

The Tunca Puncu Nugget

by Richard S. Shaver

It would be quite a trick to kill the Inca, but it could be done... if he fell for the old gag about lost treasure!

An A\NN/A Preservation Edition.

[Notes](#)

AS THE sun rose above the peaks of Sallac and Piquicho, between which lies the castle of Sacsayhuaman, little Alana—relative and servant of Mama Anac the Empress—ran to the great round window and held up to the bright, new face of the sun a little carved box of rubra wood.

Far below, in Cuzco, fifty thousand people watched the sunrise. For this was Capak-Raymi, when the Sun-Lord, Inti, reached nearest to the land and told the people of the New Year.

About the mighty city of Cuzco, in the wall openings, four thousand sentries stood at attention and held their brightly painted shields and long lances very straight, the colored pennons whipping; and listened attentively to the music of a three hundred and seventy-five piece orchestra. Flutes, little organs, guitars, cornets, trumpets and drums, and instruments without names.

When the Inca raised his finger to the height of his mouth, every one of the fifty thousand uttered a cry of joy. For this was the beginning of a five-day holiday, including free *chicha* for everyone. The *chicha* was already standing in great ollas on every street corner, and had been tentatively sampled by not a few.

Then all were silent as the ceremony went forward—watching the brilliant figure of the Inca, his solemn face topped by the *llauto*, a diadem bearing two tall red plumes of the pillco-pichui bird and two white eagle feathers. About his neck was the royal collar of fifty-two emeralds the size of pigeon eggs, from each of which hung great topazes each carved to represent the sun and moon and the fifty-two phases of the moon. His robe was the finest the looms of Cuzco produced, and was bordered with gold embroidery. In his hand was the Champi, a big gold mace, elegantly formed and beautifully balanced—which included an axe blade in the round hammer head.

He looked very fine, thought Alana, looking down from her window in Sacsayhuaman, and so did everyone today. But Alana had more to do than watch silly ceremonies! Little Alana had just pilfered a most curious object from the baskets of gifts sent the Inca from every neighboring ruler, from every vassal Prince—from everyone who could afford a gift rich enough to interest the Inca.

So it was that Alana was not present at the ceremony, but stood looking out the round window into the eyes of the new sun through a little gem in the top of the box of carved rubra wood, with the bird called Ramantzan beautifully flinging its plumes about the red wood of the box.

Alana was young and darkly lovely, and the thing she had stolen was very beautiful. The room she had chosen for privacy to examine her prize was wood-paneled of virumna wood, and the panels fastened with gold nails. The great round window silhouetting her dark, serious head pierced two feet of solid stone wall to reach the outer air and light.

Into the room behind her strode the tall, strong figure of—was it an Inca? No, this was a priest's

regalia, and from the objects in the room, this was his own retreat which Alana had appropriated.

HE MUST have come direct from the ceremony of welcoming Inti, the sun, again to earth for a year. He was still wearing the condor head-dress, with long golden sun rays terminating in the sculptured metal heads of jaguars. In his hand was the tall staff with the golden condor head. He flung off the rainbow sheen of the feathered ceremonial cloak. He bent over the girl, for she had hardly looked up. His copper skin was taut over smooth-sliding, powerful muscles on his bared limbs. The sun disc on his chest glittered with gems.

“Why do you sit here mooning, little flower of love? Why were you not in the procession? People will talk, you know!”

Her soft eyes looked up at his, still dreaming and hardly aware of his words, though his presence sent a thrill through her, compounded of love and a sense of peril and a kind of happy vertigo—like leaning over mysterious deeps filled with glorious tinted mists, far down.

“It is a magical little trinket sent as a gift to the Inca from that ugly sorcerer, the Masked Ruler of the Manabi. It contains some kind of crypt I have been trying to puzzle out. See, it is of rubra wood, tiny and carved beautifully as only the Manabi can carve. I open it thus, and upon the soft down is a tiny golden bead, and that is all!”

“What is so cryptic about that? Is gold so rare among the wood folk that they can spare no more for a gift than that?” His deep voice was not greatly pleasing, but harsh, from long chanting of the ceremonial words, from long barking of orders drilling on the military plain.

“Then you close the box, and put your eye to the little gem in the center of the carving. You hold it up to the light... Here put it, so. What do you see?”

The Priest stared through the gem into the sunlight from the round opening that was the window. Then gravely: “Little one, this was never meant to fall into our hands. It was sent here with our Inca’s gifts to get it past the border inspection unnoticed. It is a map—and a message; a message to some profound enemies of ours!”

“I knew it was a crypt, but I couldn’t make it out. What is the map for?”

“Is is for the ancient treasure of the *Bearded Ones*. You know our race was visited by the mysterious bearded men, an age ago. They brought with them many magical instruments and formulas which were left behind in a hiding place long forgotten, or kept a secret to a very few. Those magical devices have been long sought by our wise men, and also by those among us who long for power to which they have no inherited right.”

“Would the treasure give them such power?”

“Yes, little one, for the bearded ones were members of a race that knew much more than we of the powers of earth and sky and the Gods’ ways. There are supposed to be weapons in this cache which kill mysteriously at a distance; formulas of medicines that make men young; jewels of magical value through which one can see—when one looks as you are looking at the small and invisible—even living animals which can be seen in no other way. It is a vast and valuable treasure—and it has been long sought.”

ALANA’S black eyes shone with excitement, and her breath panted sharply as she looked at the scenes of the micro-engraving. “And we have it, the place of the Magic of the Bearded Ones!”

“Yes, the Masked One who rules the dark forests of the Manabi probably thinks to steal away a

treasure rightfully ours. Only luck brings it into our hands. How did you come by it, truthfully, Alana?"

"The gifts wait in their baskets for the hour of the audience. I stole in when no one was looking and looked through the things. This little box so beautifully made caught my eye. I held it up to the light to catch the sun on the gems and behold, the gem is a window into the world of the small—a world the skilled hands of the Manabi craftsmen alone can enter!"

"Come, little love—we will go and look at the other baskets; maybe we can catch the one who was meant to steal this box instead of you."

A rude and sudden voice broke in upon the conversation of Alana, sweet young sister to Mama-Anac, the Empress, talking with Huaycar Wira, chief aide to the High Priest of Pacha-Kamac, the Creator of the Universe.

The voice, in that room walled with the dignity and reserve of centuries of polite usage—that room for royalty or the relatives of royalty only; a room where no voice was raised in anger upon pain of imprisonment; a room where the wall carvings were set with rare and huge gems, and where the very foot stools were of gold... into that room came this voice, saying: "Spawn of Supay,* accursed of Inti, you think to have tricked me, Tumi Hayta, out of the secret of the Bearded God's power! I paid many strong slaves to learn of the whereabouts of that little key to the lost secrets. I will not lose it so easily!"

* *Supay: the devil, Lord of Haek-Pachac (Hell).*—Ed.

Alana sprang to her feet, her mouth a wide O of astonishment. For, through the door stepped Tumi Hayta, the Inca's brother-in-law! Two of the tall Lucanas of the Inca's bodyguard flanked him, carrying short, wide-bladed stabbing spears. In Tumi's big capable hand was a bronze axe of war, a famous "Champi" of the Inca's family. Facing these three conspirators, so suddenly coming upon him, Huaycar had but his dignity, his condor-headed priest's staff, and a tiny decorative dagger as weapons.

But Huaycar had his wits, and he stepped to Alana's side, standing between her and the spears of the grim-faced Lucanas, and picked up the little box of rubra wood, saying—"Ah, this little plan of yours should come to the ears of Tupac Yupanqui Inca. He, too, might be interested in the treasure his father sought for so long; in the map sent him so kindly by the Masked One of the Manabi."

The blood darkened Tumi's face with rage, he raised the heavy mace, but Huaycar went calmly on. "And how would you explain my death, Kayta? You would then have to kill little Alana to keep her quiet; and then your two bribed guardsmen to keep them quiet; and then you would have to kill the assassin you hired to kill these two! Since the Inca, my cousin is known to be more generous than yourself, you can trust no one! Quite a problem!"

The grim faces of the two fierce Lucanas, men sent from the North by their ruler to do honorary duty to the Inca—became thoughtful at these words, and they exchanged glances which were not missed by Tumi Hayta, for he looked to see if this thrust of Huaycar's clever tongue was understood by them—who were not expert in the subtler nuances of the Quichua tongue, themselves speaking Chimu. They understood well enough, for it was plain that if Tumi chose to kill these relatives of his to silence them, he would also have to silence themselves.

HAYTA lowered the heavy bronze mace, and a bewildered expression came over him. He muttered—"How in Supay's unspeakable name can I be so stupid?"

Huaycar laughed mockingly. "That is a question anyone can answer but yourself, my dear cousin-in-law. It were best that you go now, while you can, for I hear footsteps, and if my Incan ears*

are true, they are the footsteps of Mama-Anac Huarca, who is your sister and our Empress. She might misunderstand your presence here with our dear little Alana—especially if we are forced to speak of our mutual ‘secret.’ You and I will confer of this another time. Preferably when I, too, am armed.”

** Incan ears: The Indian races of South America are famous for an incomprehensible method of hearing, akin to telepathy, by which they know events that transpire even up to hundreds of miles distance; can count the number of horses approaching in pitch darkness at many miles distance; can follow a cold, spoorless trail for weeks... Dr. Juan Durand—A Hyatt Verrill.*

Tumi Hayta had a problem before him too complicated for his dull mind. He backed through the doorway a picture of bafflement. As he disappeared, through the opposite doorway hurried Mama-Anac Huarca, Empress of twelve hundred thousand square miles of land and some twenty million people. But Mama-Anac was not thinking of the land or of the people; she was hunting little Alana.

“Oh you young scamp, it is past time for audience, and my hair isn’t dressed yet and you always do it so much better—now come along. And you, Huaycar, you are worse than this little trifler; why aren’t you down entertaining?”

“Mama-Anac Huarca, my beloved cousin, the guests are quite as aware as myself that you are invariably at least an hour late to the audience. There is no one present yet but the cleaning women. Must I help them dust the carpet for your lovely feet?”

“Oh! You are insufferable, and what’s more, not even polite! But I love you, you handsome rogue, as much as do the virgins of the Sun, who should have their minds on more worthwhile things than your own gorgeous self. If any more of our virgins become with child, the Inca will have to take some action! Must all the children look like you? Couldn’t you let some other man do a little sinning? You should be ashamed of yourself! How can you face people?”

As aide to the aged High Priest of Pacha-Kamac, he in a way was the earthly representative of the Sun-God, Inti being the Son of Pacha-Kamac, himself in ceremonial represented the Inti, and officially he was the only man with whom the Virgins of the Sun were allowed contact—their shepherd, as it were. In this position he came in for a great deal of “kidding”, and if any of the Virgins backslid, he was always blamed for the resulting child; for all Sun Virgins are officially supposed to be in love only with the Son of God, and himself was his earthly vehicle.

Huaycar laughed off her sally, as he laughed off the usual jibes on this count, saying: “Well, if you love me, give me a cousinly kiss, and I will be off to tend to the preparations—the gift-bearing Ambassadors of the Masked One come from the Manabi and many another spying guest from afar, and things really should look as if we knew how to keep house, at least.”

ALANA started up from her chair by the window, where she had sunk in relief at the departure of Tumi Hayta’s dark and angry face, her hand going again to her throat in alarm. “But, Huaycar, what of the bead? Something will happen. What will I do with it?”

“That little golden bead from Manabi, eh? I had not forgotten you, little thief—I had only wanted not to alarm the Empress. But perhaps you are right; we should not delay in seeing it well guarded. Its proper use will require much thought.” Huaycar reached for the great woven bell rope, and far off the mellow chime summoning the guard rang and rang again as he pulled the rope repeatedly.

Within seconds the chamber filled with the brown, scarred limbs, fierce faces, and the glittering obsidian weapons of the veterans who made up the palace guard.

Huaycar turned to the Empress. “Mama-Anac, this little box contains a treasure vastly greater than its

size would indicate. Alana and I were just threatened by your brother. I will tell you all about the treasure during audience this morning.”

“You can tell me while Alana dresses my hair, in my own rooms, in comfort—and not in forced whispers while everyone tries to get my attention—while I must watch every move of the foreigners so that none of them are slighted unintentionally. You come right along, you large, lovely man, and earn your keep by being pleasant to your Empress.”

It was nearly an hour later that the three—Alana, the little ward of Mama-Anac; the Empress; and Huaycar, her cousin and a priest as well as a famous warrior of the Nobles—left Mama-Anac’s chambers for the audience hall.

MAMA-ANAC, regally attired in the long plumes of the pilco-pilcui, red and brilliant streams of glistening beauty nodding from her head, a robe of fine cloth embroidered with gold fitting her full-blown womanly curves tightly, swept on ahead, with Huaycar and Alana just behind. She spoke over her shoulder, fretful as ever at the restrictions of her rank which made the two young people she loved walk behind her. “That brother of mine gets too big for his boots. Now he has threatened you over some treasure! What can it be that leads him to such extremes? When the Inca hears of it he will send him to the prison at Macchu Picchu, and I for one will not miss him. Him and his sneering superior ways. He is no true brother of mine.”

“I have often thought that myself, Mama-Anac, but it is not polite to say it.”

“It is no secret that my mother was not always discreet, my Huaycar. But this little box; why should it upset him so? There is more behind it.”

At this instant they were traversing the hall of the seven Gods, a tall and gloomy passage full of the great sacred images and their attendant trappings. They turned out of the lofty passage into the smaller hall leading into the great throneroom where the audience would be held.

From the shadows of the great stone figures, from the little hall into which the sturdy figure of Mama-Anac had just turned, sprang a dozen masked warriors. A heavy black mace crashed upon Huaycar’s skull; as he fell, the tiny red box was twisted from his grasp. Mama-Anac screamed, the startled guards whirled up their axes, raised their spears or sprang to seize and grapple the black robed, masked, and terrifying figures. But the leader seized Mama-Anac and held a knife to her throat. Immediately another of the black-masked assassins took his cue from the leader, seized Alana. Their meaning was all too clear, and helplessly the guards stood, watching the attackers back away into the shadows of the small passage that led away from the throne room. The whole affair had lasted not a minute, and the guards knew that unless they found a way to act, the Inca would find a way to avenge their carelessness in allowing this thing to happen. Helplessly they watched their Empress and her little attendant disappear before their eyes. Tumi Hayta had won the second round in the battle for the secret of the Bearded Ones! And he had Mama-Anac, the Empress as hostage.

OUTSIDE the great palace waited litter-bearers to whisk them away to hiding. While the guards searched the Palace, Mama-Anac and little Alana lay in a curtained litter borne swiftly through the streets crowded with the holiday’s merrymakers, ever farther from the safety of the Inca’s protection. And in Hayta’s hand was the tiny box of rubra wood.

Hayta’s assassins had left Huaycar behind because he looked very much dead, his head peeled open by a terrible blow of the mace, and all spattered by his own blood—he did not look like a man apt to talk a great deal about what had befallen him. Hayta could not afford the Emperor learning of this attempt

of his to acquire the vast lost power of the Ancient Bearded Ones.

Two hundred miles away lay Tiahuanaco, upon the shores of Titicaca, the original home of the Bearded Ones' vast and almost forgotten Empire; an Empire greater by far than the present Confederation under the Incas. Tiahuanaco, The Place of the Dead, was the place Hayta must go to search for the hiding place of the treasure of the Ancients. Among those Cyclopean ruins he could hide, and it was there he must search by means of the tiny engraved map for the power that lay in possession of the treasure.

Along the great Highway of the Incas his caravan swung at the trot; himself in a rich litter, while ahead the larger curtained litter contained the bound forms of Mama-Anac and Alana. Across the gorges on the great waxed-hair cable-suspension bridges, through the Andes' Alps by means of the tunnels—tremendous tunnels built by Incan Engineers, across the masonry bridges (which are still in use today—so mightily were they built) trotted the strong legs of the carriers, urged on by curses and by liberal wads of coca in their cheeks.

Hayta's Incan hearing told him that only some ten miles behind the pursuit had formed and was on his trail. And the warriors of his brother-in-law had no burdens to hold them back!

Now that his flight was known, Hayta had a means which would stop any pursuit along these precipitous highways.

Their party numbered a hundred warriors and half as many burden bearers and slaves.

As they completed the swaying crossing of the wide fabric of a great suspension bridge, the half dozen bridge guards came out of their little guard house at the great hair cable's end. It was their duty to keep track of the passage of any party as large as this—for the records of the Inca.

Hayta signed with his hand to the trotting Captain of his warriors. Without pausing in their stride, their painted hardwood maquahuitls flashed black venom in the sun, crushed through the Guards' upthrown arms, through the bronze helmets, slashed into the copper hued necks, left sudden blood and death about the quiet guard house.

Then swarming up the piled boulders bolstering the great anchor rock of the cable, up to the round hole through the anchor rock where the cable passed—the black obsidian-edged maquahuitls gleamed sullen triumph as the blades cut and cut again upon the cable that was years labor for many hundred hands—cut and cut until at last the great bridge crashed resounding into the deep abyss beneath.

Hayta laughed at the swift destruction of such long hard labor for the Inca's glory and signed to his men to press on less swiftly. The Inca's warriors would consume several days of perilous climbing to pass that gorge.

FOUR days later they rounded the northern end of Lake Titicaca, passing now among the awesome vastness of half-fallen stone figures of the Gods—the Sky God with his fierce condor beak, the frog faced God of the Rain, past the great grotesque nosed nose of the Wind God who leered lewdly at them from where his fallen head lay between his feet. Hayta looked at the bright, frightened and angry eyes of Alana where she lay with her adorable young head thrust through the curtain of the litter.

"Fear you the anger of the Ancients, little one?"

"Not half so much as I fear yourself, rash ingrate that you are! Did you have to slay my beloved Huaycar?"

"Who is not a friend is an enemy, little one. The fewer enemies, the better."

“You should have thought of that before you kidnaped Mama-Anac and made an enemy of twenty millions of people. Can you eliminate all those enemies, O master of cunning?”

“When I have the power of the Bearded Ones again awake across the land, they will be either my friends or they will be dead!”

“Even if you find their forgotten horde of weapons and treasure you will be too stupid to use them. Think you they were fools to build such things that a child-mind like yourself could operate them? I think that before long your head will decorate a pole outside the Temple!”

Hayta’s face grew dark with angry blood, and the looks his men exchanged at her jibes frightened him, for in truth everything depended on their belief that he could do with the ancient powers what he said he could do.

“You are a magpie, a birdbrain, not to know the powers of the Bearded Ones. None will stand before me—and the place is marked well on the map you so kindly obtained for me.”

“If I had known sooner what it was you would never have gotten it, oh man-with-a-face-like-a-dog.”

The trotting cavalcade passed the great stone Plumed Serpent, so different in aspect from the Plumed Serpents built nowadays—so different that Alana, though no priestly student, doubted herself that the great mysterious thing was Kukulcan at all, but some other monstrous God of the past. Past the slim, scarred beauty of the lean figure of Xipe, that was not Xipe either, but some other God lately mistaken for the same figure as the God-warrior of the Aztecs in the far north. Past the elephant-headed God—and Alana laughed, for it was so impossible that any creature could look like that; yet the ancient peoples of this dead city had believed in him.

Now at last the vast shadowed bulk of the Punca-Puncu, the Place of the Ten Doors—loomed up before them, and the procession passed into its dwarfing shadow silently, awed by the great beauty and majesty, by the thought of the mighty ones who had built this place—so much beyond the power of Modern Incan engineers to construct.

NOW Tumi Hayta and the smarter of his men bent long over the little crystal that enlarged the micro-engraving on the nugget. Long they searched through the labyrinthine mystery of the Tunca Puncu, and long they compared markings on the walls with markings on the map. And at last, as day was closing, Hayta bent over the floor of the inner chamber where the great old Master God of the Ancients stared down at them from his vast niche with his ruby red eyes twinkling in the fire from the sinking sun that struck even here from cunning little slots in the wall... Hayta bent and lifted from the floor one of the great silver interlocking keys between the vast slabs of which the Tunca Puncu was built—and as he tugged out the key, the slab tilted on its pivoted center, and revealed a long flight of two-foot steps leading downward into darkness.

The party passed down the tall steps, the litter-bearers grunting, their sandals slapping the dusty stone hard when the weight of the litters hit them as they lowered them down the two-foot drops of the steps. Hayta came down last, carefully letting the great stone shift back into place, his shoulder helping the groaning, creaking ancient mechanism.

Alana, now dangling over the shoulder of a burly warrior, her hands bound behind her and her ankles trussed painfully, looked at the walls as they passed through the gloomy, abandoned home of the ancient people. The rocks of the walls were huge, many-faceted, fitting snugly together, and held there by slots in which solid silver keys, locking bars with T ends, had been driven. It was a method of construction no longer used or understood. The torches flickered, Mama-Anac moaned ahead of her, still suffering from a blow on the head given her when she screamed to a guard at a bridge. Mama-Anac would be all right

in a day or so, maybe.

Alana was scared, and she knew that there was little chance of the unimaginative soldiers of the Incan army finding them here. It was hot and close down here. Her face dripped with sweat and tears. She wriggled, and the warrior bearing her sank his fingers painfully into her leg to make her be still. She stopped wriggling.

They came out of the long dank passage at last into the vast subterranean Chamber of Magic, where the priests of ancient times had kept their secrets, their prisoners, their forbidden pleasures, their wine and the tools of their sacred mummery.

CHAPTER II

HUAYCAR struggled back to consciousness in a red haze of pain. Over him the face of Sana Ptaoul, the Inca's own surgeon, bent—and what he was doing with his fingers to Huaycar's scalp was excruciating. Huaycar murmured: "Must you torture me? What have I done father?"

"It must seem like torture, my Huaycar. But if you are ever to seduce another Sun Virgin, you will have to have some hair on your head—so I am sewing the pieces back in place. Your attackers, striking more squarely, would have left you your scalp, but crushed your skull. So you should be glad to be alive! By the way, just what was the shindig about? Why did they take Mama-Anac and Alana? It doesn't make sense."

"It was Hayta. He has the map to the lost treasure of the Ancients. Alana found it, showed it to me. We were going to the Audience—he struck to regain it. He must have thought I was dead."

"You certainly looked dead! Half your scalp torn off and bleeding a torrent. You would have died of bleeding had you lain a few minutes longer. But I stopped the blood. I will patch you up, I hope."

The old doctor squeezed a handful of leaves between his fingers, directing the green juice droplets upon the great gash he had just closed. Then thoughtfully he mashed the leaves in a pestle, and lay them as a poultice along the wound. Behind him stood two of the Sun Virgins, sent by the aged High Priest to care for his aide and probable successor. In their hands were tall black ewers of water, of the glossy glazed work decorated with line figures in gold; white soft bandage-weaving—and on their faces was grave concern for his welfare, for they liked the big laughing warrior who had unwillingly become their "shepherd" not long ago.

Lovely, innocent faces, thought Huaycar. So soon to die! It did not make sense. He did not greatly believe in the Gods he served. One could talk to the Gods, yes, sometimes, but the answers never sounded to Huaycar like Gods' voices, and the results were never anything he would accomplish if he had a God's power. So to Huaycar the business of pushing Virgins into a well to make rain next year was particularly unfortunate and foolish.*

** According to most writers of the Incas they did not push virgins into the well for the rain god, or sacrifice human beings; these cruel practices being confined to the Aztecs and Toltecs of Mexico and those races under their domination and influence. But this paragraph slipped in—you can take it or leave it; I left it—as the idea of these races without human sacrifice connected with their ceremonies is so general. But in truth, the Incas' laws were well enforced, and they were infinitely superior to the Spanish, who conquered them only by deceits and subterfuges the Incas found inconceivable.—Author.*

As Sana Ptaoul finished the bandaging of his terrifically throbbing head, Huaycar relaxed and closed his eyes. But as sleep swept over him he heard the soft voice of a friend, and opened his eyes again to

see Kapac Tupa, the glorious Inca, talking to Sana Ptaoul with a troubled face. Thinking that his concern was for himself, Huaycar spoke loudly—

“Oh My Inca, trouble yourself not about me, for other than a sad headache from the blow I am well. The wound, to my knowledge, is not serious.”

The tall majesty of Kapac Tupa swept closer, his rich robes sending the scent of the camac flower before him, the embroidered image of Inti on his breast glittering, and above it all the wise dignity of the man, the gentle culture that was Kapac Tupa’s self, smiling down upon the injured man.

“There is a something mysterious about this disaffection of my brother-in-law that I cannot put my finger on, Huaycar. Can you help me?”

“He thought that the bead which little Alana purloined from the gifts from the Masked Ruler of the Forest was a map to the treasure of the Bearded Ones. I thought so myself when I first examined the engraving, but now that Timi has gone overboard I have another idea. I am not yet ready to declare to you what my thought is, but I too smell a strange odor of intrigue about this affair.”

“We do not have all the pieces of the puzzle, my gentle shepherd of the Virgins. When we do, we will see a great light in this sudden action of Hayta’s. It does not make sense that he would throw away my favor for a chancy affair like the treasure of the Bearded Ones; which is in truth but a legend, and not a reliable one, to my mind. We know they had certain wonderful things, true; but we do not know that they placed them in this alleged cache when they again left this land behind them.”

Huaycar groaned loudly and shifted his weight on the cushioned couch. The Inca said in a concerned voice, “I will talk of this with you another time, Huaycar. You are not yet recovered.”

“It is not so much my head that hurts, O my Emperor.* It is that confounded joke about the Virgins. I hear it morning, noon and night. It was one of the last things Mama-Anac said to me.”

** The tenth Incan Emperor’s name before he became Inca was Panaca Kapac Tupa and after he became Inca his title was Tupac-Yupanqui Inca. The first his actual name, the last an honorary or symbolic title.*

All the Empresses are titled Mama, something like our Queen-mother.

The Eighth Inca took the name of Wira-Kocha Inca although his right name was SocSoc. Wira-Kocha was a mythical god-person who created lake Titicaca, and is supposed to have built the cyclopean Pre-Incan ruins. The Inca took the god’s name.—Author.

The Emperor laughed. “The jest is one inspired by envy, noble son of my friend. You will always hear it, till you are too old for it to make sense.”

“That is a dispiriting thought. Now my head does ache!”

“I have set my best trackers after the traitor. He will not escape, no matter where he flees.”

“It would seem that he plots further than a mere excursion after mythical treasure, O Panaca Tupa. I would keep my spies awake in Quito and in the land of the Manabi. Something may be afoot!”

CHAPTER III

HAYTA was not surprised to find subterranean chambers, as many of the greater builders of his own people built such places—escape tunnels, underground storerooms and dungeons—but he was surprised to find an extensive, labyrinthine series of chambers, leading on and on; no one now alive knew where.

The party, feeling safe in their hiding, prepared to spend the night. Hayta and his chief officer sat themselves down under a torch to study the tiny micro-map at greater length, for this latter part of its detail gave the exact location of the treasure they sought... and now must find or eventually fall to the searching Inca soldiery.

It was with vast surprise that Hayta heard from his sharper-eared warriors that, in the distance marching feet were approaching along some underground passage.

“Hundreds of men, armed men—and they are not the Inca’s!”

Now, far off, nearer and nearer, they saw a line of flickering torches. The wearied warriors sprang from the skins and ponchos they had stretched on the cold stone, to look to their weapons. For them was no retreating, they were too weary.

Into the far end of the vast chamber—gloomy with shadows and eerie as it was—marched a mass of men fronted by a frightful figure which made the already frightened Alana shiver still more with apprehension and eerie dread of the things that looked so much like the armies of the dead, talked of in their legends.

Hayta was surprised, but not so greatly as one would expect; and as the frightful foremost figure became more distinct, Tumi Hayta stood at attention, his weapon held before him in salute.

The clutched spears of his men relaxed, came to the vertical of their military salute. It was plain to Alana that this meeting, while surprising to Hayta, was at the same time not with any stranger, but with someone known to himself and to his men.

That foremost figure stalked on, nearer and nearer, but his marching warriors stopped, the foremost spread out a little in the far end of the chamber. His face was a fierce golden mask, wide mouthed and hideous; the face of Cimi, the Death God—or the face of Supay himself. His height was not great, but he was extremely wide, the legs bowed and hugely muscled and twistedly deformed. His arms hung to his knees, huge-handed and hairy as an ape’s. Tumi Hayta bowed in low obeisance before this hideous apparition, and humbled himself as he had never done before his own Inca.

“Welcome, O Lord of the Dark Forests, who holds in the hollow of his hand the lives of all the myriad of the Manabi; O visitor from the Dark Mysteries of Haek-Pachac; O master of the Mysteries of the Lost Underworld—I greet thee. I did not expect to find you here. I came here thinking I had uncovered at last the lost hiding place of the Treasures of the Bearded Ones—only to find yourself already here. With me I have a hostage who should interest you—the Mama-Anac Huarca, the Empress!”

MAMA-ANAC lifted her rather sweet middle-aged face at the sound of her name on her false brother’s lips, but at sight of the fierce golden mask and hideous deformed limbs of the Masked One, she screamed and fell again into the unconscious state in which she had spent her time since the fall of the great suspension bridge.

“Greetings, faithful servant.” The mysterious and frightening figure of the Masked One lifted a wide, bulky palm in the gesture of peace, his deep frog voice booming and echoing eerily in the rock chamber. “Though affairs have taken a somewhat different trend than I had planned, yet there is much for which to be grateful to chance and to the Gods. You see, my Tumi, I sent that bead to the Inca with a double purpose. With it I sent an agent, whom I told to rumor that it contained the map to the long sought treasure of ancient power. But I have never been quite sure of you and your allegiance, for others of high rank like yourself have failed me through an inability to realize that I could offer them vastly more than their rulers. Thinking you likewise would fail me, I did not tell you why that bead was sent to the

Inca—and it has trapped you into an indiscretion which might have made you useless to me forever. I expected my agent to tell many of the nobles of Cuzco that the bead contained the map so long sought; but he told you among the first—and you slew him before he could complete his work. Your impulsiveness is understood, and it is my fault that I did not tell you what plan I had in mind. I expected the Inca to fall for my little lie and lead a search party here to find the treasure, for he has searched other clues in person before. Once down here, I would have him—and after him his Empire—in my hands. It is unfortunate that you have removed the little bait for my trap from his hands.

The golden mask turned awkwardly, looking into all the shadows of the room to see who might be listening to him. Then he went on, “It were better we two talked alone. There are things I must tell you now—now that I know you are one who must serve me or have nothing. Our positions, the whole plan, has altered vastly by your action.”

Tumi nodded, and barked an order to his men. They left the great chamber, taking Alana and Mama-Anac with them.

Alana said savagely, “Already this traitor thinks like an Inca, he makes sixty people leave the room, where he could himself walk a few steps and be as much alone.” But Mama-Anac did not answer, and Alana bent her mind to overhear the echoing murmur of the conspiring voices in the distance. The shape and acoustics of the rock helping her, she made out to hear much.

The Masked One was continuing, his voice rolling in confusing, whispering echoes:

“My friend, I have lied to you, and I must confess it. The map on the little bead of gold is false. There is no knowledge in my mind of the location of the mysterious powers of the God-like Bearded Ones. I sent that nugget to the Inca, among other things and gifts, for a purpose. I also sent an agent to spread a rumor as to what the little bead really was. That it would lead a man to the immense power of the weapons of the Bearded Ones. But the agent I chose was a poor one, and he did not fully understand my orders. He told you of the value of the bead, because he believed that it really was such a valuable thing, and that you would richly reward him. You did; you killed him—which upset certain of my plans. It kept him from telling those whom I told him to inform. You see, if the Inca should have that map, and should come to this place, I have prepared a force of men here to take him—an army of men, indeed.”

Tumi’s voice, higher pitched, yet could be heard by Alana. “You thought to test me, to see if I would tell the Inca of the value of this map?”

“That was part of my plan, if you wish to think that.”

TUMI was vilely disappointed. “It does not lead to the Power of the Ancients—it is folly I have thrown away my life for! This is not a good thing you have done to me.”

“On the contrary, your swift, impulsive seizure of the golden bead, and your forced abduction of the Empress to keep her mouth closed about the map—or for what reason you did so—played into our hands beautifully. I can now show you how to become the Inca!”

“How, O mighty friend? I will soon be a dead man if you mislead me again.”

“Send that bit of engraved foolishness back to the Inca. Place it in the hands of one of your men—the one most likely to be believed. Have him say that he heard of its value, stole it and brought it to his Emperor in loyal upholding, knowing that his Inca would die if you, Tumi Hayta, reached the trove of weapons before the Inca. The dignified fool will go at once to the place marked on the map, taking with him but a few hundred men at the most.

The Golden Mask—a sample of fine but evil handiwork in the precious metal; a mask that contained a lifelike image of Hell’s fiercest face—looked a moment upon Tumi with the inscrutable disturbing regard of two empty eye sockets. The too-deep voice went on:

“And that place is here—*here*—where no tactical elusiveness or skill will help him to escape us. Here in these sunless borrows he will die at our hands. He will not bring a great many men because he will want to travel swiftly, and an army cannot travel swiftly for baggage. He will think that your own search for the hiding place will be delayed or blocked entirely by the loss of the map on the nugget—and will hasten to be sure to be in time to forestall you in case you had copied out the map upon a larger surface. He will believe in the truth of the map quite as much as you did. He knows a great deal about the Bearded Ones from the palace records. He has long sought the legendary cache of mighty God-Weapons.”

Tumi’s voice was gloating, pre-exultant with the taste of imagined triumph. “And here we set upon him, eh? Here we slay him, and here he will lie and rot in these forgotten halls. Then we march at once on Cuzco, proclaim the Mama-Anac Empress. Then we force her to proclaim her brother Tumi Hayta as her regent! I will be the Inca within this moon’s passage, Master of the Manabi—I will be the Inca!”

“Yes, it is lucky for us that Kapac Tupa has no lawful heir. As it is the greater part of the nobles will come over to our side, against those who see through our plan—for the sake of sweet legality. Had the Inca a son, our plan would never work.”

“I understand the plan fully. It is a good and practical plan!”

“After you have become Regent over all the Confederated Quichua, you can cede to me the lands of the Manabi now held by the Inca. Then, a little later, we will march on Quito in the North, and conquer our only rival in this whole land. After that, who is to say what could not be ours?”

“Your plans are irresistible, O Lord of Death and Life. It is also a pleasant thought to know that the nobles of Cuzco would never accept yourself as ruler. It will be to your advantage to keep Tumi Hayta in the land of the living.”

“Yes, that is a good and healthy thought for both of us. My own dark minded warriors would want none of your milk and water ways did you think to conquer or to lead them in my place, to dispense with my own dread mummery and dark mysterious claims of kinship with the Lord of Death. So there is little danger of either of us trying to annex the others power. We should work well together, Tumi Hayta, so long as you remember who is Boss!”

From the eyeholes of the golden mask a long stare bored into Tumi’s face, and slowly the power of the mind behind that mask struck into Tumi Hayta a cold and dreadful fear, so that he half credited that The Masked One’s claim of kinship with the Underworld was not a lie, and that his mention of his claims as mummery was the real lie. And Tumi shivered in his fear, and the Masked One laughed at the sudden craven face of him. For behind those holes in the metal face of the mask, Tumi could see not the least glitter of light, not the least sign of wet eyeball, but only a terrible red-lit darkness, and deep within him a flood of cold fear welled up, a superstition that would not down. This man was other than life.

Fighting hard against the fear that gripped him, Tumi seized the tall black torch that burned on the table and held it up to the golden horror of the Mask. And then he set it down again with trembling hands, and the Masked One turned away with a mocking laugh that yet was triumphant evil.

For Tumi Hayta knew that never would he do other than this thing that looked so little like a man wished him to do.

SOME seven suns later, into the glittering chambers of the Inca of all the Quichuas, staggered a sweat drenched and dust streaked warrior. One of the Lacunas; he had been absent since the flight of Tumi Hayta. He fell on his face before the Emperor, his breath coming in great gasps. Above him stood four of his countrymen, their faces like thunderstorms—for disaffection of a half-dozen of the royal guard had thrown their whole race into the shadow of the Emperor's doubt of their loyalty. It could lead to the destruction of their homeland, the transplanation of their whole race to lands farther from the center of the Inca's power, the breaking up of the homes of their people forever—did any further thing cause his doubt to grow. Their short stabbing spears were poised above the prostrate man's back, ready for the death blow did the Inca give the word. But he raised his hand, saying: "Let the traitor speak!"

The prostrate man raised his head, and held up his open hand. In the palm glowed a little golden bead! From his place beside the Inca, Huaycar uttered a low cry, and stepped forward swiftly, lifted the tiny gleaming object to his eye.

"It is, O my Inca, it is the map of the hoard of the Ancients. This man has somehow retrieved the cause of this trouble and brought it again to you."

The Inca bent forward, interest glowing bright on his face, "Speak, O fearful one. Speak of the Empress and why you have returned. Better for you had you brought Mama-Anac back to me than this tiny gaud!"

"I was forced by my brothers to help them or die. When I heard of the mighty power that lay in the lines invisibly written upon this bead, I saw my chance and stole it—bringing it to you—that our kindly ruler might not be replaced by an evil man like Tumi Hayta. He plans to use the power of the Bearded Ones—which he will find with this tiny bead—to slay you, to set himself upon your throne, to rule us all with the lightning of the Ancients' terrible weapons. I have brought you the map, that you may be swifter than he, and with your armies seize this place marked upon the map so that Tumi Hayta, when he arrives to unearth the hidden store, will find your anger waiting for him. I have run faster than any man other than myself could run, to bring you this power. With it you can be a greater ruler than any before you ever was."

"You have looked at the map through the lens?" The Inca had turned to Huaycar. "Where does the map place the ancient cache?"

"See, I will show you. I have another of the Manabi lenses. Look, here, through the light."

The Inca gravely held the gem to his eye, and moved the bead about till the lines invisible upon it became pictures, until the pictures became understandable places. "Now the first picture shows the Ancient Highway running between Cuzco and Lake Titicaca. It shows the Bearded Ones traveling along that Highway, does it not?"

"Yes, it does show that."

"Next picture: it shows the vast city of Tiahuanaco, when it was the holy city of all this land, none of the buildings fallen. And it shows the Bearded Ones entering the greatest building of all, The Tunca-Puncu. The Temple they built to their own invisible God, the Creator, whom we still worship above our god and the Inti—the sun—who is the son of the Creator."

"Yes, the map shows the Tunca Puncu."

"Now if you look carefully, the trail leads beneath the Tunca Puncu. There are subterranean chambers there about which I myself did not know till I saw this bead. The last picture of all shows the general layout of the subterranean chambers, and a cross marks the place of the cache."

FROM the stone floor where he still groveled before the Inca, the Lacuna spoke. "O my glorious Emperor, it is to the Tunca Puncu that Tumi Hayta has fled with Mama-Anac. He lifted a pivoted stone, and went down into the bowels of the earth under the mighty ruined palace of the Ancients."

"What is his strength. O man who turns his coat every day?"

The warrior's face fell at the words of the Inca, for it showed he was not entirely believed.

"His strength is some hundred warriors now, and more come in from his own lands, from Macchu Picchu—and there are too some dark skinned men from the land of the Manabi."

"Manabi? Then the Masked One, too, angles for this treasure of the Ancients! There must be more truth than I had credited to the legend of the weapons to be found there. Does the Masked One think to upset me, O fearful one?" The Inca's face was scowling, and the cunning mind of the Lacuna warrior knew that he had said too much.

"I do not know; there was much talk among the nobles I was not privileged to hear."

The Inca turned to Huaycar, his face suddenly firm with decision. "This is a gathering storm during which we cannot sit upon our behinds, Huaycar. Call together the officers, and we will plan to pull this little brother-in-law out of that hole he has found to crawl into."

"There is a certain bad odor about this, Panaca Tupa. The whole thing could be a trumpery lie. The inner plan looks strangely to me like the cunning twining of that dark mysterious snake, the ruler of the Manabi. His mummerly, his passion for secrecy, his ways of thinking, of which I have heard from spies of ours among them. I would say this could well be a trap of his—carefully planned. You see, my Inca, did he succeed in killing you, Mama-Anac could proclaim her brother the regent."

The Inca's face grew dark with anger. Huaycar hastily went on:

"I do not think the Empress has a hand in this; but they could easily trick her, after your death, into being an unwilling accomplice. Holding her, they hold a claim to the throne!"

"Whatever is in their minds, your warning is timely, but your caution is not too timely. We will send against that dark ruin enough sound warriors to pluck it stone from stone and crush the worms within before they grow into serpents."

"If they are planning a trap for you, they will insist that you come in person to bargain for the ransom of your Empress and for Alana. That will be the give-away. So do you remain here, and I will go to step into their little trap. Then, knowing what is in their minds, do not bargain; but fling your whole strength against them and crush them at once. Just to make sure they do not trap you, I will take along your robes of office, the golden mace, the feathered crown—the whole trappings of your glory. When they ask for you in person, I will show myself from afar as you—and they will spring their snare upon the wrong animal. Then all will be plain before you, and their cards will be upon the table while your own strength remains untouched. How do you like that plan?"

"You are more cunning than I had known, it is not a good thing that yourself should be a priest, when the land needs soldiers. One day I may remedy that."

"That day I will marry Alana and be happy, if she remains alive through this treachery."

THE Inca was thoughtful. "But I think your cunning in this case is wrong. I think that my *dear* brother-in-law is mad, has no alliance with the Masked one, and that there is no trap and no plan to use the Empress to replace me with her brother. I myself am going along with this expedition, because I want

to see with my own eyes what this treasure of the Bearded Ones is all about. It is a strange tale to cause so much anguish to us. I would know what lies under that gloomy ruin, the Tunca-Puncu. It has ever been a curious, dark, mysterious and unknown place. If there are underground chambers and passages, I want to see them for myself.”

“You should remember, good friend to me before my Inca, that this bead came to you direct from the hands of the Masked one! His people are skilled in making these things, and it could have been inscribed only the day before it was sent to you. There is no reason to think this so-called map is anything but a bait, and a rather obvious and silly bait, for a trap. Your own riches and power are vastly more actual than any prize of the Bearded Ones, who are so long disappeared into time that we do not know for sure they *had* any treasures we would value—or could use. It is to me too plain that the Masked One plays a devious game with us, and such is his reputation.”

“Nevertheless, my young Pillar of Caution, I am going. I have not had any fun for years. I would like to hear the battle cries, the glorious thrill of the shock of the charge; the streaming blood of brave men; the feel of a weapon in my hands! You would not allow your Emperor to scratch his little finger, had you your way. What will my warriors think of me, if I obey you and remain here like a fearful woman while my own loyal men die to pluck my wife back from a few hundred traitorous kinsmen. Bah, Huaycar, there is a thing called too much caution. There is another name my own brave warriors will give it if I listen to you! I could not face them.”

SO IT was that a thousand of the Inca’s best trotted down the King’s Highway toward the ruined city of Tiahuanaco, toward the Holy Lake Titicaca; and in the midst of them swayed the painted, luxurious palanquin of Tupac Yupanqui Inca, whose actual name was Panaca Kapac Tupa. And walking beside him marched Huaycar, his priestly robes discarded for the glittering weapons of a warrior officer—and his priest’s benign smile for the frank, honest face of a man of action going toward the action for which he was born.

The stone mile-posts, each one marking the number in distance from Cuzco, were swung by their rhythmic, strong brown legs, and every twenty miles the party of warriors stopped at the rest-house for food, wine and an hour of sprawling talk and refreshment.

Each night the Inca talked with the Officers of the distant palace by means of the fire-signals from the towers—and there was little of importance there that he was not informed of. Too, he listened to Huaycar’s still insistent warnings, and ordered from Cuzco another force of five thousand men to start the journey for the ruins of the sacred city—and at those villages about Titicaca were some two thousand men waiting to join their ruler. Thus he insured the presence of a strong force if he should need it, but Panaca Tupa did not believe he would need it to subdue the despised Tumi Hayta.

His rage at the destruction of the suspension bridges was terrible to see.

Night had fallen on the eighth day when the Inca’s thousand approached Tiahuanaco, the City of the Dead; for they were much delayed by crossing the gorges. This was the home of the Ancients. The lake Titicaca gleamed silver and placid in the moonlight, and the gloomy grandeur of the mighty home of the Elder Incas, the Holy City where the majesty of a race greater than their own, but now passed into oblivion, struck into their hearts an awe and a feeling of their own inferior worth.

Huaycar counseled that they make camp, and enter the deserted avenues of the mighty city in the safe light of the morning; but Panaca Tupa insisted on looking on the hill of the Tunca Puncu in the night. It was in his mind that some light, some motion, would betray the presence of the men of Tumi Hayta, might show whether they were many or few.

They made camp in the Kalasasaya, the Sun Temple, on the great paved terrace in front—the steep walls of the terrace forming a spot easily defended—the only entrance being the broad stone stairway. At the western end of the terrace the mighty Gateway of the Sun insured them of the protection of their God, Inti. Looking at the scenes carved on the single great stone of the gateway, cryptically telling of the preparation for the war with the Jaguar God of the Night, the assembling of his lesser Gods by the Condor God who carries the Sun, Inti, across the heavens every day—Huaycar mused that this battle of evil and good is always present in one way or another. Too, he wondered why the Incan stone-cutters had no longer the vast skill of these ancients; and wondered if it was that they no longer knew how to harden metal to their use as had the ancient race. He wondered if they should find within the supposed hiding place of the Elder Bearded Race's* tools and weapons and magic, hardened metal stonecutters' tools among the other things, so that once again their Incan stone masons might equal the mighty skill of these ancient forgotten artisans.

** It is interesting to speculate if it was not this legend of the Bearded Ones that assisted the Spanish Conquest as much as their horse and armor. The Incans had a reverence for all the works of the races that preceded them; they were Holy Ones, and the greatest of these were The Bearded Ones who came from no one knows where and disappeared the same place. It is quite possible the Incas had difficulty persuading their warriors to struggle against the "bearded" Spanish.—Author.*

Huaycar himself saw to the posting, of sentries and made all secure.

CHAPTER V

WITHIN the Tunca Puncu, Hayta was aware of the coming of the Inca. Nervously he waited, sending word by messenger down the long subterranean passage, the escape tunnel of the ancient cunning Lords who had built this vast pile—a tunnel that ran almost to the coast, opening in the foothills of the Andes on the Manabi territory.

Then night wore on, and with coming of the dawn came again the tread of the marching warriors of the Masked One. Little Alana woke Mama Anac, whispering: "That horror in the golden Mask is back, now don't wake up and start screaming, just look at me and don't think about him."

"I can't stand the sight of the beast. He is as wide as he is tall—and more ugly than is possible!"

"He seems to have Tumi Hayta pretty well under his thumb. Your brother looks at him as if he was hypnotized."

"He could be at that. Certainly Tumi is playing the fool for a lot of promises from that one. He does not exactly look like a man whose word was untarnished as gold, does he?"

"He looks like a fiend from the pit! For all that, he may be the kind of animal that our religion says really lives—the beasts of the abyss beneath our feet. We don't know! He claims to be related to the King of Death, the ruler of the Underworld; and who is to say different?"

"Bah! It is lies he has made up to frighten his ignorant forest people into obeying him. He is just the misbegotten freak from some mother who got her love affairs mixed up and came out loser. He is a monster—and probably his father was before him."

"But where could such a hairy man come from? There are no hairy Indians."

"There are tales of hairy races in the past, and he could be a throwback to some ancestor of that kind."

“But, hush, Mama—he speaks—we want to hear!”

The deep booming voice was not trying to be secret and they could not miss hearing.

“Well, Tumi Hayta, our condor has come to the trap; I told you he would do what we expected. He has taken a few hundred men and rushed to be the first to unearth the ancient wisdom.”

“It is more like he has rushed to get his wife and my head, O Masked and Secret One—but that is no matter. What matters is that he is here where we can kill him. He is camped upon the terrace about the Kalasasaya. His sentrys are well posted in the shadow of each of the mighty pillars. It is a place easy to defend, hard to take by storm.”

“He will not stay in that position. He will march straight up to these deserted doors, enter the Tunca Puncu, lift out the silver key just as you did and come down here. The whole lot of them will come down here as though they had no fear. I know their minds, little things of no strength.

“You underestimate the Inca. He will not enter these passages for you to kill him. He is rash and proud, but not that rash.”

“Well, post your men. When he comes, club down the first that enter, silently. Then if he calls down these stairs to know what is waiting, you yourself will call back that all is well. The chambers are empty of all but the wonderous magic, work of those who built this city. Then he will come, if there is nothing to cause him caution. If there is a noise of combat, and something arouses his fear—if he does not enter—we will charge out upon him as he retreats before our sudden showing of greater strength. Panaca Tupa will not live to embrace Mama-Anac again. He has already entered our trap too far to escape.”

CHAPTER VI

AS DAWN brighted the sky above the mighty Andes, Huaycar stood beneath the single massive block of carved andesite that formed the ancient Gateway of the Sun and chanted the ritual of welcome with which the priest greets every day. Silently the warriors stood, their eyes on the yellow and awesome God of the skies, and the prayer had more meaning, this day, it seemed, than ever it had among the living avenues of Cuzco.

The short ceremony over, Panaca Tupa called the officers together for a council of war. A half-dozen warriors left to scout the great bulk of the Tunca Puncu, a mile away; to look for smoke, for signs of Tumi's men.

In an hour the scouts returned with a wholly negative report. The tracks of the party could be seen entering the great ruin, none leaving. They were somewhere within. Panaca Tupa turned to the Lacuna who had brought was born.*

** Proofers note: That last sentence is copied as it appeared in the original printing—A/NN\A*

“Can you guide us to the turning stone within the Tunca Puncu where Hayta went into the underground chambers?”

“Surely, O my Emperor. It lies not far within the central chamber of Pacha Kamac, the Creator.

The Inca turned to Huaycar. “We will have to enter the burrow, dangerous as that may be, for I see no other way to lay the dog by the heels.”

“I have said *be careful* too often to repeat it, my Inca. It could be a trap, and the warriors of the Masked One waiting beneath to destroy you.”

“Bearing that in mind, we will spring the trap—if it be one—upon empty nothing.”

“Huaycar, take this fellow who claims to have turned his coat twice in one week, and find that turning stone. Send him down alone, and then follow after him, just within hearing distance. As soon as you hear him speak, return and we will decide what the speaking meant. And you, worthless one, if you want to stay alive, turn your coat my way this time for sure or your death will not be a pleasant one. If they wait beneath, speak to them in such a way that they will not realize we test them—and Huaycar can return with the words you say. If there is no one there...”

“But Master, I *stole* that bead and fled. Tumi Hayta will kill me at once he sees me.”

“In that case Huaycar will hear his words and bear them again to me, and I will know you died honestly. But in case he does not kill you, but welcomes you as returned spy—what then?”

“Why then I will have served you, for you know Tumi Hayta waits below with the Empress—what more could you know?”

“These Manabi you witlessly mentioned, how many of them wait below?”

“I do not know, Master.”

“It would be better if you did know, for you! Now, if you are a spy, how much do you think Hayta will pay you? When he is through he will kill you so that he will not have to reward you. He is not kind and generous, not a good man. Why do you serve him?”

“Let me go alone, and I will return and tell you exactly what awaits below.”

“That is a good idea. Now go!”

Quickly the tall Lacuna set out for the gloomy ruin towering in the distance. The Inca signed to Huaycar, and Huaycar—thinking like the Inca it were better if the fellow did not know he were followed—set out after the man at a distance of a hundred paces. But with him went a score of warriors, and they went at an angle, so that when the Lacuna looked back, he would think they traveled to circle the ruined Tunca Puncu.

HUAYCAR, as soon as the tall Lacuna had disappeared between the huge portals of the Place of Ten Doors, ran forward, ducked his head into the gloom, saw the man turn the corner, and hastened after him. Behind him came his twenty, as silent as serpents.

Into the dread chamber of the Creator, where his red eyes glowed startlingly through the gloom, and gaping upon the tilted slab down which the spy had disappeared. On swift but silent feet Huaycar stole to the opening, peered down into darkness. No sound came up—nothing. Quickly he lowered himself down the two-foot high steps, but with his back first, so that he could sprint upward at the first sign of attack. With Huaycar silent caution was the better part of valor just now.

A distant rumble of voices did come to his ear, but the sliding feet of someone just below him made him sprint again up the great steps, and hard upon his heels came the rush of footsteps. As he burst up into the light, an arrow shot over his shoulder, and out upon the broad paving spewed a torrent of Manabi warriors, mixed with the condor-symbolized harness of the taller, renegade Cuzco men.

Huaycar’s score of warriors, surprised at the number and ferocity of the outspewing attack cast their spears, and at the short range near half of them found a mark in the bodies of the squat Manabi warriors.

Flight was their only hope, and Huaycar was not the last as they legged it back across the rubble strewn wreckage of the great plaza that surrounded the Tunca Puncu, and dodged into the narrow

avenues of half-fallen walls back toward the Kalasasaya.

Tumi Hayta, wishing to show his valor before the Masked One, had himself led the first rush of warriors upward, after their attempted capture of Huaycar had missed its first grasp. It was useless to hide now that Huaycar knew they waited at the bottom of the steps, was Tumi's thought in ordering the rush to make good their seizure or the death of Huaycar; but if he could have heard The Masked One's great booming voice cursing him for his impulsive rush out into the light he would not have felt so proud of his courage. The Masked One sent an officer to order back the hundred or so men who had followed Tumi Hayta in his upward charge; but the whole chase had crossed the plaza and were fighting and running down the rocky littered avenues toward the Sun Temple before he caught up with Tumi.

Tumi Hayta returned to the dark chambers under the vast ruin to find himself not praised, but embarrassingly reproved for his rash action.

"It so happens that not too much harm has been done, since the Inca's watchers have seen but a short hundred men—which is about the number his spies have been led to believe await him here. But hereafter, when a decision like this of so much importance is to be made, consult me. Your action under different circumstances could have plunged all of us into defeat. You must realize, my little man, that only clever conniving can wrest the Inca's Empire from his grasp, and no sudden action like yours will ever do the trick. He is evidently suspicious, or he would not have sent his favorite, young Huaycar, to see what awaits him here."

"It was hard to keep from following when the young coward fled so suddenly. I expected to down him before he reached the exterior of the ruin; but he is young and swift, and twenty of his best warriors waited with spears at the swinging stone."

"We cannot live by alibi. Death does not keep away for excuses, Tumi. Every move we make must be a planned move, not a blunder! Never mind. We await his next move, and we do nothing, understand, *nothing*, until he ventures again down here where we have the advantage of him. He is not one born yesterday, that Inca of yours."

WHEN Huaycar arrived back among the nobles and warriors, the thousand of the Inca force, there were no laughs at the expense of the score—who were no longer a score, having left a half dozen behind.

The Inca looked at Huaycar's red and embarrassed face, saying, "Don't be ashamed of flight from five times the number; I am only sorry we did not expect just that to happen. We could have lined the ruined streets with soldiers, and caught the whole lot of them between our arrows."

Huaycar, stilling his hard breathing, said: "Panaca Tupa, there are more forces down there than rushed out. Even Tumi Hayta is not so big a fool as to send his whole force in a sortie like that. The fact that a hundred were seen, proves there are more men there than we thought—for the Lacuna told use there were but a hundred, hence there should have been but fifty at the most in the pursuit."

"I think you are right. There were two Manabi to each man of Cuzco in that bunch. If the Masked One is planning what you suspect, he plans it very poorly. Call in all the fighting men you can get on short notice, and we will ready ourselves to take Tumi Hayta apart piece by piece, and the Tunca Puncu with him."

Runners were sent now to every village within a day's march—and Huaycar figured that by tomorrow night their force would be doubled or tripled.

The scouts and sentries of the Masked One, posted in the tower of the Tunca Puncu, posted in the empty buildings for a half-mile around the ruin, reported the sending of the messengers. The Masked One

waited no more, for he saw the prize slipping through his fingers. Cursing the necessity of venturing his all upon an increasingly risky venture, he ordered an attack upon the Kalasasaya.

So it was that out of the tunnel beneath the ancient pile now poured a stream of squat Manabi warriors, rank on rank, steadily for half a day. Mid-afternoon saw some twenty thousand disciplined fighting men advancing upon the ruined Sun Temple by every broad avenue, and by every narrow street of meaner ruins. The Inca was surrounded!

The warriors from Cuzco tore up the stones of the temple terrace—a space about five hundred feet by four hundred—and built breastworks between the surrounding columns. Their situation was not good, though the temple terrace rose above the surrounding terrain by some ten feet and the improvised breastworks between the tall pillars gave them protection; still they could be attacked from three sides, and from the fourth were only partly protected by the Temple itself.

The squat, big-chested Manabi warriors advanced steadily to long arrow range, and poured over the breastworks a gradually increasing shower of arrows. Under cover of this fire, the heavier armored warriors advanced to the assault of the terrace. These, their armor consisting of cotton quilting in layers; of broad wooden shields and long lances; at their wrists hanging the war axes of stone, of obsidian, and of silver and bronze; the obsidian edged wooden maquahuatl (which was near as deadly as a sword); wooden leg-greaves; bronze, gold and silver helmets topped the more well-to-do of the Manabi; the nobles and the officers who were in the favor of the Masked One. The whole press were painted in bright colors in startling stripes, dots and weird designs. The metal helmets were shaped like the heads of jaguars, of eagles and of bears. It was as gaudy and terrifying an assembly as Huaycar had ever seen, on former campaigns of the Inca.

PANACA TUPA, now equipped in full armor—wooden greaves on his legs, the quilted armor covering him to his knees, the golden champi swining in his hand, which was his badge of office as well as a nicely balanced and well-built weapon, and topped by a glittering golden helmet which fiercely displayed the condor's beak and covered his face to the nostrils—was snorting with the excitement of the first action he had managed to get into in over two years. To Huaycar's constant concern for him he only growled, "Let 'em come, they're only ten to one. Since when did a man of Cuzco admit he couldn't kill ten Manabi!"

"But, my ruler, the whole object of the Masked One's attack is just to kill *you*—nothing else! That accomplished, he will retreat at once; and from a distance proclaim Mama-Anac the ruler and Tumi Hayta the new Inca by her orders. Then he will march on Cuzco and half at least of the nobles will join his forces out of love for Mama-Anac. That is the sole purpose. Don't show yourself—and we can hold out for a day or two till the men we have sent for arrive and start trouble for him from his rear. They will get word to Cuzco, and perhaps will penetrate his lines and bring us food and weapons. We have of arrows not enough for more than a day of fighting, as you well know. If you must fight, fight as one of us without that condor helmet and gold mace. They are more famous than your own face, you big-headed... may Manco Kapac send his spirit to watch over you, certainly I can't unless you listen to me!"

"Not for all the Manabi on the western coast will I doff this helmet or drop this mace, and may the God of all timid people, Centeotl, watch over *you* today."

That first charge brought the shouting Manabi up to the very top of the steep ten foot slope. The long lances thrusts picked off many, too many of the Inca warriors, but the Manabi could not close. What looked like a simple climb and a leap over the breastworks proved on closer approach to be an impossible feat; and every scrambling Manabi that shoved his ugly face to the top of the breastwork promptly got his skull split. The dead at the foot of the slope grew rapidly in numbers, and as fast as they

scrambled up the slope, they rolled down again, dead or dying or maimed.

Above them all, Panaca Tupa shouted and his mace plied as rapidly and as true as the most battle-hardened veteran in the ranks. At his side stood Huaycar, his eyes and his quick shield trying to catch the arrows that flew in a stream toward the Inca in time to intercept each one.

The charge broke at last against their iron resistance, and the Manabi withdrew out of bow range to lick their wounds and to plan anew.

The Inca had caught but one arrow in his forearm, but the shield that Huaycar bore beside him was a splintered wreck, bristling with arrows like a porcupine with quills. Huaycar showed this to the Inca, who wryly commended him on his quick eye, but showed no desire to keep his person less in evidence.

They counted their dead, some hundred, and tended to their wounded. Night was approaching, and of their living number but some six hundred were fit to fight. Huaycar dreaded the night attack he was sure would come. Now they would be spread thinly along the near eighteen hundred feet of breastwork, and another charge would surely break their line. Two more such attacks spelled sure doom, Huaycar knew—and looking at his Emperor, it was evident he knew it too.

LOOKING out over the enemy filled landscape, a dread and a foreboding of death filled Huaycar's breast. Tenderly he thought of little Alana waiting in the subterranean corridors beneath the Tunca Puncu—and himself beleaguered here and failing at the job of setting her free. What would be her fate did the Inca fall he well knew. It was not a good thing to think, for the customs of the Manabi are not such as can be thought of without loathing. And as he leaned against the great Gateway of the Sun looking out upon the setting splendor shining directly through the doorway in the single great stone, a little light far-off in the gathering darkness gleamed for an instant on the distant hillside—and disappeared! Instantly it reappeared, and again was swallowed by the dusk! Huaycar's heart leaped within him, for it was the fire signal of the Incan soldiery—and only fresh warriors of the Inca would be using that signal. Huaycar hissed excitedly to the Inca, hoping the too-near Manabi scouts would not notice the tiny flicker of light. The Inca swore a great oath as the light flashed again, and instantly with his own hands began to prepare the scorched cotton for the return blaze, tearing up his own quilted armor to make the tiny fire needed, which Huaycar quickly stopped, seizing the tunic from a dead warrior to kindle the blaze. About the blaze, directly in the center of the Gateway of Inti, shielded from all points but that far hill's view by ponchos held by grateful warriors, gathered the wounded men, and hope sprang in their hearts as the swift interchange between the Inca and his distant forces took place. Completed, the light disappeared instantly into the gathering gloom.

The Inca turned to the grim faces gathered about him, few of whom had been able to follow the rapid signalling.

"I have told them to attack directly opposite the Tunca Puncu. It has but ten doors, and our own choice of positions is *all* doors, it seems. They will drive through from behind the Tunca Puncu, take it if they can, we sortie from here to join them. Eh, how is that? Even at the worst, we retreat into the ancient palace of the Dead—and have our Mama-Anac again in our hands and our precious Masked One's plans are spiked!

An old noble at the side of Huaycar raised his voice—a voice that by its firmness showed the grim experience of old campaigns when this Inca whom he served had been a babe in arms.

"I have been silent, all this time, while you got us into this fix, my revered Emperor. But, as one whose life is now in peril, as well as the freedom of some two dozen noble sons and some five thousand retainers in my lands outside Cuzco, I think I have a right to make a suggestion."

His rather ironical and contemptuous manner did not nettle the Inca. He knew he had it coming, and he turned to the old veteran, a rich man of royal blood himself, though of another line, saying:

“Manco Mayta, my teacher you have long been, say your say.”

“Your present plan has not one, but *two* flaws! You have failed to provide a means of drawing off the Masked One’s forces from your line of attack. I would suggest a feinted sortie here to the east, and shortly after that one, a second feint to follow up here to the south. If he realizes the first attack is but a feint, he will be sure the second is the real attack and will fling at once his whole force against the second. Both of these are but simple good tactics—suicidal to those who participate, perhaps—but quite necessary to draw off his overwhelming strength from your real attempt to reach shelter within the Tunca Puncu and there have the walls to protect you till more complete reinforcements arrive.”

The Inca pondered for a moment, and slowly his proud head lowered in shame, for what the old man said made of himself a tyro in appearance.

“I am a fool, my friend. Here, take this mace. I am unworthy to bear it longer.”

“Nay, my Emperor, but hereafter I would appreciate a more close attention in yourself to such old heads on young shoulders as young Huaycar—who divined all along this whole thing was but a trap for your person. And a more close attention to such warriors as myself who have by battle experience proved themselves worthy of a place at your side in all counsels which may lead to the risk of their own heads. One does not like another’s thoughtlessness to cost one’s own life when a few words would have saved the whole affair. Now that even an Inca has proved himself not all-wise, let us all forget this incident—for we all love you, Panaca Tupa, but in some ways you have badly neglected your opportunities. One of those ways is in the study of tactics from ancient has-beens like myself.”

THE Inca, his fore-arm bandaged, his helmet on his arm dented, his mace still bloody from recent struggle, looked at the oldster like a spanked child, the corners of his mouth drawn down slightly, his eyes doleful.

“May Supay devour me if I ever allow your white head to be out of my sight again, if only to escape the shame of another such deserved calling down!”

The laughter at the Inca’s bearing under the reproof lightened the strained atmosphere and the Inca went on. “And may the God of Idiots devour you if you ever keep your mouth closed again when I need it open and talking—do you hear! Do you think I am too proud to listen?” The warriors pressed closer about the two to hear.

Old Manco Mayta grinned a yellow-fanged grin at his emperor, such a grin as only the privileged dare give an Emperor, saying: “You had better spend your time preparing this next bloodletting carefully, for upon it depends the whole fate of the Inca nation as well as my own worthless life, my Inca.” The old man, with this parting shot, turned and went to the breastwork, where he curled up on his poncho to await the next need for activity. At his age one needed rest to keep up with the young bloods.

“Huaycar...” began the Inca, but the young priest was not to be taken again in the net of the Inca’s impulsiveness.

“Oh no, you don’t. I am staying by your side to keep you alive, as the old man says—our heads depend upon it. Some other can lead the feinting sorties, not myself. Wisdom is needed here, not my own youthful intelligence. Smart as I may be, only your most experienced warriors can come through such a job alive. And only myself realizes the necessity fully of protecting you, for the whole plan of the Manabi’s dark ruler depends on your death.”

The Inca growled under his breath; but as other leaders in difficulty have found it necessary to swallow their pride as well as a few digs, he too obeyed the youthful Huaycar and selected from those about him the two best fitted officers for the feints old Manco Mayta had recommended.

At moonrise, an hour later, they were ready; and none too soon, for the dark line of the Manabi front had approached nearer in the darkness—was obviously readying for a new charge, protected by the darkness. The moon, a thin silver crescent, did not appreciably lessen the darkness.

The first party of fifty seasoned warriors leaped the stacked slabs of the parapet and charged, screaming insults as to the origin of the whole Manabi race. As the first impetus of their charge dissolved into a howling melee, the second wave, two hundred more, leaped the parapet, and with vast noise and apparent intent to wipe out forever every living enemy of the Incan ruler—sprang across the bloody, dead-littered plain at right angles to the first sortie.

Four minutes later the remaining six hundred, a third of which were seriously wounded, slipped over the parapet on the opposite side and silently, stooping low, raced northwest directly toward the great shadow of the Tunca Puncu. Even as they flung themselves into the dark line of Manabi before them, a tiny signal fire sparkled briefly from the dark, squat tower of the Palace of the Dead, telling them that at least the surface portion of the Tunca Puncu was in the hands of the new-come Incan soldiery.

FIERCE, bloody, hand-to-hand fighting it was; axe against axe, brawn against brawn, savagery against savagery. The Manabi, a shorter race than the Incan Quichuas, were yet sturdier of limb and were no mean antagonists. The Incans' lives depended on the swiftness with which they covered that mile between the terrace of the Sun Temple and the dark, ancient Palace of the forgotten Bearded Ones. Half the distance covered, their progress halted. The Manabi had erected a low barricade of building rocks across the end of the avenue. Beyond lay the open plain clear to the Tunca Puncu, but across the street up which the Inca and his forces raced desperately, was a solid bank of Manabi a dozen deep, the long lances a forest of death, themselves a solid rank of shields behind. It was break through the living wall or die, and their hearts sank with sight of the impossible task. Behind the Inca, Huaycar heard old Mayta muttering—and paused to bend his head and listen, for the old man's breath was gone. "Give them every last arrow from the quivers, then advance and seize their spears in your hands. Not a charge; just a slow advance so that the stab can be avoided and the spear head seized. Pull the spears to you hand-over-hand. They will either release them or come along to be maced to death. Turn the spears upon them then, and drive home. Do it right, and you can make it. Do it wrong, we all die here, and the Quichua will learn to speak Manabi and our women will bear Manabi children. Do you want Alana to have bow-legged, hairy children? The Masked One has seen her, she will belong to him."

A fury arose in Huaycar which swept away all his caution, all fear of the Inca's pre-eminence. In a loud voice—calculated so that not a Cuzco man would miss the meaning, but the Manabi would fail to understand the idiom—he detailed the old warrior's plan to them.

As one man, the fore ranks fell to their knees, swung forward their quivers, and steadily all fired upon the dark ranks of the Manabi until every quiver was empty. The solidity of the dark mass visibly lessened under the concentrated fire, but they had not a shaft left among them.

They tossed aside their bows and now sprang forward, stopping just short of the line of bronze spearheads, first one, then another, tempted a thrust by starting forward, dancing back as the long lances reached for them only to be seized by another, watching and ready. Once seized, a half-dozen hands grasped the spear shaft, and pulled head-over-heels the luckless warrior from behind the barricade.

"Just like trout from the stream," exulted Huaycar. "Like shooting fish in a cask, aye" grinned Mayta at the simple, effective strategy. From behind the lancers, flung bronze hatchets dropped some few

Incans, and a few well-directed arrows pierced the quilted armor. There were now but half the six hundred with them; and those sore wounded.

They would have won through, and the Inca was bellowing the battle cry for the last desperate all-out charge; they might have hammered this stubborn barrier of bow-legged Manabi flesh into blood and bones before them; had not there arisen before them at that moment a frightful apparition!

From among the squat and weary warriors retreating stubbornly before them, a wide lane appeared among the Manabi as they were shoved right and left by powerful, too-long arms, came the Masked One—the Son of Death, he called himself. He truly looked it now, his great head encased in the golden, horrific mask, the false mouth tusked and snarling, the hinged jaw opening with his fierce breath—and in the two round eyeholes the red flickering rage from within was a fire of doom. A fire of fear that struck every brave man that looked upon him with strange awe, that shivering terror that only the supernatural, suddenly made manifest, can bring.

BUT before the shattered remnants of the slaughtered barrier of flesh he had built so carefully to stop their last effort at escape stalked this door-wide figure, his battle harness all gleaming gold like his fearfully wrought helmet, one ape-strong arm swinging a great two-bladed bronze axe, and in his other hand a heavy too-long maquahuitl that no other warrior would have attempted to handle with two hands. Thus doubly armed, his immense, twisted and unhuman limbs terrifying in their weirdly sudden appearance before them, stalked The Masked One. Here was the feared, mysterious leader of the Manabi, whom his followers believed to be a son of the Lord of the Underworld, the son of the Death-God himself!

“Meet me, O braggart Kapac Tupa, you who falsely hold the title Yupanqui Inca—meet me or forever be branded coward and unfit to lead any man to battle.”

In the Incan code of honor there was no other course open to the Inca; for all rulers must first prove their valor and worth to lead brave men upon the battlefield before they are even considered claimants to the throne. They must likewise keep this reputation for courage untarnished or an election among the nobles would create a successor; a successor whom all men who hold courage and honor dear would choose automatically as their ruler. The Inca did not hesitate, for to hesitate here would be as final as an abdication. As his men drew back, as the Manabi lowered their weapons, the Inca stalked forward toward this apparition of superhuman ugliness, his hairy limbs looking to Kapa Tupa like the limbs of some spider, the frightful golden masking helmet like nothing so much as his own skull, not far in the future.

It was this meeting which Huaycar had dreaded—and knew The Masked One would bring about if he could—for no such warrior had ever appeared, no warrior so capable and so strong among the Incas or their neighbors for centuries, if all reports about him were true.

The Inca, armed only with his golden mace in his right hand, and a heavy round target of wood in the other, closed with the fearful figure cautiously, knowing that one square blow from either of the weapons in the huge hands of the monster would be his end.

The Masked One whirled up the double bladed axe and sent it crashing down upon the Inca's helmet; but the Inca caught it on slanted shield, flung the blow aside and countered with a roundhouse swing of the heavy mace, directed square at the center of the wide bulk. The Inca was well trained and canny, knew that a blow at his wind would cripple him more than to break an arm. The Masked Horror caught the mace on his broad maquahuitl, grunting with the force as he parried the blow, and the mace shot past his belly.

Still carrying the momentum of its original swing, the Inca arced the mace up and around and down upon the great gold mask. The hairy arm carrying the axe got the thick haft of his axe under the down swing of the mace. The haft splintered as the mace slid down the length of it to smash against the great fist.

The monster howled with pain, and the axe chopped in a short arc forward into the Inca's fiercely grinning face.

THE Inca round shield broke the force of the blow, but the sharp blade drew blood as it touched his chin with the last spent force. Without pause the sword-like maquahuitl whirled in from the side and again the target in the Inca's hand caught the blade, but it bounded from the shield in a glancing blow to his leg. The Inca gave a cry of pain. His knee would never be the same! Supay would have this hairy son of his back in short order, if a curse could do it.

In a red haze of anger, the Inca whirled the heavy mace in alternate continuous back hand and forehand. The giant, squat figure gave ground steadily, the fierce, unnatural glow within his helmet flickered as he ducked and parried, parried and ducked, the inescapable golden head of the big hammer; a hammer with one end a razor-edged axe.

Huaycar was astounded that the Inca could give trouble to the huge Masked Horror. He had often watched the Emperor in desultory practice, but had never seen him in battle before. He realized now that all the praise of his battle prowess was not flattery, by far.

But the Inca was weary with the long leg-pounding drive from the Sun Temple through the death-laden ruins; was ready for rest before they had even seen the Masked One. The huge figure was fresh, unwearied, had not before raised weapon that night.

The steady arc and swing of the Inca's shining weapon slowed. He paused and took the defensive.

Time was dragging on. They could not wait, for they heard footsteps of approaching men of the Masked One grow ever more frequent. They would be surrounded.

Honor be damned, the Masked One was merely delaying the fight, taking no chances, waiting till they were surrounded fully, when his arrows would plunge among them. Huaycar took decision again into his hands, shouted at the top of his young lungs: "We are cheated, the Manabi advance behind us to take us. Forward!"

Realizing they were allowing the code of the warriors to dupe them all to death, the Inca's warriors swung their maquahuitls, their axes, lifted their short-bladed stabbing spears of bronze, lanced forward between the Inca and his opponent. The Inca cursed them all as they swept him on through the now open ranks of the Manabi—and the suddenness of their advance gave them freedom. Two-score men died before their sudden flashing blades and they were through. The great plaza of the Tunga Puncu lay empty before them, and in the squat tower blazed the fire of the Inca signal men.

Their feet pounded now hopefully, behind them the bowlegged Manabi ran hard, but their short legs were not built to catch the slender limbs of the men of Cuzco in a race.

They sprinted into the dark shadows of the great southern doorway of the Place of Ten Doors, and into the arms of a mass of shouting warriors, and nothing was ever so glad a sight as the little shoulder-symbol Condor Heads of Gold that marked the armor of the Inca's army. Nothing so good as to hear around them good round Quichua words instead of the dog-barking of the Manabi tongue.

As Huaycar leaned wearily against the great round pillars of the huge doorway, a flying little bundle of

soft flesh, of weeping and laughing and talking all at once, of sweet smelling hands caressing his face, of welcoming lips upon his own. of flying hair that insisted on covering his eyes, of clinging limbs that somehow climbed upon him until he was holding her like a mother holds a child—all flung themselves upon Huaycar out of the darkness.

Among other things, Alana said: “I never thought I would be so glad to see anybody as your own battle-gloomy face and tall, too-attractive self. I never knew till now how much I loved you! Huaycar, never let me go again, never, never! That monster, The Masked Ape of Hell oh! He looked and looked at me, and his men laughed, knowing what he meant to do with me. I’ll never tell you, not I! Oh, poor Mama-Anac, she fainted every time he crossed her vision, the poor woman has been unconscious half the time. She has, honest to Inti, she has! The only reason I didn’t pass out, I was afraid too, for fear of what might have happened to me when I woke up and me not know I was dead. It’s a dreadful feeling, not knowing when they’re going to kill you, day after day. That Tumi Hayta, the snake. Kill him before this is over, Huaycar; kill him deader than this old hole Tiahuanaco, for me.”

AS HUAYCAR got the hair and kisses out of his eyes for the first time, he saw that Yupanqui Inca was likewise engaged with the more rotund Mama-Anac, and seemingly very happy about it.

Little Alana’s voice went right on, telling everything at once, with gestures and kisses and words all intermingled.

“When the men came from Hualla and Chawin and the other villages and gathered on the hill of Tiaspnac over there, and got the Inca’s signal and came here, they found the old door to the down-stairs guarded by only two sentries. They killed them and sneaked down into the underground, and now they hold the tunnel that the Manabi came here through, that nobody knew about but that musty old side-of-a-barn, the Masked One—and he is one who knows all about the underworld, having come from there anyway! They drove the soldiers he left to hold the tunnel up the tunnel, and are holding them there—and tell me, how are those ugly Manabi going to get home?”

Grimly the Inca, overhearing the chattering, sweet voice, answered: “They will get home as spirits, little Alana. Just spooks, that’s all. Within two days there will not be one of all that force alive, I swear it!”

CHAPTER VI

THE Masked One was a raging fury. He realized that now his escape tunnel was blocked, the whole barrier of the mighty Andes cut him off from his own trackless forests and safety. He knew that but two days or so more would bring from Cuzco the vast strength of the Incan army. That his time was running out—that whatever luck he may have had was now only bad.

That fury he expended in assault upon assault upon the immovable walls of the massive Tunca Puncu. Those cyclopean slabs of rock, pierced by ten great doorways, saw fiercer fighting now, in the dull days of their ruin, than ever they had seen in the period when they had been the mighty home of a greater race than the Inca’s hordes.

Fruitless, hopeless assaults they were, marked by the death of the brave strength of the squat courageous people who called The Masked One their Lord.

Each of those ten doors was racked by a continuous shower of the short, red arrows of the Manabi, and under that canopy of arrow fire, the warriors charged again and again—to be flung back by the savagely plied axes, spears and maquahuitls of the men of Cuzco.

The day wore on, and after each bloody attempt the Manabi withdrew, seemingly convinced of the futility of piling their dead before those sombre, age-old portals. A curse was on the place, they muttered, it was protected by the Holy Dead who were punishing the Manabi for their profaning of the Place of the Dead.

Night came again, and the silver crescent of the moon rode peacefully over the bloody scene; the moans of the dying before the ten doors; the cry of a hunting jaguar among the far ruins; and the fierce mocking calls of the Incans to the hovering army of the Masked One to come and be killed.

Day again, and the watch in the squat tower of the Tunca Puncu reported that the dawn-fire signals along the Incan highway had stated the army from Cuzon would arrive sometime soon after noon.

Themselves had lost men, sheltered though they were behind the thick walls, the fresh thousand plus their own five hundred who had lived through the flight from the Kalasasaya now joined within the ancient place, numbered again among the living but a few more than the thousand. Nearly a thousand warriors had died in defense of the Inca, and of the Masked One's horde, one guessed but half remained, for his losses were ghastly.

With the sun's advent, the fruitless assault began again, the whistling arrows fell among the warriors at the doors like rain, and their own arrows, hoarded desperately, were now held against the last resort.

This morning the wide and terrifying figure of the Masked ruler led the assault in person. He had heard from his own scouts of the nearing, overwhelming force of men on the march from Cuzon, knew that it was now or never with him.

A long crescent of bow-twanging warriors ringed each of the ten doors of the Tunca Puncu; a crescent that tried continually to close tight and crush in upon the beleaguered Inca warriors—and failed. Their steadily raining arrows took a deadly toll of the decreasing strength of the defenders; but the Tunca Puncu was built to perfection for their need. Ten men could hold each door against an army equipped as these; and the greater part of the constant flight of arrows they caught on shield, or spent themselves in the thickness of the quilted armor over their thighs.

AT THE huge central portal of the ancient palace the greatest number of Manabi concentrated; and it was here that the mighty and frightening ugliness of the Masked One boomed his battle cry, and led his chosen in charge after charge against the defenders only to bring up short against the lances of the Incan nobles.

That deep frog voice of the Masked One rolled steadily, reviling the Inca, Kapac Tupa, for a coward and poltroon, one who dared not meet again the one who had yesterday nearly killed him; meet him in honorable combat. To his repeated challenge the Inca derisively jeered his answer, that soon his horde would be laid low and that then he would meet the Masked One where his own forces would insure fair play and no tricks from the lying braggart who claimed what was an obvious lie—that he was a relative of the Supernatural Lords of the Underworld of the Dark; that he himself was immortal, here on earth only for amusement. Which obviously was not true, as the Masked One was not enjoying himself, but appeared to be in great trouble and perplexity, and could get none of his plans to come right! For that matter, it could be true that the Gods of the Dark had tired of his bombast, and had sent him to earth, and it was kind of them, for he, Kapac Tupa, was enjoying the affair immensely.

At the close of each of these interchanges of mutual insults, the Masked One would go into a rage, and rush forward whirling his great two-bladed axe, only to be stopped by the out-thrust lances, or pinked by one of the few arrows the Cuzco men had left in their quivers.

Huaycar, standing beside the Inca with his shield steadily catching arrows intended for the royal

person, shivered at the raw power in the monster's limbs at each of these charges, and knew that did he manage to break their defense not a man would live, slaughter would be short and complete.

After each raging charge, the Masked One and his bow-legged crew would withdraw, taunting them all for cowards, women afraid to come out and fight, and time and again Huaycar drew back the Inca from accepting his challenge.

Inti, the sun, rose steadily higher, stood at last directly overhead. The watch in the tower of the Tunca Puncu called down that the gleam of weapons and the color of the head plumes of the armies of the Inca, coming at the trot, were in sight on the great highway.

The Masked One, too enraged to consider flight, made one last desperate attempt to win again the safety of the mighty ancient stone walls of the Tunca Puncu—and the escape through his no-longer secret tunnel.

Placing his men in a long column before the huge main door, protecting their front with a solid rank of shields, he tried to crush through the door by main force, regardless of the death of his men the plan entailed.

In plunged the head of the huge spear of flesh and flashing axe heads, of gaudy shields splitting against the lances of the Inca's, who ground the butts of the hafts and let the Manabi impale themselves upon the bronze points, only to replace the entangled spears with new, a little further inward. Steadily the awful crush pushed in... in. The screams of the dying were a terrible sound of death agony, rising higher and higher as the Manabi trampled inward, driven by the fear of the now visible approaching column of soldiery from Cuzco, driven by the horrible shouts of their leader, whose terrible axe steadily hewed a path for them through the bodies of the Incan warriors. Back, back, the battle was now in the deep gloom of the interior of the temple, the defense was broken, and spreading out within the vast chamber from the great central doorway, the Manabi were swiftly evening the score, tipping the scales of death, with steadily plying axes and maquahuitls herding the hard pressed Quichua warriors before them. And ever over the heads of the foremost showered the short red arrows of the stumpy Manabi bowmen. Back, back into the inner chambers of the ancient house of the long dead.

KAPAC TUPA, seeing at the last moment his triumph over this gold-masked horror slipping from his grasp, called an order, and his words, picked up by his desperately fighting men, were shouted again and again through all the hard pressed line, giving for each backward step its exacted payment of blood, and paying steadily with wounds and death for the privilege.

“To the tunnel—to the tunnel—down through the turning stone!”

Suddenly all resistance ceased and the last few hundred Incan warriors turned as one man and sprinted for the gaping opening in the great central chamber which led to the Masked One's tunnel under the Andes to his own land on the coast.

About the dark hole they formed again, a solid square of wooden shields, of ready maquahuitls, of flickering lance thrusts. Nearly every man of them wounded, and each conscious of the loss of brother and comrade—they were a sight to strike terror to stronger hearts than the Manabi, who are fishermen first, forest hunters next, and warriors last of all.

“We hold here to the death!” shouted the Inca; and from each throat a roar answered him: “To the death.” And the echos of the word: *Huanacu*, death, rang and rang through the great stone chambers with an awful message of doom. *Tiahuanacu*, the place of the dead, and *Huanacu*, that day were well-mated words, for death was everywhere, sprawled and bleeding. Crushed heads and gashed limbs lay before the great Ten Doors in heaps four deep; were scattered singly and in groups everywhere

across the great chambers through which they had fought to the gaping opening which was the escape-way of the Masked One, and which he would never enter again except over their dead bodies.

That cheer's echoing *HUANACU!* reached even to the ears of the approaching Inca army, and was taken up by ten thousand throats as they broke into double time and came into the great City of the Dead on the loping, Incan ground-eating run.

"*Huanacu! huanacu!*" rang and rang in the struggling Manabi ranks like the knell of doom, like the cry of the Death Bird come for their spirits, like the creak of the Gates of Haek-Pachac, opening to admit their evil souls to Hell—and nearer and nearer came the cry as the armies from Cuzco deployed to surround the Temple of the Past. "The Tunca Puncu was to be their Huanacu Pampa of Ten Doors," shouted the foremost ranks of the Incan soldiery as they cut down the rear-most of the Manabi still struggling to force themselves into the already jammed mass of men within the Tunca Puncu.

About the turning stone a ring of dead had fallen and lay bleeding, and over their bodies they fought on, the raging axe of the Masked One rising and falling as though he were in truth the Lord of the Realm of Death; and the smaller Manabi Maquahitls flickered and flickered in short quick blows, parried by the longer, harder striking Incan weapons, though their line of living was now pitifully thin and closing steadily nearer and nearer to the gaping hole that meant freedom for the Masked One, and which they had pledged to die before he reached. As each man fell, their ring tightened, and shoulder-to-shoulder they faced the swarming, maddened Manabi, hampered by their own numbers and the jamming fright-to-escape which crushed them ever against the laboring weapons that slew and slew as they were pushed close. It was a sickening butchery, and one they deserved, but Huaycar somehow pitied these earnest, bowlegged, hardfighting Manabi—misled by their frightful "Masked One" into this impasse from which they would not escape!

USING the same tactic the Masked One had used, the massed shields of the fresh Inca soldiery crushed inward through the great central door, their fresh cries of "For the Inca" and "Huanacu" striking a terrible terror into the Manabi, who now saw their defeat was inevitable, and began to pour from out the other nine doors in a steady stream only to be cut down by the longer-legged Incan soldiers who quickly overtook them and covered the plaza of the Tunca Puncu with more dead. Here and there a fleeing Manabi could be seen clambering the far slopes of the Hanca Pira hill with a tall Quichua hard after and his far land across the Andes obviously a false hope which he would never reach.

Inside, the now despairing Manabi flung themselves upon the weapons of the Incan warriors suicidally, and swiftly the horde of the Manabi became a thousand; and then but a hundred men remained, the best armored, better-weaponed nobles who made up the inner circle of the Masked One's council. These ringed him in defense. It was his last stand, and theirs, and they meant to make their deaths count, but were not to be given the chance. The Incan officers brought fowling nets, and cast over them in sixes and sevens, pulling them to the floor and bound them. At the last the Golden-Masked and hairy-limbed monstrosity stood alone, his great axe bursting the nets flung upon him, his huge legs still free—his mask turning oddly as he watched for the next attack, the eyeholes emitting that red glow of rage that was so mystifying and awe inspiring.

Kapac Tupa called off his men and they retreated from the great cornered beast that had been king—and toward him stalked the Inca, his golden mace as wing in his right hand, and this time in his left hand a heavy hardwood maquahitl which he figured better suited to parry and block the double-weaponed attack than the too easily shattered standard shield.

"It is more than he deserves—why let him have the opportunity?" called Huaycar to the Inca. But the Inca only growled back, his usually gentle and almost scholarly face, after all this blood and struggle and death, a streaked and furious mask of war-fury. "Let me have my fun, you ninny!" and Huaycar shut his

mouth.

The combat, interrupted in their flight from the Kalasasaya, continued where it had left off; both men now equally wearied, both wounded more than once, and both filled with a rage that would be satisfied only with death.

The Golden Mask lifted and seemed to light with some flicker of hope of revenge. The huge limbs tightened their ropy muscles, the great axe swung, whirled up—and the Masked One leaped upon the Inca as leaps the hunting spider on its prey.

Kapac Tupa caught the axe haft on the heavy maquahuitl, shoved it aside to whistle past his shoulder, strike a fountain of sparks as the long arc of the blade touched the stones of the floor. His counter blow was only partly parried, put a great dent in the golden helmet—and the Mask's maquahuitl flashed in a black, whirling counter, waist high.

Square on the massive head of his mace the Inca caught the blow, the maquahuitl spun from the Mask's grasp and flew thirty feet into the air, falling into the great niche where the red-eyed and awesome state of the Creator-of-All squatted, staring unmoved down at the mad interlopers who cluttered up his peaceful gloom with their mad rage for death.

Fair, the Inca tossed aside his own maquahuitl and faced the Mask with his mace against the great two bladed war axe. The Gold Champi against the massive bronze with all its weight and heft.

THEY went at it hammer and parry, duck and swing—a vicious, expert performance of the ancient art of bloodletting, a demonstration fully worthy of the many courageous, veteran eyes awatch.

Both bled now from arm wounds where they had failed to catch the full stroke of a blow on haft or head; both gasped for breath, and the blurring, arcing blows slowed, became shorter, more carefully directed attempts to kill.

The Mask was fighting only to kill the Inca, and had no hope on earth of any other thing did he win or lose but death. The Inca was fighting for God knows what intricate self-made code of honor—to give this opponent his full chance with the Gods who rule the earth, perhaps. Was fighting to vent in full his rage at the plot against him by this man he hardly knew in any way, and who knew him only by hearsay.

The great figure of the Mask was weary, but the power in his strokes was still crushing, and the Inca's knees bent as he caught those fearful strokes on his mace handle, holding it long between his two hands to protect his head; to release with the left, swing in counter stroke, the massive figure ducking smoothly and countering. Stroke and stroke, sparks flew in showers as the blades met, and the dull thud of the haft on head of mace came steady and rhythmic. They were strangely, almost evenly matched; the Inca's quick flow of strength evened by the slower but stronger, as skillful handling of the heavy weapon, of the massive Mask.

Then, as the Mask struck a two-handed blow down upon the Inca's shining helmet, Kapac Tupa stepped wide and the axe showered bits of rock from the stone floor—and the Inca threw caution aside and leaped in close to those terrible arms and crashed the mace full into the grimming mask, crushing the whole horrible sculptured metal face. The stubby giant staggered back, tugging to get the mask free from his shattered face and blinded eyes, and the Inca followed with a wood-splitting, full-arcing blow upon the now defenseless head. The sharp leading edge of the heavy head of the Champi pierced full through the broad metal headgear and the giant toppled, fell sprawling, twitched and reached with his great hairy hands, moved his wide feet jerkily—and lay still, at last, in death! His blood formed a slowly widening pool around the bright ruin of his weird head-gear. The silence after the battle could have been cut with a knife.

The Inca broke this awkward silence.

“I always wondered what the freak really looked like.” He moved wearily to the shattered globe that was the Mask’s fallen head, tugged to get the helmet off. The Mask came off with little trouble, and the great figure rolled over. The hairy face, the thick red lips, the crushed bloody ruin of nose and eyes and forehead, were all there were to see.

“He was but a man, like ourselves, is evident. Not any supernatural horror from the abyss below. Just a man, and not too clever, either, to fling himself against the might of the Inca Empire with but ten thousand men.”

The End.

Notes and proofing history

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