

CHRISTOPHER COOL / TEEN AGENT

in

TRIAL BY FURY

By JACK LANCER

Adventure #6 in the Christopher Cool series



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CHRIS COOL, TEEN's brilliant secret agent, investigates international intrigue around the world

The final adventure of Christopher Cool, his accomplices and the TEEN agent organization run by Q with weapons and gadget supplied by Pomeroy.

The battle against the evil forces of TOAD, and international criminal organization

Trial by Fury

by JACK LANCER

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1. Death on a Tape

“My NAME IS Mei-ling Tan, ladies and gentlemen. I am your assigned guide. Any questions you have I will be glad to answer. Follow me, please.”

As members of the tour trailed along the corridor of the United Nations Building in Manhattan after the young Chinese girl, Chris Cool murmured to Geronimo Johnson, “This doll’s too pretty to be a dope smuggler.”

“She’s the one Yummi pointed out to me,” Geronimo replied.

Chris, a lean, blond sophomore at Kingston University in New Jersey, and Geronimo, his longhaired Apache roommate were giving an assist to their TEEN colleagues, Spice Carter and Yummi Toyama. The girls were on the trail of an international dope-smuggling ring, of which Mei-ling Tan was a suspected member. She knew Spice and Yummi by sight, hence the boys had been dragooned into surveillance duty.

TEEN—Top-secret Educational Espionage Network—was a corps of brilliant American students, hand-picked in an elite spy service unparalleled among the world’s cloak-and-dagger organizations.

Chris and Geronimo presently were paying more attention to their pretty guide than they were to the tour.

“We now approach the General Assembly, ladies and gentlemen,” Mei-ling Tan was saying. “French Premier Pierre Le Temps is scheduled to address the Assembly this afternoon.” She glanced at her wrist

watch. "He should be starting his speech any minute now."

At that moment a shot rang out from within the General Assembly Room. The door burst open and a small Oriental man in a dark business suit rushed into the corridor.

"Stop the assassin!" came a cry from inside the vast chamber.

As the fleeing figure darted past him, Chris reached out and grabbed his hand. Instantly the man swung toward him and the upraised sole of his foot rammed into Chris's right knee.

All TEEN agents were super expert in judo, karate, and aikido. The man, however, was so fast that he caught Chris by surprise. The blond youth's right foot shot out from under him, and he released his hold to break the fall by landing on his palms.

Geronimo instantly saw an opening. "Ai!" While the man's leg was elevated, the Apache kicked his other leg out from under him. The man carne down and Geronimo pinned him. To his surprise, he found no weapons on his prisoner.

In the seconds before security guards swarmed about them, Chris caught a brief glimpse of what looked like a small purple raven tattooed on the inside of the man's wrist.

The TEEN agent backed off when his watch suddenly turned hot. He drifted away from the crowd pressing about Geronimo and his captive. Unobserved, he lifted the watch close to his lips and whispered, "Kingston One."

From the tiny speaker the voice of TEEN Control

said in his usual fake British accent, “Q here. Tooeey with you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then both of you chaps hop. Signal is red.”

“Like a fire truck?” Chris asked.

“Four alarms.”

“Coming, Dad!”

Chris clicked off just as Geronimo came over. “How is it that you let me do all the dirty work?”

“Hot flash from Control. Who got shot?”

“Nobody. The little guy was trying for Premier Le Temps, but missed. What’d Q want?”

“Us. Right now.”

“Then *deeka, choonday!*” Geronimo said.

“Let’s go, buddy!”

They hurried out of the building and down the steps to First Avenue. Two sophisticated teen-age girls were standing at the bottom of the stairs.

One was Spice Carter, a beautiful redhead with emerald-green eyes. She was a student at

Vassar. The other, Yummi Toyama, was a delicately featured Japanese American from Berkeley with golden skin and black hair reaching to her waist.

“The tour can’t be over already,” Spice called out when she saw the boys.

“It was interrupted,” Geronimo replied. “Someone took a shot at the French premier.”

The girls looked startled.

“He’s okay,” Chris assured them.

“What about Mei-ling Tan?” Yummi asked.

“We’ll have to toss that problem back to you.

Sorry, but Q wants us on the double.” They hurried on and flagged down a taxi at the next corner.

The driver let them out in front of a foreign car agency on Broadway and Fifty-sixth Street. It bore the name *Luxury Motors*. Chris and Geronimo entered the service door, crossed the garage, and strode into an anteroom, where a girl with shoulder-length honey-colored hair sat behind a desk.

She smiled and pressed a button, whereupon a door across the room opened. The TEEN agents stepped into an elevator cage.

It rose to the top floor and stopped. A guard examined them through a bulletproof glass port before the elevator opened again. Then the boys walked along a carpeted corridor, past offices where typists and file clerks worked, past the steel-doored code room and the top-secret Special Projects laboratory, to a paneled door at the end of the hall.

An electronic eye activated a buzzer on the other side of the door. A green light flashed and it opened.

“Come in!” called a peevish voice. The owner sat behind a massive walnut desk with a built-in TV monitor screen. He was a man of early middle age, sporting a full, grayish-blond beard and sucking on an unlit pipe.

A navy-blue blazer, open-necked white shirt, and rumpled yachting cap gave him the appearance of a retired Royal Navy skipper, Hollywood style. A half-filled bottle of milk stood on the desk before him. There was always milk on Q’s desk. He had an ulcer.

“Big fuss at the General Assembly,” Chris began.

“A bigger fuss here.” Q shut him off. He switched on a tape recorder, took the pipe from his mouth, and swigged some milk. Chris and the Apache listened obediently.

The tape was of a courtroom trial. The voices were in English, but the accents were vaguely Oriental. The presiding judge spoke with a sibilant hiss, which for some reason sent cold chills along the TEEN agents’ spines.

The defendant in the trial was Harold Obie, the late, highly respected president of the new African nation of Angoruba. However, the defendant was not present to defend himself. He was being tried in absentia.

Q eyed his agents with a nod which indicated fantastic things to come. They came. A prosecutor recited a long list of “crimes against humanity” which President Obie was alleged to have committed.

A defense counsel presented what was obviously merely a token defense. A jury was charged, and promptly found the defendant guilty.

The whole thing was so cut and dried it took no longer than ten minutes. Chris muttered, “This can’t be for real!”

As if to answer him, the sibilant voice hissed, “Harold Obie, you have been tried and found guilty by a jury of your peers of crimes against humanity. I hereby sentence you, in absentia, to death.”

Q leaned forward to click off the machine.

“This was airtailed to Cloak and Dagger from Angoruba.” Cloak and Dagger was Q’s standard term for the CIA.

“By whom?” Chris inquired.

“The vice president—or rather the president now, since Obie’s death. He received it through the mail from an anonymous source one day before President Obie died last week.”

“You mean,” said Geronimo, “his death was not a heart attack, as the press reported?”

“After playing this tape, the new president ordered an autopsy,” Q said grimly. “Obie was poisoned.”

“By an avenging spirit,” Chris muttered, “and with a phony jury.” He recalled his classical mythology. “By a Fury,” he said. “Trial by Fury!”

“An insane Fury,” Geronimo added.

“You think all the blokes on this tape are insane?” Q asked. “There must be a dozen voices on it. And on this one, too.” He reached into his desk drawer and produced another recording. “This was flown in from Paris no more than an hour ago.”

He rewound the tape on the machine, removed it, and inserted the second one. Again it was the recording of a trial, with the same judge on the bench. Again the verdict, in absentia, was death. The only real difference was the defendant.

In this case it was the French Premier Pierre Le Temps!

The TEEN mentor shut off the machine. “Naturally I warned the French ambassador,” he said.

“Just before I radioed you chaps.”

“You were a little late,” Chris replied dryly.

“The fuss at the General Assembly was caused by a would-be assassin taking a shot at Le Temps.”

Q paled slightly. He took another swig. “I hope I heard you right. A would-be-assassin?”

“Yes, sir. He missed.” Chris related all that he and Geronimo knew about the incident. He ended by saying, “The assailant looked Oriental to me.

Perhaps Indonesian. Wouldn’t you say, Gerry?”

The Apache nodded stoically.

“That should help identify him,” Q said. “I’ll phone the police in a minute to see if they’ve had any luck at it. Are you lads finished with all your exams at Kingston?”

“Affirmative, sir.”

“Good. Leaves you free for this. Cloak and Dagger has tossed it in TEEN’s lap, and you two have the job of tracking down this madman.”

Chris broke in. “But, sir, law is not our specialty.”

“It is now.”

Geronimo regarded Chris with level obsidian eyes and remained silent. It’s a sticky wicket,” Q went on. “If Russian or Chinese leaders happen to get killed before you wrap it up, the Communist chaps may decide the United States is behind this lunacy, push the button, and blow everybody up.”

Geronimo nodded and Chris said, “We understand.”

Q picked up his desk phone and called the New York City police. After a short conversation he hung up, gulped down the rest of the milk in the bottle, and patted the spilled droplets from his beard with a handkerchief.

“Bad news?” Geronimo asked.

“Rather. First, the man you caught at the General Assembly turned out to be a woman!”

“Whew! What a tiger!” Chris exclaimed.

“Second, there was no sign of a tattoo on her wrist. Third, while waiting for the FBI to come pick her up, she was placed in the custody of two police matrons and—”

“Don’t tell me,” Chris interrupted.

“You guessed it,” Q said. “She kayoed both of them and escaped.”

“Great!” Chris murmured.

“One more thing,” Q went on. “The weapon was found quite a distance from where she was sitting.”

Chris looked disgusted. “In other words, she was only a decoy!” he said.

Q stood up. “Under the circumstances, this seems to be a good assumption.”

2. Bahasa Sasak

Q SAID THAT an all points bulletin was out for the escaped woman. “By the way,” he added, “the pistol used was a 25-caliber automatic of Japanese make. Its serial number had been filed off.”

“That figures,” Chris murmured.

“There’s no clue whatsoever to the person who fired the shot,” Q went on, “and I have a hunch we’ll never catch up with the girl.” He waved a hand as if to clear away the trivia. “Maybe we can get some kind of clue by listening to these tapes again. Shall we have a go at it?”

The boys nodded and he replayed both recordings. When he shut the machine off, he looked inquiringly at his agents. Both spoke a number of languages. But Chris, the genius in the field, was a master of Asian dialects.

“What do you think, Kingston One?” Q asked. “The accent of the man with the hiss sounds southeast Chinese,” Chris replied.

Geronimo broke his silence. “On that first tape I heard background conversation. Will you replay it, sir, with the volume up?”

Q complied, and for the third time Harold Obie was condemned to death. At several pauses in the courtroom procedure, the background conversation came through quite clearly. It was in some kind of Oriental dialect which neither Chris nor Geronimo recognized.

The Apache said, “Old Okey Doak could tab it.”

“Roger,” Chris agreed with a grin.

Professor Lawrence Doak, affectionately known to his students as Okey, held the Kingston University Chair of Oriental Languages. Chris and Geronimo had studied Chinese under him. Doak was an internationally known authority on dialects of the Far East.

A phone call to the university elicited the information that Professor Doak was visiting his brother John in Montclair, New Jersey, for the weekend. Another call to the brother’s home put them in touch with the professor. When Chris explained that they would like his opinion on a certain dialect, Professor Doak cordially invited them to drive over.

The boys had been using taxis to get around Manhattan because Chris had left his Jaguar in the downstairs garage for servicing that morning. When they took the elevator down from TEEN headquarters, they discovered it was ready.

The bullet like, gleaming black car had bucket seats and was equipped with a 4.2 liter engine which idled as silently as a Swiss watch, but roared with power when the gas was poured on.

They reached Montclair at four P.M. The house where Professor Doak’s brother lived was an old-fashioned brick building on a quiet street. The professor was a casual man with crew-cut gray hair and a deliberate manner of speaking. He led his two star students upstairs into a study where they would be uninterrupted.

Chris placed the tape recorder he had brought on the desk and explained that he and Geronimo had a wager about the dialect in the background

conversation. “You needn’t pay any attention to the English,” he said, and played only those portions on which the Oriental language could be heard.

The professor identified the dialect instantly. “That is Bahasa sasak,” he said, when Chris switched off the machine. “It’s spoken on some of the Lesser Sunda Islands of Indonesia. I was there last summer with my brother-in-law, Professor Orel Cyphers.”

“The zoologist?” Geronimo asked.

“Yes. Professor Cyphers was studying the habits of the Komodo Dragon on the island of Komodo”

“The Komodo Dragon?” Chris asked. “What’s that?”

Professor Doak seemed pleased to find an unfilled niche in Chris Cool’s vast body of knowledge. He immediately went into a long-drawn-out lecture about the Komodo Dragon. Both boys listened politely, but inwardly chafed at the delay in reporting their hot clue to Q.

“The Komodo Dragon, or the *Varanus komodoensis*, as it is known to zoologists,” Professor Doak droned in measured words, “is the largest lizard in the world. It grows to an average length of twelve feet, and inspired an ancient Chinese artist to paint what is now the traditional dragon of China. It has a huge red mouth lined with saw-edged teeth and attacks its prey with the viciousness that dinosaurs must have had in prehistoric times.”

Chris moved to leave but the professor went on. “It can gulp the whole hindquarters of a wild boar, bones and all, in one bite. The Komodo Dragon has a long tail covered with dull-colored, rough scales. It digs caves with its strong claws.” When Doak paused for

breath, Chris picked up the tape recorder and said hurriedly, "Well, thank you very much, sir. We won't keep you from your brother and his family any longer."

"Eh?" the professor said. "Oh, yes, of course." He took out an old-fashioned pocket watch and looked at it "My sister-in-law serves dinner quite early, and it is pushing five. Can you boys stay and join us?"

The TEEN agents politely declined and broke away. Back in the Jag, Chris reached under the dash and drew out a radiotelephone.

"Kingston One to Q."

After a short pause, "Q here."

When Chris explained what they had learned, Q said, "plan to *fly* to Indonesia tomorrow. I will make all travel arrangements. Report here at nine A.M. for briefing and outfitting by Pomeroy."

"Yes, sir." Instead of hanging up, Chris pressed the selector switch on the dash and said, "Kingston One to Vassar One."

After a moment Spice Carter replied.

"Hi. What are you girls doing tonight?" Chris asked.

"Still tailing the suspect you tossed back at us."

"Think you could combine it with a farewell dinner? Kingston Two and I head for Indonesia tomorrow."

"We'd love it," Spice said promptly. "Only you'll have to let us pick the restaurant We over heard our suspect tell someone where she was going to dine tonight"

"Will do. Where and when shall we pick you up?"

“How about six in front of the UN building?”

Chris glanced at his watch. “We’ll try, but it’s the heavy traffic hour and we’re in New Jersey. Our apologies in advance if we’re late.”

“We’ll wait a reasonable time,” Spice told him.

Chris’s guess that they might be delayed proved correct. They crawled through the Lincoln Tunnel at five miles an hour with maddening waits between snaillike advances.

Chris was driving in the right lane. Halfway through, a red convertible swung illegally in front of the Jag. Chris slammed on the brakes to let it in and avoid a collision.

“Stupid paleface!” Geronimo yelled.

The line came to a halt again. The driver turned to glare back at them. He was a burly, yellow-haired man in his mid-twenties.

“Who you calling stupid, Sitting Bull?”

The Indian was out of the Jag and nose to nose with the man ahead before Chris could stop him. The Apache examined the driver’s yellow hair with malevolent interest.

“My ancestor, Sitting Bull, took a yellow scalp like yours from another stupid paleface named George Armstrong Custer. An ancestor of yours, maybe?”

After studying the expression in Geronimo’s eyes, the burly man’s face turned as yellow as his hair.

“Aw, I was only kidding,” he muttered.

“Then so was I,” Geronimo said tonelessly and returned to the Jag.

“How you fib!” Chris chuckled. “Sitting Bull was a Sioux.”

Geronimo managed a thin grin. “All Indians look alike to most palefaces.”

At the first opportunity the convertible turned into the other lane.

It was nearly seven by the time they reached the United Nations Building, but they found Spice and Yummi patiently waiting. When they squeezed into the car, the redheaded Spice said, “Do you know where the Komodo Dragon is?”

Both Chris and Geronimo gave her startled looks.

“Did I say a bad word?” Spice asked innocently. “It’s only a restaurant in Chinatown. Mei-ling Tan is supposed to be there about eight.”

“Oh,” Chris said. “We’ll find it.”

It was after dark when they got to the Komodo Dragon restaurant. It was a small place with individual booths screened from each other by curtains made from strips of bamboo. They were suspended vertically from the ceiling, with the ends of the strips hanging loose over the backs of the seats. Chris and Spice sat together on one side, Geronimo and Yummi on the other.

As a Chinese waiter took their orders, Chris put his hand in his left coat pocket and felt something strange there. He drew out a small key chain with an ivory charm attached to it.

“Where did this come from?” he inquired. “Did you plant it on me, redskin?”

“Not me,” Geronimo replied.

The Chinese waiter's eyes glittered at the charm. "Excuse, please," he said. "Be right back."

As he walked away and disappeared, Yummi said, "What a cute charm. It's a baby elephant."

Then the lights went out. The hanging bamboo strips behind Chris and Spice rattled as they were pushed aside.

An arm went around Chris's throat from behind and the elephant key chain was torn from his hand!

3. Here Comes the Judge

THE ASSAULT ENDED as abruptly as it had begun. The pressure on Chris's throat relaxed and the arm was withdrawn.

Chris half rose to his feet, swung around with his knees on the booth seat, and drove his fist through the bamboo curtain. Nothing but emptiness!

Then Geronimo's voice came out of the darkness. "*Naha'ashla?* What's up?"

As he spoke, the lights flickered back on, and Chris gave a quick glance around. No one was near their booth. Their waiter was halfway between them and the kitchen door, heading their way with a teapot in his hands.

Spice said brightly, "Why, Chris, are you on your knees to me?"

Chris turned around and slid back down into his seat. "Somebody got a stranglehold on me and grabbed that elephant charm," he said grimly.

As Geronimo, Spice, and Yummi stared in surprise, the waiter set down the teapot. Chris asked him, "Who was in that booth behind us?"

The man glanced up, then replied impassively, "Was vacant, sir. Velly solly about lights. Fuse blow in kitchen."

Spice started to say indignantly, "Somebody stole—" but broke off when Chris lightly kicked her foot.

"You finish order now, please?" the waiter said.

When he had moved off again, Spice asked, "Why

didn't you want me to tell him you were robbed?"

"Because he either did it or set it up, and I don't want him to know we think that charm is important. It just hit me where I must have gotten it."

"Where?" Yummi asked.

"From the woman we caught at the General Assembly. She must have dropped it into my pocket when we grabbed her. Remember the worry beads in *Mission: Moonfire*, Gerry?"

The Apache nodded. "They were really pills to give extra nerve and super power."

"Right. She had both. Maybe the charm contained a similar drug."

"We know Mei-ling Tan is dealing in some kind of drug," Yummi remarked. "If we get a chance, we'll search her purse to see if she carries an elephant key ring."

"We'd better arrange with Q to have this place staked out, too," Spice added.

The pretty little Chinese UN guide did not show up. The four waited more than two hours, then gave up and left the restaurant.

Promptly at nine the next morning Chris and Geronimo entered Q's office. Before either could speak, Q said peevishly, "Deuced clumsy of you, Cool, losing that elephant charm."

"Oh, the girls have already reported in?" Chris asked.

"Yes. I put that restaurant under surveillance. But last night was a bad show. Charm might have been an important clue."

“Sorry, sir.”

Q made a dismissing gesture. “Over the dam.”

He handed each a plane-ticket envelope and gave Chris a typewritten sheet in addition. “Here are your tickets and full instructions. When you have memorized the instructions, destroy that sheet.”

They both said, “Yes, sir.”

Outside the office the agents looked at the tickets and read the typed sheet. They were to fly from Kennedy Airport to San Francisco; from there to Honolulu, then to Djakarta on the island of Java. There they were to contact a street vendor named Lim Sindhu in the Chinese Goldok section.

When both had memorized everything on the typed sheet, they burned it, leaving the ashes in a cigarette urn standing in the corridor.

Next they stopped by to see Pomeroy. The fussy baldheaded little genius was chief of TEEN’s technical staff, sometimes called the Department of Dirty Tricks.

Pomeroy received them in his laboratory with professional indifference. After a perfunctory greeting he quickly demonstrated two new gadgets he had just invented.

One was a pin which shot a dart so small, it would attract no more attention than a mosquito bite. Yet it contained a minute listening device through which sounds could be picked up on a collar-button receiver. The other gadget appeared to be an ordinary pencil.

“This is a new type of stun gun,” he explained. “I developed it specifically for getting past sentries. You may need it on this assignment.”

“How does it operate?” Chris asked.

Pomeroy fingered the harmless-looking device. “When you press this eraser—”

There was a clicking sound. “Oh, my!” Pomeroy said. “That hair trigger is too sensitive. I’ll have to adjust it.”

Chris noticed Geronimo staring sightlessly straight ahead. “Hey! That thing hit Gerry!”

“Won’t hurt him,” Pomeroy replied matter-of-factly. “Merely renders a person helpless and memoryless for thirty seconds or so. Don’t worry. He won’t fall down.”

Half a minute later the Apache snapped out of it, unaware that he had been unconscious. By then the lab chief had adjusted the hair trigger.

“Sorry about that,” he told Geronimo.

“Sorry? For what?”

Pomeroy explained. Then he checked over their regular equipment, including their sleepy-sliver pens, rocket-hopper shoes, behind-the-ear explosion tape, nostril gas masks and poison antidote kits, which were concealed under their lapels. He also examined their collar-button pickup microphones and Little Cupid heartbeat detectors. Everything was in working order.

“Good-by and good luck,” the little man said. Suddenly he stared as if stricken by a sorcerer’s spell.

“Gerry! You didn’t do that to poor old Pomeroy!” Chris said.

“Why not? Wanted to see if it worked. I check out all my new stuff.” Geronimo glanced at his finger-ring

detonator that could blow his head off.

“For heaven’s sake!” Chris muttered in mock horror as Pomeroy came to. Then they waved good-by and left.

The flight to Hawaii was uneventful. In Honolulu they caught a plane on Sunday at one o’clock in the morning which would take them via Sydney, Australia, to Djakarta.

Two people on the flight enlivened their trip. One was a plump, jolly woman of middle age who nestled close to the window in their three seat row. Chris sat next to her and Geronimo was on the aisle.

Chris noticed that the woman carried a huge knitting bag. Shortly after take-off he felt something cold and wet press against his hand. Glancing down, he saw that it was the nose of a tiny Chihuahua dog. At his chuckle, the woman looked, too, then pushed her pet’s head back inside the bag.

She rolled her eyes. “Don’t give me away,” she said in a conspiratorial whisper. “I’ve carried little Tequila like this all the way from Texas!”

“I’ll never tell,” Chris assured her with a grin. The second pleasant surprise was also south west in nature. One of the stewardesses was an exceptionally pretty, copper-skinned black-haired girl. Geronimo regarded her thoughtfully. When she came lightly across the aisle for the second time, he said, “*Hondaal, shikis,*” Apache for “Hi, friend.”

The girl stopped cold and gazed at him with delight. Then she poured out a stream of Apache. Roughly translated, she asked who Geronimo was, from what reservation, and what he was doing in this part of the

world.

The usually reticent Indian suddenly turned as glib as a used-car salesman, much to the amusement of Chris. He introduced himself, said he was from the Mescalero Indian Agency, skirted her question about what he was doing en route to Java and presented Chris. The girl was amazed to discover that Chris spoke Apache fluently, too. She gave her name as Running Fawn Smith.

For some time the three bemused the other passengers by carrying on a liquid conversation in Apache. Then the stewardess, realizing that some people wanted to sleep, reluctantly broke it off saying she would talk to them again in the morning.

“Boy, that squaw surely turned you on.” Chris chuckled.

Geronimo grinned sheepishly.

The other stewardess serving them was the opposite of Running Fawn. She was a still-faced, unsmiling Indonesian girl. After making one tour of her section of the plane to see if her passengers were comfortable, she settled herself in the last aisle seat on the opposite side of the plane.

Suddenly Geronimo took out his rear-view sunglasses and put them on. Chris gave him an inquiring look.

Geronimo whispered in Apache, “I thought so. That other stewardess is watching us like a hawk.”

“Maybe she just thinks you’re handsome.”

Chris suggested. “She must need glasses.”

Geronimo grunted. “Running Fawn will keep an eye

on us. Let's get some sleep."

They were awakened about seven by Running Fawn's voice inquiring if a passenger in the seat ahead would like breakfast. Then the Indonesian girl asked the same question of Chris and Geronimo.

"Yes, please," Chris replied.

The stewardess looked at the plump woman by the window, who still slept, and decided not to wake her up.

Then she brought them two half cantaloupes. Chris was about to spoon into his when he spotted minute crystals sprinkled over the fruit. "*Itse!*" he warned Geronimo. "Watch it!"

The Indian paused with a spoonful halfway to his mouth, then lowered it again. Chris got some of the crystals on the end of his finger, nudged the knitting bag in the woman's lap, and held it up when Tequila's head popped out.

The dog licked at the finger. Suddenly her large brown eyes glazed over and her head slid back into the bag.

Quickly Chris reached into the bag with one hand to pull the dog's head out again. With the other he grabbed an antidote ampule from behind his lapel and quickly administered it. In a few seconds Tequila's ears perked up and she tried to lick Chris's finger again. Patting her head, he pushed the dog back into the knitting bag.

After a short discussion in Apache, the boys decided to wait until they had landed before doing anything about the attempted poisoning. Obviously an enemy was on their trail.

“Here comes the judge,” Geronimo said flatly. “We got the verdict.”

“Let’s teach our girl friend a lesson,” Chris said. “I have an idea.” He scraped his cantaloupe to the rind, putting the garbage in one of the bags tucked in the seat ahead.

Geronimo nodded approvingly and followed his example.

When the stewardess returned, Chris politely told her they didn’t want any more breakfast. she lingered a moment to look at them closely before hastening off.

“I would say she’s confused,” Chris said. Geronimo just grinned.

Because they crossed the International Date Line, it was past noon on Monday when the plane landed in Djakarta.

Chris and Geronimo deliberately waited until all other passengers had alighted by pretending to search for something under their seats. The two stewardesses were at the front of the plane, bidding the passengers good-by. The Indonesian girl glanced their way, then came back.

“May I help you?” she asked.

Geronimo slipped past her to block Running Fawn’s view of what was going on. Chris pulled out his stun gun. *Phfft*. As her eyes turned sightless, he took both hands and turned them upward to examine the insides of her wrists.

There was no tattoo on either!

But the girl wobbled slightly and Chris grabbed her wrists to steady her. When she seemed to be properly

balanced again, he released them.

To his amazement, on her right wrist there was now the tattoo of a purple raven!

4. The Grapevine Design

EVEN AS CHRIS looked at the tattoo, it began to fade. He suddenly realized that the heat of his palm had brought it out. A clever form of identification, he thought, now understanding why the New York police had found no mark on the decoy at the UN.

The stewardess emerged from her trance. As though she had just asked “May I help you?” Chris said, “Thank you, but we just found the coin I dropped.”

He and Geronimo went forward to leave the plane. As they passed Running Fawn, she smiled. “I noticed you didn’t have lunch on the plane. Are you going to eat in the airport terminal?”

“We’d better,” Chris said. “When I touch my stomach, I can feel my backbone.”

“I know what you mean. I haven’t eaten either.” “Good,” Gerry said. “Meet us in the restaurant.”

The TEEN agents decided not to claim their baggage until after lunch. They waited in the restaurant for twenty minutes before Running Fawn hastened in.

“Sorry to keep you waiting so long,” she said. “But I’ve been in the office answering questions.

Remember that Indonesian girl? She was a fake!” “Oh?” Chris said in polite surprise.

“A wire came from Honolulu that the real stewardess was found drugged,” Running Fawn went on excitedly. “That Indonesian girl took her place. She told me that the regular stewardess was ill.”

“Have they arrested her?” Chris asked.

“They tried to, but she karate’d two airport police and escaped!”

Chris and Geronimo shook their heads in disbelief. Girls with raven tattoos seemed hard to hold.

After a delightful snack, during which the two Apaches brought each other up to date on tribal scuttlebutt, the boys got their luggage and took a taxi to a hotel.

On the way they studied Djakarta, with its teeming three million inhabitants struggling to cast off ancient ways and make their city into a modern metropolis. It was a potpourri of shop stalls, eastern architecture, modern housing developments, towering office buildings and high-rise apartments.

It seemed that everybody was on the move. The streets were jammed with cars, bicycles, and three-wheeled pedicabs. Sidewalks were crowded with pedestrians. In addition sampans and outrigger canoes moved along sluggish canals whose odors indicated they were also used as sewers.

The taxi took them to a hotel just off Freedom Square. As soon as the boys had checked in, they engaged a couple of *betjaks*, three-wheeled pedicabs, to take them to the Chinese Goldok section—Djakarta’s Chinatown.

The streets here were lined with *tukangs*, or street vendors, stridently calling out their wares, which varied from fish to porcelain.

Chris and Geronimo had little trouble locating their contact, Lim Sindhu, because the CIA agent was an Indonesian and taller than most of the Chinese vendors. His specialty was herbs, and his cart was one

of the busiest.

The young spies dismissed their *betjaks* and wandered over to inspect the array of herbs.

“Have you fresh anise?” Chris asked.

The tall Indonesian glanced at him. “Anise is not an eastern herb.”

Geronimo said, “They have it in East Orange, New Jersey!”

Lim Sindhu smiled slowly after the exchange of passwords. In a low voice he said, “Middle of next block you will see a vegetable stall to your right. Go through the curtained door at its back and I will be along soon. Pay no attention to the old one.”

Nodding, they started to move on. A whisper from Lim Sindhu drifted after them. “I think you are being followed.”

Neither looked back, but both adjusted their rear-view sunglasses.

“The fake stewardess,” Geronimo said tonelessly. “Out of uniform.”

Chris unobtrusively moved his head back and forth until he picked her up in his mirror. The girl had changed her stewardess suit for a skirt and Oriental jacket with a grape-and-tendrils design.

At that moment a pair of empty *betjaks* headed toward them. Signaling them to stop, the boys swung into the seats.

“*Chop-chop*,” Chris commanded. Both drivers loudly rang their bells and began to pump furiously.

The shadow looked desperately for another *betjak*.

None was in sight. She stood, undecided, as Chris and Geronimo disappeared down the teeming street.

In Chinese, Chris ordered his driver to turn left at the herb stand and circle the block. Then the two jumped out and paid their fare.

Cautiously they approached a corner building and peered around it. The woman was gone. A few moments later they went by a toothless old crone presiding over an open-front vegetable stall and pushed through a curtained doorway at its rear.

They suddenly found themselves in a large room beautifully furnished in Oriental style and with silken drapes covering the walls.

“Quite a pad,” Chris said, and sank cross-legged on a soft leather cushion to wait. Geronimo stayed beside the doorway.

After a time Lim Sindhu came in. “Kingston One and Two, pleased to meet you. I see you shook the woman.”

“Where did she go?” Chris asked.

“Nowhere. She’s still hanging around the corner where my stand is, hoping you will reappear.”

Lim prepared some tea, which he served in exquisite china cups. Between sips the boys explained their mission.

“So we’ll have to find this death judge before he has any more heads of state assassinated,” Chris summed up. “Can you help us?”

“I will try,” the CIA man assured them. “Do you have any idea how that woman got on your trail?”

“Probably followed US from the United States.”

Chris surmised. “Maybe ever since we left the Komodo Dragon restaurant.”

“The Komodo Dragon?” Lim asked.

Chris explained how the elephant-charm key ring had been wrested from him in the dark there.

“Hm!” Lim mused. “I heard the words *Komodo Dragon* in a conversation between two men recently whom I suspect to be pushing dope. I wonder if they have any special significance.”

“I’ll buy that,” Geronimo said. “Have any ideas?”

“It might be interesting to see how your feminine friend would react if those words were whispered in her ear.”

The Indian looked impassive. “You have a devious heart after my own heart, Lim. I’ll do the whispering.”

Their plan was simple. Lim returned to his vending stand. Chris waited until Geronimo had time to circle the block and secrete himself in a doorway. Then Chris emerged and casually sauntered down the street.

The Indonesian girl was pretending to examine some porcelain dishes at a stand near Lim’s as Chris passed. He put on his rear-view glasses and noticed that she followed him. Behind her, Geronimo rounded the corner and fell in line.

Chris stopped to inspect the wares of a fish monger. The woman halted too. Geronimo moved up behind her like a ghost, bent forward, and whispered in her ear.

The girl gave a start and leaped as if she had put her finger in an electric socket. Whirling, she shouted at

someone behind Geronimo, “Kill him!”

Chris spun around. “*Iltse, choonday!*”

“*Ai!*” The Apache jumped to one side just as a thin, narrow-faced Chinese in a black suit fired a pistol. The girl staggered as the bullet caught her in the shoulder.

The gunman turned and ran, zigzagging through the dense crowd and disappearing around the corner. Clutching her shoulder, the girl leaped onto a *betjak*, whose driver had stopped to gape. “*Chop-chop!*” she hissed.

The man sounded his bell and took off at full speed. The boys raced after her, but she escaped in the snarled traffic.

Chris stopped. “Are you all right, Gerry?”

“Sure. I’m sorry the girl had to take the slug.”

“A shooting sure doesn’t cause much excitement around here, does it?” Chris mused and surveyed the indifferent crowd.

Geronimo nodded. “Well, our shadow really reacted when I whispered in her ear.”

“Komodo Dragon is a key term,” Chris agreed.

“Maybe it’s the password for the dope ring operating through the UN. It might even be a person.”

“Sure could be.”

“We’d better visit the island of Komodo,” Chris suggested, “and find out if those words have a special meaning there, aside from the big lizard.”

“That might be a good idea,” Geronimo agreed. “Lim Sindhu can follow it up on this end, meanwhile.”

They contacted Lim and told him of their plan. They would fly to Denpasar on the island of Bali and then go on from there. The only Tuesday flight was at eight-thirty in the morning. Chris made reservations.

Sindhu appeared at their hotel in time to take them to the airport in an ancient sedan. He proved to be a skillful driver, although, like the other natives, he relied heavily on his horn.

Finally he pulled into one of the airport parking areas. As they lifted their luggage from the car trunk, Lim suddenly shouted, "Watch out!"

The TEEN agents instinctively dropped to the ground as a pistol cracked and a slug whistled overhead. Geronimo jerked his sleepy-sliver pen from his pocket as he fell and pointed it at a black-clad figure behind him.

Phfft! The gun fell from the assailant's hand as he collapsed. It was the same narrow-faced Chinese who had fired at Geronimo the day before!

5. Hot Mud

AS CHRIS, GERONIMO, and Lim Sindhu picked themselves up, the CIA agent said tersely, "I'll take care of your attacker. You go catch your plane!"

"Okay," Chris replied. "See you later."

They took their suitcases and hurried into the terminal building, constantly on their guard in case they were being followed. They did not relax their vigil until the plane was airborne. Even then, they carefully studied the other passengers, but finally decided none was tailing them.

The flight to Denpasar took three hours. The plane landed at Tuban Airport, on a little peninsula south of the city. Chris and Geronimo took a taxi into town.

"So this is Bali," Chris thought. "Really enchanting."

The air was soft and sweet and the temperature pleasant. Along the roadside lovely young bronze-colored maidens and bright-eyed, healthy looking children waved to them. Farmers in loincloths and broad, round straw hats tilled rice fields with ancient plows drawn by water buffalo. The taxi crossed numerous clear streams and narrow canals.

"We ought to send a postcard to Spice and Yummi," Chris said. "Wish you were here."

Geronimo gazed at the distant mountains coming into view. "Running Fawn is my dish," he uttered.

The driver turned his head and pointed out one towering peak barely visible on the horizon. It was the sacred volcano, Mount Agung, he told them, more than ten thousand feet high. In 1963 it had erupted

killing fifteen thousand persons.

However, it was thirty miles away, he added, and even during the great eruption Denpasar had only been sprinkled with a little volcanic ash.

Chris and Geronimo checked into the Bali Hotel, had lunch there, then made a tour of the town. Denpasar was a welcome change from the hectic clamor of Djakarta. It was a serene little city of about seventeen thousand, full of laughing, happy people going about their business at a leisurely pace. Open-air refreshment stands and tobacco shops tended by women in sarongs dotted the streets.

Their casual inquiries regarding the Komodo Dragon brought no results, however, and they decided to leave Bali the next morning.

That evening after dinner at the hotel Chris and Geronimo learned that there would be a program of dancing and *gamelan* music. They bought tickets.

Gamelan, Chris knew, was a Balinese orchestra, consisting chiefly of percussion instruments drums, cymbals, and beautifully carved xylophones. The musicians, all men, wore dark-red skirts and were bare-chested.

The six dancers were young girls. They wore golden headdresses atop glossy black hair and their bodies were tightly wrapped in cloth of gold and green and scarlet.

Geronimo nudged his partner and nodded toward the most beautiful of the girls. "Dig that one," he said. The girl looked older than the others, and had a grape-and-tendrill design on her dress.

"Note that grapevine pattern. Same as the fake

stewardess was wearing when she followed us yesterday,” Chris said. “Maybe they belong to the same sorority. Keep this one in your scope.”

The dances were highly stylized, with elaborate hand movements which told folk tales. As the little bodies gyrated, Geronimo whispered to Chris, “We follow grapevine?”

“Right. When this is over, let’s see where she goes.”

“Suppose in a car?”

“I’ll be right back.” Chris quietly got up and left the room.

When he returned fifteen minutes later, Geronimo gave him an inquiring look.

“Rented a Volkswagen,” Chris whispered. “It’s parked behind the hotel near the employees’ entrance.”

The dancers completed their final number about ten P.M. Amid the clapping, the TEEN agents hurried to where the car was parked.

About ten minutes later the dancing girls, minus their elaborate headdresses and wearing sarongs, began to emerge through the employees’ entrance. The beautiful one came out in a white sarong with the same grape-and-tendrill design. She paused beneath a light over the door and peered toward the street.

Chris and Geronimo waited in the shadows until a small coupe stopped just ahead of them. The dancer ran toward it and opened the door.

The girl driver, whom they could not distinguish, said in Chinese, “Hurry, Delimar. The meeting is in half an hour and we have thirty miles to go.”

“I couldn’t leave in the middle of a dance.”

Delimar replied pettishly as she climbed into the coupe. The car drove off. Chris gave it a half block lead and followed in the Volkswagen.

They drove out of town toward the mountains at a high rate of speed. There was almost no traffic and Chris switched off his lights to keep their presence unknown. Although there was no moon, the sky was so clear that the boys could see the road perfectly by starlight. On the few occasions where headlights appeared from the opposite direction, Chris simply pulled over and waited until the car went past, then speeded up until he spotted the coupe again.

Thirty miles from the city they came to a small native village of thatch-and-bamboo huts situated at the base of a tall mountain. When Chris saw the car ahead stop and its lights go out, he parked at the edge of the village.

“Now Apache warrior stalk the grapevine,” he said and Geronimo stepped ahead of him. A glow of red dimly lighted the sky at the peak of the mountain. Gazing up at it, Chris said, “Must be the sacred volcano, Mount Agung.”

“Ugh,” Geronimo grunted. “Hope-um fire god no go on rampage.”

A quick surveillance showed there were only a dozen huts in the village. Quietly the TEEN agents moved toward the one where the coupe was parked. Like the others, it was of bamboo with a thatched roof, but somewhat larger than the rest.

“Look,” Geronimo said, peering through the darkness. “Three more cars.” All were standing on the

side of the road in front of the coupe.

The boys crouched low. Fifty feet from the hut they dropped to the ground. A woman sentry was pacing up and down in front of the door.

“What now?” Geronimo asked in a low tone.

“Pomeroy’s new eavesdropper,” Chris replied and pulled out the device. He shot a dart at a curtained window. It sailed through and into the hut. Chris pressed the button on the back of his Ivy League collar, activating the minuscule receiver. Geronimo did the same. Immediately they began to hear conversation in Chinese.

“Must be the local women’s club,” Geronimo said as they listened to the babel of high-pitched female voices. They strained their ears to make something of the deluge of singsong words.

Finally a break came. The leader of the group shrilled for order. Then she said slowly and with knife-edged finality, “It will be done, by order of the Komodo Dragon.”

That ended the hectic discussion.

“So the Dragon’s a person after all,” Geronimo whispered. “The death judge, eh?”

Chris did not reply because his attention was diverted by a light shower of gravel which began to fall on them. Pushing themselves to their elbows, they caught some in the palms of their hands and examined it by starlight. The pieces were small and salt-and-pepper colored.

“Must be from the volcano,” Chris said.

Suddenly there was a thunderous roar and the

ground shook. Immediately the whole area was illuminated by a bright-red glow. Looking upward, they saw flames spurting hundreds of feet into the air from the crater of Mount Agung. Glowing molten lava spilled over the side and began to seep down the mountain.

“Fire god not like Apache!” Geronimo grunted.

As the boys jumped to their feet, they saw figures stream from every hut in the village. Six girls ran from the building where the meeting had been held. By the red glow from the volcano the TEEN agents could see that all wore sarongs bearing the grape-and-tendrill design.

Now the villagers fought furiously to get into the four cars parked around the large hut. They sped off, crammed full, with people clinging to the fenders and riding on the roofs.

Only five were left behind, two old men, a woman carrying a baby, and one of the girls at the meeting.

As the four adults started to race out of town on foot, the girl stumbled and fell. When she tried to rise, she cried out in pain and grasped her right ankle.

Chris said, “I’ll get her. Take the other three and the baby in the Volkswagen.”

He tossed Geronimo the keys and ran to lift the girl. She was Delimar, the dancer! Her heart was pounding with fright.

Glancing at the mountaintop, Chris saw that the glowing red lava was creeping downward at a snail’s pace. Since the mountain was two miles high, he guessed that the crater was five miles from them.

“Why the rush?” he asked the girl. “That lava won’t

be here for another hour.”

“The *lahar*,” she gasped. “Run quickly!”

“*Lahar?*”

“Boiling mud from the volcano! It does not glow like lava, so you cannot see it at night. Hurry!”

Suddenly a strong smell of sulfur assailed their nostrils. Chris came to an abrupt halt when a wall of hissing, bubbling mud rose fifty feet in front of them. Whirling about, he saw that a similar mass of heaving, boiling *lahar* had cut off their flight in that direction.

The two walls converged to encircle Chris and the dancer in his arms. Then the sides of the circle began to flow toward them. The heat was unbearable.

Delimar sobbed hysterically, “We will die!” Chris reached for the stun gun and knocked her out. The moment her eyes turned glassy, he clicked the heels of his rocket-hopper shoes together. The charges were activated, and with a *whoosh* Chris and the girl zoomed upward.

A moment later the spot where they had stood was a sea of boiling mud!

They landed on high ground near a bend in the road just as Delimar came to.

“Oh, I am dreaming,” she whispered. “You are greater even than the Dragon!”

“Who’s he?” Chris asked, but the girl would say no more. A little farther down the road they met Geronimo. He had driven the refugees to safety.

Delimar seemed too dazed to question how they had escaped from the *lahar*, and Chris offered no explanation. They drove her to the nearby village on

high ground to which the other people had fled.

By then she had recovered the use of her ankle enough to rest her weight on it. As Chris got out and helped her from the car, she whispered to him, "For saving my life, I will return the favor. Beware of the Komodo Dragon!"

With that she quickly limped off into the darkness, and the boys returned to Denpasar.

The next morning they turned in the Volkswagen, checked out of the hotel, and taxied to a small fishing village, where they rented a motorboat. It was a twenty-foot inboard with a 140 horsepower marine engine and a cruising range of 250 miles.

As they were loading their suitcases into the boat, an old Chinese man shuffled up to them. "*Taun*, do not go!" he warned.

"Why?" Geronimo asked the fellow, who, he thought, looked like Confucius.

"The stars are wrong. Your journey will be ill-fated!"

"Well, thanks for the tip," the Apache said." But we'll have to go."

The old man said no more, but his sad gaze followed them as the boat churned away from the dock.

6. The Man-Eaters

“THINK THE OLD boy’s some kind of nut?” Geronimo asked.

“Maybe he was planted there by the Komodo Dragon,” Chris replied.

Pondering the strange warning, the TEEN agents set course for the island of Lombok, fifty miles away.

The boatman who ran the livery had informed them that the speed limit within the harbor was five knots. With Chris steering, they purred along slowly toward the harbor entrance.

It was dotted with sailboats, motorboats, and native outrigger canoes, the latter resembling giant spiders. All at once, a half dozen or so began to converge on them. As they neared, Chris and Geronimo saw that all were paddled by male natives bare to the waist, but each canoe contained a woman wearing a sarong with the grape-and-tendrils design. These women were giving the orders!

“Here comes the grapevine again,” Geronimo muttered, “including your grateful fan Delimar.”

“That combo’s playing the same old tune,” Chris said. “I’m getting bored.”

As the canoes closed in, the one commanded by Delimar cut across their bow. Chris had had enough. Disengaging the clutch, he opened the throttle wide. The motor roared furiously without increasing the boat’s speed.

Thinking their canoe would be cut in half, the natives dug in their paddles and literally leaped out of

the way.

Engaging the clutch again, Chris violated the speed limit long enough to surge forward fifty yards, then dropped back to legal speed. When he looked over his shoulder, he saw that none of the canoes had made any further attempt to follow, but Delimar gave him a demure smile.

“You made a conquest there,” Geronimo said.

“She wants you for her very own.”

“I doubt that she has romance in mind,” Chris replied dryly. “Her girl friends certainly don’t”

The sea was rolling in large swells when they cleared the harbor, but the boat was sturdy and rode them well.

Within an hour they spotted the mist-shrouded mountains of Lombok, but it was another hour before they landed on the coral sand.

On the beach were half a dozen native men in sarongs. Grinning welcomes, they helped pull the boat up past the high-tide line. The men chatted at them in a language they recognized as Bahasa sasak, but neither could understand what they were saying.

“They seem friendly enough,” Chris remarked. “I wonder what they want.”

“Now they use sign language,” Geronimo replied with a stiff smile. “I savvy.”

With gestures, the natives urged them toward a narrow, rutted road which led into the heavy forest bordering the beach.

A hundred yards along this road they came to a clearing containing a small village. All the houses

were of bamboo and thatch except one. This was a square frame building with a tiled roof. A stocky blond man in a white linen suit sat under an awning in front of it, sipping from a tall frosty glass.

Getting to his feet, he greeted them in Dutch. Both boys spoke this language. They introduced themselves, and the man told them he was Kees Vandenbelt, a retired merchant. He offered them some lemonade.

As they sat sipping the cool drinks, Vandenbelt asked what they were doing on the island. “Looking for the Komodo Dragon,” Chris said. The Dutchman gave him a startled look.

“We’re zoology students,” Geronimo put in smoothly. “We’re writing a joint thesis on the *Varanus komodoensis*.”

“Oh,” Vandenbelt said. “I thought—” He let it die and said briskly, “Sultan Suleiman is an authority on the beast, I believe. I will take you to see him.”

The sultan lived only five miles away and Kees Vandenbelt had a jeep. En route they passed crowds of children lining the road, waving little Hags in their hands.

“Ah, the *Agong* is about to leave,” Vandenbelt said. “We’ll have to pull over and wait.”

“Who?” Chris’s eyebrows shot up.

The Dutchman explained that the *Agong* was the king “figurehead” of Malaysia and had visited the island for two days. He pointed to decorations on the side of the street.

“We spent quite some money to impress his

Majesty. Doesn't it look pretty?"

"Like a fairyland," Chris admitted.

A moment later the king's motorcade came in to view.

"*Dualat Tuanku! Dualat Tuanku!*" cried the children as he passed.

Chris knew the Chinese language rather well. He shook his head in surprise.

"I don't believe it! They're yelling 'Short pants has arrived!'" he said to Vandenbelt.

The Dutchman laughed. "Not really. It means 'Long live the king,' in Malay, but a lot of the children are Chinese and it comes out like this because of their natural accent."

Geronimo chuckled.

As soon as the motorcade had passed, they drove on to the sultanate. Kees Vandenbelt explained that the sultan no longer had any real power, merely some ceremonial functions.

"Like cutting off heads, I suppose," Chris told his buddy in Apache.

Finally they came to a poor village no larger than the place where Vandenbelt lived.

"How much farther to the sultanate?" Chris asked their host.

The Dutchman looked surprised. "This is it!" he replied.

"Apaches have better," Geronimo muttered.

The "palace" was a square frame house only slightly bigger than Vandenbelt's, and not in as good repair.

The front room, in which they were received, was lavishly furnished, however, with rich Oriental rugs on the floor and silken drapes covering the walls.

The Americans were greeted by the dignitary in a friendly manner. Sultan Suleiman was a little man of about fifty in a white linen suit similar to the Dutchman's. He spoke fluent English.

After introducing the boys and explaining what they wanted, Vandenbelt left, first making sure the sultan would return the Americans to their boat when they wanted to leave.

Sultan Suleiman nodded, waved good-bye to Vandenbelt, then invited the TEEN agents to lunch with him. Two pretty young Indonesian girls served the meal, which consisted of rice, eggs fried in coconut oil, and a buffalo-meat curry.

While they relaxed over the spicy food, their host gave them more information about the reptile known as the Komodo Dragon.

"The lizard," he said, "has keen sight and smell, but is deaf even to loud noises. When it is shot, it deflates like a pricked balloon.

"You really should go to Komodo to study the beast. It is more plentiful there than on any of the other islands. More dangerous, too. Years back the dragons were man-eaters. They used to catch convicts who tried to escape."

"Convicts?" Chris asked.

"Oh yes. Komodo Island was originally inhabited by Malay convicts exported there by the Raja of Sumbawa. Many of them died attempting to escape." The sultan's eyes glittered as he observed his guests'

reaction.

“Pretty gruesome,” Chris muttered. Geronimo looked stoically at the sultan. “Have you ever heard of a man Dragon?”

For a moment the dignitary’s expression lost its friendliness and his lips became a narrow line. In a curiously flat voice he replied, “There is no such person.”

The next instant he launched into a description of Lombok, with a manner as jovial as ever.

“Thank you for a splendid meal,” Chris said finally and rose. “Now we must be on our way to Komodo.”

The sultan would not hear of such an abrupt departure. “You have seen nothing of my domain yet,” he said, pursing his lips. “Please stay overnight. In the morning the tide will be more favorable, anyway.”

In Apache, Geronimo said, “*Choonday*, I smell a rat—Lombok breed.” All the while he shook his head in the affirmative.

The sultan looked pleased. “Come with me,” he invited. “I’ll show you the village.”

He took them into a long bamboo shed where a group of women were weaving cloth. There were several looms, and a Chinese girl was weaving an exquisite white silk cloth on one of them again the grape-and-tendril design!

In Chinese, Chris said to her, “Whom do you make that for?”

The girl giggled. “For the City of the Lion.”

The TEEN agents looked deadpan. The City of the Lion, they knew, was Singapore. Chris recalled that

they had a good contact there named Fairfield.

He examined the cloth. “Oh, for lions? How interesting.”

The sultan cleared his throat uncomfortably and rather abruptly ushered them from the shed to show them the rest of the village.

The tour was tedious, and took the balance of the day. After a tasty supper Suleiman invited his guests to spend the night in a vacant bamboo hut near the palace.

“Thank you, sir,” Chris said. “We shall sleep well”

As they adjusted mosquito netting over their beds, Geronimo said, “What do you think, *kemosabe*?”

“I’ll bet the sultan not only knows who the Komodo Dragon is, but does business with him in woven cloth!” Chris replied.

“If he thinks we’re interested in the man instead of the lizard, we may wake up dead.”

“It occurred to me,” Chris said. “Let’s sleep in our clothes. I’ll keep Little Cupid next to my ear.”

The Little Cupid sensor was a device which could pick up and magnify the sound of the human heartbeat from quite a distance. It was another of Pomeroy’s joyful playthings.

Along toward morning, but while it was still pitch dark, a pulsing throb in his ear wakened Chris. Instantly it increased in volume and he knew someone was right outside the hut.

Pushing aside his mosquito netting, he slipped from the bed and held the sensor to Geronimo’s ear. The Apache immediately bounced up. No conversation

was necessary.

Both put on their special sunglasses and took snooperscopes from their pockets. These were devices which looked like pens, but emitted an infrared beam allowing them to see in the dark through the special lenses.

The door curtain was pushed aside and someone slipped into the hut. Both boys beamed their snooperscopes at the intruder. He was a tall, muscular native, bare to the waist. In his hands he carried a two-sided executioner's sword.

Chris and Geronimo stood motionless. In the darkness the man could not see their cots, but apparently he knew the layout of the hut by heart.

On bare feet he moved silently over to Chris's bed, raised the sword high overhead, and with a *swish* brought it down just in front of the pillow.

Its razor-sharp edge cut right through the mosquito netting, through the mattress, and made a slight clicking sound when it hit the spring.

The man withdrew the blade, tiptoed over to Geronimo's bed, and repeated the process. The blade was so sharp that he was unable to tell by feel that it had cut only mattress stuffing instead of flesh and bone.

Then the "executioner" silently left the hut.

"I don't know about you," Chris whispered to Geronimo, "but I'm through sleeping for the night."

"We'd get eaten up, anyway," the Apache replied flatly. "The mosquito nets leak!"

"Let's cut for the beach," Chris suggested, "before

these vultures divvy up our boat.”

They left the hut only seconds before a bright light bobbed in the distance. The sleepy-eyed sultan and three retainers, including the executioner, made their way jovially to the guest hut.

Chris and Geronimo put as much distance between their host and themselves as possible through the thick grass. Even so, a quarter of a mile away, they could hear screams of anger and disbelief as the sultan discovered the truth.

Another scream followed, then silence.

“Someone else lost his head,” Chris said glumly.

The TEEN agents raced along the road. When they came to Vandembelt’s village, it was already growing light. A few minutes later they reached the beach.

As they approached the boat, daylight was pinking the eastern horizon. Geronimo suddenly grasped Chris’s arm.

“Itse, choonday!” he hissed. “Booby trap!”

7. Message of the Drums

BEHIND THE STRIP of coral at the water's edge the beach was white sand. Geronimo's keen eyes had spotted a small steel plunger protruding from it just behind the boat. Kneeling, he carefully pushed the sand aside to uncover a land mine.

If the boys had dragged the boat over it, the explosion would have blown them and the boat into fragments!

"Persistent little devil, the sultan, isn't he?" Chris said.

"He was taking no chances of losing us," Geronimo replied, studying the lethal device. Then he got a screwdriver and a pair of pliers from the boat and gingerly removed the mine's detonator. He flung it far out into the water. Then, with Chris's aid, he dragged the boat over the now harmless mine and launched it.

They breakfasted on provisions they had brought as they circled the island to its eastern side, from where they crossed the sixteen-mile wide Alas Strait to the island of Sumbawa.

Spotting a livery dock with a gas pump near a village of bamboo huts on stilts, they pulled in and fueled up.

From there it was seventy miles to Komodo. Halfway they passed the small, uninhabited island of Banta and broke out provisions for lunch.

"I'm worried," Chris said after a while. "This rat race is taking too long. What if we draw a blank on Komodo?"

"Patience, white eyes. We'll find the Dragon yet.

Chances are he'll have a welcoming committee on Komodo just for us."

Chris scanned the wave tops, stretching out to the watery vastness of the Dragon's lair. When it finally loomed in the distance, Komodo Island looked forbidding, just as the sultan's man-eater story had prophesied. The sun beat down on bleak beaches of knobby coral embedded with shells.

Along the skyline were towering sentinel palms and grotesque volcanic chimneys. Inland rippled a range of low, saw-toothed mountains. Between the beach and the mountains there was nothing but jungle.

Geronimo studied a map spread out on his knees. Their destination was Telok Slawi, a bay off the village of Komodo. As they pulled into the bay, a half-dozen outrigger canoes came out to meet them. The bronze-colored islanders made laughing, welcoming noises in Bahasa sasak. They led the motorboat to a floating dock with several empty boat slips and gestured to one, where the TEEN agents tied up.

The whole crowd escorted them to the village, two grinning teen-agers leading the way. The settlement consisted of bamboo huts with long, peaked thatched roofs. The single street was tan colored dirt and the men of the village were lined up on both sides, waving and calling friendly greetings. The women timidly peered from doors and windows without venturing outside.

Their guard of honor led them to the largest hut, in front of which sat the village chief under an awning of palm fronds. He was a fat, jolly looking, gray-haired man in an unbuttoned white shirt, white knee pants, and bare feet. Sitting cross-legged on the ground

beside his wicker chair were two equally fat women wearing sarongs.

In passable English the man said, "Welcome Komodo, friend visitors. I have honor to be Chief

Tjipto. You may call Chief for short."

He made no effort to introduce the women, who were apparently his wives. After a single shy smile at the TEEN agents, both lowered their gazes.

When Chris and Geronimo had introduced themselves, the chief said, "You come see Komodo Dragon, eh?"

"Yes," Chris admitted. "How did you know?"

"Visitors always wish see dragons," Chief Tjipto went on with a grin. "Too late today. Send you with hunt party early tomorrow morning. Okay?"

Grinning back, the boys indicated that this was acceptable.

The chief designated an elderly Chinese who lived in the village as their personal attendant. His name was Kang Hsi-hou. Since he spoke Chinese as well as the native dialect, the boys could not only communicate with him, but he could act as their interpreter.

Kang picked out an empty hut for them and had a detail of natives clean it up. Meanwhile, they were invited to dine with the chief that evening. The meal of hotly seasoned roast boar, fish, and rice was served by the two wives, whom the chief still had not introduced and who never opened their mouths.

After dinner, just as dusk began to fall, Chris and Geronimo took a walk along the edge of the jungle. Suddenly the sharp-eyed Apache halted and gazed

narrowly at something he had spotted among the trees.

As softly as a cat he moved in that direction. Chris followed. The Apache motioned him to circle around a thick palm tree one way while he went in the other direction.

Behind it they found a man wearing nothing but a loincloth and crouching like an ape, with knuckles dragging on the ground. At sight of them he made a hissing noise and backed away.

At a sound behind him, Chris turned to see another native in the same apelike stance. The man gave an animal like growl and showed his teeth. Then other man-animals appeared from the underbrush, all hissing and snarling.

"Itse, choonday," Geronimo warned. "They might charge."

The TEEN agents moved back to back and warily regarded the threatening pack.

"What are they—wild men?" Chris asked.

"I thought wild men only came from Borneo!"

"Look. They're trying to get up nerve to attack. Better tend to our sleepy slivers."

Both boys took out their soporific pens. The result was astonishing. Perhaps from somewhere in the dim past the wild men had memories of guns and mistook the pens for pistols. The sight of the defensive weapons sent them into panic. Chittering like frightened apes, they scurried away into the woods.

"I'm sure glad we didn't have to tangle with them," Chris said, pocketing his sliver gun.

When they returned to the village they asked Kang Hsi-hou about the man-animals. The old Chinese said he did not know what they were talking about} but he overreacted in his denial, assuring the TEEN agents several times that there were no such inhabitants on the island.

“He knows,” Geronimo muttered in Apache.

Chris nodded.

In order to protect themselves against further assault, they slept in watches. In the middle of the night, Geronimo heard the hollow sound of a native drum being beaten only a short distance away. He awakened Chris. Moments later another drumbeat replied faintly in the far distance. The rest of the night was quiet.

Next morning Chris asked Kang about the drums.

“*Kulkuls*,” the old Chinese answered, “used to send messages from village to village.”

“What were they about?”

“I was asleep,” Kang said. “I did not hear it.” The dragon-hunting expedition left after breakfast and consisted of three natives armed with carbines, in addition to Kang and the boys.

When Chris and Geronimo learned that they had to sail along the coast to another beach, they offered the motorboat, but Kang told them it might be smashed to pieces on the hard coral where they had to land. The lighter native boats could land anywhere.

They went in a proa, a double-ended outrigger canoe with a lateen sail. There was a gentle but steady breeze, and the proa moved along with remarkable swiftness.

After sailing along the coast for some distance, they finally landed at another of the bleak beaches. The hunters led them along a faint trail into the interior.

A coarse grass, which Kang informed them was *alang-alang*, grew five to six feet high on both sides of the trail. They had to move in single file. Two of the hunters went first, Geronimo next, then Kang and Chris. The third hunter brought up the rear.

Jungle sounds came to them as they plodded along. They heard the hoarse cries of white cockatoos, an occasional snort of a water buffalo, and angry grunts of wild boars who had picked up their scent and scurried for safety.

Then, from far away came the hollow sound of a *kukul*. An answering drumbeat replied no more than a mile away.

In Apache, Geronimo said, "We're being suckered into a trap, *choonday*. Keep your eyes open!"

Chris nodded and called to Kang in Chinese. "What are the drums saying?"

"The nearer drum merely acknowledged the message. I did not catch the original one."

Chris doubted it, but there was no way to force the truth from the old man. As he pondered a way to loosen Kang's tongue, Chris was startled by a shock of black hair which flicked into view. For a brief second a young feminine face peered from the *alang-alang*. A breeze bent the grass and Chris caught a glimpse of a grape-and-tendrill sarong. Then the head ducked out of sight.

"A grapevine girl is shadowing us, Gerry," Chris hissed.

“Three,” the Indian replied calmly. “Ever since we left the beach. Don’t worry, they’re unarmed. Just spying.”

“Let them spy,” Chris said as the party came to a small, dusty clearing. At one edge of it was a dry wash overhung by branches. They stopped and one of the hunters pointed to a line of peculiar tracks in the dust. He said something in Bahasa sasak.

“The spoor of a dragon,” Kang translated into Chinese. “They think one may be in that wash.”

He looked nervously toward the mouth of the vale, obviously not personally eager to see one of the beasts.

Chris and Geronimo bent to examine the tracks. The lizard had made a double trail. The creature’s claws had left marks in the dust, and its dragging tail, which looked as though it had constantly swished back and forth, had also marked a pattern.

The claw marks resembled a bunch of grapes; the swishing tail a tendril design!

The boys straightened up and Chris said to Kang, “I have seen this design on cloth. Many women wear it, don’t they?”

The Chinese was still staring nervously at the mouth of the wash, as though he expected a dragon to rush out at any instant. “Only the Birds of Darkness,” he said, preoccupied.

“Birds of Darkness?” Chris repeated. Suddenly Kang seemed to realize what he had said, and his face registered consternation.

8. Nest of Vipers

“WHO ARE THE Birds of Darkness?” Chris persisted.

Kang shook his head. “You misunderstood,” he muttered. “I said nothing about birds.”

Chris examined the man curiously. “Why can’t you give us a straight answer, Kang? What do you have against us?”

“I have nothing against you. I like you both.” “Then why do you give us the runaround?”

Kang glanced about uneasily. He whispered, “The hunters do not understand Chinese, but there are other ears. Do not get me into trouble.”

“We understand, Kang,” said Geronimo. In Apache he told Chris, “One of the Birds of Darkness is peeping from the grass just past your left shoulder.”

Chris did not turn. Kang whispered, “Go home. Do not stay in the village another night.”

Then Kang moved away from them to where the hunters were stooped before the entrance to the dry wash, peering under some low-hanging branches.

They stood up and talked with Kang. In turn the Chinese informed Chris and Geronimo, “They think a dragon is in there. But before we lure him out, we should eat, because it may be a long wait.”

“All right with us,” Chris agreed.

Two of the hunters unloosed canvas knapsacks and pulled out slices of cold roast water buffalo, bread, and fruit. After they had lunched, the third man

opened his sack and drew out a large piece of rotting meat. He carried it to a tree branch near the mouth of the ravine and hung it securely on the limb.

When he returned, he again spoke to Kang. "They wish us to hide in the grass," Kang interpreted, pointing. "Over there. Downwind."

Geronimo darted in the lead, taking to the hunt like a true Apache. Soon all were hidden in the *alang-alang* grass on the south side of the clearing. With three of the Birds of Darkness also somewhere in the vicinity, Chris and Geronimo kept only half their attention on the entrance of the dry wash, half on their surroundings.

The wait seemed interminable to Chris. One hour passed. He changed positions several times to avoid stiffening of his muscles.

Geronimo and the native hunters waited like statues and Chris marveled at their patience.

Finally the Apache flicked an eyelid to signal his buddy. Chris turned to see a python-sized head poke from beneath the low-hanging branches.

A forked yellow tongue flicked out. Then a scaly monster fully emerged, all of twelve feet long. It slithered over beneath the decaying meat bait, emitting spine-tingling hisses. Then the Komodo Dragon reared upward on its hind legs and opened its vicious red mouth to snap at the meat with cruel, saw-edged teeth.

A carbine cracked. The reptile dropped flat, writhed in death agony, then slowly collapsed and flattened out like a deflating inner tube.

The party advanced to look at the slain dragon, the

native hunters grinning with delight.

“Not a pretty sight,” Chris said.

“I wonder if *the* Komodo Dragon is equally horrible,” Chris ventured.

“If he’s the doom judge, you can bet on it.”

Apparently neither the meat nor hide of the lizard were of any value, because the hunters left the dragon untouched and began the long trek back.

The boys saw no sign of the Birds of Darkness on the way back to the beach, although they did hear the *kulkuls* again, and assumed they were reporting that they had started the return trip.

It was late afternoon before they reached the proa, and after dark by the time they arrived at the village of Komodo.

Kang Hsi-hou said no more about their leaving, but when he bid them good night, it was in a tone of resignation.

Chris and Geronimo went into their hut in the dark and made for their beds. It wasn’t anything he heard which caused Chris to pause with his hand on the mosquito netting, but some sixth sense warning him of danger.

“Hold it, Gerry,” he said softly into the darkness. Taking out a tiny flashlight, he shined it onto his bunk. A half-dozen pairs of cold, obsidian eyes glittered at him. The bed was a writhing mass of snakes. They had arrow-shaped heads, with deep pits on each side between the eye and the nostril.

“Ai! Pit vipers!” Geronimo exclaimed.

Chris turned the light on Geronimo’s bunk. The

Indian had the same kind of reception committee.

“I think Kang was right,” Geronimo said. “We shouldn’t spend another night in this place.”

Chris turned the light off. “Want to split?”

“Definitely.”

“Let’s see how safe it is, first,” Chris suggested. He took out the Little Cupid sensor and turned it on. Heartbeats registered so loudly that he did not even have to hold the instrument to his ear.

“At least three of them waiting right outside,” he whispered, putting the sensor away. “Probably wondering why we haven’t screamed. Shall we end their suspense?”

“Why not?” Geronimo chuckled. “Sleepy slivers?”

“Stun guns. That’ll give them a little more to think about.”

“Ready?” Geronimo asked.

“Right.”

They opened their mouths and emitted blood curdling screams. An instant later three shadowy figures rushed through the door. They all froze in position as the stun darts hit them.

Chris quickly shone his light into each glassy eyed face. Two were natives they had not seen before. The third was Chief Tjipto!

Chris flicked out the beam and followed Geronimo through the doorway. They sprinted for the dock, and were untying the boat when three terrified screams sounded from the hut.

The victims had vanished! Disappeared into the

balmy air before the very eyes of Tjipto and his men!" Yankee black magic," Chris said. "Let's vamoose!"

They jumped into the boat and pushed off. Geronimo started the motor as Chris slipped behind the wheel. Throttling the engine down so that it barely purred, he backed, then swung around and let the boat slowly creep away from the dock.

Fifty yards from shore he increased speed a trifle, but it took a quarter of an hour to get out of the bay and into open water.

"Think those donkeys are still shaking?" Chris asked.

As if in reply, the thump of *kulkuls* sounded in the distance. Chris opened the throttle to cruising speed, turned on his running lights, and headed out to sea.

Their cruising range was sufficient to return nonstop to Bali. Chris set a course to take them there by the most direct route. But an hour later they changed their minds.

Geronimo shouted for Chris to cut the engine.

Chris throttled down and threw an inquiring look.

"Thought I heard another motor," the Indian said.

Then they both heard it—the racketing sound of a helicopter. Chris switched off his running lights just in time. A moment later a searchlight from the black sky above swept the water a few yards behind them.

Chris gave the boat quarter speed, keeping the noise slightly lower than the chopper's. The searchlight moved off to their left, probed ahead of them, then behind, one pass barely missing them.

"They must have spotted our running lights," Chris

said. "We'll never make it back to Bali tonight at quarter speed, and if we go any faster, they'll hear our engine. Any suggestion?"

"How about hiding out the rest of the night and all day tomorrow?" Geronimo said. "Then we can run for it again tomorrow night."

"Hiding out where?"

"That little island we passed about thirty-five miles from Komodo—Banta, wasn't it? Think you could find it in the dark?"

"I'll try," Chris said. He peered at the compass and could barely read it by starlight. After some mental computing he set a course for Banta.

They continued to hear the helicopter periodically and to see the searchlight sweeping the water, but it never came dangerously close again. Chris proved his navigating skill by hitting the small, uninhabited island right on the nose.

The TEEN agents landed on a white, crescent shaped beach with a high bluff towering behind it. They dragged the boat over the sand to a strip of jungle between the beach and the bluff and hid it in underbrush.

Then they pushed their way through the jungle to the base of the bluff and found a cave. Examination by flashlight showed it was dry and not occupied by any animals.

"Home, sweet home," Geronimo said.

"We'd better haul some provisions from the boat," Chris remarked. "We may not be able to leave tomorrow."

After that was done, they slept soundly. Chris was wakened by Geronimo's whispering in the morning. The Apache lay flat on the floor of the cave, looking toward the beach.

"White eyes make good prediction," he said. "Look!"

Scores of proas and outrigger canoes were bobbing on the seas. The Komodo Dragon, or whoever had instituted the search, seemed to have called upon the natives of all the nearby islands to help.

A half-dozen times during the day a helicopter *Hew* over. It was not always the same one, they noticed by its markings. Apparently a fleet of whirlybirds was searching for them, too.

About noon a proa with three native crewmen and a girl landed on the beach in front of them.

"The grapevine, of course," Geronimo muttered.

"They'll see the rut in the sand where we dragged up the boat!" Chris exclaimed in dismay.

"Relax. The tide has been in and out since then," Geronimo assured him.

The four searchers studied the strip of jungle, stared up at the bluff, then returned to the proa. Obviously satisfied that no one was on the island they sailed away.

"A real vacation day," Chris mused as evening calmed the choppy waters. "Enjoy a cave on a South Seas island. See beautiful girls..."

"They're all gone," Geronimo said. "Look!" In the gathering darkness there were no outrigger canoes or proas in sight. The helicopters had stopped flying.

Apparently the search had been abandoned.

“Time to leave this paradise, *choonday*,” Geronimo said. “Vacation’s over.”

The TEEN agents launched the boat and headed full speed for Bali.

“Well, now what?” Geronimo asked.

“Singapore. On the way we might stop over and check in with Lim Sindhu,” Chris replied.

“Good thinking.”

They arrived in Bali in the middle of the night, awakened the Chinese who ran the boat livery, and turned in the boat.

With utmost speed they took a taxi directly to the airport and caught a plane to Djakarta. There they checked back into their hotel and caught a couple of hours’ sleep.

Early in the morning they were back in the Chinese Goldok section. Other vendors along the street were opening for business, but Sindhu’s herb stand was still covered. They walked down to the vegetable stall. This was not yet open for business, either.

Cautiously Chris and Geronimo pushed through the curtained door at its rear.

Inside, twin silken cords hung from steel hooks which had been screwed into the center of the ceiling. Um Sindhu hung by his thumbs from the cords. He was quite dead.

9. Flight to Schiphol

BRANDED ON THE forehead of the dead agent was the figure of a dragon.

Chris and Geronimo examined it briefly, before quietly cutting down the victim. A knife was in his back.

The precaution of silence paid off. From the next room they heard a squeaking sound. Moving over to the door which was nearly closed, Chris peeked in. It was a bedroom.

A stocky blond man stood with his back to Chris, searching dresser drawers. For an instant he glanced sidewise toward the window and Chris saw his profile.

Kees Vandenbelt, the Dutchman from Lombok!

Chris motioned Geronimo outside. When they reached the street, he said, "Kees Vandenbelt is searching Lim's bedroom. Think he's the Dragon?"

"Not if the Dragon and the death judge on the tapes are the same person," Geronimo replied. "Kees doesn't have that certain hiss."

"Then perhaps he works for the Dragon," Chris went on. "A cold-blooded killer! Must have caught Lim by surprise."

"Let's take him now!" Geronimo said, a steely glint in his eyes.

"Not until we discover his racket, redskin." Chris spotted a cruising taxi and flagged it down. When they climbed into the back seat, Chris told the driver to park and wait.

In ten minutes Vandenbelt emerged through the door at the rear of the vegetable stall. He hailed a pedicab.

“Follow that *betiak*,” Chris told the driver. The Dutchman led them to a hotel not far from their own. When he went inside, the boys paid their fare, then followed and hid behind a cluster of potted palms.

Vandenbelt was getting a room key from the desk. Chris made a mental note of his box number 406.

Next he took out Pomeroy’s eavesdropper and fired one of the tiny darts. Vandenbelt swatted at the back of his neck as though an insect had bitten him, and entered the elevator.

Chris murmured, “Pomeroy didn’t say what the range of this eavesdropper is, but it can’t transmit four floors, I’m sure. Let’s go up.”

On the fourth floor they found a bath across the hall from Room 406. It was empty.

The TEEN agents entered and flipped the lock. Then they pressed the buttons at the back of their shirt collars. Kees Vandenbelt’s voice was saying in Dutch, “Get me the Dutch-Japanese Airline.”

There was a wait of perhaps a minute before he continued, “When is the next flight to Amsterdam?”

A pause, then, “In two hours?... Very well. I want a reservation for Kees Vandenbelt.”

Chris clicked off the receiver. “Let’s go,” he said. “We have to get on the same plane.”

Back at their own hotel, Chris anonymously alerted the police about the remains of Lim Sindhu. Then he phoned the Dutch-Japanese Airline. The next flight to

Amsterdam was completely filled, he was informed, but no one was on stand-by. They could be first in line in case of last-minute cancellations.

Chris gave their names and said they would be at the airport by flight time.

The boys checked out, had a snack, bought newspapers and taxied to the airport, where they took a bench in sight of the Dutch-Javanese Airline desk.

A half-hour before plane time they saw Vandenbelt enter, carrying a suitcase. They raised the papers to shield their faces as he passed. He went to the desk, paid for his ticket, and weighed in his suitcase.

When he walked away toward the loading gate, Chris and Geronimo approached the desk. They gave their names and asked if there had been any cancellations on the Amsterdam flight. The clerk checked a list, said No, but they were on the top of the stand-by list.

Fifteen minutes later a loudspeaker announced the final call to board the plane. Still no cancellations!

“This is an emergency,” Chris told the clerk. “We must get on that flight!”

“You still may, sir. People sometimes just don’t show up and fail to cancel. The stewardess will call us ten minutes before take-off to report if all passengers are aboard.”

“We’ll stay right here,” Chris said, drumming his fingers on the counter.

“Relax, *choonday*,” Geronimo advised.

Five minutes later the phone rang. When the clerk hung up, he said, “You’re in luck. Two failed to show.”

The TEEN agents heaved their suitcases on the scales and were ticketed to Schiphol Airport. The long corridor to the loading gate was deserted when they hurried along it, but they made the plane in time.

Fortunately, Vandenbelt sat in the front and their seats were in the rear. The flight was long and tedious. In turns, Chris and Geronimo caught some sleep.

When they landed in Amsterdam, Vandenbelt slipped through customs fast. Chris nearly lost him. However, when they hurried from the building carrying their suitcases, Geronimo spotted the Dutchman getting into a taxi. They grabbed the next cab and ordered the driver to follow.

Amsterdam was well known to Chris, who never ceased to marvel at the city of one million, which was crisscrossed by canals dividing it into a hundred separate islands. There was as much traffic on the canals as on the streets, and three hundred and fifty bridges binding them together.

Kees Vandenbelt led them to the quiet and respectable Dulen Hotel, on one of the waterways. When he disappeared inside, the boys got out, but waited a few minutes before carrying their suitcases into the hotel.

Vandenbelt was nowhere in sight when they entered. As they registered for a double room, Chris casually mentioned to the woman desk clerk that he believed an old friend of theirs named Kees Vandenbelt lived there.

“Oh, yes,” the woman replied. “He keeps an apartment here permanently. A fine gentleman. Just arrived a few minutes ago. What a coincidence!”

Chris said, "After we get settled, we'll look him up. What's his room number?"

She told them it was 122, at the rear of the hotel on the first floor.

The boys were on the second floor, in a room also at the rear, but at the opposite end of the building from Vandenbelt's apartment. Their window overlooked the canal, along which there was a busy traffic in motorboats.

"What now?" Geronimo asked.

Chris pushed the button at the back of his shirt collar. Nothing happened. If the eavesdropping dart was still working, they would have been able to hear the sounds of the motorboats outside Vandenbelt's window.

"The dart must have come loose," Chris said. "I guess we just stake him out and wait for his next move."

But the Dutchman did not make any. He never emerged from his apartment. The TEEN agents relaxed their vigil at eleven o'clock at night, breakfasted at six in the morning in their room, then Chris resumed the stakeout at eight.

Before sitting down, however, he went to the desk and inquired whether Vandenbelt had gone out.

A man was on duty. He said he believed the tenant in 122 had left about six.

Chris went upstairs to get Geronimo and they descended to the main floor. No one was in sight when they paused before the Dutchman's door. A quick twist of Chris's picklock got them inside.

They found themselves in a front room. Other doors opened off both sides of it. Geronimo checked the right one, which led into a kitchen. Chris looked into the other. It was a bedroom.

Clad in loud pajamas, Kees Vandenbelt lay in bed, wide awake. He sat up and stared speechlessly at Chris.

There was a long charged silence. Geronimo came over behind Chris and gazed past his shoulder. The Dutchman climbed out of bed, pulled a pair of trousers over his pajamas, and shoved his feet into loafers.

Chris said casually, "Vandenbelt, why did you murder Lim Sindhu?"

The man walked over to the open French window and gazed down pensively into the canal.

"How did you find me here?"

"Answer my question first," Chris suggested.

Vandenbelt glanced at the two boys in the doorway. Then suddenly he stepped up on the windowsill and dived headfirst into the canal.

Geronimo was the first one across the room. Pausing only long enough to make sure no boats were beneath him, he dived after the Dutchman.

When Geronimo surfaced, he saw Vandenbelt fifty feet away, clinging to the side of a taxi boat. The driver pulled him aboard and the boat sped off.

No other boats were passing at the moment. The Apache swam to the curb, pulled himself out of the water, and walked around to the front of the hotel.

As he dripped across the lobby, the clerk looked up

in surprise. "What happened, sir?"

"I tried to jaywalk," Geronimo said bitterly and went upstairs. There he changed to dry clothes and hung the wet ones over the tub. Then he returned to Vandenberg's apartment. He found Chris in the kitchen.

"You made a graceful dive," Chris said. "Have you ever thought of the Olympics?"

The Apache decided to ignore this. He examined the square tin box on the table. Its lid was open and it was filled with a Huffy white powder.

"What's that?" Geronimo inquired. "Pure heroin. About three pounds." Geronimo emitted a low whistle. At that moment the doorbell sounded. Chris closed the box, opened the refrigerator, and shoved it into the freezer compartment.

"The only way out is into the canal," Geronimo muttered. "And I'm not taking that route again."

Chris shrugged. "Let's brazen it out."

When he opened the door, two long, lean Chinese in black suits and black turtleneck sweaters stood there. The older one glanced at both boys, then bowed and said to Chris, "Mr. Vandenberg?" Obviously he had decided that the copper-skinned Apache could not be the Dutchman.

Chris played along. "Yes?"

"May we come in?"

Chris stepped aside and allowed them to enter. Then he closed the door behind them.

The older man glanced at Geronimo and went on, "Our business is rather private, Mr. Vandenberg."

“I have no secrets from my assistant,” Chris replied.

“Very well then,” the Chinese said. “I will get right to the point. I represent the Komodo Dragon. He has decided to come to terms with TOAD!”

10. The Rattrap

TOAD! THE INTERNATIONAL criminal organization and archenemy of TEEN! Chris and Geronimo knew it well. TOAD aimed at world domination and was willing to accomplish its ends by every evil means possible, including an international dope empire. So Kees Vandenbelt was their agent! It seemed possible.

Chris's calm voice betrayed none of the furious thoughts running through his mind. "What does the Dragon offer?" he said evenly.

"Come with us and you will learn," the Chinese replied.

The boys exchanged glances. The Indian said in Apache, "What do we have to lose—except, possibly, our old age?"

"Lead on," Chris said to the Chinese.

The two men had a motorboat tied up in the canal behind the hotel. They wound in and out of the waterways for several miles and finally pulled into a boathouse attached to a large home. The TEEN agents were led through a door from the boathouse into the building.

The interior had been converted into a business office and the sound of typewriters came from several rooms. Chris and Geronimo were taken to the front room, which served as the main office.

Seated behind a desk was a cadaverous-looking Indonesian with a skull-like face. He was also dressed in black and looked at Chris and Geronimo, then at

the older Chinese.

“Well?”

“Kees Vandenbelt, Excellency,” the man said, indicating Chris.

The Indonesian’s eyes flashed fire. “Fool! Vandenbelt is at least fifty. This is a mere youth!”

Both Chinese turned to stare at Chris indignantly.

Chris said smoothly, “I told a little fib, Excellency, because I figured it would be easier to explain things to you than to these jokers. They didn’t look too bright. It’s all on the up and up. Are you the Komodo Dragon?”

“Of course not,” the man replied coldly. “The Dragon would not stoop to deal personally with a menial such as Vandenbelt. I represent the Dragon, however.”

“Oh. Well,” Chris went on, shifting from one foot to the other, “my friend and I are college students. We do a little smuggling for Kees and are authorized to deal in his name.”

“Indeed?” the gaunt man’s voice had lost none of its coldness.

At that moment Kees Vandenbelt himself was propelled into the room by a squat, powerfully built Chinese. The Dutchman looked terrified.

The squat man said, “Fat Chow pulled this out of the canal, Chief. He came diving through a window almost into his boat.”

Realizing that Vandenbelt was in as much of a jam as they were, Chris decided to enlist him as a temporary ally. He said, “I was just explaining to his

Excellency that Gerry and I have been doing some smuggling for you, Kees, and that you authorized us to deal in your name.”

After gazing at Chris stupidly for a moment, Vandenbelt caught on.

“That’s right,” he said with a cringing smile.

In a frigid voice the gaunt Indonesian said, “This farce has gone far enough. It is time to explain, Mr. Vandenbelt, that the supposed offer by the Komodo Dragon to deal with TOAD was merely a ruse to get you here. Why would the Dragon stoop to deal with a competitor who is already beaten?”

The Dutchman licked his lips. “What do you want?”

“To know what you were doing in the apartment of Lim Sindhu in Djakarta after our executioners left it.”

The words came like an electric shock to all three. Vandenbelt’s bulging eyes attested to his amazement about the Dragon’s espionage.

Chris and Geronimo were amazed to learn it was the Dragon’s men who had killed Lim.

The cadaverous face leered at the Americans. “You were there, too. Unfortunately, our lone lookout had no opportunity to eliminate you.”

“How do you know I was there?” Vandenbelt finally managed to ask.

“The Dragon knows everything. You were followed to the airport, but the plane was filled. A cable to Amsterdam got you picked up again as soon as you landed here. That boat you climbed into was operated by one of my men covering the rear of the hotel. Now what were you doing at Sindhu’s place?”

Vandenbelt licked his lips again. “Lim was a member of TOAD—”

The frigid voice interrupted him. “Lim Sindhu was an agent of the CIA. You were planting evidence to show that he was killed by the Dragon, so that the CIA will go all out to destroy him!”

“That’s not true,” the Dutchman protested feebly, but his adversary cut him off with an impatient gesture.

“Put them all in the cellar,” he ordered his henchmen. “Then pack up and move everything out of here to our alternate headquarters. This site is no longer secure. TOAD may have tailed Vandenbelt here.”

Geronimo said in Apache, “About time we start using the sleepy slivers, *choonday?*”

“Let’s play it by ear,” Chris replied. “Maybe we can get more out of Vandenbelt if they lock us all up together.”

Going along docilely with their captors, the three were taken to a windowless room in the cellar and locked in. It was pitch dark. They heard only one sound—the scurrying of rats!

Chris took out his pencil flashlight and began to investigate the room. The only means of exit was the door by which they had entered. It was made of solid oak and was barred from the outside.

Waist-high in one wall was a hole about a foot in diameter with a tile lip below it resembling the spout of a pitcher.

“What’s that?” Vandenbelt inquired fearfully when

the light focused on it.

“Probably the outlet of a sluice connecting to the canal,” Geronimo said. “If they open the sluice, it should solve their rat problem.”

Chris switched off the light and asked Vandenberg, “Want to tell us about the Komodo Dragon, Kees?”

“What are you?” the Dutchman countered. “CIA?”

“I guess he’s not ready to talk,” Chris told Geronimo. “We can wait.”

Upstairs they heard the sound of heavy furniture being moved. The noises went on for about an hour, then the house became ominously quiet.

After a time they noticed the sound of running water. Chris turned his light on the sluice outlet. A narrow stream was coming from it and splashing on the floor. The flow rapidly increased in volume until it gushed out with the force of a fire hose, soaking the three prisoners.

It became impossible to hear one another over the roar of the water. It rose to their knees, then to their waists, until it reduced to a gurgle and disappeared entirely when the sluice’s outlet became completely submerged.

Chris shone his light into Vandenberg’s face. “What are you going to do?” the Dutchman blubbered, terror-stricken.

“Oh, we can get out of here any time we want to,” Chris replied calmly.

In the beam of the flashlight Vandenberg’s eyes widened. “Then do it, man! Do it!”

“We will after we hear all about the Komodo

Dragon,” Chris told him.

The water was now to their chest. In a high voice Vandenbelt screamed, “I’ll tell you everything. I swear I will. Get me out of here!”

“After you talk!”

“There is no time!” Vandenbelt almost sobbed.

The water was up to their necks.

“Time’s getting shorter,” Chris agreed. “So you’d better talk fast. We don’t move until you do, even if we all drown. Who is the Komodo Dragon?”

“A monster,” the Dutchman said on a note of hysteria. “Gross, bloated. The most horrible sight you ever saw. His organization has undercut TOAD’s heroin business all over the world. He has hurt us so much, he must be destroyed. That is my mission.”

“Where do we find him?” The flood rose above their heads. Chris and Geronimo began to tread water. Vandenbelt floundered.

“I can’t swim!” he screamed. “I’m drowning!”

“Okay, Gerry,” Chris called. He swam over to the struggling Dutchman, dived beneath his clutching hands, came up behind him and got a safety grip from the rear to hold his head above water.

Geronimo disappeared beneath the surface and swam to the door, simultaneously peeling off explosive tape from behind his ear. Affixing it across the door, he set his feet against the solid oak and shot himself away from it clear across the room.

Then he flicked the tiny detonator concealed in his

ring.

Boom! There was a muffled explosion. The shock momentarily stunned all three of them as they were swept through the door by the water which surged out into the rest of the cellar.

Geronimo found the stairway and they climbed to the first floor. The rooms were empty, and there was no sign that they had ever been occupied.

Still dripping, Chris hailed a motorboat taxi, which carried them back to the hotel. Vandenbelt led them in by a side door so that they would not have to cross the lobby. They went directly to his apartment, waited while he donned dry clothes, then insisted upon his accompanying them upstairs while they changed.

“I will not leave,” Vandenbelt assured them. “I will meet you in the lobby.”

“You’ll stay right with us,” Chris told him. “Either conscious or unconscious. Take your choice.”

The Dutchman decided to go along on his feet. As the TEEN agents peeled off their soggy garments, Chris resumed his interrogation, but Vandenbelt would not cooperate.

“I will tell you about it over lunch,” he said. “When you are dressed, we will go to a quiet place I know.”

“Well, I guess we can wait that long,” Chris muttered.

Five minutes later the trio walked out through the lobby and into the street. The doorman was nowhere in sight, so Chris beckoned a passing taxi.

As it slowed, Vandenbelt, in a sudden burst of alacrity, tripped Chris and shoved him against

Geronimo. Both stumbled to their knees. Vandenbelt rushed to the taxi and jumped in.

“Hurry!” he cried to the driver. “They were trying to rob me!”

The taxi shot away from the curb. Chris and Geronimo jumped to their feet and gazed around for another. None was in sight.

Then a familiar voice behind them said, “Why, Mr. Cool and Mr. Johnson! Fancy meeting you this far from home!”

11. Sympathetic Ingrid

STARTLED BY THE familiar voice, Chris and Geronimo whirled about to see Professor Lawrence

Doak of Kingston University coming out of the hotel. He had a lovely young strawberry blond with him.

“Another of your vacations, eh?” the professor said with an avuncular smile. “Why didn’t you tell me you had planned a holiday in Holland?” He turned and beamed at the girl, apparently proud of his alliteration.

“Why, er, we hadn’t exactly planned it, sir.”

Chris managed a smile. “And what brings you here?”

The educator cleared his throat. “I’ve been invited to deliver a paper on linguistics at the University of Amsterdam. Oh, sorry. This is my niece, Ingrid Doedyns. She lives here.”

Both boys bowed slightly as Doak introduced them as “ubiquitous usurpers of university privileges.”

He added, “The second semester has already started, you know.”

“I know,” Chris admitted. “But we’re really not all that bad, even though we do cut a few classes.”

When Doak learned that the boys were staying at the Dulen, too, he was delighted. Ingrid, who worked nearby, was on her lunch hour, he said, and he was taking her to dine. Would Chris and Geronimo join

them?

Chris glanced at his buddy, who accepted the invitation. Ingrid looked as if she could not care less.

“I’ll have to make a phone call first,” Chris said. “please excuse me. I’ll be back in a minute.”

He went inside and called the police from the public booth in the lobby. Slowly and distinctly he said, “You will find three pounds of heroin in the freezer compartment of the refrigerator in Apartment 122 of the Dulen Hotel.” Then he hung up.

The professor took them to a small restaurant near the Rijks Museum. He embarrassed the TEEN agents by spending most of the lunchtime boasting about what fine students they were.

“They both speak numerous languages,” he informed his niece at one point.

“So do I,” Ingrid replied with boredom. “I specialize in European languages and work as an interpreter at the Exchange Commission.”

Professor Doak said, “Speaking of languages, boys, remember that dialect on the tape you asked me to identify?”

Both nodded. “Bahasa sasak,” Chris remarked.

“Yes. The oddest thing was reported in the papers the day I left New York. A young girl guide at the UN was arrested for smuggling heroin, and it turned out she was from a colony of Bahasa sasak-speaking people in Singapore.”

“Imagine that!” Chris tried to act nonchalant, but his pulse quickened at the mention of Singapore. And the girl—was it Mei-ling Tan?

“It was a strange coincidence,” Doak went on, “since we were just discussing the language a few days before. It’s such an obscure dialect, the average person wouldn’t hear it mentioned twice in a lifetime, let alone in the same week.”

Chris said in Apache, “Spice and Yummi must have gotten the goods on Mei-ling Tan.”

“Wonder if they established a connection with the Komodo Dragon,” Geronimo said. “Incidentally, notice how Singapore comes up again?”

“Yes. First Sultan Suleiman ships grape-and-tendrill designed cloth there, now there’s a connection with the UN heroin ring. We’d better get ourselves to Singapore.”

“If we can ever get ourselves away from old Okey Doak,” the Indian said.

“Whatever is that language?” Ingrid asked.

Chris grinned at her. “Apache. You’re such a linguist, we were sure you’d understand it.”

She made a face. “Touché. I guess I bragged too soon. Did I sound that overbearing?”

“I thought you showed restraint,” Chris told her smilingly. “Your uncle praises us too much.”

“Justifiably,” Professor Doak put in. “They are my top students, my dear.”

He suggested that they return to the hotel for after-lunch coffee. Much to the surprise of the professor and his niece, the place was in a mild uproar. The police had raided one of the apartments and found a cache of heroin. A dragnet was out for the tenant, who was a permanent resident and one of the Dulen’s

most-respected guests.

Chris decided he would not have coffee with the others and excused himself. Ingrid gave him a cold farewell, and the boy went directly to his room. There he telephoned the airport, inquiring about flights to Singapore. He memorized the schedule but made no reservations, pending a conference with Geronimo.

There was a sharp knock on the door. Chris opened it. Ingrid stood there, looking upset. Chris let her in and closed the door.

“What’s the matter?”

“I hope you don’t think I’m interfering in your friend’s business,” the girl said. “But I think Mr. Johnson is in some kind of trouble.”

Chris instantly became alert to danger. “In trouble? How?”

Ingrid explained, “I had left Uncle Larry and was on my way back to work. When I got to the corner, I remembered my mother told me to ask him to dinner tonight. So I returned to the hotel. Three Chinese men got out of a car in front of the building. Two were quite tall and lean, the third short and muscular. They all wore black suits.”

Chris nodded grimly. “Yes. I know who they are. Go on.”

“They went into the lobby just ahead of me. The squat man walked over to the desk, another one looked into the dining room, and the third man peered into the coffee shop. When I saw him staring at the table where Uncle Larry and Geronimo sat, I

decided not to go over there.”

“Good thinking. Then what happened?”

“I asked the cashier for change and watched the Chinese from the corner of my eye. It was Geronimo he was looking at, and his expression gave me the creeps. When he turned and left the coffee shop, I followed him out.”

“Are they still down there?” Chris asked.

“Not inside the hotel. The man who had gone in the coffee shop signaled the others and they went out. I waited a minute, then looked to see if they had gone.”

“Had they?”

“No. They’re still waiting in the car out front. I didn’t want to tell all this to Geronimo in front of my uncle, so I came up here. Who are those men?”

Chris thought fast.

“They’re the brothers of a little Chinese girl who has a crush on Gerry,” he said. “She followed him here all the way from New York’s Chinatown, and they followed her. They have a nice Chinese boy picked out for their sister, and want no part of an Apache in the family. They’ve threatened to kill him.”

“How awful!” Ingrid sighed. “Why doesn’t he call the police?”

“That would involve the girl,” Chris improvised. “He’s too chivalrous to do that.”

“Oh, he’s a dear!” said Ingrid, a soft look coming into her eyes.

The door opened as she spoke. Geronimo entered and looked at her in surprise. “Hi, Ingrid. I thought

you went back to work.” He turned to Chris. “Who’s too chivalrous to do what?”

“You. To have Tsai-yu’s brothers arrested.”

“Oh—ah,” the Apache said, completely at sea.

“Of course. I mean not. Or whatever.”

“Three of them are out front, waiting for you to leave the hotel,” Chris said. “Still wearing those black outfits.”

Geronimo caught on. “The two longs and the short?”

“Uh-huh.”

Chris walked over to the window and gazed down at the canal behind the hotel. Moored across from their room was a water taxi with a burly Chinese driver.

Geronimo looked, too. In Apache he said, “Same guy Kees Vandenbelt hitched a ride with after he dived out the window. Fat Chow I think somebody called him. What did you tell Ingrid?”

“That they’re brothers of a little Chinese girl who’s chasing you around the world.”

“What are you two talking about?” Ingrid inquired with a nervous smile.

“Sorry,” Chris apologized. “We forgot you don’t speak Apache. We were discussing getting out of town.”

“You won’t get past those men in front.”

“We’ll manage if you’ll do us a couple of favors.”

“Of course. Anything.”

“First, pay our hotel bill for us after we’ve gone.

We'll give you the money. It wouldn't be wise for us to stop by the desk." He handed her some bills. "Any change give to your favorite charity."

"All right," Ingrid agreed. "What's the other favor?"

"Ship our suitcases to the airport by taxi and have them left at *Will Call* under our names."

"Of course."

The boys quickly packed their belongings and bade the girl good-by. She looked admiringly at Geronimo, then stood on tiptoes to kiss his cheek. "I hope you find happiness," she said.

"I-I appreciate that," the Apache stammered.

"Better give us about ten minutes before you call down for someone to get our bags," Chris told her. "By then we'll be in the clear, And please excuse us to your uncle."

"Certainly," Ingrid replied. "Good luck!" "Thanks." Chris said, "Let's get moving, redskin!"

12. The City of the Lion

AT THE END of the hall was a window leading to a fire escape. The boys climbed up to the roof and jumped across a six-foot areaway to get to the next one. This was an office building with shops on the street-level floor. They climbed down the fire escape at its far end.

When they peered around the corner of the building, they saw the squat, powerfully built Chinese idling on the sidewalk not twenty feet away. Apparently the stakeouts had decided to spread out along the street. Fortunately, the man's back was to them.

In the other direction was the canal. While they were considering what to do, the driver of a panel truck which was backed up to a flower shop at this end of the building finished loading the truck and climbed into its cab.

Chris signaled Geronimo to follow him and ran over behind the truck. They were seated on the floor among the flowers and had closed the door behind them before the truck started moving.

Chris waited until they had traveled a full block. Then he leaned over and yelled into the cab, "Hey driver!"

The man slammed on his brakes and looked over his shoulder. "How did you get in there?" he demanded.

"Slipped in," Chris said. "Want to earn fifty guilder?"

This was about thirteen dollars in American money.

The offer changed the driver's indignation to cupidity.

"How?" he asked.

Chris passed him a bank note and told him to take them to the airport.

En route a newscast carne over the truck radio. The first item was a bulletin that Premier Pierre Le Temps of France had been assassinated in Paris.

The newscaster said, "A previous attempt was made on the premier's life last week. At that time the police revealed that a tape recording of a kangaroo court trial condemning Le Temps to death had been received in the mail. Word now comes from Warsaw that a similar tape sentencing Poland's Prime Minister Anton Bielak to death has been received there."

"That does it," Chris said. "We'll have to get to Singapore fast."

At the airport an emaciated Chinese was near the *Will Call* desk. He wore a black suit and a black turtleneck sweater. The boys had not seen him before.

"Oh, oh," Geronimo muttered. "The stakeout at the hotel must have overheard the doorman giving some taxi driver instructions about our luggage."

They went into the waiting room. Another black-clad Chinese sat on a bench from which he could see all the reservation desks. He, too, was a stranger.

"I hope these clowns don't know us by sight," Chris said.

"They don't have to," Geronimo replied gloomily. "We can't get our luggage without giving our names, and we can't buy plane tickets without showing our passports. Even if we forget about the bags, all the

stakeout sitting on that bench has to do is ask the reservation clerk before each flight if we're on the passenger list. Then a cable to Singapore would get us picked up by a shadow the minute we land."

Chris was studying a group of about a dozen young Americans clustered together in the waiting room. "Hey, Gerry. That dark guy with the long black hair. Wouldn't you say he roughly answers your description?"

Geronimo looked at the boy. "Pretty close," he conceded.

"And the fellow with the blond crew-cut. Does he fit mine?"

"Not so close, but passable. Why?" "Let's go meet them," Chris said.

They discovered it was a college travel group from the State University of Iowa that had been studying dramatics in Europe and was now en route back to America. The boy who somewhat resembled Geronimo was named Tod Greentree. The blond boy introduced himself as Art Downs. Both were sophomores.

The TEEN agents drew them aside and Chris inquired if they already had their plane tickets to New York. They did.

"I have a proposition for you," Chris said. "We'll give you the money to buy two more tickets to New York. You can use them and cash in your original tickets when you get there."

"In exchange for what?" Greentree asked suspiciously.

"Because we have a bet with a fellow in New York

that we can send our passports back to him and still continue to travel around Europe. We'll switch passports with you two. When you get to the States, you can deliver our passports to the guy we have the bet with."

"Give us your addresses and we'll mail yours back to you when we get home," Geronimo added.

Tod and Art looked at each other. "Sounds fishy to me," Tod said. "But the refund on that ticket will be a couple of hundred bucks."

"Yeah," Art agreed. "And even if these guys never return our passports, we don't need them once we're back in the States."

After some discussion, the pair agreed to the switch. Chris gave them Dick Curry's New York City address and told them he was the one they had the bet with. Dick was an ex-Army flier who now piloted a helicopter for TEEN.

"One more thing," Chris told them after giving them the money to buy new tickets under his and Geronimo's names. "We have some luggage at *Will Call*. Will you get it out for us?"

Art Downs shrugged. "Why not?"

A few hours later the boys were winging toward Singapore under the names of Art Downs and Tod Greentree.

"Let's hope that the Dragon has received word that we're flying back to the States," Geronimo said, "and that the clever little scheme of yours works."

They landed in the evening the following day, rented a Ford at the airport, and drove to the new section of Singapore. There: they checked into a hotel,

and next morning drove to the old city.

The contrast between the two was striking. The new section consisted of skyscraper office buildings, modern apartments, hurtling traffic, and bustling activity.

There was as much activity in the old city, but of a different sort. The narrow, smelly streets teemed with people of all nationalities: Malays in gay-colored *bebayas* and sarongs, Chinese in their pajama-like *samfus*, slender Chinese girls in vivid-hued gowns called *cheongsums*, Indians in *saris*, Americans and Europeans in western dress.

Small shops lined both sides of the crowded streets. There were open food stalls, Chinese apothecaries where ancient drugs such as rhinoceros horn and tiger bones were displayed next to aspirin and penicillin, and other stores of every variety.

Chris parked the Ford in front of a relatively new building on Hock Lam Street in the old Chinese quarter. A sign over the entrance read:

FAIRFIELD EXPORTING COMPANY, LTD.

Hugh Fairfield was a tall, tweedy Englishman with an Oxford accent which had remained unchanged by his years in the Orient. He cordially welcomed the boys, told his secretary not to disturb him, and closed his office door.

“Anybody follow you here?” he asked when the TEEN agents were settled in chairs before his desk.

“I don’t think so,” Chris replied. “We threw the Komodo Dragon a curve. It left a little passport mix-up, though.”

When he had explained the ruse they had used to

get the Dragon's agents off their trail, the Englishman promised to straighten things out.

He would arrange with the American consulate to have duplicate passports issued for Chris and Geronimo, and would see to it that Art Downs and Tod Greentree got theirs back

He wrote down their hotel name and room number. The duplicate passports, he said, would be delivered the next morning.

Then the conversation turned back to the Komodo Dragon. "There are definite indications that this Dragon chap is operating in this area," Fairfield remarked. "I have a suspicion that he is responsible for the disappearance of a number of prominent Singapore men during the past year. One was my good friend, Dr. Un Wu, a Chinese scientist."

"Why would the Dragon be kidnapping these people?" Chris asked.

The Englishman hesitated for a moment. "That I couldn't say," he said in an odd tone.

"You sound as if you had some idea, though," Geronimo said.

"It's really too fantastic to mention," Fairfield went on reluctantly. "It is only a rumor, and really doesn't explain why the Dragon kidnapped them anyway, if, indeed, it was the work of that blighter."

"Well?" Geronimo prodded.

"Several hunting parties have reported seeing something strange in the jungles over on the mainland. They encountered bands of what they describe as wild men, dressed in nothing but loincloths, walking like apes and howling like wild

animals.”

The TEEN agents looked at each other. “We saw some creatures like that on Komodo.”

Chris said thoughtfully. “But what makes you think this has anything to do with the disappearance of these prominent Singapore residents?”

“Because,” Fairfield replied, “from the descriptions given by the hunters who saw them, two of the creatures are spitting images of two men I know well. And both have disappeared!”

13. Jungle Surprise

WHEN HUGH FAIRFIELD saw that the boys believed him, he became more open about his suspicions.

He thought that someone had deliberately reduced these men to bestiality. "You mentioned drugs," he went on. "And I'm sure drugs were used on these people. The Dragon's dealing in drugs..." He sighed. "It doesn't prove anything, but it's worth following up."

They decided that the next order of business was to capture one of the man-animals for study. Fairfield spread out a map of the Malay Peninsula, and showed them where the wild men had been seen.

"I suggest we leave right away," Chris said.

They said good-by to the CIA man, who could not accompany them, and drove across the three-quarter-mile-long Johore Causeway which connected the island to the Malay mainland.

Not far beyond the end of the causeway the boys took a side road which led deep into a rain forest. Two miles from the spot Hugh Fairfield had pointed out on the map, they parked and continued on foot.

The jungle growth was so dense that by the time the bright sun filtered through the thick leaved branches, it was reduced to a green twilight. The voices of birds, some raucous, some as musical as flutes, formed an overriding chorus. "Lead to the music, redskin," Chris said to Geronimo.

"This is not my kind of territory," the Apache

grunted, but silently moved ahead.

Now and then they heard the distant growl of some man-eating cat, and once looked up to see a huge python twining among the lianas.

They had followed a dim jungle trail for nearly an hour when Geronimo suddenly halted and held up a warning hand. From up ahead came the sound of voices.

He signaled Chris to follow him, grabbed hold of a thick vine, and pulled himself hand over hand up into a tree. Twenty feet aboveground he ran along a wide branch and lightly jumped from its end to the branch of another tree. Thus the two boys worked their way through the treetops in the direction of the voices. As they drew nearer, they recognized the language as Bahasa sasak.

Soon they came to an area about a hundred yards square which had been cleared of jungle. In its center was a barbed-wire stockade.

Chris gave a low whistle. "What a setup!" he whispered to Geronimo, who was straining his eyes to take in all the details.

To one side of the stockade was a barrack-type building which seemed to be used as living quarters. On the other side stood a smaller building. The door was open, and the boys could see what appeared to be an operating room.

"Wonder what—" Geronimo began, but Chris interrupted him.

"Sh!" He pointed to two Indonesians armed with carbines. It was their voices they had heard in the distance. They were dressed in white shirts and knee

pants and loitered near the stockade. Obviously they were there to prevent the escape of its occupants.

In the stockade were men, dressed in nothing but loincloths. They moved about the fenced-in area with their knuckles dragging on the ground, snarling and snapping at each other like wild beasts.

“Fifteen of them,” Chris whispered. Suddenly there was a rustling sound above them. Chris glanced up and froze in terror. Sliding along the branch immediately overhead, beady eyes fixed on him, was a fifteen-foot python with a body more than a foot thick. Before he could move, it slithered toward him. The next moment it had Chris enfolded in its crushing coils.

There was a slight click and the coils loosened. Geronimo had fired a couple of sleepy slivers. The huge serpent slid to the branch they were standing on, then on downward.

Chris and Geronimo backed against the bole of the tree so that foliage would screen them from below.

With a thud, the snake hit the soft ground. The guards turned around in surprise, then walked over reluctantly to look down at it. Stunned, they gazed up at the tree it had fallen from, and for a heart-stopping moment the boys thought they had been spotted.

But then the two men looked down again, all the while jabbering excitedly. One touched the reptile with the point of his carbine.

Suddenly a second, somewhat smaller python came into view from the adjoining tree. It writhed toward the men, who hurriedly backed away. One shot it through the head. It convulsed for a moment

violently, then lay still. Several men emerged from the barrack-type building. One of the guards called out to them, and they went back inside.

An instant later another Indonesian came out with a pole across his shoulders. Two buckets hung on each side. He carried them over to the stockade and set them down at a feed trough running through the fence inside the enclosure. The man-animals saw him coming and clustered on that side of the compound, jostling each other and slavering.

Now the Indonesian emptied the contents of the buckets into the trough. It looked to the boys like the kind of swill usually fed hogs. Growling at each other, shoving and fighting for places at the trough, the man-animals lowered their heads and devoured the food. The sight sickened Chris and Geronimo.

When the Indonesian carried the empty buckets back into the barracks, a Chinese wearing a white surgeon's jacket and a stethoscope around his neck came out the door. He said something to the guards.

One of them set down his carbine, went to the enclosure, and lifted a looped lasso from a nail in a fence post. He opened the gate and went inside, while his companion held his carbine ready in case any of the wild men would attack.

Some of the man-animals had already finished bolting down all the food they could hold and had drifted off to other parts of the compound. The guard swung a loop overhead and cast it at one of them.

When the loop tightened around his waist, pinning his arms to his side, he was dragged out of the stockade and herded into the small building containing the operating room. The other guard

closed the gate of the stockade behind him.

Through the open door the boys could see the wild man being tied to an operating table. The doctor held the stethoscope to his chest, examined his eyes, and tapped his body in various places with a small rubber mallet.

When he finished his examination, he made some notes, then returned to the large building. The guard led the man-animal, still roped, back into the stockade.

Chris took out his gun and motioned Geronimo to do the same. As the doctor disappeared into the barracks, Chris shot a dart at the guard leading the man-animal, Geronimo took care of the other one.

An instant later the TEEN agents were sliding down vines to the ground.

Chris ran over and grabbed the end of the rope looped around the wild man's waist. The creature hissed at him, but offered no resistance as Chris dragged him into the forest. Geronimo followed, but suddenly stopped at the edge of the clearing. "I dropped my stun gun," he said and turned back. He spotted it on the ground beneath the tree they had been standing on. By the time he scooped it up, thirty seconds had elapsed.

The two guards regained consciousness. Startled, they stared at him. The one with the carbine swung the muzzle toward the Apache. Geronimo had no choice but to stun-gun them again. As he turned to run after Chris and his captive, a shot rang out from the direction of the barracks, and a bullet plucked at his sleeve. Glancing back, he saw two men armed with guns emerging from the building.

Before either could fire again, Geronimo ran alongside the stockade to put the herd of man animals between himself and his adversaries.

Furiously, they raced to the edge of the compound to get a clear shot at him. Geronimo opened the gate and slipped inside. The man animals circled around him, hissing and snarling.

Desperately, Geronimo clicked the heels of his shoes. *Zoom!* The rocket hoppers raised him high into the air.

In panic, the wild men backed off and the guards gazed upward in superstitious fright, too terror-stricken to fire at him again.

When the Indian was fifty feet in the air, One hopper suddenly malfunctioned. The thrust of the other one started him cart wheeling above the trees!

14. Fan Flirt

GERONIMO SAW THE solid green roof of the forest below him. In a split second he cut off the single rocket hopper and crashed into a tree.

The small branches at the top bent to cushion his fall. The larger ones slowed his descent. He made a desperate grab for a still larger one and ended up with his arms wrapped around it ten feet above the ground.

When he caught his breath, he lowered himself until he was hanging by his hands, then dropped down the rest of the way.

“Ai!” he muttered and prodded himself in various places. “Not the most pleasant way of descent!” But the only damage was to his dignity.

Chris came along leading the roped man animal behind him. “Why the aerobatics?” he called out.

“Unintentional,” Geronimo told him. “Wait until I tell Pomeroy what I think of his faulty rocket hoppers!”

They got back to the car without further delay. Geronimo sat in the rear with the wild man, while Chris drove. The creature huddled against the window and emitted an occasional hiss, but seemed more frightened than belligerent.

Chris headed for the highway and recrossed the Johore Strait to the island. Soon Singapore harbor came into view. It was packed with ships from all over the world.

There were small Chinese coastal freighters which still ran under sail power, and the inevitable sampans.

Scores of *tongkangs*, small freight boats which take cargo from larger ships, plied back and forth between the huge steamships and *godowns*, or warehouses, along the four-mile-long dock.

“What’ll we do with our prize specimen?” Geronimo asked as they drove to the old Chinese quarter.

“We’ll have to get him into Fairfield’s place without being seen. Wish us luck!”

When Chris brought the Ford to a halt in front of the exporting company, they looked out the window in dismay.

A crowd was gathered around a Chinese spirit medium who was preparing to cast out demons by driving a dagger through his tongue and simultaneously walking on a bed of sharp nails. He was getting ready for the ordeal by putting himself into a hypnotic trance.

“No good,” Geronimo stated. “Too many witnesses.”

Chris looked concerned. “That’s putting it mildly. Let’s try the other way.” He drove to the corner, turned right, then right again down the alley behind the exporting company. A few minutes later they had the man-animal in Hugh Fairfield’s office.

The Englishman turned white when he saw the creature. “Incredible,” he said in a horrified voice. “It’s Soong Shu-an, the Chinese banker. Or at least it looks like him.”

“We could make certain of his identity if he’s ever been fingerprinted,” Chris suggested.

“I’m sure he was, for his passport. But first we’d better get him to a hospital.”

Fairfield made three phone calls. The first was to arrange for a private hospital room. The second was to a reliable, close-mouthed physician named Dr. Byron Smith-Jones. The third was to the chief of police, to whom he described the situation and who would meet them at the hospital.

They took the man-animal back to the car and drove him there immediately. The room was ready, and both the doctor and the chief of police were present when they arrived. Dr. Byron SmithJones was a plump, dour man who talked very little. The chief, a tall, stiff-backed Englishman named Sir Reginald Forbes, had been at Oxford University with Fairfield and the exporter called him Reggie.

After a cursory examination of the patient, the doctor declared it would be several hours before he could give a diagnosis, because he had to run a number of tests.

The chief had brought two uniformed policemen with him. One took the patient's fingerprints, then returned to headquarters to check them against those on file for the missing banker.

Chief Forbes posted the other on guard outside the room with instructions to let no one in but the doctor and whatever nurses he designated.

Outside, he drew Fairfield aside. "Now let's have a go at that compound these chaps discovered, old man. I assume you want to accompany the raiding party."

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Fairfield replied dryly.

The TEEN agents went along, too. The raid took a little time to organize, because the mainland was out

of Chief Forbes's jurisdiction and he had to arrange for the cooperation of the Malay police. But eventually they got started, with Chris and Geronimo leading the way through the jungle.

When they got to the compound, they stopped short in surprise. It was completely deserted!

"They worked fast," Chris muttered angrily. "And now we're up against another dead end!"

The stockade was empty and there was no sign of the Chinese doctor and the Indonesian guards.

Forbes's eyes took in all the details. "They certainly were in a hurry," he said, and pointed to some clothing still hanging in the barracks. In the kitchen there was a pot of cooked food standing on the stove.

The surgical equipment was gone from the smaller building, but some scattered papers had been left on a desk.

"Nothing but printed medical pamphlets," Fairfield said and leafed through the pile. Suddenly he stopped to examine something closely. "Look at this!" he called to the others and handed Chris a small piece of lavender paper. It contained a message in Chinese, which neither he nor the chief of police could read.

Chris translated: "'Dear Doctor: The next celebration will be when the full moon shines on the Dragon's hyacinths.'" There was no signature.

"Now what do you suppose that means?" Fairfield inquired.

Forbes shook his head. "It's beyond me. But the celebration must be scheduled for tonight, because there is a full moon."

They showed the note to the Malay policemen who had come along, but none of them could make any sense of it either.

Back in town, they learned that the fingerprints had identified the captured man-animal as banker Soong Shu-an, missing for nearly a year.

Dr. Smith-Jones had come to the conclusion that the man's mental condition was the result of a drug, but he was unable to identify it. He would keep Soong Shu-an in the hospital for further observation.

By now it was evening. Chris and Geronimo returned to their hotel to change, and found that the duplicate passports had been delivered by messenger.

"I don't have much of an appetite after what we've seen today," Chris said glumly, "but we'd better get something to eat anyway."

"Fairfield mentioned a sidewalk cafe on Bubis Street, not far from his office, remember?" Geronimo suggested. "Let's try that."

They found the restaurant and sat down at a table with a snow-white cloth. Silently they watched the flow of bicycles, motorcycles, cars, and pedestrians along the narrow street.

"That note we found definitely seems to link the Dragon to the wild men," Geronimo stated after a while.

Chris nodded. "I wonder what kind of drug would do a thing like that."

"Me, too."

They ordered *satay*, a delicious Malaysian national dish consisting of bits of spicy beef and lamb cooked

over charcoal. Each bite was skewered on a separate stick and dipped in a hot peanut curry sauce.

As they ate, the boys placed the wooden skewers on the empty plate furnished each diner. At the end of the meal, the waiter figured what they owed by counting the sticks.

After a while Chris and Geronimo rose to look over the tempting array of fruits on a large dessert table.

Suddenly Geronimo stiffened. "Over there," he hissed, giving the direction with his eyes.

A slim Oriental girl sat at a nearby table watching them over her fan. They could only see her eyes, because the fan covered the lower part of her face. She wore a long, colorful Japanese geisha girl gown.

"No grapevine," Chris said. "This one's harmless."

"She's watching you too closely, *choonday*. Of course"—Geronimo grinned maliciously—"it's possible she just likes your big baby-blue eyes!"

The girl's left eye slowly closed in a wink. Then she gestured with her head toward the narrow areaway between the two bamboo screens separating the cafe from the one next door. Still shielding her face with the fan, she rose and disappeared behind the screen.

"She might have a purple raven tattoo on her wrist that only shows when the skin is warmed," Chris mused.

"Well, are we going to find out? Curiosity has killed my appetite for dessert."

"Mine too," Chris said. "Let's go."

They walked over into the private, narrow areaway. The girl was waiting there, the fan still shielding her

face.

Chris and Geronimo approached her warily. The fan was in her left hand. She made no objection when Chris took her right one. His fingers closed about her wrist and held it for several seconds. The bright purple figure of a raven appeared when he released it. Chris backed away.

The girl lowered her fan and grinned at both of them. "Hi, Chris baby," she said. "You too, big chief!"

15. Rite of the Full Moon

“YUMMI!” CHRIS AND Geronimo exclaimed, vastly relieved. “What are you doing here?”

“Just having a little fun,” she replied with a mischievous smile. “I phoned Hugh Fairfield earlier and he told me you might dine here. So I thought I’d give you a thrill.”

“You nearly turned our hair gray,” Geronimo said. “What brings you to Singapore?”

“Oh. Q sent us to interview Mei-ling Tan’s parents, who live here. The girl was arrested by narcotics agents on evidence we furnished them, you know.”

“Yes, we heard,” Chris said. “Is Spice with you?”

“Over there,” Yummi replied. She led them out to the sidewalk and pointed across the street.

Spice Carter, in a bright-green dress, wearing sunglasses and with a camera hanging from her shoulder, was the picture of a rich young American tourist. She haggled with the proprietor of an open-air curio shop over the price of a carved incense burner.

When Chris whistled, she turned around, waved, then darted through the congested traffic to their side.

“I see Yummi found you,” she greeted them brightly. “Did she take you in with her Mata Hari act?”

“She was about a split second away from getting a karate chop when she showed her face,” Chris said.

Yummi gave him a reproachful look. “Would you strike a woman, you cad?”

“Only one who’s got a purple tattoo on her wrist. I’d

rather be unchivalrous than sorry. Did Pomeroy fix you up with that?"

Yummi nodded. "Cute, isn't it?"

"I guess I'll forgive him for goofing up my rocket hoppers," Geronimo put in. "That tattoo must have been tough."

"It was Q's idea really," Yummi explained. "Pomeroy just figured out the technical details. Q thought it might lead me to the Dragon."

"Great. We haven't much time to get to him," Chris said. "Some kind of celebration is scheduled for tonight, only we haven't the vaguest idea where."

He told the girls about the note they had found on the Chinese doctor's desk.

"When the full moon shines on the Dragon's hyacinths," Spice repeated thoughtfully. "Yummi, Didn't Mei-ling's mother say something about Mei-ling and her friend spending a lot of time at some hyacinth garden?"

"Her friend T'zu An," Yummi confirmed.

"Maybe we'd better drop in on her and find out where that garden is."

"You should go alone," Spice suggested. "If she's one of the Birds of Darkness, you can make use of that purple raven tattoo!"

They decided that all would go together in the Ford, but that the boys and Spice would wait outside while Yummi called on the former UN guide's friend.

The girls had gotten T'zu An's address from Mrs. Tan, and they directed Chris to the house. It was in a section of expensive homes in an outlying part of

Singapore. Chris parked a half block away and Yummi walked from there.

When she returned, it was dark. She jumped into the back seat with Geronimo and said, "Get going, Chris, and I'll explain en route. The meeting is at a little village on the mainland called Chikow and will start around ten o'clock. That's when the moon rises tonight."

Chris started the car and headed for the Johore Causeway. Yummi explained that she had introduced herself to T'zu An as a friend of Mei-ling Tan from New York. After some polite conversation, she had held her wrist long enough to make the tattoo show, then had briefly flashed it. T'zu An had immediately grasped her own wrist, warmed it for a few seconds, then had exhibited a similar tattoo.

"After that we were old buddies," Yummi said. "I told her I had just been ordered to Singapore from the States and didn't know the local geography."

"Smart girl," Chris said.

"As usual," Yummi quipped. "Anyway, I told her I knew about tonight's meeting, but needed directions to get there. T'zu An apologized for not being able to guide me to it personally. She said she had to catch a plane. So she gave me detailed directions."

"Where is she going?" Spice asked. "To Warsaw on an assignment from the Dragon."

Chris and Geronimo exchanged glances.

"Look, Spice," Chris said. "We'll drop you off at the first public phone booth we spot. We won't have time to wait for you, so you'll have to catch a cab back to your hotel. Get in touch with Fairfield and tell him

about T'zu An flying to Warsaw. He can arrange for the CIA to meet her plane and pick her up."

"Sure, boss man," Spice said. "Whatever you say."

They spotted a phone booth two blocks farther on. Chris pulled over to the right, let Spice out, then sped on.

It was only nine o'clock when they reached the fishing village of Chikow, situated on the shore of the Johore Strait. It was a sleepy little place inhabited mainly by Chinese.

Chris parked the Ford on the outskirts of town, facing back the way they had come, told Yummi to get behind the wheel and be prepared to take off fast if necessary.

"Okay," she said. "The temple is supposed to be in the village square. T'zu An said I couldn't miss it, because it's the largest building in town."

"We'll find it," Chris assured her. "See you later."

They left Yummi sitting in the car and walked into town. Soon they arrived at the temple. It was a stone building, about a hundred feet square, and windowless. A peaked roof only about twenty feet wide ran around all four sides of the building, indicating that the center area was open and roofless.

"The hyacinth garden might be in there," Geronimo ventured.

"Right. Let's walk by the gate."

A beggar in rags sat on either side of the temple's entrance. As the boys casually walked past, they could

hear them conversing in Bahasa sasak.

Geronimo said in Apache, “Those aren’t beggars. They’re guards.”

They walked clear around the square, examining the building from all four sides. There were no entrances other than the one in front.

“We’ve got to go in the front way, if we go in at all,” Geronimo said. “How long now until meeting time?”

Chris looked at his watch. “Half an hour.”

By the time they had gone completely around the temple, people were gathering in front of the building. Both the men and women wore ceremonial kimonos with the grape-and-tendrils design!

“What we need is one of those outfits,” Chris murmured.

“They’ll converge on the temple from all over the village,” the Apache observed. “Let’s go hunting where it isn’t so crowded.”

They found what they were looking for on a dark street two blocks away. Two tall Orientals wearing the ceremonial dress came toward them. Chris and Geronimo faded into the mouth of an alley a quarter block ahead of the men.

The two glanced into the alley as they walked by. When they saw the boys lurking there, they reached for their knives. Sleepy slivers hit both of them and they fell silently to the ground.

The TEEN agents dragged the unconscious men into the alley and helped themselves to their kimonos.

“At least it’s warm enough”—Chris chuckled—“so our friends won’t catch cold!”

He used his compact disguise kit to darken his hair and skin and to give his eyes an Oriental slant. Geronimo could easily pass for Chinese in the dim light.

About fifty worshipers had gathered in front of the temple by the time they got back. All kept gazing off toward the horizon. Chris and Geronimo wondered what they were looking for, until, promptly at ten o'clock, a long sigh of satisfaction rose from the crowd.

The full moon was just beginning to rise!

Suddenly a deep-throated gong sounded from inside the temple. Both sides of the broad arched door opened outward from the center. Slowly, the worshipers moved inside. The TEEN agents got themselves in the center of a group and went along.

They crossed a roofed foyer and passed through a second door into an open courtyard. Centered in each wall was an arched doorway. All three stood open and flickering candlelight could be seen through them.

The inner walls of the courtyard were hung with silken cloth decorated with the grape-and-tendrill design and with dragon heads.

At the rear of the courtyard was an oblong pond overflowing with hyacinth blooms. In front of it, restrained by golden chains, lay a huge Komodo Dragon, hissing and snapping at its chains.

The assemblage knelt in a semicircle, facing the dragon. Weird Oriental music came from the room behind the pond. Three men, dressed all in white except for a flaming dragon head on each chest, appeared and performed a ritualistic dance around

the dragon.

A chill ran down Chris's spine as he took in his eerie surroundings. Geronimo next to him stared stoically at the writhing animal.

The only light, other than that from the candles flickering through the open doors, was from the rising full moon. The TEEN agents could now make out the faces of those kneeling near them, since it got brighter as the moon climbed higher. They were glad that they had taken the time to disguise themselves.

After the dance two young girls wearing sarongs with the grape design carried out a large golden bowl from the room on the left. They set it down in front of the hissing dragon. A heavy vapor steamed from it.

One by one the worshipers rose to their feet and filed by the bowl, deeply inhaling the fumes. They seemed to put them into a trancelike state. Their movements became heavy and in slow motion, as though they were wading through neck deep water. They began to emit a keening sound somewhere between a hum and a wail.

Then it was the TEEN agents' turn to sniff the drugged vapor. There was no way to avoid it without giving themselves away.

They got up from their knees and went toward the steaming bowl.

"Gas masks," Chris hissed in Apache.

16. Temple Chase

As THEY NEARED the golden vessel, the boys unobtrusively inserted their nostril gas masks. Chris approached the bowl first, held his head over it, and deeply inhaled the fumes. Geronimo followed his example. As they moved away, they slipped the gas masks back into their pockets.

Assuming trancelike expressions and moving in the same slow-motion manner as the worshipers, they joined a line which was forming. Both uttered the same keening sound as the others.

The line led behind the hyacinth pond and through the doorway from which the weird music was coming.

Two of the men in white who had performed the ritualistic dance stood on either side of the door. The one to the left intoned over and over in Chinese “Enter into the divine presence of your lord the Komodo Dragon”. His counterpart recited something in Bahasa sasak which the boys assumed was the same message.

Geronimo murmured in Apache, “Seems as if we’re finally going to meet the old boy.”

As the worshipers passed through the door, they removed their shoes and lined them up against the wall. There were doors off both sides of the room, and the *How* of candlelight came from each. Quite obviously the Dragon was beyond the high, golden portal to the right, because there the people entered, one at a time.

Suddenly the TEEN agents gasped in terror. Before passing through the portal, they had to walk over a bed of glowing coals!

“Ai!” Geronimo said. “The drug must make their feet insensitive to burns. But ours won’t be. What do we do now?”

“Split out of here,” Chris hissed.

He headed for the door to the left. The third man who had performed the ritual dance appeared from behind. He examined the boys from narrowed eyes and instantly realized they were not in drug-induced trances.

“Infidel spies!” he shouted, and drew a Malay kris from beneath his robe.

As the serpentine blade appeared, Chris crossed his forearms, the right one on top, grasped the man’s wrist with his left hand and his elbow with his right. Pushing downward with his left hand and pulling upward with his right, he spun around and smashed his left hip into the man’s body.

His opponent ended up face-down on the floor, his right arm twisted behind his back, and with Chris kneeling next to him. The dagger had fallen from his numbed hand.

Meanwhile, the other two dancers had rushed in from the courtyard. They, too, drew long ridge-edged daggers.

Geronimo was already through the door to the left. As the men ran toward him, Chris scooped up the kris, leaped to his feet and followed. There was another door across the room, and next to it a stone stairway leading downward.

A squat, powerfully built Chinese in a black suit and turtleneck sweater appeared in the doorway, holding a coil of silken rope in his hands. He was the same man

who had staked out their hotel in Amsterdam!

Geronimo ran down the stairway with Chris right behind him. The Chinese cast a silken noose at Chris. It was an expert throw. As the noose encircled him, the TEEN agent raised the kris before the man could pull it tight. Instantly the razor-sharp blade sliced through the rope.

Chris continued down without even breaking stride. Behind them raced the guards in white, the Chinese, and a mob of maddened worshipers now recovering from their trance.

At the bottom of the stairs, the TEEN agents found themselves in a candlelit underground corridor with stonewalls. Other passageways led off it in both directions, and there were entrances to numerous dimly lighted rooms. The complex beneath the temple seemed to be vastly larger than the portion aboveground.

The boys raced along the corridor, with the howling Orientals in close pursuit. Skidding around a corner, they sped along another passageway.

Just before the worshipers rounded the corner behind them, Geronimo hissed, "*Koya!* This way!"

He ducked through a doorway on the left. Chris was right on his heels. They flattened themselves on either side of the opening and listened to the mob pound by.

Desperately they looked around for another exit, but there was only the door by which they had entered.

"They'll be back," Geronimo whispered. "We'll have to find a place to hide!"

They looked around the room, which was a kind of pagan chapel. In its center stood the bronze, lifelike

statue of a grossly fat man with the head and tail of a Komodo Dragon, and with the reptile's front legs instead of arms. The figure stood erect on enormously thick human legs, with the clawed front feet raised in evil benediction.

Noticing the statue's empty eyes, Chris realized it was hollow. "Maybe we can get inside," he said and went over behind it. He discovered a hinged door with a strap-and-keeper-type hasp. Hastily he pried it open.

The figure was so enormously fat that they each fitted inside one hollow leg. There was only room for one of their heads at the top of the statue, so Geronimo crouched low and let Chris look out through the eyeholes.

Soon they heard footsteps returning along the corridor. One of the white-clad guards and a number of the drugged worshipers came into the chamber and looked around. Satisfied that it was empty, all but one streamed out again.

A young Oriental girl in a kimono with the grape-and-tendril design remained behind. She walked over and peered into the dragon's face.

When she drew a small pistol from her kimono, Chris realized she had spotted his eyes.

In the singsong accent of a native he said in Cantonese, "If the infidels come in here, they will die, little Bird of Darkness."

"Oh, you are one of the guards," the girl said in a disappointed tone, suggesting she would have liked to be the one responsible for the intruders' capture.

Putting away her pistol, she left the chamber.

The boys slipped from the statue and headed for the door. Suddenly one of the long, lean Chinese in black whom they had encountered in Amsterdam walked into the chamber.

He carried a loop of silken rope similar to the one with which the squat man had attempted to lasso Chris.

Before the man could shake free the noose, Chris had the blade of the Malay dagger pressed to his throat. His adversary froze in position, his frightened eyes fixed on Chris's face.

"Come on, Gerry, give me a hand with him," Chris said.

Geronimo took the silken rope. Quickly he bound the man's hands behind him, then gagged him with his own handkerchief.

"What'll we do with this cowboy now?" he asked.

Chris grinned. "Think he'd like it in there?" he asked and prodded the man over to the hollow statue. He made him climb inside, then latched the door. Geronimo shoved the narrow blade of the kris into the loop of the keeper, so their prisoner could not kick the latch open.

As they started for the door again, each threw the statue a cheery wave of good-by.

Then they cautiously peered out of the chamber. The corridor was deserted, and they stepped soundlessly outside. They continued in the same direction they had fled before. Rounding another corner, they came to a stairway going upward. It led to the foyer where the entrance to the building was.

When they heard voices above, they crouched below

the top of the stairs.

A man said in Chinese, “Our lord the Komodo Dragon has decreed death to the infidel intruders.

You are to shoot them on sight!”

Another voice, which they recognized as that of the squat Chinese in black, replied, “Do not worry. This is the only way out, and they will not get past us.”

Then footsteps moved away.

“Stun guns,” Chris whispered. Geronimo nodded and they cautiously raised their heads above the top step. In front of the door, pistols in their hands, stood the squat Chinese and another guard in black.

A moment later, as two darts hit them, both froze into position and gazed glassily straight ahead.

Quickly the TEEN agents slipped outside, but suddenly stopped short when two men disguised as beggars confronted them. They stared at the boys in surprise, the boys stared back. Before they could stun-gun the two, their scream brought the whole mob from the temple.

“*Deeka, choonday!*” Geronimo hissed, and bolted away with Chris on his heels and the guards in hot pursuit.

Fortunately they were not armed with guns. But some of the worshipers running behind were. Shots began to ring out and bullets whistled past the TEEN agents. They increased their speed and widened the gap between themselves and their pursuers.

Yummi heard them coming and had the engine running. Both rear doors of the car stood open. They dived into the back seat from either side and slammed

the doors. Then the Ford took off with a squeal of burning rubber.

No one spoke until the car rolled over the Johore Causeway. Then Geronimo said, “*Ai!* That was too close. Let’s get a little more headway next time we run from an angry mob.”

Yummi studied them in the rear-view mirror.

“You both look darling in kimonos.”

Grinning, they took off the stolen garments and removed their disguises. Yummi drove to the Raffles Hotel, where the girls were staying.

They found Spice in her room, still up. After briefing both girls on what had occurred during their “sightseeing tour at the temple,” as Geronimo called it, they promised to pick them up in the morning. Then they left and returned to their own hotel.

Early the following day they knocked at Spice’s door. she was ready to leave. Then they went for Yummi. She did not answer when Chris knocked. He tried the door, found it unlocked, and opened it. The room was empty.

“That’s strange,” Spice said. “Where could she possibly be?”

“Let’s call the desk and see if she went somewhere,” Geronimo suggested.

Suddenly an SOS beep sounded on Chris’s wrist-watch radio. He stared at the others in alarm. “It’s Yummi’s distress signal!”

17. Sago Lane

“YUMMI’S IN TROUBLE!” Chris exclaimed. He turned to Spice. “Geronimo and I will go after her. You get in touch with Fairfield, Spice!”

“Of course,” she said. “And tell him what?” “About last night, also that Yummi is missing and we’ve gone after her. Tell him we’ll talk to him as soon as we have a chance.”

“Right. You’d better get moving.”

The two boys raced out to their car. In the Ford Chris switched on the loop-antenna direction finder attached to his wrist-watch radio. He positioned it until the bleep signal from Yummi was strongest.

“It’s coming from the old section,” he said. He started the car and headed toward the old city.

When they had crossed the Singapore River, he stopped and checked the signal again. It came from the Chinese quarter.

Chris drove on, then stopped after a while and repeated the procedure. “Southeast,” he declared.

“Let’s go,” Geronimo urged.

Chris went on two blocks south and two blocks east and stopped again. The signal, now stronger, still came from the southeast.

They continued to move two blocks south and two blocks east until finally the signal reversed itself and came from the northwest.

“We’ve overshot,” Chris said. Turning around, he drove back one block north and one west. Then he

parked the car and checked the signal again. It was at its peak.

“She must be in one of the nearby houses,” Chris declared. He had been paying too close attention to the direction finder to notice where they were going. Now he glanced around and asked, “Where are we?”

“Sago Lane,” Geronimo muttered with distaste. “The street of the death houses!”

In the Singapore slums it was not only considered unlucky for people to die at home, but living quarters were so crowded that it wasn't practical to tend the dying there in their last moments. The mortally ill were therefore sent to death houses to pass away, and their funerals were conducted from there.

Every day flower-decked trucks stood on both sides of Sago Lane, waiting to carry the cheap coffins to burial grounds.

The caskets were usually gouged out of a single soft log and had one-piece lids which were nailed on instead of being screwed into place. Musicians on the sidewalks blared their instruments whenever a casket was carried outside. Through the open doors of the houses families could be seen praying and burning joss paper before open coffins. Chris knew of the custom. Joss paper—make-believe money—was burned so that its spirit would accompany the corpse to the afterlife and make him wealthy.

On the second floors of the death houses the dying lay in narrow rooms, awaiting their turns to be carried below.

The direction finder indicated that Yummi was in one of the houses only fifty feet up the street from

where they were parked.

When they were certain from the strength of the bleeps that they had the right place, Chris switched off the instrument.

“Keep your fingers crossed that we’ll find her alive,” Geronimo muttered as they entered.

Inside the death house only one funeral was being conducted at the moment. Two Chinese men and a woman stood next to a coffin containing the body of a relative. The woman was placing joss paper, a paper house, and some pieces of paper furniture on a smoke-blackened altar.

Since there was nothing on the first floor but the funeral room, Chris and Geronimo took a soiled staircase to the second floor.

Here they found a long hallway with cubbyholes on either side of it. The odor of sickness pervaded the hall. In the first two rooms, dying Chinese lay on narrow cots. The third was empty.

In the fourth Yummi lay on a cot, tied hand and foot and gagged.

Chris and Geronimo bolted into the room. From the corners of their eyes they caught movements on either side of the door. They whirled. Too late! Hypodermic syringes were jabbed into their arms!

Chris had time to recognize the squat, powerfully built Chinese in black as his assailant before his vision began to fade. Then his knees gave in and he started to pitch forward. With his last shred of consciousness he grabbed at his special fraternity pin and drove its point into his thumb.

The sudden squirt of pure adrenalin into his

bloodstream kept him from passing out, but only barely. The poison in the hypodermic syringe must have been powerful, because he found himself unable to move even after the adrenalin.

He was dimly conscious of other black-clad figures entering the room. Then he was lifted by the shoulders and legs and carried to a vacant death room. There he was dumped onto a narrow cot and left alone.

By supreme effort Chris succeeded in raising his hand and getting hold of one of the poison antidote ampules in the kit behind his lapel. He managed to bring it to his mouth and swallowed it.

“Probably too late,” he thought as his hand fell back to his side. It felt as though the poison had already taken hold. His last thought was for Geronimo. Was he dying, too?

When consciousness returned, Chris blinked at a white ceiling. He glanced both ways and was confronted by blank wood six inches on either side of him. The sound of grief-stricken chanting came from nearby.

The antidote had worked after all, he realized. Still in a semi-daze, he wondered where he was.

Then he was jarred fully awake by the realization that the wood around him was a coffin. He sat up. Two Chinese men and a woman mourned for an old man next to him. Chris recognized them. They were in the funeral room!

He looked around. In a casket next to his lay Geronimo with his eyes closed. When Chris reached over to shake him, the Indian's eyes popped open. He

sat up, shook his head, and took in his surroundings instantly.

“Hi, *choonday*,” he said. “You look very natural.”

The mourners glanced over their shoulders to see who had spoken. When they saw the two supposed corpses sitting erect in their coffins, the woman screamed.

“Ghosts!” she shouted and rushed out. After a moment of paralyzed fright, the men raced after her.

The TEEN agents climbed from their caskets.

Chris looked at his watch and saw that it was now past noon. They had been out for several hours.

“Let’s check out the second floor,” Chris suggested.

They went up the soiled staircase. There was no sign of either Yummi or the black-suited Chinese in any of the rooms. Chris switched on his direction under, but it emitted no signal.

“This was nothing but a trap to get us here,” he said. “Let’s scam.”

They went downstairs again. A crowd of Chinese had gathered on the sidewalk in front of the death house.

The woman who had run from the funeral room pointed to them and screamed, “Those are the ghosts!”

Panic-stricken, the people dispersed in all directions.

The boys walked to the corner, climbed into the Ford, and drove off. Chris stopped at the first phone booth he saw. It was on Bubis Street near the cafe where they had met Yummi the evening before. From

there he phoned Fairfield.

“Hi, Uncle Hugh. We just arrived in town to look for our sister. She was kidnapped by her ex-husband,” he began.

“So I heard,” the Englishman replied. “Your cousin told me all about it. Did you find her yet?”

“Yes, but we’ve lost her again. This old man of hers is a real dragon.”

“She might be at his country residence,” the exporter said. “Your cousin mentioned it last night.”

“Maybe we should have the place raided.”

“That’s a little sticky. I phoned Reggie, and he says there are no grounds to request a raid. It’s out of his jurisdiction, of course, so he would have to ask the Malay police to do it. And there’s no real evidence of criminal activity. She might not even be there.”

“But we’ve got to do something! Father will be furious if something has happened to her.”

“I know, I know. Listen, I have an idea. Let’s talk about it over lunch. Have you two eaten yet?”

“No, we didn’t even have breakfast. Things happened so fast.”

“Then suppose we meet at the same place you had dinner yesterday.”

“Fine. How soon?”

“Where are you?”

“Not far from there.”

“All right then. Fifteen minutes.”

It took the boys less than that to get to the cafe.

Before they went in, Chris bought a newspaper. A waiter came over and they chose a table. Chris told him they were expecting their uncle and would wait to order until he arrived.

When the waiter left, Chris scanned the headlines, then leafed through the rest. On page four the photograph of a blond square-faced man caught his attention.

Over the picture in bold letters was:

**RETIRED DUTCH MERCHANT FOUND MURDERED IN
HIS LOMBOK HOME.**

Chris emitted a low whistle. "Our old buddy Kees," he said and showed the item to Geronimo.

The Apache read: "Kees Vandebelt, aged 55, was beheaded in his sleep, apparently by a native executioner's sword. There are no clues to the murderer's identity as yet. Police are investigating the case in cooperation with authorities in the victim's native Amsterdam."

"They ought to talk to Sultan Suleiman," Chris muttered.

18. Flip the Whip

WHEN HUGH FAIRFIELD arrived at the cafe, the boys showed him the news item.

“Even TOAD can’t stand up against the Komodo Dragon,” the CIA agent said in a grim tone. “He must be stopped at all costs.”

During lunch they discussed strategy. Since they could not count on help from the police, the TEEN agents themselves would have to rescue Yummi. While it would be safer to wait until dark, they decided the matter was too urgent for any delay. By nightfall the girl might not be alive.

When they left Fairfield, the boys drove back to their hotel. This time Geronimo applied makeup to give his skin a yellowish cast, since his disguise would have to pass scrutiny in bright daylight.

Chris also carefully disguised himself as a Chinese, and both put on the grape-and-tendrill design kimonos they had taken from the two natives in Chikow the night before.

Geronimo examined Chris from head to toe.

“Pretty snazzy, *choonday!*”

“You’re kind of cute yourself,” Chris retorted.

“Let’s go.”

They drove across the Johore Strait on the causeway and parked the Ford on a side road a quarter mile from the village limits of Chikow. Walking into town, they approached the temple from the rear. They could hear no sound from within the courtyard.

Chris scanned his surroundings. Nobody was near. “What say, redskin? The roof?”

Geronimo nodded.

Chris took out a small, flat, spool like device resembling a spring-motored retracting tape measure reel. Pulling out a length of thin, nickel-steel wire with a small grappling hook on its end, he cast the hook upward.

When it caught on the peak of the roof, he pulled the wire taut, then pressed a button on the reel. As its tiny but powerful motor wound in the wire, Chris gripped it with both hands, put his feet against the wall and walked up the roof.

A moment later Geronimo had used a similar device and was on the roof next to him.

Crouching just below the peak, they peered over into the courtyard. They saw no one and crawled over the peak down the other side. From there they let themselves into the courtyard by means of the scaling wires.

There was no sound. Chris tried the door behind the hyacinth pool and found it locked. Examining the lock, he noticed that it was a special burglarproof type which could not be picked.

Gesturing toward the door centering the wall on the right, he said, “You try that one, Gerry, while I check the one across from it.”

Both proved to be equipped with the same type of burglarproof locks. The boys met in front of the door leading into the foyer and from there into the temple.

It also had a burglarproof lock! “Now what?” Geronimo asked.

Chris looked around contemplatively. His gaze touched one of the stone dragon heads spaced at intervals around the walls. He went over to examine it closely.

“The mouths of these things are air intakes,” he concluded. “Probably for some kind of forced air ventilation system for the underground complex.”

“So?”

Chris pointed to the hyacinth pool. Around the edge of the pool the flowers grew so lushly that they spilled over the raised concrete sides and touched the ground.

“If we lay flat next to the sides of the pool, those flowers would cover us,” he said thoughtfully.

The Apache stared at him without understanding.

“First we rout them out from below,” Chris explained. “When they open the doors and run out, we go in.”

He pulled out half a dozen tear-gas pellets from his pocket.

Enlightenment showed on Geronimo’s face. Producing a similar handful of pellets, he said, “I’ll take the right side, you take the left.”

“Roger.”

The boys walked the length of the courtyard, popping a pellet into the open mouth of each stone dragon as they passed it.

Then they wriggled beneath the overhanging hyacinths at the side of the pool, until they lay flat against the raised concrete edges with the flowers completely covering them.

A few moments later all four doors burst open and people poured into the courtyard. There were perhaps twenty men and women, all choking and coughing from the tear gas. Among them were the three black-suited Chinese the boys had encountered in Amsterdam, also the two men dressed in ragged beggars' robes. The rest wore kimonos with the grape-and-tendrils design.

The boys quickly inserted their nostril gas masks and got ready to rush from their hiding places.

Suddenly the three white-clad men who had performed the ritual dance the previous night emerged from the door behind them.

They were temporarily blind from the tear gas just as the others who had stumbled from the building, but they had brought with them a substitute for vision.

Each had a huge Komodo Dragon on a chain leash!

When the monsters began to drag the guards straight for the hyacinth pond, the TEEN agents recalled what Sultan Suleiman had told them about the reptiles' keen sense of smell.

"Change of plans," Chris hissed in Apache.

"Deeka!"

The boys burst from their cover and made for the opposite end of the courtyard. They went unnoticed by the tear-gas victims, but the dragons hissed and slithered after them, dragging along their blinded keepers.

The boys tossed their small grappling hooks to the roof, pulled the wires taut, and pressed the reel buttons, a moment later Geronimo was on the roof.

Chris had walked halfway up the wall when his hook suddenly slipped its grip. He twisted in the air like a cat as he fell and landed on his feet. The rest of the wire shot back into the reel.

The dragons were almost at the spot where he landed. Nimbly Chris skipped out of the way as the jaws of one snapped at him, then leaped entirely over another. The creature's saw-edged teeth missed his feet by a fraction of an inch!

Making a split-second decision, he dashed through the door leading into the foyer off the front entrance, slammed it shut behind him, and slid the bolt.

Meanwhile, Geronimo had run up the peaked roof and down the other side. He let himself to the ground in such a hurry that he failed to check what was below. He landed right on the head of a startled beggar-guard!

Both tumbled to the ground, then leaped erect. The guard reached into his ragged robe and produced a kris. Geronimo disarmed him with judo and knocked him out.

There was only one guard at the temple door in the daytime. Glancing around, Geronimo detected no one else. He dragged his victim into a clump of bushes, took off the grape-and-tendrill design kimono, and put on the beggar rags.

There was a key in the pocket. It fit the front door. Geronimo pulled the cowl over his face, then unlocked the door and went inside.

After Chris had bolted the door from the courtyard behind him, he ran down the stairs near the front entrance. He was still wearing his nostril gas mask,

and the tear gas had no effect upon him.

In the corridor below he spotted two Chinese dressed in black, walking away from him. They wore canister-type gas masks, and suddenly disappeared through a doorway.

Quietly approaching it, Chris heard one of the Chinese say in a muffled voice, "We were lucky to get a mask on the Komodo Dragon so fast, or someone would have lost his head."

Chris peered into the room. It was full of air-conditioning equipment. The two men turned on auxiliary pumps which began to make a steady whirring noise.

Chris knew the air in the underground complex would be clear in minutes. He slipped past the door and began to search for Yummi.

Soon he had checked all the rooms off the two corridors he and Geronimo had traversed the night before. As he approached the stairway, he heard people descending. Quickly he slipped into one of the empty rooms.

The people walked past him. Chris glanced cautiously into the passageway and noticed that none wore gas masks. He removed his.

Then he resumed the search. Worshipers were now in a number of rooms, most still red-eyed, but largely recovered from the gas. Chris kept out of sight as much as possible, but in his disguise those few who saw him paid scant attention.

Finally he came to a chamber in which there was a tall Indonesian wearing a ceremonial robe and a dragon mask. He was performing a strange ritual,

flicking a long black whip at a six-foot high post.

Chris realized he was watching a whip dancer practice his art. He had heard about the ritual. The dance was practiced on the island of Flores, near Komodo. It was a graceful but cruel performance in which two male dancers dueled, raising bloody welts on each other.

The man paused in his practice, coiled the whip, and turned to Chris. He said something in Bahasa sasak.

Chris replied in Chinese, "I do not speak your barbaric dialect."

"Barbaric? On the island of Flores we were making works of art while you Mongols were still living in caves!"

"You did not even invent this dance," Chris sneered. "It came from China."

The masked dancer tossed him the coiled whip and picked up another from the floor. "We will see who is master of the art," he said coldly.

Before Chris could move, his adversary's weapon snaked out with a loud crack, leaving a stinging welt on the TEEN agent's shoulder.

19. Prisoner in Chains

As THE MAN in the dragon mask started to lash out again, Chris's whip answered with a slash to the feet. There was a strict ritual to the duel, he knew, and the dancer was outraged when he departed from the rules.

But Chris had not prodded the man into challenging him to a contest just to demonstrate his skill. He wanted a change of costume. That mask would come in handy!

His whip wrapped around the man's ankles. A quick jerk brought him crashing to the floor in a seated position, then Chris reeled him in like a snagged trout. When he got him close enough, a karate chop to the neck stopped his struggling. To the left was a small storeroom. Chris dragged the unconscious man into it and changed clothes with him. On a shelf in the corner he found some rope. Chris tied and gagged the dancer, left the room, and closed the door behind him.

He had just adjusted the dragon mask to his face when one of the white-clad guards came in. To Chris's great relief, he had left his dragon outside.

In Chinese the man said, "You will have to suspend your practice with the whip, Labu, and join in the search. That infidel dog is loose in the temple somewhere, and our lord the Komodo Dragon has ordered all to help search for him."

Chris merely nodded, not trusting his voice to sound enough like the real Labu's. He followed the man out into the corridor, then turned the opposite way.

Now having an excuse to search the temple, Chris boldly looked into room after room. Everyone was on

the move. But the Dragon's servants were searching for him, and he was searching for Yummi!

Rounding a corner into a corridor he had not previously investigated, he came face to face with a man in the ragged, cowed robe of a beggar. The man stared at him narrowly, then started to slide past in a furtive manner.

Had the beggar-guard penetrated his disguise? Chris was suspicious and could take no chances.

He spun around and aimed a karate chop at the guard's head.

It never landed. The man ducked, whirled toward him, and jabbed stiffened fingers at his solar plexus. Chris sidestepped. Both crouched and warily circled each other.

"Ai!" his opponent hissed in Apache. "Your scalp will adorn my tepee, dragon face!"

Chris straightened up. "Hold it, redskin! It's me."

Geronimo grunted and pushed the cowl back from his face. "How was I supposed to know you in that outfit?"

Grinning beneath the dragon mask, Chris said, "If you didn't know me, they won't either. Let's go find Yummi!"

The Apache pulled the cowl back over his face. Together they continued their search. Shortly afterward they looked into a room outfitted as a chemical laboratory. A Chinese man in filthy clothing was chained to the wall in one corner. The condition of his clothes indicated that he had been there for some time.

The boys stopped short in surprise, then closed the door behind them. The man was emaciated and looked half-starved.

Chris walked over to him. "Who are you?" he asked.

The Chinese gave him a scornful look. "You know very well who I am, Labu!"

"I am not Labu," Chris said, raising his dragon mask for a moment. "If you are a prisoner of the Komodo Dragon, we're on your side."

Hope grew in the chained man's face. "I am Dr. Lin Wu."

The Chinese scientist who had disappeared!

Chris gave a low whistle. "We know about you from Hugh Fairfield," he explained. "Why are you chained?"

"Because I refused to do any more experimenting for the Dragon. I have been held here for a year, and have done his dirty work under threat of death!"

The weak man stopped for breath, then continued, "When I developed an antidote for one of his evil drugs, it had an unexpected after effect of turning men into beasts."

Chris nodded. "We have seen them, Dr. Wu."

"It is terrible," the scientist said sadly. "When I realized how he was enslaving honorable men with my discovery—some of them personal friends of mine—I refused to work for him any more, no matter what the consequences. Since then I have been chained here."

"How come he didn't just kill you?" Geronimo wanted to know.

"Because he has hope that I can be starved into

submission. I am fed barely enough to keep alive. My research knowledge is too valuable to the Dragon for him to kill me.”

“Who is he?” Chris asked.

“A mad genius,” Dr. Wu replied.

The Komodo Dragon, he told them, was the son of a convict condemned to the island of Komodo many years ago. His father had arranged to escape with his mother, who lived on one of the nearby islands.

The Dragon’s mother had taken the child along with her in the proa in which she planned to rescue her husband. As she beached the boat on the deserted shore where the convict waited, a score of dragons suddenly attacked him. The woman had run screaming to her husband’s aid, and the child had seen both parents devoured by the monsters.

“It drove him mad,” Dr. Wu finished. “But his madness has not affected his intelligence. He is highly educated and an intellectual genius. He has gained world-wide power through the evil cult he founded, and vast wealth through his international traffic in drugs. But physically he is horrible.”

“A Dutchman named Kees Vandenbelt told us that,” Chris said. “Pretty fat, isn’t he?”

“He is gross, bloated, disgusting. Despite his brilliance, he eats like a pig—or rather like his reptile namesake, bolting his food down in enormous quantities.

“Sometimes I have wondered if this is not because of seeing his parents devoured. Perhaps he is getting even by devouring the world, which he does symbolically at every meal.”

“What about the Birds of Darkness?” Geronimo asked.

“They are the elite spy corps of his cult, trained to fanatical obedience. A Bird of Darkness impostor was caught just today.”

“Yummi!” Chris exclaimed. “What have they done to her?”

“Nothing yet. There will be a trial, she will be found guilty, because no one is ever found anything else at the Dragon’s trials, and she will be condemned to the pit.”

“The pit?” Geronimo repeated.

“The standard form of execution in the temple. The pit is full of Komodo Dragons who have been starved for a few days.”

The TEEN agents shuddered. Then Chris suddenly had a belated thought.

“Hey,” he said to Geronimo, “this place might be bugged!”

He took out what appeared to be a plastic credit card, but was actually a bug-detecting device developed by Pomeroy. The raised letters, usually white, were bright red.

“Ai!” Geronimo said. “Somebody’s been tuned in on our whole conversation! Let’s get out of here!”

Chris tried to open Dr. Wu’s chains, but without the key or proper tools it was impossible.

“Go ahead,” Dr. Wu whispered. “I’m comparatively safe here. Try to get help!”

Geronimo jerked open the door and rushed into the hall. Chris was right behind him.

They had taken only a couple of steps when the floor beneath them suddenly sank about a foot, and spike traps snapped about their ankles, holding them helpless.

“Boy, did we ever run into this one!” Chris cried out in dismay.

From one direction came the squat Chinese with his two lean companions in black. From the other hurried the three white-clad guards with the flaming dragon heads on their chests.

The squat man jerked the mask from Chris’s face and cast it aside. Taking out a handkerchief, he wiped off the boy’s makeup.

“Ah, Mr. Christopher Cool,” he said. Then he pushed the cowl away from Geronimo’s face. “And your Indian friend, unsuccessfully trying to look Chinese, too.”

“I thought it was a pretty good disguise,” Geronimo told him.

“Obviously it failed,” the man replied sarcastically.

The TEEN agents’ hands were bound behind their backs, then the traps gripping their ankles were released. They were led along several corridors to a huge chamber they judged to be under the hyacinth pool. Its floor was tiled with gold and ivory. Costly silks covered the walls. At one side of the room was an altar in the form of a dragon, inlaid with gold and with rubies for eyes. Across from it stood a huge golden throne with a seat large enough to accommodate four normal-sized men.

Along the wall was what appeared to be a jury box, with a large table and several chairs in front of it. A

smaller table with only one chair stood nearby.

Chris and Geronimo, their hands still bound behind them, were ordered to sit at the large table.

The squat Chinese sat between them. One of his black-suited companions seated himself at the small table, and the others spaced themselves around the room.

A deep-throated gong sounded from somewhere beyond. Chris stiffened. A chill ran down his spine as he realized that this must be the courtroom where the tapes sent to the world leaders had originated!

One of the white-clad guards intoned, "All rise for our lord the Komodo Dragon!"

Everyone except Chris and Geronimo stood up. The squat Chinese took them by the arms and jerked them to their feet.

A wide double door opened, and through it came a litter borne by four tall Indonesians bare to the waist. On it sat the most grossly obese man the boys had ever seen, clad in a golden robe decorated with flaming red dragons.

He was so enormous that he quite obviously could not even stand on his feet, but had to be carried everywhere by his slavish attendants. He had the face of a savage Buddha.

Chris felt a knot in his stomach and noticed obvious disgust in Geronimo's usually stony face.

"He's everything Dr. Wu described him to be," Chris whispered in Apache.

"More," Geronimo replied. "Quiet!" hissed the squat Chinese.

The litter bearers carried the monstrous figure to the huge throne and set it down there. Then they backed away and fell to their knees before the Dragon.

The white-clad guard intoned, "All kneel to our divine lord the Komodo Dragon."

The squat Chinese did not even wait for the TEEN agents to obey. He dropped a heavy hand on each shoulder and forced them to their knees.

"You may rise," the Dragon said in a sibilant hiss.

"Ai!" Geronimo said to Chris behind the squat man's back, while the shuffling of feet drowned out his voice. "That sounds familiar!"

Chris nodded. There was not the slightest doubt. The Komodo Dragon was the judge who had condemned Harold Obie and Pierre Le Temps to death!

20. The Trial

THE WIDE DOUBLE door opened again and Yummi Toyama was led in with her hands tied behind her. She was forced to kneel before the throne, then was seated at the same table with Chris, Geronimo, and the squat Chinese.

The monstrous creature on the throne said in his hissing voice, "Did you fools think you could oppose the Komodo Dragon? Even the high officials of TOAD tremble at my name!"

"What are you trying to accomplish?" Chris inquired.

"Not just trying, young man," the Dragon replied sardonically. "I am succeeding. Soon the nations of the world will be leaderless. This morning a tape of his trial was mailed to your president and within a week he will be dead."

The Dragon continued mercilessly, "The leaders of other nations will follow him to eternity in the near future.

"Since all influential men in line to take their places will have been reduced to mindless slavery by my beast drug, the world will have nowhere to turn except to me. I will rule. I alone!"

"You are mad Yummi exclaimed. "You think you are the Almighty!"

A gloating expression appeared on the evil face. "I know I am!" He stared around at his respectful subjects, then clapped enormously fat hands. "Bring in the jury and let the trial begin."

“Trial?” Geronimo said to the squat Chinese seated between him and Chris. “What trial?”

“Yours,” the Chinese replied. “Our lord the Komodo Dragon believes in justice. No one is condemned without a trial. I am your defense attorney.”

“Thanks”, Geronimo said. “I want a change of venue.”

“Quiet!” his “lawyer” instructed him. “The jury is entering!”

The wide double door had opened again, and twelve people filed through to take seats in the jury box. Six were men wearing kimonos with the grape-and-tendrill design. Six were young women in sarongs with the same pattern among them Delimar, the girl Chris had saved from the boiling mud on the island of Bali. She looked at him without expression and demurely lowered her eyes.

The Dragon clapped his hands again. “Let the prosecution read the charges.”

The tall black-suited Chinese seated alone at the other table rose to his feet. “The defendants are Christopher Cool, Geronimo Johnson, and Yummi Toyama,” he began. “They are charged with crimes against our lord the Komodo Dragon.”

In his sibilant voice the Dragon inquired, “How do the defendants plead?”

The defense attorney rose. “Not guilty, your honor.”

“So far you’re doing fine,” Chris told him as he sat down again.

“Present your case,” the Dragon ordered the prosecutor.

“The specifics are as follows,” said the Chinese. “The first crime, by Cool and Johnson, was interference with an agent of our lord, whom they apprehended after an unsuccessful attempt to carry out the sentence against the premier of France. A sentence, I might add, which was later executed successfully.

“The second crime, on the part of Cool only, was possession of an elephant charm belonging to the aforementioned agent, which contained an energy drug.”

“That was planted on me!” Chris objected.

“Quiet!” his attorney said with a frown.

The prosecutor continued, “All three are charged with following and spying on agent Mei-ling Tan at the time she was employed as a UN guide. Miss Toyama is further charged with conspiring with a certain Spice Carter to have Agent Tan arrested on a narcotics charge, thereby interrupting our lord’s drug traffic. Spice Carter, therefore, is tried with Yummi Toyama in absentia.”

He continued to enumerate everything the three had done to cause the Dragon inconvenience. It was unnerving to the TEEN agents to realize that virtually their every move had been observed by Dragon agents, even before they left the United States.

The only time the Dragon’s spies had been thrown off the trail was when the boys pulled the passport switch at the Amsterdam airport. And for that they were charged with the crime of deceiving the Komodo Dragon!

When the long recital was finished, the prosecutor sat down.

“The defense may make its opening statement,” the Dragon hissed.

The squat man turned to his defendants. “Do you deny these charges?”

Chris said, “Of course. We did everything he said, but none of them are crimes.”

The defense attorney turned to Geronimo. “Is that how you feel, too?”

“I couldn’t have said it better,” the Indian assured him.

The Chinese craned to peer beyond Geronimo at Yummi.

“Expresses my sentiments,” she said.

Now the squat man rose to his feet. “If it please the court, my clients admit all charges.”

When he sat down again, Geronimo examined him sardonically. “Where did you study law? Professor Corey’s Ding-Dong School?”

The prosecutor rose again. “Since the defendants admit all charges, it will be unnecessary to call corroborating witnesses. The prosecution rests.”

He seated himself and the squat man popped up. “The defense rests,” he added.

“I have a question,” Chris said.

The Dragon raised his eyebrows, and an amused smile curled his lips. “Do go ahead, Mr. Cool!”

“How did your people on the different islands and the various cities know who we were?”

“Efficient communication,” the Dragon replied, gloating proudly. “A picture of you sent by Mei-ling

Tan was reproduced and circulated among all my agents. You were doomed from the time you left your country!”

“Congratulations!” Chris muttered. “It seems, however, that your executioners are not equally efficient. They bungled the job quite a few times!”

“That is all over now,” the Dragon hissed angrily. “The jury will consider the evidence and render its verdict!”

The jurors bent their heads together. When the discussion continued for some time, the Dragon frowned. “What is the delay?” he demanded.

“One jury member is holding out for acquittal,” the foreman replied.

The Dragon’s bloated face became enraged. “Who?” he hissed.

Delimar turned pale. She said something to the foreman.

He rose and announced, “The juror has changed her mind, your honor. We find the defendants guilty as charged on all counts.”

“The defendants will rise!” the Dragon snarled.

The squat Chinese got up and pulled Chris and Geronimo to their feet. Yummi rose under her own power.

“Christopher Cool, Geronimo Johnson, and Yummi Toyama, you have heard the verdict,” the Dragon intoned sibilantly. “You are sentenced to the pit!”

Two of the white-clad guards went over to the wall behind the altar and drew aside the silken drapes revealing a floor-to-ceiling panel behind them. The

guards pushed it open. The chamber immediately beyond it had no floor!

Now the defense attorney and the prosecutor prodded Chris, Geronimo, and Yummi over to look down into a deep pit. At its bottom six huge Komodo Dragons hissed and reared up on their hind legs in a ravenous attempt to get food.

The TEEN agents froze in horror and Yummi let out a stifled cry as the monstrous creature on the throne clapped his hands again. His litter was lifted up and carried to the edge of the pit, so that he could look down into it.

“Ah,” the Dragon sighed. “My lovely pets are hungry.” From beneath his billowing robe he took a package and unwrapped it to disclose a huge chunk of bloody meat, which he tossed into the pit.

As the hissing, snapping lizards fought for it, he laughed loudly.

“Beautiful,” he said between cackles. “Cast the infidels into the pit!”

At that moment a clear feminine voice came from the doorway. “Hold it, buster!”

Everyone whirled around. Spice Carter stood there with a ball-point pen in her hand.

The black-suited guards reached for their guns, but both collapsed as sleepy slivers hit them.

The white-clad guards drew crises and started toward Spice. Sleepy slivers took care of them, too.

All but one of the people in the jury box rushed toward the redhead. Spice managed to sleepy-sliver five before the rest overwhelmed her. She was crushed

to the floor with a kimono clad man kneeling on each arm. A Bird of Darkness was holding each leg, another girl straddling her stomach and a fourth keeping her head down.

Geronimo whirled and started toward Spice. In doing so, he crashed into one of the litter bearers and kicked his feet out from beneath him. The man sat on the floor with a thud, his legs protruding over the edge of the pit. He scrambled backward to keep from falling in.

The litter tipped dangerously toward the unsupported corner. The other three bearers made an heroic effort to right it, but the weight of the Dragon was too much for them. Inexorably, the litter tipped more and more, and the bloated giant slowly slid into the pit!

He emitted one long, bloodcurdling scream which ceased abruptly. Then the only sound was the snapping and hissing of the six huge lizards.

The TEEN agents backed away from the edge. At the same time, the bearer whom Geronimo had spilled leaped to his feet. He and his three companions turned on the boys in rage. Two grabbed Geronimo, one each seized Chris and Yummi and started to hustle them toward the pit.

But the litter bearers dropped senseless to the floor before they got there, because Delimar suddenly karate'd each one of them, giving Chris a tigerish, yet friendly smile.

Then she cut the bonds of the TEEN agents with a kris she had picked up from the floor.

As the three sprang toward the fanatics holding

Spice, a dozen men poured through the door. In the lead were Hugh Fairfield and Chief Forbes. The rest were Malay police.

It took them only seconds to free Spice and tie up the jurors. Then Fairfield said, “Reggie had second thoughts. When he contacted the mainland police, they decided that the kidnapping of an American citizen was grounds enough for a raid.”

“Boy, you just got here in time!” Chris said, vastly relieved. “Those lovely beasties down there were all set to have a Western-style lunch.” “They got an Oriental dinner instead,” Geronimo added.

Two days later all four TEEN agents met in Q’s office in New York for debriefing.

“Jolly good show,” Q said when they had completed their report. “I have word from Fairfield that records found in the temple list everyone of the Dragon’s agents, including all his dope pushers, so that we can round up the whole bunch.”

“Great!” Chris said. “They’ve done enough damage, especially to those wild men.”

“It won’t be permanent,” Q assured him. “Dr. Wu believes he can develop an antidote and return those poor chaps to normal.”

“I hope so. Oh, there’s one more thing,” Chris added. “That girl Delimar—she helped us.”

“Her cooperation will be taken into account. And now you’d better get back to Kingston.”

The boys left TEEN Control and drove back to the university. There was a letter waiting for Chris from Ingrid Doedyns.

Among other things, she wanted to know if Geronimo had married the Chinese girl.