but did not believe, when I struck in China. I struck also in Soviet Russia. An entire regiment was crippled there. The report was hushed up. I arranged the demonstration today to reveal the extent of my power.

"And to prepare you for what is to come!"

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A second time there was a pause. Millions clustered breathlessly about their radios.

"T—that ain't Doc!" Monk burst forth. He leaped to his feet, his face contorted in a deadly snarl. Chemistry also leaped up, paced beside the chemist.

"No, it isn't Doc," Ham agreed. A worried look was on the dapper lawyer's features. "It isn't Doc, but the world won't know that. Doc's being made a fall guy — " He held up his hand quickly, listening.

"You have all heard rumors, although your newspapers have not printed accurate reports of many strange happenings in the world recently," the fake Doc's voice went on. "No need for me now to recount those happenings. That is past history. Suffice to say I was responsible for them. I have started minor revolts and large-scale revolutions. It all is leading to one thing. Listen closely.

"I, Doc Savage, am going to rule the world!"

Monk's long arms went over his head in a gesture of helpless rage. Ham motioned for silence.

"It would be better for you, people of France, to be with me, rather than against. Rebel, overthrow your government, put your army out of commission. If not, I will; and my methods, as I have demonstrated, are not pleasant. Besides, I would regret exceedingly if it became necessary to use such methods on civilians."

The voice stopped. There was a long pause. Something more had to come. It did.

"You may still doubt my power," the voice concluded. "I hereby make you a promise. Within a few hours — and I could give you the exact second — one of the largest battleships of one of the most powerful nations in the world, is going to disappear with all on board.

"It will be destroyed! I, Doc Savage, who am to become the ruler of the world, so promise!"

The high-pitched whine of the transmitting set died out. The French announcer in the Eiffel Tower station could be heard stuttering wordlessly.

"D—doc had better come soon. We've got to stop this!" Monk said hoarsely.

It was at that moment that the door was knocked down in the room where Doc Savage had been listening intently to the words of the radio speaker. He turned.

Five men poured into the room. Two carried submachine guns. The others were heavily armed.

### **Chapter IV. "SHOOT TO KILL!"**

DOC Savage a criminal!

Police broke into the bronze man's offices on the eighty-sixth floor of a New York skyscraper. A constant guard was put there, even though none of Doc's men were in the country.

Federal secret service agents investigated the mystery of the many devices that were found in those offices. Some they could not solve. They might be instruments to cause death and destruction. The Federal men did not know.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Word was sent out quietly to round up any of Doc's aids that could be found. None could be located.

Major Thomas I. Roberts, known as "Long Tom," the electrical wizard of the group, it was learned, had persuaded operators of a test Clipper service to Europe to permit him to make a trip in one of their planes. He was in the air, hundreds of miles away.

William Harper Littlejohn, the famous geologist and archeologist, called "Johnny" by his friends, and Colonel John Renwick, the noted engineer, who answered as "Renny," were in the Arctic, far from civilization, on an exploration trip of their own.

A conference of high government officials was held in Washington. All available evidence was set before them. That evidence appeared overwhelming.

"It is incredible. It is beyond belief," a tall, gray-haired man pronounced solemnly. "But we can only go on the evidence we have. And we must act. Do you agree?"

Others at the conference nodded glumly. The order was sent out. Doc Savage must be found at all costs!

In the French Surete offices, where the Seine ran close by, another similar conference was held.

The orders that were issued were swift and concise. It might be better for all concerned if Doc Savage tried to resist arrest.

"Shoot to kill!" was the command, and soon it became the byword in a dozen countries.

A THIN, unhealthy-appearing man sat tensely in the seat of a giant Clipper plane. He was not very tall, and seemed almost a physical weakling.

He wore a worried expression. His hands opened and closed. Facing him, a stern-visaged man in blue uniform was staring at him intently.

"It can't be. Doc wouldn't do anything like that. He's been framed," the thin man said.

His companion laughed shortly. "I'm afraid not, Major Roberts," he said. "I wish for your sake that it was so."

Major Thomas I. Roberts was silent for a moment. It was significant that his companion had not called him by his nickname, Long Tom. That small thing was enough to show how the other felt, for he and Long Tom had been good friends.

"I know it looks funny, Fred," Long Tom said. "But I know Doc Savage. There is not a word of truth in what is being said about him."

"But the broadcast, in his own words?"

Long Tom shook his head dolefully. "Doc did not make that broadcast. And that means that he must be a prisoner somewhere. How soon will we land? I've got to get to Paris as quickly as possible."

The uniformed man, captain of the Clipper, shook his head slowly.

"It's not going to do you any good for us to land, major," he said. "We have received radio instructions from Washington to place you under arrest. When we arrive, you are to be turned over to Scotland Yard."



## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Long Tom slumped deeper in his seat. The captain might think he was a prisoner. Long Tom had other ideas. He had to get to Doc Savage somehow.

The bronze man might need aid.

MONK and Ham had similar thoughts. The two wasted no time getting out of the hotel room. They realized it would soon be overrun with French police, who would hold them while they were searching for Doc.

They left Chemistry behind. Ham protested, but Monk pointed out logically that if the ape was with them, their chances of being caught were doubled.

"That girl. I saw her picture on a poster advertising a café," Monk piped grimly.

They called a cab. Ham gave instructions.

"Of course, she won't be there," Ham said, "but maybe we can learn something about her, get a clue that will help."

A long sedan was trailing the cab. As the aids' cab drew up in front of the café, the sedan parked directly behind. The sedan's driver jumped out, edged close to the lawyer and the chemist.

"Doc Savage sent me," he whispered.

Neither Monk nor Ham indicated they had heard. Ham finished paying the cab driver, added a five-franc tip. Then he spun. In the same instant, Monk was on the other side of the man who had approached them.

"What's the game?" Monk growled.

Ham's eyes were hard. His grip on the man's arm was almost enough to break it.

The man made no attempt to escape. He smiled slightly. "The bronze one said you would act like this, but to remind you that his offices are on the eighty-sixth floor. He wants you to help him."

Monk's eyes met those of Ham.

Ham spun the man around so that he faced the other way. His lips formed words noiselessly.

"A trap!" he indicated.

Monk nodded. The man had endeavored to use a code word to indicate his message was an honest one. He had used the wrong phrase.

Monk's eyelids dropped slightly. He spoke loudly. "Yeah, I guess Doc would like to have us with him," he said.

"We'll go with you," Ham agreed.

It seemed the man gave a faint sigh of relief, but he masked it instantly. "I will drive," he said. "You two had better get in back, out of sight. The gendarmes are looking for you."

Monk rolled down the windows in the rear of the car. "We'll take no chance on gas," he whispered.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Ham nodded. A gun appeared in his hand. "We'll take this guy as soon as the car stops," he said. "But first let him take us wherever he wants to go. I'll bet it is where Doc is."

They got in. Their driver reached back, slammed the door firmly behind them. A vicious grin twisted his lips.

When the door had slammed, the seat had dropped. A dark curtain had shot across and above Monk and Ham as they sprawled on the bottom of the car. They were in an almost airtight compartment. Gas overcame them at once.

The car turned, sped toward an airport on the outskirts of Paris.

In another car, at the same time, Chemistry, tied firmly and still squealing occasionally, was being taken in the same direction.

"Don't know what anyone would want that gorilla for," one of his captors moaned. The man's face was battered.

"At any rate," a companion consoled him, "Doc Savage has been left without help."

If the man had second sight, he would have wondered if Doc needed help.

The bronze man was still in the room where he had been taken by Mary Standish and John Marsh. But he was not alone. And he was not a captive.

Five figures lay sprawled in various attitudes around the room.

When the attackers had burst in, two of the men — those armed with machine guns — had ordered Doc to raise his hands. The others had slipped around behind him, had lifted their blackjacks, ready to strike.

Those with the Tommy guns never did know just what happened.

There was a bronze flash. The guns were knocked from their hands, even as blackjacks swished through the air harmlessly.

Doc Savage whirled. The other three hit him at once. Ordinarily, Doc preferred to overcome opponents as painlessly as possible. The speed with which the others attacked was their own hard luck.

The bronze man acted fast. Huge, rugged fists at the end of steel-hard arms lashed out with a speed so fast the eye could not follow them.

The three men folded up.

Doc surveyed them calmly. One, undoubtedly, was the leader; he was better dressed, his face showed more intelligence.

The bronze man reached inside his shirt, opened the small, compact kit he always had around his body. His hand came out with a hypodermic needle.

He dissolved a white powder in water, filled the hypodermic, then injected the shot in the man's arm. Instantly, the man sat up, his eyes opened. But he did not seem to realize where he was.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Doc replaced the powder and hypodermic. The powder was one of his own devising, one that might have won a fortune if he had sold it to prize fighters. It cleared the brain instantly of the effect of a knockout blow, but at the same time left the victim so he would do exactly as he was told, whether to answer questions or to resume fighting.

"Who sent you after me?" Doc asked quietly.

The man's mouth opened. "It was Car -- "

His words broke off. He gave a shrill scream. Then he was silent.

Doc's low, trilling sound, filled the room.

The man would never talk again. He now lay in two parts. His body had been completely severed, directly at the waistline.

Each end of that body was seared, exactly as the stricken soldiers' legs had been seared!

### **Chapter V. TRAPPED!**

IN the office of Carloff Traniv, the broad-shouldered man smiled thinly.

"This Doc Savage is smart, very smart," he conceded. "But I, Carloff Traniv, am smarter."

Traniv released a key he had been holding, lifted headphones from his ears.

Across the desk from him sat a second man, a man now white-faced, with lips trembling.

"W--was that necessary?" he gasped.

Traniv looked at him almost contemptuously. "Of course," he sneered.

"You killed him -- killed him from here?" The other's voice held awe.

"Certainly," Traniv said. "A simple little trick, but one that will remain my secret."

The other shrugged. He was a man of medium height, with a prematurely streak of gray in otherwise perfectly black hair. His face appeared that of an indolent ladies' man, but his eyes hinted a shrewd brain.

"What now?" he asked.

Traniv reached for a telephone, gave a number. When the connection was made, he spoke swiftly in French.

"El Surete? Bon! Good! I am afraid to identify myself, but my word is accurate. Doc Savage is hiding in a building at Rue Jacob. Go there swiftly."

He slammed the receiver down. His companion's face was even blanker. "But what Why I thought -- "

Traniv lifted the telephone receiver again. When there was an answer, he barked a command.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

His companion's face cleared. "Oh, I think I see."

Carloff Traniv preened. "I want Doc Savage," he said. "So far, Allbellin, my men have failed. This time there will be no slip-up. I'll get him myself."

"Pecos" Allbellin's face resumed its vacant look. "You know he will escape the gendarmes then?" he commented.

Allbellin's eyelids dropped. Those who knew him in Paris believed him only a rich exile from South America. He appeared a fop, always well supplied with money, but with apparently little interest -- except in pretty faces. Few realized there was a shrewd, unscrupulous brain behind his dull exterior.

"Are you being just exactly wise?" he asked slowly. "Arraigning Doc Savage against us is not to be dismissed lightly."

A faint sneer split Carloff Traniv's features.

"We have been branching out, as you know, Pecos. To continue in our ambition, it is necessary to branch out more. Such was the reason for the display today.

"But it was also necessary to have someone to take the blame, a fall guy. I picked Doc Savage for that. No one else has reputation enough, has been such a master of strange inventions. He is the only one that we could blame, and get it believed."

Pecos Allbellin nodded.

"If you understood all the devices I have perfected," Traniv went on, and now a note of pride entered his voice, "you would realize there is no possibility of failure."

"Oh, I believe that." Allbellin's head turned slightly; his lips were set in a thin grin. "I realize that I am merely the financier, and could not be expected to understand all you have done. But did you really mean the warning you gave about a battleship?"

Traniv rubbed his hands avidly; his eyes glowed fanatically. "At just four o'clock, Pecos, you will learn just how much I did mean it."

DOC Savage did not need to ask if that warning had been meant. He had dealt with fanatics before.

The Latin quarter is only a short distance from the office of the French Surete. Scores of armed men reached the scene within minutes after Traniv's message.

The raiders were trained man-hunters. They moved casually, but purposefully. The average citizen would have mistaken them for curious visitors.

The bronze man spotted them at once. He descended the ladder which Mary Standish and John Marsh had used when they had fled. A small, dark tunnel was at the bottom. It led a winding course. Doc followed it swiftly.

When officers rushed the building, they found only the bodies of five men. Four of these were unconscious. The fifth had been cut in two.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

The men took only one look. Then they added another crime to those already charged against Doc Savage.

The bronze man emerged on the street more than a block away, well outside the police lines.

A hundred yards in front of him a man glanced at him, then turned and started walking away. He appeared interested only in his own affairs.

Doc's eyes flashed. The man no longer wore a gendarme's uniform, but he was one of the two who had seized Doc when the soldiers had been stricken. Now he wore a blue shirt, blue beret and tattered trousers.

The man reached the next corner, stopped and glanced in a window. A startled expression crossed his face. He whirled. The street behind him was empty. He darted into a store, ran to a telephone.

In a few moments the man returned to the street. He set off at a rapid pace. He did not look behind again.

On the roof above the store, Doc was returning a small mike, connected by a wire, to the pouch about his body. There was a plug at the other end of the wire.

The apparatus was a small, compact replica of a device often used by secret service and other investigators. It had enabled Doc to listen to the telephone conversation without hooking onto a wire. All that was necessary was to place the sensitive mike near the telephone, and the plug in his ear.

"This is By-2," the fake cop had said. "He started to trail me, then vanished."

A chuckle had come from the other end of the wire. "Naturally he would not let you see that he was trailing you.

If he realized you knew it, he would become suspicious and not come here."

"But what am I to do?"

"Return to the street. Come here as directly as you can. Do not look back and do not worry. Neither Doc Savage nor anyone else can escape what I have in store for him."

Doc's flake gold eyes were thoughtful. Then he set off swiftly over the rooftops.

It was three-thirty o'clock.

AT an airdrome, not far from Paris, two cars arrived. From the first of these Monk and Ham were removed. Chemistry, roped until he looked like a hairy cocoon, came from the second.

Two planes were on the field. A huge transport ship and a small, swift scouting plane.

Monk and Ham were lugged to the transport. They were bound securely, and weapons concealed on them were confiscated.

Small, animal-like sounds of delight came from Chemistry as he saw the bound figures of his friends. When he was placed near them, he rolled over and over until he could wash Monk's face with his tongue.

The hairy chemist groaned and opened his eyes. The effect of the gas passed swiftly in the open air. Then Monk took a look at Chemistry, groaned again and closed his eyes.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

"Something like looking in a mirror?" Ham mocked weakly.

"A mug like that is enough to frighten even strong men," Monk bleated.

"Pipe down, you two!" a voice ordered harshly.

With difficulty, Ham rolled until he could see the speaker. His gasp brought Monk's eyes open again, caused the hairy chemist to squirm until he could look also.

Monk's jaw dropped. "It ain't so," he protested feebly. "I—it, it couldn't be," Ham agreed. "No one could be more homely than you; yet this guy —"

The man roared angrily. He was a short man, with a long, thin neck. But his face was what held attention. His head was big and almost square, his features almost as flat as if he had been run over by a steam roller. His nose was tiny and he appeared to have no lips at all, while the entire surface of the skin was as rough as sandpaper.

Ham controlled himself with an effort. "You know," he said softly, "Doc Savage is skilled in remolding faces. If you're real nice, I'll ask him to make that one of yours at least so you can look at it in the dark."

The man swore. He kicked the dapper lawyer hard in the ribs. "Doc Savage ain't goin' to do nothing," he sneered. "The boss is taking care of him."

A TALL man dressed in blue shirt, blue beret and tattered trousers did not seem quite so sure.

The man had reached the building where Carloff Traniv had his offices. Bodies of the stricken and dead soldiers had been removed, but crowds still milled around.

The man glanced over his shoulders occasionally, but if he was being followed there was nothing to indicate it.

Then he ducked into an entrance way, slipped up several flights of stairs. And once inside the building, he no longer appeared doubtful.

On the third floor he stopped, walked swiftly down a hall until he came to the office that said, "Carloff Traniv, Avocat."

He did not reach for the knob. Instead, he spoke softly:

"By—2, reporting."

For a moment nothing happened. Then the door opened silently. The man entered, taking three quick steps forward. The door closed behind him. Again he stopped, eyes front, one hand raised in salute. His second hand was partly concealed behind him. It contained a small, queer-shaped object.

He was standing in a room apparently vacant. Three heavy doors led from it, but there were no windows. The room had the appearance of being airtight.

Across the ceiling ran a series of small pipes, some with queer-shaped openings.

"You were followed?"

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

The question came seemingly out of the air. There was no sign of the speaker, but the man shook his head as if he were being watched.

"I am afraid not. I could not detect it if it were so."

A faint humming noise filled the room.

"What's that?" The question came out of the air, sharp, startled.

The man with the blue shirt and blue beret did not answer. He moved suddenly, instead, darting toward the center door.

There was a terrific blast of air. Not air into the room, but as if it were all being sucked out by some terrific force.

The man was in mid-stride. He remained that way. He appeared clothed instantly in white. Even his features and hands were sheathed.

Then he fell to the floor. He landed with a solid thud and did not stir.

He resembled a cake of ice.

A MINUTE passed. Air hissed slowly back into the room. Then the center door opened. Carloff Traniv moved in cautiously. Behind him was Pecos Allbellin.

Allbellin's eyes were wide and staring. The figure on the floor before him appeared petrified.

"But what "Allbellin gasped.

Traniv was breathing heavily. "You are right, Pecos," he gasped, "Doc Savage is not to be underrated!"

Allbellin's jaw dropped. "But this — this is not Doc Savage!" Traniv moved forward, turned the rigid form over until he could look into the other's face. Wide, flake gold eyes looked at him.

"He used some electrical device to neutralize the television set through which I was watching him," Traniv said. "If I had not acted when the television image faded, he would have been upon us."

Traniv shook his head, and his face became stern. "Somehow, he overpowered the man sent to lure him here, learned from him how to reach this room. How that could have been done, without my knowing it, I do not see."

Pecos Allbellin swallowed hard. "B—but, what happened to Doc Savage?"

Traniv smiled slowly. "He fell into my trap. What I did was to create a vacuum of sudden, terribly intense coldness in this room. The moisture that was in the room froze instantly. So did Doc Savage. You might literally say he is 'on ice' until

I want him."

It was ten minutes of four.

## Chapter VI. DEATH ROARS

THE United States battleship Georgia was five hundred miles off the British coast. Foam curled from its heavy bow as it plowed through rough seas.

The U. S. S. Georgia was homeward bound, after a courtesy call to principal European powers. Aboard were several American diplomats who had attended a Geneva conference.

The ship was unusually quiet. Occasionally a seaman would cast an anxious glance overhead. In the battle towers, sharp eyes watched the sea. The slightest unusual ripple was the object of immediate scrutiny.

Gobs whispered curiously when no officers were near by.

There was something strange. Several things, in fact.

For one thing, three-inch antiaircraft guns had been prepared for action. For another, gun crews were close to their weapons. They had not been told why they were there.

Gun crews were near several five-inch weapons that could be used quickly against submarines. And the officers of those crews were equally uncommunicative.

But then, only the rear admiral, in command of the battleship, and the radio officer really knew the reason.

There had been a terse order from Washington:

Doc Savage threatened attack on battleship sometime today. Probably hoax, but prepare for any eventuality.

The rear-admiral believed he had taken such preparations. If any such attack was to be made on the U. S. S. Georgia it would have to come either from the sky or from a submarine.

"Looks as if the rumor was right and the Old Man really thinks Doc Savage might try to sink this wagon," Seaman Smith, first-class, chuckled to his buddy, Seaman Phelps.

Seaman Phelps gave no answering chuckle. He was small, and had been to sea many years. His eyes appeared perpetually squinting. His jaw stuck out belligerently.

"Don't blame the Old Man," he said shortly.

Seaman Smith snickered outright. "Forgot you once met this Doc Savage," he kidded. "Rather sold himself to you, didn't he?"

"If Doc Savage said he was going to sink this crate, he will," Phelps said solemnly. "But Doc Savage wouldn't try to attack us. He'd keep anyone else from doing it, too."

THE bronze man was in no position to stop anyone. It had been easy to trade places with the fake cop who was to lure him to the office of his boss.

In fact, it was hours before the fake cop knew what had happened to him. He had suddenly felt himself snatched into the air. Then, before he could cry out, something had hit him on the back of the neck.



## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Doc's actions had been simple. He had merely snared the other from above, dropping a rope about the man while he himself remained on the roof top.

He moved so swiftly that none noticed the man go sailing upward. Then Doc had knocked him out.

From the fake cop — by using hypnotism — the bronze man had obtained the directions for reaching Carloff Traniv's office.

Doc had realized instantly the type of trap that had been prepared for him as soon as he entered the office. The airtight room, the queer-shaped pipes in the ceiling had told their own story.

He had slipped a small, electric vibrator of high intensity, from his pocket. The vibrator was a tiny but powerful battery. Given time, it would have served Doc's purpose. It did do so to some extent.

But the waves from the vibrator also had made ineffective the television set Traniv was using. And Traniv had acted instantly.

The extreme sensitivity of the bronze man's skin gave him warning of that, even before the temperature in the room went far below freezing. He had leaped for the door — but too late.

Traniv had done merely what other scientists had done before him — used an almost instantaneous freezing method which left its victim apparently devoid of life, but in whom life could be restored.

But the bronze man had known what was coming. And the marvelous physical training he had given himself since childhood stood him in good stead.

At the first hint of change of temperature, he had forced himself into a comatose state. This had slowed his heart, had reduced his body heat. Thus he had not been rendered unconscious.

But he was helpless — for one of the few times in his life. He had been dazed. And he was encased in ice, held more firmly than if he had been encircled with steel bands. His mighty muscles were cold and powerless.

CARLOFF Traniv paid no more heed to his captive. He knew Doc could not move, believed him unconscious.

The big, broad-shouldered man with military bearing returned to his office. The bronze man understood many things when he saw that office,

There was a small microphone on the desk. It was attached to a powerful, but compact transmitter. High over Paris, almost up to the stratosphere, was a plane. It contained even a more powerful transmitter — and one turned on the wave length of the Eiffel Tower station.

It was instantly apparent how Traniv could broadcast his messages without fear of having them traced. The transmitter he was using was on a micro wave, one that would escape ordinary detection. And even if French directional-finders pointed upward toward the plane, where the message was being rebroadcast, that plane could be miles away before ships went up after it.

Traniv threw a switch. He glanced sardonically at Doc's prone body, inserted a small, oval object in his mouth. Then he spoke into the microphone.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

"Doc Savage speaking," he said. His voice was more than a credible imitation of that of the bronze man. The artificial larynx he was using had been cleverly devised.

Sharp silence seemed to follow those first words. It was a silence that blanketed the entire city.

Every radio had been left tuned in on the Eiffel Tower station and as those words blasted out through the loudspeakers, the city paused.

It was two minutes of four.

"I am now about to make good my promise of several hours ago," the voice went on. "In just two minutes one of the most modern battleships afloat will be sunk. Nothing can save it.

"That will be my last warning to the world. Unless then, the peoples of the various nations overthrow their rulers and call for me to become their leader, I will strike. Death such as the world has never known before will sweep unexpectedly but surely through all countries.

"I, Doc Savage, have spoken. It is now fifteen seconds of four o'clock. In fifteen seconds the United States Battleship Georgia will be sunk."

The voice stopped. It was exactly four o'clock.

A THIN whine came from high in the air. It was not the roar of a diving plane with motor wide. The sound was much fainter than that.

The rear admiral of the Georgia looked up. Sailors leaped to the anti-aircraft guns. Sharp orders were given.

Then hell struck!

From out of the sky, almost soundless, powered evidently by electric energy, and coming so fast the eye could hardly follow them, dived two weird shapes.

Those shapes could hardly have been called planes. They had wings, but they were short, stubby. They appeared more for directing purposes than for sustaining weight.

Between the wings were huge, streamlined objects that looked something like torpedoes. But they were much larger than torpedoes.

A frightened radio operator grabbed for his key. He had time only to rap out the beginning of an S. O. S.

Then the twin streaks of destruction landed!

There was a noise like the explosion of a thousand sixteen-inch guns molded into one.

One of the gigantic flying bombs struck near the bow of the battleship. The other hit dead center.

The battleship's deck was heavily armored. The huge bombs pierced it as if it had been snow. Then came the explosions.

The bombs had been cunningly contrived. They did not go off with a single blast. There was a series of deafening, world-rocking blasts; each sounded louder than the last.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

The blasts occurred at almost every stage of the passage of the bombs through the battleship.

The U. S. S. Georgia literally flew apart.

The explosive used was one Carloff Traniv had perfected. It was more than a hundred times as powerful as any other explosive the world knew.

Ammunition carried by the battleship was set off. More thunderous explosions occurred, even while the big battle wagon was still flying apart.

A haze hung over the sea. Flying pieces of men and ship created the haze. The concussion rolled the waters of the ocean back, left a low spot almost a quarter of a mile deep as if there had been a subterranean earthquake.

The waters roared back, filled in the low spot. What was left of the hulk of the battleship was engulfed. It was never seen again.

Score upon score of bodies were sucked under by the raging maelstrom.

The U. S. S. Georgia had been destroyed!

NO one should have been left alive. Few were. But, as in every catastrophe, fate had saved a few.

Seaman Phelps was one of these. His squinting eyes were blank and uncomprehending. The impossible had happened. Only his subconscious mind kept him paddling, kept him afloat. His fingers wrapped around a piece of wreckage.

It was seconds before he became aware of a strange noise in the sky. And when he looked, he could not believe his eyes.

Half a hundred strange craft were swooping down with deadly speed. They looked like a flock of hawks, only much more vicious.

They were flying machine guns, radio-controlled. With a wing spread of small gliders, they had no human pilots. In the nose of each was a machine gun.

They swept almost to the water, wheeled, and came along the sea in a solid line, wing tip to wing tip.

Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

The guns opened up at the same time. They sounded louder than a battery of riveting machines. A hail of lead shot across the water.

A moan came from Seaman Phelps.

The flying machine guns were making sure that no one who had been aboard the U. S. S. Georgia was left alive!

High above, almost out of sight, loomed a huge cabin ship. Men were inside. The men moved levers, and the radio-controlled flying machine guns wheeled and dived again, spraying their deadly cargo.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

The huge aerial torpedoes also had been controlled by radio. But when they had been launched, the cabin plane had been high in the stratosphere, absolutely invisible.

"Remember the boss told us to leave one guy alive — if possible," one of the men in the plane said tonelessly.

A man at the radio levers shrugged his shoulders, sent the guns below firing again.

"I am afraid it will not be possible," he said with slight interest.

Far below, Seaman Phelps's hands loosened on the wreckage he had clutched. He sank beneath the water.

### **Chapter VII. AN UNBELIEVER CONVINCED**

A THIN man with yellow-appearing complexion sat, quite straight. Long Tom watched others in the Clipper plane with worried eyes.

The radio officer came into the cabin, addressed the man in uniform at Long Tom's side.

"Can't raise her, chief," the radio officer said laconically. The Clipper captain's face got whiter. Long Tom's features became even more stem.

"Repeat again just what you did hear," the Clipper captain said.

"I'd tuned in on the U. S. S. Georgia wave band because, as you know, she had promised to give us a radio navigation check," the operator said. "Just at four o'clock I caught two letters, '5 0,' then nothing."

"Anyone else been trying to raise her?"

"The air is full of calls. Seems this Doc Savage broadcasted in Paris the Georgia was the ship he was going to sink."

Long Tom's frame slumped. His face became old, suddenly. The Clipper captain tamed to the navigation officer. "You have the Georgia's position?"

"Got it all worked out. At four o'clock she should have been just about an hour's flight from where we are now."

"Tell the pilots to head there."

The Clipper captain turned. His face became hard and merciless.

"Major Roberts, you have been my friend. But if anything has happened to the Georgia, and if Doc Savage is the one responsible — I'll — I'll

"It wasn't Doc," Long Tom said. But even his voice sounded doubtful.

Doc was a big packing box. The box was airtight, and cold, like a refrigerator. He had been placed there by Traniv and Allbellin.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Four men carried the box to the street, put it in an enclosed truck. Then they got into the truck and drove off.

In the rear of the truck, a frightened urchin crept from under canvas where he had been hidden. Pierre was a true child of the streets. Loose objects sometimes found their way into his hands. Pierre had to eat.

The box looked big, and also it must be very valuable, by the careful way in which the four men had carried it.

Pierre tried to lift the hinged lid. The lid was heavy. The best he could do at first was to get it up an inch or so, then he would have to drop it.

He searched around the back of the truck. There were several blocks of wood on the floor. The next time he got a block of wood under the lid of the box. Then he got a second block under.

Pierre peered inside, but could see nothing. It was too dark.

Searching through his pockets he found the stub of a match. He lighted it carefully, put it inside the box, then stuck his head inside.

He gave a startled bleat. The match went out. But not before he had seen the body inside.

Pierre remembered where he had seen that face before. He was alone in the rear of a speeding truck with Doc Savage, the arch-criminal!

Pierre screamed. The sound carried to the men in the front of the truck. A few minutes later the truck stopped.

And then Pierre wished that he had kept still. He could hear men coming around to the back of the truck. As the door was unlocked and opened, he leaped out. He landed running.

The truck already was outside Paris. It was near an airport. And the road was deserted. A yell came from one of the four men. He tugged under his coat.

The yell lent speed to Pierre's heels. He weaved from side to side.

Blam!

Lead blasted by his ears, Pierre really started to go places then. He cut off the road, dived into the fields. He got trees between him and the man who was firing at him.

The man with the gun wore a worried look. He closed and locked the rear of the truck swiftly.

"Get going! Get to the airport!" he rapped. "And if any of us tells the boss what happened, you know what hell do."

The truck got underway. The four men were very pale.

PIERRE knew he had learned something very valuable. But, at first, he was too frightened to know what to do about it.

He heard the truck drive away, but returned to the road cautiously. One of the men might have been left to lay for him.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Pierre was hungry, but he was French as well. He did not want to sell the information he had. He wanted to get to the authorities as quickly as possible.

When he got to the road, he made his way down it as fast as he could. He reached a main traveled highway in about a mile. Many cars were on it.

Then Pierre learned what frustration was. No one would stop at his hail. He jumped up and down. Tears of rage stained his cheeks.

He saw another car approaching. Several men in uniform were in it.

Pierre risked his life. As the car neared, he ran directly in front of it, threw himself before its wheels.

There was a loud howling of brakes — but the car stopped. Instantly, Pierre was up. He rushed to the side of the car, and babbled so fast it was several minutes before the army officers inside could understand what he was saying.

At first they were inclined to scoff. Here a ragged urchin was telling them that the infamous Doc Savage had been in a box in a truck, and was himself a cake of ice.

"And he was alive. I could see his eyes. They were not the eyes of a dead man!" Pierre sobbed.

The officers sobered. "There is an abandoned airport not far from here. It will not hurt if we investigate. A plane might be there," one of them said.

Their car turned. They sped toward the airport, Pierre going with them.

Two planes were about to take off as they arrived. One was a transport ship, the other a swift scouting plane.

The officers ran their car toward the scouting ship. They stood up and signaled wildly for the planes to stop.

Motors on the ships merely whined louder. The two planes took to the air.

Pierre was gesturing frantically toward one side of the field. The truck he had ridden in had disappeared, but lying on its side was the big box that had been used to transport Doc Savage.

The officers drove swiftly to a telephone. In a few minutes orders had been sent to all army aviation fields. Planes took to the air by hundreds.

The transport and scouting plane were to be ordered down. If they refused to land, they were to be shot out of the air.

CARLOFF Traniv was at the controls of the scouting ship. Beside him was Pecos Allbellin.

"We've been discovered," Traniv said quietly.

Allbellin shrugged. His face had resumed its vacant look. "You'll take care of us," he said blandly. "But I am sorry to be leaving Paris and Mary Standish. I wish she were along."

"She'll follow us shortly," Traniv said.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Astonishment flared for a moment in Allbellin's eyes.

"You -- you know about her?"

A thin grin creased Traniv's face. "More than you think," he replied.

Allbellin started to speak again, then became silent. Traniv sent the swift plane up as rapidly as it would climb. He was far above the transport ship.

In the distance faint dots appeared. Those dots neared rapidly. Through glasses, Traniv could make out the markings. They were army ships. They were headed toward the transport.

Monk, Ham and Chemistry were lying helplessly on the floor of the transport. Near them, still sheeted in ice and enclosed in a transparent container, was Doc. Condensed air kept the inside of the container far below freezing.

Monk was watching Doc's eyes. In some manner the bronze man had freed his eyelids. They were blinking up and down rapidly.

"He says the men in the other plane are the real villains," Monk interpreted.

Doc was telling what had happened, blinking his eyes in Morse code.

"He says that if we get a chance to get loose and tackle any of the guys on this ship to be sure they don't get an opportunity to talk. They've got belts on them that evidently contain radio transmitters," Monk went on.

Then the hairy chemist's jaw sagged. He lifted his head, listened intently.

"He's right," he said with awe in his voice.

"Of course, but on what now?" Ham snapped.

"Even fixed up as he is, he heard other planes coming. He thinks army ships are after us."

The dapper lawyer squirmed around, managed to inch his way up until he could see out the plane window.

Half a dozen army ships were streaking toward them. They did not see the tiny scouting plane far above.

Ham's mouth dropped open. Startled, horrified surprise filled his eyes.

The army planes suddenly became flaming meteors. Even their metal wings were aflame. They dropped out of the sky, vanished.

"A thermite combination that burns any metal which it comes in contact with," Traniv was explaining casually to Allbellin. "Our ships are covered with a special preparation to protect them. All that is necessary is to release the powder, like a smoke screen, and let other planes fly into it."

Allbellin nodded. The sky was clear except for the big transport and themselves. Unmolested, they flew across the border.

It was at that moment that the huge Clipper ship reached the spot where the U. S. S. Georgia had been.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Wide, tortured eyes stared down from the Clipper. Long Tom's face was a picture of pain.

Doc Savage had not done this. That he knew. But the bronze man was being blamed for it.

Usually Long Tom was mild-tempered. He wasn't now. He was filled with a consuming rage.

Others aboard the Clipper were filled with anger just as strong. They looked at Long Tom as if they felt he, too, were a murderer.

"Major Roberts, I promised you --" the Clipper captain started. He broke off. The radio operator was gesturing wildly.

"There's one alive, I think! I saw something move!" Everything became tense. It was dangerous to set the Clipper down in that sea filled with wreckage. The captain did not hesitate. He took the controls himself. Carefully he maneuvered to land in a semi-cleared area. Then he taxied toward the spot where the survivor had been seen.

Seaman Phelps was more dead than alive when he was pulled aboard the Clipper. He had one bullet hole through an arm, another through his shoulder. He was weak from loss of blood and hysterical from all he had seen.

Hot drinks were poured down him. Dry clothing was provided, his wounds were dressed.

"I saw them coming -- coming again and again," he gasped. "Each time I would dive down under the water. But I was too slow once. They hit me twice. I thought I was gone."

His audience was white-faced. Muscles stood out in ridges along hard jaws.

"I-I didn't think Doc Savage would do it! I didn't think he was that kind of guy!" Seaman Phelps raved.

"He didn't do it, and he isn't that kind of man," Long Tom said gently.

"But he is! He is!" Phelps's voice rose to a shriek. "I saw it! I saw it!"

"You saw what?" the Clipper captain asked in a dead voice.

"I saw what was on the bottom of each of them flying machine guns. They all had the same words!"

"And those words?"

"Doc Savage, World Ruler!" said Seaman Phelps.

### **Chapter VIII. AN ESCAPE ACT**

NEWSPAPERS sold as rapidly as presses could turn them out. The headlines read:

DOC SAVAGE Sinks U. S. battleship! Lone Survivor Tells Terrible Story of Sea Massacre!

Silent groups stood on New York streets reading those newspapers. The silence gradually gave place to a sullen undertone. Crowds started to gather.



## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

There were no apparent leaders, but the crowds all moved in the same direction.

The mob pressed toward the giant skyscraper where Doc's offices were located. Police reserves were called. The mob pressed on. Fighting started as the mob tried to enter the building.

The rioting in New York lasted several hours. The hospitals were filled before it was quelled.

A torch was set to Doc's warehouse on the East River, where his submarine, yacht and planes were stored. Only automatic signals and fire-fighting equipment which the bronze man himself had installed saved the warehouse from destruction.

Doc's name had been a synonym for courage in the United States. Now it was a synonym for all that was evil.

Telegrams flooded the White House, demanding that Doc Savage be brought to justice at once and publicly executed. Families of those killed aboard the Georgia started a fund to hire a group of desperate adventurers whose only job would be to run down the bronze man and his aids and exterminate them.

Charred fragments of the French army planes were found at about the same time. Again the headlines screamed:

**MURDERER SAVAGE DESTROYS 6 PLANES!**

**French Hero Fliers Burned to Death Trying to Halt Super-Criminal!**

The pieces of the planes were all that was ever found. The fire generated by the thermite had completely destroyed all traces of the pilots and observers.

On the Clipper plane, rapidly nearing London, Long Tom was a prisoner. He had stopped protesting. Doc would take care of the situation. Doc had to do so.

MONK and Ham had the same idea. They were watching the bronze man. Doc's eyelids were blinking again, rapidly.

"Darn it," Ham muttered disgustedly. "I should have thought of that myself."

The dapper lawyer uttered a crooning sound. Monk snickered outright. Chemistry, tied and bound as he was, rolled over until he could be close to Ham. He placed his face lovingly alongside that of the object of his adoration.

"Daggonit, it must be love and nothing else but!" howled Monk.

Ham turned an undignified red, but ignored the hairy chemist.

Monk choked some more. The flat-faced homely guard in the front of the plane turned to stare disapprovingly. Two other guards were with him, but they were playing cards, paying little attention to their prisoners.

Ham whispered in Chemistry's ear. The ape moved, and Monk's laughter stopped.

"You really had an idea for once," he said.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

"Doc told me what to do," Ham admitted glumly. Chemistry squirmed around until his back was toward the ropes that bound Ham. The ends of his powerful fingers were much more facile than those of the average man. He tugged at the bonds. They didn't give.

The ape grunted. He wheeled around and leaned over. His sharp incisors came down hard on the rope.

The rope was good strong manila. But it couldn't be expected to stand up under such treatment. It didn't. The strands parted.

The dapper lawyer worked swiftly once his hands were free. He untied the ropes around his own legs, then freed Monk. Together they released Chemistry.

Doc's eyes blinked rapidly. Ham whispered in Monk's ear. The hairy chemist lay back on the floor, placed the ropes so it looked as if he were still tied. Ham did the same.

Then Ham gave a swift command to Chemistry. Monk sometimes claimed Chemistry understood the English language better than Ham. He didn't, of course, but Ham had taught the ape to obey certain commands and Chemistry was proud of showing off.

A squeal came from the ape. He bounded toward the front of the plane, landed on the homely man's shoulder.

The man shouted, tried to claw Chemistry off his back. The ape hung tighter. This was a game he had played often. Then his little eyes darted to the cards. One long paw swooped out, grabbed them.

Grunting gleefully, he raced toward the rear of the ship, still holding the cards. He had done just as Doc had expected, and the guards reacted just as naturally.

They started in pursuit. It was only an ape, so they did not draw guns as they reached the rear of the ship. That was an error.

Monk and Ham went into action!

THE ropes fell to the floor. Monk and Ham were on their feet instantly. The guards were caught by surprise.

A pleased smile was on the hairy chemist's face. If there was anything he liked better than fighting, it was more fighting. He swung barrel-like fists gleefully.

The first guard tumbled backward as if he had run headlong into a truck. Ham's tactics were different. He was the fencer type. His fists darted in and out with lightning rapidity.

The homely faced man's features became even more unpleasant. One eye closed, his button of a nose was pushed farther back into his face.

The third guard clawed for his gun. This also was something Chemistry understood. The ape had thought it was all a game, but if Monk and Ham wanted to make it a fight it was all right with him. He liked to fight, too.

Chemistry bounded upward. His long arms wrapped about the guard's neck. One steel-like grip fastened on the man's wrist.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Then disaster struck. The roar of the plane should — and did — cover all sounds of the fight. But even a mediocre pilot could have told something was wrong by the way weight shifted at the rear of the ship.

The door leading to the cockpit burst open. One of the two pilots jumped out. He held a Tommy gun.

"Hold it. All of you get your arms high, or I'll turn it loose!" he shouted.

Monk was breathing heavily. He poised, undecided, as if about to try a desperate leap toward the man with the Tommy gun.

"Don't try it!" the other snarled.

"Hold it, Monk," Ham breathed. "We made a good try, but we lost. If only Doc had been free — "

Ham's eyes widened.

The transparent container holding Doc suddenly came apart. The bronze man leaped to his feet.

A MOAN came from Monk. If Doc only could have got free a few seconds sooner! Now it was too late.

Monk and Ham acted on the same impulse. Someone would be killed before they could overpower the pilot. It couldn't be Doc, but if it had to be, then they would die with him.

They leaped forward together.

The pilot came out of his daze. It was enough to shock even one with his steady nerves to see a man apparently frozen in a container far below zero suddenly tear out of that container, start forward.

The pilot's finger tightened on the trigger.

Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r! The Tommy gun stuttered rapidly.

Monk and Ham did a queer thing. Just an instant before the gun roared, they seemed to be trying to stand on their heads. Both went to the floor, their legs kicked up.

The guards did likewise. A second more and the pilot was going through the same contortions.

It was as if the plane were looping the loop.

But Monk noticed something else, too. The others in the plane were a long way off, suddenly. In fact, the plane itself appeared to have grown to an enormous size.

And besides that, everything was upside down.

The pilot did not know what had happened. He knew only that he had intended to kill the bronze man, but that Doc had unexplainably receded into the distance and seemed upside down. He had changed the elevation of the gun to take care of that.

Bullets intended for Doc had gone through the floor of the plane.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Doc alone was on his feet. Quite casually he walked forward, took the Tommy gun from the pilot's hand. A whiff of gas from an anesthetic capsule took care of the copilot. The plane soared on, a gyroscope keeping it on its course.

But now Doc Savage and his men were in control of the ship.

DOC'S escape, miraculous as it had seemed, had not been so difficult.

The electric vibrator he had used in Carloff Traniv's office had covered his body with a dry layer of static electricity. Ice had formed over that, leaving Doc himself dazed, but unharmed. The ice alone had been thick enough to hold him prisoner.

Aboard the plane, however, with his faculties back to normal, Doc had reversed the process he had used when he had been trapped. Then he had thrown himself into a comatose state, lowering his body temperature.

This time he worked himself into an artificial fever. It had taken time, but the ice had melted slowly until only a thin crust remained.

Then the bronze man's enormous strength had come into play. Tearing his way out of the transparent container had been comparatively easy.

Monk and Ham were sitting up on the floor of the plane. Things were returning to normal. Once again the plane appeared its natural size. No longer did it seem they were upside down.

"W—what happened, Doc?" Monk gasped.

The bronze man's eyes flashed faintly. "A gas," he explained simply. "A type of gas that spreads instantly and freezes on the eyeballs. It coats the eyeballs in such a manner that the faint shield it forms works as a telescope would work were you looking through it toward the small end. In other words, things close at hand appear to be far away. At the same time it makes things look upside down. I had a few of the gas pellets in my carry—all vest and broke them."

Ham's eyes were wide. He understood now that Doc could have escaped earlier, but that he had been waiting for the proper moment, when his aid would be most needed.

"Tie up the prisoners," Doc said.

Monk and Ham hastened to obey.

Then the three went to the cockpit. "Now maybe we can turn the tables on the guys behind all this," the hairy chemist grunted. "They won't know what's happened."

"I imagine he knows," Doc said. "There undoubtedly is an open radio transmitter somewhere on the ship, but at least we have a plane. That is something to work with."

The bronze man seated himself at the controls, moved the stick. Nothing happened. The plane remained on its course.

Doc's low, trilling sound filled the cockpit. Ham was looking on blankly.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

A stutter came from the headphones that had been on the pilot's ears. Doc picked them up, placed them on his head.

"Nice work, Doc Savage," came Carloff Traniv's jeering voice. "You really are smart. I can use you. But don't be getting ideas. Your plane is being controlled from mine. You can't get away. You are still prisoners."

There was a pause, then a harsh chuckle. "And don't try to question any of those in the crew. The only ones who knew anything are dead. That's the price they paid for letting you get loose."

Doc tore the earphones from his head, leaped toward the rear of the plane.

There had been five prisoners. Now only three were alive. The homely man and the pilot were dead.

Their bodies had been cut in two at the waist, as if by a terrifically hot flame.

### Chapter IX. LONG TOM FALLS

THE Clipper changed its scheduled landing place on Long Tom's account. Not as a favor to him, but because Scotland Yard wanted him alive.

Foreign agents with instructions to kill were in the crowd at the regular landing place. And the crowd itself was sullen. Newspapers had printed that Doc Savage and his men had been responsible for disorders in India and other parts of the empire. The British did not like that.

But the change enabled Scotland Yard inspectors to get Long Tom to their car safely. That was about all. Word of the ruse soon spread.

Passage of the car was greeted with jeers. Many automobiles tried to follow it. A majority were shunted aside by escorting cars.

But at least two machines hung on, far back at the rear of the procession. At the wheel of one was a pretty girl who had lately danced in a Paris café.

John Marsh drove the second car. Mary Standish's dancing partner looked tense.

The Scotland Yard machine swung into the city on a main highway. John Marsh glanced quickly at Mary Standish. The girl nodded.

At the next intersection the two cars changed direction. They left the main highway in opposite directions, increasing speed rapidly. A few moments more and they turned again. This time they were on parallel roads on either side of the main street. Neither John Marsh nor Mary Standish noticed that there had been a car trailing them, a car which now followed the girl.

In the Scotland Yard machine Long Tom was doing his best to keep silent in the face of a steady barrage of questions. The electrical wizard realized it would do him good to talk.

Long Tom wanted to escape. But even for a seasoned battler, that seemed impossible. He was not handcuffed but he was hemmed in on all sides by burly inspectors, some of whom gave the impression they really wished he would start something.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

A faint sigh escaped Long Tom. It was going to be tough to be in London Tower — a prison — unable to aid Doc.

"Where is Doc Savage?" an inspector roared angrily.

Long Tom didn't even bother to answer.

A cleared space appeared in the street ahead. The driver increased the speed slightly, drew away from the escorting cars. They started across an intersection.

Without warning, a small car appeared from the side street. It was coming at a rapid rate of speed.

The driver of the Scotland Yard car tried to turn. He didn't have a chance. The small roadster swung also. It appeared its driver swerved deliberately toward the car bearing Long Tom.

There was a thunderous crash. The Scotland Yard machine, big as it was, spun crazily, then rolled up on its side. Its occupants were spilled to the street.

The shock was enough to daze most men. Long Tom was different. In the split second after he'd seen a collision was inevitable, he'd doubled up, head protected. As the car rolled on its side he tumbled out, but came instantly to his feet. He landed running.

Long Tom realized his escape would probably be shortlived, but there was no harm in trying. He sprinted desperately.

Then a second car appeared. A girl was at the wheel. She slowed. "Jump in, I'll help you," she called softly.

The electrical wizard did not stop to ask questions. He piled into the car. In the moment before the girl stepped down on the accelerator, another form tumbled into the machine.

Long Tom recognized the man as the one who had driven into the Scotland Yard car.

"So far so good, Mary," John Marsh said coolly. "Now let's get away from here."

LONG TOM did not know that these were the two who had kidnaped and tried to question Doc in Paris. It would have made little difference at the moment if he had.

They were putting distance between him and the Scotland Yard inspectors. That was all that counted.

And just in time. The escort cars had pulled up, were taking the Scotland Yard inspectors aboard. Pursuit was rapid.

A faint grin lighted the girl's face. It was as if she enjoyed the chase. She was a superb driver, and the small car had amazing speed. They drew away from those chasing them rapidly — that is from all except one car. They did not notice that one.

"I don't know how to thank you — " Long Tom began.

"Don't try," John Marsh said crisply. "We'll tell you how."

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Long Tom's jaw dropped. The man had jabbed a gun into his ribs, hiding it under his coat. It took no mind reader to figure out what he should have understood before. The collision had been staged for the sole purpose of capturing him. What the reason was remained to be seen.

Placards of newsdealers blazoned headlines along the street.

JAPANESE DESTROYER SUNK; DOC SAVAGE AGAIN STRIKES

Others read:

CONCLAVE OF WORLD POWERS CALLED TO DEBATE MENACE: NO TRACE FOUND OF FIEND

That last line was the only one that gave Long Tom any hope. Not that he considered Doc a fiend, but he knew that others so believed him. But at least Doc was still at large. And the bronze man would take care of the menace.

Even Long Tom, however, admitted the problem was probably the toughest Doc Savage had ever been called upon to face.

No one spoke in the car. Long Tom was busy with his thoughts. The others seemed to be waiting until they reached some agreed upon destination.

The car had slowed to a legal pace, confident pursuit was thrown off. They reached Hyde Park, entered. They stopped not far from Buckingham Palace.

"Now we'll talk," the girl said quietly.

Long Tom nodded approvingly. The spot had been well chosen. Other cars were parked along the road, but none close by. It was an excellent place in which to talk without danger of being overheard.

"Where does Doc Savage have this inferno of his located, the place from which he is directing world-wide destruction and hate?" John Marsh demanded.

Long Tom looked at him blandly. "Doc Savage has nothing to do with it," he said calmly.

"Don't give us that," the girl sneered. Her face turned hard. "We were in Paris. We saw what happened there. We saw Doc Savage direct it."

"Take us to him and you'll never regret it," John Marsh said harshly.

"Why?" Long Tom asked. "Just what is it you want?"

"Buddy, not only what we want, but what we are going to get!" the girl snapped. "We're going to muscle it, as you Americans say. We don't know just what Savage figures the payoff will be, but he must figure it will be big. We want our share."

LONG TOM sat a moment, thinking swiftly. Music could be heard in the distance. They were changing the guard at Buckingham Palace. It was a colorful ceremony that always drew a crowd of curious. But Long Tom wasn't thinking of that.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Nor was he shocked at the discovery that a pretty girl was a crook. What did interest him was that these two must at least know something, even if they were mistaken about Doc.

"Where do you two fit in?" he asked casually. The sound of martial music almost drowned out his words. The guard had been changed. Those relieved were returning to their barracks.

"We've been on this for a long time," John Marsh answered. "We have wires out. We knew something big was up. The business of spying isn't as profitable -- or as safe -- as it used to be. We decided to cut in on this. Then in Paris we learned Savage was behind this. We had him, but the gendarmes came and we had to run. So we came after you."

"An!" Long Tom looked thoughtful. He had his own ideas about this pair getting Doc Savage. "Well -- "

The man's hand gripped his arm hard. Long Tom quieted. The guards were nearing. They were surrounded on all sides by an admiring audience. It would be difficult to talk until they passed.

The Grenadiers, with their high, bearskin hats, seemed to tower over those around them. Long Tom looked at them in admiration. Then his eyes changed, his mouth opened slightly.

Toward the fringe of the crowd a man was riding along on a bicycle. That was not so unusual; bicycles almost overrun the roads at times. But the man's behavior was unusual.

He was a small man, with a thin, narrow face. Under one arm was what appeared to be a big bottle, loosely wrapped. And the little man's head was darting from side to side with quick, furtive glances, as if to see whether he was being observed.

A quick thought flashed through Long Tom's mind. His attention was riveted on the little man.

That was why he did not see the four men approaching the car from behind. They were the same four who had been trailing John Marsh and Mary Standish before Long Tom had made his break when the collision came. They had trailed along ever since.

Now they were coming near, their progress casual, but definite. They split, so that two would come up on either side of the car.

The girl saw them suddenly in a rearview mirror, started to speak. A startled cry from Long Tom stopped her.

The little man on the bicycle evidently had found what he was looking for. A cleared space appears in the crowd. He rode forward swiftly, edging near the lines of marching Grenadiers.

The little man gave a faint cry. His bicycle appeared to be unmanageable. The front wheel twisted. The bicycle fell. So did the little man. The bottle he was carrying broke into a thousand fragments.

A few of those close by turned when the little man fell. But they forgot him instantly.

A horrified roar burst from the spectators. Sudden, tragic cries of unbearable pain came from the Grenadiers.

In the space of an instant the proud ranks melted. Before the eyes of the panic-stricken crowd the guards plunged to the ground.

Their legs had vanished part way to the knee!



## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

The horror of the Paris parade had been duplicated in London. The Grenadier Guards, most colorful of English regiments, had been stricken.

LONG TOM was yelling, but did not know it. He forgot the gun pressed hard in his side. He leaped up, tried to jump from the car.

At that moment, the four men closed in. The air brought the unmistakable whiff of anaesthetic gas. Subconsciously Long Tom's mouth closed, he held his breath. Then he whirled, hurled himself at the nearest of the four men.

A blackjack rose and fell swiftly. None of those who had been watching the guards even saw it. All attention was on those pain-ridden, terribly stricken forms floundering in the center of the broad pavement.

Long Tom tried to dodge. Ordinarily he could have done so. But the gas had been powerful. Even the one breath he had taken had slowed his reactions. The blackjack caught him squarely. He went down in a heap.

The electrical wizard did not know he was placed in another machine, or that the car cautiously edged its way out of the crowd.

He knew nothing until he recovered to find himself aboard a big plane. The girl and John Marsh were there, also. It was the girl who spoke.

"They told us you really didn't know what Doc Savage was up to," she said. "So Savage sent them for you. Since we were with you, they're taking us, also. That suits us. Maybe we can cut in on this game yet."

At least part of the statement was correct, Long Tom admitted grimly. He didn't know what Doc Savage was up to.

### **Chapter X. LIVING DEAD**

ABOARD the giant transport, the bronze man was working busily. Bodies of those slain had been disposed of, the surviving guards and the co-pilot were tied securely.

Traniv had been right. The co-pilot knew nothing about how Traniv controlled the transport, except that there was a robot through which Traniv could disconnect all the controls.

The robot was concealed behind the instrument panel. Of steel alloy, it seemed a part of the ship. Doc Savage inspected it carefully.

The plane was flying at an altitude that would have injured the eardrums of novice fliers. White, fleecy clouds below them obliterated the earth. None of the ship's instruments were working. The three men had only a general idea of their direction.

"Howlin' calamities," Monk grunted. "I'd like to know where we are and where we're going."

"Eventually, you're going to a museum," Ham observed dryly. "Stuffed, you'll give future anthropologists a problem they'll never solve."

"Why, you razorback denizen of a pigsty!" Monk howled, waving his long, hairy arms.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

A voice crackled in the radio headphone. Doc put it on. "Your men might as well cease quarrelling," came the smooth voice of Carloff Traniv. "You will find in due course what your destination is. Meanwhile, I must warn you not to tamper with the robot pilot. The bolts that hold it in place, also hold the motors; if they are loosened, the motors will tear free and destroy the plane.

"And should you, by some miracle, solve the secret of the robot, you then could not get away either, although I would be forced to kill you, and do not wish to do that. You have heard of radio heat waves. I have one on this ship, that could burn your transport plane to pieces."

Doc Savage whipped off the headphones, stood erect. He spoke swiftly in Mayan. Traniv could hear them, but it was doubtful that he could understand the ancient, almost forgotten tongue. Doc gave rapid instructions.

The bronze man handed several pieces of equipment, taken from his carry-all vest, to his aids. Then he reached out through the pilot's observation window. With a hammer and a small cold chisel he cut a hole in the light metal fabric of the fuselage. A moment more and he had eased out through the hole. When he returned, he held a radio receiving unit.

SWIFTLY Doc took it apart, reassembled it into two units. Monk grinned queerly. He thought he understood Doc's action.

The hairy chemist had been working rapidly on a small apparatus that looked like a welding torch. He had dissolved two lozenges into compartments of liquid chemical. Doc took the torch from his hands, turned a tiny valve.

A white-hot tongue leaped from two holes in the nozzle. Silently, Doc applied it to a steel strut in the cabin. The strut curled, like burning paper.

"It will do," the bronze man said quietly. "In a dozen seconds we will have the top off that robot." He continued to speak in Mayan.

Monk's face lighted. Ham smiled with amusement. He was not surprised. He was rarely surprised when Doc overcame some seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

Doc turned the torch on the top of the robot. The bronze man worked swiftly, but carefully.

Inside the robot, as all knew, had to be delicate mechanism, radio-controlled. Should the torch cut the wrong wires the plane might spin down out of control before enough of the robot could be removed to reattach the regular controls of the plane.

The bronze man halted an instant, replaced the headphones over his ears.

"Doc Savage! Doc Savage!" came Carloff Traniv's harsh voice.

"Yes?" said Doc in English.

A relieved sigh came from the headphones. "I thought you might be trying some trick," Traniv said. "I would dislike to kill you, but if you did solve the secret of the robot, I would have no other alternative."

Doc said nothing. The torch moved like a live thing in his hands. The top of the robot came free.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Monk snatched the torch, killed the flame. Doc's long, ultra-sensitive fingers darted inside the robot. The bronze man seemed to know exactly the wires and connections he was seeking.

His feet slid to the controls, one hand came back, grabbed the wheel. He swung the wheel.

Instantly the plane responded. The robot control had been cut loose!

An angry yell crashed in the headphones.

"I warned you!" Traniv shouted. "Now die!"

There was a sudden crash of static as if ten thousand devils were trying to shout each other. The roar blasted in the cabin, high above the whine of the plane's powerful motors.

IN the small scouting plane, high above the transport, Carloff Traniv looked down, amazed. He had expected to see the transport dissolve in flame.

Instead, it was continuing serenely on its course.

"What happened?" Allbellin shouted. The roar of static was loud in the scouting ship, also.

A look of reluctant admiration crossed Traniv's features. "Dec Savage is a genius," he admitted. "I turned loose a radio heat wave as soon as I saw Savage had freed the robot control. It should have blasted the transport out of the sky. It didn't. That bronze devil checkmated the wave the only way it could be stopped: He tuned loose a static machine that disrupted the burning ray."

"You mean they can escape now, with all Doc Savage knows?" Allbellin demanded anxiously.

"Could, possibly, but won't," Traniv grinned. "We could stop them if they tried it, I think. But if I know Doc Savage I don't think he will even try to get away."

Monk and Ham had reasoned the same. They watched in silence as they saw Dec reconnect the robot. Once again the transport was being controlled by the scouting plane overhead.

"It will be easier to have Traniv take us to his hide-out," Doc explained.

Monk nodded solemnly. "And we've got to get there, if we're going to get this mess cleaned up. But I'd still like to know where we are."

Doc nodded toward the two receiving sets he had constructed. "I have our location," he said calmly.

Monk gaped. Ham laughed. "Of course, ape," he giped. "Didn't you see Doc tune in on two transmitting stations simultaneously? Naturally he could figure out where we are."

"We're over Africa," Dec said. "And you should both brush up on what you can remember of Yoruba dialect. We may be permitted to land with this plane intact but I doubt it, now that Traniv knows we can operate it ourselves."

"But what are we going to find when we get there?" Ham demanded.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

Doc did not answer at once. He began fitting small pieces of copper tubing together into a queer-looking telescope. He attached what looked like a compact radio receiver to one side. Then he began to focus the instrument and sweep the verdant jungle below and ahead of the transport plane.

"Five miles ahead," he said calmly, "there is a huge, factorylike structure painted the same shade as the jungle. No smoke arises, so there must be some sort of chemical or electrical power available."

Monk's eyes opened wide. "I can see five miles ahead with my naked eye," he objected. "And I can't see anything."

"This is a radioactive telescope," Doc explained.

Monk gulped. It was easy to understand now. Whatever it was ahead had been so skillfully hidden, that only such an instrument as Doc was using would disclose it.

"But what is it?" Ham asked.

"Probably the largest, most complete munitions factory in the world," Doc said simply. "And a secret one. One used to disrupt the peace of the world."

"Well, I'll—" Monk began. He broke off. Doc had suddenly leaped to his feet. He dropped the telescope, smashed windows of the cabin with his fists. Next he reached inside his carry-all vest. Even as he scattered small, pebblelike objects into the air, the attack came.

A HEAVY, gray cloud had appeared in the sky above them. It had not been noticeable at first. Just as Doc moved, the cloud appeared to drop. And from the cloud came scores of radiocontrolled flying machine guns. The machine guns were of the same type that had attacked the survivors of the battleship U. S. S. Georgia. They swarmed down with only the roar of air split by their wings.

The hammers of 37 mm. mounted guns on the heavier machines gave a deadly obbligato to the staccato barking of the lighter machine guns.

The swift flying weapons were upon the transport almost before there was time to breathe.

But they did not fire at the cabin of the ship. Their hail of bullets tore into the wings. Hot lead seared through the metal of those wings with a continuous sweep, as if a giant knife were being used. The wings were seared cleanly from the fuselage.

Monk and Ham had stopped to ask no questions. Even as the attack started they dashed to the rear of the plane.

Already landed in his scouting plane, Traniv looked up anxiously. The attack on the transport had been by his orders, but he did not want Doc or his aids killed. He merely wanted them to be forced to jump in parachutes, but with the plane destroyed.

He saw the wings fall from the transport. Then the body of the ship twisted and spun. It dived through a second cloud, one that had appeared suddenly beneath the big plane. Seconds later it smashed on through that cloud.

The fuselage landed with a terrific crash. Flames burst from it. No one could escape a fall and flames like that.

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"The fools!" Traniv said bitterly. "Why didn't they jump?"

But, though Traniv didn't know it, Doc and his men had jumped. They'd been delayed putting on parachutes — Doc had located the parachutes in the rear of the plane — and freeing the three guards so they would have a chance for life.

Doc was the last from the plane. And all went out in concealment of the artificial cloud bank Doc had created. They were invisible because the cloud bank drifted earthward almost as fast as they did.

The bronze man, the last from the ship, waited longest before pulling his ripcord. He swung scarcely a hundred feet from Monk when his 'chute billowed out.

"Jumpin' catfish!" Monk bawled. "What happened to the shyster?"

A yell above them made Monk pull frantically on the shrouds of his 'chute, swing it to one side.

"Gangway!" the voice yelled. "This is an express! No stops!"

Monk burst into a loud guffaw as Ham shot past. Chemistry swung pendantlike below Ham. His neck was held firmly between the lawyer's knees. He didn't look as if he were enjoying the trip.

"That's just like you, you legal nitwit!" Monk howled. "Always take something soft along to land on!"

Ham did not dignify that sally with a reply. He was too busy. He hauled Chemistry up so that they both landed together. All the breath went out of the ape. Monk was still laughing when he landed on his stern portions.

Doc held up a cautioning hand. "Our intended host may have been fooled by our strategy," he said. "This may be our only chance to survey operations here unobserved."

DOC and his men had made the speediest descents. The guards were seized as soon as they landed, were once more bound and tied. It almost seemed as if they were glad they were prisoners.

The landing had been made in a small clearing. Around was rich tropical growth. It was difficult to realize they were only a very short distance from a huge industrial site.

Chemistry was chattering happily. Africa wasn't his home, but this was the type of surroundings in which he'd first been found by Monk and Ham. He was delighted. Ham had difficulty in restraining the ape from making a bounding pilgrimage through the trees.

Doc had a peculiar-looking disk in his hand. It appeared like a small compass. It was really an extremely sensitive device for detecting ultraviolet rays. It did not seem possible that Traniv would not have mechanical guards around his factory.

The needle did not move. There was nothing to indicate there were rays of any kind present which might sound an automatic alarm.

The bronze man's flake gold eyes flashed. Monk, looking over his shoulder, was chuckling gleefully.

"Looks like we're here unobserved," he grinned.

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Doc shook his head, but said nothing. Cautiously they started to advance. They left the bound guards near a big tree. The jungle was thick, progress was difficult.

Then they ran into a fog.

A low, trilling sound came from Dec.

"Turn! Run!" he barked.

Monk and Ham turned to obey. A squeal came from Chemistry. He grabbed for the nearest tree.

Simultaneously, the jungle seemed to come to life. There was a crashing in the underbrush around them. Men shuffled into view from every side.

Monk was saying words to himself in vast quantities. Doc had been right, as usual. Traniv did have automatic alarms. But he hadn't used ultraviolet rays. The fog had been the tip-off.

It was an artificial fog, created so that only a certain type of light would pierce it. Lookouts, either automatic or human, watching through glasses of the right color, could then see the approach of any intruder.

The hairy chemist grabbed for his gun. Ham stood, as if frozen, eyes unbelieving. He was gazing at the approaching men.

Those men were in the uniform of soldiers. They carried weapons, automatic rifles and bombs, as soldiers do. They were advancing at regulation pace in a skirmish line.

But they did not look like living men. Ham recalled a case he had once prosecuted in Haiti. He thought of all the things he knew of the Zombi legends, of the living dead who walk as automata. These men filled that description.

Their bodies showed they were alive. Their eyes showed their minds — or at least most of their minds — were dead.

An order was barked. The men started forward on the double, weapons raising. Then Ham understood, although the explanation appeared unbelievable.

These men, in some manner, had been so altered that they would obey any order, would do anything they were told without consequence for themselves. But that was because they could not think for themselves.

A hard-bitten army man probably would have called them the perfect type of soldier.

Monk's gun came out. Ham grabbed for his weapon. Real bullets were in those guns, not the "mercy" bullets Doc's aids usually used. Their mercy guns had been taken from them. The only weapons they had were those they had taken from the guards.

The aids' guns came up.

"No," Doc said quietly. He threw his own gun to the ground. "We surrender," he added.

Ham gasped. Monk looked unbelievably at Doc.

"I thought you would see it that way, Doc Savage," came the tones of Traniv. The voice came from the wall of fog. "I knew that you would understand these were living dead men, and that you would be too much of a humanitarian to kill them."

Traniv laughed loudly, as though at some secret joke. "For your kindness to them, my bronze giant, I am going to let you become one of them."

### **Chapter XI. AN OPERATION ORDERED**

SQUADS of soldiers formed on all sides of the four captives. They were marched toward a trail at one side of the clearing. The fog belt parted here, evidently upon a signal. Without a word the soldiers swung, passed through.

Carloff Traniv remained close at hand, but he kept out of sight until after the fog belt had been passed. Then he appeared. His tall, powerful frame was more erect than ever. His jaw jutted forward, but he appeared in excellent humor.

"Doc Savage is a great man," he chuckled. "But I — Carloff Traniv — am greater. Is not Doc Savage now in my power?"

None of his captives made a reply. Traniv's mirth grew.

"Of course, you want to know what I am going to do, why I want you. I doubt if any of you will ever know that, but at least you will play your part in my plan."

Only silence greeted him.

The trail widened. Other silent, blank-eyed soldiers materialized from the jungle. The trail spread out into a vast clearing. The clearing ended against a huge masonry wall.

Beneath the crazy camouflage paint designs that made the place invisible from the air, the masonry looked ancient. Stone abutments showed the design of some ancient fortress of the days when the tribes of Yoruba roamed Africa.

A hundred yards from the wall the soldiers stopped at Traniv's orders. The big man went on alone, disappeared inside the wall as a cleverly hinged section of masonry swung back to receive him, then closed once he had entered.

Then Carloff Traniv's voice blasted through a giant loudspeaker:

"Savage, I think you realize just how well I control the soldiers around you, but I am going to give you a demonstration. It will prove to you, also, that you and your aids cannot escape."

There was a sudden, sharp click! A lurid, white flame, like burning phosphorous, leaped into the air close to the wall. It made no smoke. The heat seared the flesh many yards away. Flames roared and crackled.

"Squads 6 and 101" Traniv rapped. "Forward march!" Without hesitation, sixteen soldiers marched ahead. They went directly toward the searing flames.

A gasp came from Monk.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

"Halt!" Doc Savage roared. His voice had the peculiar carrying quality that had made his command obeyed on many and many an occasion. For once he was disobeyed.

The soldiers marched straight ahead, without pause. They marched into the flame. The stench of burning flesh filled the air.

HAM'S face was pale. Doc Savage's flake gold eyes were glinting strangely. But not a flicker of emotion showed on the faces of the soldiers surrounding them.

There was another click! The flames disappeared. Little remained to show that sixteen men had marched into those flames only seconds before.

"You see, Doc Savage," came Traniv's voice, "my men are perfect soldiers. They question nothing!"

"It ain't hypnosis," Monk grunted. "No hypnotic suggestion could carry that far."

"It is something far more fearsome," Dec said quietly. Ham looked his question. Doc did not reply. Soldiers were prodding them with bayonets from behind. They moved forward.

Two dozen feet from what appeared to be a blank masonry wall, Chemistry began to squeal in terror. Ham whirled toward him. The dapper lawyer stopped in a ludicrous position. One foot was off the ground. It froze there.

Monk began to laugh. His jaw suddenly remained rigidly open. He could not move a muscle. Even Doc Savage was motionless.

"You are in the grip of my electrical paralyzing field," Traniv's voice came. "You have encountered it before, Doc Savage. You have even used it. But never before have you seen it so highly perfected."

Traniv paused, then spoke sharply, warningly:

"Your men are to be taken from you here. The first sign of trickery on your part means they will die horribly. I am your master in all arts but one. I need you, and can control you, even in that art. But always remember your men will die if you attempt tricks."

Monk, Ham and Chemistry found they could move. With a bellow of rage, Monk leaped toward the nearest soldier. His huge fist smashed the other on the jaw. The man went down, unconscious. Ham danced in to join the fight.

Then they both realized that Doc was still helpless in the electrical paralyzing field.

"What shall we do, Doc?" Monk implored.

Doc could not speak, but he could use his eyelids. They blinked rapidly.

Monk turned to Ham, caught him by an arm. With Chemistry, they moved forward. Cleverly hinged sections of masonry swung back to receive them.

"Doc said to go," Monk whispered. "He said we couldn't do anything here."

Ham groaned. "You mean we're licked at last?"



## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

"Licked nothing!" Monk gloated. "Doc repeated the word 'here' twice. And that means something."

THE inside of the huge building was almost cold, compared to the tropical heat outside. Ham shivered. Apparently the whole place was air-conditioned. The interior showed none of the time-aged qualities of the outside walls. The sides, floor and ceiling of the passageway were of tooled steel. Doors opened before them, actuated by hidden photoelectric cells. At one door they were halted by a guard.

He placed Monk between two posts, looked at a dial. A needle swung crazily. The guard went methodically through all Monk's pockets, looked each time at the dial. Still the dial jerked.

Finally, in the lining of Monk's coat, the guard found the hidden cutting tool Monk sometimes used to free himself of bonds.

Ham gasped. "As bad as Alcatraz," he said as he took his turn between the posts. This place, Doc's aid began to realize, was probably the most advanced prison in the world.

A door opened at the end of the passageway. A man stood there, a slender man with a streak of premature gray in his hair.

But Pecos Allbellin's ordinarily vapid features had changed. It is doubtful if Carloff Traniv would have recognized him at first glance. Allbellin allowed himself to show the keen intelligence he usually kept hidden.

"Permit me to introduce myself. I am Pecos Allbellin," he said. His tones were cultured, refined.

"So what?" Monk snapped belligerently.

"I wish to be your friend," Allbellin said softly.

Monk looked his suspicion. Ham was a better actor; he donned his courtroom manner.

"We can use a friend in this place," he said with apparent cordiality.

Allbellin gave a sharp order to their guard. "I will take you with me," he said, grinning to show white, even teeth. "There are some things Traniv does not know."

Monk looked bewildered. Much to his surprise, the guard obeyed Allbellin's orders.

"A trap?" Ham questioned from the side of his mouth. Monk's forehead creased. "Maybe, but why?" he asked logically. "We're already prisoners."

Allbellin lead the way down a series of small passageways, turned to a door.

"My own quarters," he said, throwing the door open. "Enter."

Inside, Doc's aids could see the room was luxuriously furnished. They stepped inside with Chemistry.

Instantly the door was slammed behind them. A silky chuckle came from Allbellin.

Monk whirled, tried to pound on the door. "Gas," he muttered weakly. Slowly he collapsed. Ham and Chemistry went down.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

MONK and Ham were not out long. But much had occurred. When they recovered, they found themselves suspended from a masonry ceiling. Manacles were imbedded there. Other manacles were about their feet, with a chain that led to the floor.

Both Monk and Ham had been stripped to their shorts. And about the waist of each a queer-looking belt had been placed.

Allbellin was surveying them with sardonic eyes, in which latent cruelty had now come to the surface.

"My friend Traniv tries to keep secrets from me," he said silkily. "He has devised a method of killing men from a distance. I believe these belts have something to do with it. I intend to find out. You, my friends, will not be able to tell me if I am correct, but I will know when I see your bodies."

Perspiration appeared on Monk's hairy hide. He remembered what Doc had said about belts. He remembered the two men in the plane who had been cut in two, as if by a white-hot flame.

Allbellin bowed with mock courtesy, went to the door. "I am going my friends. I am going to press a button. If it is the right button—"

The door closed behind him.

DOC SAVAGE meanwhile, was directed to another hinged section of the masonry wall. The passageway he entered was the last word in luxury. The carpets felt as if they reached the knees. Costly tapestries hung on the walls. Priceless pottery and ironwork adorned the corridor.

But here also photoelectric doors slid open and closed as the bronze man strode forward. Dec noticed the metal alloy doors were more than two inches thick. A tank-rifle would not have penetrated them.

The last door opened into a huge room. It seemed illuminated by natural daylight. But there were no windows.

And the light cast no shadow. Seated at a desk that was more a throne was Carloff Traniv.

He was dressed as if he were the most powerful monarch in the world. His uniform would have been the envy of a Russian grand duke on parade.

He smiled confidently as Doc stepped into the room, did not seem at all concerned by the bronze man's presence. There were only two guards in the room. They fell in step with Dec.

The bronze man walked toward the desk. Then he stopped. There was a smell of ozone in the air, as if a high-powered dynamo were operating within the room. The dead-eyed guards did not stop. They slammed into an invisible wall, stood motionless.

"A high-frequency ray," Traniv smiled. "You recognized its presence. But anyway, you are helpless."

Traniv barked an order. A door opened and another soldier came in. He bore a portable forge and bands of metal.

The soldier went to work.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

"I do not trust ordinary bonds with you," Traniv said. "But no one can break these steel alloy bands. They will remain on your wrists until you are ready to do my bidding. Until, in fact, you are a living dead man."

Doc said nothing. Traniv did not seem to expect a reply. He pressed a button. Light flashed on the wall behind him. A picture came into view. It was a telephoto picture of activity around them.

A low, trilling sound came from Doc.

A dozen immense buildings could be seen on the screen. They bustled with activity.

In one section aircraft were being constructed. There were hundreds of huge, powerful bombers. There were squadrons of fast scouting planes. There were hundreds more of the radio-controlled flying machine guns.

At other points shells were being made; cannon were being turned out. Even swift submarines were under construction. All types of weapons civilization had devised were being manufactured here, and some civilization had not heard of.

A laboratory was pictured, showing scores of white-gowned figures working with gas masks on their heads.

"Disease bombs and some new poison gases we have developed," Traniv said laconically.

The bands were completed on Doc Savage's wrists. The soldier withdrew.

"And now you shall be privileged to witness something that I, and I alone, have developed," Traniv said. He pressed other buttons. The scene changed.

First a true autogyro was seen being prepared for a take-off. It lifted into the air, straight up, rose to a height of five thousand feet.

"You no doubt know of the aerial camera your own country had developed," Traniv went on. "It can photograph another plane a hundred and fifty miles away. Mine will treble that.

"We are three hundred miles from the coast. In five minutes the Capetown airmail plane is due to fly down the coast. There are many passengers aboard. Watch!"

A faint outline appeared on another panel. Slowly it grew plainer. The distant coast line appeared, showed the river that led to this hidden spot. A black dot drifted from one corner, grew larger.

"Now!" Traniv said. He pressed a hidden control. The dot became a tiny burst of flame. Then there was nothing.

"My radio wave can work even at that distance," Traniv said.

IN an adjoining room, Allbellin chuckled softly. His features were aflame with a peculiar light. He removed the headphones he had had over his ears.

Allbellin had not lied entirely to Monk and Ham. There were many things Traniv did not know. Even Traniv had been deceived at times by the vacuous look Allbellin habitually wore.

Allbellin had once been dictator of a South American country. He had ruled by cruelty and fear. And one of his delights had been torture.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

When he had been forced to flee, taking, however, all available funds of his country, he had also been forced to give up the one pleasure he enjoyed most: that of exercising cruelty.

Here, however, where he and Traniv ruled supreme, he could once more enjoy himself.

Traniv wanted Monk and Ham left alive. Allbellin understood why. Doc Savage was a clever man. It would be well to have hostages to hold in case he should make an escape, even though that appeared impossible.

Allbellin could not wait. Here was too good a chance for killing.

He plugged his headphones into another outlet. Now he could hear in the room where Monk, Ham and Chemistry twisted between floor and ceiling, helpless captives.

Carefully he surveyed the row of buttons on the wall before him. When he pressed the right button the three he had suspended were going to die. They were going to be cut in two parts. Their death would not be a pleasant one.

A smile came to his lips. He pressed one finger down— hard.

And then Pecos Allbellin came as close to real pleasure as he ever did.

Two terrified, agonized shrieks came to him over the headphones. Mingled with them for an instant was the hopeless wailing of an ape.

Then there was silence.

For a long moment Allbellin sat quietly, gloating. Slowly he took the headphones off, hung them up. He slipped from the room. A minute later and he entered Traniv's office. Once more he appeared insipid, almost stupid.

Traniv's lips twisted scornfully as he saw the other flick an imaginary speck of dust from his immaculate attire.

DOC SAVAGE was standing perfectly erect, his bronze features expressionless. Only his flake gold eyes flickered.

"As I was saying, Savage, that is what is going to happen," Traniv went on.

"You are known to be one of the greatest masters of surgery the world has ever known. For that reason, and that reason alone, are you alive.

"I have a surgeon here, an excellent one. He is responsible for the lying dead men you see — my soldiers. He has developed an operation that severs certain nerves leading to the brain. Once those are cut, my soldiers obey only military commands. They can think of nothing else; they can do nothing else.

"That is simple. Just before the operation they are told what I desire. Afterward, they remember nothing, are merely automata.

"Unfortunately, my surgeon has also been operated on. He can do nothing but the one operation. I desire one of a different type. You will do it for me."

Doc Savage said nothing.

"The operation you will perfect for me will be performed on the world's dictators. It will not affect them outwardly. But it will make them subject to my commands, and my commands alone."

Doc Savage's lips tightened slightly.

"The last operation will be on the president of the United States. Your country will have declared war, and he will be the supreme commander.

"You can do such an operation, I know. And those are my commands."

Traniv's hand made a slight movement. Men leaped into the room suddenly.

Even with arms and legs in alloy steel bands, Doc Savage tried to fight. His body arched and threshed. Men rolled to the floor. Others went down as Doc's head crashed into them.

The battle was too uneven. He was pinioned to the floor, A misshapen creature, swarthy of face, faltering of gait, appeared. Doctor Fernor Koral quietly slipped an anaesthetic-soaked cloth under the bronze man's nostrils.

Doc Savage convulsed once more. He struck out with his powerful legs. Then he went limp.

"Take him away, Koral," Traniv rasped. "He belongs to you.

Allbellin shook with silent mirth. "And that is the man I once feared," he chuckled. "That is the one man I thought might upset our plans. Now he is helpless. He will do as you say. The last obstacle has been removed."

Carloff Traniv's eyes were glinting with exultation. "Not quite removed, Pecos, but almost," he said. "Doc Savage soon, however, will do just what he was told. He will perfect the operation that is vital to our plans. And no longer does anyone need to fear him. In ten minutes he will be a living dead man."

## Chapter XII. VISITORS ARRIVE

PECOS ALLBELLIN left Traniv's office, went to a cleared space inside the walls of the gigantic plant. He glanced at his watch and nodded.

A faint hum had sounded in the distance. Everything was going according to plan. The system that had been built up was as near perfect as could be devised. Much time and much money had been expended to insure that it would be.

A plane came into view swiftly, swooped down. Even before it stopped rolling a door was swung open. A moment later and figures tumbled out. Allbellin walked forward.

Three of those who had emerged were apparently prisoners. They were surrounded by guards.

Two of the three were men. The third was a girl. It was upon the girl that Pecos Allbellin's attention was riveted.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

The girl stopped, frozen, as she caught sight of him. Her face whitened slightly.

"Pecos!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Miss Standish," Allbellin said politely.

"You are one of the head men, here?" John Marsh asked curiously.

Again Allbellin nodded. "I am, and now -- "

That was as far as he got. Long Tom had paid little heed to the girl's first words. But he had heard John Marsh's question and the answer.

That was all the electrical wizard wanted to know. A long, smoldering anger in him flamed to white heat. He was glad now that his arms had been untied when he had given his word he would not try to escape from the plane.

Long Tom leaped forward. He didn't make any outcry,

He plunged at Allbellin before the dandified South American could realize what had happened.

One fist swung up. Allbellin toppled over as if he were a tenpin. He tried to cry out. He couldn't. Long Tom had dived on top of him, had wrapped wiry fingers on Allbellin's throat.

Mary Standish gave a startled cry. She ran forward. Before Long Tom knew what had happened, she had caught him from behind, was pulling him with surprising strength.

Long Tom's fingers slipped from Allbellin's throat. The other gasped an order.

Instantly, blank-eyed soldiers piled on Long Tom. He went down, was pinned, helpless.

Allbellin got to his feet, wiped blood from his face.

"I could have you shot at once!" he snapped. "But that would not make you suffer. I have a surprise for you that will make you do just that. After that, you die!"

Allbellin turned to the guards. "Throw him in Cell 3!" he rapped. "I am sure he will like it!"

Guards prodded Long Tom with bayonets. The electrical wizard was forced ahead, but before he moved he threw one look at Mary Standish. It was not a pleasant look.

LONG TOM did not know that Cell 3 was where Monk, Ham and Chemistry had been suspended between ceiling and floor. He did not know what surprise Allbellin had in store for him.

Unresisting, he permitted himself to be propelled along. The guards stopped at a cell, threw open the door. It was dark inside. Long Tom was hurled in, the door slammed.

Then hell broke loose in the darkness. What felt like tons of bone and muscle converged on the frail-appearing electrical engineer. Long Tom whipped out his fists. He parried, weaved, fought as he never had before.

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He was no match for the combined strength of his adversaries. Slowly he was borne to the floor. Hot breath beat against his neck. A low animal growl ripped out close by. There was an ejaculation of pain.

"Leggo my arm, you danged shyster!" Monk's voice complained. "Who do you think you're fightin'?"

Long Tom laughed more heartily than he had in weeks. The pressure on him relaxed immediately.

"Long Tom!" Monk howled. "How did you get here?"

"A fine thing for you to ask, you fuzzy ape!" Ham's voice cut in. "It's a wonder you didn't kill him. It was your idea."

Ham screwed an electric bulb in place and light came on. Both looked ludicrous in their shorts.

"We thought you was one of the guards," Monk explained apologetically. "Ham and me and Chemistry got loose after Allbellin had thought he'd finished us."

Monk pointed to the chains that had held them. "He put some kind of funny belts on us," he said. "It's a good thing Doc made us learn how to twist our bodies to get out of things. We wiggled out of the belts. Then something hit the chains."

"Yeah," Ham said dryly. "Look what that something did." The chains were twisted and fused as if they had been melted in a blast furnace. Long Tom shivered slightly. He understood what Allbellin had expected him to see.

"What do we do now?" Long Tom asked.

"First take the lawyer out and shoot him!" a voice came suddenly. It appeared to come from the passageway outside the cell. It sounded like that of Carloff Traniv.

Ham's jaw dropped. Long Tom started.

"A good idea," Monk muttered.

"Lawyers are no good anyway," the strange voice went on. This time it appeared directly behind Ham.

The lawyer whirled, then turned back to Monk, his face flushed. Monk often used his carefully acquired ability at ventriloquism to annoy Ham. It seldom failed. Ham started a sharp retort. The look on Monk's face halted him.

Monk seemed transfixed. His homely face spread into a smile the size of a small pie plate. He held up his hand. The sound of shuffling feet came from the corridor outside.

Monk's throat moved slightly. Words came, but they appeared to come from outside and in Traniv's voice.

"Liberate the men in Cell 3!" the voice snapped.

The shuffling footsteps stopped. There was a moment's hesitation. Then the portal slid slowly back,

Scarcely breathing, Monk and Ham slid out, Long Tom and Chemistry close behind them.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

"Stack arms and inspect Cell 3!" the voice came again. Like automata, the soldiers stacked their rifles, walked into the cell.

Instantly the three aids grabbed guns. Long Tom slammed the cell door closed, locked it.

"Those guys always obey the voice of Traniv or Allbellin," Monk gloated. "This was easy!"

"Too easy," Ham said seriously.

"At any rate," Long Tom smiled, "let's do a little exploring."

Without hesitation, they moved forward.

"WE'VE got to find Doc," Monk muttered.

"The entire world would like to find Doc," Long Tom said grimly.

"Munitions," Ham said shortly. "Munitions intended to blast hell out of the civilized world. And enough to do it, too, unless Doc can stop it."

Monk halted suddenly. There was a turn in the corridor ahead. From around it came a mumble of voices. The hairy chemist crept ahead cautiously, peered around. He motioned for his companions and cleared his throat.

"The four prisoners are directed to come to me!" Traniv's voice instructed loudly. "They must be permitted to do so."

Monk stepped boldly into the room. It was something like the wardrobe of a barracks. There were tables with decks of cards.

The men lounging in the place were as choice a collection of gangsters as ever graced a "wanted" poster. Ham recognized several who had prices on their heads.

No one seemed to pay any attention to the newcomers. Monk led the way toward a door at the opposite side of the room.

That door closed suddenly. The door by which they had entered also closed.

Men jumped at Doc's aids from all sides.

There was no chance to use the rifles they carried. Besides if they had tried to use them they might have shot one another.

Animal sounds came from Monk's throat. He used the butt of his rifle to swing about him. Men went down. Ham was using the bayonet on his rifle, swinging and parrying. Long Tom brought the barrel of his gun down over the head of the man closest to him.

Men dived at the feet of Doc's three aids. A rope was tossed over Chemistry's shoulders, binding him securely.

Monk, Ham and Long Tom went down. Their weapons were knocked out of their hands.



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Then there was a battle royal. The hairy chemist was at his best in this kind of fighting. But their opponents had blackjacks, and there were too many of them.

There could be but one ending. There was.

"It was a good gag!" one of the gangsters snarled, as half a dozen pinned each of the three aids down. "But the boss has to have some men with all their senses. We're the royal guard, so to speak."

Another chuckled. "And don't think you were getting away with anything, buddies. Traniv knew the second you got out of that cell. We knew it, too. Now back you go."

Monk groaned. "O. K. Anyway, it was a lot of fun. And Doc'll still get us out of this thing."

MONK did not know that Doc Savage was already in the operating room near Traniv's private office.

Doctor Fernor Koral had been the second surgeon to master the technique of the will-destroying operation. There had been another before him. But the misshapen scalpel-wielder didn't remember that. The first surgeon had performed the operation on Koral.

Then Traniv had killed the first one. He could not have a surgeon about who was not under his domination.

Traniv grinned broadly as he strode into the operating room. Flat-eyed attendants were making the amphitheater ready. It was an operating room that would have been the envy of any medical center.

An anesthetist stood at the head of the white-draped table. The bronze figure before him was prone, motionless. The shuffling, queerly flat-headed surgeon turned the bronze body over slowly. Skillful fingers explored the region at the base of the brain. He motioned to an attendant.

A razor scraped bronze hair from the area of the operation. The surgeon's face was as dull and flat-eyed as that of his attendants, but his fingers were sure and swift. The scalpel moved surely toward the spinal cord.

Once, Doctor Fernor Koral had been one of the greatest surgeons of the Eastern Hemisphere. That was before a hospital scandal enmeshed him and he fell into the hands of Carloff Traniv.

The anesthetist moved closer to the prone figure. The bronze body stirred slightly. It was apparent Doc was not entirely unconscious.

Carloff Traniv leaped to his feet, eyes snapping. "Wait!" he rapped. "Before the anesthesia is complete, I will give other instructions to Doc Savage. This will make it perfect."

His brilliant uniform a startling contrast to the white worn by the others, Traniv strode to the side of the operating table, spoke swiftly.

"In addition to your other instructions, Doc Savage," he said, "you will become my front man. You shall be the dummy through whom I speak. As long as I so desire, you shall appear the actual plotter."

Traniv backed from the table, gave a sharp order. The dull-eyed surgeon moved the scalpel, laid the flesh open neatly. Vital nerves of the spinal cord were bared. Fingers moved swiftly and surely. The scalpel became crimson.

The dead-faced surgeon turned, wiped the scalpel clean. He spoke slowly, his voice as listless, as impersonally flat as his face.

"The wound is sutured," he intoned. "The operation is complete. The patient will be conscious and able to do your bidding within a short time."

He turned, began to bandage the wound.

Traniv's teeth were gleaming. Without a word he left the operating room. He had succeeded where all others had failed. Doc Savage was now one of the living dead; he would do only as Traniv ordered.

## Chapter XIII. AN INTERCEPTED MESSAGE

MARY STANDISH'S hips swayed slightly as she walked across the room toward Pecos Allbellin. She paid no attention to John Marsh, standing stiff and white-lipped in one corner of Allbellin's office.

An odd smile played about Allbellin's face. His eyes were mocking. "So," he said softly, "you have decided to be friendly? You were not always so in Paris."

The girl smiled archly. "I did not know who you were then. Now it's different. Why not cut us in on the game, Pecos?"

There ought to be enough to go around."

Allbellin's grin became broader. Then he laughed harshly. A flicker of doubt showed in Mary Standish's eyes. The South American took a step toward her; his mouth hardened.

"Enough to go around, so?" he said silkily. "Are you sure you do not mean you merely want information to give the British government?"

Mary Standish opened her mouth as if she were going to scream. She jammed her fist against her lips, her eyes wide.

John Marsh came to life. He made a leap across the room. One of the harsh-faced gangsters, the one who had called himself a "royal guard" stepped from concealment. He slammed a blackjack down with bone-crushing force.

John Marsh went to the floor and did not move.

Allbellin's expression did not change. Mary Standish's eyes became even more horrified.

"Y—you know?" she stammered.

Pecos Allbellin chuckled. "We have known for a long time that you and John Marsh were British secret agents," he confided; "It amused us to watch you run in circles. But you did do us one good job: You got Long Tom from the hands of the Scotland Yard men with your fake accident, hoping he would put you on the right trail. We had wanted Long Tom, but until you acted, did not see how we would get him"

He pulled a flat automatic from his pocket. "Now," he said pleasantly, "I shall make sure of your boy friend. Then I shall take care of you."

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STANDISH screamed, stepped backward. She tripped, fell to the floor. As she did, one hand touched Marsh's outstretched fingers. She gave a start. Her other hand clutched quickly for a knife she carried in her dress. She looked at Marsh's body, felt his pulse. Her voice was a low, anguished moan.

"He's --- he's --- " She burst into tears.

"He's already dead?" Allbellin supplied. "That is too bad. I should have liked to have killed him myself. At any rate --- "

A phone jangled on the wall. A look of annoyance on his face, Allbellin answered it. Mary Standish clutched the outstretched hand of John Marsh. Even in death it seemed to cling to her.

At the phone, Allbellin was grinning. "So the bronze man has been taken care of? That is excellent!"

Mary Standish's mouth formed a sudden "O". "So Doc Savage was not behind this," she said aloud. "What fools we were!"

Allbellin nodded. "Yes, perhaps you were," he agreed. "But you will soon forget that. You will forget many things. In fact, you are going to be able to remember only one thing."

A look of mystification appeared on the girl's face.

Pecos Allbellin laughed softly. "Yes, mi chiquita," he purred, "we are going to visit Doc Savage. When we leave, you will remember only this: that you love me, have always loved me, and will always love me."

The girl's face whitened. Fright appeared in her eyes, then vanished. With difficulty she smiled. "But --- but --- " she started.

"Tut-tut!" said Allbellin. He caught her by the arm, led her toward a door. "Just come with me."

At the threshold he paused, spoke to the hard-faced gangster. "Take care of the body," he rapped, motioning toward John Marsh's still form. "Cremate it."

AS the door slid shut, John Marsh's fingers began to move. They were the fingers of the hand that had held Mary Standish's wrist behind her back while Allbellin answered the phone.

The fingers had tapped a message onto Mary's wrist that had brought the expression of surprise to her face:

"M-a-k-e h-I-m t-h-I-n-k I a-m d-e-a-d," he had tapped out in Morse code. "I h-a-v-e t-o b-e f-r-e-e, I-f e-v-e-n f-o-r h-a-l-f a-n h-o-u-r!"

And Mary Standish had been an actress.

The hard-faced guard leaned over, caught John Marsh under the shoulders, started to drag his body out.

John Marsh came to life. His fingers were closed about a slender object. It was the knife Mary Standish had drawn from her dress. The secret service man reared up; light flashed on steel.

The knife was driven to the hilt into the breast of the hard-faced gangster.

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For a moment John Marsh stood weaving, shaking his head. He should have been dead, but there were a few things' not even Mary Standish knew about him.

One was that he was bald. And to hide that baldness, he wore a toupee. Because of the dangers in the business he was in, that toupee was fitted over a steel skullcap. The steel had absorbed most of the shock of the blackjack blow.

John Marsh straightened. "I've got to get out a message," he muttered. "I've got to warn the world. Got to clear Doc Savage."

A peculiar look came in John Marsh's eyes as he said that. He had always been an admirer of the bronze man. It had pained him to believe Doc was crooked. Now he was glad he had learned the truth.

Marsh fumbled for a button beside the door, found it. The door slid back and the British secret service agent glided out into the passageway. He crouched against the wall as he moved silently down the hallway. He passed a door marked "Radio," hesitated then shook his head.

Another door showed him a stairway, going upward. A tight smile flickered on his lips as he mounted swiftly. He went up many flights, emerged finally on the roof.

Marsh's movements then became very rapid. First, he took from his pocket a tiny, compact sextant. He squinted through it at the sun, made rapid notes. He checked his figures with a precision wrist watch and grunted softly.

Then he took off his shoes. The soles split, showed neatly coiled, fine copper wire. The heel of one shoe yielded two tiny transmitter tubes. The other bared a tiny dial and a key. There was an electrical socket on the roof. He made a connection swiftly.

Then John Marsh reached for the key. His lips split in a grin of pleasure.

MARY STANDISH was far from happy. Pecos Allbellin had apparently forgotten something. He had turned, was retracing his steps toward his office, forcing the girl along with him.

The terror in Mary's eyes was very real this time. She was not acting to make Allbellin believe her partner dead.

"It can't be important," she argued. "Let's go on. Show me how you can make me forget the things that are in the past."

"In time, in time; do not be impatient." Allbellin's face was full of confidence. Everything was going his way. He opened the door to his office.

A shout of alarm came from the dapper South American. Mary stepped into the room swiftly, pressed the button closing the door.

Allbellin whirled. There was something wrong. Where he had expected to find nothing, was the body of a slain guard. Then Allbellin halted.

A tiny gun was in Mary Standish's hand. It was very small, could almost be hidden in her hand. But at close range it would be deadly enough.

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"All right, lady-killer!" she rapped. "Move one inch and you'll take it. And think, while you're standing there, that the British may be slow, but they always arrive. John Marsh is getting help."

Allbellin closed his mouth. He wheedled, he pleaded. But most of all he spoke loudly. He gave no sign when he saw the door open behind the girl.

Carloff Traniv stepped inside silently.

One strong fist shot out. The gun was snapped from her hand.

"We'll kill her!" he barked.

"Not now!" said Allbellin, and his voice was almost hysterical. "Get Marsh! He must have some signaling device!"

Carloff Traniv galvanized into activity. Without hesitation he turned, raced toward the roof. That was the logical place, the only place Marsh could have gone.

Marsh did not know that. He had tapped and tapped. At last he had made contact.

Traniv stopped short as he reached the roof. His trained ears caught the signals John Marsh was sending.

"This is 2-X-R," the secret service agent sent swiftly. "I have completed the assignment. I have found the source of the mysterious munitions and the hide-out of the master mind who is upsetting the world. The location is -- "

Blam!

A heavy gun in Traniv's hand barked once. The precision of the shot showed army training. The slug drilled a hole in the base of John Marsh's skull.

TRANIV was in motion even before John Marsh could slump forward. The secret service agent's fingers had scarcely stilled when Traniv was on top of the body. He rolled the man aside, seized the tiny key in his own massive fingers.

There was scarcely a break in the message. What little there was could easily be attributed to the makeshift transmitting set.

"-- longitude, -- latitude. The antarctic cold makes transmission difficult," the message continued. "Send all possible warships at once. Doc Savage is prepared to launch terrible offensive within few hours against whole world. This his base. Nearly impregnable. But enough ships can stop him before he gets underway. Need combined fleets of nations. Fate of empire, probably world, depends on fast action. Must sign off. 2-X-R. 2-X-R."

A broad grin was on Traniv's face. He dismantled the small set rapidly. It had been an excellent thought, he admitted to himself, to send that message.

Now the entire navies of the world would head on a wild-goose chase, thousands of miles from where they were needed. That would make his task just that much easier.

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Allbellin had followed only long enough to see Traniv shoot Marsh. Then he had returned, to find Mary Standish held firmly by dead-faced guards Traniv had brought with him.

He tied her hands, pushed her ahead of him. "You'll soon forget this," he gibed. "Just think now how much you hate me. That ought to make it tougher to realize that soon you won't hate me, but will love me."

Mary Standish said nothing. Her lips were tightly compressed. She and John Marsh had worked for weeks on this case; had worked, in fact, ever since the British government became suspicious that there might be one central mind, one central place behind the outbreaks that seemed steadily seeping throughout the world.

Now she knew the answer, but there was nothing she could do.

"You shall love me, my dear," Pecos Allbellin repeated with relish.

Mary Standish bit her lips. Only one thought buoyed her:

Somehow, Doc Savage would find a way out. And now that she knew Doc was not a party to the plot, she felt that he might even save her.

She was pushed into the operating room. A bronze figure was alone in the amphitheater. Slowly that figure turned.

Mary Standish sagged; she almost fainted. She was facing Doc Savage. But there was no recognition in his flake gold eyes. The alloy bands had been taken from his wrists, but his eyes were dull, lifeless.

PECOS ALLBELLIN chuckled mirthlessly. "You see, even the mighty have fallen," he said softly.

With an effort, the girl brought herself erect. "I do not believe it. I do not believe even if he has been operated on, as you told me he was, that he will obey you."

The smile left Allbellin's face. "Doc Savage!" he snapped. The bronze man did not move. Allbellin muttered a swear word. "Doc Savage!" he bellowed harshly.

Still the bronze form stood motionless. A faint smile came to the girl's face. Hope revived.

Pecos Allbellin swelled. His face became very red. "Doc ——" he started.

A chuckle came from behind him. Allbellin whirled. Traniv stood there.

"Doc Savage will answer to me alone," Traniv explained quietly.

"Then tell him I want an operation performed on this girl!" Allbellin said angrily.

"Savage!" said Traniv.

Doc's head came up. "Yes?" he asked dully.

"Perform an operation on this girl at once!" Traniv rapped.

"Yes, Traniv. At once," Doc Savage repeated.

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Then Mary Standish screamed. And this time she fainted. She did not know when she was put on the operating table. Only her subconscious brain caught the commands Allbellin gave before an anesthetic was administered.

His cabled, surgeon's hands moving with the wizardry that had made him famous, Doc Savage went to work.

Traniv watched closely. He tried to follow the operation, but he lacked the medical knowledge.

As Doc completed bandaging the back of the girl's head, Traniv again spoke.

"Write a detailed description of that operation," he ordered. Doc Savage moved as if in a trance. He walked to a big blackboard at one side of the room. His skilled fingers drew the back of a skull. Deftly, he traced in the various motor nerves in the spinal column. He spoke slowly and dully, explaining in medical terms.

Traniv copied the drawing, wrote down the description. He was grinning broadly. At last he had what he wanted. He had the secret of an operation that would leave men apparently normal, not dead-eyed as were his soldiers, but men who would obey his commands just as readily — an operation which if performed on the right men, would let him rule the world.

The smile left his face. His features became as grim and forbidding as any dictator's.

"We are ready," he told Allbellin. "Now we can strike!"

### **Chapter XIV. A WORLD INFLAMED**

THE little man had eyes that were psychological blow-torches. They burned holes into the minds of men who matched wits with him. They could hold the attention of a crowd of thousands. A voice that seemed to swell from a body twice his size did the rest.

That was why the little man was dictator over millions.

That was why his word was law, his displeasure quick death.

The dictator bounced as he walked. He was in a hurry.

Morvan Zagor, his No. 1 lieutenant, had assembled his staff for an important meeting.

The dictator walked quickly. He was unescorted. In the center of his capital he had no fear; no one would dare approach him. That was what the dictator thought. He did not know he was the most important cat's-paw in Carloff Traniv's game.

He turned into an areaway that led between two imposing buildings. A secret door admitted him to this short cut to his destination. It was a short cut that should have been known only to his closest confidants. Certain soldiers on guard saw the dictator disappear into one end of that areaway.

No one saw him come out. The answer was that he didn't. A dozen feet along the metal-floored passageway, his footing gave way beneath him. The dictator shot down into a black abyss. So sudden, so swift was his descent that he did not even scream. A sponge, soaked with chloroform, was slapped over his nostrils.

A rumbling motor lorry took a long box marked "Tools, Export," to the flying field. Loyal soldiers on guard

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seemed to have orders not to molest the huge, queer-looking transport that swallowed up the box. Attendants noted idly that the plane flew south. But there were many places one could get to in that direction.

A HUGE crowd milled in the street below the dictator's palatial offices. There were angry cries as excited citizens watched news reports flash on an electric bulletin board.

News flashes reported that the combined fleets of the world — their own included — were steaming southward under forced draft. They were searching for the antarctic hide-out of Doc Savage, the American.

Other flashes told of events in far-flung spots on the earth:

LIMA, PERU—RIOTING BROKE OUT LATE TODAY AS ARMED MOBS CONVERGED ON THE CAPITAL, DEMANDING THE OVERTHROW OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE INSTIGATORS WERE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN AGENTS OF DOC SAVAGE.

ADDIS ABABA—A NEW REVOLT WAS REPORTED AMONG TRIBES IN THE NORTH TODAY. THE TRIBESMEN WERE WELL ARMED, MANY WITH A NEW TYPE OF MACHINE GUN....

TOKYO, JAPAN—TEN MEN WERE SUMMARILY EXECUTED HERE TODAY, CHARGED WITH INCITING INSURRECTION. PAPERS FOUND IN THEIR POSSESSION INDICATED THEY HAD CONTRACTED FOR A HUGE SUPPLY OF ARMS, SUPPOSEDLY FOR A POLITICAL

FACTION DISSATISFIED WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY IN CHINA.

A college professor, on the outskirts of the crowd, sneered slightly.

"That's all it is, too," he muttered to his companion. "Every radical band, every dissatisfied minority in the world, is taking advantage of the attention focused on Doc Savage to start something of their own. Savage, or some other criminal, may be behind part of it. The rest of it is just a contagion of ideas."

HIS companion shrugged angrily. The professor was known to be an independent thinker. Independent thinkers are not encouraged under dictatorships.

In a room high above the crowd, Morvan Zagor paced up and down. Occasionally he looked down upon the flashing news boards. His face was an inscrutable mask. A group of subordinates watched him anxiously. Zagor was second only to the dictator himself.

Morvan Zagor was huge. He was powerful and just as ruthless. But he lacked that confidence-inspiring magnetism of the dictator.

One man in the room was pale, more nervous than the rest.

"W—where do you suppose the dictator could have gone? Why is he late?" he quavered.

Zagor ran fat fingers through his bristly black hair. There was an odd expression on his face. His answer was cryptic.

"I trust we shall have word from him soon," he said. "If he were only here," the subordinate wailed. "He would stop this war talk. He would censor those news flashes."



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The pale man had been through the last war. He knew what war really was. What he didn't know was that Morvan Zagor had written many of the news flashes that were inflaming the minds of the growing mob below.

A light flashed on a panel at the end of the room. Zagor whirled, raced to the panel. His hands trembled as he picked up a radiotelephone. It was a special radiophone on a secret wave length. It was Morvan Zagor's private means of communication.

Zagor's eyes snapped. His face lighted in a grin of malevolence. He slammed down the receiver, stood erect.

"Gentlemen, the time has come! Many navies are away from home. Assemble the air fleet. Prepare for war!"

The pale man became even whiter. "Y—you mean — "

"I mean the hour has arrived that we have been waiting for. Great Britain is practically defenseless. The dictator has said it is time to strike.

"Tell the nation that Doc Savage has forced us to do it. We are attacking for defense."

Zagor wrote that last phrase down. He seemed quite pleased with himself for having thought of it.

CARLOFF TRANIV turned away from the telephone he had been using to talk to Morvan Zagor. He gave swift instructions to his radio operator. Other connections were made.

Traniv talked swiftly to Rome, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Tokyo and many other capitals. He talked to trusted men over a radio-telephone circuit that could not be intercepted.

His instructions in each case were short and concise: The hour had arrived to strike. He repeated the medical description Doc Savage had given him for the operation that left the victim subject only to the will of Traniv.

"Kidnap the ruler. Operate upon him," he concluded tersely.

The plan was simplicity itself. The professor had been right. Many of the outbreaks throughout the world were spontaneous. Radical groups were taking advantage of a time of uncertainty to strike for themselves.

Traniv had expected that they would. He had even aided them, furnishing the necessary munitions. He would use them for as long as was necessary.

With dictators and rulers under his command, he would then have them summon aid. He would furnish the aid. He would quell the rebellions. The dictators would take his orders. He would rule the world through them.

A half smile came to Traniv's face. He stood erect, admired his image in a full-length mirror.

A discreet knock came at the door. "The operation is about to begin," a white-clad attendant reported.

Traniv hurried from the room.

The dictator was on the operating table. By him stood the bronze figure of Doc Savage. The bronze man was to perform the operation that would place the dictator under Traniv's power, make him obey the would-be world ruler's slightest wish.

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"Proceed!" Traniv said harshly.

Doc Savage's eyes were flat, listless. But his hands did not tremble. They did not falter as he worked with lightning speed and precision.

"It is complete," he said flatly.

"Long live Carloff Traniv!" muttered the dictator. He seemed to be speaking in a delirium.

"Millions will be saying that soon," Traniv muttered enthusiastically. "No one can stop me. No one, now that I have Doc Savage under control."

A SOMEWHAT similar thought was being expressed by a man several thousand miles away. Only he worded it slightly differently.

"Doc Savage is the only man who might stop what the world faces," the man groaned. "And here he has to be the one behind it."

The man was the president of the United States. Members of his cabinet were gathered with him. He shook his head wearily. Then his jaw hardened.

"We must get Doc Savage!" he said harshly. "Our entire fleet is on the way to the hide-out as reported by the British!"

The secretary of the navy nodded. "It means leaving both our coasts unprotected, with anything likely to start a world conflagration," he warned.

The president nodded. "Fortunately we are bulwarked by strong and friendly governments on both north and south."

The secretary of war entered the room hurriedly. He laid a message before the president. The president's hands shook as he read it. The message stated:

Three regiments of Mexican regulars hopelessly crippled by ghastly leg burning. Mobs rioting in capital. Doc Savage. American citizen, blamed for tragedy. Government has fallen to enraged mobs. Foreign power reported off coast with aid if war is declared on United States. Suggest all available troops be rushed to border.

"If Doc Savage would only recover his sanity," the president said wearily.

Fear, not hope, that such a thing might occur was worrying Carloff Traniv at that moment.

He hastened back to his office, pressed a button. A panel slid back and he entered an enclosed passageway.

The passageway was dark. Here and there small slits had been cut. The slits could not be seen from the other side. But from the passageway watchers could see all that went on in the operating room and the rooms connected with it.

Traniv checked hastily. Members of the "royal guard" were at the slits. They had strange-appearing weapons with them. Soldiers would have recognized them as modified flame-throwers.

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Had anyone attempted to escape the operating room they first would have found it necessary to solve the combination of locked doors. While they were working, they could be wiped out by fire.

Traniv asked a hurried question. The gangster in charge of the watchers laughed harshly.

"Naw, boss, he ain't tried nothin'. We been keepin' our gains open. Doc Savage and Koral wander around just like those dumb soldiers you got, except when you give a command. Don't show no interest in nothin'."

Traniv's breath went out in a long sigh. He turned, went back to his office. He could not admit before others that he ever was uncertain, but he had just remembered that Doc Savage had been known to be an excellent actor.

That could not be true in this case. Alone, if the bronze man were in possession of his faculties, he would attempt to escape. No such attempt had been made.

"And that means I don't need his men any longer," he muttered. Relief was in his voice. Even with Doc Savage hopelessly out of it, his men were still a danger that could not be overlooked.

He summoned Pecos Allbellin. The South American's face did not change expression, but light flared in the back of his eyes as Traniv talked.

"You may have the pleasure of supervising their execution," Traniv concluded.

Allbellin's teeth shone. "A pleasure. This time I shall not fail."

Traniv's mouth opened. "W-what?"

"Just a little experiment of mine that did not work," Allbellin explained hastily.

He left the room. Killing was a job he liked.

## Chapter XV. A RESURRECTION

THE guards in the concealed passageway were not exactly careless. But they were not too alert after Traniv left. There was no way for Doc Savage to escape. That they knew. Besides, if he did, he could do nothing. He was one of the living dead.

But fear is an active force. Not all the guards left the peepholes. After all, something might happen. And if it did, and they were to blame, they knew what the result would be.

Those especially chosen for the "royal guard" as they had nicknamed themselves, were hardened killers. They killed for money, sometimes had killed merely for the pleasure of it.

Traniv was the one man they feared. And they felt there was good reason for that. They had seen Traniv work.

And then there were the belts that each one wore next to his body. None were sure just what the purpose of those belts were, but they had a fair idea.

Careful, private investigation had convinced them that at least the belts contained radio transmitters, and that

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Traniv could hear anything they said. Therefore, even when alone, they conversed in a sign language of their own.

The belts held some other, some more dreadful secret as well. All were convinced of that.

When they had first been ordered to wear them, one of their crew had scoffed, had started to take off the belt as soon as Traniv was out of sight.

Something had happened, whether it was because the man tampered with the belt, or for some other reason, none knew.

But the unlucky man had been cut in two instantly. It was as if a hot flame, as hot as that which came out of the flame-throwers, had been turned on him.

After that, the others were careful to wear the belts at all times.

One of the guards drew in his breath sharply. Wind whistled in his nostrils. Instantly the others jumped to attention, reaching for their weapons. Then they laid their flame-throwers down on the floor.

The man who had signaled was grinning and motioning with one hand. The others gathered about him, peered through his peephole. Then they grinned, also.

Below them, in the big operating room, stood the misshapen figure of Doctor Fernor Koral. He was acting even more senselessly than usual.

His dark hair awry, his jaws working strangely, Doctor Koral evidently believed he was trout casting.

He had a long roll of wire in his hand. Standing at one side of the room, he would whip his arm back, speed the wire into space. It flicked across the room with amazing accuracy.

Time after time, the maneuver was repeated. The guards lost interest, paid little attention. Then something happened. The cast this time appeared no different from those that had preceded it, but the wire must have crossed two exposed spots on the heavy electrical cords that led to the brilliant lights used to supply illumination for operations.

That could not have been deliberate, the guard knew. Only a man with excellent muscular control could have done it.

There was a searing flash, and the room was in darkness. It was less than a minute before one of the guards above had raced to the main light panel and replaced the blown-out fuse.

When the lights went back on, there was a sigh of relief. The guards could see into the rooms where Koral and Doc Savage slept. Two forms were in the beds.

THERE was another still form, also, but the guards could not see that. One of the gangsters was always on duty, directly outside the sole entrance to the operating room, merely as an added precaution.

The gangster never did know just what happened to him.

The door had suddenly opened from the inside. A figure slipped through.

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The figure appeared to be that of Doctor Fernor Koral, and the guard reached for him. That was the last the guard knew. The figure had flicked out one long arm. Strong fingers had caught nerves on the back of the man's neck.

Even as the guard went to the floor, the other slipped down the passageway.

Thus it was that the guard did not see the second figure emerge from the operating room. Had he seen it, he probably would have thought he was seeing double.

This figure also appeared to be Doctor Fernor Koral. As a matter of fact, it was Doctor Koral.

The misshapen physician's eyes were glowing strangely. No longer did those eyes hold their dead, flat look. Ahead of him, he could see the disguised figure of Doc Savage. He held back, let that figure disappear.

It had been Doc Savage who had gone through the pretense of trout casting, to lull the guards into a feeling of false security. But Doctor Koral had watched closely. He, also, had left a dummy in his bed.

The bronze man, Koral knew, had remained in the hospital only as long as it had suited his purpose. Had he disappeared earlier, Traniv would not have been tricked. And Doc's usefulness might have been destroyed if Traniv had not believed the bronze man a victim of Koral's operation.

Koral knew now that Doc never had been operated upon. Doc had explained to him what had happened. But that had been afterward.

The bronze man had never been unconscious at the time of the operation for the simple reason that Doctor Koral, not himself, had been on the operating table.

En route to the operating room, Doc had freed himself from his metal bands with acid secreted in a glass ring he wore on one finger. The dead-faced soldiers and Koral had suddenly been overcome by a whiff of one of Doc's anesthetic glass balls which he had taken from his carry-all vest. The bronze man had then made his personage up to resemble, Koral, and disguised Koral as himself.

The soldiers, when they recovered, were unaware of what had taken place and had continued on their way as if nothing had happened.

And the operation Doc had performed had restored Koral to his full senses. Koral, as a surgeon, paid silent tribute to that feat. It was easy to destroy. But to repair severed nerves as Doc had done, was an accomplishment that only a few surgeons in the world could have achieved.

Now Doc Savage was out of sight. Doctor Koral went forward, slowly, silently. He had an errand to perform that he was going to take delight in carrying out.

His eyes were a little wild.

ALLBELLIN left Traniv's office expecting to carry out the execution order at once. Then he had another thought.

Anticipation always made killing more enjoyable. Then, too, why shouldn't Mary Standish see what was happening? She should be recovered from the operation by now. And if the operation was a success, as certainly it must be — Smiling thinly, the streak of premature gray in his hair rising almost life a ruff, Allbellin made his way to his private apartments.

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Mary Standish's eyelids flickered slightly as he reached her bedside. She moaned, raised one hand to her bandaged head. Then her eyes snapped open. Her expression was one of bewilderment.

Pecos Allbellin smiled, placed one sleek hand on her forehead. "Do not be alarmed. It is only I, the one you love," he purred softly.

Mary Standish screamed. She sprang from the bed, her eyes wide with horror.

Allbellin's mouth dropped. He couldn't believe what he saw. "D—don't you feel different toward me now?" he demanded. "W—why — " Mary Standish's expression changed suddenly. She put one hand to her face, then smiled faintly. "Why, of course I do!"

She tried to put the proper feeling into her words. She was remembering instructions whispered to her by Doc Savage just before she went under the anesthetic.

Mary Standish's recovery was just a fraction of a second late. As she reached up, tried to put a hand on Allbellin's arm, he hurried her from him. Then he seemed to reconsider; he dashed after her, caught her up roughly.

Before the girl knew what he intended, he had spun her around, was whipping the bandages from the back of her head.

A startled oath burst from the South American. There was no cut on the back of the girl's head. There were merely long marks of mercurochrome. The bandages themselves were stained with red ink.

"The bronze man could not have failed if he had wished to perform that operation," Allbellin said slowly. His expression changed, became one of deadly fury. "That means he is not under Traniv's power at all!" he burst out furiously.

For a moment he stood stock still stunned by the enormity of his discovery. Then he spun, started to race for the door.

Mary Standish made a neat football tackle. A quarterback of her weight could have done no better. Pecos Allbellin went down.

But the South American was tough. He belied his dandified appearance. He was up almost as soon as he landed. The girl tried to fight, struggling hard to hold him.

Allbellin was very cold-blooded about it. He smacked her on the jaw.

Even as she dropped, he was out of the room and yelling orders.

"Get the execution squad! Have those men and that ape in Cell 3 taken out for immediate execution!" Allbellin shouted at an officer. "I will be there to witness it."

Then he ran on. Reaching Traniv's office, he blurted the whole story hurriedly. Traniv could hardly believe Allbellin's story. It was impossible, but it must be so. Somehow, Doc Savage had tricked him.

"Then he must be executed at once!" Traniv raged. His big figure swelled; his eyes became red.

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Doc Savage had been the one man he had secretly admitted might upset his plans. He had thought that menace past. Evidently it wasn't. But the bronze man was still a captive.

He could afford to take no chances at this stage of the game. Things had been set in motion all over the world. Much would depend upon the next few hours.

No longer did Traniv have any hope of using the bronze man. And Doc must never be allowed to escape.

"Enter the operating room! Kill Doc Savage!" he snapped. His voice rolled out of loud-speakers throughout the big building. It carried to the guards in the hidden passageway.

THE command reached a figure who now was outside the building, as well. A figure whose flake gold eyes sparkled slightly.

Doc Savage had business to attend to. The world must be notified of the danger that threatened it, and where that danger lay.

But Doc Savage also intended to rescue his men. They were captives, undoubtedly in peril.

The bronze man had removed his disguise. Now he stood forth, bronze hair back, tall figure erect.

"Kill Doc Savage!" the loud-speakers echoed.

A low, trilling sound came from the bronze man's lips. He had forgotten, for an instant, another man he wished to protect.

Doctor Fernor Koral had thought Doc had not seen him slip from the operating room. Koral had been mistaken. And Koral would be killed, also, if he were found outside the hospital.

The bronze man turned, raced back into the building. Koral was very busy when he heard the order to kill Doc Savage.

The misshapen physician was in a dressing room. His actions were strange. Evidently he wished to inspect every uniform, every military accouterment in the room. They belonged, he knew, to Allbellin and Traniv.

Traniv alone might have realized what Koral was doing. No other would.

And not even Carloff Traniv realized how much Koral knew. The subconscious often stores up memories, even while the conscious part of the brain is not working.

So it had been with Koral. And from the babblings of chemists and others he had doomed to a living death by the skill of his scalpel, he had learned much. That had come back to him now that his brain was normal again.

Koral stopped his strange actions the instant he heard the command. A queer expression crossed his face.

He started to run from the room. Then he hesitated for a moment, and his hands worked swiftly. When he did enter the passageway, his eyes glared wildly.

Then he, too, was running back toward the operating room. He knew his life depended on not being caught outside.

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The guard by the operating room door was just regaining consciousness when he was whipped to his feet. A bronze hand held him firmly.

"Let me back inside, or you will be killed if it is known I escaped!" the bronze man hissed sharply.

The guard paled. The other spoke the truth.

"Turn off the lights inside, give me some chance," the bronze man said. "You have a control switch out here, I know."

A crafty expression crossed the guard's face. He agreed, almost too willingly. The lights flashed out inside the big room, just as the guards from the concealed passageway were moving around until they could fire down on what they believed was Doc's helpless form.

The door opened. The bronze man dived inside.

The gangster's eyes flashed wickedly. Instantly he turned the lights back on. "Get him!" he shouted.

The killers above gaped. Directly beneath them, racing frantically across the floor, was the bronze man.

The flame-throwers came up. There was a hiss, as if water were spraying through a high-powered jet. A dozen sheets of blinding flame flashed through space, enveloped the running figure.

There might have been one faint cry. The killers were not sure. When they turned off their flame-throwers there was only a charred mass on the floor that did not resemble anything human.

"Doc Savage is dead!" their leader reported to Traniv.

### **Chapter XVI. AN EXECUTION**

THE gangster's report to his chief reverberated over the entire munitions factory. It blared from loud-speakers in every corner of the place. The reactions of listeners were varied.

The misshapen form of Doctor Fernor Koral seemed to take it the hardest. He had reached the head of the corridor just in time to see the guard yank the door open, had watched the bronze figure being wiped out by flame. Now, he made no attempt to escape. The gangsters seized him.

"It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter," he muttered. "I might as well be shot."

The gangleader slapped his prisoner brutally. "Don't worry," he rasped, "you will be. Traniv will see to that." He shoved Koral ahead of him with the muzzle of his flamethrower.

Carloff Traniv was pacing up and down in the huge execution yard, Pecos Allbellin beside him. Traniv's black, bushy eyebrows protruded farther than ever as he received the gangsters' report on Koral.

"Put him with the others!" he snapped. "Execute them all at once! With Doc Savage dead, his men can do me no good, and they are possible menaces. I remove menaces."

He glanced malevolently at the four figures in the yard. Monk, Long Tom and Ham were tied to posts. Long Tom was the only one dressed. Monk and Ham still wore shorts. The posts were in front of a chipped stone



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wall. The chips had come from bullets. Chemistry hovered near Ham; he refused to leave the dapper lawyer.

Monk stared straight ahead of him. He had been bickering angrily with Ham when the loud-speakers announced that

Doc was dead. Monk was swallowing hard now. His voice choked as he tried to conceal his emotion.

"Dang it all," he muttered, "why couldn't it have been someone that wouldn't be missed? Like a lawyer. Or that fuzzy accident draped around your shoulders."

Ham's eyes snapped. He, too, was sorrowful, but he rose to the occasion.

"Nobody'd miss a mistake of nature like you!" he growled. "In some ways I'm in favor of this execution. Think of all the happy children you'll never be able to frighten again."

A tramp of feet silenced Ham. There was a vaulted archway leading from the main concourse of the factory into the execution yard.

A squad of uniformed soldiers came through that archway. They were dead-eyed men. And they carried rifles. One, who seemed to be a sergeant, led them. He apparently was in command of all his senses.

The gangsters shoved Koral toward the execution squad. "Tie him up. He's to get it with the rest," the gangleader said. Koral cringed.

Monk's gaze swung suddenly from the execution squad to Chemistry. The ape was acting in a peculiar fashion. He suddenly squealed in fear.

Chemistry knew what guns were for, what they could do. Apparently he now realized this was a very unhealthy place to be. He began to slink away from Ham. The gangsters laughed harshly.

"Even Chemistry's desertin' us," Monk growled. "Nothing like a sinkin' ship to bring the rats out."

"I told him to go!" Ham snapped. "There isn't any reason why he should be killed."

Ham was only partly telling the truth. He had ordered Chemistry to seek the safety of the jungle outside if he could get to it. But that had been some time before. And the ape had refused to leave.

There was only one way out of the execution yard. That was through the archway. Chemistry ambled timidly toward that. The soldiers were having difficulty with Koral. He appeared to have fainted; his form was lolling lifelessly.

Then things happened. Chemistry's fear and docility disappeared in a furry ball of squealing rage. The ape hurled himself at the execution squad. The squad, Doctor Koral and Chemistry became a sudden maelstrom of arms, legs and profanity.

TRANIV shrieked orders. The gangsters dropped their flamethrowers and jumped into the fight. The flurry ended almost as soon as it had begun. There could be only one ending. Chemistry was a good fighter, but not that good.

When the mess was untangled, Koral seemed to have fared the worst. He was unconscious. The sergeant of the execution squad towered over the others. He roared with rage, seized Chemistry by the back of the neck.

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He held the ape in front of him, whipped out a heavy automatic.

The gun blasted. Chemistry dropped to the ground. A crimson pool formed under him slowly.

Monk howled. The chemist had been struggling with his bonds ever since the soldiers had tied him to the execution post. He had them free now.

His voice was a bellow of rage as he plunged across the execution yard. "Dang you!" he screamed. "Kill an animal like that, will you -- "

The chemist's huge hands were balled into fists that could break the jaws of most men. But he couldn't break a flamethrower. The gangsters brought their weapons up.

"Burn him!" shouted Traniv.

The execution squad sergeant was too fast. He met Monk halfway across the yard. The sergeant was a huge fellow. He dodged as Monk tore in, smashed an uppercut that made Monk's huge mouth express a silly, vacant grin. Monk slid to the ground.

The sergeant tied him again to the execution post, Koral was also tied to a post. The sergeant then snapped orders to his squad.

Running footsteps sounded loudly. As the dead-eyed soldiers brought their rifles up, a gangster raced toward them. He was yelling at the top of his voice.

"The girl has gotten loose!" he shouted. "She was headed for the radio room, and we lost her!"

Traniv whirled away from the sight he wanted so much to watch. Business came before pleasure.

"Shoot them down!" Traniv rapped. Then he turned to Allbellin and the gangsters. "Come on, Pecos. We can't take chances now."

The two plotters and the gangsters raced toward the main building. The steady voice of the sergeant rapped out orders:

"Ready. Aim. Fire!"

Six rifles spoke in unison. Apparently the sergeant decided to take no chances. He repeated the orders. Once again the six rifles spoke. The second round of shots rang out even before Traniv and Allbellin were swallowed by the archway leading from the execution grounds.

Traniv glanced back. Four figures were slumped forward. Only the ropes around their middles kept them from falling to the ground.

MARY STANDISH tried to make the radio room. She found it impossible. There were too many guards in her path. Then she saw a big transport plane on the landing field.

She started to race for it just as Traniv and Allbellin ran from the archway. Both of them saw her at once.

"You get her! I'll join you at once!" panted Traniv.

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Allbellin and the gangsters raced after the girl. Traniv dived into the main building. There was something he had almost forgotten.

Swiftly he made his way to the radio room. Everyone who might be a danger to him was either dead, or as in the case of the girl, about to be caught, except --

Once inside the big radio room, Traniv sat down before the apparatus himself. This was something he cared to have as few know as possible.

He twisted dials, reached the wave length he wanted. Then he spoke swiftly.

On board a big transport plane, rapidly winging its way north, a radio operator received the message laconically.

"O. K.," he said. He wrote down the message, handed it to a hard-faced man beside him. The man looked at the message, gulped, then turned and went back into the cabin of the ship.

The dictator was looking out a window of the plane. He was trying hard to keep his eyes dull. His life depended upon that, he knew.

But if his eyes were dull, his brain was busy. With difficulty he restrained his impatience. It was hard to know so much and to be able to do nothing about it.

And the dictator now had a different view of many things. Once he had wanted a war. He didn't want a war now. That war would cost him everything, as well as everyone else who went into it.

The dictator knew, too, that Doc Savage was not the man behind the world unrest. He could picture the headlines that would greet that announcement. He preened himself slightly as he thought of the credit he would receive. He would tell the story so that it would seem he had been responsible for discovering the truth through his own initiative.

The dictator rubbed the back of his bandaged head and almost chuckled. Doc Savage was a wizard. He had performed an operation that had been no operation at all. During the fake operation, the bronze man had warned the dictator in a voice only heard by him, to play the part of a man who had apparently lost his senses, but who would be obedient only to Traniv and his wishes. Once he was home, he was to keep playing his part for fear Traniv's spies might realize what had taken place and warn Traniv. Doc Savage would send him word when to strike at the proper time.

The door to the cockpit opened. The hard-faced man came through. Instantly, the dictator made his eyes blank.

The hard-faced man came back, dropped in a seat by the dictator. He seemed almost affable.

"The boss is quite a guy, ain't he?" he said.

The dictator turned a dull glance toward him. "Long live Carloff Traniv," he intoned, and turned his head back toward the window.

The hard-faced man chuckled. He brought up a gun, pressed it almost in the dictator's ear. Then he pulled the trigger.

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The dictator became very dead. He also had been executed. Traniv had ordered his death, knowing Doc must have performed a fake operation similar to that of Mary Standish. Therefore, the dictator was in full possession of his senses. Traniv had taken no chances, but had seen to it that the dictator wouldn't stand in his way.

IN the execution yard, the men in uniform were finishing their inspection. Had a shrewd observer been present, he would have noticed something strange.

Four men had been executed. But now there were seven bodies huddled on the ground. And they were not bullet-ridden bodies.

There had been six men and a sergeant in the execution squad. Now there were only four and a sergeant. And one of the "soldiers" had no shoes on. His black toes were long, finger-like, made for grasping tree branches.

"I can't tell you apart in uniform," Ham observed dryly. "Except that Chemistry looks a bit more human."

"Shut up!" Monk squalled. "We apes stick together."

Chemistry opened his mouth in a close imitation of Monk's toothsome grin. Ham guffawed. Doc Savage held up his hand.

"We must not permit our deception to become apparent," he warned.

For the "squad sergeant" was Doc Savage. The man who had fled into the operating room when the flame-throwers went into action had been Doctor Koral.

Koral had been made up to look like Doc once. He had resumed the disguise in an attempt to convince the guards that Doc had never left the operating room. Normal again, Koral had been horrified at what he knew; he had given his life in the hope that Doc might remain free, might somehow block Traniv's plans.

Doc had arrived too late to save Koral, and had resumed the appearance of the surgeon, knowing that thus he could most quickly find his own aids.

Chemistry's peculiar action had been directed by the bronze man, also. Long ago, Doc had learned to pitch his voice above the range that human ears can intercept. But many animals, accustomed to catch the slightest jungle noises at night, have a hearing that goes behind the human scale. That was why no one heard Doc's orders to the ape.

Doc had pretended to kill Chemistry to prevent the gangsters from actually doing so.

The squad soldiers had fired at a blank wall. Their vacant minds obeyed whatever orders were given them. Then Doc had overcome them, had freed his own men who had shifted into the soldiers' uniforms. Only the real sergeant, who had been fixed to resemble Koral when Doc had changed places with him, had not been knocked out again. He already was unconscious.

Doc clipped orders to his "squad." The bronze man's voice was an exact imitation of that of the real sergeant.

The squad fell into line, began to march toward the archway. Doc Savage's bronze fingers explored the secret vest he wore next to his skin. Various chemicals came to light. The bronze man acted swiftly.

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Thin spirals of smoke began to rise. They were practically invisible against the dull gray of a cloudy sky. Then the grayness of the sky began to deepen. The chemical "smoke" acted at higher levels. The moisture-laden tropical air precipitated into rain.

As Doc led his squad across the concourse the drizzle increased, turned into a downpour. The clouds above already had held sufficient moisture for a rainstorm, since it rains much in the tropics, Doc's chemicals had merely released that moisture.

Visibility was greatly cut. Guards and gangsters huddled into shelter as the rain pelted down. Doc led his squad to the central building. "We are to guard the radio room!" he snapped.

The gangster grunted, wiped rain from his face. The "soldiers" had hats pulled well down over their faces as they strode into the building.

BUT the rain served another purpose as well. The real sergeant, huddled with six other figures, revived. Before he became a gangster, he had been a sailor. He knew all about knots. A snarl crawled from his throat as he freed himself. Then he ran from the yard. Near the transport plane he saw Carloff Traniv. The sergeant ran toward him.

Ugly-looking thugs were climbing from the transport

Mary Standish had reached it in safety, had locked herself inside, but the gangsters had disabled the motors. It had taken them some time to break into the plane, however.

Now they were dragging the girl out of the ship. Her pretty face showed despair.

Allbellin reached for her. His face had lost his usual vacant look, was contorted with anger. He slapped her smartly.

"You'll pay for this!" he raged.

A startled exclamation came from a gangster. Traniv whirled, and reached for his gun.

A man he had thought executed, was running toward him. The sergeant still looked like Doctor Koral. Three of the gangsters jumped on the sergeant. It was some time before he could make himself known.

Then he told what had happened. Doc Savage and his aids not only were alive, they were loose! There was something more than cruelty in the sergeant's face as he spoke. There was fear.

"The radio room!" Allbellin bleated. "They'll head for the radio room!"

Traniv's jaw dropped. Allbellin was right. And if they got a message off —

The big man's form straightened; his bushy eyebrows protruded, and he grinned. He pulled one of the gangsters to him, whispered swiftly into his ear.

The gangster grinned, raced for the main building like a startled rabbit.

Mary Standish was praying. Perhaps there was a chance yet. Then she heard Carloff Traniv chuckle. It was the chuckle of a man who has all the cards.

Hope died in Mary Standish. She feared the world was doomed.

## Chapter XVII. A MESSAGE SENT

MARY STANDISH wasn't the only one who feared the world was doomed.

In London, there was strange activity. Unexplained outbreaks were occurring in various parts of the British Isles.

And spies reported an unexpected aerial attack was to be staged by a certain unfriendly power!

Faces were grim at 10 Downing Street. There was one serious conference after another. The British air force was ordered to hold itself in readiness for immediate combat. The war would mean the deaths of thousands of innocent people, victims of bombs from above. It could not be helped.

American troops were being rushed to the Mexican border. Chaos was reported to reign south of the Rio Grande, but no one knew for sure. One report, unverified, was that the chaos was mere pretense now, that with the old regime ousted, new leaders were preparing for a shrewd attack, backed by tremendous resources.

No one could tell where that attack might fall.

A regiment of soldiers, dressed as Russians, had invaded Manchuria, had inflicted many casualties before vanishing.

A regiment of soldiers, dressed as Japanese, had invaded Russia. They, too, had killed many before disappearing.

Air forces of both powers were warming up, ready for war.

Overthrow of governments already had been announced in some small South American countries.

Serious-minded statesmen doubted, even if Doc Savage were found now, and executed, that a conflagration could be avoided that would embroil the entire world.

But in each capital there was another group that did not seem worried. These were the men of Carloff Traniv.

Traniv had plotted shrewdly. He did not have a private army big enough to conquer the world. But he could provide munitions for dissatisfied factions, and he could throw units of dead-faced soldiers into any fight at the right time to seize control.

These he intended to use only where he could not obtain power through dictators.

Hundreds of small, radio-controlled flying machine guns had been dispatched. Each group was under the control of a "mother ship," a stratosphere plane that flew high over them and directed all their movements.

Other robot-controlled planes contained explosives of the type that had destroyed the U. S. S. Georgia. Still others were loaded with gas and disease bombs.

These planes were in the air!

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There are unscrupulous men of all nationalities. Traniv had sought these men out, had won them through flattery, money, and promises of power.

Some of these men had worked themselves into positions of trust. It was these men who were aiding him most now. Wherever possible, when their advice was asked, they urged doing that which would serve further to inflame, not quiet, the tension.

Morvan Zagor was jubilant, although outwardly calm. The dictator was dead. The public did not know that. There was no reason for them to know it, yet. The dictator's body was being brought back to his own country.

It was to be "discovered" in his apartment in a few hours.

Then it would be announced he had been assassinated. The last spark needed to bring the people behind the war Zagor intended to launch would be provided.

Carloff Traniv was going to win. Nothing could stop him.

IF Doc Savage and his aids knew that, they did not show it. Monk, Long Tom and Ham trailed the bronze man as they went swiftly through corridor after corridor. They kept Chemistry in the middle.

After all, even wearing a soldier's uniform, and despite

Ham's sarcastic comments, Chemistry did not look much like a soldier. He was inclined to drag his rifle by the barrel, rather than carry it on his shoulder as he should.

"But at least Chemistry had sense enough to fight with Doc, not try to fight against him," Ham chuckled.

Monk blushed. "Nobody but Doc could have knocked me down," he protested angrily.

"And you were trying to avenge Chemistry. I didn't think you liked your twin brother," chided Ham.

"Y—you, you ill-dressed specimen of a shyster! You hillbilly law book!" Monk raged.

"I see things are back to normal again, with you two fighting," Long Tom put in dryly, "but really I think we have business at hand."

Monk and Ham quieted; then the hairy chemist grinned. Doc had just taken them around another corner. They were in a winding maze of passageways. Occasionally they would reach a door. Doc always seemed to know what button to press to make the door open.

"With Doc along, we don't have to think," Monk said airily.

"Hasn't it impressed you these corridors are almost too deserted?" Long Tom asked quietly.

Monk's grin vanished. Doc said nothing. The same thought had occurred to him some time back.

The bronze man stopped suddenly, listening. The others also stopped. Not a sound was to be heard. A faint line appeared on Doc's forehead.

The others looked at the bronze man. Doc's face was emotionless. His big figure gave the impression of being ready for instant action, yet there was no tenseness in his muscles.

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"We are almost there," Doc said quietly. He moved on. The others gripped their rifles more tightly. Conversation ceased. Foot at a time they advanced, ears alert.

A door appeared before them. Doc's flake gold eyes flickered slightly. There had been no door at this point the last time he was in this corridor.

Silently he motioned the others to stay back. As they halted, Doc eased to his toes. He made no noise as he approached the door. His finger went to a small button beside the door. He pressed it.

Things happened fast!

There was a blinding burst of light. An entire section of the floor appeared to vanish, directly under Doc.

Fire roared up from underneath. The flames were fed by thermite. They were of tremendously high temperature.

A YELL broke from Monk. The hairy chemist would have leaped forward if Ham and Long Tom had not grabbed his arms.

The section of floor that had vanished extended back almost ten feet. It was impossible for anyone to leap through those flames. They would have been burned to death instantly.

"A trap!" Long Tom muttered harshly. Monk and Ham said nothing. A glazed look was in Monk's eyes. His rifle had swung up; the bolt clicked!

Then the flames vanished. They disappeared as swiftly as they had come. The opening in the floor closed. The door beyond stood open.

Long Tom dashed forward, Monk, Ham and Chemistry at his heels. The corridor ahead appeared vacant.

"They got Doc, the ——" Monk gritted. His big body hunched, the hairy chemist went tearing ahead.

Men leaped at them from concealed doorways. The passageway was suddenly crowded. Some of the dead-faced soldiers appeared in the passageway behind. They were trapped.

And then a strange thing happened.

The corridor was brightly lighted, but even as the first of the attackers leaped at Doc's aids, the lights seemed to dim.

Monk swung at a man's jaw he could see clearly, only to have the man vanish before his rifle butt hit the chin. From the sound alone was he able to tell that he had connected. He couldn't even see his own fist.

Strong arms grabbed him, yanked him to one side. "Quiet!" Doc Savage's voice said in his ear.

The corridor was a mass of fighting men. But none could see whom he was fighting. None dared use guns.

Long Tom felt his wrist grabbed. As he tried to break away, he heard Doc's whisper. He joined Monk at one side. Chemistry and Ham came next.

"Hold hands," Doc ordered softly.



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The bronze man took the lead. Despite the savage fighting and the smash of bodies, he appeared to move easily. Doc had foreseen a trap at the door. There had been two buttons beside it. It had been a chance, but Doc often took chances.

He had pressed both buttons. One had sprung the fire trap, but the other had opened the door. He was through the door before the fire could catch him.

And anticipating the ambush that the others would run into, Doc had generated a powerful smoke screen. Colored glasses on his eyes enabled him to see.

From behind the bronze man and his aids, a hoarse voice was shouting orders. Fans whirled. The smoke was sucked out of the passageway almost instantly. But the radio room was directly ahead.

Then it came!

Doc and his men were only one room from their destination. That room suddenly became an airtight vault.

Doors clanged shut. Doc and his aids suddenly felt weightless. Their hearts pounded so hard it seemed they would burst from their bodies. Their heads were very light.

"Vacuum! All air sucked from room!" Long Tom gasped. Then he crumpled to the floor. One by one, the others followed.

CARLOFF TRANIV bore a wide grin as he came from his office. Allbellin also appeared pleased.

Traniv and Allbellin had known a short cut; they had reached the center of the building long before Doc and his men. And the gangster Traniv had sent ahead had arranged the ambushes.

Traniv stopped outside the sealed room. "A very clever thought of mine," he said. "Those five in there will have unpleasant deaths. In ten minutes at the most, it will be over.

The big man stepped to the wall, flicked a switch. A televisior lighted, showed the interior of the room. Five forms were twitching on the floor. Gradually they quieted. That of Doc Savage moved longest. He was hardest to kill.

Traniv kept his eyes on his watch. Ten minutes passed. He flicked off the televisior, turned a knob near by. Air hissed back into the room inside.

With Allbellin at his side, he entered the room while dead-faced soldiers stood at attention.

A few moments later, Traniv reappeared. His bushy black eyebrows stood out belligerently. He closed the door behind him.

"Allbellin is examining the bodies of the victims. See that he is not disturbed!" he snapped.

Then he walked to the radio room. Two guards were outside. Five feet away, Traniv halted. "You may turn off the protective devices now," he said.

The gangsters grinned. Their fingers sought cunningly hidden levers in an ornamental scrollwork.

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"I almost wish those guys had reached here, boss," one of the killers grinned. "We was all prepared to run like we was scared and let them step into it. I'll bet you couldn't have found a piece of them after that blast went off."

Traniv nodded, entered the radio room. The killer was right. Even if Doc had gotten that far, it would have done no good. It was doubtful that he could have found the concealed trap in time. He would have been blown up.

His bushy eyebrows wiggling, Traniv motioned the radio operator aside. Then he sent a message.

The dead-eyed soldiers outside heard mild sounds from the room where Allbellin was with the bronze man and his aids. Then a siren sounded.

The soldiers did not move, but others did. The gangsters, the "royal guard," rushed forward, threw open the door. They found Allbellin and another man who looked strangely like Traniv fighting with Doc's aids.

"Get Doc Savage! He tricked me and got out of here!" the real Traniv yelled.

Doc's aids quit fighting. They had no chance. They were hopelessly outnumbered. Traniv raced toward the radio room.

The guards there stared open mouthed. "W—why, you just went in there!" one of them gasped.

Traniv cursed savagely, yanked open the door. Only the regular operator was in the room. He was unconscious.

For a moment hope flared in Traniv; then he noticed an open window. Doc Savage had disappeared through that.

With fingers that trembled, Traniv opened a small cubbyhole, took out a wax cylinder. All messages sent from the radio room were recorded. His face paled as he heard the message on the cylinder:

"This is Doc Savage, the real Doc Savage, speaking," came the measured tones of the bronze man. "Calling the combined fleets. Calling the combined fleets. I have discovered the hide-out of the munitions master who is endeavoring to embroil the entire world in war, it is at — latitude, — longitude, in Africa. You are being sent to an erroneous destination. Correct your course at once. With my men, I will endeavor to do as much as possible before you arrive. I am repeating — latitude, — longitude. Come at once."

Carloff Traniv's face was livid red. He leaped from the room. Sight of the grinning faces of Monk and the others aids did not help his feelings.

"That still won't stop me," he roared, "but you won't know it! Capture the bronze man, then kill them all! And this time there will be no mistake! Put them in the belts of death!"

### **Chapter XVIII. CHECKMATE!**

TRANIV was terrible in his rage. His big jaw protruded; his almost curly hair rocked on his head, while his black, bushy eyebrows lowered until his eyes appeared hidden. He shouted order after order. Dead-eyed soldiers and gangsters went scurrying in all directions in response to those orders.

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All were told the same thing: "Get Doc Savage!"

Monk, Ham, Long Tom and Chemistry were tied securely and thrown back into the airtight room. The door was locked and a special guard placed in front of it.

Then Traniv rushed back into the radio room. He was forced to admit that he had been tricked, but not that he had lost.

When he and Allbellin had entered the room where Doc lay supposedly dead, they had been set upon at once. The one thing Traniv hadn't known was that Doc had oxygen tablets.

The bronze man had realized instantly the trap he and his aids were in, had given each of his aids and Chemistry one of the tablets. Then they had gone through convulsions.

Doc had traded places with Traniv, but the others had realized they must stay behind and guard Allbellin, or arouse suspicion. Traniv, watching his chance, had touched a hidden alarm before Monk, who was watching him, had realized what he was up to.

Now Traniv donned headphones, twirled dials. A vast quantity of code was being broadcast. Ordinarily, navies use secret codes, but the combined fleet could not do this, so international Morse code was being used.

Traniv could read it readily. Slowly, the tenseness went out of his big figure. He even smiled.

"Sounds like a Doc Savage trick," came a message from the flagship of the American fleet.

"Agree with you and believe we should disregard message," was the reply flashed back by a British admiral.

"Would suggest that even if it is a trick we should take no chances," the Japanese commander put in.

"If we split our strength we may be making a serious error," the American admiral warned.

"We have our real destination. It came directly from a trustworthy man, a British agent!" the English admiral snapped.

Traniv's grin grew broader. Once a message from Doc Savage would have been believed implicitly. Not now. Doc Savage was credited with being the worst traitor in history!

And while the naval commanders were wasting time in arguing, death was winging through the skies toward the unprotected shores of their nations.

The admirals were silent for a score of minutes. Consultations were taking place. Then came a terse order:

"Two destroyers and one cruiser from each fleet will proceed toward location given in Doc Savage message. Message undoubtedly fake, but speed to scene and radio report as swiftly as possible."

Carloff Traniv almost chuckled. He removed the headphones. Only a skeleton force was to be sent against him. That was a laugh. Hidden mines would take care of most of the destroyers. His reserve fleet of robot planes carrying high explosives and a hundred or so flying radio-controlled flying machine guns could take care of the cruisers.

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The battle-wagons, the only thing to be feared if they came in force were proceeding in the wrong direction, were getting farther and farther away.

By the time they learned their error, it would be too late. The very governments they represented would have fallen. They would find new rulers, and those new rulers would see to it that they did not investigate Doc Savage's report.

Traniv lifted a telephone, gave clipped orders. In huge airplane hangars, more ships were made ready for flight.

WHEN Doc Savage went out the window of the radio room, he went directly up to the roof.

There was no stairway, but that did not bother the bronze man. He had removed his shoes. His powerful, agile fingers and toes enabled him to climb the sheer wall of the building as swiftly as the average man could go up steps.

Apparently he had decided to abandon his aids. He raced across the roof, descended an opposite wall. This time he moved more slowly.

Bright lights flared from windows on the third floor. The bronze man moved cautiously until he could look inside those windows.

Men, a majority of them in gas masks, were hovering over glass retorts. There were hundreds of bottles of chemicals. A huge floor space was taken up with an ultramodern laboratory. Equipment of all kind was being used.

One man was working not ten feet from the window, his back turned. The man felt a draft of air as the window was opened. He spun.

He thought he saw a bronze streak flashing toward him. He never was sure. The next instant, and he was on the floor, unconscious.

Doc stripped the other's gas mask from him, removed the robe and apron the man wore. When he rose, he appeared only as another of the laboratory workers.

The bronze man worked swiftly. From a secret pouch he wore around his waist, he removed a small object, studied it carefully, then swiftly selected bottle after bottle of chemicals from the almost unlimited store.

He made test after test. Finally he gave a satisfied nod. Doc usually carried a fair supply of chemicals with him, but the task he had undertaken had required even more. Carloff Traniv's laboratory had stood him in good stead. And he had reached a solution in minutes where the average well-trained chemist, even Monk, would have needed hours.

Doc filled several capsules with a thin, colorless-appearing liquid that he had concocted from several of the chemicals. The capsules he put in the secret pouch around his waist.

A moment more and he was back outside the building, started to climb again.

Then he stopped. His low, trilling sound came faintly.

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The bronze man was outside a window on the fourth floor. The room inside was where all uniforms were kept.

Allbellin was inside, working almost in darkness. The small, dandified–appearing man with the gray streak in his hair, had donned a uniform almost as resplendent as that worn by Traniv.

But it wasn't that which held Doc's gaze. Allbellin's face wore an almost vicious look. His eyes darted nervously toward the door.

He was standing in front of uniforms that could only have been worn by Traniv. They were much too big for Allbellin. And the small South American seemed to be caressing those uniforms. His hands rubbed the Sam Browne belts, the gay trappings that ornamented them.

Doc paused only a moment. Then he went on up.

The attackers struck him just as he reached the roof.

TRANIV'S instructions to his men had been thorough. And his orders had been well carried out.

Men had been sent to all parts of the huge grounds with powerful binoculars. They had been instructed to report the slightest thing out of the way that they saw.

One had seen what he thought was a shadow descending the side of the main building. He had reported this to his commander.

The gangleader should have passed the report on to Traniv. He hadn't. He'd thought to win additional favor for himself by capturing Doc on his own.

With half a dozen of his picked men, all well armed, he'd rushed to the roof. For a time, he thought there must have been a mistake. Then one of the watchers saw Doc coming.

The very eagerness of the attackers was in the bronze man's favor. They jumped just an instant too soon.

Doc caught a faint glimpse of motion in the growing dusk.

Blam! Blam!

Guns blared. Lead roared toward the spot where Doc's head had been. It was no longer there.

The bronze man had released his hold, had thrown himself sidewise. The tips of his powerful fingers caught along the top of the roof. Taking full advantage of his swinging body, and with the grace of an acrobat, he threw himself up and over.

His feet made a faint sound when he landed. The killers whirled, guns flared.

They thought they had been struck by a tornado. Doc dived the dozen feet that separated him from the gangsters. His body was low, his arms outstretched.

The killers were grouped. That was another mistake. They went down like tenpins.

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Doc's hands moved swiftly. He smashed two of the gangsters' heads together. His fingers found the nerve centers on the necks of another pair. As the others struggled to get up, Doc came to his feet. He had no time to spare, could not afford to be merciful.

His fists went out with dynamic force. Jaws gave under the terrific impact.

Shouts were heard from below. More killers were on the way.

Without loss of time, Doc sped to where two radio towers reared skyward. Silently he went up one of those towers. When other men arrived, Doc was not to be seen.

High above them, his feet wrapped around an antenna pole, the bronze man was doing something that would have puzzled even Traniv.

He had a very small, compact condenser in his hand. Several wires and a tiny tube were connected to the condenser, and a small flashlight battery. One wire was fastened to the antenna, the other to the radio pole.

The antenna was that used by Carloff Traniv to transmit his radio messages.

As the search quieted down, Doc slid back to the roof. His face was unusually grim. The bronze man had reached an unusual decision.

It had been Doc Savage's practice never to take a human life if it were possible to avoid doing so. He had risked his own life time after time rather than violate that principle. It was for that reason, too, that he had perfected the mercy bullets he and his men used, bullets that brought quick unconsciousness, putting foes out of action, but not killing them.

Doc's flake gold eyes were sorrowful. If he were to save the world, it was necessary that he should personally kill scores, possibly hundreds of men.

MARY STANDISH thought her guards were careless. She had been taken to the office where Allbellin had first interviewed her. Allbellin had left almost at once, but two killers remained behind.

Mary Standish was not afraid of killers; she had dealt with them before. When one of the guards insisted that she put on a strange-appearing belt, she had decided it would be best to humor him, had submitted without protest.

The belt was wide and thick. It had been pulled snug about her waist. When the guards were not looking, she had tried to loosen it, only to discover that it had a trick latch that made it almost impossible to remove.

That had not impressed her. The belt did not hamper her in any way.

An argument started between the two guards. Soon they came to blows. They paid no attention to the girl.

Mary Standish did not hesitate. She slipped out of the office at once. She did not know that as soon as she had left the guards stopped fighting. One of them picked up a telephone.

"It worked," he reported briefly, "She thinks she has escaped."

Mary Standish did not know whether Doc Savage had managed to elude the ambushes set for him or not. She hoped so. But she did know she wanted to find the bronze man. Working together, she felt sure they could

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work out some plan to balk Traniv.

She reasoned, just as Allbellin and Traniv had thought she would reason.

If Doc were free, then he would head either for the radio room or that room of mystery where Traniv was known to have many strange appliances, through which he ruled his men.

Those rooms were not far apart. She went in that direction.

Once Mary Standish thought she saw several guards step aside, almost as if they had seen her coming and were getting out of the way. But she decided she must have been mistaken. If she were seen, she would be retaken instantly.

She came to the corridor she sought. Her pace quickened. Then a glad cry came from her lips. She ran forward.

Doc Savage had come around a corner.

THE bronze man shot Mary Standish one quick glance. He said nothing but he motioned swiftly for her to turn and run. She did not obey. She believed Doc did not know who she was.

"But I want to help!" she cried. "I am a British secret agent — "

Doc bounded forward, picked her up and started to race down the passageway with her.

A door opened suddenly. Allbellin stood there, at one side. Farther back in the room could be seen Carloff Traniv.

"Stop or the girl dies!" Traniv said.

His voice was not loud, but it had the ring of conviction. And Doc had seen the belt around the girl's waist.

"Surrender without fight, or I will pull this lever!" Traniv went on exultantly. "If I do, Mary Standish will die, horribly, painfully!"

Then the girl realized what had happened. She knew she had been permitted to escape in the hope she might aid in trapping the bronze man. She knew, too, that if Doc surrendered, all hope for the world was gone.

"Don't do it! Run!" she cried fiercely. "What is my life against the lives of millions? Run!"

Doc Savage set her on her feet. His bronze face was expressionless. He had a choice to make, but it really was no choice. Doc Savage could never let an innocent girl die.

"I surrender," he said quietly.

## Chapter XIX. THEATER OF DEATH

CARLOFF TRANIV donned a new uniform so that he might appear properly dazzling. Pecos Allbellin was also resplendent in a uniform of many colors.

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"Looks like a Christmas tree," Long Tom chuckled. The electrical genius was a trifle white about the mouth, but otherwise he did not show the strain he was under.

Monk had eyes only for Mary Standish. His homely face had assumed what he thought was a winning smile, but one which Ham told him reminded him more of the expression he had seen on fish in the Aquarium.

"No need to look like a dying calf," Ham added, shifting metaphor rapidly. "You'll look like a dead ape quick enough."

Monk only sighed. When there was a pretty girl around, even if death was coming in the next moment, Monk had thoughts only for that girl. It was the end of everything. But both Monk and Ham had known that the end had to come sometime. At least they would die with Doc.

Chemistry was squirming curiously in the odd things that bound him. Only Doc Savage and Mary Standish appeared calm and collected. The bronze man showed no expression whatever.

The scene was a curious one. One wall had been rolled up in the office where Carloff Traniv had his many strange appliances. It was as if they were in a theater, and the office was the stage.

Beyond the opened wall was a huge auditorium. That auditorium was now filled with silent spectators. Many of them were not curious. The blank-eyed soldiers had no interest in anything except obeying orders. But the gangsters, in the front rows, were taking a frank interest in the proceedings.

And Traniv was in his element. He gloried in a show, gloried in acting before spectators. Now he was playing a role that he liked.

Mary Standish, Doc Savage and his men were to be killed. They were to be killed in spectacular fashion. Traniv wanted an audience.

Belts such as had been placed on Mary Standish now were about Doc and his men. Not one belt, but many, some of them looped over the shoulders. Even Chemistry had his share.

The six who were to be killed were lined up so that all in the auditorium could see them.

Standing at one side, near a set of levers, was Traniv. Not far from him was Allbellin.

Doc Savage's flake gold eyes passed over the small South American apparently without interest, but they missed nothing. Traniv could not see Allbellin's expression.

The South American's eyes were not dull and vacant now. They were sparkling as if at some jest known only to himself. In his hand he held a cigar.

It was a most peculiar cigar. It was gigantic in size. It plainly was made of tobacco, but it seemed impossible that anyone should want to smoke a cigar so large. In some ways it resembled the loaves of bread a small man with a thin face had been carrying in Paris.

Traniv cleared his throat. His voice boomed loudly. "Within the next hour I expect to be proclaimed world emperor!" he thundered. "These people here were all I had to fear. You are now to watch them die!"

He grinned savagely. His head protruded as his bushy eyebrows came down.



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Slowly, as if savoring every instant, he reached toward a lever on the wall.

THE drone of approaching planes could be heard on the American coast. The planes were still miles away, but the sound of their motors were picked up through special amplifiers.

Frantic calls for help were sent to Washington. The war department promised aid as soon as possible, and shot quick orders to army flying fields.

The army said they would start planes to the coast immediately, but that they could not arrive for some hours. A majority of the planes, it appeared, had been rushed to the Mexican border.

The war secretary was frantic. Help would arrive too late. Long before the army could get its pursuit planes on the job, the invaders would have completed their job and fled. Cities would be in ruins. Thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, would die.

Morvan Zagor sat in a brightly lighted chamber of the administration building. Around him were men upon whose faces horror and sorrow were mixed almost equally.

The dictator's body had just been "discovered." He had been assassinated in his apartment. He had been killed in cold blood, a bullet through his ear. He had been given no chance for life.

"An English spy did that," Morvan Zagor said. "It could have been no one else."

"And that means war," a member of the council said. His face was old and lined.

"It means war," Zagor agreed. He reached for a pen. "I have here, almost ready, a proclamation calling that war. Our air fleet is ready. I will complete this, then sign. You gentlemen also will sign. Then he will order the fleet to take the air. It is agreed?"

One by one, the members of the council nodded. Zagor raised his pen.

In Moscow, a small group of men waited impatiently. Occasionally they glanced at the sky.

Planes were on the way. That they knew. Fast, high-flying bombing planes. In the course of minutes those planes would swoop down. They would come so fast there would be no time to halt them.

No one knew exactly in which building Stalin slept. It did not matter. He could only be in one of a dozen places. Bombs would destroy all those places.

Then these men would act. Dissatisfied elements in the army had already promised their support. Before Russia knew what was happening, there would be a new ruler, a ruler answerable only to Carloff Traniv.

In every capital of the world similar groups were waiting for the zero hour. Terror and destruction were to strike simultaneously, all over the globe.

Southward, toward the antarctic, plowed the combined fleets of all nations. The battle-wagons were cleared for action. But they were miles from where action would occur.

A small fleet, consisting of the oldest destroyers and the weakest cruisers, was headed for the coast of Africa. According to the directions received from Doc Savage, it would be necessary to proceed for some distance up a river. That would take time. It would be at least twenty-two hours before this fleet came close enough to

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feel the power of Traniv's engines of destruction.

"I KNOW my audience will be interested in my explanations," Traniv said. His smile was queerly dead. "On this wall you see I have many levers such as this. Beside each lever is a place for headphones."

He paused, looked toward his audience, then back toward his victims. Doc Savage's expression did not change.

"Doc Savage, Major Roberts and Lieutenant Colonel Mayfair, you three in particular should appreciate this. I am afraid it is over a lawyer's head."

Despite the seriousness of the occasion, Monk chuckled. "The belts you wear, as you now doubtlessly know, are instruments of death," Traniv went on. "They also provide me with a method for listening in on my many agents in all parts of the world.

"Tiny radio transmitters are inside those belts. I can plug in on them, hear what is being said. But the belts also enable me to kill any one of my men, no matter how far he may be away, if I believe him disloyal.

"I will not trouble you with a complicated description of the method I use. Suffice to say that each belt is on a slightly different wave length. By sending the proper signal I can release a force that will kill only one particular man, not all.

"But the belts you wear are all on the same wave length. When I pull this lever, you will all die, die horribly."

Monk and Ham thought of the men they had seen cut in two on the transport plane, and gulped. Mary Standish's face was white, but showed no trace of fear. All was lost. The world was lost, she was lost. She knew it, but she would die bravely.

"A thoroughbred," Monk whispered.

Doc Savage showed no emotion at all. Death was only seconds away. With death would go all hope of preventing a conflict that would wipe out nations, destroying men, and leave those not destroyed under the power of Carloff Traniv.

The bronze man seemed without feeling. His back was straight, his head erect. His flake gold eyes looked straight before him.

Only his fingers moved, and those fingers were hidden from sight. In his palm were several small capsules.

Pecos Allbellin's face was white. For a moment he appeared almost frightened. His fingers moved nervously with the oversized cigar he held. He watched Carloff Traniv anxiously.

"Gentlemen and lady," Carloff Traniv said, bowing with mock courtesy, "you have afforded me much pleasure in life. Now you will afford me much more pleasure as you die."

His voice rose shrilly. "And now, damn you, Doc Savage, you are dead! I say so, Carloff Traniv, world emperor!"

His fingers yanked down the lever!

TERRIBLE yells smashed through the auditorium. Death struck!

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Traniv half turned to look at Pecos Allbellin. Pecos seemed paralyzed. His twitching fingers knocked off the end of the huge cigar he carried.

The next moment and there were two more terrific shrieks. One came from Carloff Traniv. One came from Pecos Allbellin. As the blank-faced men in the audience stared with uncomprehending eyes, Carloff Traniv melted away in several pieces.

He parted first in the middle, where the Sam Browne belt was strapped about him. Then his torso became two parts, where the belt went over his shoulder. Part of his legs disappeared.

Pecos Allbellin was in as many pieces.

In the front rows of the theater of death, where the gangsters had been seated, none were left alive. All had been sliced cleanly in two at the waist, as if by hot flame.

Listeners on the American coast noticed at that second that there was a change in the sound of the approaching planes. There was a reason for that.

Occupants of the "mother ships," those planes flying far above, directing the hundreds of flying machine guns, were dead.

They also had been burned in two at the middle. And as they died the "mother ships" dived into the sea. With them went the flocks they were guiding. The ocean opened up to receive the cargo of death that was never delivered.

In capitals throughout the world, small groups of conspirators suddenly became ex-conspirators. They could not plot when they were dead.

Morvan Zagor still held the pen in his hand. He had just started to sign the declaration of war. He never would sign that declaration now.

Of all those who had worn the belts of death, only six were alive. They stood alone on the stage in the theater of death.

Mary Standish, Doc Savage and his men, and Chemistry, were untouched.

## Chapter XX. PEACE

DOC SAVAGE was in Carloff Traniv's huge, perfectly equipped operating room. The bronze man had on the white robe and gauze mask of a surgeon. He held a scalpel in rubber-gloved hands.

Monk was operating the anesthetic. Mary Standish acted as nurse. Long Tom and Ham were bringing in patient after patient.

The patients were the blank-eyed soldiers.

Doc operated swiftly. Patient after patient was placed on the table, went under ether. Then the scalpel moved with sure, quick motions.

The patients were wheeled to waiting beds. Soon they would recover consciousness. And when they did, they

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would be normal. Doc was undoing all the harm that Doctor Koral had accomplished. He was bringing sanity and peace back to men who had been "perfect soldiers."

Mary Standish's eyes were alight with admiration. She had eyes only for Doc. Monk had eyes only for Mary Standish.

A blue-uniformed officer appeared at the door to the operating room, saluted smartly.

"Compliments of the admirals, Doc Savage," he said respectfully. "All have arrived. They are waiting to see you at your pleasure."

Doc stripped the rubber gloves from his hands, laid down the scalpel. His flake gold eyes were kindly. The work of a surgeon was one of the things he did that he enjoyed most.

He left the operating room with the officer.

Monk sighed, looked sheepishly toward Mary Standish. "I -- ah, would you like to take a walk with me?" he asked meekly.

Mary Standish's eyes twinkled, but she kept her face straight. "I'm sorry, Monk, I already have a date," she said demurely.

Monk's face fell. He shot a hard glance at Ham and Long Tom. They did not appear to be looking his way, although Ham's shoulders were shaking suspiciously.

The girl walked from the room. She did not glance back. Monk growled angrily, hesitated, then followed her. Ham and Long Tom did not seem interested.

At the door Monk stopped. A shriek of pent-up rage burst from him.

Halfway down the passageway, Mary Standish had halted. Beside her, his face spread in a grin that resembled that of Monk, was Chemistry. The ape offered his arm gravely. As gravely, the girl accepted. They walked away.

"Y-you-you planned that, you foppish dude of a dog-eared law book!" Monk squealed. He dashed angrily toward Ham.

Ham was laughing so hard that tears were streaming down his face. It was all he could do to get out of the way of Monk's berserk charge.

"W-well, she said she couldn't tell you apart!" he choked. "And I just suggested she go with the one she thought the most intelligent!"

THERE was no laughter aboard the big cruiser where the admirals had gathered. A dozen boats from as many navies were strung up and down the river. They completely hemmed in the disguised freighters Carloff Traniv had used to transport munitions to ports throughout the world.

Representatives of every sea-going nation sat at the big conference table. The place at the head of that table had been reserved for Doc Savage.

## THE MUNITIONS MASTER

"First we owe you our utmost apologies for misjudging you. Then we owe you the heartfelt thanks of the world for what you have done," said the grave-faced spokesman.

Doc Savage nodded, without speaking.

"You told us much by radio, but we would like to hear from you personally just what it was all about," the spokesman added.

Again Doc nodded. "It was the plot of a munitions master, the plot of a man who had once tasted dictatorship on a small scale, who desired to exercise that power over the entire world. That man was Pecos Allbellin," Doc said quietly.

"Allbellin! But I thought it was Traniv — " started one.

"So did Traniv," Doc Savage said calmly. "But Allbellin was the master mind. He was a step ahead of Traniv all the way. And at the end, Allbellin killed Traniv. Through his own hand — although he did not know it — he killed himself."

Doc did not point out that his enemies had a habit of doing that.

"If you will explain — "

"Allbellin put up the money. Traniv provided his inventive genius, and he did have a genius for perfecting means of horrible death. From papers I have studied in their offices, it seems they started this secret munitions factory soon after the World War," Doc explained.

"They found a ready market. There are always dissatisfied groups. Their business expanded, particularly in recent years where some nations have neutrality laws forbidding the export of arms, and in other countries the government itself controls the manufacture.

"Then they became ambitious. Allbellin decided to rule the world. As you gentlemen know, he almost succeeded."

Sober faces nodded in unison.

"And at the end?"

"Traniv had a particularly spectacular method of death — the burning death. He used it on the troops in Paris, on the Grenadier Guards in London, and elsewhere. It was spectacular, designed to arouse fear, but it was a trick that depended upon much groundwork.

"Through his chemists Traniv perfected a paste, which, when it came in contact with a certain type of gas, would burn instantly anything which it touched. In the case of the Paris troops this paste was placed on their boots when the men thought they were using shoe polish. A man carrying hollow loaves of bread released the necessary

The admirals nodded slowly.

"He used a similar method to kill his own men. The paste was already in the belts they wore. Also, there were capsules of gas. This gas could be released by a radio signal. The result was to burn the victim in two."

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"And he destroyed his own men? He made an error at the end?" one of the admirals asked excitedly.

"He destroyed his own men. Every plotter wore a belt, except the blank-minded soldiers. Every plotter died," Doc affirmed quietly.

The bronze man did not say how that had happened. He saw no reason to refer to the condenser he had placed on the radio antenna, a condenser that revolved when the antenna was used, spreading the killing waves over a wide band, instead of hitting only those for whom they were intended.

Nor did he mention his own work, the analyzing of a piece of leather taken from the fake gendarme he had overcome in Paris; the finding of the secret of the burning death, and of the antidote he had prepared — a gas that counteracted that which brought the burning gas, one he released from capsules as Traniv sought to kill him and his aids and Mary Standish.

"Doc Savage, world rescuer!" one of the admirals breathed.

Newspapers throughout the world were hailing the bronze man. He was receiving even more praise than he had received condemnation such a short time before.

Here and there were still a few disorders. These soon stopped. The principal conspirators were dead. And besides a stern message came to the world. It came from the combined fleets of all nations. It was signed by every admiral. The message stated:

There is no cause for war. We are patriots. But we are humanitarians first. If any one country attacks another, then our fleets will unite to wipe out the aggressor.

That brought world peace.

"BUT I still don't quite understand," Monk said plaintively. "We had belts on. Radio impulses released the gas in those belts. That was to kill us. But Traniv and Allbellin did not have on belts with trick gadgets inside."

"They were wearing leather, however," Doc explained mildly. "Doctor Koral, I think, probably rubbed the death paste on all the leather strappings he could find. Allbellin, I know, rubbed the paste on the belt worn by Traniv."

"And the gas?"

"Came from the big cigar Allbellin held in his hand," the bronze man said. Doc turned back toward the operating room. He still had work to do.

Bluejackets from warships were razing the plants of the munitions master.

Monk saw Mary Standish approaching. He hesitated, then got up his courage.

"Y—you know, I think I really like you," he piped. He tried to keep his voice firm. "If only you —"

"Monk," the girl said solemnly.

"Yes?" the hairy chemist blurted eagerly.

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"Doc Savage operated on me, you know," she said. "Perhaps that left me a little crazy."

Monk's eyes lighted. "You mean, then -- "

"But not that crazy," Mary Standish concluded.

In the distance, Ham and Long Tom chuckled delightedly.

But Monk did not chuckle. He was blushing. For Mary Standish may have meant her words. But the kiss she planted on the hairy chemist's lips more than took the sting from her jest.

THE END