

THE MONSTERS

A Doc Savage Adventure by Kenneth Robeson

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Chapter 1. THE PINHEADS

ON THE fifteenth of the month, Bruno Hen did the thing which was actually his first step toward disaster -- a disaster that was to affect not only himself, but many others as well.

Bruno Hen sold his furs on this date.

Most of the pelts were muskrats, cunningly stolen from the trap lines of Bruno Hen's neighbors, the chief loser being big, honest, slow-witted Carl MacBride. The thefts were slyly executed, for Bruno Hen was as foxy a half-breed as the North Michigan woods held.

Ox-like Carl MacBride never suspected.

Not that Carl MacBride liked Bruno Hen. One day big MacBride had come upon Bruno Hen killing a chicken for dinner. The breed had been choking the chicken to death and taking great glee in prolonging the fowl's death agonies. After that, Carl MacBride held a suspicion that no more cruel a breed than Bruno Hen ranged North Michigan.

The fur market was strong the day Bruno Hen sold. His pelts brought more than he had expected. So he decided to celebrate.

This decision was his second step toward disaster.

The Atlas Congress of Wonders was showing at Trapper Lake that day. The Atlas did not amount to much as a circus, being financially very much down at the heel. But it was the best Trapper Lake offered. So, by way of celebrating, Bruno Hen went to the circus.

That was his third step in the direction of disaster. The fourth pace, taken all unknowingly, was when he stopped in front of the freak side show.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" bawled the side show barker. "We have here a stupendous, marvelous, awesome, dumbfounding sight! We have here the three most amazing beings ever to come from darkest Africa! Look them over, good people. Try to make yourselves realize that these monstrosities are actually human. They are called the pinhead men. They are cannibal savages from darkest Africa!" The Atlas Congress of Wonders was not above faking an occasional wild man or a cannibal, but it chanced that these pinheads were the genuine articles. They had been brought from Africa by a more affluent circus, which had then gone bankrupt.

Bruno Hen moved close to the platform to stare at the three pinheads. He had never seen such hideous humans.

The pinheads were squat, the tallest reaching barely to Bruno Hen's topmost vest button. They were nearly as broad as tall, and they were as black as human skin could practically be. They might have been oversize monkeys, shaven bare of hair, dyed black, and given a high polish.

The contour of their heads was especially haunting. Instead of being rounded in the fashion considered normal, the skulls sloped upward to a sharp point. The pin-pointed heads were also very small in proportion to the rest of their gnarled black bodies.

The pinheads had a trait of casting darting, animal-like looks about them. At times they jumped up and down, after the fashion of chimpanzees. They emitted caterwauling noises -- apparently their

way of conversing with each other.

Trapper Lake citizens, looking on, probably thought this behavior was part of the circus act. They were mistaken.

The poor pinheads were beings almost devoid of mentality.

BRUNO HEN looked at the pinheads and grinned from ear to ear. The idea of human beings so handicapped by nature tickled him. He laughed out loud.

That laugh was his fifth step toward disaster.

The pinheads stared at Bruno Hen, their attention drawn by the laugh. Bruno Hen's smile was derisive, but the pinheads did not have the intelligence to realize that. They thought the grin friendly. They smiled back, jumped up and down, and beat their chests with nubbins of fists. Back in the African bush, that was the way one showed heart-to-heart friendship.

Bruno Hen thundered another laugh. It was the same kind of a laugh Carl MacBride had heard when he had come upon the breed slowly throttling a chicken to satisfy a lust for cruelty.

The utter cruelty of that loud laugh caused the barker to end his spiel abruptly and stare at Bruno Hen. The barker ran his eyes up and down the breed's person.

In Bruno Hen he saw a bulky lout constructed on the lines of a brown bologna. Bruno Hen's clothing was frayed, greasy. It never had fitted properly. He wore high deerskin moccasins, obviously made by himself. He wore a dazzling green hat and a blinding-yellow necktie, both new. The barker was a pleasant-natured soul. He did not like Bruno Hen's laugh; it sent wintry chills along his spine. He decided to bullyrag Bruno Hen to persuade him to move on.

The barker sprang to one of the three pinheads, and made an elaborate pretense of listening to the unintelligible cackle the fellow was making.

"Crowd right up, folks!" he yelled. "An amazing thing has happened! These pinhead cannibals from darkest Africa claim they have just recognized a member of their tribe who was lost years ago!"

The barker leveled an arm at Bruno Hen. "The pinheads claim this man as their brother tribesman."

The crowd roared its laughter.

The pinheads hopped about, clucked and gobbled. They were just happy. But it looked as if they were agreeing with the barker. Actually, they couldn't understand a word he said.

Bruno Hen glowered. His fists made big knobs at his side.

A grinning pinhead leveled an arm at the breed and spouted gibberish.

The barker yelled, "The gentleman from Africa declares that any one can tell this man is his brother by looking at that green hat and yellow necktie."

At this point, to the barker's relief, Bruno Hen stamped off. He yanked his green hat over his eyes and loosened his yellow necktie, as if it were too tight.

Bruno Hen's swarthy neck was purple and he was muttering under his breath. It was a tribute to his stupidity that he thought the pinheads had said what the barker declared they had. Accordingly, he was very angry with the pinheads.

Farther down the midway was the strong-man show. A fellow with remarkable muscles stood on the platform.

"We have one of the strongest men in the world!" the barker was claiming raucously. "Only ten cents, a dime, a tenth part of a dollar, to see him perform. I might even say this man is the strongest in the world. The only other man who might be his equal is Doc Savage. But, unfortunately, this Herculean gentleman and Doc Savage have never matched strength. We do not know who is actually the stronger."

Bruno Hen scowled blackly.

"You may never see Doc Savage, folks!" yelled the barker, "So step in and see one of the strongest men in the world!"

Bruno Hen tried to remember who Doc Savage was. He seemed to have heard the name before.

Soon the breed came to a show featuring a mental marvel, a fellow who claimed to be able to answer any question asked of him without consulting a reference book. The mental marvel was supposed to know all things -- or so the barker was saying.

"The only living man who may possibly be a greater mental marvel than this individual, is Doc Savage!" extolled the barker.

Bruno Hen scratched his head, trying to remember.

"Doc Savage you may never meet, my good people," the barker howled. "So pay a dime and see the mental marvel who is almost his equal!"

Abruptly, Bruno Hen remembered who Doc Savage was. He was an almost legendary figure, a man of mystery, who was reputed to be a superman in strength and mental ability. Doc Savage resided in New York. He traveled to the ends of the earth, punishing wrongdoers and helping others out of trouble. In Trapper Lake stores, Bruno Hen had heard traveling salesmen tell of Doc Savage's fabulous feats.

Little dreaming that Doc Savage -- to whom amazing feats were commonplace events -- was to play an important part in the future of Trapper Lake, Bruno Hen walked on. He did not give a hoot about the future of Trapper Lake, anyway.

WANDERING OVER the circus grounds, Bruno Hen soon found himself back among the tents and wagons

which the performers used for living quarters.

He came to a stop; his porcine eyes glittered. He put a wide, fatuous grin on his face.

Coming toward him was a young woman with the most striking hair Bruno Hen could recall having seen -- hair the exact shade of steel. The young woman had it drawn like a tight steel skullcap, with steellike knobs over her ears.

She wore boots, laced breeches, and a brilliant red jacket. The garments set off a shapely figure to great advantage. A shiny metal revolver was belted about her waist,

Bruno Hen was nothing if not bold. He prepared to accost the young woman.

The girl evidently knew the ways of such louts. She veered off and avoided him.

Not daunted, Bruno Hen followed her. He stopped, however, when he saw the young woman pick up a chair and calmly climb into a cage with several ferocious-looking maned beasts. These greeted her with ugly roars.

The steel-haired girl was a lion tamer.

Standing back, marveling that the lions did not devour her instantly, Bruno Hen watched the cage as it was hauled into the Big Top.

Inside the Big Top, the ringmaster was bellowing, "And now we are going to present that extravagant, unparalleled exhibition of human nerve!" He paused to get the proper drama. "Jean Morris, and her troop of blood-thirsty, untamed lions!"

Bruno Hen loitered about in hopes of getting another glimpse of the young woman with the amazing steel hair. But she did not appear. He concluded she must have left by another exit.

He got to thinking of the pinheads again, and his rage arose. He stalked off the circus grounds, bought some groceries in Trapper Lake and betook himself home.

Bruno Hen had no idea that he had laid almost the full foundation for future disaster.

BRUNO HEN'S cabin was located not far from the shore of lake Superior. The structure was a patchwork of logs, cheap slab lumber and tar paper. It had one room. An open fireplace served for both warmth and cooking. There was a window, and plenty of cracks for ventilation.

Except for big, slow-witted Carl MacBride, who lived half a mile down the lake shore, there were no near neighbors, There was no telephone, and Bruno Hen took no newspaper.

Hence, when the Atlas Congress of Wonders went bankrupt in Trapper Lake after counting the proceeds of its last performance, Bruno Hen did not learn of the fact immediately.

The day following his experience at the circus, he expertly robbed a gill net set by Carl MacBride. He took only such fish as he wished to eat; but instead of leaving the others in the net, he removed them and tossed them aside. He was not doing the fish a kindness, for he knocked each finny specimen in the head before discarding it. There was a peculiar twist to Bruno Hen's brain which made him delight in cruelty.

The pretty circus lion tamer haunted his thoughts somewhat. Memory of her steel-hued hair especially stuck with him.

The next few days Bruno spent in overhauling his canoe, replacing a staved rib or two, and applying a coat of varnish. The fishing season was near. With the coming of summer, he usually traveled south to a district more inhabited, where he offered his services as a guide.

It was a week to the day after his visit to the circus when Bruno Hen took his next step toward disaster.

He was getting a late supper when he heard a noise. He was frying fish. Over the sputter of grease, he thought he heard a low moan.

With a quick gesture, he put out the light. Being of an evil nature himself, Bruno always expected the worst from others. His eyes became accustomed to the murk. Although there was no moon, the sky was cloudless and the stars furnished fitful luminance.

The breed eyed the window. The pane needed washing, but he could discern an object outside. His hair all but stood on end.

One frenzied leap took Bruno Hen across the cabin to his rifle. He snatched it down, then dashed outside.

The thing at the window had been a hideous apparition, yet vaguely familiar. A cold dew stood on the breed's skin as he squinted into the night.

"Hell!" he swore.

The odious specter at the window had been one of the pinhead cannibals.

ALL THREE of the grotesque little black fellows huddled near the window. They trembled after the manner of frightened animals.

Bruno Hen, seeing that they were very scared of him, felt more bold.

"What d'you want?" he demanded.

The answer was a hooting, clucking conglomeration of sounds. Bruno Hen could understand no word of it. He could not tell that the unfortunate pinheads, stranded when the circus went broke, were slowly starving. Unable to speak English, and lacking the intelligence to convey their needs by making signs, the pinheads were in a predicament.

Bruno Hen scowled at them, thinking of the mortification they had caused him at the circus.

"Get outa here!" he snarled.

The pinheads only waved their arms more vehemently and cackled louder. They were desperate for

food. One kneeled, seeking to grasp Bruno Hen's knees in supplication. Bruno Hen kicked the pinhead, sending the unfortunate fellow sprawling away. Apparently pleased by the sound of his foot on human flesh, the breed launched another kick. He struck with his rifle barrel, with his fists. The pinheads, weakened by lack of food, could evade only a few of the blows. Mauled and bleeding, they finally managed to drag themselves away. "I'll do worse next time you show up!" Bruno Hen bawled after them. The pinheads disappeared in the timber to the southward. The breed stood in the starlight until he could no longer hear sounds of their footsteps. Then, chuckling, he entered his cabin. It was possibly ten minutes later that he heard faint but terrible human screams. These came from the direction the pinheads had taken. They lasted only a moment, and ended with unpleasant abruptness. "Probably two of 'em eatin' the third one," Bruno Hen snorted. The breed did not know, but he had just taken his final step toward disaster.

Chapter 2. TERROR

MONTHS PASSED.

Bruno Hen went southward during the fishing season. Pickings as a guide, much to his disgust, proved slender. Only two short engagements did he obtain in some ten weeks. Finally, there was a third job. This one promised to pay well. Bruno Hen, however, made the mistake of trying to lift a fat wallet which his temporary employer carried in a hip pocket. Upon being discovered, he narrowly missed getting shot. To evade jail, he was forced to flee back to the timber fastnesses out of which he had come. If stolid Carl MacBride was surprised at Bruno Hen's premature return, he said nothing about it. MacBride's fish traps had yielded a more abundant catch during the past weeks, but he had failed to attach the true significance to this. If Carl MacBride was not surprised at Bruno Hen's early return, he was surprised when the breed paid him a visit a few nights later. Something was wrong. MacBride could see that as he admitted the breed to his cabin. Bruno Hen's eyes rolled. He perspired freely, although the night was cool. There was a noticeable bulge in one of his coat pockets. "Did you hear anything a few minutes ago?" the breed asked bluntly. Carl MacBride shook his head. He never used a word where a gesture would do. He had heard only the usual night sounds -- insects and nocturnal birds. Bruno Hen's next question was more surprising. "What happens when a man goes crazy?" MacBride did not laugh. "Search me. He has funny ideas, I guess." "He sees things, huh?" "I reckon." The visitor wiped his forehead with his palm, then swabbed the palm on his corduroy pants. Abruptly, he thrust a hand in his bulging coat pocket. He brought out an enormous roll of greenbacks. "You're the only honest man I know, MacBride," he said. "Want you to do me a favor." Carl MacBride was a great mountain of a man, reddened by many winds, and with eyes as blue as Lake Superior itself. He eyed the money placidly. "Sure, I'll do you a favor," he rumbled. "But I ain't takin' pay for it." Bruno Hen placed the money on a table. "Take it," he directed. "If anything happens to me, use this kale to hire the best detective in the world." Carl MacBride batted his lake-blue eyes. "I want the detective to investigate whatever happens to me," Bruno Hen went on. "I want the best damn detective there is anywhere! Plenty of money here to pay his bill." MacBride eyed the currency. There were many thousands of dollars in the bank roll. He knew it must be Bruno Hen's life savings. "What's got into you?" MacBride rumbled. "This whole talk don't make sense." Bruno Hen swallowed uneasily, squirming. A flush darkened his swarthy skin. He seemed on the point of answering. "Maybe it don't amount to nothin', after all," he mumbled. "But if somethin' happens to me -- hire the detective." "I'll do that," MacBride agreed. Bruno Hen took his departure, ignoring the slow questions which Carl MacBride asked. The breed carried a flashlight, and kept this blazing steadily as he made his way through the timber. He washed the beam about continuously, seeming to be in deathly fear of some habitant of the darkness. From the door of his cabin, big Carl MacBride watched the retreating breed. He shook his ponderous head slowly. "Somethin' is sure wrong with that guy," he grunted. He fingered the roll of money thoughtfully. "Bruno Hen kinda acts like he'd seen the devil." With that last statement, Carl MacBride came far nearer the truth than he dreamed.

HAVING REACHED his shack, Bruno Hen locked himself in. He tore up parts of the floor and spiked the rough plank across the windows. Loading his rifle, he placed it on the table alongside a fresh box of cartridges. He charged both barrels of his shotgun, and arranged a little mound of shells. Loading his revolver, he belted it on.

He did not sleep at all that night; he scarcely sat down. Around and around the hut he paced nervously, stopping frequently to peer outside through the cracks.

There was a brilliant moon. In the surrounding timber there were no stirrings except for the undulating of tree boughs before a gentle breeze. Out of the far distance came sometimes the squawling uproar of fighting lynxes; a lonely wolf howled mournfully. The odor of pine came with the breeze.

This peace of the woodland night seemed to soothe Bruno Hen not at all.

Strangely, the breed did not leave his cabin at all the following day. Literally hundreds of times, he peered outside as if in deadly expectation. It was apparent that he had seen something -- probably on the night before he visited Carl MacBride -- which had frightened him. The more he thought of what he had seen, the more terrified he seemed to become.

Toward noon, he slept a little. He did not sleep that night. The following day, Carl MacBride came over.

"Wondered how you was comin'," MacBride said. Bruno Hen peered out at his neighbor through his barred window. He did not invite MacBride in. In fact, he said nothing.

MacBride, big and slow moving, ambled around the shack. He noted that the place had been turned into a fortress.

"Afraid of somebody?" he asked.

The breed scowled. "You git! Tend to your own business."

Not taken back, MacBride grinned pleasantly. "I've got your money, if you want it back."

"Keep that money. If somethin' happens to me, you hire the best detective in the world, like I told you."

"I been readin' in a magazine about a feller that makes a business of helpin' other people out of trouble," MacBride offered. "Maybe he'd do."

"What's his name?"

"Doc Savage."

Bruno Hen recalled the flattering references which he had heard the circus side show barkers make to Doc Savage. A muscular Hercules and a mental marvel, they had termed Doc Savage.

"He'll do," growled the breed.

"O. K.," said MacBride. "But listen, Bruno, what's aillin' you?"

"Nothin'," snarled the breed. "You go 'way."

"You must be nuts," opined Carl MacBride, and took his departure.

By way of paying the good-natured giant back for that last crack, Bruno Hen left his cabin during the afternoon and raided one of MacBride's fish traps. He selected several choice walleyes, and turned the rest of the catch loose. The breed was thoughtful as he slunk back toward his cabin.

"I ought to have told MacBride about what I seen prowlin' around here the other night," he said slowly. "Hell! He would think I was crazy."

Reaching his shack, he fastened himself in securely. Exercise seemed to have lulled his fears somewhat.

He lay down and slept.

The night was well along when Bruno Hen opened his eyes. He lay in a sort of drawn rigidity, listening to what had aroused him.

It was a strange wind, which seemed to be blowing outside. This came in puffs, regularly spaced. The breed shivered from head to foot. The gusty sounds were too peculiar to be made by a natural wind.

Using extreme care to make no noise, Bruno got up. He gripped his rifle in one hand, his shotgun in the other. He crept to one of the timbered windows and crammed an eye to the crack.

What he saw caused him to shriek out in awful horror.

Jumping back, he lifted his rifle. It was high-powered, intended for bagging moose. He fired. The slug slapped through the planks as if they had been paper. Again the breed fired. He pumped jacketed lead through the wall until the magazine was empty.

Plugging in fresh cartridges, he continued his wild firing.

"It's worse'n it was before," he moaned, referring to the horror outside.

Over the whacking of the rifle and the breed's moaning there sounded a tremendous rending and tearing. The breed stared upward in ghastly terror.

Parts of the roof of his shack were being torn off. Stout boards split apart or snapped off. Rafters buckled under some cataclysmic force.

Still firing madly, Bruno retreated to the other side of the cabin.

With a final squawling of withdrawn nails, and a cracking of wood, a section of the roof came off. Something extended through the aperture.

The breed emitted one squawling shriek after another. He dashed from end to end of the cabin. He was like a trapped rabbit.

The breed's neighbor, Carl MacBride, unlike many big men, was a light sleeper. He heard the yelling and shooting coming from Bruno Hen's cabin. Leaping up, he yanked on his pacs, grasped a rifle and ran for the uproar.

Long before he reached the breed's cabin, MacBride heard Bruno Hen's shrieking die. Its termination was a piercing, bleating sound, remindful of a mouse which had been stepped upon. Arriving at the shack, MacBride found an amazing sight. The structure itself was little more than a great shapeless wad of timber and planks.

Striking matches for light, he circled the spot. His gaze lighted upon a timber as thick as his leg, and he whistled softly in amazement; for something snapped off that timber as if it were a match stick.

MacBride stood still, straining his ears. There was an occasional creak from the settling ruin of the cabin. From out on the lake he thought he heard faint splashing. This was very distant. No other sound came. The bedlam at the cabin had been so awesome that the night birds, animals, and insects had been frightened into complete silence.

MacBride now dug into the cabin wreckage. He found a gory wad of a thing. He had to examine it for some seconds before he would believe it was the earthly remains of Bruno Hen.

Bruno Hen had been crushed to death in ghastly fashion! Carl MacBride made a slow circle of the cabin and the vicinity, searching. Then he headed for his own cabin, running.

"This is a job for that Doc Savage!" he muttered,

Chapter 3. PLANE ACQUAINTANCE

MODERN PASSENGER planes are remarkably efficient creations. Not only are they capable of great speed, but the cabins are soundproofed until it is possible to conduct a conversation in ordinary tones. Pretty hostesses serve coffee and sandwiches.

Big Carl MacBride occupied a seat in one of these passenger ships, as it rushed toward New York. He tried to look nonchalant. He balanced a cup of coffee clumsily on one calloused palm and held a tiny sandwich between thumb and forefinger of his other hand. Between nibbles and sips, he eyed the surrounding clouds.

This was his first time in the air. From impressions gained in a life spent on the ground, he had supposed clouds were fairly solid things; but he was discovering they were really of a very wispy nature, with hardly more body than widely diffused cigarette smoke.

A fellow traveler interrupted the bulky woodsman's thoughts.

"I see you like to read back issues of magazines," the fellow remarked.

Carl MacBride turned his head. He saw a tall man with a freckled nose, reddish hair and a reddish mustache. The latter was an artistically waxed creation. The man was attired in a quiet business suit, and looked prosperous.

The fellow had been perusing a newspaper. This was folded carelessly, and an advertisement was uppermost. It was a strange sort of an ad. It consisted simply of large black type in the center of a white space:

BEWARE! THE MONSTERS ARE COMING!

This somewhat unusual advertisement was not in line with Carl MacBride's gaze, however. He failed to see it.

The big woodsman had always associated freckles with friendly individuals. He smiled, and said:

"Sure -- if the magazine ain't too old, I enjoy it just as much as a late one."

"I notice you were reading about Doc Savage," said the freckled man.

"Yep."

"My name is Caldwell," the fellow traveler introduced himself. "Quite an interesting chap, this Doc Savage."

"Do you know him?" Carl MacBride asked eagerly.

"Oh, no, although I'd rather like to. I've read of his accomplishments. I guess almost every one has heard of him."

"Yep. He's quite a detective, I reckon."

"Detective!" laughed Caldwell. "Doc Savage is not a detective."

Carl MacBride's jaw fell. He was shocked. The article in the magazine was all he knew of Doc Savage. He had judged Doc Savage to be a detective, for the story was one telling how Doc and a group of five assistants had ferreted out a gang of villains seeking to seize the nitrate industry of the South American country of Chile.

Believing Doc Savage to be a detective, MacBride was now on his way to ask him to investigate the death of Bruno Hen.

"Not a detective!" he gulped.

"Not exactly," smiled Caldwell. "He is more in the nature of what you would call a trouble-buster. He goes to the far corners of the earth, metes out justice to evildoers, and helps those in trouble."

Carl MacBride breathed a little bit easier. Doc Savage might be interested in Bruno Hen's death, after all.

"What do you know about Doc Savage?" MacBride asked. "This magazine story didn't tell very much."

"No one seems to know a great deal about Doc Savage," replied Caldwell. "It is general knowledge, however, that he is a man who has been trained from the cradle for his present purpose in life. The training was done scientifically by his father, who is now dead. As a result, Doc Savage is almost a superman, both in physical capabilities and in mentality."

"How do you mean -- physical capabilities and mentality?" Carl MacBride asked vaguely, befuddled by the -- to him -- high-sounding phraseology.

"They say that Doc Savage has developed his muscles until he is the strongest man ever to live," Caldwell explained. "He has also studied intensively in every branch of science. He has become a mental marvel. In other words, he knows about everything."

The plane dipped sharply.

Caldwell looked over the side. "We're nearing New York City."

Carl MacBride showed little interest in New York City, although he had never seen that impressive metropolis before. "What else do you know about Doc Savage?" he asked eagerly.

"Well, not much more," Caldwell rejoined amiably. "Doc Savage has five men who help him. Each one of these is a world-famous expert in some line. One, according to what I've heard, is a chemist, another a lawyer, and a third is an electrical expert of ability. Of the other two, one is an engineer and the other a geologist."

"Sounds like some crew!" ejaculated the big woodsman.

Caldwell eyed Carl MacBride. "You seem rather interested in Doc Savage?"

"I am," MacBride grinned. "I'm on my way to see him." Caldwell looked properly impressed at this, his brows rising in astonishment.

"Imagine!" he ejaculated. "Say, that is the most interesting thing I've heard in a long time."

Carl MacBride expanded before the flattering tones. He wanted to talk about the strange demise of Bruno Hen, anyway. He proceeded to do so.

He told the story in detail. Drawing a newspaper from his pocket, he exhibited it.

"I cut that from the Trapper Lake Clarion, as you can see by the name at the top of the sheet," he explained.

Caldwell read the clipping.

"It says here that a peculiar tornado dipped down and demolished Bruno Hen's cabin, killing the breed," he remarked.

"That newspaper feller done some tall guessin'," MacBride said confidentially. "My cabin ain't very far away from the breed's place. There weren't no daggone tornado. I'd have heard it. Anyway, the sky was as clear as crystal."

Caldwell returned the clipping. "And You are going to New York to get Doc Savage to investigate?"

"That's right. Bruno Hen gave me the money to do it. It's only fair that I should live up to the promise I made him."

"Quite true," Caldwell agreed; then broke off to watch a young woman who came down the aisle from the washroom.

Carl MacBride also eyed the girl. She was a striking vision. She had hair the exact hue of steel. Her traveling costume, while neat, was somewhat worn. MacBride's contact with pretty girls had been largely from their pictured faces in magazines. This young woman was as entrancing as any photo he could recall having seen.

The girl passed the two men without a glance. Her eyes were a steel color that about matched her hair. She took a seat forward.

A battered traveling bag reposed on the floor beside the girl's seat. Carl MacBride possessed eyesight an Indian would have envied. He read the writing on the tag appended to the young woman's bag:

JEAN MORRIS THE WORLD'S PREMIER WOMAN LION TAMER THE ATLAS CONGRESS OF WONDERS

"Atlas Congress of Wonders" had a line drawn through it. Immediately below the circus name was written: "New York City."

Carl MacBride scratched his head. He remembered that the Atlas Congress of Wonders was the circus which had gone broke in Trapper Lake many months before.

MacBride recalled one particular morsel of gossip. There had been three pinhead savages with the stranded circus. These had wandered off and mysteriously disappeared.

"There's the New York airport," said Caldwell, interrupting the woodsman's thoughts.

IN THE excitement of disembarking, Carl MacBride lost track of his friendly traveling acquaintance, Caldwell.

Had he been able to watch Caldwell, he would have received a surprise. Caldwell scuttled around to the deserted side of the field operations office. Hidden there, he opened a large bag which was his only luggage. He unearthed two large, blue automatics, and slung them in bolsters under his armpits. Next came a hand grenade of the small, fluted type used in the world war. He pocketed this.

The bag yielded a banjo. The round body and the neckpiece of the musical instrument were in separate sections which clamped together. The banjo actually held an ingenious, silenced gun, which could be fired simply by plucking one of the banjo strings.

One who knew how could aim this unusual weapon with accuracy, without seeming to do so. Working rapidly, Caldwell combed out his waxed mustache. He applied a chemical to it' and smeared more of the same compound in his hair. Mustache and hair turned black. He drew a ragged coat from the bag and donned it. He sagged his shoulders as he walked.

A stooped musician with a stringy black mustache and black hair got in one of several cabs waiting near by.

New York is a city harboring many curious people. The taxi driver thought little of it when his face querulously commanded him to wait a few minutes before starting.

Not until Carl MacBride had clambered into a cab and rolled in the direction of the business district, did Caldwell permit his machine to move. Issuing terse orders, he contrived to follow the hulking woodsman without calling his driver's attention to what he was doing.

When they had traveled twenty or thirty blocks, Caldwell became sure of their destination. It was Doc Savage's office. He ordered his conveyance to halt while he entered a telephone booth located in a tobacco shop. He got a number.

CaIdwell and the party he was calling recognized each other's voices. They exchanged no names.

"Exactly what we were afraid of is happening, boss," Caldwell informed the other. "This lunk of a backwoodser is on his way to see Doc Savage."

"You sure?" asked the voice at the other end of the wire. "He don't want to go to a lot of trouble taking care of him, unless it's necessary."

"It's necessary, all right, boss," said Caldwell. "I pumped the guy while we were on the plane. He never suspected a thing. Came right out and told me the whole story."

"He told you he was on his way to get Doc Savage to investigate what happened to Bruno Hen?"

"That's exactly what he told me."

The voice at the other end swore violently. "We've got to stop him before he gets to Doc Savage."

"I've got a grenade, my gat, and that silenced pistol-and-banjo contraption. I'll be able to stop him at Doc Savage's office."

"Nothing as reckless as that!" ordered the other. "Can you keep MacBride in sight and nail him somewhere en route?"

"He's headed straight for New York on the main road. Guess I can overhaul him."

"Do that. Get him on the road somewhere." Caldwell, his deadly banjo tucked under an arm, dashed to his cab.

"Whoop it up, buddy!" be ordered the driver. "If you get me downtown fast enough, there's an extra twenty in it for you."

"Get the twenty ready," retorted the driver, and they were off.

Chapter 4. THE KILLER

CARL MACBRIDE had never before visited a city of any consequence. So he stared with great interest as they approached the cluster of towering skyscrapers. The tremendous size of the structures caused a feeling of awe.

One building in particular reared like a great thorn of gray masonry and shining metal above the spiked tops of the other cloud-piercers. Not only was it among the tallest, but its simple, modernistic lines made it far the most impressive.

Carl MacBride made a mental note that, before he left New York City, he would go to the top of the towering, modernistic structure to have a look at the town.

It had not occurred to the big woodsman that he might have difficulty in locating Doc Savage. Up in his woods country, one had merely to walk into town and inquire for an individual and some one would be able to point him out. Every one knew everybody else.

It occurred to Carl MacBride that he had better ask where Doc Savage resided.

"How do you find anybody in this town, partner?" he asked the taxi driver.

"Look in the phone hook is one way," was the reply.

"Maybe you know the feller I want to find -- his name is Doc Savage."

The taxi driver turned to eye his fare, and almost ran off the pavement. He straightened his machine out, then pointed ahead to the skyscraper which Carl MacBride had admired.

"Everybody knows that guy. He hangs out on the eighty-sixth floor of that building."

The fact that the driver knew the whereabouts of Doc Savage's headquarters did not impress earl MacBride as much as it should have. In New York, the average individual knows only his business acquaintances and immediate friends.

"You got an appointment to see Doc Savage?" asked the driver, taking advantage of the obvious amiability of his fare to ask questions.

"No. Do I need one?"

It had not occurred to the lumbering woodsman that an appointment might be necessary. In the backwoods, a business appointment was a rarity. There was time for everything.

"I don't know Doc Savage personally," the taxi driver said. "I've seen him a time or two. He's a big shot, so you'd better get an appointment."

"How'll I go about doing that?"

"Phone him."

"Stop off somewhere," Carl MacBride commanded. "Guess I'll call him."

The cab pulled up in a filling station which displayed a public telephone booth sign.

A NEWSBOY loitering at the filling station in hopes of making a sale, ran out.

"Read the latest mystery advertisement about the coming of the monsters!" he shouted.

Curious, Carl MacBride bought a paper. The "mystery" ad was in black type in a square, white space. It read:

WARNING! WATCH OUT FOR THE MONSTERS!

"What's this mean?" the woodsman asked.

"Nobody knows," replied the newsboy. "Newspapers all over the country been gettin' them advertisements in the mail, along with money to pay for their insertion. It may be a movie stunt -- to get people talkin' about some picture that'll come out soon."

Carl MacBride frowned and tucked the paper in a pocket. He entered the booth and thumbed through the directory until he found Doc Savage's name.

The telephone was a dial type. He was unfamiliar with the dial device, and had some trouble with it. Eventually, however, he got his number.

The voice which came to his ears was one so profoundly impressive that he knew instinctively that the speaker must be Doc Savage. The tones were deep, vibrant with controlled power. MacBride had never before heard a telephone receiver reproduce with such distinctness.

"I want an appointment with you, Mr. Savage," said the woodsman. "It's something mighty important. My name is MacBride."

"You do not need an appointment," Doc informed him. "Feel perfectly free to see me at any time." MacBride reflected that the driver had given him some bum advice.

"I'll be right up," he said.

"Is your business something you would care to discuss over the telephone?" Doc Savage asked.

MacBride was so impressed by the remarkable voice that he did not answer for a moment.

"I'd rather tell you in person," he said finally.

"Very well."

The telephone conversation terminated.

MacBride went to his cab. The machine moved toward the towering skyscraper which was Doc Savage's headquarters.

Big Carl MacBride did not know it, but this chance pause to telephone was instrumental in prolonging his life. Caldwell had passed without observing the big woodsman in the filling station phone booth. Even now, the murderous Caldwell was hugging his death-dealing banjo, and cursing.

"I've lost the big lunk somewhere," he gritted. "Well, hell! I'll have to catch him at Doc Savage's office, after all."

CARL MACBRIDE was even more impressed by the big skyscraper which housed Doc Savage's office, when he alighted before it. Head back, mouth open, MacBride peered upward. When he entered the lobby, the magnificence of the ornate place made him feel mouselike.

His amazement at sight of the great building accounted for the big man's failure to note a fellow with black hair and black mustache who carried a banjo and lurked in a corner of the lobby. MacBride lumbered into an elevator.

"Doc Savage's office," he said.

He was promptly rushed to the eighty-sixth floor. He found a door which bore, in very small bronze letters, the name:

CLARK SAVAGE, JR.

There was a button, but few persons had doorbells where Carl MacBride came from. He rapped the door with his knuckles in the good old-fashioned way.

The door opened.

The unusual voice over the telephone had partially prepared Carl MacBride for the sight of an unusual personage when he confronted Doc Savage. Even then, the bronze man was so far beyond expectations that MacBride gaped in amazement.

Doc Savage had evidently opened the door by some mechanical means. He stood, not near the panel, but some feet from it -- in the middle of a great office. This was fitted with a costly inlaid table, an enormous safe, and a number of comfortable chairs.

That the bronze man possessed amazing physical strength was evident from the enormous tendons which bundled his neck and cabled his hands. He was a giant; but his proportions were symmetrical, and standing in the massively furnished office, he seemed little larger than an ordinary man. The mighty bronze man's eyes held Carl MacBride's attention. They were strangely impressive, those eyes. They had the appearance of tiny pools of flake gold which eddied and whirled continuously.

The bronze of Doc Savage's hair was somewhat darker than the bronze of his skin. He was attired in quiet business garb.

"Doc Savage?" asked Carl MacBride, although he knew he was confronting the man he sought.

"Right," confirmed the remarkable man of bronze. Carl MacBride took a step into the office.

An elevator door down the corridor opened. A man popped out. He had a black mustache, dark hair, and carried a banjo. He raised the banjo to the level of his eyes and gave one of the strings a

forcible pluck.

There was a chugging sound -- it might have been a man emitting one harsh cough. A tongue of flame leaped from an almost indistinguishable round hole in the side of the banjo.

Carl MacBride opened his mouth wide, and a crimson flood came out. His knees buckled. His hands clamped to the back of his neck, where a bullet from Caldwell's deadly silenced gun had clubbed a hole.

He slammed face down upon the floor. MacBride felt no pain from the impact, for he was dead.

Chapter 5. THE CLIPPING

CALDWELL, THE killer, was in a position where he could view Doc Savage's office. He saw the giant bronze man, got a most unnerving look at the weird golden eyes. He realized that Doc, having witnessed the killing, was a menace.

Caldwell darted his banjo weapon in Doc Savage's direction and plucked the trigger-string. The concealed gun lipped powder flame and slugs.

Caldwell's eyes threatened to jump from their sockets. A weird thing had happened to his bullet. It had disintegrated in a grayish lead puff in mid-air, some feet inside the door.

He fired the hidden gun until it was empty. He wrenched out his two automatics and squeezed the weapons at the office door. They convulsed thunderously, and spouted empty cartridges.

To all of the bullets the same fantastic thing happened. They splashed into innumerable fragments in mid-air or became shapeless blobs which fell back to the floor.

Caldwell spun and fled. He dived into an elevator, menaced the attendant with his gun and forced an instant descent.

As the cage sank, Caldwell heard a fragment of weird sound. The note was not loud, yet it penetrated to the descending elevator with remarkable clarity. It seemed without definite source; it might have been a product of the movement of the very air itself past the sinking cage. It was not a whistle, nor did it seem quite the emanation of vocal chords. A mellow trilling which defied description, the sound trickled up and down the musical scale.

Caldwell, unable to define the note, dismissed it as a freakish trick played by his own ears.

He was wrong. The strange, undulating note was the sound of Doc Savage. It was the small unconscious thing which the bronze man did in moments of stress -- when thinking, or surprised, or contemplating some unusual procedure.

AN ONLOOKER, knowing Doc Savage, and cognizant of the mighty bronze man's abilities, would have expected pursuit of Caldwell. At Doc Savage's disposal here on the eighty-sixth floor, was a high-speed elevator capable of dropping the bronze man to the lobby level before Caldwell could arrive.

Doc did not pursue the slayer. Instead, he moved into a room adjoining the office. The walls of this chamber were banked with book shelves. Massive cases laden with ponderous tomes stood thickly on the floor. It was Doc Savage's library, and it held one of the most complete collections of scientific works in existence.

The bronze man seemed to be moving without hurry, but his speed was surprising.

Beyond the library was another vast room. This held glittering arrays of bottled chemicals, banks of test tubes, retorts and filtering devices. Electric furnaces and costly metalworking tools occupied the floor space.

In the center of the great workshop-laboratory Doc Savage halted. He stood before a paneled cabinet. A microphone dangled in front of this. Inset in the cabinet was a square panel that resembled frosted glass.

Doc spoke into the microphone. "Did you see what just happened in the outer office?"

From a loud-speaker, the grilled throat of which was almost unnoticeable on the side of the cabinet, the reply came. It was couched in a tiny, almost babylike voice.

"We did," said the small voice. "Ham and me both saw it. And we're off."

Doc Savage reached over and flicked a switch. Upon the panel of frosted glass a picture appeared. It depicted cold concrete floors, walls, and an array of parked automobiles. There was a door in this pictured room. Two men were just diving through it, making a wild departure from the place.

Doc switched off the televisior-phone with which he had communicated with those two men. He returned to the outer office. Here also, but concealed cleverly in the walls, was another televisior-phone. This one had transmitted an image of what had occurred in the office to the two men to whom Doc had spoken.

Doc Savage and his five men were accustomed to keep each other in view with these devices whenever convenient. Thus they could witness danger which might threaten each other.

They had many enemies.

In approaching the lifeless body of Carl MacBride, Doc circled widely to avoid the agency which had caused Caldwell's bullets to mushroom so mysteriously in mid-air.

It was nothing more mysterious than an upright sheet of clear bullet-proof glass.

Due to the fact that he had many enemies, it was Doc's custom to first greet strangers from behind this unnoticeable shield.

THE GIANT man of bronze closed his office door to avoid the notice of passers-by in the corridor. Then he examined the body of the unfortunate Carl MacBride.

The first thing Doc brought to light was that the enormous roll of bills which Bruno Hen had given the big woodsman. He riffled through the money. In the act of doing this, his nostrils quivered slightly. He lifted the bundle of currency and gave it an olfactory test. Doc Savage had a daily exercise routine of two hours which he had taken unflinchingly from childhood. The exercises were scientifically designed to develop his every sense touch, hearing, sight, the sense of smell, and taste. His faculties were far beyond those of an ordinary man.

Doc identified the odor easily, faint though it was. The scent of musk! Continuing his examination, he brought out a newspaper clipping -- the one Carl MacBride had shown his plane acquaintance, Caldwell. After noting that it was from a Trapper Lake, Michigan, paper, Doc read it:

TRAPPER LAKE MAN VICTIM OF WEIRD TORNADO

Bruno Hen, trapper and fisherman residing near the lake shore five miles north of Trapper Lake, met death last night in what authorities have decided was a freak cyclone. Hen was found crushed to death in his demolished cabin by Carl MacBride, a neighbor.

MacBride, it is reported, heard sounds from the direction of Bruno Hen's cabin. Rushing to the spot, he found his neighbor dead in the wreckage of his home.

MacBride reported that he saw no evidences of a tornado, and that it was a moonlight night. The coroner and the sheriff, however, point out that a tornado is the only explanation for the demolished condition in which the cabin was found.

The tornado apparently dipped suddenly upon the exact spot where the cabin stood. After annihilating the building, the twister tore up brush and smashed down small trees over a narrow path to the lake's edge. The storm evidently progressed out over Lake Superior without doing more damage.

Bruno Hen, it will be remembered, a few months ago sold the largest collection of muskrat pelts trapped in this vicinity in a long time.

AFTER HE finished reading, Doc Savage's fantastic trilling sound came into being. So low as to be scarcely audible, it existed for three or four seconds, then ebbed away.

Bruno Hen had sold muskrat pelts. The scent on the roll of bills was musk, such as would be put there by the pawing of hands which had skinned muskrats.

Doc Savage carried the bills into the laboratory and used a finger-printing outfit upon them. He discovered a few of Carl MacBride's prints upon the bills, but the preponderance of handling had been by another set of fingers.

Having found musk odor on bills which Carl MacBride had hardly touched, and which were thick with the other finger prints, Doc felt there was a likelihood that the money had originally been the property of Bruno Hen.

The giant bronze man returned to his search of the body. The dated stub of an airways ticket showed that Carl MacBride had come to New York by plane; that day.

DOC BROUGHT out the newspaper which Carl MacBride had purchased in the filling station. MacBride was a laborious reader, and in perusing the strange advertisement regarding the giants, had traced the words with a finger nail. The indentations were plainly discernible:

WARNING! WATCH OUT FOR THE MONSTERS!

Doc Savage studied this with no little interest. Then he went to the library, and came back bearing a tray. This contained newspaper clippings.

One, from a Detroit paper, read:

BEWARE! THE MONSTERS BRING DEATH AND DESTRUCTION!

Another, from a Chicago paper, stated:

TERROR! THAT IS WHAT THE MONSTERS BRING!

There were numerous others, all in like vein. In no ease were the advertisements signed. They came from newspapers in Cleveland, St. Louis -- every city of consequence in the country.

Doc Savage sorted over these thoughtfully. His fingers, sensitive and possessed of a dazzling speed, for all their superhuman strength, turned to the clipping concerning the weird death of Bruno Hen.

The giant man of bronze made it his business to keep tab on all strange circumstances. Thus did he sometimes see danger before it struck.

He had collected these "monster" clippings because their very nature was sinister. Doc had newspaper connections.

Through them he had learned that no one actually knew what was behind the "monster" advertisements. It was no motion picture press agent's build-up.

The ads simply came in the mail, with money to pay for their insertion. And in each case, the ads had been mailed from Trapper Lake, Michigan.

Chapter 6. MYSTERY MANSE

IT WAS more than an hour later when the telephone buzzer whined and Doc Savage picked up the instrument.

The tiny childlike voice which had spoken to him from the televisor-phone in the laboratory came over the wire.

"At the junction of Hill Road and the Hudson Turnpike, in New Jersey," said the small tones.

"Be right out" Doc replied, and hung up.

The bronze man took his private high-speed elevator to the skyscraper basement. This lift was the product of his inventive genius, and operated at hair-lifting speed.

Stepping from the elevator, Doc entered his basement garage. This was the chamber with the array of parked cars which had appeared on the scanning Screen of the televisorphone.

For his immediate purpose Doc chose a long, somberly colored roadster. This machine, as he wheeled it up to the street, showed by its acceleration that the hood housed a powerful engine. Wending through traffic, it attracted no attention, due to its quiet hue.

Not so the bronze man. Scarcely a glance rested upon him that did not become a stare, so striking was the picture he presented.

The roadster swept over George Washington bridge, which connects Manhattan Island with New Jersey. When traffic thinned, the machine increased speed. It traveled just within the bounds of safety.

Several times, traffic policemen sprang into startled life as the car moaned past; but they subsided upon observing the occupant. The greenest rookie knew there was an imperative order out to extend to this man of bronze. every possible co-operation.

Hill Road ran east and west, and the Hudson Turnpike was a north and south thoroughfare. The two intersected in a nest of filling stations and hot-dog stands.

Doc Savage pulled into a gasoline station at the intersection and ordered fuel.

A few yards distant, a crowd of excited children surrounded a man whose appearance was nothing if not startling. He came near bearing more resemblance to an ape than to a man. His furry hands dangled on beams of arms well below his knees. He had a little nubbin of a head. His hair grew back from his eyebrows. The huge simian fellow's face was likeable, although entirely homely.

This pleasantly ugly personage was amusing the kids by calmly folding pennies between a hairy thumb and forefinger. The feat of strength he performed without great exertion.

The gorilla of a man hardly glanced in Doc's direction. He ceased performing for the amusement of the children and entered a large sedan which stood near by. He drove westward along Hill Road.

Doc Savage, having paid for his tank of fuel, also rolled westward along Hill Road. He topped the first hill. In the valley beyond, the gorillalike man had stopped his car.

Doc came to a halt alongside the simian one. "Where's Ham, Monk?" he queried.

Monk grinned, showing a tremendous array of large white teeth. His head seemed to disappear entirely behind the grin; certainly, there did not seem to be room for much intelligence in his head.

His looks belied the truth, however. He was Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair, whose ability as an industrial chemist had brought him worldwide fame and a fortune in money.

MONK WAS one of a group of five who had associated themselves with Doc Savage. These five men were all capable of commanding high monetary returns, had they chosen to exercise the professions at which they were skilled. But they loved adventure. Possessing ample wealth, they had thrown in with Doc Savage in his career of punishing evildoers in the far corners of the earth.

Monk pointed down Hill Road. "We trailed the killer to a kind of a funny-lookin' country estate. Ham's watchin' the place. We better go on afoot."

Doc switched off the roadster motor. So silently had it operated at idling speed that cessation of movement of the ammeter needle was all that showed the cylinders had ceased firing.

The two men strode along Hill Road, leaving the cars drawn into weeds beside the highway.

"We had the televisor from your office to the basement garage turned on while we were working on a car," Monk said. "We thought you might want us or something. It was lucky we did. We saw the killing, and got a good look at the guy who did it. We caught sight of him as he left the building."

Doc nodded. "I figured you would have the televisor-phone turned on."

Monk was puzzled. He scratched his knob of a head and eyed the giant bronze man curiously.

"Wonder why that guy was killed," he offered.

"To shut his mouth, obviously," Doc Savage replied. "The killer may have been a hired slayer. That's why I allowed him to escape -- so you fellows could trail him to the man who hired him, if any."

Monk nodded as he waddled along. His legs were so bowed that his gait was grotesque; he seemed momentarily on the verge of taking to all fours.

"Any idea what's behind it?"

"Remember the mysterious advertisements which have been appearing in newspapers recently?" Doc queried.

"You mean that 'Beware the Monsters!' stuff?"

"That's it. Those ads were mailed to newspapers all over the country. They were postmarked, every one of them, as being mailed from Trapper Lake, Michigan."

MONK SQUINTED his small eyes. He had known of the "monster" advertisements, but had not been aware that they had been mailed from Trapper Lake. Doc, he realized, had unearthed this fact in the course of his usual checking on things which 'night be of sinister nature.

"Why'd the murdered man want to see you, Doc?"

"Possibly concerning the mysterious death of a trapper named Bruno Hen, near Trapper Lake," Doc replied. "He had a clipping concerning the Bruno Hen death in his pocket."

"What about Bruno Hen's death?"

"He perished, according to the report of the local officers, in a mysterious tornado which struck on a moonlight night, and did nothing but demolish Bruno Hen's shack and tear a path to the nearby lake."

"Queer tornado!" Monk grunted.

"A neighbor claimed there was no tornado. His name was Carl MacBride -- the man who was killed at our office door."

"Huh! If not a tornado, what did he claim it was?"

"The clipping didn't say."

Monk squinted ahead. His small eyes in repose were nearly invisible so deeply were they sunk in their pits of gristle.

Hill Road at this point was seldom traveled, due probably to the fact that its macadam surface was uncomfortably roughened by the weather. Untended brush made a wall on either side.

"That shyster lawyer, Ham, should be waiting along here somewhere," Monk declared, his small voice pitched even lower than usual.

The gentleman to whom Monk referred in such undignified terms promptly stepped out of the brush. He was Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks, one of the most astute lawyers ever to be graduated from Harvard.

"You homely missing link!" Ham whispered irately at Monk. "One of these days I'm going to skin you and make a red fur rug!"

Ham was slender, slim-waisted, quick-moving. His clothing was absolute sartorial perfection. He was a tailor's dream.

In his right hand Ham carried a black cane. Ham was rarely seen without this.

The unlovely Monk turned an innocent look on the enraged Ham.

"Always threatenin' me!" he complained in low tones. "What's on your mind now?"

Ham shook his cane in the air and turned purple. He was not, however, making undue noise with his dramatics.

"You left that infernal pig behind and had him follow me around!"

Monk seemed grieved.

"Habeas Corpus must be takin' a fancy to you," he groaned. "I never thought that pig would stoop so low as to associate with a shyster lawyer."

At this point, Habeas Corpus walked out of the brush. A more astounding-looking specimen of the pig family than Habeas would be difficult to find. The pig was under-sized, razor-backed. He had the legs of a dog and ears so large as to resemble wings.

Habeas eyed the dapper Ham, emitted a friendly grunt and ambled toward the lawyer. Ham launched a spiteful toe at the pig. In dodging this, Habeas displayed an agility as surprising as his appearance.

Habeas was Monk's pet. The homely chemist had trained the pig until the porker seemed to possess a near-human intelligence.

Doc, low-voiced, interrupted what amounted to a perpetual quarrel. "Where's the killer, Ham?" he asked.

"He went into a funny-looking place over the hill." Doc noted the appellation, "funny-looking."

Both Monk and Ham had used it.

"What do you mean -- funny-looking?"

Ham, like many orators, had a habit of making gestures when he spoke. He gestured now, although his words were whispered.

"We're in the country," he said. "There's no reason for anybody having a high wall around his place. But there's one around this joint. It's at least forty feet high."

"Forty!"

"Every inch of that." Monk entered the conversation with his small voice. "I ask you, Doc -- what does any one want with a forty-foot wall out here in the country?"

"I walked around the place," Ham said, scowling at Habeas Corpus. "There's only one entrance. That's secured by the strongest steel gate I have ever seen."

Doc Savage did not comment on the somewhat startling revelations. He went forward.

Monk and Ham trailed him. They exchanged throat-cutting looks. Actually, either of them would have sacrificed his life for the safety of the other, should necessity for such an act materialize.

The pig, flopping big ears at Monk's heels, grunted contentedly.

"Put on the muffler, Habeas," Monk directed.

Obediently, the pig fell silent.

Chapter 7. THE ELECTRIFIED NET

AS DOC and his two aids topped the hill, the mysterious wall came into view.

"Some joint, eh?" Ham suggested.

The wall was so high as to conceal whatever lay behind it. A somber barrier of gray, it was

altogether forbidding.

"Concrete," Ham offered softly.

They left the road. The brush was high: it grew thickly. They eased through the leafy maze with little sound, and came to the gate in the wall -- the only gap, according to Monk and Ham. This gate was notable for its size, being fully fifteen feet wide and equally as high.

Monk breathed, "Look at the size of the bars."

Monk possessed furry wrists almost twice as thick as those of an ordinary man. The gate bars were of a diameter about equal to his wrists. The gigantic gate was supported by a multiple array of ponderous hinges. Apparently, it opened and closed through the medium of machinery.

"They wouldn't need bars a fraction of that size to hold elephants," Ham said. He ran a finger thoughtfully up and down the glistening black length of his cane.

Doc Savage listened for a time, but detected no sound. He moved along the wall, eyes ranging its towering height. When he had circled the place completely, he had proven Monk and Ham's declaration that there was only one entrance.

The wall did not enclose much of an area.

Doc Savage withdrew with his two men to a point remote from the gate of giant bars.

From within his clothing the bronze man produced a collapsible metal grapple hook. To the shank of this was secured a long silk cord. He sprung the book open, then tossed it upward expertly. The grapple fastened itself somewhere on the opposite side of the wall.

Doc mounted the thin cord with an amazing ease and speed.

Nearing the crest, he slackened his pace. From a pocket came a tiny periscopic device. This instrument he had put to frequent use in the past. Its barrel was little larger than a match; the average eye would fail to detect its projecting above the wall. Its tiny lenses were finely ground; its functioning was almost equal to that of a larger instrument.

Doc jugged the periscope above the wall, not showing himself.

What he saw brought forth the weird trilling note which was characteristic of the bronze man. He swung atop the wall. Crouching there, he gestured to Monk and Ham, directing them to ascend the cord.

Monk grasped the thin thread. The hairy chemist had bent copper pennies quite easily for the amusement of the children. Great as was his strength, however, he could barely cope with the task of mounting the silk thread -- a feat which Doc had accomplished with ease. Monk was perspiring prodigiously from the effort when he reached the top.

Monk had buttoned the pig, Habeas Corpus, inside his coat.

Ham struggled valiantly to mount the silk line. But his most Herculean efforts got him less than ten feet from the ground. His hands became sweated and he slipped back.

Doc made gestures indicating that the lawyer should tie the cord under his arms. This done, Doc hauled him upward.

The three men surveyed the enclosure.

"For the love of mud!" Monk gulped. "What kind of place is this, anyway?"

STRETCHED OVER the walled area was a huge, crisscrossed net of copper cables. The cables were nearly three inches in thickness. Their mesh measured nearly a yard.

"I don't understand this!" Ham muttered. The lawyer had retained a grip on his cane as he was hauled up: Now he gave the cane handle a twist, and withdrew a long, slender blade of steel.

Ham's innocent-looking black stick was a sword cane.

"Notice that the cables are insulated from each other," Doc said.

These insulators were substantial affairs of a brown dielectric composition.

"The cables are built to carry a high-voltage electric current," Monk decided.

"Don't touch them," Doc warned. "They may be charged."

"What gets me, is the solidity of the construction," Ham mused.

From the gigantic net, they dropped their attention to what lay below.

Beneath the net stood a house of native stone. It was vast; undoubtedly old. Its state of repair was good. It was two stories in height, the roof top almost reaching the thick cables.

"I'll bet that place has fifty or sixty rooms," Monk muttered, and held Habeas by an ear to keep him away from the insulated copper hawsers.

Untended shrubbery surrounded the house. It was carelessly crushed down at some points. Nowhere was there sign of life.

"We make swell targets up here," Ham said grimly.

The grapple had hooked on the wall lip. Dangling it by the silk cord, which was not a conductor of electricity, Doc used the hook to short-circuit two of the crisscrossing cables.

There was a crackle and a blue-hot spark. The big net was electrified!

"Enough of a current to kill a man, if you ask me!" Monk grunted.

"You fellows keep an eye on the place," Doc suggested. Monk and Ham nodded. From their clothing they drew weapons which resembled slightly oversize automatic pistols. They were fitted with drum magazines, and the mechanism looked somewhat intricate.

These were superfiring machine guns perfected by Doc. Their rate of fire was so rapid that their roar was like the hoarse song of a gigantic bass fiddle. In addition, the slugs which they

discharged did not produce fatal wounds, being "mercy bullets" charged with a drug which brought only unconsciousness.

Doc Savage calculated briefly, then sprang outward upon the spreading copper net. He went forward in a series of agile leaps, maintaining perfect balance.

His position was dangerous. Should he touch two of the metal hawsers simultaneously, death by electrocution would be almost certain. He was safe as long as he poised on only one conductor at a time, just as a bird can perch, unharmed, on a high tension power line.

Soon he was over the house roof. The net mesh was amply large to permit him to drop through. He did so, executing the move with a batlike quietness. The roof shingles were very old.

The bronze man listened for a time. His ears, attuned to the keenness of a wild animal's, detected vague stirrings. There was also an odor -- a beastly odor.

Doc worked down the steep slope of the roof. From eaves to ground was an appalling drop. He took it with the casual ease of a great, tawny cat. Leaves fluttered slightly as he landed in the shrubbery.

Doc's two men still crouched on the wall, alert. Monk shook his small head, indicating he had seen no danger astir.

The shrubbery, unclipped for months, was over Doc's head at points.

From the wall crest, Monk howled, "Look -- "

A rifle sounded from a window of the house.

To his remarkable vision, developed and kept sharp by scientific methods, Doc owed his life. He saw the rifle barrel even before Monk perceived it and started his yell of warning.

Doc saw the face behind the gun -- the visage of the man who had killed Carl MacBride.

A split second before the gun discharged, Doc veered left.. The bullet chopped shrilly at the space he had vacated. Seeming not to slacken his pace at a", the bronze man gained a sheltering corner of the house.

FROM THE top of the wall came an abrupt, almost deafening moan. Monk and Ham had put their supermachine pistols in action.

The rifleman ducked from view so quickly, that he was unhit.

Monk and Ham hastily made the grappling hook fast and slid down the silk cord. They used care not to touch the charged copper cables. Monk had his pet pig under an arm.

Ham came up, sword cane unsheathed. Monk lumbered on his heels. The pig, Habeas, trailing Monk, was as excited as the simian chemist.

"We'd better get inside," Doc said crisply. " That fellow may try to use his rifle from another window."

The bronze man reached a window and gave the sash a rap with his palm. Glass fell with a brittle clanging. Doc crawled in through the opening.

Ham and Monk kept at his heels. The homely chemist grabbed Habeas by an ear and hoisted him inside.

The room in which they found themselves was large, apparently a smoking room. The chairs were upholstered in leather; the furniture was massive, dark. A thick layer of dust reposed over everything. Cigarette stubs were scattered about with great carelessness for the well-being of the furniture.

Not for a long time had the place received a cleaning.

Doc yanked open a door. It gave into a hallway. This, too, needed cleaning.

The men went down the hallway, making no attempt at silence, except when pausing to use their ears. But no sound did they hear; nor did they see any one.

They came to the room from which the rifle had been fired. An empty, high-powered cartridge shell lay on the floor. It reeked of burned powder.

The rifleman had fled.

A scuffling sound led the trio toward the upstairs regions. They mounted stairs which were carpeted. From the carpet nap their feet knocked up little puffs of dust. It had been long uncleaned. At the top they found a corridor lined with many doors. Passages branched off from it.

"You'd think this place was a hotel," Monk breathed.

To their left a door opened. The bright metal snout of a pistol poked out.

A determined feminine voice said, "Don't move!"

Chapter 8. THE EX-LION-TAMER

THE YOUNG woman was tall. A plain traveling frock set off the enticing curves of her form almost as effectively as would have an evening dress.

Her hair was her really striking feature. Young women with attractive figures were fairly common. Not so hair such as this. It was the shade of steel. And the young woman's eyes were as metallic as her hair.

Doc acted while her command still echoed. His hand drifted with blinding speed to Ham's sword cane. Surprise had slackened the dapper lawyer's clutch on the weapon. Doc swept it from his hand and flung it, hilt first.

The hilt hit the girl's gun hand. She squealed and dropped her gun, then sought to recover it. Lunging, Doc scooped up the gun before she got it. His fingers banded the young woman's wrist,

not tightly enough to inflict pain, but with a firmness which prevented her flight. The girl threw back her head and shrieked. There was splintering terror in her voice. "I'll do it!" she wailed. "I'll do it!"

That she was genuinely frightened, Doc could tell by her trembling. Her firm muscles quivered under his clutch.

"Where's the fellow who shot at us?" he demanded. The girl looked surprised. Her struggling ceased. "What -- what -- " She seemed bewildered. "You mean -- you're not one of them?"

"Who are you?" Doc asked her.

The girl stared distrustfully. She seemed a bit more at ease when Doc released her wrists. "My name is Jean Morris," she explained.

The name meant nothing to Doc. This was the first time he had heard it

"I'm a circus lion-tamer by profession," Jean Morris elaborated. "My last job was with the Atlas Congress of Wonders. It went broke in Michigan."

"Not at Trapper Lake?" Doc asked sharply.

"How did you know?"

"Do you know a man named Carl MacBride?" Doc queried, instead of answering her.

The girl's burnished-steel head shook a negative. "No."

Monk now addressed Habeas Corpus. "Go hunt 'em, Ha. beas. Hunt 'em up!"

The pig trotted off.

The girl stared after the pig, surprised at the unlovely porker's prompt obedience. "I got 'im trained until he's better'n a bloodhound," Monk grinned.

Doc entered the room from which the young woman had accosted them. It was a bedroom, bleakly furnished. The mattress was missing from the bed; there were no curtains at the windows. Long disuse was apparent everywhere.

Doc crossed to a window in need of washing. Looking out, he found he could keep an eye on the gate.

Monk stationed himself in the door, apparently waiting for the return of his pig, Habeas Corpus. "How did you get here?" Doc asked the young woman.

Her eyes snapped. "In answer to an ad in a circus trade journal -- an ad offering a job to any one who could speak the language of the pinhead tribe of African natives."

"You speak it?"

"I do -- a little. There were three pinheads with the Atlas Congress of Wonders. They were pitiful little fellows. They used to follow me around like three black dogs. I learned to speak some of their language."

Doc Savage's features indicated neither belief nor disbelief. He asked, "When did you come to New York?"

"To-day, by plane. I had been directed by telegram." She thrust her fingers into a tiny pocket in her frock and brought out a folded yellow paper. "Here it is" -- handing it to Doc.

Doc accepted the wire, and read the contents.

J MORRIS CARE OF GUIDE'S HOTEL TRAPPER LAKE MICHIGAN
JOB YOURS STOP CATCH PLANE IMMEDIATELY FOR NEW YORK AND COME TO MY HOME ON HILL ROAD NORTH OF CITY GRISWOLD ROCK

"Does Griswold Rock own this place?" asked Doc.

"A taxi driver told me he did," the girl replied.

Monk had been listening for the return of Habeas. Now he glanced at the girl.

"That name -- Griswold Rock -- sounds kinda familiar," he said.

"Griswold Rock is president and chief stockholder of a small railroad which serves northern Michigan," Doc said. "He is well known."

"There are several men here," said the girl. "I don't think I saw Griswold Rock, though."

"You said there were three pinheads with the Atlas Congress of Wonders," Doc reminded the young woman. "What became of them?"

"They disappeared. They wandered into the country, and that was the last heard of them."

"How long ago?"

"Almost a year."

"Then the circus did not go broke recently?"

"Oh, no, it went on the rocks months ago. I have been working in Trapper Lake as a waitress."

With a slow gesture, Doc Savage indicated the high wall and the mysterious net of copper hawsers.

"Have you any idea about the meaning of all this?"

"No," the girl shuddered, "the place gives me the jitters."

"SOMETHING MUST'VE happened to Habeas Corpus," Monk groaned.

"You three stay here," Doc directed. Then he was gone down the stairway into the lower regions of the house.

Reaching the library, he glanced about. The furnishings, while old-fashioned, were not cheap. Condition here, as elsewhere in the house, indicated months of cleaning neglected. The library was empty of life.

Doc crossed to a ponderous desk which' was something of an antique. Letters littered the top of it. More letters, obviously containing advertising matter, had been flung upon the floor. Doc ran through the epistles. All were addressed to the same individual: "Griswold Rock." Doc read several missives. They pertained to routine operation of the railroad with which Griswold Rock was associated.

One thing was evident from the text of the missives. Griswold Rock had been operating the railroad from seclusion. It seemed that he had not visited the offices during recent months, but had handled all business by letter, telephone and telegraph. Just why this somewhat peculiar condition should exist, the communications gave no hint, Doc left the library and continued his hunt.

Monk's pet pig should have returned long ago. The fact that Habeas had not appeared was ominous. Doc Savage examined a kitchen, a dining room, and a large pantry without finding any one. He did, however, note an enormous food supply. This indicated some tremendous eaters were around. Doc dropped to all fours and pressed an ear to the floor. The wood brought faint noises from somewhere in the house. But they were too vague to be located.

Glancing from a window, Doc noted ruts which seemed to be auto truck tracks, swinging from the great barred gate and terminating against one wing of the house. This particular wing was windowless, little more than a great wooden box.

The peculiarity of the construction was interesting.

Doc Savage worked in that direction. His intention was to investigate the box of a room.

A door barred his progress. He tested it with his shoulder. Judging from its solidity, the panel must be armored on the other side with sheet steel.

There was no peering through the keyhole. It was covered on the opposite side by a swinging shield. This refused to move when Doc probed it with a slender metal instrument which he extracted from a pocket case.

Doc worked at the lock with his metal probe. He threw the tumblers, but the door still resisted. It must be barred on the inside.

Doc moved to a window, lifted it, poked his head out and surveyed the surroundings. He was under no delusions. Death was a prowl somewhere in this fantastic place, for all of the quietness in the air.

Doc saw no one. He clambered outside and, circling, he examined the wing of the house which was like a great box. At the end he found ponderous doors, closed tightly. Nowhere was there a crack to permit inspection of whatever was inside.

Doc tried his giant muscles against the panels. The wood only groaned.

The sun was low. The huge copper net overhead made a barred shadow pattern on the concrete walls, and on the sides and roof of the house.

Inside the house, Habeas Corpus began squealing terribly.

Chapter 9. THE MAN OF FAT

DOC SAVAGED dived around the corner of the boxlike wing of the house and reached the open window through which he had come a few minutes before. He pitched himself quickly inside.

The pig was squealing somewhere in the basement regions. Doc plunged through rooms, hunting the entrance to the cellar.

On the stairway which led down from the upper floors, Monk and Ham created racket. They were descending. Evidently they had left the girl behind; the sound of her feet was not mingling with theirs.

"Stay with the girl!" Doc yelled at them.

Monk and Ham came to a stop on the stairs. From behind them came a sudden awful sound. A board snapped with a tremendous noise. Planks broke, splintered. Nails pulled out of wood with shrieks like dying things.

The bedlam drowned the squealing of Habeas Corpus. Monk and Ham wheeled back up the stairs, reached the top and pitched down the hall. Aghast, they skidded to a halt.

A fantastic thing was happening to the hall floor. It was heaving upward, forced by some unearthly power from beneath. Stringers were crashing apart, planks rending and tearing.

Beyond the point where the floor was upheaving they could see the steel-haired girl. Then the buckling of the floor blocked their view.

The hallway was dimly lighted. Dust was arising. These two factors joined to prevent Monk and Ham from ascertaining the cause of the fantastic destruction.

The Thing was smashing up from the boxlike part of the house which Doc Savage had sought to investigate.

Doc Savage joined Monk and Ham.

"It's something alive -- a monster!" Monk gulped. "Hear it breathin'?"

The breath sounds were like great, windy rushes. Doc produced a flashlight. It traced a beam like a white-hot thread. This spiked out at the boiling dust clouds, but could not penetrate deeply enough to show anything.

Behind them, in the lower regions, Habeas Corpus squealed monotonously.

Then the steel-haired girl cried out in an awful fear. Monk and Ham held their tiny superfiring

pistols. They did not dare use them blindly, for fear of hitting the girl. The slugs were not lethal, but one in an eye could do damage.

The clouds of dust, swirling in the glittering crystal rods of the flash beam, suddenly convulsed more violently. Wreckage, splinters and small planks flew toward them.

"Back!" Doc rapped. "It's coming for us!"

MONK AND Ham found their arms grasped by Doc's powerful hands. They were all but carried down the stairs. They had moved none too quickly. The monster seemed to be trying to get to them.

It was evidently baffled by the dust, and by the strength of the timbers which composed the old house. It seemed to turn back.

The steel-haired girl, who had been briefly silent, began to shriek again. But her yelling suddenly decreased in loudness. It was as if she had been dropped, still screaming, into a bottle, and the bottle corked.

"The thing yanked her down into the lower story," Doc said grimly.

Monk wiped sweat off his simian features.

"I've seen a lot of unearthly things in my time!" he gulped. "But this takes the cake."

In the basement, Habeas Corpus still squealed.

"I'm gonna see what ails that pig!" Monk rapped, and plunged off.

Doc lunged toward a window. Before he reached it, a loud throbbing roar arose. This came from the boxlike room. It lifted to a great syncopation of power.

"A truck!" Ham yelled.

There was a clanking of machinery; the great door in the end of the house swung open.

A motor van lumbered out. The thing was long, the great closed box of a body rolling on a four-wheel truck at the rear. This body was of steel, and access was had by two doors at the rear. These were closed.

The van driver was the man with the dyed black hair and mustache -- he who had killed Carl MacBride.

Ham flipped up his machine pistol. It bawled, ejector spraying empty cartridges. But the bullets only turned into chemical-and-lead smears on the windows of the van driver's cab.

"Bullet-proof glass," Ham growled disgustedly.

Doc Savage plucked the little superfirer from Ham's clutch. The bronze man's fingers worked on the weapon, flipping the magazine drum off.

In the cartridge intake chute, Doc inserted several special shells which he extracted from a pocket

The great van had evidently run over a buried trip device in the driveway. The gate of thick steel bars was opening.

Doc lifted the gun; his ability as a marksman was as accomplished as his other capacities. Then the gun blasted fire. On the sides of the van appeared tiny, grayish puffs, as if snowballs had broken. Nothing else happened.

The van rolled through the great gate and was gone.

"Blast it!" yelled Ham.

HAM REMEMBERED that ejaculation for a long time, due to what immediately followed. For the floor seemed to sink several inches under their feet, then jump. The walls rocked. A terrific explosion all but shattered their eardrums.

Wreckage came spouting down the stairway which led to the second story. Walls cracked open like over-ripe fruit. The sides of the house split, to let out spurts of smoke and flame.

The roof over the boxlike room which had held the van spit in the middle and folded outward like a double lid.

Smoke, flame and debris, propelled by the blast, spurted up through the coarse net of copper cables.

Doc and Ham were catapulted the length of the room in which they stood.

Their eardrums, strained by the first concussion of the explosion, registered the crash, thump and bang of wreckage falling back to earth.

Doc Savage glanced through the shattered rectangle of a window. The explosion had practically annihilated the mysterious wing of the house which had harbored the big van.

Overhead, boards and lath had fallen back upon the coarse net of copper. Dust from the explosion whirled in a great pall.

"The girl!" Ham gulped. "She couldn't have lived through that explosion!"

The dust cloud, settling and rolling aside, partially dispersed. Flames appeared -- fire sweeping the wreckage of the house wing. Scattered tongues became scarlet bundles. They licked at the wood, flared up and spread.

"The explosion scattered an incendiary compound," Doc rapped out.

The bronze giant and the slender lawyer flung out through the window and ran toward the fire.

Waves of heat assailed them, searing as they drew closer. Extinguishing such a blaze was beyond all possibility.

They circled the inferno, eyes searching. They discerned several things of interest, the chief item being the amount of broken glass in and about the wreckage.

Countless test tubes and bottles seemed to have been smashed. Here and there lay pieces of shiny, intricate apparatus, all battered beyond recognition.

"There was a laboratory of some kind here," Ham hazarded.

Neither man mentioned the main fact that there was no sign of the girl. Nor did they voice a hope both held that the girl had been carried away in the van.

Monk had not put in his appearance. He had been absent since before the blast, when he had started searching for Habeas Corpus.

"We gotta get him out," Ham wailed.

There was genuine concern in Ham's voice -- a marked change from the sarcasm with which he addressed Monk when they were face to face.

THE TWO men reentered the house. They found, beyond a door which opened off the kitchen, a stairway leading to the cellar region. A loud, thumping noise drew them to the right.

The basement was filled with smoke. The fumes were blinding, irritating to the lungs. Sounds of the fire came to their ears, an increasing roar. Mingling with this was a shrill whine -- an electric generator.

Then they sighted Monk. The ungainly chemist was pitching himself against a door -- a panel which did not bulge in the slightest under his weight.

There was a small, square opening in the door, apparently for ventilation purposes. Through this came the mournful squeal of Habeas Corpus. Too, the generator whine emanated from here.

"I don't seem to be able to do a thing toward bustin' this down," Monk groaned.

Doc dabbed his flash beam through the hole in the door. Inside, Habeas pranced about. It was a large, bare concrete chamber. It held a huge motor-generator set, obviously employed to charge the overhead net of copper cables with electricity.

Doc gave the head of the flash a twist. This caused the beam to widen, and illuminate the entire room more effectively.

"I'm a son-of-a-gun!" Monk exploded.

A man lay on his back in the middle of the floor, glassy eyes fixed on the ceiling. He reposed near the big motor-generator.

The man was short, very fat; his fat looked soft. His hands lay on the floor in lumps, like a semi-melted formation of butter. He was reposing face up, and his jowls hung down in buttery bags against his ears.

His business suit, while expensive, was wrinkled. His shirt was soiled. He wore no necktie. The man did not move, or even shut his wide-open eyes.

Doc thrust a hand in the door opening, and explored on the other side. "It's sheeted with steel," he explained.

The bronze man now examined the lock. It was of the key type, with the lock mechanism on the other side. Picking it would be slow work.

Two small bottles appeared in Doc's fingers. Using a match stick, he poked a pinch of powder from one of the bottles into the keyhole. He followed this with a bit of compound from the second bottle.

"Back!" he said sharply.

They retreated.

There was a brilliant flash and a whooping roar! Splinters and torn steel geysered from around the door lock. Chemical reaction of the two compounds which Doc had used, had caused the explosion. Doc shoved the door open. Squealing delightedly, Habeas Corpus bounded for Monk.

The man on the floor was stirring. He groaned; his eyes closed, then opened again. He acted like one who had been asleep, and was awakened by the explosion.

Doc grasped the fat man's arm; it was very soft, as if he had clutched a partially deflated inner tube.

Picking the fat man up bodily, Doc carried him out of the room.

"Better get out of here," he called over his shoulder. "That fire is spreading fast."

Monk scooped up Habeas Corpus, and said, "I wonder how the pig got in there?"

Without replying, Doc Savage carried the fat man up the stairway and outdoors, Monk and Ham following him.

They ran toward the gate, which still gaped open. With his sword cane, Ham pointed at the net of electrified cables above. Then he indicated the high, forbidding walls.

"If you ask me, this whole place is nothing but a gigantic cage!" he declared.

"What I was thinking, too," Monk rumbled. "I wish I could get my hands on this Griswold Rock, who owns the place. I'd find out what it's all about."

The man Doc was carrying squirmed feebly.

"I am Griswold Rock," he said.

Chapter 10. THE PRISONER

THE BRONZE man and his two aids digested this surprising information as they ran through the gate.

Doc lowered the fat man. Then he left the spot, running. He vouchsafed no information as to where he was bound.

"I wonder what Doc's up to now?" Monk muttered. "He put some special kind of bullets in my gun and shot at the departing truck," Ham offered. "I don't know what the idea was. But he may be working on that angle."

Doc Savage topped the hill, descended into the valley beyond, and reached the roadster. He had run a quarter of a mile at a speed a champion sprinter would have considered remarkable, yet his breathing was hardly hurried.

Built into the roadster was a radiophone transmitter and receiver. Doc switched this on.

"Renny!" he called.

Out of the radio loud-speaker came a roaring voice which might have been owned by a disturbed lion.

"On deck, Doc!"

"Where are you, Renny?"

"In your office. Just drifted in."

"Long Tom and Johnny there?"

"Sure. Right beside me."

The men named were the other three members of Doc's group. The bronze man issued rapid orders to the men.

"I want to locate a large van-bodied truck," he said. "It's painted red."

"There's only about a thousand red vans in New York," said the lion-voiced "Renny."

"Use the planes," Doc directed. "Fly over Hill Road, and over the Hudson Turnpike. Look for red vans, large ones. When you find them, size them up with ultra-violet light and fluoroscopic spectacles."

"I get you," said Renny.

Doc switched off the apparatus and returned to the spot where he had left Monk and Ham.

Great clouds of smoke were climbing above the high concrete wall. Doc found the pleasantly ugly chemist and the sword-cane-carrying lawyer eying plump Griswold Rock.

The fat man was holding his head. From time to time, his fingers explored in his hair.

"Has he talked?" Doc asked, indicating Griswold Rock.

Ham shook his head.

"They made me drink something," Griswold Rock muttered. "That was right after they saw you fellows on the wall. I no more than drank the stuff, then I passed out."

"Where were you when that happened?"

"Upstairs."

Monk nodded, as if a point had been clarified. "They carried you down to the basement, and Habeas Corpus followed. That explains how Habeas got locked up with you."

"I don't remember what happened," Griswold Rock mumbled.

Monk waved a hand at the concrete-walled enclosure, from which smoke poured as from a titanic chimney.

"Is that your place?" he asked.

The fat man nodded gloomily. "Yep. But it isn't like it used to be. They made me build the wall."

"Made you?" Ham asked.

"Exactly," said Griswold Rock. "I've been held a prisoner for almost a year. To preserve my life, I had to do what I was told."

"Who were your captors?"

"Pere Teston was the head of the gang."

"Pere Teston?"

"He's a former employee of my railroad," explained the fat man. "He worked in a Michigan division point. He was discharged because he failed to show much interest in his work."

GRISWOLD ROCK poked a soft arm angrily at concrete wall and the gate of metal bars.

"They made me transact all my business by letter or telegraph, and sometimes by telephone. One of stood at my side with a gun," he grated.

"You don't know the purpose of the wall and the electrified net of copper cables?" Doc asked.

"No. They made me buy motor-generators to electrify the net. I don't know why."

"Ever see any kind of a monster around?"

"Monster!" muttered Griswold Rock. He shuddered. "Maybe that explains the sounds I occasionally heard."

"What sort of noises?"

"It's hard to describe them. Pere Teston kept me in a windowless room in the basement, but sometimes I could hear things walking about. Huge things!"

"Ever hear anything about advertisements in newspapers?"

Griswold Rock nodded vehemently. "Yes -- I did. They were inserting ads in every paper in the country. I don't know what kind -- or why."

"Was Pere Teston a slender man with freckles and a mustache?" Doc asked.

The plump railroad magnate shook his head violently.

"No. Pere Teston is a shriveled runt. The skin on his face is white, dead-looking. Once you see

him, you'll never forget his skin''

The fire had progressed rapidly. A house wall collapsed, slapping a great cloud of sparks above the concrete enclosure. In the distance a fire engine moaned. Some one had evidently telephoned an alarm to the nearest suburban station.

Doc Savage went to the gate. From the recesses of his clothing came an unbreakable tube. The powder this contained, he sprinkled upon the gate bars. Finger prints became visible. Doc Savage made no effort to photograph them. He merely studied them, fixing the whorls indelibly in his mind. Months could elapse before the bronze man glimpsed like prints, yet he would still recall their configuration, to such retentiveness had he attuned his memory. Upon one particular set of prints, Doc bestowed a great deal of attention. Then he joined the others.

Griswold Rock was saying, "I am not a brave man. They kept me terrified."

"Didn't you make an effort to escape?" Monk queried.

The fat man nodded. "Oh, yes -- several times. But I do not seem to be very ingenious. My attempts always failed. Only yesterday, I managed to get as far as the gate. I'd have gotten away, too, I believe, but the mechanical fastener defied me. I could not discover how it operated, although I fumbled all over the gate."

Doc Savage reached out abruptly and grasped Griswold Rock's fat wrist. He turned the hands palm up so as to inspect the finger tips. His experienced eye appraised the whorls and rings.

"You left your finger prints on the gate," he said dryly.

Griswold Rock raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"I just found the prints," Doc explained "We'd better clear out of here now. Hear that fire apparatus?"

Griswold Rock was eyeing Doc. He emitted a loud ejaculation.

"I know who you are!" he exclaimed. "You're Doc Savage, the fellow who has become so famous as a trouble-buster."

Doc waved the party in the direction of the car. Doc entered his roadster. Monk, Ham, and Griswold Rock and the pig got in the other car.

With its siren moaning, the fire engine approached on Hilt Road.

Doc's party took the opposite direction. They got away without being seen, thereby avoiding the necessity of answering the questions of curious firemen.

NOR WAS the presence of Doc Savage ever connected with the mysterious walled mansion which the fire fighters found aflame. Never afterward in public did Doc mention the place. He told no one, outside of his five aids and the others immediately concerned, of what had occurred at the fantastic spot. He did not tell that he had discovered the enclosure to be a prison for the retention of some species of fantastic monster.

The monster angle, however, was unearthed by an aggressive newspaper reporter who turned up on the scene. This news hawk possessed an imagination. He was employed by a tabloid which was not averse to coloring its news with a little invention.

This journalist of wit, after studying the high concrete enclosure with its over-flung net of copper cables, played havoc with the speed laws in getting to the nearest telephone. The next edition of his paper appeared with tremendous black headlines.

LAIR OF MONSTERS FOUND! MYSTERY MANSE GOES UP IN FLAMES.

The story below was vague as to detail, but it made interesting reading. It stated that the property was owned by a railroad man named Griswold Rock, and added further that Griswold Rock had not been in evidence at his New York club during recent months.

It suggested that the police conduct a search for Griswold Rock; and, climaxing the yarn, was a suggestion that the mysterious "monster" advertisements, which had been appearing in newspapers throughout the United States, were connected with the unusual establishment which had been found in flames.

It happened that this tabloid newspaper was noted for the scatter-brained quality of the reports it published, and as a consequence, its deductions were not taken seriously.

Some of the more sedate metropolitan journals dispatched reporters to the fire, and these later turned in stories which were carried on inside pages in small type.

To the very fact that the tabloid newspaper first connected the mystery mansion with the "monster" advertisements, could be attributed the small amount of real notice which the affair received. Nobody took the tabloid seriously.

Since the newspapers never connected the walled estate of Griswold Rock with the hideous menace of the monsters which was soon to cast its grisly spell over the cities of the United States, they remained blissfully unaware that, in turning up their noses at the flamboyant tabloid, they had passed up what might easily have been the front-page story of all time.

Furthermore, the tabloid itself failed to profit as much as it might have, for its reporter lacked the detective ability to follow up the possibilities which his imagination had suggested; or maybe the reporter did not believe what he wrote. He might merely have come uncannily near the truth in conjuring an interesting yarn out of his fertile brain.

At any rate, no one connected Doc Savage with the fire, least of all the fire fighters who

arrived too late to witness the bronze's man departure. While they were playing the first streams from their chemical extinguishers on the blaze, Doc Savage rolled along the deserted road perhaps two miles distant.

Chapter 11. THE ULTRA-VIOLET TRAIL

DOC SAVAGE switched on the radio telephone. There came immediately from the loud-speaker the sound of static and, intermingling with these cracklings, a many-throated drone.

The droning, sent from other transmitters, was the sound of plane motors.

"You fellows sighted anything?" Doc asked.

Out of the loud-speaker came a well-modulated, cultured voice. This belonged to "Johnny," who was known to his learned associates as William Harper Littlejohn. He had once been the head of the natural science research department of a famous university.

"No," said Johnny. "Not a sign of them yet."

Doc lifted his gaze. Flying low and to the southward, he could see a plane.

"Roll your bus, Johnny," he suggested.

The distant ship spun over slowly in the sky.

"O. K.," Doc said. "I've got you spotted."

The bronze man halted his roadster. Monk was driving the other machine. The pig, Habeas Corpus, was perched on his lap. He drew to a stop alongside Doc's car. The three men and the pig piled out. For the benefit of Griswold Rock, and for his men, who had not heard the entire story, Doc Savage gave a brief synopsis of all that had occurred. While doing this, he spoke close to the microphone which fed the radio telephone transmitter, so that his men in the distant plane would get the story clearly.

Monk showed particular interest in the newspaper clipping concerning the death of the half-breed woodsman, Bruno Hen.

"Tornado -- nothing!" he snorted. "I'll bet it was the monsters -- whatever they are -- that wrecked the cabin."

Griswold Rock shuddered violently. "The more I think of my last months, the more terrible they become," he moaned. "My captors forced me to sign so much stuff that they wouldn't let me read!"

Doc Savage studied Griswold Rock. The plump fellow certainly had not taken much exercise recently. He was carrying some of the flabbiest fat the bronze man had ever seen.

"The Timberland is the name of your railroad, isn't it?" Doc asked.

Griswold Rock's fat jowls went through a convulsion which was evidently a nod. "That is right."

"And you direct the destinies of the railroad absolutely?"

"Yes. I am not only president, but I also own much of the stock -- that is, providing I didn't sign it away with some of those papers they made me put my John Henry on without reading."

"Is the town of Trapper Lake on the Timberland Line?"

"We have a station there. Not a very profitable one."

THE SOUND of the plane became audible in the sky to the east; a moment later the ship appeared. The craft was of a type as yet rarely seen in the air lanes. Its shape bore faint resemblance to the popular autogyro. Actually, it was a true gyro, another product of Doc's fabulous inventive skill. In making a take-off, the ship was capable of rising vertically.

The ship became stationary less than fifty feet above their heads. The door of the closed cockpit opened; a hand appeared.

It was an enormous hand -- fully a quart of bone and gristle encased in a skin which resembled rhinoceros hide. The owner of the big hand thrust his head out. He had a long, horselike face which bore an expression of utter gloom.

With his other hand, he threw a lever which turned the motor exhaust into a muffler. The engine assumed a surprising quietness.

"We ain't having any luck yet," he called. His voice resembled the roaring of a disturbed lion. This was Renny -- Colonel John Renwick. The engineering profession used his name in terms of highest respect. His engineering feats had given him a world-wide reputation and earned him a fortune.

Renny permitted himself only one form of amusement. When the opportunity offered, he liked to demonstrate his ability to knock the panel out of the strongest wooden door with one blow of his enormous fists.

"Long Tom is further west," Renny advised. "Guess you saw Johnny's bus."

He swung the gyro in the direction of the strange walled enclosure with its grille of copper cables. From this, great quantities of smoke still poured.

Renny circled the fire for a time. Then he returned, and hovered "is craft in the air over Doc's head.

The big-fisted engineer had an ejaculation which he used at every opportunity. He employed it now.

"Holy cow!" he boomed. "That's the dangedest-lookin' place!"

Then he climbed his plane, and followed Hill Road into the distance.

Griswold Rock had been an interested observer. He now addressed Doc.

"I believe the tales I've heard of you were to the effect that you have five associates. Was that

fellow with the enormous hands one of them?"

Doc nodded. "He's one of the greatest of engineers, when he chooses to work at it."

From the loud-speaker in Doc's roadster came the words which he had been awaiting.

"Here's the van, Doc," said a shrill voice.

GRISWOLD ROCK started violent!y. Evidently the ramifications of Doc's communication system were beyond his comprehension.

"Who was that?" he gulped.

Instead of replying, Doc started the roadster engine. The giant bronze man had a habit, somewhat disconcerting to those who did not know him well, of seeming not to hear questions which he did not wish to answer.

Had he chosen, he could have taken time to explain that the voice belonged to Major Thomas J. Roberts, an electrical wizard whose contributions to that science were among the greatest ever made.

The public knew little of "Long Tom" Roberts' work, for the reason that his discoveries were largely beyond the understanding of the average layman. Within fifty or sixty years, textbooks would no doubt state that Major Thomas J. Roberts had done important pioneering and discovery work along many lines.

"Where is the van, Long Tom?" Doc asked.

"It's going north on Hudson Turnpike."

"We'll see if we can overhaul it," Doc said grimly.

Griswold Rock grimaced and became quite pale. "Can't you -- can't you let me out somewhere?"

Doc and the others eyed Griswold Rock curiously. Most men, when frightened, put up a front of exaggerated bravado to hide their fears. Not so this fat man. He was terrified, and not backward about asserting the fact.

"I'm an awful coward!" he wailed. "I'm especially scared of these devils."

"Do you want them punished?" Monk demanded.

"Of course I do! But I don't care about going after them myself."

Ham eyed his sword cane thoughtfully. Apparently he was wondering how a man with such a marked lack of physical courage had managed to become manager and major owner of a railroad. Big business men, with whom Ham had come in contact, had always been go-getters with plenty of courage.

"You go with us," Doc told Griswold Rock. "We'll keep you out of danger."

Often in the past, Monk and Ham had seen the remarkable voice of the bronze man work miracles. Never had it secured a more profound effect than now. Griswold Rock seemed to draw courage from the powerful tones.

"I feel as safe with you as anywhere," he said, and got into the roadster.

THE CAR hurtled forward in a fashion which caused Griswold Rock to utter a terrified choking sound and grasp the door. However, as he observed the expertness with which Doc guided the machine, his trepidation subsided. Within a mile, he was resting easily on the cushions, although seventies were dancing on the speedometer.

"Still got the man in sight?" Doc asked into the radio mike.

"I'm cruising above it," came Long Tom's radioed reply.

"Sure it's the right machine?"

"Positive. The fluoroscopic glasses show the presence of the chemical mixture you always use, Doc."

Griswold Rock wrinkled his plump brow at these words. "You put something on that van to identify it?"

"Shot bullets laden with a chemical concoction at it," Doc replied. "They splashed the chemicals on the sides and roof of the van."

The fat man waved his puffy hands. "For the life of me, I cannot comprehend how that could help you."

"To the naked eye the chemical mixture presents nothing extraordinary. In fact, it's hardly noticeable. But the stuff has the property of fluorescing, or glowing, when exposed to ultra-violet light. Ordinary vaseline, for instance, has a similar property. This stuff glows with a different color -- a hue peculiar to itself."

"But you speak of fluoroscopic eyeglasses."

"The glowing marks are very small. Since it is now daylight, special eyepieces are needed to make the glow visible."

There came an interruption, a sound like metal knocking rapidly on wood. It emanated from the radio loud-speaker.

"Doc!" Long Tom's voice rapped excitedly from the instrument. "They've got a machine gun -- " The rapping grew louder, drowning out the electrical wizard's tones. Then, with an ominous abruptness, the racket ceased completely.

"That clatter sounded like a machine gun!" Griswold Rock wailed.

Doc Savage said nothing. He put weight on the gas accelerator. Larger and larger speedometer figures crawled past the dial marker.

For a time, Griswold Rock failed to note the new pace at which they were traveling. Then,

chancing to look at the speedometer, he turned very white.

Chapter 12. THE TUNNEL

LONG TOM Roberts had studied the red van intently through binoculars, before dropping down close to it. He had searched particularly for possible loopholes, but had seen none.

Too late, he learned they had been covered by clever covers caps disguised as the heads of rivets that held the van body together.

A procession of lead slugs, gnashing angrily at his left wing, was his first warning of disaster. The leaden stream made a quick march for the cockpit.

It was the hammer of these slugs which Doc Savage had heard over the radio.

Long Tom was not flying a gyro, but another of Doc Savage's ships -- a rather nondescript-looking biplane. Doc used this type of craft when not wishing to attract attention by being seen in his distinctively-designed speed ship, or the gyro.

The crate heaved over on a wing tip as Long Tom trod the rudder and cornered the stick. It got away from the hungry lead.

He jerked a lever in the cockpit. On the cowl, hatches rolled back; a disappearing machine gun jumped into view. This was synchronized to fire through the prop.

Out of the van top, more bullets climbed. Every third or fourth slug seemed to be a tracer. The metallic threads waved like a deadly, windblown gray procession of raindrops.

Long Tom's gun fired from Bowden controls on the stick. He ringed the van in his sight; his hand clamped the Bowden trip. The gun on the cowl shook its iron back, and smoked.

Like cobweb spun by an invisible spider, Long Tom's tracers ran down through the late afternoon sunlight to the van. Against the steel van body, however, they only made splotches of chemical fire, or spattered into shapeless blobs.

Long Tom felt his ship jar under him. The stick waggled in his hand as bullets lashed at the control services. He jockeyed the stick madly to evade the fire.

His plane had never been intended for combat. It handled sluggishly. A procession of slugs beat against the engine. Their sound was like rapid hammer blows.

The engine stopped.

Long Tom booted the ship into a flat glide, then looked overside. What he saw made him grind his teeth.

The only field suitable for a landing was one near the road. To plant the plane anywhere else would mean an almost certain crackup, for all around were trees, rocks and abrupt hills.

Long Tom slowed the plane by fish-tailing. He three-pointed perfectly on the clearing. While the ship was still rolling, he dived out and ran for the nearest bush.

He had hardly taken a dozen leaps when a machine gun stuttered behind him. He saw hazy tracer lines near his head. Dust gushed on a hillside in front of him. A dozen feet to the left he saw a shallow ditch. Long Tom dived into it.

The machine gun stilled its noisy chatter.

"Take the guy alive if you can!" shouted a man.

Take him alive they did. The ditch was not deep enough to permit Long Tom to crawl away. It chanced that he was at the moment unarmed.

Four men ran up. They were unsavory fellows, men who had followed the path of crime so long that it was reflected in their voices and actions.

"Lamp the guy!" snorted one of the quartet. "He looks like a case for the hospital!"

This statement about Long Tom was caused by the electrical wizard's unhealthy appearance. Long Tom was slender and only fairly set up. He was very pale, as if no sunlight had reached him for a long time. His appearance, however, was deceptive. Few men were healthier than he.

The four men pointed machine guns at Long Tom. These weapons were an airplane type, firing full-sized cartridges. Recoil was taken care of by an elaborate bracing device, which each man wore harnessed about his middle.

Long Tom arose from the ditch. He was searched.

"Who are you?" asked one of the gang.

The electrical wizard ignored the query. A man lunged forward and gave him a painful kick.

"Maybe that'll give you a voice!" the fellow growled.

The last word was still rattling his vocal cords when Long Tom's fist collided with the point of his jaw. The blow had the sound of a loud handclap. The man's eyes rolled, showing the whites. He sagged to hands and knees and began shaking his head fish.

"I ought to snuff your wick!" one of the other men snarled, and juttred his rapid-firer at Long Tom.

"Keep your shirt on!" growled a red-necked thug. "We'll drag him along. The boss may want to juice him for information. The punk had some reason for taggin' us with the sky lizzie."

"I'm in favor of giving him a lead pasting, Hack," grumbled the blood-thirsty one.

"Dummy up!" said Hack. "The big shot may not want him rubbed."

They placed stout handcuffs on Long Tom's wrists and his ankles. Then hurried him over to the big red van.

A man stood beside the machine, dancing about in his impatience. He was tall and waspish, and had

freckles and dark hair and a mustache.

Doc's story, coming to Long Tom over the radio, had included a description of this man. The fellow was the murderer of Carl MacBride, the electrical wizard realized.

"Why didn't you smear him?" he yelled, indicating Long Tom.

"We thought the big greezer might want to put the screws on him, Caldwell," said the florid-necked Hack.

Caldwell -- he had evidently not troubled to give Carl MacBride a fake name on the plane -- considered this.

"No good! Too risky. Croak 'im!"

The men lifted submachine guns. For an instant Long Tom stared death in the face.

"Wait!" Caldwell rapped. "We'll plant 'im in the truck. That's better."

The van cab was commodious. It accommodated Long Tom and the four men who had seized him.

Caldwell clambered into the rear.

The engine started; the van swung into motion. It traveled swiftly, taking tremendous runs at the hills.

THE ELECTRICAL wizard listened. The monster, whatever it was, which had broken through the floor of Griswold Rock's house, must be in the rear of the van. He hoped to ascertain, from some sound, what the thing might be.

He heard nothing in the nature of a clew.

Hunched down in the seat, Long Tom surveyed the heavens. Twice, he saw planes. They were too distant for him to tell whether they were Doc's ships.

The setting of the sun came about abruptly, due to the rising of a bank of clouds in the west simultaneous with the descent of the blazing orb.

"I don't think we're doin' the brainy thing!" said one of the men in the cab.

"Nobody asked you!" growled Hack.

"Maybe not. But I don't get the idea of finishin' off the thing in the truck. After all the trouble we've gone to!"

"Sh-h-h!" hissed Hack. "It might hear you. This one ain't workin' so good. You know that. So the boss has decided to get rid of it. We'll bring up others for the big push on New York. Damn it! We'll have to get another headquarters."

"I hope that explosion got the bronze guy!" growled another

"Dummy up!" said Hack, scowling at Long Tom. "This guy's got his ears unpinned."

"O. K., O. K.," the other muttered. "What are we gonna do after we get rid of our load?"

"Light out for the Trapper Lake country," replied rednecked Hack.

Night clamped down blackly. Long Tom kept accurate check on their progress, and their whereabouts. They followed the State highway for a time, then turned off. He could see the highway markers.

Long Tom made no attempt at a break. His captors kept eyes upon him all the time they were on the ferry. Hands remained in gun-bulged pockets. His slightest move would have meant sudden death. The van rolled on -- for hours, it seemed. The terrain became hilly. At almost every brook they stopped and added water to the radiator.

At last, the van halted. There was a stirring in the rear. Long Tom peered through the window. Caldwell appeared from the after regions of the van. Ahead of him he propelled the steel-haired girl, Jean Morris.

Her wrists were handcuffed at her sides; adhesive tape crisscrossed her lips. She could only glare rage with her metallic eyes and make angry noises through her nostrils.

The pair were illuminated faintly by the backglow of the van's headlights.

Caldwell stared at Long Tom. He spat disgustedly. "Don't let this guy get away!" he warned. "He's probably been listening to you guys talk, and knows plenty."

"We ain't been talkin'," lied the red-necked Hack. Long Tom kept his pale face expressionless. In his listening, he had garnered one really important morsel of information. This gang seemed to have a headquarters in the vicinity of Trapper Lake, Michigan.

"How do we dish it out to him?" asked Hack,

"Just tie him in the van cab," said Caldwell. "Two of you birds come along with me. The other two are enough to do the job."

"Sure," said Hack. "I know the spot. I was raised in this country. The place is right ahead. It'll work swell."

"It'd better," Caldwell said grimly.

The van rolled ahead, leaving Caldwell, the steel-haired girl, and the two thugs behind. The ponderous vehicle covered perhaps two hundred yards, then angled into a disused side road.

The headlights picked out a tunnel-like hole which slanted down into the side of a hill. Some time in the past, an attempt at mining had been made here. The tunnel was rather large -- big enough for the van to be driven in.

The mumble of the engine became terrific thunder as the van entered the bore.

For the first time, Long Tom detected the vibration of something of great size moving in the van rear. The monster was apparently disturbed by the roar of the engine.

"I hope the thing don't try to get out!" Hack muttered.

"The van will hold it," grunted the other.

Long Tom tested the handcuff links uneasily. He was stronger than nine out of ten run-of-the-street men. His muscles, however, were unequal to snapping the stout steel links.

"Gettin' uneasy, eh?" jeered Hack

The fellow drew another set of handcuffs from his pocket He grasped Long Tom's leg.

The electrical wizard kicked and pitched about violently. The driver cursed. His attention was distracted; the van crashed into the tunnel wall and stopped.

Both men seized Long Tom. Clubbing him with pistols, straining, grunting, they managed to link his ankle manacles to the steering-post

"Let's go!" snapped Hack.

They piled out of the cab.

Long Tom heard scraping sounds, then saw the reddish flicker of machete. He leaned out. Although his feet were secured, he could see the two men. They were applying a match to a fuse which led into a large steel tool locker slung under the van body.

The fuse hissed, and spat sparks. The two men whirled and ran.

THE VAN motor had killed itself when the machine collided with the tunnel side, and inside the tunnel there was comparative silence, except for the noise of the running men. Somehow, to Long Tom, it was as if the receding steps were in actuality the departure of his own life-ghost.

He wrenched madly, fighting the handcuff links. The steel circlets scraped skin off his wrists and ankles, cut flesh, and rasped tendons. And they held him.

Back in the van interior, the monster stirred uneasily. On the faint chance that he might arouse the thing and cause it to break free, and in some manner accomplish the saving of himself, Long Tom began to yell.

"Bust out!" he shrilled. "They're trying to kill us!"

There was a violent stir, a terrific impact inside the van; then great blows.

The thing realized something sinister was under way. Either it had understood Long Tom or had sensed the danger.

Long Tom peered out of the cab, stretching as far as the handcuff links would permit. The sparking fire had crawled along the fuse until it was lost to view inside the box.

The monster's struggles caused the van body to rock slightly on the springs.

Long Tom widened his mouth to yell again. The shout, however, never came. Instead, he sealed his lips and listened.

He had caught a sound, a sound so weird as to defy description. A fantastic trilling note -- it might have been the plaintive cry of some exotic feathered thing lost in the umbrageous depths of the ancient mine.

It was the sound of Doc Savage.

"Doc!" Long Tom yelled.

The giant man of bronze came plunging down the declivitous mine tunnel, flashlight in hand. He moved the beam occasionally to avoid larger lumps of rock which had fallen from the roof of the abandoned diggings.

The bronze man wrenched at the underslung tool locker into which the fuse ran. It was of steel, heavily constructed like the rest of the van. Opening it was work for a key, or for a steel-cutting torch.

Inside the van the monster struggled futilely.

Doc Savage leaped to the rear. A huge padlock secured the doors, too strong to break! He whipped to the cab and grasped the stout handcuff chain which linked Long Tom to the steering column.

Long Tom had battled that chain futilely. His best efforts had not even elongated the links. The chain parted under Doc's fingers as if it were cheap, soldered watch linkage.

Long Tom was yanked out of the cab and borne toward the tunnel mouth at a dizzy speed.

Doc Savage's flashlight funneled white, and in the incandescence, stony outthrusts of the tunnel walls cast weird, squirming shadows.

Here and there lay lumps of coal which had disintegrated from long exposure to the air. Grayish shale floored the tunnel, this still bearing depressions left upon the removal of tramway ties. Through these, the van tracks rutted deeply.

Long Tom gnawed his lips. He was holding his breath, unaware of doing so. Would the explosion come before they got out?

It did not. Doc Savage dived through the entrance, and veered to the right. In his haste he made some noise. Rocks rolled; bushes whipped.

Drawn by these sounds, from a spot at least a hundred yards distant, a powerful hand-searchlight protruded a white tongue. Doc and Long Tom were embedded in the glare. From behind the light, angry yells volleyed.

"Hell -- it's the bronze guy!" Hack howled.

Two gun muzzles, lipping flame, became like winking red eyes above the white-hot mouth of the hand searchlight. The bullets passed Doc and Long Tom so closely that the ugly sound was not the conventional zing, but more like the snap of glass rods.

From the tunnel mouth came a great, whooping roar. The big hole spat shale, dust, and lumps of old coal.

It might have been the mouth of a gigantic cannon.

Chapter 13. THE MICHIGAN CLEW

THE CONCUSSION of the explosive within the tunnel caused the earth to quake until Doc all but lost his balance, despite his tremendous agility.

Rubble was blown from the mouth of the tunnel with sufficient force to carry many yards; the stuff blasted in the direction of Hack and his companions.

As the hail of debris struck, the pair stopped shooting. Either a rock broke their light, or they switched it off, for its glitter vanished.

Doc Savage, with Long Tom's manacled frame across his tremendous shoulders, pitched through the night. The hill into which the tunnel penetrated was steep. There was danger of the explosion sliding its top down upon them.

The cataclysmic force of the detonation seemed to lift the entire hilltop. Great cracks split and gaped open. Trees upset. Rocks and soil spurted upward, as explosion-gas escaped through the rents. The hilltop settled, causing great gushes of dust. The tunnel mouth closed completely. The reverberations of the blast whooped and thumped, like unseen giants fighting each other, until they weakened away into nothingness.

The monster within the van, whatever might be its nature, certainly had perished in that blast, buried under hundreds of tons of stone, shale and earth.

A more effective tomb would be hard to conceive.

Doc Savage lowered Long Tom. By way of proof that the bronze man's earlier feat of snapping the handcuff b.links was no freak. the linkage securing Long Tom's wrists and ankles now parted easily under Doc's great corded hands.

"How'd you get here, Doc?" Long Tom demanded.

"Renny picked me up in the gyro," Doc explained. "Using the ultra-violet light, we managed to locate the van. We followed the thing, and lost sight of it when it went into the tunnel. I dropped down by parachute to see what had happened."

"The steel-haired girl was taken off the van a few hundred yards back," Long Tom offered.

With the ghostly abruptness as of a bronze specter, Doc Savage vanished into the night. He made directly for the spot from which the shots had been fired.

DUST ROLLED in choking waves. The cloud banks that had made the sunset so abrupt had gorged the sky with their sooty mass. Dust and clouds, combined, made the night very dark.

Far overhead, Doc could hear faint hissing noises. They might have been made by the wind.

Actually, they were the sound of the silent motors which propelled Renny's gyro and the larger speed plane in which Johnny and the others rode. Johnny had landed and picked up Monk, Ham, and fat Griswold Rock.

Griswold Rock had not been enthusiastic about taking to the air, having admitted a fear of airplanes.

Doc Savage, using his fabulously sensitive ears and nostrils, ascertained that the gunmen had fled. He increased his speed. The fleeing pair had taken to the disused road which approached the mine mouth.

Doc, catching faint sounds of their flight, ran faster. His quarry had turned off the road into a very level field. Doc caught a faint tang of gasoline.

Out of his pocket came a small boxlike device. It was a radio transmitter-receiver, designed for an ultra degree in portability. He clicked the switches.

"Renny! Johnny!" he called.

"I'm on," Renny's thumping tones replied

"Me, too," added Johnny's more scholastic voice.

"Toss out flares," Doc commanded. "I think these fellows have a plane waiting down here. There's a smell of gasoline in the air."

That this deduction was correct was quickly verified. A plane motor whooped into life out on the level field.

High overhead, almost against the black flanks of the clouds, a light appeared. Rivaling the sun in brightness, it bathed the earth in glittering white, causing every grass blade to stand out. It was the flare which Doc had ordered. It sank slowly, lowered by a small parachute. Its intensity seemed to increase as it eased down in the sky.

Doc caught sight of the plane. It was a low-wing cabin job, and it looked fast.

Caldwell himself was inside the glass enclosed cockpit, handling the controls.

GIVING HIS engine no time to warm up, Caldwell fed the cylinders gas. The low-winged ship picked up its tail and scudded across the field.

In the calcium dare, Doc Savage discerned a feminine face jammed to the cabin windows. The steel-haired Jean Morris apparently was still a prisoner.

The plane vaulted off.

Above, Renny's gyro and Johnny's speed ship came spiraling down to attack.

Doc, directing the affair by radio, commanded, "Watch it, you fellows! The girl is in their

plane."

His warning was hardly necessary, however. Caldwell's plane climbed with astonishing speed. To the west, clouds hung very low. The craft made for these. As it banked, Doc caught a glimpse of the license numerals in the flare glitter. He made note of the number, fixing the figures in his retentive memory.

It dived into the vapor bank and was lost to sight before it could be overhauled.

"Holy cow!" came Renny's disgusted ejaculation from the gyro. "We haven't got a chance of trailing them through these clouds."

Renny's gyro and Johnny's faster bus swung in great circles, searching. Johnny even climbed the ship above the clouds, where there was moonlight. No trace did they discern of Caldwell's aerial conveyance.

It had made an escape.

Johnny tossed out another flare, banked down and leveled off. There was some bouncing to his landing, but considering the landing speed of his ship, it was expert.

Long Tom had joined Doc. He watched Johnny get out of the plane.

"Johnny sure looks like the advance agent for a famine," the electrical wizard remarked.

This described Johnny's appearance accurately. He was extremely tall, and thinner than it seemed possible for any man to be. Dangling by a ribbon from his left lapel was a monocle -- actually a powerful magnifier.

Griswold Rock scrambled out of the plane after the gaunt Johnny. Rock's fatty face was white as dough, and was dripping perspiration. His hands trembled.

"I hate airplanes!" he wailed. "They always scare me."

So that only Doc could hear, Long Tom remarked, "Everything seems to scare that guy!"

Renny now dropped his gyro lightly upon the field. Alighting, he fanned a huge fist in the general direction of the sky.

"Holy cow!" he rumbled. "How're we going to trail 'em?"

"I can help out," Long Tom said shortly. "I overheard them talking. They've got a hangout somewhere near Trapper Lake, Michigan. They were going to head for that spot."

Griswold Rock held up plump, soft hands in a gesture of incredulity.

"Surely you're not going to follow them!" he ejaculated. "Don't you see that they are too dangerous to monkey with?"

Big-fisted Renny answered this. "Cracking down on guys like them is what we do for a living."

GRISWOLD ROCK shuddered, and all of his fat jounced and shook.

"I'm a coward!" he wailed. "Don't count on me. I wish I could go to South America or some place until this is all over."

Doc Savage began outlining his intended course of action.

"Renny," he addressed the big-fisted engineer, "your knowledge of engineering includes dope on excavating methods. You probably know where machinery and men can be gotten in a hurry."

Renny nodded and looked gloomy. The gloomy expression was deceptive. The more somber Renny looked the more he was probably enjoying himself.

"You will start excavation on the closed mine tunnel," Doc told him. "Dig in and see what the monster was."

"O. K.," Renny said.

Doc Savage now addressed Ham, whose specialty was law. "You go over the records and recent legal papers of Mr. Rock's Timberland Line railway. See if you can unearth anything of value. Mr. Rock will want to know what kind of papers he has been forced to sign recently, anyway."

Fat Griswold Rock suddenly shook his fist violently at the sky where the plane of their enemies had lost itself. Color came into his flabby cheeks.

"You don't need to look for the chief villain!" he yelled. "It's that chemist, Pere Teston."

For the briefest moment it seemed that Doc Savage's weird trilling note was audible. His five men showed marked interest, for the sound indicated that the big bronze man had just heard something which he considered important.

"Chemist!" Doc repeated. "You neglected to state that he was a chemist."

"Did I?" Griswold Rock clucked regretfully. "I was excited. I suppose I left out that detail."

It's not important, anyway. He was a half-baked chemist."

"Half-baked!"

"I mean he had crackpot ideas. He was a nut on scientific farming. He was always going around talking about increasing the efficiency of farm animals. He got so goofy about the idea that he was worthless to my railroad as an employee, so we fired him."

"Along just what lines did he hope to increase the efficiency of farm animals?" Doc asked pointedly.

"I don't know." The fat man shrugged. "I didn't pay much attention to that. He was just another employee. Now, though, I wish I'd kept my eye on him."

Doc asked several other questions. These merely developed the fact that Griswold Rock had no more information of importance to divulge.

"I don't want to go to Michigan with you!" said the fat man.

"We have no intention of forcing you into danger," Doc told him. "You can remain here in New York, if you prefer."

"The rest of us are going to Michigan?" Long Tom demanded.

"We are," Doc told him.

Chapter 14. NORTHWARD

THE REMAINDER of the night, and part of the following day, was filled with fast, if unexciting, movement.

Big-fisted Renny, calling on engineering acquaintances and contractors, assembled steam shovels, a fleet of dump trucks, and workmen. He began operations on the caved-in mine, scooping his way in to ascertain the nature of the monster which Caldwell's gang had buried.

"This job is apt to take some little time," he reported. Ham, the legal expert, set to work on the papers of the Timberland Line, Griswold Rock's railroad. Although the little railway operated in Michigan, its main offices were in New York.

"I moved the headquarters down here," Griswold Rock explained. "I never did like northern Michigan. It gets too cold for me up there in the winter."

In his first few hours of searching, Ham unearthed several noteworthy morsels of information. First, Griswold Rock had signed numerous checks under duress. They were large checks -- they totaled nearly a quarter of a million dollars. Furthermore, it was evident that Pere Teston had been the recipient of all of these sums. At least, his name was on the face of the checks, and on the back in endorsement.

Fat Griswold Rock did not seem greatly concerned over the huge inroad on his finances. Apparently he could stand monetary loss, but any threat of danger to his person drove him frantic.

"I got out of it lucky!" he said, and fingered his own fat bulges lovingly.

Another interesting detail turned up by Ham was the fact that the Timberland Line had recently bought tremendous quantities of food. This stuff Tanged from some hundreds of sacks of flour, to several carloads of dressed beef. There were literally carloads of groceries.

"The purchase orders for that junk must have been among the papers I was forced to sign!"

Griswold Rock declared. "This is the first time I've seen them. But they have my signature, all right."

Ham traced down these food supplies. He learned the material had been transferred to a barge in Lake Superior, near Trapper Lake. No one seemed to know what had happened after that. The barge had simply gone away late in the night, and had come back empty.

"Oh, gracious!" ejaculated Griswold Rock. "They've bought enough food for an army! What can it mean?"

"It means that this is something gigantic and carefully planned," Ham decided.

All of Griswold Rock's bulges shook as he shuddered.

"I have an awful feeling," he moaned. "It is that some gigantic, awful menace is hanging over us. I tell you these devils must contemplate something horrible. I've a notion to go to Europe until it's over."

"Suit yourself!" snapped Ham, somewhat disgusted by the fat man's manifestations of profound cowardice. "But before you sail, give me legal authorization to go through the records of your railroad up in Michigan. I want to do some more checking there."

"Very well," Griswold Rock agreed.

He signed an authorization which Ham drew up.

It was well past noon before Doc Savage took off in his largest speed plane for Michigan. With him went Ham, Monk, Johnny and Long Tom. Each man carried such mechanical devices and supplies as he believed he might need.

They left Renny behind, superintending the excavating of the buried monster.

"I'm going to Europe, or somewhere," said fat Griswold Rock, as he saw them off.

THE SPEED plane Doc was using for the Michigan trip, in addition to being his largest, was his newest. It was a gigantic thing, built to the bronze man's personally drawn specifications -- a ship which had created a small furor in the aeronautical world. It was nearly a hundred miles an hour faster than anything approaching it in size.

The fast craft was volleying over the Trapper Lake region of northern Michigan when sunset approached.

Doc was handling the controls. He had not slept the previous night nor that morning. Moreover, the giant bronze man had that morning taken the two-hour routine of exercises which he never neglected.

The exercises consisted of muscular exertions, performed so strenuously that they spread a sheen of perspiration over his great frame. A series of sound waves above and below those audible to a normal ear, he had employed to attune his hearing. He tested an assortment of odors, this sharpening his olfactory organs.

He read pages of Braille printing -- the writing of the blind which is a system of upraised dots on paper -- to make his sense of touch more acute.

There were scores of other angles to his routine, all intended to develop mental and physical perfection. All of the exercises were scientific in nature, calculated to obtain the most pronounced

results.

Despite the exercises, intensive activity, and lack of sleep, Doc Savage showed no signs of fatigue. His companions did not regard this as unusual. They had become accustomed to Doc's phenomenal powers.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, reposed on a coat in the aisle. The air was cooler in these northern regions. Ham, carefully attired in tailored outdoor garb, felt the chill and glanced about in search of his topcoat.

He saw Habeas. His eyes popped. His neck became purple.

"Ow-w-w!" he shrieked. He made a pass at the pig with his cane.

Habeas sought shelter under Monk's seat. Ham tried to reach him, but was fended off by Monk's hairy hands. Ham promptly belted Monk over the head with his sword cane.

"You fuzzy baboon!" he gritted. "You put that pig up to eating a hole in my coat! He never chewed on things before!"

Monk looked at the overcoat on which Habeas had tried his teeth. It was a straw-colored garment, the latest in weave and cut. Monk lifted a scornful lip.

"If you'd wear clothes like other men wear, it wouldn't have happened!" he snorted. "Habeas must've thought that funny-lookin' thing was a new kind of fodder!"

Ham's swing with his sword cane missed as the plane heeled over on a wingtip, and he had to grab a seat to maintain his balance. Doc was circling Trapper Lake.

TRAPPER LAKE was considered something of a metropolis in this remote woods region. It boasted a population of nearly seven hundred. The largest building in town was the hotel, the Guide's House. The sign on the Guide's House stood up as the most prominent object in town.

The fact that many of the buildings were constructed of logs gave the town an aspect somewhat out of place in this modern age.

The Timberland Line railway depot was a squat red structure.

No level ground suitable for a plane landing was discernible near town.

"We'll go on and land on the lake near Carl MacBride's cabin," Doc offered. "We'll be on the spot then, ready to look things over, when daylight comes."

Bony Johnny looked surprised. "How we going to find the cabin?"

"That shouldn't be hard," Doc told him. "The newspaper clipping gave its location in a general way."

From their altitude, the shore of Lake Superior was visible to the northward. Red lines, slanted across the lake by the setting sun, seemed to squirm with the undulations of the waves.

The few miles to the lake shore they covered in short order. Renny, peering over the side, slanted a quart of pointing knuckles.

"There it is," he rumbled.

He had discovered the wreck of Bruno Hen's cabin. Brush and timber resembled a moss growth around the demolished structure. The fragments of the shack itself were not unlike a bunch of crushed and broken matches.

Doc's plane was an amphibian, capable of alighting on water or land. The under-carriage wheels disappeared into wells.

The bronze man dropped the big ship expertly on the lake, then taxied inshore.

He did not beach the craft. Instead, he pressed a lever and a light grappling anchor was lowered mechanically. This caught and held on the bottom. Collapsible boats came out of a locker and were planted on the water. They paddled ashore.

A late-calling meadowlark made sound; a jaybird scolded them angrily. Along the lake, leaping fish made splashes. It was a peaceful scene.

They walked to the ruin of Bruno Hen's cabin.

HAM, LEANING on his sword cane, studied the wreckage in the pale gray light which was all that remained of the day. The ruin had been yanked apart by curious individuals. These persons had tracked down whatever sign the surroundings might have held. In addition, there had been a heavy rain since the disaster.

"We'll wait for daylight to hunt dews," Doc decided. They pitched their tents on a bit of high ground near the wreckage. While the others did the actual erecting of the shelters, Doc paddled out to the plane and made use of a powerful radio set which it held.

"Wonder what Doc's doing?" Long Tom pondered, battening down a tent stake with a dead branch.

The question was answered when Doc rejoined them. "Caldwell's plane actually flew to this vicinity," Doc announced. "Checking with the airports between here and New York disclosed one which saw the ship during the night. The plane circled, but the pilot was evidently afraid to land. He went on."

"How'd they come to notice it?" gaunt Johnny asked curiously.

"There was an alarm out for a ship carrying the license numerals which that one bore."

The men showed surprise. They had not known that Doc had spread an alarm for Caldwell's ship.

"The license number should show who owned the craft," Johnny exclaimed.

"It was stolen a month ago from a commercial air transport company in southern Michigan," Doc replied. "A checkup revealed that."

"Another crime to be charged against Caldwell, or Pere Teston, or whoever is behind this," Johnny said thoughtfully.

Complete darkness arrived. This night, like the previous one in New York, was cloudy.

"Kinda feels like a storm," Monk remarked. The homely chemist was engaged in playfully upsetting Habeas Corpus with a toe. The pig seemed to like this.

While they were cooking supper, cottontail rabbits occasionally ventured into the zone of firelight, only to flee as some one moved or spoke. Owls hooted mournfully. Insects clattered high notes, and bullfrogs whooped in bass.

It was a peaceful scene. They settled for the night in pneumatic sleeping bags. All were tired; they soon dropped off to sleep.

Chapter 15. NIGHT TERROR

THUNDER WAS chuckling softly in the distance when Monk awakened, Doc's hand upon his shoulder. There was no lightning. Monk squirmed, peered into the inky void, and gulped. "Hey, what the -- " "Quiet!" Doc cautioned. "I think something's going to happen.'",

Monk bounced out of his bag, much to the disgust of Habeas, who had been asleep on the foot. The pig grunted a few times in discontent, then with strange abruptness it became silent.

Monk fished out a match and thumbed it alight. He hid the tiny flame in his cupped palm, so that only a spear of light escaped and fell upon the pig.

Habeas was sniffing like a pointer. Coarse bristles along his back were on end. Monk listened, and could hear nothing. But the pig had detected the presence of something.

"Habeas has remarkably keen senses," Doc said softly. "The nearest of the things must be at least a mile away from us."

"What things?"

"Just a minute," Doc said, "I'll let you listen." The bronze giant went to the other men and awakened them. All moved to one side, a few yards clear of the camp.

A strange-looking bit of apparatus stood here. Doc had evidently erected this after the others had gone to sleep. Long Tom, the electrical wizard, recognized it instantly.

"A supersensitive listening device!" he said.

The electrical expert did not trouble to explain further that the thing utilized sensitive parabolic pickup microphones and 'amplifiers of great power, similar to those employed in radio sets. He presumed that the others knew this.

Doc Savage flicked a switch which connected the loudspeaker to the amplifier output. The sensitivity of the listening device was at once apparent. An owl hooted in the distance, and the sound poured out of the loud-speaker in a great bawl. Habeas Corpus grunted. That, too, was magnified a thousand fold.

Suddenly there came from the loud-speaker noises foreign to the other night sounds. These were watery notes, a great splashing and gurgling. Then came tremendous hissing noises, as of a monster breath expelled.

Doc switched off the listener.

"Huh?" Monk gulped. "That sounds like something wading along the edge of the lake."

"There's another of the things in the opposite direction," Doc advised. "As far as I can tell, there are only the two of them. They're approaching slowly."

After a brief interval, the bronze man switched on the listening device again. This time, the splashing sounds were louder, and it was evident that they came from both up and down the lake shore.

"Do you reckon they're huntin' us?" Monk asked uneasily. "We'll wait," Doc said. "We won't use this listening device any more, either. The things may hear the amplified sounds."

The men waited, listening so hard that they could almost hear the gurgle of blood in their own veins.

NO LISTENING device was needed now. The noisy wading was becoming louder as the fantastic waders of the night approached.

"I hope they meet each other and fight it out," Long Tom said uneasily. "They sound as big as elephants."

This proved a futile hope. The gigantic things prowling along the lake shore apparently met. One of them emitted sound, a roar which terminated in a hacking and sputtering.

"For the love of Mike!" Monk breathed. "First time I ever heard a sound like that."

There came a loud clank. It was like a tin can being kicked, only infinitely louder. It was followed by another. Metal crumpled noisily; rivets shrieked; brace wires parted with loud dongings.

"Our plane!" Monk growled. "They're tearing it up!"

He started forward.

"Wait!" Doc admonished sharply. "Those things may be dangerous."

A tremendous splashing was accompanying the ruining of the plane. This came nearer, as if the monsters were pushing the plane to the beach.

"Ain't we gonna do something about this?" Long Tom asked indignantly.

"I planted a camera in the treetops, upon first hearing them," Doc explained. "The things are

almost in position now to have their pictures taken."

From the ground beside the electrical listening device Doc picked a metallic-looking object, slightly smaller than a baseball. He threw this in the direction of the beach.

The thing detonated with a flash that stabbed at their eyeballs like hot flame. It was powerful flashlight powder which would expose the plate of the camera. He had been able to plant the camera with shutter open, thanks to the murk of the night.

At the flash, both monsters came crashing through underbrush and timber toward the camp.

"They must have located our place by the camp fire earlier in the night," Ham breathed grimly.

"Scatter!" Doc ordered. "These things show signs of intelligence. They're dangerous."

Stealthily, the men parted..

Doc Savage remained where he was, except that he moved a few feet to one side, stooped, and opened a bag. This was part of their equipment, all of which they had fortunately removed from the plane.

Out of the bag Doc took two metallic containers, each of perhaps a quart capacity. Balancing one of these in either hand, he waited. They were great tear-gas bombs.

He delayed throwing until convinced one of the monsters was within fifty feet. Then he hurled both gas bombs. They landed, bursting with loud whups.

Then Doc dodged wildly. Something came at him -- something thrown. Whether by accident, or due to the fact that the monsters had heard some slight sound which Doc had made, the object was thrown accurately.

It hit Doc. It was such a blow as he had never before felt. He was propelled backward, crashed into a tree, bounced from it to a smaller sapling, and dropped. He lay perfectly still after he fell.

THE THROWN thing had not struck Doc Savage squarely, however. A shift, executed almost as he felt the thrown object, had put him partially in the clear. He had an opportunity to tense his great muscles to absorb the shock.

He lay in the soft weeds and dead leaves for only a moment, then reared up. The monster was charging him.

Doc glided to the side, one hand exploring the blackness for saplings and trees, to avoid collision. With his other hand he felt for his flashlight. He found it -- a shapeless mass of battered metal and squashed glass. It had come into contact with a tree and was useless.

The monster missed Doc and ploughed on through the brush, travelling blindly. Its coughing, hacking, sputtering and other hideous sounds indicated the effects of the tear gas.

It veered toward the lake, its companion following. With a great splashing, they fled into the night. They traveled with amazing speed, for their sounds were soon lost to the unaided ear.

Doc started toward the beach, desirous of getting to his camera. The plate should tell them the nature of the monsters. But he encountered the tear gas. The night breeze, which was very light, had not yet pushed the stuff out on the lake.

Rather than trouble to dig a gas mask out of his duffle, Doc decided to wait until the breeze dispersed the vapor. That should not take many minutes.

His men came back to the camp

"Have any of you got ideas about what the monsters were?" Doc asked them.

None had. It seemed nobody had a flashlight in his possession during the affair. This explained why no light had been shown.

Doc dug a flashlight from their luggage and swiveled the beam about. He was searching for the thing that had been thrown at him. It took only a few minutes to ferret out the object.

"Whew-w-w!" Monk breathed. "Did one of them throw that?"

That was a rock as large as a water bucket.

Doc spattered the flash beam about.

"Look here!" yelled the bony Johnny. "Tracks the things made!"

The prints were roughly rectangular in shape, and outlined plainly in the soft earth.

"They're bigger than any man could make!" Monk muttered.

This was no exaggeration, the prints measuring much longer than Monk's feet, which were not small.

The amazing thing, however, was that the prints were without definite shape.

Doc Savage, examining them, noticed that the earth was pressed perfectly smooth where the weight of the monsters had borne down. There was no mark of hair or scales, nor were indentations of claws distinguishable.

"The prints don't give us much of an idea," Doc said. "Fortunately, we have the camera.

They spent several minutes inspecting the undergrowth, noting how saplings were crushed down, and even small trees bent aside and their limbs torn off.

"Those babies were really strong," Monk muttered.

The gas had dispersed by now.

"We should have a good flashlight photo of the things," Doc declared, and led the way toward the beach.

Once on the sandy strand, he stopped. He played his flashlight beam. For a moment, the fantastic

trilling note which was part of this remarkable man of bronze became audible. It seemed to have a slightly disgusted quality.

"What is it, Doc?" Monk asked.

"The monsters smashed into the tree that held the camera," Doc advised. "Moreover, they seem to have been lucky enough to walk on the camera, There's hardly enough of it left to stuff a pipe."

Chapter 16. THE SUICIDE SLAYING

THE STORM on the horizon threatened with hollow thunder for the rest of the night, but did not materialize. Morning sun brought silence to the owls -- they had not resumed their hooting for nearly an hour after the visit of the monsters. Meadowlarks, bobolinks, and thrushes greeted the dawn. The rays of the sun turned into glistening jewels the dew which dappled the leaves and grass. Doc and his men inspected the plane. It lay in shallow water, close inshore. One wing was askew, almost ripped off. The stout metal fuselage was dented, crushed. Propellers were bent.

"They sure wrecked the bus!" Monk exploded.

Doc Savage went over the ship, seeking dew. But if there had been signs of any, the lake water had removed them.

He studied the size of the holes which had been beaten in the fuselage. They were nearly large enough to permit a man to crawl inside. The thin alloy metal had parted under the impact of great blows as if it had been paper.

"The things have an almost fantastic strength," Doc commented.

He gave his attention to the tracks which were imbedded in the beach sand and in the softer woodland loam.

"The prints seem to have been made with a substance as unyielding as steel," he declared. "A flesh-and-blood foot would show some change in configuration."

He went over the scene thoroughly. Deep in the tangled brush beyond the camp, whence had charged the monster which had flung the rock, Doc found a clew. It proved that their visitants of the night had not been metal robots of titanic proportions.

The clew was a crimson fluid. The red stuff was spilled over leaves, and across the grass for a short distance.

The monster had apparently snagged itself on a limb.

Doc Savage spent half the morning going over the vicinity. Satisfied at last that he was going to unearth nothing, he scrutinized the remains of Bruno Hen's cabin. He spent an hour at that job, but found nothing of value.

They visited Carl MacBride's cabin, and Doc went through MacBride's belongings. The inspection revealed that Carl MacBride had no near relatives.

"That's a relief." muttered homely Monk, who had entertained visions of the unpleasant task of informing some one close to Carl MacBride that the man was dead. Such jobs usually fell upon Monk. Doc and his party went back to their camp-site, packed their equipment in tump-line rigs, and set out to walk the five miles to Trapper Lake.

THEY COVERED half of the five miles, and came upon a grassy glade surrounded by a dense growth of conifers. The group were crossing this when Doc flung himself face downward.

"Drop!" he rapped.

The others had only time to sag their jaws in astonishment before a short, shrill whistle knifed at their eardrums.

Every man flattened; they knew that sound. It meant the passage of a high-powered rifle bullet. The grass was almost knee-high. Prone in it, the men could not be seen at a distance of more than fifty feet.

"Spread out, brothers," Doc directed. "He's liable to try random shots into the grass."

"How'd you locate him, Doc?" Monk called.

Not getting an answer, Monk angled over to find Doc, with the intention of putting the question again. But the bronze man was not to be found.

Doc, at the moment, was scores of yards away, He traveled swiftly, almost against the ground.

Another bullet made a loud buzzing sound through the grass.

Doc's discovery of the rifleman had been no accident. For the previous mile of their progress, the bronze man had noticed a marked lack of bird life. To his trained eye, this indicated some one was moving ahead of them and had frightened the feathered creatures away. Accordingly, he kept his eyes open.

He had sighted the bushwhacker's rifle as the fellow aimed.

The rifleman had a plain white handkerchief tied over his face.

Doc gained the edge of the clearing. Not until he was well into the conifers did he arise. A mighty Nemesis of bronze, he circled to flank the attacker.

He was unsuccessful. The rifle wielder, suspecting his shots had missed, had fled. He could be heard plunging through the brush.

Doc Savage, heading across to intercept the man, found his path barred by a great thicket of brambles. Large trees grew out of the thorny maze. Their branches almost interlocked in spots. Scarcely slackening his running pace, the bronze man hurtled upward in a great leap. His hands clamped a low limb, and the momentum of his leap carried him over. With an acrobatic agility he

landed atop the limb, maintaining a perfect balance. He remained there so briefly, however, as to seem not to pause at all. He swung up and out, caught another limb, and repeated the process until he stood among the top-most branches. He glided out on a bough and sprang into space. An onlooker, not knowing the tremendous quality of the bronze man's muscles, would have felt he was committing suicide. Doc's hands found the branch of another tree. He went on through the aerial lanes. His progress involved Herculean exertion, but he was probably traveling as swiftly as the fleeing rifleman.

Beyond the brambles, Doc dropped to the earth. He was on his quarry's trail. His path lead through tangled brush, through thickets of stunted evergreen. They descended a sharp slope. A sluggish stream appeared, wide and shallow. At one point, a log had fallen across the water. The bushwhacker's trail led directly to the log. Doc Savage reached the log and stopped. The water beneath the log was only a few inches deep, and it overlay pleasant-looking sand. This sand was riled, disturbed. At one point, great bubbles were rising and bursting. QUICKSAND! AND the bubbles arising might mean some one had fallen in. Or it might mean that Doc's quarry had dropped a rock into the treacherous sand, in an effort to pull a trick. Doc's eyes ranged the log. It was covered with a green moss. This was undisturbed. The bushwhacker had not walked across; and nowhere was the quicksand stream narrow enough to leap. Doc gazed around. There were no limbs to which the fugitive might have sprung to hide his tracks. The opposite bank of the stream was a wall of brush and small trees, and beyond lay thick timber. To gain refuge, the bushwhacker would have had to take wing. The fellow was in the quicksand. No doubt of it! From Doc's clothing came the silken cord and grappling hook which he so frequently found of use. He doubled the cord twice, and took a loop around the log. Monk and the others came up. They were scratched; their clothing was torn. Ham's immaculate garb hung in tatters. They had evidently had a tough time with the brier thicket. "Hey, Doc!" Long Tom yelled in horror. "You ain't gonna go into that stuff, J hope!" Doc did not reply. He knotted the ends of the silk cords around a wrist and tied them securely, allowing just enough line to prevent his arm sinking below the surface. The giant bronze man dropped into the quicksand. As he had expected, the stuff was very loose and liquid. This accounted for the quick disappearance of the bushwhacker. Doc churned about. He had no trouble sinking in the stuff. The difficulties would come when he sought to extricate himself. His feet soon found a yielding form. He worked at this, and got it clamped between his knees. Then came the laborious job of hoisting himself. It was a terrific task, even for Doc's matchless strength. Very slowly his rising was hardly perceptible to the eye -- he lifted himself and his prize. Great tendons, which were normally part of the symmetrical mold of his arms, stood out in tremendous fashion. His arms might have been corded with steel bars. Perspiration rivulets wriggled down his bronze skin, and mixed with water which covered the quicksand. The sand made unlovely bubbling noises. Doc's men waited on the bank above. Monk had to be restrained from wading out into the quicksand, with the idea that he might be of some assistance. At last, Doc lifted the bushwhacker free of the quicksand. He carried the fellow out and laid him on the bank. The man's handkerchief mask was gone now. It was Caldwell, the slayer of Carl MacBride. A knife hilt stood out from his chest. IN A dazed fashion, the gaunt Johnny fumbled with his monocle magnifier. "The knife -- this fellow was murdered!" he gasped. "Is he the same man who fired upon us?" "The same," Doc replied. "Weren't there any other tracks around?" Instead of replying, Doc stood erect and ran across the log which spanned the quicksand. He entered the thick bushes on the opposite bank. There he found the explanation of the knife in CaIdwell's heart. Tracks! There was the print of a large foot encased in pac-type shoes. The maker of the print had stood for some time. Doc followed the pac trail of Caldwell's killer. It was a short procedure. A hundred yards to the right, the quicksand brook joined a larger stream. The murderer had entered a canoe. Doc worked up the stream, then down. He studied the fish, for the water was clear, trying to ascertain in which direction the finny denizens had been frightened to cover by the passage of the canoe. It was not this, but the absence of turtles from logs, that gave him his clew. The killer had. gone downstream. Doc set out in that direction. A low pop-pop-pop came from ahead -- an outboard motor. Ten minutes later Doc gave it up. He could not hope to overhaul a canoe fitted with an outboard. He rejoined his men. They had the contents of Caldwell's pockets spread out on the grass. These

consisted of a penknife, cartridges for a rifle, a case of cigarettes, and a sheet of yellow paper which had evidently been torn from a grocery wrapper.

Three words were written on the paper:

THE DEATH MILL

"What in blazes do you reckon that means?" Monk demanded.

They left the body of Caldwell where it lay. As a death shroud, Monk and Ham contributed what the brier thicket had left of their coats.

It did not take them long to reach Trapper Lake.

"Not such a hot-lookin' town," Monk decided.

Changing the subject impolitely, Ham pondered aloud, "But why was Caldwell murdered?"

"Probably because we knew his identity," Doc replied.

"But he was masked when he shot at us."

"We saw his face when he killed Carl MacBride in New York," Doc reminded. "That made him a liability to his gang. He was a definite individual for whom we could hunt."

"Wonder if Pere Teston killed hi," pale Long Tom muttered thoughtfully.

Doc did not reply.

They worked their way through the business section of Trapper Lake. This was spread along a single street.

Doc entered a general store. In slightly over a minute, he was outside again.

"You fellows wait here," he directed.

Ham waved his sword cane. "But what -- "

He withheld the rest. Doc Savage had already vaulted a wooden fence and set out across lots.

In the general store, Doc had asked about a spot called The Death Mill. This place, it seemed, was an old grist mill on the outskirts of town. The ominous place had been deserted for years, it seemed, ever since the former owner had been caught in the grinding stone and crushed to death.

Hence the name -- The Death Mill.

Doc sighted the dilapidated structure. Mischievous boys had knocked planks off the walls; the roof had shed shingles, as if it had the mange.

Doc took to roadside brush as he drew near. He circled the mill warily, for he could hear sounds from within -- nervous pacing.

A man came to the ramshackle door and stood looking out. It was fat Griswold Rock, who had vowed he was on his way to Europe when Doc had last seen him!

Chapter 17. RENNY'S MYSTERY MISSION

DOC SAVAGE bobbed into view.

For a fat man, Griswold Rock moved suddenly. He jumped at least a foot in the air. He leaped backward, and his head, due to his own clumsiness, banged the ancient door jamb. He sank to his knees, half stunned.

He began to tremble. The trembling was an interesting phenomenon, for it made all of his fatty bulges seem to be tilled with kicking frogs. It was almost a minute before he controlled himself.

"I'm so g-g-glad you've come," he stuttered.

Doc's bronze features exhibited no change of expression. "Your t-t-telegram s-said you'd be here ab-bout this t-time," continued Griswold Rock, still stuttering.

"Telegram!"

"The one you sent me in New York. I got it just as I was ready to leave for Europe."

"I sent you no telegram!"

Griswold Rock had gotten to his feet. At the words, his knees buckled as if the tendons had been cut. In his distress, his fingers seemed to wriggle separately, like fat living strings.

"The t-telegram t-told me to come here and w-wait," he wailed. "It was s-signed with your name.

Do you think it was a t-trap to rn-murder me?"

Instead of answering, Doc Savage roved his gaze over the surroundings. The weeds were very tall, the brush rank; vines entwined to make a labyrinth. Somewhat scrawny-looking walnut trees thrust above the whole. It was a macabre place, suggesting rattling chains and ghostly cries.

"There are no tenanted dwellings near by," Doc reminded.

Griswold Rock tied his hands into a fatty lump. "They decoyed me here. Maybe they planned to seize me again. Worse still, they might have intended to kill me."

Doc Savage entered the abandoned mill and moved through its moldy rooms. He even examined the cracked, long-disused grinding stones in which the former operator had met his death.

Dust was thick. That made it simple -- for the bronze man's trained eyes -- to ascertain that no one but Griswold Rock had visited the place recently.

"Where is the telegram which you received?" Doc asked.

"I took a room in the Guide's Hotel," explained Griswold Rock. "I left the wire there."

"Let's go have a look at it."

The backwoods nature of Trapper Lake was evident as they made their way through the streets.

Wooden planks were evidently cheaper than concrete, and most of the sidewalks were composed of this material.

The residents were robust, friendly souls. Although Doc

Savage and Griswold Rock were strangers, they received pleasant greetings.

The Guide's Hotel, in addition to being the largest building in town, was the newest. It was entirely of frame construction.

The two men went directly to a room on the second floor. Griswold Rock opened his suitcase.

"Oh, my!" he wailed. "It's gone! Somebody's taken the telegram!"

Doc Savage left the room and descended the stairs. He found the hotel proprietor.

"Have you noticed any one prowling around within the last few hours?" he asked.

"Within the last two hours," amended Griswold Rock, who had followed Doc. "I just arrived here two hours ago. I came most of the distance from New York by plane."

The Guide's Hotel proprietor was a grizzled man with humor in his eyes.

"'Sides you two," he declared, "only one stranger has been in this here building today."

"What did that one look like?" Doc asked.

"He was kinda tall, middlin' thin, and had one of them there movie mustaches. Just looking at it made me kinda want to reach out and jerk it off."

"Did the fellow have freckles?"

"Yes siree. Come to think of it, he did."

"Caldwell," said Doc.

"It's his description," Griswold Rock agreed. "Pere Teston is a wizened fellow, and no one would ever forget his weird, dead-looking face. So it wasn't Pere Teston."

Doc made no comment on this. "They were afraid the telegram would be evidence against them,"

Griswold Rock continued after a brief interval. "Caldwell came and got it. I tell you I'm worried! They're after me and they're clever."

"Caldwell will not bother you," Doc advised. Griswold Rock looked surprised; "But he is one of the gang."

"He is also dead." With a few terse words, Doc described the demise of Caldwell.

"Caldwell was stuck with a thrown knife as he reached the log," Doc finished. "He toppled to the quicksand. The murderer escaped. There was no clew to his identity."

"What about the killer's tracks?"

"They were made by extremely large pacs. The size indicated the killer was wearing them over his shoes."

"That sounds like Pere Teston!" Griswold Rock ejaculated. He shuddered. "That shriveled fiend has small feet."

Doc's four men arrived at the hotel. It was decided to make the hostelry their Trapper Lake headquarters.

Doc Savage inquired for a long distance telephone connection with New York City, and learned there were no phone wires out of town.

Doc set up his radio apparatus. Working through a station on Long Island, which transposed his words from the ether to land-line, he got in contact with Renny.

"How's the excavating going forward?" he asked. "Better than expected," Renny reported. "Doubled the working crew this morning. I located a hydraulicking outfit such as they use for gold mining in the west, and we're using powerful streams of water to wash the hill away."

"Did you check up on the finger prints found on the gate of Griswold Rock's estate?"

MONK AND Ham exchanged glances which, for once, were surprised instead of mutually insulting looks. Here was an angle upon which they had not known Doc was working.

"I checked the prints," Renny reported. "The classifications were broadcast to leading police departments."

Renny paused at the other end to give an order to some one, probably an associate in the excavating work.

"Here's a strange thing about the finger prints, Doc," he continued. "They were all of men who have escaped from prisons within the last few months."

"All from one particular prison?" Doc asked.

"No. Several different States. One bunch got out of the Jefferson City pen, in Missouri. Another broke out of the Oklahoma hoosegow at McAlester. All got outside aid in escaping."

"This may be significant," Doc remarked.

"Here's something else that may be, too," Renny reported. "The police have a record on Caldwell. His picture is in the rogue's gallery. He has served two prison terms."

"For what crimes?"

"He's a crook who makes a specialty of getting other criminals out of jail. He was caught doing this a couple of times. That's how he happened to go to the hoosegow."

"Anything else?" Doc asked.

"Nope."

The radio and land-line consultation ended with that Doc Savage turned to his friends. They eyed him expectantly. It was Doc's custom to assign his associates work which fell in their respective lines.

"Monk," Doc said, "you'll fix up chemical bombs. Make them strong enough to knock out an elephant

Use a gas which produces unconsciousness, rather than fatality."

Monk nodded. The job was up his alley.

Doc assigned work to Ham -- the lawyer was to delve further into the records of the Timberland Line railroad, in an effort to see what he could find.

"If you wish, you can assist Ham in this matter," Doc told Griswold Rock.

The plump man trembled violently, but nodded.

"Very well," he groaned. "It seems I had best help you fellows, greatly as I am frightened. I will never feel at ease until this devil, Pere Teston, is brought to justice."

Johnny, the bony geologist, whose learning naturally included an understanding of earthquakes and the seismographic method used to study them, was to plant sensitive listening devices in the earth. Long Tom, the electrical wizard, was to assist in this.

"The idea is to trace the direction which the footsteps of these prowling monsters take," Doc explained.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in following Doc Savage's suggestions.

The homely Monk possessed a remarkably compact portable chemical laboratory which he always took upon expeditions of this sort. Long Tom, the electrical wizard, likewise carried an assortment of devices. The two experts utilized their equipment to carry out Doc's suggestions.

Doc Savage spent some time working with devices which he himself had brought. During this interval, he secluded himself in a room of the Guide's Hotel.

When the bronze man appeared, some time later, he was placing in a pocket objects which resembled ordinary .410 gauge shotgun shells.

Ham and Griswold Rock returned to the hotel near nightfall.

"I talked to conductors on some of the Timberland Line passenger trains," Ham reported. "They gave me some interesting dope. It seems that they have noted some very tough-looking passengers on their trains during recent months. These fellows are obviously criminals. All of them got off at Trapper Lake."

Ham paused; he could not resist an urge for dramatics. "These tough-looking fellows were always in the company of a certain man!"

"Don't beat around the bush!" growled Monk, who was listening. "Who was the guy?"

"Caldwell!"

Griswold Rock wrung his fat hands in fright. "I cannot understand this. Caldwell has been extricating criminals from prisons and bringing them to this vicinity. Why?"

That was the mystery.

It was deepened somewhat by information which Doc Savage secured by radio, later in the day. A fresh crop of "Beware the Monsters!" advertisements had appeared in newspapers all over the country. These had been mailed from Trapper Lake.

Doc consulted the Trapper Lake postmaster. The latter was reluctant to speak at first, but Doc produced credentials signed by the highest of government officials. The postmaster turned into a fountain of information.

Yes, he had noted a man mailing many letters to newspapers all over the United States. Yes, he could describe the man.

He described Caldwell.

Monk, having completed his chemical bombs, did some prowling about town. The homely chemist was an excellent mixer. When he returned to the Guide's Hotel he had some information.

"Caldwell seems to have pulled one of his jail deliveries right here in Trapper Lake," he declared. "The local calaboose was broken into about a year ago. A fellow called Nubby Bronson was taken out. The man suspected of engineering the jail delivery answers the description of Caldwell." "Who was Nubby Bronson?" Doc asked.

"A local bad man," Monk explained. "The fellow had served several short prison terms for petty crimes."

"Was he in for a serious offense when the jail delivery took place?"

"That's the strange part. He was serving thirty days for stealing traps. The jailer said he seemed satisfied with his lot. They were surprised when the break took place."

Doc Savage considered this for a time.

"The inference is that Nubby Bronson did not want to get out of jail bad enough to hire his own delivery?" he queried at last.

"That's the idea," Monk agreed.

Griswold Rock gestured astonishment with his fat hands. "But why should Caldwell break into jail to free a man who did not particularly want to escape?"

If Doc knew the answer to that question, he gave no indication of the fact. He maintained silence.

THE GUIDE'S Hotel, they discovered, set an excellent table. Strangely enough, it was the thinnest man in the party -- skeletonlike Johnny -- who was the heaviest consumer of food.

"I wonder where the stuff he eats goes to," pondered homely Monk when Johnny, having eaten prodigiously, arose from the table looking, if anything, thinner than before.

Ham scowled at the pleasantly ugly chemist. "One doesn't have to wonder where your grub goes to."

It's converted into hair."

Later, Doc employed his radio transmitter to obtain a connection with New York City. He sought to locate Renny.

"Mr. Renwick left New York by plane about an hour ago," reported one of the big-fisted engineer's associates.

"Left the city!"

"That is correct."

"Why?"

"The excavators uncovered some object late this afternoon," the man in New York explained.

"What was it?"

"No one but Mr. Renwick knows. It was he who found the thing. He ordered all work to cease, and finished the digging personally. He wrapped his discovery in canvas and carried it away. I believe he took it with him in his plane."

"In which direction did he head?"

"There was something said about northern Michigan, I believe."

Doc Savage broke the connection.

"Renny found something important," he informed the others. "He is rushing it up here by plane."

"Then we should hear from him before morning," Monk declared.

Chapter 18. THE TERROR THAT SWAM

ALTHOUGH THERE were no long distance telephone lines, Trapper Lake itself boasted a local phone service. Rooms in the Guide's Hotel were fitted with instruments.

It was slightly past midnight when the bell in Doc's room snarled. The bronze man scooped up the receiver.

"They've attacked Renny!" yelled a shrill voice.

"Who is this?" Doc countered.

The voice was one he had never heard before. The words sounded as if sawed out by a high-pitched violin string.

"Renny is fighting a mob in a patch of woods about a mile north of town," continued the shrill voice.

"Who are you?"

"Renny says he must have been unlucky. He landed right among the gang. I'm calling from the edge of town."

"Are you going to identify yourself or not?" Doc demanded grimly.

"I live in a cabin close to where Renny's having his fight," said the informant excitedly. "He gave me fifty dollars to come and call you."

Doc Savage started to ask questions. A click denoted the receiver had been deposited on the hook at the other end.

"Ham -- watch Griswold Rock," Doc ordered.

The fat railroad man had retired to his room, but he now appeared in the door.

"That is very kind of you," he said earnestly. "I would be terrified if one of you gentlemen was not near by for protection."

"Long Tom -- Johnny," Doc asked. "Have you got your seismograph devices all set?"

"Sure."

Homely Monk had been listening. A slow grin overspread his features as he saw that he was to accompany Doc.

"Get your chemical bombs," Doc directed. "Better leave the pig."

Down the street, Doc and Monk found Trapper Lake asleep. Street lamps -- they were electric bulbs which dangled from wires spanning the thoroughfares -- had been extinguished long ago. A light burned in the depot of the Timberland Line railroad.

The town had only one cab. Finding it at this hour was out of the question. Doc and Monk headed north, running. Monk, considering his short, bowed legs, was capable of surprising speed.

They were nearing the edge of town when sounds of shot came rapping to their ears.

"Rifles'." Monk ejaculated. "The fight!"

A bullfiddle of a moan suddenly drowned the other gun noises.

"It's Renny!" Monk howled. "That noise was made by one of our machine pistols!"

A MOMENT later, Monk found himself running alone. The homely chemist had thought he was running fast, but Doc had left him behind so suddenly that it seemed to Monk that he had turned around and traveled backward.

Until this moment, Doc had been skeptical of the phone call. It was the sort of thing by which a trap would be sprung. But hearing the moan of the supermachine gun had alarmed him more than a little. The weapons were not public property. Doc manufactured them himself; the only ones in existence were those in possession of his men.

For some distance, Doc followed the ruddy roadway. This sloped downward and became more rugged, the wilderness on either side more impenetrable.

More rifle shots sounded, and the superfirer blared hoarsely. The sounds came from the left.

Doc veered over. He was forced to go slowly, for the darkness was intense.

He could hear Monk come thumping up. The homely chemist was trying for speed rather than quietness. His approach was anything but silent.

From far down the road -- from a point which Monk had passed -- a whistle shrilled. It was a blaring whistle of the sort used by policemen. Doc Savage jerked to a halt and listened.

"Monk!" he yelled. "Duck under cover somewhere. Stay quiet."

The bronze man's great voice reached the homely chemist and halted him. Most convenient shelter was the ditch beside the road. Monk flopped into it.

He listened. There was only the fluttering of leaves as they were moved by the night breeze. Monk jammed an ear to the ground. Borne by the earth came thudding noises which might have been gigantic footsteps.

The thumpings approached. Then there was loud breathing -- tremendous breathing, such as they had heard the night before on the lake shore.

Doc's powerful voice crashed, "The gas bombs, Monk!"

Monk clawed at a pocket and brought out a gas mask of very compact construction -- merely a nose clip and a mouthpiece. From the latter, a tube led to a breath-purifier which was not as large as Monk's hand.

Doc, Monk knew, would be donning a similar mask. The gorillalike chemist stood erect, preparatory to hurling his gas bomb. But he never threw it.

A rasping, metallic voice thundered out. In volume, it was gigantic.

"They've got gas!" it said. "Don't take chances. Beat it! Get Griswold Rock!"

The metallic nature of the huge voice indicated it was issuing from a loud-speaker. And it was the voice of the rednecked thug, Hack.

Obeying the order, the monster wheeled and charged off in the direction of town. It was followed by another, then a third, and a fourth. Monk's hair all but stood on end as he listened to the thunder of Gargantuan footsteps.

But he was not too unnerved to whip out his flashlight and spray it after the monsters. The things were beyond thick brush. He saw nothing to give a clue to their nature.

Over where Doc Savage was positioned there sounded a sharp report, and powder flame spurted. Doc was shooting.

Running, Monk joined Doc. He found the bronze man with an ordinary 410-gauge shotgun-like pistol. As Monk arrived, Doc again fired at the sound of the fleeing monsters.

The big bronze man was charging the weapon with the special cartridges which he had manufactured during the afternoon.

Doc Savage fired his over-size pistol twice more from where he stood. Then he ran to the road and sent more of his special bullets down it.

"It was a trick to decoy us out of town," he said grimly. "They've gotten one of our machine guns, somehow."

"D'you reckon they got the weapon off Renny?" Monk asked uneasily.

Doc did not answer this, for it was not the bronze man's habit to hazard guesses. He headed in the direction of town, running swiftly, Monk lumbering along behind.

They had covered scarcely a hundred yards when sudden, scalding white light washed over them. The beam came from some distance down the road.

Doc slammed against Monk. Together, they spun into the ditch.

Machine-gun lead moaned and ripped along the road. The volleying metal scooped clods and kicked dust into the ditch. The mingled buzz of ricocheting slugs was like the droning of oversized bees.

"This must be the guy who gave the command with the loud-speaker," Monk hazarded.

The homely chemist was tugging to get his superfiring machine pistol from its holster.

"I was afraid this lead-sprayer wouldn't stop the big babies," he growled. "I'm sure gonna use it on this cookie, though."

He reared up on his knees. His gun howled, and the light promptly went out.

"Got him!" Monk exclaimed, his usually small voice boisterous and gleeful. He ran toward the machine gunner.

But he had not gotten the fellow. That slight error would have cost him his life, had Doc not seized his leg and yanked him down. As Monk sprawled prone, a fresh storm of machine-gun slugs swept the road.

"Didn't you notice how steady the light was?" Doc inquired. "The fellow laid it on something."

While the machine-gun slugs were gnashing at the opposite side of the road, Doc Savage lifted for a quick look. He could not detect the muzzle flame of the weapon.

"The gun must have a flame-digester on the muzzle," he said. "Otherwise, we could spot it."

The bronze man quitted the roadside ditch. Working to the right, he reached a mass of vegetation. He worked through this with a quietness little short of uncanny. In developing his ability to move silently, Doc Savage had studied the ways of the masters of stealth--the hunting carnivora of the jungles.

He listened, hoping to locate his foe.

But it was another sound which caught his attention. Shrieks! Excited cries! Shots, the crashing of timber and the squall of a fire siren! The uproar came from the direction of Trapper Lake.

The monsters had fallen upon the town.

Chapter 19. THE MONSTERS RAID

THE MACHINE gunner menacing Doc Savage could be heard running. He was making in the direction of Trapper Lake.

Doc plunged in pursuit.

The fleeing gunner turned off the road. There came a squeak of automobile springs, the metallic clank of a slamming door. An engine moaned and headlights came on. The car dived into the road and scooted away.

Doc Savage sprinted. Given a break, he might have overhauled the machine before it gathered too much speed. But the driver suddenly sprayed machine-gun bullets over his back trail, on the random chance that he might score a hit. In addition, Monk started shooting from down the road.

To avoid being caught in the cross fire, Doc Savage was forced to retreat. The car's headlights were lost in the windings of the road.

Monk came lumbering up.

"Blast it!" he growled. "If there had been some kind of a target to shoot at, I'd have bagged him."

Falling silent, the homely chemist listened to the uproar from Trapper Lake. Women were screaming now. Pistols whacked; shotguns made cannonlike bangings. Men howled and cursed. Wood splintered, and large things upset with jangling noises.

Doc and Monk headed toward town.

After a time, they were conscious that, from the sky, beginning in the infinite distance and growing louder, had come a drone.

"A plane!" Monk ejaculated. "That'll be Rennyk!" Doc Savage drew his flashlight and pointed it at the plane sound. His thumb tapped the button, and the lens spouted long and short bursts of light -- the telegraphic code.

A flashlight eye blinked answer from the plane.

"It's Renny!" Monk grunted. "He seems to be flying the gyro."

With his light, Doc directed Renny to land on the road. "We'll tackle this mess in Trapper Lake from the air," he advised Monk.

The windmill ship spun down and hovered overhead. Hood lamps under the wings spread a glare which illuminated the road. Then it landed.

Renny thrust his somber features into view. He cut the exhaust into the muffler cans, and the motor became silent enough to permit conversation.

"Got any flares?" Doc cabled to him. "Nope," Renny rumbled. "I unloaded all extra equipment; to lighten this crate so it'd fly faster."

Doc and Monk piled into the gyro cabin. The ship, while not large, would lift Doc and his five men. Doc took the controls.

"You just got in?" he demanded, as he guided the gyro into the air. "Just got here," Renny agreed.

"Was a supermachine gun stolen from you in New York?" Doc asked.

"Yeah -- how'd you guess it?" Renny boomed, surprise in his great voice. "I left the thing in the car while I was supervising the excavating. Some one lifted it."

"They were watching you!" Monk ejaculated. "Whoever stole the gun probably came on by plane."

"What did the digging in New York yield?" Doc asked. "The dangedest thing!" Renny rumbled. "I'll show it to you now."

THE BIG-FISTED engineer twisted and dropped an enormous hand to a canvas-swathed package reposing on the floorboards in the rear of the cabin of the plane. He began unwrapping it.

"Huh!" Monk muttered. "The darn thing, whatever it is, is almost as big as a suitcase!"

"Get ready to have your hair stand on end," Renny boomed.

He flung back the last thickness of canvas.

Monk stared. His small eyes all but jumped from their gristle-walled pits. His oversize mouth opened as much as was possible.

"Whe-ew!" he exclaimed.

Up until that moment, Renny had possessed the biggest hand Monk had ever seen. Renny's paws were tremendous.

Yet, compared to this monster hand which had been swathed in canvas, Renny's was as the hand of a baby alongside that of a man. It was natural in shape, but unearthly in its hugeness.

Renny himself whistled in awe as he once more looked at it.

"Holy cow!" he boomed. "The guy who owned that must have weighed a ton."

The bronze countenance of Doc Savage exhibited no marked change as he inspected the titanic relic. It was as if he had expected something of the sort.

"Is this the only part of the monster you uncovered?" he asked.

"No," Renny said. "The rest of the body was there -- the fragments of it, that is. The thing was instantly killed in the explosion."

"For the love of mud!" Monk's tiny voice was wisplike. "So this hand belonged to the baby who reared up through the floor of Griswold Rock's house."

Doc Savage dropped the gyro down toward Trapper Lake. Their discussion, and Renny's exhibition of the colossal hand, had taken only a moment

At two or three points in Trapper Lake houses were bun}ing. These scattered flickering red light over the rest of the town. The crimson-swathed scene was starkly fantastic.

The giants -- they were monster men -- had already raided the Guide's Hotel.

They were now retreating, skulking among the houses. They were like hideous men in a toy town.

"Holy cowl" Renny boomed. "Any one of 'em would make two ordinary men!"

'The big babies are wearin' armor!" Monk breathed.

Monk had hardly spoken when they were witness to a potent demonstration of the effectiveness of the shiny steel plates which banded the giants' chests, heads, and legs -- even their feet.

A Trapper Lake citizen leaped out of his cabin. He held a rifle. Taking deliberate aim, he fired.

The bullet merely tilted a helmet over on the ear of a giant. This particular giant was a big black fellow. His head, judging from the shape of his helmet, came to a conelike point, instead of being rounded.

"Remember the three pinhead savages from the circus?" Monk yelled. "That must be one of them!"

After adjusting his helmet, the pinhead giant charged the woodsman who had fired.

The rifleman ducked into his cabin, ran through it, popped out of the front door and scuttled into the concealment of high weed.

The pinhead thought the rifle wielder was still in the cabin. The black monster lowered his head and lumbered inside. A few moments later, he apparently became tired of moving about the interior.

A wall burst open and his tremendous shoulders and head appeared. He wrenched his arms free. He tore thin clapboard siding boards out bodily and threw them away. Finally he extricated himself from the ruined house.

"They're tremendously strong, even for their size," Monk breathed. "Dumb, too, or he wouldn't waste his strength bustin' out through a wall like that.'t

The pinhead followed his fellow giants out of town.

DOC SAVAGE toolled the gyro after the monster men. He kept fairly high and switched on the brilliant Landing lights. These illuminated the giants.

The monsters were running down the road which led to the lake shore.

Doc Savage advanced the gyro accelerator. The ship did not have a conventional propeller. Its speed was regulated by the inclination of rudderlike vanes affixed to the tips of the rotating wings. Advancing the accelerator set these vanes to digging into the air at a greater angle.

Doc had discovered that the giants were following a car. The top of the machine bore a cluster of four large loudspeakers.

"That's the guy who tried for us with the machine gun!"' Monk declared.

Doc sent the windmill plane toward the fleeing car. They Were close to it when a man stuck his head out of the rear door.

It was Griswold Rock. The fat man flailed about with his pudgy fists; he drove fierce blows back into the car at a target which could not be seen. He made imploring gestures with his arms, as if pleading for help, then was yanked back out of sight into the car.

A man swung out, clinging to the running board of the automobile. He held an aircraft-type machine gun harnessed to a belt about his waist. With one hand he elevated the weapon. Its muzzle flamed red fire.

The bullet stream -- a reddish thread of tracer -- missed the gyro by fully a hundred feet, then sought the target in wild sweeps. The bouncing car was not a foundation conducive to marksmanship.

"I'll fix that cookie!" Monk gritted, and leaned out with his superfirer.

Monk's gun hooted, and the man on the car sagged. Monk was a remarkable shot when he could see his target. Mercy bullets from his rapid-firer had stricken the gunner with instant unconsciousness.

Hands inside the car caught the senseless man, however, and hauled him inside.

"Now, if I can pot the driver through the top of the machine!" Monk chortled.

He never had a chance to try this. Doc suddenly whipped the gyro away from the spot.

"Hey!" Monk yelled. "We may be able to bag -- "

Doc merely pointed at the fuel gauge.

"I made it here non-stop from New York!" Renny groaned. "Fuel is about gone."

"We'd best get far enough away that the giants won't see us when we make a landing," Doc offered.

The engine died, fuel gone, as the bronze man was bringing the ship down some miles to the north. He had picked a spot near the lake shore.

"What a break!" Monk groaned.

Chapter 20. THE WINGED PERIL

DOC SAVAGE had selected an emergency landing spot near the lake shore for a specific purpose. He dug binoculars out of the cockpit duffle pocket, then quitted the windmill plane.

He ran for the beach. Here, as along most of this wilderness shore, there was timber. Doc sought a large tree. He did not use his flashlight, but felt about ill the black night with his hands.

Finding a towering pine, he mounted. Monk and Renny, puzzled, clambered up after him. The monsters, from the direction they had taken, should have reached the lake shore perhaps two miles away to the westward. Doc focused his binoculars in that direction.

"What's the idea?" Renny asked.

Doc passed the binoculars to him. "Take a look."

Renny did so. In the jet night he could not see the giants. But he did discern tiny spots which glowed with all un earthly purple luminance.

"Say, what's them light patches?" he demanded.

"A chemical compound akin to phosphorus," Doc explained. "The stuff begins to glow after it is exposed to the air half an hour or so."

Monk, astride a limb below, emitted a knowing snow. "The dope was in the shotgun slugs you plugged at the giants!"

"It was," Doc admitted.

The bronze man fell to watching the luminous spots which marked the position of the monsters. The glowing patches moved out into the lake and became stationary.

The great loud-speaker voice of Hack, thundering out, carried over the two miles with surprising volume.

"Bring the speed boats!" Hack called.

A moment later, in answer to the red-necked man's behest, marine engines sputtered into life.

Boats had been waiting out in the take. They sped for the shore.

"Three of them!" Monk decided, after counting the craft. The giants went aboard the speed boats, and the craft headed out into the lake.

The glowing spots on the giants seemed to grow larger, although the monsters were being carried away.

"They're trying to rub the shiny stuff off," Renny thumped. "Their efforts just spread the dope."

Doc Savage got careful bearings on the direction taken by the launch.

Distance finally swallowed the glowing smears on the giants.

DOC AND his two men moved down the lake shore to the point where the boats had been boarded. They found the car with the loud-speaker equipment. It was parked near the shore, deserted.

Later, Doc traced the license number of the vehicle. The machine had been purchased in Detroit a few weeks before by a man giving his name as Pere Teston, but who answered the description of the slain Caldwell.

On its side the car bore the advertising of a political party which was now campaigning. It developed that the car had no connection with the political organization, however.

"They put the sign on it so the loud-speaker wouldn't attract suspicion," decided big-fisted Renny.

The men returned to Trapper Lake.

The town was m an uproar. Women still screamed, sobbed and had hysterics. Men galloped about, wild-eyed, their persons bristling with weapons. Almost every one was barefooted, having been routed out of bed. A number of old fashioned male nightgowns were to be seen.

The house into which the pinhead monster had crawled was a wreck. A number of fences had been torn down; gardens were trampled. The door of the Guide's Hotel had been demolished. Shapeless tracks of the big, armored feet were thick.

"One of the infernal giants just butted the door down and climbed in," reported the dapper Ham. He indicated the hotel door with his sword cane. "I made a pass at the brute. Then retreat looked good, so I jumped from the handiest window."

"They came after Griswold Rock!" declared Long Tom. Doc and his men scattered, and devoted themselves to attending to the injured.

The giants had seized four Trapper Lake men in the course of their raid. Using only their leviathan hands, they had crushed every vestige of life from these victims. The bones of the unfortunates had been broken, limbs wrenched from their bodies, their skulls crushed.

"I saw one of the men get killed!" wailed a Trapper Lake citizen. "A giant just picked him up, took his head in both hands, and mashed it like you and me would bust an egg."

HAVING STAYED awake the rest of the night, Trapper Lake looked around in the morning and saw something like fifty newspaper men. While there were no long distance telephone lines out of town, telegraph wires paralleled the Timberland Line railroad, and wires had conveyed news to the outside world of the visit of the giants.

The press took fire. Almost half the passengers on the next train were newspaper reporters, and the other half newspaper cameramen.

More correspondents came by plane. A blimp flew up from Detroit, carrying the reporters and cameramen of a tabloid newspaper.

It dawned on newspapers in every large city in the United States that here was the explanation of the strange "Beware the Monsters!" advertisements which they had been publishing.

A tri-motored speed plane came in with the sound cameras of a news-reel concern. Two enterprising journalists brought their own radio stations and operators.

Before noon, Trapper Lake stood on the front pages of every newspaper in the country in two-inch black type, or larger. Pictures were telephoned. Maps were drawn with X marking the spot where Trapper Lake stood.

Some enterprising city editors, unable to get pictures, had their artists draw giants. Exaggerated stories were flying around, so the artists drew their giants tossing houses around. The giants grew in size with every repetition of the tale. Trapper Lake had its share of tall story tellers, and these fellows outdid themselves. The giants became bigger and bigger. Word got out that Doc Savage was on the scene. A wild rush to interview the bronze man ensued. A New York newspaper wired its reporter, promising him a year's vacation in Europe, all expenses paid, if he could get a first-person story from Doc.

The reporter hunted like a wild man, but failed to earn the year in Europe.

Doc Savage, being possessed of a hearty disapproval of seeing his name in public print, had withdrawn to the seclusion of a clearing some miles from town. Here he and his men discussed and consulted with each other.

They had done some sleuthing before the newspaper locust swarm had arrived.

"I checked on the finger prints of the giant's hand which Renny dug up," Long Tom said.

He mopped perspiration off his pale brow. "You remember that bird, Nubby Bronson, who was taken from the Trapper Lake jail?"

"Sure," Monk grunted.

"The finger prints of that big hand and Nubby Bronson's prints were the same in design."

"Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun!" cried bony Johnny. "They grabbed Nubby Bronson out of jail and made him into a giant!"

Ham, his sword cane tucked under an arm, came up. He had been working with the portable radio.

"I've broadcast a description of those giants, as you directed," he told Doc. "They answer the description of the criminals whom Caldwell got out of jails all over the country."

"We know now why Caldwell was collecting them," said Monk. "He was gathering them for Pere Teston to make into giants."

With that, Monk scratched the winglike ears of his pig, Habeas Corpus.

The dapper Ham scowled at the pleasantly ugly chemist and his equally homely pet.

"The pattern must have been mislaid the day you two were made!" he snorted.

Monk sighed, as if he had stood about as many jibes as he could bear.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, was looking intently at Ham, as if he resented the dapper lawyer's words.

The pig opened his mouth.

The thing which happened then always drove Ham into a screaming rage. The pig seemed to speak distinct words:

"I'm gettin' dang tired of the stuff this funny-faced lawyer calls humor."

Ham purpled very indignantly. He gripped his sword cane.

"Dramatics!" sneered the voice from the pig. "Ain't he a funny-lookin' snipe in them rags?"

Ham was particularly touchy on the subject of his clothing. He still wore the garb which had been ruined in the bramble thicket, although it was far from his liking. He slashed suddenly with his sword cane.

Monk dodged wildly to get clear.

Monk had learned ventriloquism solely for the purpose of having Habeas Corpus express scathing opinions of Ham. The business of the talking pig, although ridiculous to watch, invariably filled Ham with rage.

The conversation reverted to the giants.

"But for what purpose did Pere Teston make the big fellows?" Renny pondered.

THE WORLD got the answer to that question that afternoon. To the mayors of four great cities, the mail brought letters. The cities were Detroit, Cleveland, New York, and Chicago. The letters bore Trapper Lake postmarks.

They had been mailed during the visit of the giants! The four mayors had read the newspapers, so they knew what had happened in Trapper Lake. They could not fail to know it -- the news was in scareheads all over the front pages..

The four mayors opened the letters with curiosity. All four got the shock of their lives.

The Detroit mayor received his missive first. It read:

YOUR HONOR:

Have you read the "monster" advertisements in the newspapers recently? Those were part of my campaign. Possibly you have read of the episode at Trapper Lake last night. If not, I advise you to do so.

My giants visited Trapper Lake for a reason other than the seizure of Griswold Rock, although the latter was necessary. I wanted the world -- particularly Detroit, Cleveland, New York, Chicago -- to realize the power of my giants.

You will consult with leading bankers of your city, advising them to assemble five million dollars. The sum is to be in small, unmarked bills.

To-morrow you will receive a letter of instruction about getting the money into my hands. That letter has been posted.

If my terms are not complied with, my giants will visit your city. They will not be in a pleasant mood.

They will kill people, and wreak incalculable damage. One giant will be designated to hunt you out personally.

You may think machine guns and gas will be effective against my giants. Do not be fooled. They wear bullet-proof armor, and they have special gas masks.

I trust you will not make the mistake of thinking this is a crank's letter.

PERE TESTON.

After reading that, the Detroit mayor tilted back in his chair and had a good laugh.

Then he sent out for the late newspapers and reread the Trapper Lake story. When he finished, he was not laughing. The story had made detailed reference to the crushed condition of the Trapper Lake victims. The mayor called several leading bank presidents and showed them the letter.

"What is the police force for?" asked the bankers.

So the mayor called the police chief, and the chief, in turn, had his men oil their machine guns and break out fresh gas bombs. Radio squad cars were set to prowling roads around the city. Police boats covered the lake front.

In Cleveland, New York, and Chicago, the reaction was about the same, except that in New York City, naval destroyers quietly took up positions around Manhattan Island. They knew Doc Savage's reputation in New York, knew his name had been in the past associated with the combating of perils before which police departments were helpless. If Doc Savage was involved in the matter of the giants, the thing was no laughing affair.

Newspapers ate up this newest development. sheets that had red ink ran it in their biggest headlines. Here was the newspaper story of the year.

Pere Teston was investigated, and the facts unearthed added to the general excitement.

It was found that Pere Teston was a man who had dabbled in chemical experiments since childhood. But he had not made chemistry his profession -- it had been a hobby.

Pere Teston, railroad men who had known him revealed, had for years maintained that it was possible to develop compounds to increase the size of living beings. The friends had laughed; they thought this was just another crazy idea.

That day, several of Pere Teston's former acquaintances collected large sums of money for telling their story to the newspapermen. Pere Teston, these men declared, had talked much of developing giant cows, who would give great quantities of milk. He had spoken of huge draft horses, which would be a boon to the farmer.

No one could recall his having spoken of an army of giant men to terrorize the world.

"Probably he thought of that later," said one man who had known Pere Teston.

"When did he disappear?" asked a reporter.

"A year or two ago, maybe," was the reply. The truth was that no one seemed to be just Certain when Pere Teston had dropped from sight.

Before nightfall, almost five hundred more planes were enroute for Trapper Lake, bearing correspondents and photographers.

BEFORE NIGHTFALL, too, Doc Savage and his men took off on a prowl of their own. Doc entertained an idea.

"Everything points to these giants having their headquarters somewhere in the lake," he pointed out. "Their food supplies, brought in on the Timberland Line, were transferred to barges on the lake."

"But where can their hangout be?" pondered big-fisted Renny.

"We got a line on their retreat last night," Doc said. "The gyro fuel tanks were filled to the slosh-over point with fuel smuggled out of Trapper Lake. They headed out into the lake.

Half an hour's flying put them over an island. It was covered with brush and rock, and certainly harbored no giants. Doc continued onward.

The previous night had been cloudy, extremely dark. This one promised to be gloriously moonlit. They flew high, dropping down when they sighted islands.

An hour passed; another. The fuel was holding out well. The gyro, thanks to its hovering ability, enabled them to scrutinize closely such islands as they viewed.

A half dozen specks of rock and soil they sighted without discerning a sign of the giants.

Another and somewhat larger island appeared.

Ham eyed his watch. "Ten o'clock and all's well," he stated.

He was wrong. Up from the isle ahead a plane came boring.

When it was still some three hundred yards away, machine-gun muzzles flamed like tiny red eyes from its cowl. Tracer bullets, climbing past Doc's gyro, might have been red sparks.

The attacking ship was a low-wing bus, very fast. "That's the crate in which Caldwell and his gang hopped from New York." Long Tom yelled.

Doc climbed the gyro, jockeying to one side, then the other, avoiding the machine-gun slugs. As the attacking ship slid past, Doc heaved the gyro over on its side and flicked the landing-light switch.

The illumination disclosed a face in the control cockpit of the other plane. It was the

steel-haired girl -- the ex-lion tamer, Jean Morris.

Chapter 21. THE SWIMMING GIANTS

LIKE A thing frightened by the glare of the landing lights, the other plane scudded away. It banked and came back. Again the cowl-mounted rapid-firers opened red eyes.

Doc Savage hung the gyro motionless in the night sky and watched the thread of tracer bullets warily, prepared to maneuver the gyro clear if it came too close.

The sight of the steel-haired girl in the other plane had kept Doc from driving bullets into the engine of the enemy ship while the pilot was blinded by the floodlight.

"The hussy," Monk complained. "Who'd have thought this of her?"

"You were making calf eyes at her in New York," Ham snorted.

Monk grinned sheepishly. "I'd probably do it again, too. She's a looker."

The tracer bullets drew too near. Doc dropped the gyro straight down. The move was so abrupt that the men grabbed at their chairs.

Tracers ran strings of phosphorus fire through the space they had vacated.

"What are we gonna do about this?" Monk pondered.

Doc sank the gyro rapidly. The other ship followed them down in a tight spiral. Doc flattened some fifty feet above the lake surface. Advancing the accelerator, he streaked along above the lake.

It looked as if he had generously helped himself to suicide, for the other plane swooped down upon their tail, its two cowl guns lipping flame.

The lake surface was fairly calm, and the small geysers knocked up by the bullets were visible ahead of Doc's windmill. The tracers, as they ricocheted, seemed to be sparks bouncing from the water.

Doc waltzed the gyro right, then left. The other ship, attempting to follow these maneuvers with its sight rings, merely succeeded in firing wide of the target.

Renny used his enormous hands to mop perspiration off his forehead. He knew the danger they were in. Even Doc's consummate skill could not avoid the pursuing bullets for long.

Abruptly, for no visible reason, the plane behind gave up the attack. It wobbled off to one side, careening in the sky.

The pilot seemed to control his craft with the greatest difficulty. Trying to fishtail to reduce speed, the ship nearly went into a spin. Then it sought to land.

"Bet the gal don't know what happened to her" Monk howled gleefully.

IF THE steel-haired girl was mystified, she was not the only one. The dapper Ham was also puzzled.

"What did happen?"

Monk slapped his bulging chest with a furry fist. "Give me credit for that."

"I didn't see you do anything," Ham sneered.

"Doc turned the stuff loose, of course," Monk admitted. "But I mixed it before we took the air.

it's gas. The stuff is in a tank in the back of the bus. Doc simply pulled a valve cord and released some of it. In the moonlight, our steel-haired lady friend didn't notice it."

Ham glanced at the other ship. "You can have the credit!"

"Huh?"

"The gas doesn't seem to have worked!"

To their astonishment, they saw that the other craft had straightened out and was climbing into the air.

"The glass enclosed cabin of the crate!" Doc said. "Just enough of the gas got in to cause temporary dizziness."t

The bronze man hurled the gyro toward the other ship.

His metallic features were expressionless. He reached a corded hand back into the cabin.

"Your rapid-firer," he requested of Long Tom.

The slender, unhealthy-looking electrical wizard passed over his compact little supermachine pistol.

"Every third slug in the ammo drum is a tracer," he vouchsafed.

The other ship, instead of turning back to give battle, was flying a straight course not far above the water.

"Givin' her head a chance to clear!" Renny boomed. Conversation was possible inside the gyro because of the unusual efficiency of the silencer on the engine. The rotating wings had also been designed to create a minimum of wind-whistle.

Doc Savage drove after the other ship. It was flying slowly; he overhauled it rapidly.

"This is gonna be simple, after all," Monk said optimistically.

The fight had drifted through the sky until they were now hardly more than a mile from the island which they had intended to investigate.

The isle seemed to be nothing more than an expanse of rock, spotted here and there with stunted, wind-twisted trees. There were many large boulders on it.

Doc Savage opened the cabin window. Air rushed in, together with the loud hiss of the silenced motor. He aimed with his machine pistol.

But before he could fire, a tiny rip appeared in the fuselage of the other plane. This had apparently been made by a knife or an ax.

The muzzle of a machine gun poked through the opening, its snout slavering flame. The shooting was more accurate than previously.

Clattering, gnashing, lead chopped at the underside of the gyro. Long rips opened in the fuselage.

Monk's pig, Habeas, squealed in alarm.

Doc juggled the controls with a dazzling speed to get away from the deadly leaden hail eating at the fuselage. He succeeded; then the lead storm found them again.

This time, the slugs snapped in the region of the gas tank. They chattered with an appalling noise.

Again Doc maneuvered clear.

"Holy cow!" Renny thundered. "That last burst opened the fuel tank!"

An instant later, colorless gasoline washed over the floorboards. It reeked in the cabin.

The other pilot had been more fortunate than he knew. The fuel tank of the gyro was coated thickly with a fire-proofing and extinguishing compound -- it was practically impossible for it to be fired by incendiary bullets. A burst must have struck, opening a leak through the spongy protective coating.

A stark grimness had settled on the faces of Doc's men. The sky brawl had progressed to a point where chivalry had somewhat lost its appeal.

The gyro flung in alongside the enemy ship. They made a discovery which was nothing if not interesting.

"Hey!" Monk howled. "The girl ain't flying that bus!"

THE STEEL-HAIRED GIRL was lashed in one of the bucket seats in the pilot's cockpit. They could see that now, because she was pitching about madly, and apparently was on the point of freeing herself.

"I knew she was all right," Monk chortled.

The actual pilot of the other plane was a squat fellow in a tan blazer. Due to the shadows inside the plane, they could not tell much about him.

"He ducked out of sight and flew blind whenever he was close to us!" Monk decided, his usually small voice a great yell. "That's why we couldn't see him!"

The other pilot discovered that the girl had loosened her bindings. He flung himself toward her. Using the machine gun, he clubbed at the girl.

The young woman threw herself from under the descending weapon, then clutched its fluted barrel with both hands.

Pitching about in the fight that followed, one or the other disturbed the controls. The plane reeled over on a wing tip, motor bawling.

The squat pilot saw his danger. He released the steel-haired girl. Wildly, he battled the controls. But there was insufficient time.

The girl took one look at the water, then covered her head with her hands to break the force of the crash.

A wing tip knifed the water first. The wing crumpled. The plane hit the water and jumped end over end. The other wing left the fuselage as if sliced off by an invisible razor. The battered hulk wallowed a few yards and came to a stop. It began to sink.

DOC SAVAGE drove the gyro toward the wreck. The windmill plane could land with equal facility on earth or water. Doc, however, did not intend to land. He hovered over the wrecked and sinking plane, the water some ten feet below. He turned the controls over to big-fisted Renny.

"See what you can do about that gasoline leak!" he directed. Then, head-first, he pitched overboard.

Doc struck the water cleanly, with a minimum of splash. His powerful frame curved expertly an instant after the moment of impact, and the result was a perfect shallow dive. He seemed scarcely to wet his back.

Doc stroked to the wreck. A hole gaped in the fuselage, He grasped the edge of this, hauled himself up and glanced into the cabin

The body of the pilot was being tumbled about by the water that poured into the cabin. There was a crease nearly three inches deep across the top of his skull, where he had smashed against a strut.

A few feet from the dead flier, the steel-haired girl paddled feebly. She was dazed, but seemed otherwise not seriously damaged.

DOC SAVAGE reached into the sinking plane and hauled the girl out. He was none too soon, for the stricken craft, weighted by its engine, sank. The whirl drew Doc and his burden beneath the surface. powerful stroking on the bronze man's part brought them up again.

Bubbles the size of water buckets arose from the sinking plane and, bursting, made plopping noises.

Doc glanced upward, then around. The gyro was on the lake surface! It had settled there during the momentary space when the bronze man was under water.

"You'll sink!" Doc shouted warningly. "Those bullets all but tore the bottom out of the fuselage!"

"The gas is gone -- leaked out!" Renny boomed. "We couldn't plug that hole. It was in an inaccessible position."

The men in the gyro were bringing out collapsible canvas boats. They tossed these into the water, then flung articles of equipment into the little shells.

The gyro settled, rocking a little. Doc's men voiced no more words; the business of transferring their paraphernalia to the boats was too 'urgent.

Monk moved Habeas Corpus from the stricken plane.

They completed the shift with only fragments of seconds to spare, and clambered hastily into the folding boats, barely escaping from under the great wings of the gyro as it went down.

Doc Savage paddled to the nearest folding boat. He lifted the steel-haired girl in; then, careful not to upset the shell, clambered aboard himself.

The steel-haired girl, recovered now, stared at Doc in the moonlight. She spoke, and her voice was calm for all of the ripping excitement of the last few minutes.

"They tied me in the cockpit," she said. "They wanted you to think I was your attacker."

"We guessed that," Monk put in, anxious to get the favor of the entrancing young woman.

Doc seemed about to ask the steel-haired girl questions, but withheld them. He leveled an arm.

"Our trouble seems to be just starting!"

The pig, Habeas, reared up from his position near Monk's feet. He looked toward the island. His tremendous ears shot straight in the air. He emitted a procession of staccato, excited grunts. Then he ducked below the gunwales of the boat, as if to shut out the sight.

In the direction of the island, three gigantic human heads projected above the lake surface. Huge black arms appeared and disappeared in measured swimming stroke.

"They're coming after us!" the girl shrilled.

CLIPPED TO the light metal frame of the collapsible boats were telescoping oars. The men hastily freed these and began to paddle.

"One consolation," said bony Johnny, "is that those freaks can't swim as fast as we can row."

They paddled briskly. All six were men of more than average muscular development: The steel-haired girl, insisting on wielding a paddle, exhibited strength somewhat beyond the ordinary. The swimming pinhead giants dropped farther back.

"They're not wearing their armor," Ham remarked. "If they come close, we'll see how bullets affect 'em!"

Without interrupting his paddling, Doc addressed the steel-haired girl.

"The gang wanted you to teach them the pinhead language so they could issue commands to those three black fellows, didn't they?"

She nodded. "Yes. They made me repeat numerous commands until they understood how to issue them.

I found

out why they were so anxious to be able to give them orders. It seems that the blacks hated Bruno Hen. He had done them some injury. One night they escaped and murdered him. They wouldn't have done this, had their chief ordered them not to do so."

"Why was the giant murdered in the New York mine tunnel?" Doc questioned. "Or did you hear of it?"

"I heard," said the girl. "That particular giant had been stubborn about taking orders from Pere Teston. They were afraid of him."

"Pere Teston!" Doc asked sharply.

"He is the chief," the girl explained. "I did not see him. But his name was mentioned numerous times."

"What about Griswold Rock?"

"He's on the island somewhere. I didn't see him."

Monk put in, "What I fail to understand is why they seized Griswold Rock the second time?"

"I don't know why they grabbed him," the girl replied.

"Do you know any of their plans?" Doc asked.

"Only that Pere Teston intends to send his giants against Detroit to-morrow night."

To their ears came the mutter of a motor boat. It was a fast craft; it appeared a moment later, scudding around the end of the island. It veered to one side in order to keep clear of any bullets they might launch, and circled to get ahead of them.

"Holy cow!" Renny groaned. "That thing is making sixty an hour, at least."

The motor boat was soon ahead. A tripod, mounted on its bow cowling, supported a machine gun.

This went into action, sending a ribbon of lead across the lake surface.

Doc's men tried returning the fire with their small supermachine pistols. The range of the other weapon, however, was too great. They were driven to back water, their own bullets falling short. The swimming pinheads speedily overhauled them.

Chapter 22. THE AWFUL ISLE

RENNY, WITH his huge, rocklike hands, was the most skilled marksman of the party, excepting only Doc. He lifted his supermachine gun and fired. The bullets traced a foamy line across the water, a

line that sought and found one of the swimming pinheads.

The giant made a great gobbling sound of anger and dived beneath the surface. He came up some yards nearer.

From the speed boat came a tremendous voice -- words launched by a loud-speaker of the high-powered type sometimes mounted on the under side of airplanes used in delivering advertising talks from the sky.

It was the voice of red-necked Hack.

"Everybody come out here and help!" Hack called.

Answering the summons, more giants appeared on the island. They might have been hideous genii, conjured by the rubbing of a magic lamp, for they sprang up from what had seemed a bleak, boulder-strewn hump of rock. Amid a great splashing, they swam to aid the three black, gigantic pinhead ads.

"It's only a question of time till they nail us!" Renny said glumly.

The speed boat darted toward their little collapsible shells, and its machine gun tossed salvos of sound over the lake surface. The bullets were carefully aimed. They herded Doc and his party toward the swimming monsters.

Long Tom, on his knees in one of the little shells, opened a light metal case. In this were racked objects which resembled metal cannisters holding movie film. These were ammo drums for the supermachine pistols.

"Some of these are explosive bullets," the electrical wizard announced.

The others had known this. Doc carried all types of cartridges -- mercy slugs, tracers, incendiary bullets, armor piercers, and explosives.

Renny clipped a drum of explosive ammo into his weapon. He aimed carefully, after latching his gun into single-fire position, and fired once.

There was a flash, a loud report, and the giant who was Renny's target bawled loudly. The explosive slug had opened a gaping pit in his shoulder.

Hack's coarse voice came from the loud-speaker on the speed boat. "Don't kill the bronze man, or any of those with him!" it commanded.

Then the florid-necked Hack repeated the command in the hooting, gobbling dialect of the pinheads.

Doc's men swapped glances in the moonlight. Their features held blank surprise.

"Didja hear that?" Monk exclaimed. "Apparently they don't want to kill us."

"It may be a trick to get us to surrender!" the girl said wildly.

Doc Savage selected a container of equipment and opened it. He removed several of the compact devices called "lungs" by divers. These consisted of clips to close the nostrils, and mouthpieces -- the latter with attached hoses which led to chemical breath purifiers.

Doc and the others donned these lungs. The bronze man himself showed the steel-haired girl how the contrivance functioned.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, watched these preparations with a beady-eyed intentness. His near-human intelligence was exhibited when he began squealing plaintively.

"Blast it!" Monk groaned. "We're gonna have to let 'im take care of himself."

"Can he swim?" Ham asked.

The dapper lawyer sounded anxious. Considering the desire he had expressed on innumerable occasions to slaughter Habeas, his present concern was surprising.

"He's a swell swimmer," Monk grunted.

The homely chemist lifted Habeas by the scruff of the neck and pointed at the island.

"We'll meet you there, buddy," he said optimistically.

The pig plunged overboard and began swimming for the rocky protuberance.

Doc and the others slid into the water. Each carried a case of equipment, these serving as weights. They sank beneath the surface.

Doc switched on his flashlight when he touched the lake bottom. The flash was waterproof. The others gathered about the light. As soon as they were together, they linked hands in a living chain. Doc switched off the light. He did not want the giants, swimming above, to spot the glow. They moved along the lake bottom toward the island.

DOC SAVAGE wore upon his right wrist a small, highly accurate watch. This was made entirely of non-magnetic metal; and slung on a jeweled bearing between the crystal and the hands, was a compass needle. This was luminous; and since the watch case was waterproof, it could be used under water. The water pressure was not especially disagreeable, the depth being scarcely more than twenty feet. Moonlight made a faint silvery haze overhead. Waves suffused this with undulating shadows. On the bottom, where they walked: it was very dark.

That water transmits sound more effectively than the air was demonstrated by the distinctness with which they could hear the slopping noises the swimming giants were making.

Distinct also was the throb of the speed boat's motor. This latter sound drew closer.

Unexpectedly there came a terrific concussion. Invisible fingers seemed to ram into the ears of Doc and his aids and press against the drums until the agony was intolerable. Their bodies felt the shock, a distinct impact from head to foot.

Doc Savage knew what had happened. Their enemies had explosives in the speed boat. They were dropping the stuff into the lake.

The first explosion, terrifying as were its effects, had occurred some distance away. Other detonations, occurring nearer, would bring crushing death.

Doc Savage dropped the case of apparatus which he was using for weight, and stroked to the surface. His five men and the girl followed.

"Tough," he said grimly when they were all afloat. "But to stay down there would have been suicide."

MOUTHING TREMENDOUS sounds, the giants converged upon their quarry. The manner of the monsters was ferocious. They seemed possessed of a killer lust.

The huge loud-speaker on the speed boat blasted metallic words.

"Do not harm them," Hack thundered. "We'll hold 'em until we hear from the chief."

Low-voiced, Doc addressed his five aids and the girl.

"Take it easy. We haven't a chance. They really mean that stuff about not harming us."

A moment later, one of the swimming giants reached Doc Savage. The monster chanced to be one of the pinheads.

Doc Savage, who towered in stature when beside ordinary mortals, was dwarfed by the grotesque proportions of the pinhead. A monster hand clamped upon Doc's arm. Desirous of ascertaining what strength the giants possessed, Doc struggled.

The result was astounding. For all of his fabulous muscular ability, he might have been a child opposing a mature man. Not wishing to anger the pinhead monstrosity unnecessarily, Doc permitted himself to be towed shoreward.

The girl, Monk, Ham, and the others were captured in like fashion and dragged toward the island. Habeas Corpus had circled wide of the giants in swimming toward the island. A tiny funnel of wake, barely distinguishable in the moonlight, marked his position. He reached shore and disappeared among the rocks, much to Monk's relief.

THE STONY isle, when they reached it, furnished a surprise. Its height had been deceptive in the moonlight, as had its formation. Viewed from above, it had seemed covered with boulders.

The largest of these huge rocks thrust up from the water near shore.

Closer inspection developed that the protuberances were, in many cases, camouflaged buildings.

In landing, the prisoners were towed close enough to these to observe details of their construction. Metal girders composed the framework. Over these were stretched stout-woven wires, the netting of which formed foundations for a canvas covering, cleverly painted and veined to resemble stone. The structures were unexpectedly large.

Each held a plane. These craft were large, tri-motored amphibians.

A light was turned on in one hangar, permitting a man to resume work tuning a plane motor. This job must have been interrupted by the approach of Doc's gyro. Thanks to the light, and the fact that the cabin door of one of the planes was open, Doc's party got a glimpse of the ship's interior. Wicker seats, usually a fitting of a plane's cabin, were missing.

"Seats taken out," Monk muttered.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "These planes are equipped to carry the giants!"

Monk surveyed their gigantic captors, as if calculating the weight of the fellows. He nodded his bullet of a head as if satisfied.

"Yep," he said, small-voiced. "They're too big for the seats, so the seats were ripped out of the crates."

"Shut up, big hairy," growled the ruddy-necked Hack, getting out of the speed boat which bore the machine gun and the loud-speakers.

"I been wondering how you was gonna move your big partners around," Monk told him amiably..

"Shut up, I said," Hack gritted.

Long Tom surveyed their captors -- those who were of normal size.

"Some of these are the birds who grabbed me near New York," he offered. "You know -- in that van."

Hack yanked an automatic from an armpit holster. He waved it meaningfully to enforce his command for silence.

Four men of normal size appeared. These fellows were tough-looking customers, swaggering and belligerent.

Doc Savage, studying them, said nothing; but he glanced at Renny.

The big-fisted engineer nodded.

The nod informed Doc that all of their captors -- the thugs of normal size, as well as the giants -- were convicts taken from the prisons of the United States by the ill-starred Caldwell.

Doc and the others were dragged inland. There was another captive on the island. They discovered this a moment later.

This prisoner, Doc and the others did not glimpse fully. Hack and another thug went ahead and removed this mysterious captive from under what seemed to be a great, flat-topped rock.

Black shadows lay among the great boulders. The pair moving the mystery captive kept in these, either by chance or through design, which accounted for Doc's not being able to identify the bound

form which they bore.

"It's Griswold Rock!" guessed big-fisted Renny. Doc, the girl and the five men were dragged toward the spot from which the other prisoner had been taken.

What had seemed to be a huge flat rock proved to be a cshed. It was of no inconsiderable size. This roofed and concealed a deep pit. The depression might have been a grave, except that it was considerably larger.

Doc and the others were searched to make sure they carried no weapons. The steel-haired girl's frock, being wet from her immersion in the lake, clung to her shapely figure in such fashion as to make it obvious that she carried no weapons.

All of them were forced to slide down a rope into the shed-covered pit. The depth was surprising.

They explored the stone floor and walls of the prison. The rock was smooth, offering not the slightest fingerhold. There was no fitting of any kind in the well-like pit.

"Holy cow!" Renny groaned. "We're sunk!"

"YOU SAID it, Big-fists," growled Hack's voice from the top. Renny glared upward. It was very dark in the depths, and little lighter above, thanks to the shed.

"O. K., O. K.," Renny grumbled. "But your big scheme ain't gonna work, fellah. The people in those cities, Detroit, for instance, ain't gonna kick in with such huge sums of money."

"So you think," jeered the man above. "Listen, guy, them 'Beware the Monsters!' newspaper advertisements had the public stirred up and curious. They furnished just the foundation we wanted. They showed the public that this giant business ain't no two-bit scheme!"

"If you think they'll lay down and give up their money, you're crazy!" Renny shot back at him.

"They may not, at first," agreed Hack ominously. "But to-morrow night, we're gonna haul a load of the big boys down to Detroit. They'll wear armor that's proof against anything less than artillery, and they'll wear gas masks. What they will do to Detroit will be plenty. The other towns will kick in after that."

"Planes will bomb the giants!"

"Oh, yeah? Not when the giants carry off the mayor and some others for hostages."

"What do the giants stand to make out of the whole thing?" Renny asked curiously. "What good will money do them? They're just monstrosities. They can't enjoy themselves. They can't even talk coherently."

"After this is all over, they'll be returned to normal size," Hack retorted triumphantly.

'Can Pere Teston make them little again?"

"You said it, Big-fists!"

Doc Savage now entered the conversation, inquiring, "Are the giants taking part in this devilish scheme because they are under the impression they can be returned to normal size?"

"They don't think -- they know!" Hack growled. Hack now gave orders for two giants to station themselves near by and watch the covered pit.

"Have any of the giants been returned to normal size?" Doc Savage called.

"It can be done all right!" yelled Hack. "Pere Teston did it with monkeys and guinea pigs. He even did it with a cow."

"But has he returned a man to normal size?" Doc persisted.

"Hell, not" Hack snarled. "There ain't been no need of it yet."

"Are you sure that the animals, once reduced in size, enjoyed a normal span of life?" Doc questioned.

"What d'you mean, bronze guy?"

"I mean that the shrinkage in size probably brought on almost immediate death," Doc said quietly.

This seemed to be somewhat of a shock to the man above. There was silence. He swore softly.

"Hell, you're just tryin' to worry 'em! You know they're listenin'."

Hack now withdrew.

"Was that a bluff, Doc?" Renny asked. "Can't they be returned to normal size?"

Doc Savage vouchsafed no reply. Instead, he made a silent round of the pit, assembling his five men.

Chapter 23. ESCAPE AND CAPTURE

DOC'S AIDS were puzzled at first, not realizing his purpose in gathering them together. Then they comprehended; and without Doc issuing orders, they went into action.

Renny braced his head and arms against the stone side of the pit. With an agility befitting his apish build, Monk bounded upon Renny's shoulders and balanced there. Johnny topped Monk. Soon they had formed a human pyramid, reaching almost to the top of the pit.

Up this living ladder Doc Savage clambered. Upright on the shoulders of Long Tom, who was the lightest, he could reach the rim. He peered out.

In the moonlight beyond the camouflaged shed he distinguished the two guardian giants. One was to the north. The other stood at the south. All around the shed, the rocky isle was smooth. Chances of crossing this without being observed seemed nil.

Over toward the other side of the island there was talk and laughter -- some of the mirth being

expressed in' thunderous howling noises. This was evidently the only type of laughter permitted to the afflicted giants' vocal cords. Doc's dire prediction that they could not be returned to normal size apparently had not been taken seriously.

Making no noise, Doc Savage clambered over the pit rim. It was then that he caught a faint stir in the darkness inside the shed. He poised, listening, thinking perhaps that it 'night be Hack. But it was not.

The pig, Habeas Corpus, nosed against Doc, making another faint stir as he did so. The homely shote had managed to reach the shed without being seen by the giants.

Doc grasped the pig. Through the medium of signs and a gentle shove, he made the intelligent porker understand that he was to run away from the shed.

The pig galloped off.

The giants saw him. So unusual was the appearance of the pig that their attention was gripped.

The running porker held their attention only a moment]but that was long enough for Doc to move, unobserved, from the shed to the sheltering maze of boulders.

A bronze phantom who blended with the tawny hue of the rocks and melted entirely into the shadows, Doc Savage made directly for the edge of the island. The huge camouflaged hangars jutted up darkly. He waded past them, on out into the lake.

Scarcely a splash marked his entrance into the water. He filled his capacious lungs with air and submerged.

Doc was capable of swimming a tremendous distance under water. He had acquired the ability to do this in the manner that he learned all things -- by studying the methods of the masters. The fine points of underwater work he had picked up from the skilled divers of the South Seas.

Coming to the surface at long intervals, projecting only his nostrils to replenish his air supply, Doc stroked into the lake.

He reached the point where his aids, the steel-haired girl, and himself had been forced to drop the containers of equipment which they had employed to hold themselves on the lake bottom.

The bronze man had made careful note of the location of the spot at the time of their capture by the giants. He had done this unobtrusively, and it had passed without being observed.

DOC SAVAGE chanced lifting his eyes above the surface. By aligning several of the larger boulders on the island, he located the spot where the equipment lay.

So accurate were his calculations that he found the cases on his third dive.

His sensitive hands explored a container. He was familiar with the boxes, having constructed them himself. This was not the case he wanted. He searched over the black depths of the lake bed until he found others. Not until he had identified the fourth container by touch, did he seem satisfied.

With the rather heavy box cradled under an arm, he stroked for the surface.

The return to the isle, swimming under water for the most part, was by no means easy, the weight of the case being a tremendous handicap.

Realizing there might be watchmen near the hangars, Doc left the water at the opposite side of the island. He did not waste time resting, once ashore. The effort of the return swim, great as it had been, had tapped only slightly his fabulous reservoir of vitality.

Carrying the metal case of equipment which he had retrieved from the lake, he crept inland.

Toward the other end of the island, there was still noisy talk and coarse laughter. Doc Savage approached the spot. To no phantom in the stories of mythology was ever attributed greater stealth.

The mirth sounds were emanating from a large, camouflaged shack which was evidently a bunk house. After ascertaining the nature of this structure, Doc did not approach too closely. He did not wish to risk discovery.

He began a foot-by-foot search of the island.

Near the boathouse he found a hidden building of some size. This seemed to be a laboratory.

Shelves of rough, temporary construction held a surprising array of chemicals.

Doc examined the compounds, noting particularly their nature. For light in viewing the container labels, he employed matches from a box which he found near a Bunsen burner. He kept the tiny flame carefully cupped in his palms.

He found books on chemical treatises. The flyleaves of these bore the scrawled name of Pere Teston. There were also notebooks in the same handwriting.

The notebooks contained data on experiments at increasing animal growth. The cases described were apparently Pere Teston's earlier efforts. There was data on the abnormal growth of a cow. Pere Teston seemed to consider this of great importance. He had written:

"It will be noted that the mllk-producing capacity of the bovine kept pace with the expansion in bone and tissue. This means that my process of size increase will result in the creation of more efficient farm animals.

"Particularly do I hope to be able to center the effects of my compound to certain organs of the animal in further experiments. This would achieve, for instance, cattle with enormous milk-producing capacities."

There were more notes of this nature. One set had to do with the growing of an enormous draft horse.

In these earlier experiments, dating back several years, Pere Teston had apparently entertained

no idea of creating giant men to be used in terrorizing cities.

Doc found no data covering work over the last few months.

DOC SAVAGE left the laboratory and continued his search of the island. He entered several buildings, only to leave at once. They were store rooms, holding immense quantities of food for the giants' sustenance.

Near the south end of the island Doc Savage came upon a small, shedlike structure of metal and camouflage-daubed canvas.

Crosslegged before this, so huge and ugly as to give the appearance of a grotesque, oriental idol, sat one of the giants. He seemed to be on guard. The fellow held a large pipe.

The giant poured tobacco into the over-sized bowl. His big, clumsy fingers had trouble with matches. Several broke; the night breeze blew others out.

The giant was fully occupied with his smoking difficulties. Doc Savage circled and drifted, waitlike, toward the shed. In negotiating one narrow stretch of rock, he was completely exposed to the gaze of the colossus. Crossing this, Doc chose an instant when the giant was carefully striking a match.

Unseen, the bronze man reached the shed.

The metal sides of this were open, the canvas cover having been roiled up for ventilation. This sheathing could be lowered if necessary, making the shed seem from the air -- or from a distance of a few yards on the island -- nothing more interesting than an angular rock.

Doc Savage eased inside, curious to learn what the giant was guarding.

That mystery was soon clarified.

A man reposed on the rocky shed floor. Darkness was complete where he lay, so black as to seem solidified. Doc Savage found the fellow only by touch, and through use of his sensitive olfactory organs.

Doc's bronze fingers explored, their skilled touch conveying impressions of almost visual clarity. He got the height of the prisoner, his probable weight. He found stout handcuffs on wrists and ankles.

The man lay perfectly motionless; none of his muscles stirred. Yet he was definitely alive.

Doc applied pressure on certain nerve centers, testing the reaction of muscles to pain. Doc's knowledge of drugs, their effects and their symptoms, was profound. He came to the conclusion that the captor's limbs were under the influence of injections of some local anesthetic -- some substance in the nature of the novocaine which dentists use.

Doc Savage examined the man's ankles again. The chain of the manacles encircled the steel framework of the camouflaged shed. Doc tested the links. They were very strong.

The bronze man began removing his shirt, it being his intention to wrap the cloth around the manacles to muffle the inevitable snap as he broke them.

Then the giant guard, probably with the idea of getting out of the wind to light his big pipe, entered the shed.

Doc Savage was under no delusions. The match flame was certain to reveal his presence. He left the strange captive and crept out silently on the opposite side.

For several minutes he loitered near by. But the giant showed no sign of leaving the shed.

DOC SAVAGE continued his search. He found more huts. All were cleverly constructed to escape detection from the air. At last he located one of which he seemed to have been seeking.

This structure was obviously the headquarters. It held maps. These were marked with red lines to indicate the intended course of attack upon Detroit and other cities. There was also a large safe in the place.

Here, when he was upon the island, the master mind of the giants obviously made his headquarters.

Doc Savage still carried the case of equipment which he had rescued from the lake. Opening it, he removed certain small boxes and coils of wire. He concealed a tiny disc of a device overhead, where it was unlikely to be observed. The insulated wires leading from this were so thin as to be unnoticeable to the eye. Doc carried these down a metal girder to a boxlike container of his apparatus, which he buried under the dry sand floor.

This done, Doc left the hut.

At the other end of the island stood the log structure in which the giants were quartered. Doc approached it cautiously.

At a concealed point only a few yards from this bunk house he planted more of his apparatus, hiding it in such a fashion that it was practically certain to escape detection.

Then he returned to the pit where his companions were imprisoned. The pig, Habeas Corpus, was not in sight.

Doc studied the giant guards intently. Then the bronze man's throat muscles tensed in a peculiar fashion. From the boulder some distance away came a voice -- a voice resembling that of the florid Hack.

"Come over here a minute, you two big guys!" it directed. The giants hesitated. They glanced at the shed. "Hurry up!" rapped the voice from the rocks. The giants were sure it was Hack's voice. They lumbered toward the sound. They had not taken a dozen steps when the voice came again.

"Never mind," it said, "I thought I heard a speed boat out on the lake. But it was just a frog croaking."

The giants returned to their position. Not overly-bright fellows, neither realized they had been tricked.

Doc Savage was an excellent ventriloquist and a master of voice imitation. Throwing tones which were very like those of Hack, he had decoyed the giants, getting their attention.

While the giants had looked away, Doc had crossed to the roofed-over pit. Here he found Habeas inside the shed. He tucked the pig under his arm and dropped into the pit.

Doc's five men all but held their breaths, waiting for their bronze chief to explain what he had been doing. No explanation, however, was forthcoming.

Two or three times, the men imagined they heard faint whisperings. These they dismissed as being gentle sounds made by grams of sand swept into the pit by the night breeze.

They failed to realize that Doc had drawn the steel-haired girl aside or that he was speaking to her in a wisp of a whisper.

Chapter 24. MASTER OF THE GIANTS

HACK, THE the thug with the neck which seemed perpetually flushed, appeared at the top of the pit half an hour later. He was excited; his electric hand lantern blazed light downward with an angry suddenness.

"What's been goin' on here?" he rapped.

Doc Savage did not look upward. His manner was tranquil. He ignored Hack's question.

"You, big bronze guy -- I asked you a question," Hack grated.

"Yeah?" said homely Monk.

"Don't get funny. I'm talkin' to your boss. What's been goin' on here?"

Doc Savage seemed to consider, as if debating what could possibly be meant by the inquiry.

"We've been talking," he replied. "And we're getting a bit hungry, too. Suppose you produce some food."

"I'll produce some trouble," Hack promised harshly. "The big fellows say they heard my voice around here a while ago. I wasn't here. What did they hear?"

"Can the giants talk?" Doc asked. "From the sounds they have made in the past, I presumed their vocal cords were affected by the size-increasing process."

"They can't talk, but they can write out their words. What've you birds been up to?"

Doc glanced at his fellow prisoners and asked, "What have we?"

"Search me." Renny popped his huge fists together, and the impact made a rocky sound.

"You're givin' me a run-around!" Hack rasped. Then Hack discovered Habeas Corpus. The sight of the pig brought a cry of angry surprise. He leaned over to see better, with the result that he nearly fell into the pit.

"Where'd that peewee edition of a hog come from?" he demanded, when he had recovered his balance.

Monk held Habeas up. He spread the shote's enormous ears, and asked, "D'you see these ears?"

Hack only snarled.

Monk, homely face serious, explained, "Habeas is a very special kind of a pig. You'd be surprised at what he can do. He uses his ears for wings. He can fly like a bat. He flew down here."

Hack made a choking sound of wrath.

"Habeas can talk, too," Monk added. "Listen."

He held the pig higher. Words seemed to come from the freakish porker's mouth.

"Say, Hack, when do we eat?" asked the voice. Hack maintained a dumbfounded silence for a long minute. Then the explanation dawned on him.

"A ventriloquist!" he barked. Laughing heartily, he extinguished his light. "That explains the voice they heard."

In a loud tone, Hack yelled for four additional giants. These arrived, their heavy footfalls plainly audible to the prisoners in the pit. After ordering the newcomers to assist in guarding the captives, Hack took his departure.

"Fat chance we've got of getting away, now," Renny groaned.

Monk moved close to Doc, and asked, "Did I do right -- havin' the pig talk to him?"

"You could not have done better," Doc replied.

THE HOURS which followed seemed interminably long. Monk prowled around the pit walls like a caged gorilla. Habeas grunted at his heels.

"The sun must've forgotten to come up," Monk complained. Later, the homely chemist was surprised to find Doc sleeping in the center of the pit. Reassured by the calmness with which the bronze man was taking their incarceration, Monk also tried to slumber. Failing even to keep his eyes shut, however, he gave it up.

He started a whispered consultation with the others by asking, "I wonder what Doc found while he was outside?"

"Why don't you ask him?" inquired the steel-haired girl.

"No use."

"Why not?"

"Doc's ways are kinda strange to those who don't know him," Monk explained. "If he don't want to give information, he won't."

"But you haven't asked him what he found," Jean Morris retorted.

"The five of us know Doc as well as anybody knows him. We can tell when he's got things to say, and when he hasn't. When he kept silent after returning, that was the tip-off. Right now, he's not talking."

"Humph!" sniffed Jean Morris.

To kill time, Monk managed to pry several small fragments of rock from the pit bottom. He pegged these up at the giants.

The monsters retaliated by showering down great handfuls of fine sand. The choking cloud produced great discomfort.

"Let them alone," advised Doc, who had been awakened by the sand. "They have the upper hand now."

Jean Morris decided to try her hand at persuading Doc to talk.

"What did you find outside?" she asked. "And what did you do?"

"That will be cleared up when the time comes," Doc answered.

And this was all the information the steel-haired girl received, although she put several more questions to the bronze man.

Disgusted, she flounced to the other side of the pit and tried to get some sleep.

Dawn came after what seemed an age. It gorged the top of the pit with reddish light. The depths remained gloomy.

Doc Savage approached Jean Morris where she sat apart from the others, and said something which the rest did not catch.

The young woman was apparently piqued by Doc's refusal to answer her questions. Her voice was waspish.

"I remember every word you told me last night," she said, "but you might inform me of what you found outside."

"Not so loud," Doc admonished, and left her.

The bronze man's aids exchanged surprised glances. This was their first hint that Doc and the steel-haired girl had held a consultation.

"We heard whispers right after Doc got back," Monk said thoughtfully. "He was talking to her then."

The five men eyed Doc. Curiosity was consuming them, and their expressions showed it.

"Listen, Doc," Monk said hopefully, "what's the idea of keepin' us in the dark?"

"Psychology," Doc replied.

"Huh?"

"If you fellows were told how our trouble here will work out -- if it goes according to my expectations -- your hopes would rise. You might get the idea you were almost out of the mess."

"And would that make us mad!" Monk snorted.

"On the contrary, it would make you highly elated."

"Spill it, Doc! After a night in this hole we need a pick-up."

"If the scheme goes wrong, you're going to be very disappointed," Doc remonstrated casually. "You will feel much worse than you would if you had known nothing of it. To save you that let-down is the reason I did not tell you."

"Well, we're all stirred up now," Monk grinned. Doc studied them. He apparently concluded the purpose of his keeping silent had been defeated.

"All right, I'll tell you," he said.

But he never did.

PLANE NOISE came through the morning air. It started with a faint drone, like that of a mosquito, and loudened with surprising rapidity. It stopped the discussion and gripped their attention.

"Sounds like a fast bus," Renny offered, and eyed his huge fists in the dusk of the pit bottom.

The plane swooped overhead, so low that its propeller blast fluttered the canvas shed covering. Fine sand was blown into the pit.

"It must be a friend of theirs," Monk grunted. "I don't hear any sounds of excitement."

"It's the boss!" came Hack's excited yell from somewhere on the island.

Once more, the plane crashed its exhaust stacks past overhead. Then, with noisy backfiring, it landed. Motor boat engines sputtered and howled. They were evidently towing the plane into a camouflaged hangar.

The giants on guard at the pit made coughing and gobbling sounds at each other. Delight was distinguishable in the uncouth noises.

"They seem glad to see the big shot," said Long Tom. "And no wonder," Ham snapped. "He's the guy who knows how to return them to normal size. If something would happen to him, they'd be in a fine pickle."

The arrival of the plane had completely occupied the attention of Doc's five men, so the bronze man was given no opportunity to explain his plans for their escape.

Amid many glad cries from the giants, men approached the pit. Hack's raucous tones became

audible. He was explaining things to his chief.

"We've got the whole Savage gang," he said. "They're in the pit. We disarmed them. They're helpless."

"Then why in hell didn't you rub them out at once?" The master villain spoke these last words, there was no doubt of it. Utter arrogance crackled in the voice. The tones were hollowly froglike.

"Pere Teston!" Monk breathed.

"It doesn't sound like a natural voice!" gasped Jean Morris.

"Too hollow," Monk agreed.

Doc Savage spoke. "The master mind seems to be speaking into a tube to disguise his voice. Using a gas pipe, or perhaps a cardboard mailing tube."

Hack's harsh tone said, "We kept 'em alive, boss, thinkin' you might want to talk to 'em."

"They can tell me nothing of importance," snarled the master of the giants.

"They might know how Detroit is fixin' to receive us," Hack whined. He sounded servile, ingratiating. This was a marked change from his usual overbearing manner.

The master villain laughed harshly into the tube which he was using to disguise his voice.

"It makes no difference what Detroit does!"

Hack wailed, "But if they use airplanes and bombs on -- "

"We're not attacking Detroit to-night," retorted the ruler of the giants. "Instead, we'll give Milwaukee a surprise."

"Milwaukee -- instead of Detroit?" Hack gulped.

"HACK, MY friend, you are very dumb at times," said the cavernous voice. You do not think that the few giants we have here, even with their armor, would stand any chance in attacking a city prepared to receive them."

"They're mighty big -- "

"Size is not of supreme importance these days, my friend. It is brains which count. Bombs and modern machine guns would make short work of our giants."

"Then what are we gonna do?" Hack groaned.

"Do not sound so disappointed," chuckled the hollow tones. "My plan is based on psychology. If you had read the newspapers to-day, you would understand. The size of our giants has been exaggerated. Our earlier newspaper advertisements helped."

"I don't get you."

"The imaginative American public actually thinks we have monster men a hundred feet high. We will make our little foray upon Milwaukee, first bombing the light plant so that the city will be in darkness. The giants will smash windows, and catch a few people and break their necks. In the darkness few will see the big fellows. After that, rumor will have the giants infinitely larger than they are."

Hack seemed to be digesting his chief's words. "You think we can scare them towns into coughing up five million apiece?"

"We can certainly try," chuckled the hollow voice.

"But if he don't -- "

"Then there are many other crimes our giants can commit, my friend. As you know, the compound which made them large also made them very hard to kill. Wounds which will overcome an ordinary man will not even faze these fellows."

"You're right, at that," Hack agreed.

Chapter 25. DEATH MAGNIFIED

NOTHING WAS said for some moments. The giants made hootings and cluckings of a happy nature. The big fellows apparently had not relished attacking a city ready to receive them. The assault on Milwaukee was more appealing.

In the pit there was stark silence. Renny perspired, and blocked and unblocked his enormous fists. Monk, homely face grim, absently scratched Habeas Corpus behind the ears. The steel-haired girl was rigid, pale. The giant mail of bronze alone was devoid of emotion.

They all knew that death crouched outside the pit

Hack asked his chief, "But how're we gonna get the giants down to Milwaukee?"

"The planes," he was reminded. "I have marked the position of lighting plants. We will bomb them.

Then we will land on the lake front. From there, the giants can work into the heart of Milwaukee. In the darkness, that will not be difficult"

"Swell idea," Hack agreed.

"Dispose of the prisoners," snapped the master of the giants.

"How?" Hack asked.

"Use a machine gun. Then have the giants fill the pit with rocks."

Hack loudly directed a human monster to bring him a rapid-firer. This was done. There were clickings, as a fully loaded ammo drum was jacked into the mechanism. Hack appeared on the pit rim. He was going to do the wholesale murdering himself. Steel-haired Jean Morris moaned and covered her eyes with her hands. Monk made an animal snarling noise, and crouched as if to leap up at the killer.

Doc Savage rested his strange, flake-gold eyes on Hack. "I left this pit for a time last night,"

he said. "You can't kid me!" Hack sneered. "You're lyin'!" "The giants heard your voice from the rocks," Doc reminded him. "The voice was thrown by ventriloquism, as you guessed, but its purpose was to cause them to look away, so that they would not observe my return."

This startled Hack. He blinked. The master of the giants had heard the words. His Voice rattled from the hollow tube he was using for a disguise.

"What's this, Hack?" "He's kidding us," Hack growled. "I was never more serious," Doc assured them. "The giants heard a voice all right," Hack advised his chief. Then the scarlet-necked thug glared down into the pit. "What'd you do when you was outside, bronze guy?"

"When you learn that, it will be too late to help yourself," Doc informed him without expression.

"Whatya mean?"

"Disaster will have overtaken you."

The steel-haired girl suddenly removed her hands from her eyes.

"I know what Doc Savage did!" she screamed. "It's something that will destroy all of you. Take me out of here, turn me loose and I'll tell you what it is!"

"You hussy!" Renny thundered, and reached hands for the girl.

"GET BACK, you big-fisted hooligan!" Hack gritted from the pit top.

The command was hardly necessary. Renny had already dropped his arms. It had been his intention to clap a palm over the girl's lips and shut off her words. But it was now too late.

The hollow voice of the leader of the giants joined the discussion. The master villain, however, did not show himself.

"Take the girl out," he commanded. "We'll hear what she has to say. We can't run any risks."

"You've got to turn me loose in return for what I have to tell you," Jean Morris wailed. "You've got to promise that!"

"It's a promise," boomed the czar of the giants.

A rope dangled down into the pit like a bronze snake. Hack menaced Doc and his men with the machine gun, keeping them away from the hemp strand. The girl knotted the rope under her arms and was hauled up.

Doc Savage watched her as she reached the top of the pit. When the girl saw the master-sinister of the giants, she started violently and her hands made a fluttering gesture. "Oh -- it's -- " she began.

"Shut up!" warned the man's sepulchral voice.

The girl obediently controlled her surprise. Then she said, "What I've got to tell you is in confidence. Have you a place where we can talk in private?"

There was a pause, while the leader of the giants considered. "I've got a shack I use for headquarters. That'll do," he said.

He and the girl moved away, and their footsteps were soon lost to the ear.

There was something bordering on agony in the looks which Doc's five men exchanged. The perfidity of the young woman had been a bitter shock.

"I thought there was more to her than that!" Monk groaned, "After all we've done for her! Imagine her givin' us the double-cross!"

"We haven't done so much for her," Renny retorted gloomily. "She couldn't be much worse off than she was down here in the pit"

Long Tom, somewhat more pallid than usual, asked Doc curiously, "Did you really tell her what preparations you have made?"

"I talked to her last night," Doc replied.

Monk groaned and sat down on the pit floor.

Comparative silence fell over the men. The six giants remained on guard at the pit. Hack was also present, his machine gun ready in his hand.

The minutes seemed much longer than usual. When voices suddenly reached them, no more than five minutes had elapsed, although it seemed infinitely longer.

The steel-haired girl and the master of the giants were speaking. The voices obviously came from a mechanical loud-speaker, for they were metallic, although not loud. The leader of the giants was not disguising his tones now -- and they had a familiar ring!

Doc's men registered astonishment. There was something about the voice of the master mind that tickled their memories. Monk opened his cavernous mouth, as if to speak the name the voice brought to mind.

But the import of the words which they overheard caused him to keep silent.

APPARENTLY THE conversation was occurring in the headquarters shack, although the loud-speakers were relaying it from the opposite end of the island.

"What did Doc Savage do last night?" the master of the giants asked.

"He arranged for the giants to learn something," Jean Morris retorted.

"Learn what?"

"The truth about a point on which you had deceived them."

"You're not talking sense!"

"Oh, yes, I am! Savage arranged for the giants to learn that they cannot be returned to normal

size."

"Hell! How'd he find that out?"

"He went through your laboratory. He learned the method by which the size of these men had been increased. He has a vast knowledge of chemistry, and realized instantly that you had been lying to the giants. They cannot be returned to normal size and remain alive for any length of time."

The master of the giants swore violently, bitterly.

"It's a good thing I talked to you, Sister," he snarled finally. "If them big boys found out they can't be reduced, they'd turn on me. How was it arranged for 'em to find out the truth?"

From the pit bottom, Doc Savage and his aids were watching Hack. The thug's features had become slack, astounded, as he listened to the words relayed by the loud-speaker. These words were not loud enough to reach back to the hut where the girl was being questioned.

The giants on guard had fallen silent. Theirs was a grim, ominous quiet. They had heard every word that had been said.

The widest of grins suddenly overspread Monk's homely face. He turned to Doc. "How'd you do it?"

"There's a sensitive microphone planted in the headquarters shack," Doc explained. "It is connected to my portable radiophone transmitter. There's a receiver and a loudspeaker hidden near the bunk house occupied by the giants, It's that loud-speaker. you're listening to now."

"You concealed the apparatus last night!" Monk grunted.

"Right."

In his delight Monk bounced up and down, ape fashion.

"I see it!" he howled. "me girl didn't double-cross us She decoyed the master mind to his headquarters and got 'im to spill the truth!"

OUTSIDE THE pit things began to happen. The giants made hoarse, violent sounds of rage. It had dawned on them that they were doomed to spend their natural lives as the monstrosities which they now were.

Hack backed from the pit rim with his machine gun. He must have decided to take sides with the giants. Possibly their nearness and their rage influenced this decision.

"The big shot has been lyin' to us," he yelled. "What're we gonna do about it?"

His answer was a thunder of gigantic footsteps as the monsters charged for the headquarters shack.

"Wait!" Hack yelled, and ran after them. "My machine gun may come in handy."

From other sections of the island howls of the giants arose. Although none of these unearthly sounds were words, their portent was clear. The giants had turned upon their master.

"Make a pyramid," Doc directed.

His men whipped into movement. Renny took up a crouching position against the pit walls, and Monk sprang atop his shoulders, then the others mounted. As he had done the night before, Doc Savage clambered up this living pyramid to the pit rim and hauled himself outside.

The monster men were converging on the headquarters shack. Some of them had picked up boulders almost as large as washtubs to use as missiles, and these seemed as light as pebbles in their hands. One huge fellow wrenched the covering off a camouflaged shack and tore out a section of iron framework as if it were of thin lath construction. Waving this, he charged with the others. From the headquarters a machine gun clattered.. The master of the giants was using it, and his slugs pommelled one of the oncoming monsters.

The big fellow shook under the impact, but kept coming. The vitality of the Gargantuan man-thing was astounding. Not until the slugs battered his head almost out of shape did he sink, sprawling. Doc Savage glanced about. Near by lay the rope with which the girl had been hauled from the pit. The bronze man scooped this up and tossed the end down to his comp anions. They climbed in. Within some thirty seconds all five stood at his side, Monk carrying the excited Habeas by a leg.

Chapter 26. PERE TESTON'S END

DOC SAVAGE and his men made no move to join the fray. They merely looked on. In a fashion, this climax was reminiscent of others which they had witnessed Their policy was never to take human life directly, no matter how great the provocation, but their enemies had a surprisingly regular habit of coming to an untimely end as a result of their own machinations. And their foes were meeting such a fate now.

The master of the giants was a sly devil. He had evidently taken precautions against the possibility that his big fellows might turn upon him. He had plenty of weapons handy. Another giant collapsed before the withering storm of machine-gun lead.

Hack opened up with his rapid-firer. In doing so he made a fatal mistake, for he neglected to shelter himself suffi ciently.

Hack's late chief returned the fire. Hack suddenly dropped his machine gun. He stood very straight and stiff and turned slowly, while a crimson flood began seeping from his body, as if it were sieved with many holes. His final collapse was abrupt, and marked the complete departure of life.

"Let's get out of range," Doc directed. "Over to the end of the island will do."

They worked across the rocky surface of the isle, pausing frequently to watch the progress of the

fight. They saw that the steel-haired girl had escaped from the headquarters shack, and was retreating furtively. Her course took her toward the same headland for which Doc and his men were making.

The master of the giants -- he was far from being their master now -- had not noticed her departure. He was too busy dealing with his erstwhile monster followers.

"Got your eye on the girl?" Doc demanded of his men. "Sure," Monk grunted. "The way she's going, she'll join us at the end of the island."

"Keep her with you," Doc directed. Then the bronze man dropped back.

Monk also halted. He stared anxiously after Doc, then called. "Hey, what

Ham grasped the homely chemist's arm. "You're holding up our stroll, you missing link. Come on."

They sprinted toward the farthest end of the island.

DOUBLED LOW among the rocks, at times moving on all fours, Doc Savage made himself as inconspicuous as possible. He watched the giants closely, in order to avoid coming too near them. Doc was making for the shack where he had found the strangely immobile prisoner -- the poor unfortunate who was under the effect of the drug.

The bronze man could now see the shack among the boulders. He circled warily, apparently oblivious to the fighting off to his right.

The monster man guarding the hut had not quitted his post. The big fellow was bouncing about in impatience and making rage sounds.

The giant paced away uncertainly, as if to join the fight. Coming to a pause, he lumbered around and glared at the hut. He gibbered more wrath.

It was obvious that the stupid fellow considered the helpless man inside responsible for the unpleasant things which had befallen him. Emitting a roar, the monster charged the shack. He crashed in the covering with his fist and began tearing the framework apart

Doc Savage pitched from cover. Swooping as he ran, he scooped up two flinty, elongated pebbles, each nearly the size of a man's fist. He held one of these in either hand; they were his only weapons.

The monster was on the point of forcing entry to the hut. Doc yelled. The man-monstrosity wheeled, attention attracted. He perceived that Doc was going to attack. He hurriedly scrambled out of the hole he had opened in the hut wall.

Doc did not pause in his rush. It seemed that he intended to come to grips with the huge fellow.

The monster opened enormous hands, spread his arms to receive the bronze man.

Giant among ordinary men though Doc was, he seemed diminutive alongside his huge foe.

What occurred next surprised the monster. Doc folded down, almost against the ground. The monster's hands clutched empty air.

There came two loud cracking noises. The man-thing squawled in agony. With the stones gripped in his fists, Doc had struck each of the fellow's kneecaps a hard blow.

The bronze man sprang clear. He dropped his rocks and shoveled up handfuls of the fine sand underfoot.

The man-giant had grasped his kneecaps and was walling like a small boy who had fallen down.

Doc rushed him again.

The monster straightened, bellowing, to meet him.

Doc flung his fine sand into the big one's eyes.

The gritty particles blinded the monster. It weaved in aimless circles, howling, swinging random blows that encountered nothing.

Doc Savage darted into the hut. He scooped up the drugged man who lay there and bore him out.

Carrying the unfortunate, Doc ran to join his companions.

THE FIGHT between the giants and their late chief was rapidly approaching its gory end.

The master of the giants, keeping under cover, had not shown himself to Doc and the others. They had not, as yet, identified the fellow by sight.

The chief villain now began hurling small metal cannisters out of his retreat. These burst with slightly more noise than bad eggs, and spewed a lemon-colored vapor. This fog spread rapidly. It swathed the giants in a citrous mantle. The monsters began to scream and stagger in agony.

Renny and the others, nearing the opposite side of the island, could see the affair.

"Poison gas!" Renny rumbled.

There was a breeze across the isle. This swept such of the gas as fell short directly toward the monster men. Two of them turned to flee, but were too late. The lemon-hued cloud descended upon them.

"Whe-ew!" breathed Renny. "The breeze is a lucky break for us."

Not until much later did Renny realize that it was foresight against just such a contingency which had moved Doc to direct them toward the side of the island where the wind would sweep the gas away before it could reach his companions.

It became apparent that all of the attacking party -- giants and normal men alike -- were certain to be smitten by the poison vapor.

The men of ordinary size dropped almost instantly after encountering the fumes. The giants, with

their infinitely greater vitality, survived some moments after the stuff swept over them.

A strange vengeance befell the master of the giants. The fellow had, no doubt, seized the three black pinhead savages against their will, and by feeding them his sinister concoction by force, had turned them into giants.

It was this seizure of the pinheads, indirectly, which had put Doc Savage on the fantastic trail, for the pinheads had escaped from the island to wreak vengeance upon the man who had mistreated them -- Bruno Hen. The beating Bruno Hen had administered to the little black fellows, when they came pleading for food, had later been the cause of his own death.

And it was the three monster black pinheads who now wrought justice upon the czar of the giants. They, alone, did not swerve when the poison gas bit them. Probably they did not know what the stuff was, did not realize they were doomed, for all of their great size.

The three of them fell upon the headquarters shack. There was reenacted much the same drama which must have marked the demise of Bruno Hen. The monster pinheads beat at the sides of the shack. They flung themselves headlong and crashed in its walls.

Disappearing inside, they sought the man who had made them the hideous things they were. An awful screeching arose as their enormous hands found their quarry.

They hauled the lifeless body from the shattered shack and tossed it away as if it were an unclean thing. The body fell at some distance, and the pinheads started after it, as if to wreak further vengeance. But the gas was having its effect;

They began to claw at their chests. They pawed at their great mouths. They sank to their knees.

After swaying there for a moment they toppled over, one at a time.

These three black monsters were the last of all the giants to die.

DOC SAVAGE joined his five men. Over one shoulder he carried the figure of the man he had rescued.

The steel-haired girl had joined the group. They all stared at Doc's burden. They noted the wizened, extremely pallid countenance of it.

The homely Monk scratched in the reddish bristles which furred the nape of his neck.

"This fellow answers the description of Pere Teston," he muttered.

"No doubt we will find he is Pere Teston," Doc replied.

It was some fifteen minutes before Doc's surmise was verified. There was still danger from the gas cloud which covered the other end of the island. While waiting for the wind to sweep it out over the lake, Doc Savage swam to the spot where they had dropped their equipment.

He dived until he found the box he desired. He brought it ashore. The container held medical supplies, restoratives, stimulants.

Using these, Doc revived Pere Teston. Before long the man could speak coherently.

"You are Pere Teston?" Doc questioned.

The wizened man nodded. "They have been holding me here for months -- a prisoner."

"Why?"

"My chemical compound!" Pere Teston wailed. "I only intended to develop super farm animals. But they used it on men. They kept me here, made me mix the stuff."

Doc gestured toward the other side of the island. "How did the master of the giants first find out about your compound?"

Pere Teston grimaced and shuddered. "I went to him, hoping he would supply money to finance my experiments."

Doc straightened. He moistened a finger and held it up to judge the strength of the breeze.

"The gas has been swept away by now," he decided. "We could go over and take a look at the fellow who was behind all this."

Monk and the others ran ahead, anxious to be first to view the features of the master villain.

The steel-haired girl lingered behind. She kept her eyes on Doc. "You have guessed who he is?"

Doc Savage nodded. "When the giants made their raid on Trapper Lake, it was clear who he was. The fellow wanted to get away to supervise personally the raid of his monster men. So he had his giants come and get him."

Monk reached the spot where the czar of the giants lay. His loud ejaculation as he glimpsed the lifeless features carried distinctly.

"Griswold Rock!" he squawked. "Griswold Rock was the guy behind all this!"

THE GROUP, which had gone to the body of Griswold Rock, came back. Their return was slow, for they angled right and left, inspecting the gigantic hulks of the men-monsters and the bodies of the thugs of normal size.

"The gang is all done for," Monk told Doc, when he had reached the bronze man.

Monk's words, in a sense, marked the end of the menace of the monsters.

It also signified the beginning of what, to the rest of the world, became a profound mystery. Doc and his men never told of the isle or of what had happened there.

Steel-haired Jean Morris, given her chance by a motion-picture company, on Doc's recommendation, became within a few months a star of some magnitude. She never told of the isle, either. It was something she wanted to forget.

Nor did Pere Teston talk. He followed a suggestion which Doc Savage made. Questioning him, Doc

learned that Pere Teston was actually a man of great mental ability. The bronze man placed a considerable sum of money at Pere Teston's disposal for use in making scientific experiments. But Pere Teston's future work had nothing to do with increasing the size of men or animals.

"I'll never touch that stuff again," Pere Teston declared.

Pere Teston's gratitude to Doc Savage was profound. Many times he expressed his feelings.

"Anything I can do to repay you," he said earnestly. "Anything."

"Forget it," Doc advised. "Your payment will be your useful scientific work in the future."

Doc and his men buried the giants there on the island. They broke up the camouflaged shacks and disposed of them in the lake. The laboratory, with its bottles of chemical compounds, they also cast into the water.

One bottle alone did Doc Savage salvage. This held the growth compound which Pere Teston had developed. Later, Doc tested the stuff.

If the size of domestic animals could be increased to the benefit of farmers, he intended to place this elixir in the proper hands. He made, however, a surprising discovery living things, after their size was increased, lived, as a rule, less than two years. From a practical standpoint, Pere Teston's concoction was relatively valueless.

And in the meantime, the world was wondering what had happened to the monsters who had raided Trapper Lake.

THE END