

# ***THE FIGHTING FOOL***

*The first of the Captain Trouble series*

By  
**PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN**

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*Beginning a New Series of Stories of an*

# *Captain Trouble*

## **THE FIGHTING FOOL**

By  
**PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN**

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### **I**

**T**HE way Shattuck slid around that rock would have done credit to a fox. But, even as he did so, he knew that he was trapped. There was no other cover near. The rock had concealed him from the camp he'd been stalking. When he'd heard those voices from the rear his quick shift of position meant he'd be seen from below.

The people in these hills had eyes like hawks—eyes like those of their own hunting eagles.

In any case, he was out of rifle range from the camp. That lay about a mile below, in a hidden little valley. He'd been looking at it for the past two hours as he slowly approached it from above. In the high thin air of the mountains the camp lay microscopic—it had been like looking at it through the wrong end of a telescope, everything minutely clear, but too microscopic to be studied.

And he had to study his moves—did Shattuck.



He didn't know where he was. He'd almost forgotten that he was a freeborn American—almost forgotten his name, he'd been called by so many different names in so many different dialects.

**A**LL he knew was that he was somewhere in the midriff of Asia—Himalaya country—Pamirs—Hindu Kush; that one of those gossamer billows of blue and white off there to the north might be the Tien Shan—that is, the Heavenly Mountains, as the Chinese called them.

In a general way, he was headed for China.

China to Shattuck almost meant the United States. He'd passed his boyhood there—in Canton, Shanghai, Tientsin—where his father had lived and traded.

**N**O other countries open to him at all! And perhaps not even China! A man without a country! He had no papers, no relatives. He could hardly think of a living soul who could link him up with his past—who could actually swear that

# American Adventurer in the Orient



he was Pel Shattuck—Pelham Rutledge Shattuck—and not some international tramp who'd merely appropriated that name.

Like a wild animal caught in his dangerous position he blended himself as best he could with the gravel and dead grass at the foot of his rock and there lay completely still.

For a time the voices he had heard were stilled. He might have been seen. Or the intruders might have spied some other game.

From where he lay, without other movement than that of his eyes, Shattuck could view the camp—or the better part of it—through a crotch of his sheepskin coat. No excitement yet!

Whatever happened, he'd have to go into some camp again pretty soon anyway.

He wondered where he was—wondered who these people were.

**T**HESE were some of the questions that had kept him on the scout ever since running away from Juma's camp. The trouble with Juma's

camp was that Juma had a daughter, a girl named Mahree. And not even a man who has got himself in bad with governments will do certain things that a girl might propose.

"*Khabadar!*"—a voice near-by had spoken.

**I**T was a word of warning. It hadn't been addressed to himself. But Shattuck knew that he'd been discovered.

His mind worked quickly. There was no friction even to thought in the thin air of these high altitudes. Down in the camp just now he'd seen a man staring up in his direction. He could guess the rest. The man had signaled to the hunters on the mountain. ...

It wouldn't do to let them take him for a wolf or a bear.

Shattuck began to whine a bit of song that he'd learned in Juma's camp—just a bar or two—then stopped short.

As if by accident he thrust his foxskin cap beyond the edge of the rock. No shot was fired.

He left the cap where it was and took a look from the other side. He saw four men—two of them elderly, with beards, and all of them slant-eyed. The quartet were fanned out and had their rifles ready, evidently in a maneuver to surround him.

"Let us drink tea," Shattuck offered, in one of the last phrases he'd picked up in Juma's camp.

It was an invitation to a parley, an offer to talk—they'd get the purport of it whether they understood his speech or not. He recovered his cap. He stepped from behind his rock with his own rifle ready.

"Who are you?" one of the bearded elders asked.

His language wasn't like the Kirghiz dialect of Juma's people, but it was close enough to it to be understood.

"Ameriki," Shattuck answered.

He smiled and raised his right hand in salutation. He'd dropped his rifle into the crook of his left arm but he'd be able to use it, he guessed, if he had to.

The four stared. They were a wild looking lot, dressed in sheepskin and felt. The two elders, those who were bearded, had their left ears pierced and ornamented with large turquoise earrings. None of them looked as if he'd been washed or had had his hair cut since the day of his birth.

As for that, Shattuck felt that neither had he himself.

The four converged closely as Shattuck approached. There was an air of tenseness about them that Shattuck didn't like. They were like strange dogs closing in on a dog they'd selected for a kill.

In an instant Shattuck had swung his rifle back to ready again and had them covered—ready to fire from the hip.

The movement was so swift that they were caught unprepared. He gave them a quick survey, then addressed the elder who carried the best weapon—that alone was enough to indicate he stood higher than these others.

"Let the guns fall," he ordered. "Quickly! Then, maybe, we shall talk like friends."

## II

THERE is a sort of universal language, more of looks than of words or gestures—the sort of communication that had already thrown Shattuck on his guard. In the same way he could grasp the thought of these four now as they let their weapons fall.

"Here is a mad fool! We'll get him later!"

Shattuck pushed the four guns into a pile with his foot. One was a modern sporting rifle—English, he surmised. The others looked like copies of older models—clumsy imitations, but effective enough, such as might have been made in Lhasa or Kabul.

Even with his eyes down he surprised a movement from one of the younger men.

The emergency was so sharp that Shattuck spoke up in English.

"Do you want to die?"

The young man had started to signal the camp in the valley. He'd done so already, perhaps. With their telescopic eyes most of these hill-men could flash signals or read them across amazing distances.

There was a lull, then the leader of the four spoke up.

"*Huzoor*——"

THAT was vernacular, an address of respect; but the rest of it was coming in English—as slowly, as creakingly, as a door forced open on rusty hinges, but English.

"Excellence, we mean you no harm; and I take it that you mean us no harm."

"Who are you?"

"Your servant, Tsarong!"

The humility was too great to be sincere. Shattuck looked the old man in the eye. The gaze that met his was veiled and shrewd.

"Who are your people?"

"Just a few poor Changpas."

Changpas! People from the Chan-tang!

As the meaning of this simple statement flashed into Shattuck's mind it was all that he could do to suppress a start. Even so he divined an answering start in the eyes of the old man.

The Changpas were Tibetans—the people of the *tang*, the desert plains of Tibet's Far West. It was an affair of Tibet and Russia that had got

Shattuck into trouble with the Cheka, the Soviet Secret Service.

Shattuck smiled pleasantly.

"Sit down, Father Tsarong," he invited; "and tell your friends to sit down. Thus! You four sit down with your backs to the camp and I'll sit here in front of you. Like that, should you see any other of your people coming from behind me, you can signal them not to shoot—as they might miss and shoot you instead."

Old man Tsarong hesitated.

"We are unworthy of that honor," he said. "Only our lord, the general, is worthy such an honor."

"What you say is perfectly true," Shattuck replied. "Send for him."

"Send for him! He is the governor of the entire Chantang!"

"Father, do as I say. Tell him you've met an earth demon who knows everything. I know all about those Russian arms you've come to this valley to get. Dorje-Pamo, the pig-faced goddess, told me about them herself."

The old man was stricken.

He mumbled an order and the three others—including the other elder himself—were for setting off together. But Shattuck stopped the rush. Only one was to go, and he was to be the best runner among them.

As the runner started off down the mountainside, Shattuck could see that there was already some alarm in the camp. A string of yaks, horses, sheep and goats had begun to straggle in from behind a shoulder of the hill, driven by women and children.

"Are you not, then, English?" Tsarong asked.

"Ameriki," Shattuck replied.

HE could see that the word meant nothing to the Tibetans. To them all white foreigners were English—that, or possibly Oross, Russian.

The three Tibetans sat in front of him and below him at a respectful distance, facing him, their backs to the camp. Shattuck also had folded his legs and seated himself on the ground, the four surrendered rifles piled in front of him and his own weapon across his knees.

The queer thought came to him that he was no longer an outcast and a man without a country, after all. He was now as a king seated on a throne.

The throne was a mountain. He had an arsenal. He had subjects who looked at him with awe, speculating, like other subjects, on the divinity of kings.

There was something about the vast panorama that surrounded him, that stimulated this thought—stimulated it to the point of sheer craziness. Yet, hereabouts, there were still legends of Alexander the Great, of Ghengis Khan and Kubla Khan and Tamerlane.

There was a persistent legend that from this part of the world would come the next great King of the World.

The three Tibetans were watching him. He was watching them.

"I am Pelham Rutledge Shattuck," he announced slowly.

He was making the announcement for himself as much as he was for them. It sounded strange to hear his own name spoken like that, even by his own voice, here in this Himalayan space. It was like some sort of a mantram—a spell. The name went vibrating off into the blue of Central Asia.

The Tibetans looked puzzled, even old Tsarong.

"Shattuck! Get that?"

There was a respectful murmur.

"Repeat it," Shattuck told them. "Shattuck!"

They tried it—first Tsarong, the linguist, then the others. They also seemed to think that it was some sort of a spell.

"*Sha-dak!*" "*Sha-dak!*" "*Sha-dak!*"

It might have been a spell, at that. As they pronounced it the name became a Chinese word meaning "trouble": Shadak.

They were repeating it with honorary titles added:

"Shadak-la!"

"Shadak-beg!"

"Shadak-khan!"

"My God," Shattuck muttered. "That's who I am, all right!"

In the silence of his thought it was as if an echo of silent thunder had come rolling back upon him out of space, calling him by a name to which he was fated:

"*Captain Trouble!*"

## III

IT may have been what some would have called just a coincidence, but as that new name of his vibrated in Shattuck's thought with a queer sensation of something magical about it, a din broke out in the camp below.

*"Shadak!"*

It sounded like trouble. It was a din of horns and gongs, drums, a shouting. The whole camp, it seemed, dogs included, had begun to turn out with its full capacity of noise.

Shattuck never winced. He'd become used to a lot of things since his escape from the Cheka in Samarkand. He'd become used to a lot of things before that.

He'd gone to Russia as a mining expert—especially as one who spoke Chinese—expecting to be sent to Manchuria. Instead of that, through some error, perhaps, he'd found himself switched to Bokhara. The error, it turned out, was that he'd been falsely accused of pro-Japanese activities. It was true that he'd lived in Japan for a while.

In Samarkand he'd broken open some boxes which should have contained some overdue mining machinery. The machinery turned out to be machine-guns instead, and destined for Chantang.

Suddenly, it had become desirable that he leave the country. He was on the Cheka's black list. He'd always wanted, anyway, to see Afghanistan; and the devil was there in the person of a former Afghan wazir, Michmander by name, to speed him on his way.

Michmander knew of certain lost mines in the Hindu-Kush. It was knowledge that had to be kept, of course, from the thieving government at Kabul, the Afghan capital.

Shattuck was willing.

HE stuck to Michmander in a trek that took them into mountains not marked—except vaguely and incorrectly—on any map. And they'd had a small army of cutthroats and all-round soldiers of fortune with them before they were through—Shattuck himself the only white man in the lot.

They'd penetrated to the depths of that great upheaval known as "the Purdah Lady"—"K-2"—

a mountain as veiled and as hard to get to, that is, as a lady shut up in a harem.

And there they'd had a battle with wild natives who were armed with spears and long-handled hatchets.

It was a great battle.

Shattuck had seen almost all of it. And he must have done his share, for the last thing that Michmander—he who had led him into this mess—ever said to him was to call him a fighting fool.

Michmander—having been exiled from Afghanistan long ago—had passed enough time in America to have picked up some American slang.

He was laughing as he said it, in the thick of the fight, and trying to reload his automatic—a difficult job because he'd lost a couple of fingers; and Shattuck himself was swaying on his feet and covered with blood.

*"You fighting fool!"*

One of the few supreme compliments ever paid to any man; for, just as Michmander said it, a long handled hatchet came swishing down and split Michmander's head like a melon.

How the fight ended Shattuck didn't clearly know. Anyway, there were parts of it that he was willing to forget.

But he had a vague idea that he'd lived for a while in a cave where long ranks of stone gods a hundred feet high looked down on small brown men bearing saucerlike lamps.

After that, there followed months—it might have been years so far as he knew then—of wandering, always wandering and always amid mountains.

When he emerged from this daze or trance it was to find he'd been adopted by Juma, the Kirghiz chief, who was almost blind. He cured Juma's blindness by simple cleanliness and an application of boracic acid. He'd worked up the wash himself from borax he'd found in the bed of a dry lake.

IN the meantime he'd found out that he had been barred from India. The Government of India was taking no chances with tramps who'd messed things up in both Russia and Afghanistan. Yet he might have told those folks at Delhi about those boxed machine-guns had they let him in.

Or again he might have stayed on with Juma. He liked the old man and Juma had given him a rifle and ammunition, considerably more valuable than their weight in gold.

But the girl Mahree—fifteen, slender, full-breasted, with eyes like a fawns'—had broken an apricot in two and offered him half.

**T**HE din from the camp had assumed something like order and processional movement, swelling louder, coming nearer—horns and gongs, clanging cymbals, that tumult of shouting. The voices of women and children split through all this now and then with a shrill like that of fifes.

There were, Shattuck judged, three or four hundred persons in the mob. Most of the noise seemed to come from a solid phalanx of men in the center. It wasn't long before he could see that these men were roughly uniformed in long red robes. At first he thought that these men were masked. But in a little while he could see that what he'd taken to be masks were simply their own blackened faces.

Somewhere he'd read about those blackened faces—the fighting monks of the Tibetan lamaseries. Even their name popped up. He repeated it:

*"Dok-dokpa!"*

He kept his air of unconcern. But he decided that, at the first show of battle, he'd seize old Father Tsarong over there, and hold him as both shield and hostage.

"They have heard," said Tsarong, "what your presence has said about Dorje-Pamo. They wish to honor the messenger of the Pig-Faced Goddess."

It was simply stated, but it sounded like irony to Shattuck. He had an idea that old Tsarong was not so simple as he would have it appear. Nor could Tsarong have been so unimportant, either. The other elder had placed himself slightly back of Tsarong. The beardless one was frankly remote.

"Stand up and face them, Tsarong La," said Shattuck.

"Your presence——"

"Stand up and face them! Signal them to remain where they are."

There was something besides blood that had begun to beat through Shattuck's arteries. It was

always that way when a fight threatened—especially if it was apt to be a fight against overwhelming odds. It was a sort of lulling warmth. It was as sweet as a bugle call to a cavalry horse. It was a premonition.

As Tsarong still hesitated—pretending not to hear—pretending not to understand—Shattuck saw a glint of something in the old man's eyes that confirmed the premonition in his veins.

**F**ROM where he sat, Shattuck jumped.

It was a trick that Juma's young fighting bucks had taught him. They'd be sitting crosslegged on the ground—they might have been sitting like that for hours; and then—presto!—they could fling themselves to right or left, or forward or backward, as if their legs had been springs.

As Shattuck sprung, it was exactly as if a fragment of that swelling din from down the hillside had detached itself and had almost fallen upon him.

He came down crouching at the side of old Tsarong. As he did so he whirled and fired without taking aim. An instant afterward—and always afterward—it seemed to him that he must have seen what was coming up behind him with some sort of eyes different from those in the front of his head.

He'd as if seen that enemy sneaking upon him from behind.

Felt boots, red cloak, black face—it was a giant of a man, and he'd been on the point of cutting down on him with one of the biggest swords that Shattuck had ever seen.

The bullet from Shattuck's rifle had taken the giant through the shoulder. He was twisted back and around like a big tree hit near the top by lightning. The sword got a jerk that sent it spiraling like a boomerang for a good twenty yards.

"You next?" grunted Shattuck.

And even while this was happening he had caught an arm about the old man Tsarong's shoulders.

To Tsarong it must have been like an embrace from Death.

"Shadak—Shadak Khan!" Tsarong squeaked.

In the confusion of the moment the pronouncing of that name reached Shattuck like a

happy portent—a sure enough mantram.

He was aware that Tsarong wasn't the only one who'd pronounced that name. So had that other elder—also perhaps the beardless boy. The fact that they had joined in the cry—some intonation of horror and pleading in their voices—gave Shattuck an idea.

"Ai-ya!" he laughed. "You thought to fool me, Old Man Tsarong. Why, you're the Governor yourself!"

#### IV

**A**LL this had taken place in full view of that mob of dokpas and civilians coming up from the camp. They'd been coming pretty fast. There'd been a crescendo to their racket culminating in a shriek and clang that was like the explosion of a high-powered shell.

The Goliath of the sword was staggering around in a narrowing circle like a dog looking for a place to lie down. Down he went—coiled, then straightened out. He was summoning all that vast strength of his to become a man again—become the hero he must have felt himself when he'd swung up that big sword of his to kill an earth demon, no less, and his whole tribe looking on.

It was a swift impression that Shattuck got—but detailed, one apt to be lasting. That big face of his, shining with grease and blacking, contorted with terror more than pain, was nothing human.

**T**HEN Shattuck saw that the big man had been merely the first of several. There must have been a dozen swordsmen headed in his direction.

In one respect, at any rate, his strategy had been correct. There wasn't a single gun in sight. Tsarong must have seen to that. Unwilling to take a chance on any dokpa marksmanship, he'd given his order accordingly when he'd sent his runner back to the camp.

Shattuck, still embracing Tsarong, gave an order:

"Tell your swordsmen to retire—" The old man panted, but did not speak.

"—else I'll kill you before their eyes!"

"The victory is God's!" Tsarong panted—slowly, fatalistically—in English. He raised his voice and shrilled something in Tibetan.

Just an affair of seconds all this was—seconds that galloped like horses in a race, but each horse of a second mounted by some watchful jockey that recorded every move.

"You haven't answered me, Tsarong La," said Shattuck softly.

"Wherefore, O Shadak Khan, when you know all things?"

"It's you, the Governor of Chan-tang."

"I am but half the Governor, as you see, O Shadak Khan. The other half is he who sat beside me. Each district has two governors."

Shattuck eyed the other bearded and earringed elder. He'd been sitting there in a white trance.

"And what's your name?" Shattuck asked.

The old man merely gasped like a carp out of water. He wanted to answer something. But he was afraid. He hadn't understood.

"Don't you understand even the language of heaven?" Shattuck asked in his best Chinese.

"*Kuan-hua!*"

The stricken elder recovered himself in a gulp of amazement that made him forget his fears.

"The Mandarin dialect," was what he meant.

"My lord speaks even the language of the Sons of Heaven!"

"I am, indeed, your lord, Old Uncle," Shattuck told him rapidly in Chinese. "And make no mistake. I have proved it. I am a spirit merely disguised as a Hairy Face. Which is the superior of you twain?"

"My brother, Tsarong, is the elder."

"Doesn't he speak the *Kuan-hua*?"

"Inadequately. While I went East, he went West."

**"T**ELL Moon Face, here," said Shattuck, "to go get such help as is needed to carry away this crippled dokpa. He is to be cared for kindly."

Moon Face was sped on his way.

"And before he returns," Shattuck hurried on, "I'll tell you that both of you old men are deserving death. But see! Instead of that, here while all your people are looking on, I embrace you both. To him who went West I speak the language of the West. To him that went East I speak the language of the East. Who then, am I?"

"Verily, you are Shadak Khan!"



"I am Shadak Khan! I am Captain Trouble! Have you not heard—hasn't the Dalai Lama himself heard—that a new king is coming into the world? I am he! I've come to rule the world for a while! My name is—Shadak Khan! My name is—Captain Trouble!"

Something of this talk must have reached the crowd down the hill. It may have done this partly through that curious intuition of crowds—especially of crowds already incandescent and annealed by excitement. Moon Face, the messenger, may have spread something of it as he went down seeking help for the wounded man.

A DOZEN lamas not of the fighting sort but regular *ge-longs*—the superior sort who'd had brains enough to pass their examinations, and showing it in their faces—had responded to the call. The appearance of them gave Shattuck another idea.

"And is there not one among these," he asked, "who speaks either the language of the Chiling-ky-me?"—he'd put the question in English, but he'd used the only Tibetan word he knew. It made a pretty flourish.

*Chiling-ky-me!*

Old Juma had taught him that word. For Juma had conducted robber raids off and on into pretty nearly every section of the high country, even into Tibet. The word meant foreigners—that is, the English.

Before old Tsarong could pull himself together to answer Shattuck, it was another's voice who answered in English:

"Sir, my—father—"

Shattuck, just at the sound of that voice, felt a tingling thrill, he didn't know why. He didn't have time to ask. He'd raised his eyes and had seen the speaker—a lean face and a shaven head that might have belonged to some young Roman general. Even his tattered robe of a Tibetan lama might have been a toga.

The voice was forcing a calm that the brilliant eyes belied.

"Sir, my—father—was—American!"

## V

IT was Shattuck's turn to exert all his will at self-control. The other lamas were staring. So were the two old governors. Shattuck could feel that they were. But he kept his eyes on that soberly flashing face of the young lama who'd spoken.

"Brother," he said, "what is your name?"

"My Tibetan name is Champela."

"You have another?"

There was a long pause.

"John Day."

It had been his father's name, this young lama explained. His father had been a geologist who'd married his own Lalla Rookh in the Vale of Cashmere. They'd both been killed by an avalanche in that gorge called by the Tibetans "the Four Devil Pass."

It was also Champela himself who referred to his mother as Lalla Rookh. He'd read the poem as a boy.

"So did I," said Shattuck.

To Shattuck, after his months of exile, it was as if he'd stumbled onto a lamasery here in the heart of Asia floating the American flag.

While the other lamas carried the wounded black-face away, Shattuck deserted the two old governors and drew Champela aside.

"John Day," he said, "are you free?"

Champela reflected.

"As free as you are, Shadak Khan," he replied.

Shattuck let the title ride. There'd been no hint of mockery in it. If anything, there'd been something just the opposite. It was as if the title had been confirmed by a prophet.

"You're not held by any vows?"

"None but those I have made to myself."

"No chief lama is your master?"

"Not even the Dalai Lama himself, Shadak Khan."

"Why don't you call me by my right name, John Day?"

"I believe that I am calling you by your right name, Shadak Khan. Your coming has been predicted since a thousand years—since twice a thousand years—"

"You mean?"

"A scourge of God, perhaps—a Shadak Khan—a Captain Trouble. He has a thousand names. But so has the sun. So has Maitreya—He Who Will Come—"

They were standing there on the high slope of what has been called the Roof of the World. The sun was going down. And with one of those sudden transformations of light so common in mountain country the snow peaks had turned to flaming gold.

"You be my prime minister, John Day," said Shattuck.

He'd still intended his proposal, even then, to sound something like a joke. But it didn't sound like a joke at all. It was as if the very mountains were celebrating the event. This was something that had been predicted since, twice a thousand years.

"I'll be your prime minister," Champela told him.

"Shake!"

**T**HE young lama might not have caught the meaning of the word in that particular sense, but he was quick enough to understand the extended hand.

"Now I'm not free," he said.

"Neither am I."

"No man is free from his destiny—and this, our meeting, also was predestined—perhaps since the beginning of the world."

There was a barbecue in the little valley of the camp that night, though not in the American style. The Tibetans like to eat their meat boiled—or raw; washed down with gallons of tea and rancid butter, or *chang*, the beer of the country, and *arrak*, a whisky distilled from the beer.

The dung fires seethed and spit blue flames.

There was singing, dancing and fights, before it was fairly dark.

The people were celebrating the advent of Shadak Khan. They weren't quite sure yet just what this signified. But it had something to do with Dorje-Pamo, the Pig-Faced Goddess. They knew that much. And that was enough. The way to please old Dorje-Pamo was to gorge and souse, brawl and make love. . . .

But John Day, prime minister of Shadak Khan, wouldn't let Shattuck partake of the feast—not even as a guest of the governors.

"They'll fill you with aconite," he said, "you'd be dead before dawn."

Most Tibetans were ardent poisoners in times of great emergency.

There was an early moon. In its ghostly light a cavalcade of ponies left the scene of the camp and wound its way further up the valley.

Shattuck was in the midst of it, in the place of greatest safety and honor. Those in front and those following, so far as he could see, were white lamas like Champela.

IN the moonlight it was hard to think of Champela as John Day, American. For that matter, Shattuck found it hard to think of himself as himself. He was something else—something bigger than himself—something predestined since the beginning of the world.

Shadak Khan!

Captain Trouble!

## VI

**B**Y the light of this same moon a caravan of more than three hundred camels came padding back into this same secret valley from the outlying desert. Unknown to Shattuck it was this caravan for which the warring Tibetans had been waiting.

The camel-bells made music in the night. It was a rhythmic music to which the swishing feet of the stock kept time like the feet of tireless dancers. It would have been hard to find a better equipped or a better conducted caravan anywhere.

Every man was armed. Even the camel-pullers were armed.

Any old caravan man would have spotted the sort of caravan this was without looking twice.

"*T'u fang-tze!*"

Opium-runners! Caravans like this brought the precious "white opium" of Persia through the Gobi to all points east. But even an old Gobi man might have been puzzled by the loads and the haste of this present caravan if not by the trails it followed.

No opium-train ever followed the regular roads anyway.

But these camels were carrying full loads—compact and strongly boxed. Arms! That would

be sure. But the trail could lead nowhere except back into the wild and thinly populated Chantang country of Tibet's Far West.

Along a smooth bit of going the owner of the outfit, mounted on a nimble black pony, drew alongside of his caravan-master, who was riding half asleep and half awake on the pick of the camels. The relations of owner and master were about like those of owner and captain on a ship at sea.

They were speaking Mongolian, a language that had been largely developed in desert places. Their voices were no louder than the occasional bubbling of the camel the caravan-master rode.

"We'll soon arrive at the turn-off of the Thorny Well Trail, Big Man," the owner of the outfit said.

"What of it, Duke?"

"It is a short way and a safe way."

"To where we're going?"

"No, Big Man, to Kansu."

"We're not going to Kansu, Duke. We're going to the Lesser Valley of the Soaring Meditation."

"I can't help thinking about how much more money these arms would bring in China than they would in Tibet."

The caravan-master yawned and belched.

"Big Man, I mean it."

"Mean what?"

"The difference in price would enrich us both. General Hokwa is in Kansu with all the gold he collected during his last campaign."

"May it give him inflammation of the bowels!"

"But Kansu needs these machine-guns. Tibet doesn't."

"Search me!" groaned Big Man, or words to that effect.

HE dropped his head on his chest and pretended to be sleeping again. The owner of the outfit still ambled on at his side.

"Big Man," he said, "when they've got you back there in the hills, how do you know that those louse-breeding Tibetans are going to pay you?"

"I don't know it."

"What then?"

"They'll pay first or they don't get the arms."

"They may take them anyway."

"From this bunch? Don't make me laugh? This bunch? I haven't got a man in my string who hasn't been slitting throats for the past ten years! We're a bunch of fighting wildcats."

## VII

WE'LL need a fighting-man like you," said the old abbot, as Shattuck stood before him.

John Day translated the Tibetan into perfect English.

"They are bringing fighting-machines into the Little Valley," the abbot went on in a whispering monotone, "and they that bring the machines are fighting men."

The abbot was very old. His eyes were so glazed that they appeared to be sightless. He seemed to be talking in his sleep about things that he saw in his sleep.

He sat cross-legged on a cushioned bench back of a carved teakwood table. On the table were a covered teacup and a bell. The table was like an altar. When the abbot was silent he sat so still it was easy to imagine that he was an image in a temple.

He was silent for a long time, then he spoke again.

"The spirit of revolution has entered Tibet. There are foolish men planning to put a king in the place of the Dalai Lama."

John Day translated. He saw that Shattuck was about to ask a question, but he raised a warning hand.

It was as if the movement had struck a spark of life from the image presented by the abbot. What he said was:

"I will answer your question, Captain Trouble."

And Shattuck knew then beyond all doubt—as he'd already been prepared to believe—that he was in the presence of an authentic Bogdo—a Living Buddha. Although the old seer continued to speak in Tibetan it was as if a skillful painter were now casting up a picture on some invisible canvas of the air.

"Along toward the next peak-shining time"—and Shattuck could see the light of the rising sun

along a mountain-crest while it was still night in the valleys.

"—they will arrive at the narrow place of this valley of ours called the Jaws of the Wolf."

Shattuck would recognize that narrow gorge when he saw it—he would recognize it from what he was seeing now.

SEVERAL times the Bogdo seemed to be on the point of speech again, and each time that he did so Shattuck caught some fleeting vision in which the movement and the figures were confused by a red mist. Each time when the red mist was shaping itself into something definite, the Bogdo made an erasing gesture in front of him with his slender hand and the unformed picture disappeared.

Finally he murmured two words, which John Day translated:

"Acquire merit!"

The Bogdo reached out and touched his teacup as if he were about to drink. It was a ceremonial gesture meaning that the audience was ended. . . .

The Soaring Meditation Lamasery of the Lesser Valley—as the place was known—was like a series of setback houses against a steep mountain slope. As Shattuck and his new prime minister came out on an upper terrace they both could tell by the stars that the night was already far gone.

"It is time that I hit the road," said Shattuck.

"Pel—Captain—"

"Make it Pel."

"I'm going with you."

YOU'RE not. I'm Captain Trouble. I'm even the Fighting Fool. I saw a blood-red mist when the Bogdo talked. You're not a man of blood."

"The camp is debauched and drunk. You'll have no one to help you."

"So much the better."

"You can't go alone. These are gun-runners—all fighting men."

"His holiness, the Bogdo, saw me fighting them there alone. So did I. That's why he mentioned that place where one man can turn them back. Is there a horse in the stables with a chestnut coat and a white mane?"

"Torang! The abbot's own! If he showed him to you in the vision he meant you to have him."

For an interval John Day closed his eyes. During that interval he had become Champela, the mystic desciple of Buddha again. He opened his eyes with a changed expression.

"I have just received a message myself from the Bogdo," he said.

"What about?"

"I'm not sure myself. Follow me."

They went down a dozen flights of steps as narrow and as steep, as ladders. Most of the time they were in almost complete darkness. Only here and there a butter-lamp burned.

They came into a dusky temple room and there, without hesitation, Champela, again the mystic, went over to where a monumental statue of Buddha reared its height and breadth into the shadows from a breast-high platform. The front of this platform Champela raised like the lid of a coffer. Into this receptacle he stood gazing for a few seconds with a rapt attention.

Then he drew out a long object swathed in fold after fold of silk.

"What is it?" Shattuck whispered.

The young lama also whispered, but his voice was thrilling.

"Something else the Bogdo is sending you—the sword of Kubla Khan!"

## VIII

WHEN Chief Juma awoke to the fact that his adopted son, Dak (the nearest he'd ever got to Shattuck) had put the wind between them he was very disconsolate.

Like many another hillman, nature had been generous to him in the matter of height. He was all of six feet seven in his well-worn chaplies, the sandals he stuck to in winter as in summer. And physically he was as tough as a bundle of rattan. But he was at an age when he was prone to go over and over the same story time and again.

And now that "Dak" was gone, he was worse than ever in this respect. Formerly he'd had a number of favorite stories—how he'd killed this or that blood enemy, how he'd robbed whole caravans single-handed.

But now he could think of only that one story.

He'd come on this crazy young sahib (Shattuck) back in the hills being more or less neglected by some roaming Kazaks. After all, even Kazaks may treat a crazy man no worse than a dog. And he was about to pass up the incident when, by mere chance, he learned from a renegade Afghan the sort of battle the lad had put up against great odds while trying to raid a government gold mine.

Thereupon, in the hope of merit in heaven and also, perhaps, a few honest rupees from the sahibs to whom this lad evidently belonged, he'd sought to turn "Dak" over to the English. But the cow-eaters wouldn't have him at any price.

He'd done something that had made him skip out of the country of the Oross, the English had said. Then he'd got into this battle in Kafiristan.

After that, Juma wouldn't have parted with the boy anyway—not at any price. He'd nurtured the lad like his own child; He'd spent a year's income on prayers and medicines for him. As a result, the boy came out of his dream. And having come out of his dream he'd put the healing touch on Juma's own eye-trouble.

**J**UMA couldn't understand it. They'd loved each other like father and son. Why had "Dak" put the wind between them?

And so it went on and on, day after day. Until the mother of the girl Mahree came and told Juma the tale she'd learned from Mahree herself.

"Now, by Allah and all the fiends of Gehenna," said Juma, "had Dak but whispered it to me I'd given him the girl as readily as I would have given him anything else I won. Didn't he restore my sight?"

After that, he kept his band on the move. He was looking for "Dak." Over high passes and into valleys he'd almost forgotten, into villages where there were unsettled blood-claims against him, into forbidden temples and lamaseries—there was no place where Juma wouldn't go in the pursuit of that strange search of his.

To make matters worse, Mahree was getting older. Also she was gaining in beauty. He'd never gone in for purdah nonsense. He was able to take care of his women. But he'd have to wrap the girl up in a *burgua* at that, if he wanted to keep her for

"Dak." He was getting higher and higher offers for her all the time.

Then, one day, Juma came on a fakir sitting naked on a glacier. And the devout neighbors assured Juma that the holy man had sat like that, unmoving since the last new moon. That meant the fakir had suffered killing frost for more than ten days. Yet he showed not the slightest ill effects from it. The man was holy.

When Juma went to see him, the holy man came out of his period of meditation and said:

"He whom you call your son is near death."

Juma said: "Sick?"

"No! In bloody battle!"

"Praise God, at least for that," said Juma. "Where?"

"I see—wait!—a lamasery in a little valley—a cleft between two hills—and there thy son is as one against a hundred——"

The sadhu stopped as if he'd never spoken at all.

"Where?" screamed Juma. "Or I'll tear you——"

The sadhu looked up at him unmoved. And Juma, for the first time in his life, began to quaver.

"Where, O holy one? See, I am getting old!"

The holy one looked at him with compassion. He made a forward movement with his hand to indicate a direction.

"That way—until the sun goes down!"

**J**UMA turned and strode away as he stood. He didn't have his gun. He hadn't dared carry it into the presence of the holy one as he'd wanted to be sure of having his questions answered. But he had his knife. And the hills were rich in rocks of throwing and hammering size.

He'd covered a mile before he discovered that he was followed. It was that curse of a female, the cause of it all, the girl Mahree.

He tried to drive her back.

But to his amazement and her own, she defied him.

"Since when," she shrilled, "is a woman forbidden to fight for her man?"

## IX

WITH Torang between his knees and the sword of Kubla Khan held close to his breast Shadak Khan, Captain Trouble, the Fighting Fool, was off to fight he didn't know exactly what.

Long ago he had known someone called Pelham—Rutledge—Shattuck. The name kept time to Torang's swift but easy lope. Pelham—Rutledge—Shattuck—

But it wasn't he—it wasn't he—who'd sat on a mountain throne and looked into the eyes of his subjects. It wasn't he who'd stood in the presence of a reincarnated Buddha and heard his fortune told. It wasn't he who rode an abbot's horse down a long dark valley with the sword of a great warlord against his breast.

No, those were pages from the life of Shadak Khan—Captain Trouble—Fighting Fool—

There came to the reincarnation who was himself the sharp pang of a realizing thought. The thought was this—that he might be riding to his death. He remembered the red mist—the half-seen astral pictures that the Bogdo had wiped away with his slender white hand, the old man's final words:

“Acquire merit!”

How? If death was the way, he'd take his chance!

He looked up just in time to see a meteor slide across the sky. It wouldn't be so bad to go like that.

He felt a sense of elation. It was as if the sword against his breast were coming to life—taking on a warmth of its own. It had no scabbard. The blade was a long strong scimitar, yet so exquisitely balanced to the hilt it could be handled like a wand.

He flashed it about his head. It sang.

To that faint note Torang let out a link or two of speed. In this light the gelding's dark body was invisible. His white mane and tail glinted along like a pair of detached specters.

It was this dash of white in the dark that had given the horse his name. Torang!—the first glint of daybreak; a high cloud shining white while the earth was dark.

There was a cloud like that hanging over the easterly summits when Shattuck passed the camp

where, last night, the two old governors would have given him aconite. He spat in their direction.

IT was a gesture as much for all their gorging, guzzling, lecherous herd of human swine as it was for them. And these were the men who'd barter for a revolution!

Before you could revolute a land you had to revolute yourself!

So said the heir to the blade of Kubla Khan.

The thought was still with him when the valley suddenly twisted and went into a corridor like that of some overwhelming ruin. He was at the very lips of the wolf's open jaws.

He didn't know how to pray but some instinct was telling him that the moment was solemn and that he ought to do something.

He reined in Torang, with a swift hand. He raised the sword of the great khan Kubla straight up above his head. His head went down. For a moment he was thinking of the strange John Day.

“I sure would be glad to be good enough,” he whispered, “to have him not as a prime minister—you're crazy!—but merely as a friend.”

A moment later he was stirred from his reverie by some faint spasm of nervous excitement that ran through Torang's lithe frame. It was like a faint current of electricity, a silent telephone call. Torang had arched his neck. His slender ears were focusing on a distant sound.

A moment later, Shattuck was hearing the sound himself—the faint, far-off clink and clank of camel bells.

## X

THE gorge of “The Wolf”—literally the throat—ran between towering cliffs for a twisted mile, and pretty bad going all the way. After the primordial earthquake had riven the mountains apart, a stream—or recurrent streams—had scoured out the bottom, leaving a debris of footless boulders, causing a cave-in here and a dike there and a pit like an elephant trap somewhere else.

The caravan-master knew all this. He had been through the gorge time and again before. It used to be part of the regular opium route until the old Bogdo of the Soaring Meditation Lamasery

put an end to it.

The Bogdo was known to have great powers. Otherwise he would have "taken the aconite" a long time ago. There had often been talk among the caravan-master and his band that they could raid the lamasery and make their fortunes at it.

The place was isolated. There wasn't a drunken, brawling, dok-dokpa about the place—not a fighting man of any kind. And it was generally known that into the mountain back of every monastery the treasure caves were being dug deeper and deeper every year. That sort of thing had been going on for centuries. The treasure of even a rundown old lamasery like that of the Soaring Meditation would be enough to buy Japan.

But they'd never tried to make a raid. They didn't dare. The Bogdo had a reputation of being in league with certain ghosts.

It was that matter of ghosts as much as the uncertain footing of the gorge that had caused the caravan-master—a pastmaster in timing, like all good smugglers—to bring his weary train to the outer mouth of the gorge just at the "peak-shining" hour.

No more ghosts after peak-shining. And there would be light enough, although night got clogged in the narrow defile and stuck there like a fog until late morning.

He didn't dare halt now, even for a minute. Camels were peculiar creatures. You could keep them going and going—as he had this time—

*"Kwa-chi-cheng!"*

ONE forced march on top of another. But let up on them, after a race like that, and the beasts would flop down and die in their tracks. Besides, inside the valley there were good grazing and water. Outside, there was none.

Still in the lead and only half awake the caravan-master pushed on into the gorge. He'd scarcely entered it before there was a clattering of hoofs and he saw a lone horseman in the shadows ahead.

From the moment the caravan-master saw this man he felt the approach of trouble—a dark horse with a white mane and tail. Then, to a sharp increase of his trouble, he saw that the man in front of him was unquestionably white.

The man came ambling toward him at a good

swift track and didn't stop or speak until the caravan-master's own camel stopped.

"I know you," said the man on the horse. His Chinese was that of Pechili, with a good snap to it. "You're Wong Tajen." It was as if to say, "Wong the Big Man."

Wong was beginning to simmer.

"This is no place to halt my caravan," he said.

He guessed the fellow might be a Russian. He'd heard about big fights between opposing clans of the Oross beyond the Gobi.

"I'm halting it, Big Man."

"Who are you?"

"Don't talk to me from a camel. Dismount!"

Big Man's ears were picking up tell-tale sounds from back of him as squad after squad of camels came to a halt.

"Dismount and send your camel ahead or all the camels will be lying down on you. You know that, Fathead."

Wong did know it. He'd been handling camels for the better part of thirty years. But not for twenty years had anyone dared call him *ta-tou*, "fathead," except a fresh tax-collector whom later he'd slowly killed.

WITH a curse and grunt he rolled himself from the riding camel he was on. The beast was already smelling grass and water and lurched ahead. The camel that followed also lurched. As it did so, something amazing happened. It shed its load—one heavy box to either side.

A sword had flashed across the pack rope—a mere swish, and the rope had parted.

Even while Wong was rolling from his camel he'd found the grip of the revolver he carried in the breast of his sheepskin coat. He got that far when he stopped to think. This man might have an army back of him. Already two camels were past—his favorite of all the camels he'd ever slept on, leading the way.

The thought meant hesitation; the hesitation lost him his chance and two other camels. Two other loads had crashed down.

"Hands up and face the rock, you!"—this fellow spoke like no Russian.

There was a needle of steel against Wong's neck.

Wong's nerves were tuned to small things. In

that needlepoint against his neck he could detect not the slightest quaver—no skipping, no torture.

His hands were up. His face was to the rock.

There were shocks of falling boxes, the grunt and scramble and heave of camels becoming frenzied by a prospect of camel heaven after a long, hard drag through camel hell.

And the fellow kept talking all the time—slanging the camel pullers and laughing at them; he was driving them back along the gorge as fast as he slit the lashings of the heavy freight. “Hey, you, Big Man! Why don’t you ask me who I am?”

“Who?”—and Wong dared to turn.

“Hands still up, or I’ll slit your throat as you did the widow’s in the Traveling Sands!”

**T**HAT was the most secret murder that Wong had ever done. His eyes were beginning to pop. The man leaned down from his horse—Torang wasn’t very tall—and found with his left hand the pistol in Wong’s breast. Wong felt a faint breath of courage when the white devil searched no further—else he’d found a second pistol lower down.

“Who are you, duke?” Wong asked placatingly.

“Not ‘duke,’ kahn!” He stopped to sever the ropes on two more camels and Wong had snatched his second pistol higher. “Shadak Kahn!—all same Captain Trouble. You savvy, Captain Trouble?”

Shadak Khan turned to yell at a camel puller who was trying to stop a camel by the nose-rope. The camel-puller was either stupid or deaf. He raised apologetic frightened eyes to the horse-riding duke and pulled harder than ever.

At that instant there was a crashing report—it sounded like a hand-grenade, there in the rocky confines of the gorge.

Shattuck felt a blaze of heat at his side as if his coat had caught on fire. But before he’d take note of this—more swiftly than Wong the Big Man could fire his Number Two gun a second time—Shattuck lunged. Like a thing alive and self-directed the sword of Kubla Khan slit the Big Man’s throat.

## XI

**T**IBETANS are early risers. Their climate has made them so. Late night and morning hold about the only golden hours they ever know. Along about midday the horrible wind comes up—the buran, the hideous dry gale that blows stronger and stronger under a blanched and cloudless sky.

As often as not the people of Tibet will be up and about well before daylight even after a night of debauch.

It was so this morning in the little valley, in the camp of the two old governors, Tsarong and his brother. Then the black-faced fighting lamas where thirsty and on the prowl for fresh adventure so early—or so late—that there had practically, been no night for them at all. And the dokpas were the first to note that queer invasion of camels from the Throat of the Wolf. They were a superstitious lot, those dokpas—none more so, since to each of them had come, some time or other, manifestations of powers they could not understand.

These blubbering, crazed, and naked camels rocking into the valley like so many camel ghosts, and something really terrifying about them.

The governors were roused.

In an incredibly short time the whole camp was up and active. These were livestock people—more used to yaks than camels, but recognizing in this stampeded herd more value than a century of goats would ever bring.

**O**LD Tsarong wasn’t long in putting two and two together.

This was the munition train they’d come to meet. Something had happened to it. But what? Where were the men? Where was the freight?

Through the thin air of daybreak they heard that distant revolver shot. After that, there were the muted staccato barkings of a small-arms battle.

While the governors were still shouting conflicting orders, a special shout went up and the people fell aside as if tossed by an invisible plow and through this furrow—beautiful as a dream-horse and as elusive—they saw the horse of the Bogdo go trotting by.

“Torang!”



Torang they believed to be as holy as its master. They saw it saddled but riderless, unblemished, uncannily wise when it came to its keeping on its way. Wasn't it likely that it was ridden by a ghost?

It had come very close to that.

In less than a minute after Wong had fired—and died—Shattuck recognized that this was no place for an abbot's horse—or any horse. He had an overwhelming gust of pity for all horses, camels, dogs—and men! These men had fought the Gobi until they were as cruel as the Gobi itself! He'd sent Torang home.

This wasn't a chain of reasoning.

His reasoning all went into the fight—clear, precise, perceptive with a thousand eyes only opened in times like these.

Still with that revolver he'd taken from Wong in his left hand and the great scimitar in his right, he plunged on further into the pass.

Already the place of his first stand was being choked with cast boxes, and blue steel brought a flash of clairvoyant memory. He'd seen these self-same boxes, and at least a part of what was in them, back in Samarkand.

He cut more pack ropes and dodged. Camels slipped and straddled and disappeared. Horses were being kicked forward by hard-faced Mongols.

Shattuck would remember those faces. When the world needed fighters, these were fighters. But they'd have to be led, bled, crucified, to be taught the things they'd known before when they conquered half the world.

ONE was poking a gun in his face when Shattuck dodged under the horse's belly and cut the gunman down from the other side. An instant later he'd fired his first shot and had seen the horse jump from under its rider as if the fellow had been roped.

The confusion saved him a dozen, a score of times.

"Back!" he shouted. "Or you'll all be killed!"  
"Ya-ming!"

That was shorter: "Sure death!"

Some of the riders were trying to turn back to regain the desert.

Camels were retching, moaning, grinding their teeth. Some thudded to a fall and squealed as

panic wrenched them to their feet again.

A sudden weakness blew a breath over Shattuck. It was like the first whiff of the anaesthetic before an operation. But he felt no pain.

He gathered his nerves to a tighter pitch.

"Ya-ming!"

"And that means you," a calm voice echoed in his brain.

"Let me do this first," his thought replied.

He was drawing the great blade across another pack-tie when a Mongol struck down at him with the loaded butt of a whip.

At the same moment Shattuck fired.

Bullet and bludgeon both went home.

"I'm taking him with me," was the Fighting Fool's last thought.

## XII

A BUNCH of the dokpas—faces black with grease and their dank hair making them look like devils on a frolic—were looting what they could find in the Throat of the Wolf.

They screeched and laughed. They stripped the dead and kicked the dying, leaving a number of naked and humiliated corpses in their wake.

Then they made the one gorgeous and outstanding discovery of the morning. They'd not only found the white devil of the preceding day—he who had called himself Shadak Khan—but leaning over him, trying to lift him, trying to recall him to life, one of the most beautiful female creatures they had ever seen.

They'd all heard legends about the Kashmiri maidens. They told filthy stories of their own invention about their affairs with such. They vaunted of local conquests that had Kashmiri conquests beaten a mile.

But here was the real thing. So they believed. Anyway, it was the first of her species any of them had ever seen. They crowded toward her and the white man like a pack of wolves at a spent doe.

Mahree was no spent doe, though, even if she had traveled for one full day and one full night over a terrain that would have strained a yak.

She turned to fire. Her eyes shone green. Her forehead seemed to flatten.

Before the boldest of the dokpas could carry out his plan of stepping on Shattuck's face and seizing her at the same time she'd literally brained him with a sliver of rock.

The unfortunate thing about this was that it gave an idea to the more cunning wits of the crowd. The dokpas also groped for rocks. At least two of them failed to do their groping fast enough.

Mahree threw a rock splinter with the free-shoulder grace and power of a professional ball-player—although she'd never seen one. She scored two perfect hits. Then a rock like the end of a sledge-hammer caught her shoulder and she staggered.

She was staggering, trying not to fall, when she saw another sort of lama coming through the gorge. He'd seen what was happening. His hands were up. He was shouting things that Mahree couldn't understand, but which the expression on his face told her were prayers on her own behalf and denunciation of the dokpas.

**T**HE black faces got his message. They turned on him with howls. One of them with a stone all ready let fly at him and scraped his head. The young lama covered his face with his hands and arms and kept on coming.

It was his only way of fighting back.

One of the black-face ruffians already had his hands on him when from behind and above the young lama a hand plunged down with a knife in it. That was one good knife that was apt to be lost forever. The dokpa went down with the blade out of sight in his shock of hair.

That was Juma's knife. It was Juma, looking more than his six-foot seven, who had followed John Day here—Champela, whom he'd found in the Lamasery of the Soaring Meditation. Champela himself was just setting out, having heard that Torang, the abbot's horse, had but then returned without the Shadak Khan.

**C**HAMPELA and Juma had then run the length of the valley. But Mahree, even so, had got there first—a long first, having followed some instinct of her own.

Juma cried to heaven as he tried to pull his precious knife from the dead man's skull. It wouldn't come. It was a tussel as short as it was fierce—Juma's struggle with the stubborn knife.

He was losing seconds, and in any sort of fight Juma never lost any time. He spat on the corpse and almost, without looking, had found the throat of another black face with his able hands.

The others were in full flight. Champela came to Shattuck's side. He lightly touched a temple; he thrust his fingers into Shattuck's shirt.

It was clear that he thought at first that Shattuck was dead—the end of a dream, the eclipse of a great adventure!

Mahree, with all that she had left of consciousness—after that wallop with a rock—centered in her eyes, let out the beginning of a wail.

"Ai-ya-yat I have killed him! He went away because of me! And I meant nothing! I loved him only as a sister!"

"Hush!" said the prime minister of Shadak Khan. "He's not dead!"

It was a message that went up to old Juma, too.

Juma, having just killed two men, one by stabbing and one by barehanded strangling, was leaning over with a great deep tenderness burning in the secret cavern back of his old-eagle eyes.

"Allah Akbar!" he said.

He gently pushed the prime minister aside. He stooped and picked up Captain Trouble, as if that famous Fighting Fool was the merest infant.

"Friend," he said, "if you know any effective magic, I'll see that you get a couple of those runaway camels."

"Get him quickly to the tent of the governors," John Day said. "You put them out and I'll do my best."

### XIII

**S**HATTUCK was getting well. As soon as they were able to move him again they'd carried him up the valley to the Lamasery of the Soaring Meditation where there were some authentic records of Kubla Khan.

They'd found—by a well authenticated miracle, it was claimed—Kubla's sword where Shadak Khan had dropped it when he fell—as he thought—dead. And the sword was presented to the new khan by the old dogpo himself—the divine incarnation who had the power, it was

generally believed, to look into the past lives of others.

Perhaps the good old man saw something in some past life of this modern Captain Trouble, something that linked him with the life of Kubla Khan.

It was, according to the secret books, about the time that an avatar should come about to purge the world before the coming of the Great New King.

The times were full of portent.

Tibet itself would have to be purged. There were mysteries in Tibet such as the world never dreamed of, John Day said. There were hollow mountains he knew about where the secret libraries of the ages had been stored away.

"Couldn't you and I find them?" Shattuck asked.

"We'd find them, all right; but how about the guardians?"

"What sort of guardians?"

"If I thought we had a right to get into those caves we'd get into them," said Captain Trouble.

"There you go! I thought you'd had enough of fighting for a time!"

"I'll never have enough of it so long as there is anything worth fighting for."

Unknown to Shattuck, there was a scribe in the monastery making a record of his stay. Some day, it was argued, such a record might be as valuable as such a one concerning Alexander the Great would be.

"And, according to the horoscope that three of the astrologers in three different lamaseries cast up, this man Shadak Khan, was going to have a number of stirring adventures. . . ." He had one, in fact, before it was considered advisable for him to leave his bed.

He awoke one night to see a huge dokpa crawling into his room on all fours. It was this fact that discovered to Shattuck the identity of the

man, because, walking on all fours like that, he revealed a limp in the shoulder where he'd been stopped by a bullet the day he tried to saber Shattuck from behind.

"Ah, go on and get out of here, you big bum!" said the Fighting Fool in English.

And that's what the big bum did—sneaked out and never showed himself again.

Juma had sent for his people, for Juma also would be lingering on in the valley indefinitely. He'd become as you might say the official steward of the loot—camels, horses, boxes of machine-guns, small arms, and ammunition.

Juma loved especially to sit in when Captain Trouble and his prime minister talked about cleaning up some robber band or other and starting an independent state where men could be free and women happy and everyone would get enough to eat—with a few punitive expeditions now and then, just to keep your hand in.

**B**UT, best of all, was when the two of them were alone on some upper terrace of the lamasery and the earth so uptilted about them that it almost seemed they were among the stars. Then it was no mere correction of some poor robber band that engrossed them. They talked greatly of great conquerors—men who had been sent into the world to boost men on—by struggle, pain, self-mastery.

There was the inevitable struggle between Asia and Europe—the never surveyed frontiers of China and Russia, for example; the necessary merging of nations that still hated and feared each other; there was the growing challenge of Africa—a riddle as ancient and profound as that of the Great Sphinx.

And when it was all over, when they had the world cleaned up, why, maybe then, they'd go back to America and settle down, like Cincinnatus, on some quiet farm.

*Watch for More "Captain Trouble" Stories by Perley Poore Sheehan.*