



THE SACRED DRAGON

by Steve Fisher

What forgotten phase of yellow lore held the key to a dead man's riddle?—Red Eyes Turner thought he knew—and followed the trail of the Sacred Dragon to its lair of sudden death.

THE ghastly white moon over Wai-kiki Beach slipped out from behind a tropical rain storm; at the same moment, as if it had been a signal, the phone in Mark Turner's room rang shrilly. It paused the barest fraction of a minute before it began again. It was incessant, demanding.

The captain of Honolulu detectives had gone to bed only an hour before. He groped out for the lamp switch now, and pressed it on. Rubbing his eyes, he stared about him. The phone kept ringing. Turner picked up the receiver. In fifteen years as a dick he had learned that night calls were sometimes the most

important and the most exciting.

Turner was over six feet, and well built. He had short cropped red hair and a van dyke beard of the same color. Because of these contrasting reds, his somber brown eyes appeared to be of that color also. The natives feared his sleuthing ability and called him "Red Eyes."

"Mark Turner speaking," he said into the mouthpiece.

An excited feminine voice rushed over the wire. Though the girl talking seemed near hysteria, her tones were obviously being kept down:

"Mark, you must come over here at once. Something is going to happen. I feel it."

"Where are you?"

"At home," she replied quickly. "I had gone to bed, but I kept hearing noises, and I had the strange feeling that something was wrong. I got up and got dressed. I'm still in my room."

It was Judy Landre, niece of a rich Honolulu banker. His organization had been looted by crooks a month ago, and as a consequence he had failed.irate depositors, a large number of them Chinese, had blamed Philip Landre for the failure and the loss of their money. Judy had been nervous for fear something would happen to him, but this was the first time she had actually called for Turner's aid.

"Stay where you are," Turner said, "I've faith in your hunches, Judy. Bolt your door and wait for me. Even if there isn't anything wrong it won't hurt to look the place over."

"All right," she said, "I'll be—"

Turner's hand tightened on the receiver. He heard Judy Landre scream; then there was a buzzing in his ears. In another moment the line went dead.

The detective captain leapt from the bed. He had never dressed so quickly in his life. He rushed for the door, still

strapping his .45 automatic about his waist. Through the hall he went, down the steps and out the front door.

The moon was slipping behind a dark cloud again. The glittering stars in the vast Hawaiian sky were dimmer than usual. Turner raced for his garage and slid the doors open. In another moment he was backing his roadster out onto the highway.

The car roared down the road and he was underway for the Landre mansion. The banker lived two miles above Turner near Wailupe Point. It was pretty desolate up that way; Turner marvelled that under the circumstances Judy had remained living there.

He turned off the main highway and drove rapidly down Landre's private road. Presently he reached the house, shut off the motor and coasted up the driveway. The mansion was dark. Not a single light could be seen from the outside. Turner leapt from his machine and rushed up the steps to the porch. He entered through the open front door.

The red bearded detective hadn't thought to bring his flashlight along. He struck a match now, and groped through the foyer. He knew the house fairly well. His acute ears were cocked for the slightest sound.

It came presently and it was more than he had expected. It was Judy's shrill scream, from upstairs.

TURNER found the steps. He took them three at a time. Reaching the second floor landing, he rushed in the direction of the sound.

Suddenly there was a blinding light. A dozen small Chinese rushed at him with drawn knives. Leering, evil faces; snagged teeth; narrow and glittering eyes. Turner had reached for his automatic while climbing the stairs. Shots rang out now, and two Chinese fell.

A knife slashed into Turner's side. He elbowed out ruthlessly. He kicked out, slammed his fists into the yellow faces and fired his big Colt. He was hopelessly outnumbered, but he was a mad machine of human fury. Red Eyes Turner—grim, untiring,—with the strength of ten men.

Stumbling, bleeding, his brain throbbing, he pushed forward through the mob of Chinese. He felt that Judy was beyond this yellow barrier and that he had to get to her.

But it was useless—a mad charge against a stone wall. He was tripped and stabbed. Guttural words of the Chinese screamed in his ears.

He'd emptied his 45. and he'd accounted for a few of the Chinese. It meant nothing, for there were too many of them. Half a dead man—a bleeding, broken thing—he refused to go down. He stood with his legs spread apart. His red eyes—horrible and satanic now—glowed like the burning faggots they were. They boiled in their sockets, brimming over with the hatred that was in his heart. He was a devil—with his short red hair and his red van dyke beard—but he had rushed into a trap.

Cords whipped about him. His wrists and legs were bound. Somehow he managed to keep his eyes open. The corridor was entirely light now, and he could see the whole filthy scene before him. The Chinese he had shot, writhing on the floor.

He stared down to the end room. It was the one he had told Judy to lock herself in. The door was open, and presently two large Manchurians came out. They were dragging Judy with them, bound and gagged. She saw Turner at once, and her terrified eyes pleaded with him.

And then following the Manchurians who carried Judy, came a figure resplendent in rich, gold embroidered garb. He had tight saffron hands with many rings

on the well cared for fingers. Turner was bewildered, for he wore a gold colored mask over his evil, slant eyes.

The clattering din of the other Chinese ceased. They bowed low. The figure in the golden robes crossed his arms over his chest and said in a cold voice, "Those who intrude, must die."

For some reason Mark Turner failed to feel fear. He knew full well, however, that the Chinese wasn't talking just for effect.

"I am confident," the masked figure went on, "that you can tell us nothing. But it is written that even the wisest of men are often mistaken, and if you can give us the information we are seeking, your life will be spared."

"I have no idea what you're driving at," Turner said. His body was aching and the blood of his wounds was caking in hard clots. The henchmen had evidently been ordered to spare killing him until their master had spoken with him.

"We seek the whereabouts of the sacred dragon," the robed Chinese said.

Turner's reddish eyes burned. "You'll have to kill me," he said, "I've never heard of—"

"White fool," the Chinese hissed at him, "if you know and are keeping this information—" He came a step closer. Judy Landre was watching, her eyes wide. "If you know—"

"I've told you that I don't know!"

Without emotion the masked Chinese gave low, guttural commands to his servants. Turner was dragged about; taken down the hall.

He struggled desperately, but his bonds were tight and the chances of getting free from them were slight. He was carried down the steps and it took only four Chinese to handle him, for the wounds in his body and the loss of blood were making him weaker.

On the first floor of the mansion they

dragged him to the study. The light was snapped on, but before Turner was able to see anything, it went off again. Something slugged brutally across his head, and his knees caved in. Blackness engulfed him.

Tick tock—tick tock—tick tock!

It was incessant, that clock; ticking, ticking—tapping out eternity; echoing, ominous, unending—

Tick tock—tick tock—tick tock!

A WARM, glowing dawn marched up out of the East and made the sparkling sands of the coral beach whiter and more radiant. Turner stirred, moved his body, and then at last, opened his eyes. Dawn and a ticking clock.

He had been left for dead. The room had been dark when they hit him and the blow had not been fatal. Anyway, he was made of hard stuff. Had to be, to remain a detective captain on a Chink infested island. He was alive, that was important. Providence had spared him for the job that was ahead.

Tick tock—tick tock—tick tock!

The first thing his reddish eyes fell upon was the clock in the study. It was a huge thing, probably an heirloom of the Landre family.

Mark Turner's eyes left it and shifted about the room. He sucked in his breath as he saw the corpse that was lying just beneath the window. Struggling, his muscles racked with pain, he raised to a sitting position and stared.

The body was that of Philip Landre. The banker had also been slugged on the head, and Turner guessed that he had been dead all night. One chair was overturned. There was blood on the carpet.

For several minutes the detective captain didn't try to move. Strength was gradually beginning to flow back into his veins and with it came a clearing of his mind. The mystery of the sacred dragon

would be the answer to the riddle of Philip Landre's murder and the kidnaping of Judy.

Turner was pretty much up on his Chinese, because his job demanded it, but he had never heard of a sacred dragon. The obvious trail leading to the murder's solution was that the infuriated Chinese depositors of Landre's bank had come to demand repayment of their loss, and failing to get it, had killed him.

But a sacred dragon and the abduction of Judy Landre didn't fit into that theory. At least, they didn't at the present time.

Turner managed to get to his feet after some effort. His high cheek boned face, van dyke beard, and rugged complexion gave a jaded but grim appearance.

He went and bent down over the body. Landre's face had a contorted expression in its death pose. Blood was caked over his gray hair. The banker was garbed in his smoking robe.

Turner got up and looked about the room. There was paper strewn on the desk, and there was a fountain pen on the floor. The detective captain went over to the desk. On a sheet of paper there were four words in a wild scrawl. They had evidently been written during a struggle, or after Landre had been struck with the blow that caused his death. It had taken him only the barest fraction of a second to write them, but they made Turner's heart leap. A clue perhaps!

His joy faded a little as he made out the writing. Written one atop the other, were four words.

*Time
Strikes
Dead
Fleet*

Time fleeting before death? That would be a senseless message to leave. The thing just didn't make heads or tails. Turner studied the sheet of paper further, then jammed it in his pocket.

He'd have to get back to the station, and then to work. There was plenty of it to be done. Judy Landre had to be found!

LOY CHOW glanced down at his fingernails which were long and tapering; then his narrow slant eyes came up and met Mark Turner's gaze.

"I am indeed sorry to hear of Philip Landre's untimely departure from this earth, but I assure you that I know nothing of the affair." His saffron face a tight mask, he bowed stiffly, "—expecting that which has been told to me by your honorable self."

"You represent the Chinese in Hawaii," Turner said irritably. "You practically run the tongs. You surely must know something—"

Loy Chow shook his head sadly. His narrow eyes were gleaming. "May I be given the death of a thousand tortures for harboring the thought, but when police are baffled over evil Chinese doings, I suggest they solve the case without consulting the leader of the honest Chinese of Honolulu. Each time a new crime occurs I am questioned, and unkind things are said to me."

"You made some pretty sour statements to the press at the time of Landre's bank failure," Turner accused.

"You are quite right," Loy Chow replied, bowing again, "my people lost a considerable amount of money. It was to soothe their aroused feelings that I spoke strongly concerning the mismanagement of Mr. Landre's bank, which allowed a robbery by a gang of hoodlums to make it fail."

"You had an idea that Landre should pay off with his personal cash!" Turner said sharply.

"I knew, just as you did," Loy Chow corrected, "that Mr. Landre had lost everything; that he had no personal savings to speak of. That is why I did

nothing about it. Surely I would not have wanted him murdered."

The room they were in was quite small, and very stuffy. It was a chamber in the old court house given to the Chinese representatives of city government. Another tall Chinese was present. He was standing at the window with his back to the other occupants of the room.

He turned about now as the conversation lessened. He had a narrow hawk-face, and was aid to Loy Chow.

"May Su Ming's humble tongue be cut from his mouth for saying so," he spoke, "but Honolulu police seem very inefficient. Big gang robbed Landre bank over a month ago. No trace of money found yet."

"Su Ming's tongue may not be cut from his mouth, but his jaw might be cracked open if he doesn't shut up," Turner snapped, eyeing the Chinese.

"It is time we were doing something," the Hawaiian alderman said in a high pitched voice.

Loy Chow and Su Ming exchanged significant glances at Turner's expense. The detective captain was at loss for a moment. He lit a cigarette and puffed on it. He turned to Loy Chow again.

"You know more about things Chinese than I do. Ever hear of a sacred dragon?"

Loy Chow stared straight at the detective. A faint smile creased his brownish lips. "Someone has been joking with honorable Mark Turner; the dragon is the sacred symbol of China, but there is no particular one for which a person might seek in quest. And if one did meet a dragon—"

"Never mind the Chinese humor," Turner said disgustedly. "I thought perhaps there might be a common usage for the phrase; at least—" New light leapt into his reddish eyes. He stopped in the middle of his sentence, stroked his van

dyke beard for a moment, then turned and rushed from the room.

He drove to his own home to get the scrap of paper on which the message had been written, and on the way, mentally examined his new theory.

TURNER remembered being told, a long time ago, of the legend that surrounded the Sacred Dragon. Old Wu Sing, the man who had befriended him when he had first come to the islands, had spent long hours acquainting Turner with the ancient folk lore of old China. During long, sultry days and moonlit evenings on the beach, the old man had been Turner's tutor. The conversations had not been consciously educational, but Wu Sing knew so many stories, and told them so well that Turner had become intensely interested. Those days were now of great value to him, for his present occupation demanded that he know almost as much about the Chinese, their life and background, as they did themselves.

The Sacred Dragon, it seems, had been a symbol of protection, and no Chinese in his right mind would dare lay hands on any object that evidently had been entrusted to its care. Superstition had it that anyone who disobeyed this unspoken mandate would die by the sting of a scorpion.

Landre had known this, though, and had—

This put a new light on the whole thing. The words scrawled by Landre were not a message! They were directions!

*Time
Strikes
Dead
Fleet*

Red Eyes Mark Turner studied it closely; this time with a new knowledge and in a different light. When he saw what was there before him, he wanted to kick himself for having not seen it before. It was so very, very obvious. Both the first

words and the last two were maps of direction within themselves!

Which first? Would there be people guarding the sacred dragon? He knew there were not, and decided he would go alone to the first place.

He got up, put the paper in his pocket, and strapped on his .45. He was pretty well taped up, having spent two solid hours at the Queens Hospital after arriving from the Landre murder mansion this morning. His blood was tingling with the thrill a police officer gets when he has put a maze of baffling clues together and is beginning to see the rays of light which will reveal the mystery.

And too, though he was helpless at the moment to do more than send police searching everywhere for her, Turner was anxious about Judy. More anxious than he wished to admit to himself. Recollection of that scene with her bound and gagged and in the hands of Chinese caused insane rage to sweep through him—made him berserk—a human monster grim in his purpose to avenge!

The detective captain whose eyes were burning pools of red; whose grotesque van dyke beard and high, jutting cheek bones made him look like the very devil himself, left his home and ran to his car.

The last two words in Landre's death message were imprinted on his mind:

dead fleet

It was in a barren part of Pearl Harbor, navy base in Hawaii, that three hundred old and rusted ships lay against the half rotted docks. They were deteriorating with every day that passed. Most of them were old time destroyers and submarine chasers. Ghosts of men stalked aboard them; phantoms of days that had seen the shooting sprays of the sea, and heard the chatter of sailors—felt the rocking of a booming gun—trembled with each screaming shell that roared forth. Port holes were crusted with green and decks were

eaten away. Cobwebs and shadows mantled the creaking hulls as the tide drew the secured vessels first one way, and then another.

The huge white moon climbing over Diamond Head shot scurrying beams down over the three hundred dead and discarded bulldogs of the navy. The graveyard of ships was ominous and cold and silent. A marine walked by once each hour, and then when his steps died away, again there was silence.

But suddenly, two rats scurry from their dock home and disappear into crevices. Footsteps creak along the rotted wood. A scraping sound, and someone leaps aboard one of the boats.

TURNER'S thoughts were queer ones. What a perfectly natural hideout for a gang. The navy's obsolete ships. They were never intruded upon.

His blood ran hot. How did they get through the navy yard gates? He answered his own question quickly—they didn't—they came through from the Schofield side of the island where there were no gates.

Turn back now? Go for help? He'd be insane to walk into a trap now. The Chinks numbered too many. But Turner decided he'd go one ship further inboard. If he saw anything he'd turn back for help.

Suddenly a light sprayed into his face!

He whipped out his automatic; raised it. A figure groped forward in the dark and Turner fired. The figure sprawled forward.

Several other silhouetted shadows rushed forward. Turner shot at them calmly and deliberately.

Turner ducked into a nearby doorway. He saw the mob of Chinese on the deck of the ship and fired at them through the port hole.

Some of them reached the doorway and Turner raced out through the opposite

exit. Then he leapt to the deck of the third ship, and into the old destroyer's wardroom, firing as he ran.

He turned now, amazed, and stared into the face of the masked Chinese he'd seen the night before. In the same sweeping glance he saw Judy Landre. She was bound to an old chair. Her eyes were wild—her hair down about her shoulders. Vicious marks on her neck and shoulders indicated that she had been tortured.

The masked Chinese reached for a knife, but Mark Turner was on him in an instant. He slapped the weapon from the Oriental's hand, grabbed his arm, and twisted it in back of him. In the same movement he jammed his gun into the leader's back.

"Call off your coolies!" he rasped.

The Chinese servants were tumbling into the wardroom in pursuit of Turner. The detective captain's body was shielded by that of the masked Oriental.

"Call them off—hear me?"

The robed Chinese snapped some orders to his men and they fell back.

"Tell 'em to drop the smoke rods!" Turner rasped.

The masked man gave another order and the subjects of his command let go of their weapons with bitter reluctance.

Turner's reddish eyes were narrow.

"All right," he said, "now have them take a splash over the side of the ship. All of them!"

"You are unjust. Arrest us if you wish, but to do what you tell me is impossible. Some of those Chinese can't swim and—"

"Do what I say," Turner ordered harshly.

"If I don't—"

"Then you die here and now!"

The masked Oriental almost hissed the orders to the men. Fear leapt into their faces. It was several minutes before the first of the Chinese climbed over the side of the ship and into the water.

"Would you deign to tell this humble slave where you wish him to accompany you?" the robed figure asked.

"To get something you wanted last night," Turner said. "The sacred dragon!"

THE three of them were in the study of the Landre mansion. Judy was standing by the window. The handcuffed Chinese, still wearing the mask over his eyes, stood back by the curtains.

To the detective captain, this room brought back ugly memories. The large clock was still ticking.

Quickly, Turner stepped forward. He tore the mask from the Chinese. He stared into the stolid face of Su Ming. Su Ming—aid to Loy Chow who had been deceiving his master.

Su Ming smiled bitterly and bowed.

"It is written that all things must end."

"So it is," Turner said. "And this affair is just about finished. The set up this time was simple. Working with Philip Landre you arranged to rob his bank and made a huge haul. But Landre double crossed you. He paid you a gangman's wage and kept the bulk of the loot for himself. He had it hidden. You tried to make him tell you where it was located but he refused. You killed him, and thinking that his niece Judy knew, kidnapped her to make her talk."

Turner continued: "You had heard

Landre, in an unguarded moment, refer to the hiding place of the loot as the Sacred Dragon."

"It is written—" Su Ming began.

"Yes," Turner interrupted, "Many things are written—your fate, for instance. Landre wrote four words before he died—*Dead Fleet*, which gave your hideout away, and two other words."

As he spoke, the great clock struck the hour, and the sound echoed through the empty house. Turner reached up with the intention of moving the clock, but at his touch it swung forward.

There behind the clock was a wall safe, and upon the door was a beautifully embossed dragon, the Sacred Dragon of legend, head flung back, fangs bared. The safe opened easily, and Turner hauled out a large suitcase. He laid it on the floor and it burst open, spilling bundles of currency on the floor.

"That explains the Sacred Dragon," Turner said. "The other words that Landre wrote were *Time Strikes*."

With that he swung the clock back into place. There was a faint smile on Judy's face and Turner grinned ironically. The clock continued as it always had, as if nothing had occurred to disturb its eternal routine.

Tick—Tock—Tick—Tock—Tick—Tock.

THE END