

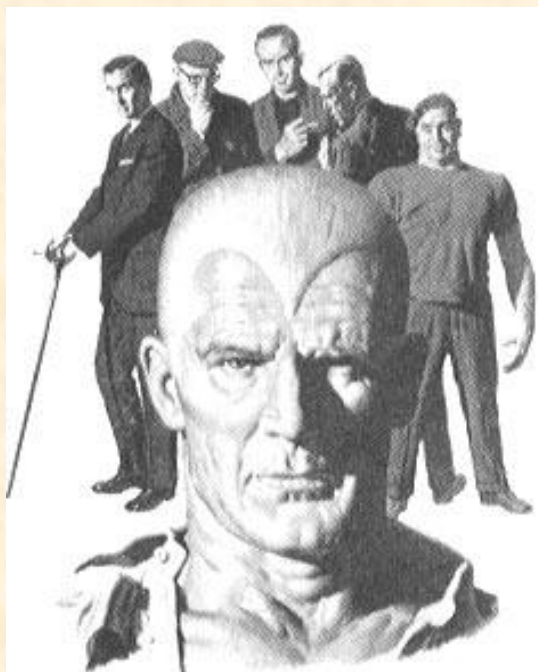
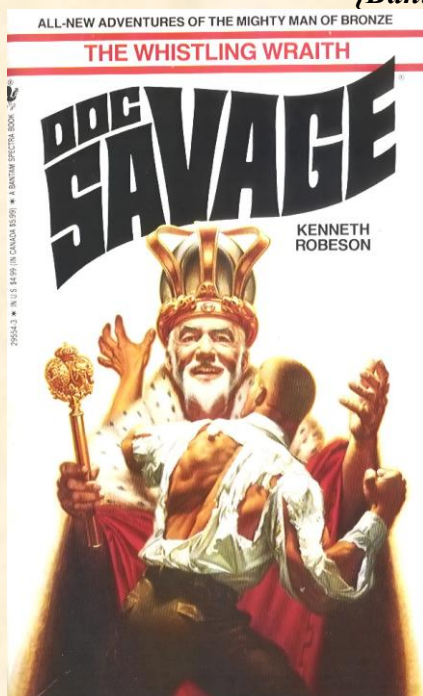
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Doc Savage Magazine #189 - "**The Whistling Wraith**"

by Will Murray - July/1993

{Bantam Cover by Joe DeVito}



*Called to Washington, Doc Savage confronts the impossible --a **Mad Monarch** who vanished centuries ago.*

*Unstoppable and untouchable, the **Demon** stands ready to plunge his uncanny sword into the vitals of all who seek to unravel the most baffling enigma ever to confront the brilliant **Man of Bronze**! with Patricia Savage !*




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The adventurers of Doc Savage originally appeared in magazine format in 1933-1949. Note that this timeframe was before jet planes and the semiconductor technology to which we are accustomed today. The fastest planes were 400-mph propeller jobs and vacuum tube technology still ruled radio. The most fantastic weapons encountered by Doc may have been based on of John Keely's "*vibrational*" and Nikola Tesla's "*scalar-wave*" theories [<http://www.stealthskater.com/Bearden.htm>] that were popular then.

At times, the writing style of the various Doc Savage "ghostwriters" was influenced by the prevailing sentiments of the Nation's reading audience of that era. As a result, a few portions might not be "*politically correct*" in today's society. Minor editing efforts have been made in these archives to "update" these. Finally -- as a rough estimate -- multiply all dollar(\$) amounts by 10 to convert to '2004' dollars (e.g., \$5 back then would be \$50 today).

#189 The *Whistling Wraith*

by Will Murray (July/1993)

the Adventures of Doc Savage	by 'Kenneth Robeson' (house name)	Bantam Cover Artists
refer to DS000.doc for a biography of all the Kenneth Robeson "ghostwriters"   	Lester Dent (creator and main author)	James Bama (created 72 covers)
	Harold A. Davis (wrote 13 adventures)	Bob Larkin (created 77 covers)
	Laurence Donovan (wrote 9 adventures)	Fred Pfeiffer (created 14 covers)
	Philip J. Farmer (wrote 1 adventure)	Boris Vallejo (created 6 covers)
	Will Murray (wrote 7 adventures)	Doug Rosa (created 2 covers)
	William G. Bogart (wrote 14 adventures)	Jim Aviati (created 1 cover)
	Ryerson Johnson (wrote 3 adventures)	Mort Kunstler (created 1 cover)
	Alan Hathway (wrote 4 adventures)	Peter Richardson (created 1 cover)
		Roger Kastel (created 4 covers)

{limited editing/embellishing and electronic formatting by '*StealthSkater*' - April/2005}

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I -- One Missing King

The King of Merida vanished before the eyes of the entire World.

In truth, there were perhaps fewer than 300 witnesses to the King's actual vanishment.

But one of them happened to be a newsreel cameraman and the inexplicable event wound up being repeated in movie theaters all over the World in subsequent weeks. So, there was more truth in the statement than falsehood, technically.

The King (his royal name was Egil Goz the First) had come to Washington, District of Columbia for one of those elegant soirees known as a "state dinner". The King was to dine with the President of the United States and other dignitaries.

His homespun steak and baked potato repast was never consumed.

King Goz's motorcade pulled up the White House at a little past 5:00 in the afternoon. The machine was heavy; its sides armor-plated; glass bulletproofed; and tonneau windows curtained to protect His Highness from the stares of commoners. The King had enemies. Particularly in a neighboring state.

The official car was driven by a liveried chauffeur. When the car pulled up, a footman in a uniform more appropriate to an opera than a state affair stepped smartly from the seat (where he had been riding beside the chauffeur) and opened the back door.

The footman stood with his back ramrod-straight, his head thrown back, and his eyes looking -- seemingly -- at nothing while he waited for King Goz to step forth, resplendent in his bemedaled official uniform.

Although King Goz had started out on the road of life as a war chieftain, he was a thoroughly modern king. No regal robes or showy crowns for him.

King Goz did not step out. Minutes crawled past.

Overeager newshounds wasted flashbulbs. The lone newsreel cameraman cursed to himself as he wasted expensive film. The President of the United States looked at his watch with polite interest.

Finally, the footman was forced to unbend his military posture and look inside the limousine tonneau.

He gave a squeak in his native tongue and suddenly there was pandemonium.

King Goz could not be found!

Excitement boiled around the limousine. The seat cushions were thrown about. The floorboards examined. Dignified aides suffered the indignity of getting down on hand&knee to look under the chassis. They even checked the trunk even though witnesses (and there many) clearly recollected the King entering the limousine outside Blair House where visiting dignitaries enjoyed American hospitality.

When questioned by District of Columbia police, the other passengers of the limousine (i.e., the chauffeur and the befuddled footman) insisted that at no time did the limousine stop to deposit a passenger. Of this, they were quite certain. Even vociferous.

One, however, did recall stopping at a traffic light. This was the stiff-faced chauffeur.

"Notice anything suspicious?" a cop inquired.

The chauffeur considered this a moment.

Then he remarked in a remarkably unaccented voice: "I do recall a *whistling*."

"Whistling?"

"Yes. It was rather a melancholy air."

The footman too suddenly recalled hearing the *whistling*. He could not tell from whence it had originated. But he also remembered a *whistled* refrain that was infinitely sad in its strains.

The police next asked for an official photograph with the idea of manufacturing missing posters for telephotoing purposes.

They received an unpleasant surprise.

There were no photographs of King Goz. The point was pressed and a member of the King's anxious retinue remembered a solitary snapshot which was consequently speedily dispatched to Washington by air mail.

It proved to have been taken when King Goz was a mere lad -- a beardless mountain youth dressed in flowing native clothes. It was quite a handsome photography, showing that the future monarch possessed a certain warrior flair even then.

Unfortunately, it was useless for the purpose required.

That was on Tuesday.

Doc Savage arrived in Washington the following Thursday to look into the matter.

His arrival was quiet. This was necessary because everybody -- almost -- knew who Doc Savage was.

It did not stay quiet for long.

Doc Savage arrived by passenger plane at the Washington airport. Normally, Clark Savage, Jr. (to use his given name) seldom resorted to public conveyance.

By repute, he owned a fleet of airplanes and was an expert pilot. The fact that he himself had designed the fleet -- which were *bronze*-painted marvels of aeronautical engineering and instantly archived at <http://www.stealthskater.com/DocSavage.htm>

recognizable to anyone familiar with his reputation -- probably had something to do with his choice of transportation. Doc Savage was the stuff that newspaper copy was made of.

Doc Savage was spotted by an eagle-eyed newshawk as he deplaned. The airport was already awash in reporters. Some had staked out the place in hope of ambushing arriving dignitaries who came to the Nation's capitol to gather first-hand accounts of the inexplicable regal evanishment. Others were themselves just arriving. The disappearance of King Goz was hot copy.

"Is that who I think it is?" gulped a surprised scribe.

"Is who?"

"The tall chap coming down the air stairs."

The other man emitted a bleat of surprise.

"I'll be!" he said with the enthusiasm of a man who smells a story. "The '*Man of Mystery*' himself!"

A 3rd individual joined them and asked: "Who?"

"The man they claim is a human scientific product," the first scribe explained. "The one who was trained from the cradle y the greatest scientists of the World until he was greater than any of them -- a kind of 'superman'. And he was trained so as to be a king of a modern 'knight' in an armor of Science to go around the World helping people and righting wrongs."

The second observer whistled.

"So that's the fellow they claim is probably the most remarkable living human being," he muttered.

"Yeah," said the first. "Blazes! I thought he'd be an old guy. He's 10 years younger'n I am, bet you."

"Who are you talking about?" asked the exasperated 3rd journalist.

"Doc Savage."

"Oh."

The befuddled scribe had heard of Doc Savage.

Presently, the object of their attention entered the Terminal Building.

He was a tall man bundled in a tan gabardine coat who towered over his fellow passengers. A gray hat was pulled low, the snap brim throwing shadow over his face in an attempt to mask the distinctiveness of his features.

It was a futile gesture.

Even bundled up as he was, the amazing nature of his muscular development was evident. The **sinews** stood in great bars under the fine-textured skin of his neck. Huge **cables** sprang out in his hands as he walked along. They indicated fabulous **physical strength!**

Long exposure to tropical Suns coupled with the use of a solar health radiator (which he himself had perfected and which had all the beneficial qualities of natural sunlight) had given Doc Savage's skin a **bronze** hue which caused him frequently to be called the **Man of Bronze**. This distinctive coloration all-but-shouted his identity.

The scribes plucked copy pencils and notepads from about their persons and made a beeline for the **Big Bronze Man** ...

... they were blocked by a sudden wall of men.

"One side, pal," invited the first newspaperman in an indignant voice. "We're the Fourth Estate."

But the blocking wall of men did not move. They were polite but very firm about their not moving. They looked tough. Not in the gangster manner but tough nevertheless.

"Please step away," one invited in a no-nonsense tone of voice. But for his crisp suitcoat, he might have been a Marine.

"Press! See?" the anxious scribe insisted. Press cards in hatbands were indicated with stabbing fingers.

One of the blocking men removed his billfold and offered it open for the belligerent newshound to see.

He got a gander at an ornate badge ... stepped back ... and croaked: "G-men!"

Thereafter, the Press contingent became as polite as the human wall of what were obviously Government agents. They made room as the agents approached the big **bronze** fellow and -- after exchanging low words -- surrounded him protectively.

Then Doc Savage was efficiently escorted from the building.

A few of the newspapermen were so bold as to shout questions to the departing **Bronze Man**.

But no answers were forthcoming. And no one seemed surprised.

"Well for the love of Mike!" said one of the press men. "Doc Savage is working with the Feds on this thing."

"So what are we waiting for? Let's hotfoot it after them."

The reporters charged through the busy terminal to the taxi line outside. They spilled out, their heads turned every which way.

One spied the *bronze giant* ducking into a nondescript sedan in a line of nondescript sedans.

"There!"

They rushed the line of machines.

Seeing them approach, one of the Federal men flashed his badge and growled: "Any man found to interfere with Uncle Sam's business will find his pants clapped in the local pokey."

That seemed to settle that.

The reporters -- wearing disappointed faces -- watched the line of sedans bear the mystery man Doc Savage away.

The scribes then found a bar and began swapping yarns about Doc Savage, hoping to bring to light something new and unpublished which they could give their city editors in lieu of the story they had not gotten.

Doc Savage, their talk disclosed, was quite a remarkable fellow being something of a combination mental wizard, physical superman, and inventive genius. Concocting wild stories about the *Bronze Man*'s fabulous feats, it developed, was a favorite pastime with the tabloid quota of the gathering.

Doc Savage, they all agreed, was a strange fellow who went to the far corners of the World on the rather thankless business of helping other people out of trouble; righting wrongs; aiding the oppressed; and punishing evildoers.

It might have been noted that several reporters did not believe that this muddlesome matter of the missing King of Merida was really Doc Savage's business at all.

The King was hardly oppressed. In fact, he was something of a benign tyrant, having been elected president in a popular vote and -- after a suitable interval -- declaring himself king.

But all present admitted that Doc Savage was a '*Man of Mystery*' and that anything was possible where he was concerned.

One thing was noteworthy about the confab.

No one spoke deprecatingly of Doc Savage. They all seemed to agree that he was a personage of great ability.

One person who was an avid listener was a woman. Or girl if "girls" are still considered girls in their early 20s.

She was a little mouse of a girl. She wore a mousy coat and a mousy hat. Her stringy hair was remindful of a rodent that had been washed until all the color had leached out of its fur.

She had followed them out of the airport terminal and been privy to their reaction to the unexpected arrival of Doc Savage. No one had paid her any mind and now she was listening intently.

A reporter was yarning enthusiastically now.

"I heard that this Doc Savage was once offered the crown of a Balkan country not far from Merida. But he turned it down cold. And there was a princess gonna be thrown in with the deal, too!" *[read "The King Maker (#016)"]*

"Imagine that! Jilting a Princess!"

"How thrilling ... if true," the girl murmured.

She was noticed then. Not many looked at her twice. She was that plain.

But reporters are afflicted by an innate curiosity and noticing the press card affixed to the lapel of her spring coat, they asked her identity.

Her name, she said, was Barbara Bland. With the *Denver Globe*.

Everyone had heard of the *Globe*. But no one had heard of her.

The conversation veered back to the subject at hand. Someone remembered that a magazine had just published an extensive article on Doc Savage and one of the journalists went to fetch a copy off a newsstand.

The magazine (it was of the sensational "true crime" variety) rapidly became dog-eared as it was passed around, reporters taking turns reading the most interesting portions aloud. More than one scribbled notes for later use.

After the young woman reporters had absorbed her fill of the topic at hand, she slipped away and found a telephone booth where she fed a nickel into the slot and whispered a number to the answering operator.

She continued to whisper after she had reached her party. Her manner was clipped. She might have been dictating copy to a rewrite man on the other end.

"Doc Savage has just arrived."

She paused while that sunk in.

"Federal agents met him at the airport and took him away. There is no doubt but why he is in town."

The voice on the end of the line was firm, cultured, and masculine.

"If anyone can find the King," said the voice, "it is this man Savage. He may represent the opportunity we have been waiting for. Attempt to learn all that can be learned."

"Understood," the girl said and promptly terminated the connection.

On her way out the door, she passed the reporters. They were still engaged in the swapping of yarns about Doc Savage. If anything, their talk was wilder than it had been.

The girl reporter Barbara Bland gave a tiny snort of disbelief as she walked by. It was plain that she took the reportorial tall tales with a very large grain of sodium.

The Federal agents who had taken charge of Doc Savage were respectful. He might have been their superior if appearances meant anything. And in a way, he was.

The *Man of Bronze* held an honorary rank of 'special agent' with the Justice Department's Bureau of Investigation in return for certain assistances rendered in the past.

They first took him to the scene of the disappearance. Or rather to the spot where it had been discovered in front of the White House door.

From there, the *Bronze Man* backtracked to the intersection where the eerie *whistling* had been heard according to the chauffeur and footman. It was an open intersection literally around the corner from the White House.

The circuitous route that the kingly motorcade had taken was evidently for purposes of making a dramatic entrance and impressing the cameras. Indeed, the King could have walked to his assignation in less time than it took to be driven.

At the intersection, there were no objects or buildings which might have produced a *whistling* sound whether mechanically or through the action of wind. There was not even a whistle-blowing traffic cop stationed at any corner.

If the *Bronze Man* made any discoveries, he gave no outward indication.

"Take me to the King's limousine," he requested.

The vehicle was garaged in the Department of Justice Building. It was a short walk from Blair House to the Justice Building -- virtually everything in official Washington is within walking distance of everything else -- but they drove anyway.

There, the *bronze giant* examined the machine. The hood and boot had been thrown up and the doors all lay open. Additionally, fenders had been removed for inspection of the wheels and chassis.

After a cursory examination of these cavities, Doc Savage fell to investigating the tonneau into which the King of Merida had stepped, not to be seen again. He lifted cushions ... pried up the floor coverings ... and conducted what appeared to be a very thorough search.

He rolled the windows up-and-down examining the thick bulletproof glass. There was a glass partition between tonneau and driver's compartment. This he cranked up-and-down as well. The speaking tube came in for scrutiny also.

The Federal men watched in silence. Their orders were not to interfere with the *Bronze Man*. This had come from the Director himself.

When he was finished in the back, Doc Savage fell to examining the driver's compartment. He was not at this long when an unexpected sound permeated the garage confines.

It was a *trilling*, low and melodious. Tuneless, it roved the scale sounding in the confines of the garage like a small breeze in a chilly *Arctic* ice pack.

It hardly seemed to be a product of human vocal cords. But there was no other possible source. The Federal agents found themselves looking at one another doubtfully as if suspecting one of their numbers to be the author of the elusive sound.

Doc Savage suddenly emerged from his study and the sound trailed off. Only then did it occur to the agents that the strange *Bronze Man* might have been responsible for the nebulous tremolo.

Doc straightened, holding something between *metallic* thumb and forefinger.

An agent was so bold as to ask: "Have you found something, Mr. Savage?"

"Hairs."

"Eh?"

"*Red* hairs."

The agents exchanged blank looks. The royal car had been examined for fingerprints, blood, and other forensic clues. No one had thought to look for hairs or -- if they happened upon any -- attached great importance to them. Hairs fall out of perfectly healthy bodies all the time.

But the mysterious *Bronze Man* evidently thought the hairs that he discovered had significance. The G-men looked at them. They were short and thick and definitely *reddish*. Almost like copper wire.

"Must belong to the chauffeur," said an agent promptly. "He was a redhead by reports."

Doc reached into his coat and from somewhere produced a metal vial with a screw cap.

He unscrewed the cap and let the metallic *red* hairs drop into the vial. Recapping it, he stowed it back on his person.

Then Doc Savage said: "There were numerous press photographers and a newsreel cameraman present when the King's limousine stopped before the White House."

"There were," an agent admitted.

"I would like to see their pictures," Doc said.

"All of them?" gulped the agent.

"All."

It was not as difficult an undertaking as the Federal agents expected.

They had already confiscated several sample photographs. And when none proved illuminating, further requests were abandoned.

It was assumed that the King had disappeared en route to the state dinner and that no clues were to be found among the photographic record, any more than a snapshot of a patch of sky where lightning had appeared a day before would reveal any trace of the flash.

Too, the name of Doc Savage opened many doors. The photos began arriving at the Department-of-Justice Building along with requests for interviews.

The photographs were accepted. But the interview requests were not.

Hearing of this lack of reciprocity, a few magazines and newspapers made noises about withholding their photos.

The editors in question received personal telephone calls from no less than the Director of the Bureau of Investigation of the Department-of-Justice.

The photographs were sheepishly surrendered.

In a projection room in the Justice Department, Doc Savage was studying the photos. Oddly enough, he had not removed his hat and his fine-textured features were not readily visible to onlookers.

A person familiar with the **Bronze Man's** methods would have found this behavior uncharacteristic. Doc Savage seldom wore a hat.

"The newsreel is here," announced a government clerk.

The **Man of Bronze** left his examination.

The reel was loaded and the room darkened. They watched intently.

The so-called raw footage was brief. Ragged. It depicted the King's limousine arriving, the chauffeur and footman visible through the windscreen.

The film then darkened and brightened again, this time showing a different angle.

The footman emerged from the ostentatious machine ... went to the rear door ... and threw it open. The footage dwelt on the open door for what seemed an interminable interval until the footman -- impatient -- bent and looked within.

The rest was chaos. Milling reporters and police. A shot of the waiting President and other dignitaries.

It was difficult to imagine how the footage had been spliced into anything coherent. But it had and was already packing in theater-goers around the Civilized World.

After the lights had come on again, Doc Savage stood up and said: "I think the chauffeur might help clear up the mystery."

"Don't you want to see the film again, Mr. Savage?"

"Not necessary," replied Doc.

They went to the dignified hostelry where the chauffeur -- and the rest of the King's retinue -- were ensconced and asked for him. The Merida party had long since departed the official hospitality of the Blair House to await the results of the official investigation.

There they were met by a stern-faced white-haired man in an ostentatious **crimson** uniform and carrying about him a very dignified air. The medals on his chest were many.

"I am General Graul Frontenac," he said by way of introduction. *Even his voice had a stiffness.*

"This is Doc Savage," one of the G-men said, indicating the *bronze giant*.

The General was burdened by the stiff-backed carriage of the European military man to whom soldiering is a point of family honor. But at the mention of the name 'Doc Savage', he lost some of his stick-necked bearing.

He was wearing a monocle in one eye. It popped out, saved from extinction only by a long black cord anchored to his gold uniform braid (which was profuse).

The General clamped the monocle back into his eye and employed it to give Doc Savage a thorough going-over. *He was very bold in the manner in which he did this.*

"The Director personally asked that Mr. Savage enter the investigation," one of the Federal men said, hoping to dispel the awkwardness of the moment.

General Frontenac <clicked> his heels together and executed a stiff bow.

"I am honored to meet the great *Domnule* Savage," he purred.

*But if the **Bronze Man** was impressed by this morsel of flattery, he did not acknowledge it.*

Instead, he said: "We would like to question the chauffeur who was driving the limousine on the night that the King vanished."

"But he has already been questioned thoroughly."

"We would like to question him further, please."

Behind the monocle, the weaker eye of General Frontenac of Merida swam blearily.

"As you wish," he said, snapping his fingers at 2 courtiers who rushed ahead to pave the way. "Let us go to him now."

They were led to a suite elsewhere on the same floor. The courtiers had thrown open the door and stood waiting impassively.

They entered. The room was unoccupied.

General Frontenac pointed his monocle at the 2 trembling courtiers.

"Where is he?" he snapped.

"W-we do not kn-know, General," one stammered.

"W-we have not seen him today," the other gulped.

Red-faced, General Frontenac demanded of the courtiers: "When was he last seen?"

The courtiers looked 'blank'. Neither, it turned out, could recall when they had last laid eyes on the missing chauffeur to the missing King.

"Find him!" General Frontenac thundered, his face **crimsoning** until it threatened to rival the blood hue of his sumptuous uniform.

The chauffeur was nowhere to be found. But it was not surprising.

In the land from which the chauffeur had come, men had lost their heads for less offense than misplacing a head of state.

"Ce plictistor (How vexing)!" said General Frontenac after a complete search had turned up no trace of the man. "This is very strange."

He turned his monocle eye in the **Bronze Man's** direction.

"Tell me, Savage, do you suppose the strange fate that befell our glorious Monarch might have taken the chauffeur as well?

Doc Savage did not answer. *Instead, he seemed to not have heard the question.*

His **eyes** were questing about the chauffeur's room. *It was quite lavish.*

He turned abruptly and said: "The footman, if you do not mind."

Again, General Frontenac snapped his fingers and courtiers rushed ahead to -- presumably -- announce them.

Why they would have to be announced to a flunky of the low status of a footman, no one thought to ask. Or if they did, the question was never put forth.

The courtiers came rushing back, white-faced and winded. They talked over one another in a violent effort to be the first to break the news.

Finally, the plainly exasperated General demanded of one while simultaneously husing the other with a curt chop of his hand: *"Cum?* What is it? Speak!"

"The footman," gasped the courtier who had been given leave to speak, "is dead."

"Dead?"

"Murdered."

II -- Sword Swallower

The footman had indeed been murdered.

They found him -- ironically enough considering his occupation -- impaled to a footstool in his own room. It was an expensive room. But not as lavish as that which had formerly been occupied by the chauffeur who had evaporated.

No one was paying attention to the surroundings, however.

All eyes rested on the *bejeweled* sword which had been used to skewer the unfortunate footman where he knelt.

It had been thrust into his mouth with great force and driven downward through his vitals. The begored point exited the victim's back and penetrated the footstool's cushion.

Seeing the sword hilt protruding from the dead face, General Graul Frontenac swore profanely in his native tongue.

"Tha-that sword!" he choked, lapsing back into English and pointing at the bizarre sight.

They waited for him to get it out.

"It-it is the King's own ceremonial sword!" he managed.

This much might have been guessed by the expensive *babbles* which encrusted the *golden* hilt which filled the footman's mouth so grotesquely.

But the next statement that the General made gave a twist to the mystery that shocked even the hardened G-men.

"Good King Goz," the General said in a hollow voice, "was wearing that very sword the night he entered the limousine from which he never emerged."

No one had anything to say to that.

The coroner was called. The corpse was photographed from all angles and covered with a sheet pending removal by hears.

There was a knot of hard-faced police detectives. And after some consultation with the government men, it was agreed that this was a Federal matter.

The detectives went away. *They looked glad to be shed of the responsibility.*

After the death scene had been completely scrutinized by all present, General Frontenac put forth a theory.

"It is clear to me," he announced in an important voice, "that the poor footman has been done away with by the missing chauffeur."

The Government agents began nodding their heads in silent agreement. It was a reasonable theory.

They looked to the **Bronze Man** who was deep in the study of the dead man's awkward posture. *He had removed the sheet.*

"Do you not agree, *Domnule* Savage?" he pressed.

Doc said absently: "There is no evidence pointing to the chauffeur."

"But," sputtered the General, "It is so obvious. The chauffeur is somehow responsible for the disappearance of our beloved Monarch and has now murdered the footman. Perhaps they were accomplices in this act of extreme treason."

Restoring the sheet, Doc Savage straightened.

"One thing is clear," he imparted.

]

"And that is?" inquired General Frontenac interestedly.

"Once we locate the chauffeur, we will locate King Goz."

"You sound very confident of this," the General murmured. "As if you have already plumbed this unfathomable mystery."

"I would, Doc said calmly, "be very much surprised if my theory were to be eventually disproved."

"Which is," the General prompted.

"That the missing chauffeur is the key to this particular mystery."

General Frontenac lost his monocle again. But this time, he did not seem to notice.

The **crimson** was coming back into his features. He opened his mouth to speak ... sputtered something unintelligible ... cleared his throat noisily and decided in the end to say nothing.

It was clear that the manner in which this big **bronze** American fellow had swept into the puzzle of his ruler's uncanny evanishment had bowled the Balkan general over to the point of speechlessness. The fame of the U.S. Bureau of Investigation's G-men had spread even to his tiny nation. Yet they had accomplished nothing.

Less than an hour in Washington, Doc Savage had all-but-solved the mystery.

IF his unspoken theory was proved correct.

"I wonder," ventured the General slowly, "if you have a thought as to the meaning of the strange **whistling** that was heard prior to His Highness' disappearance?"

"Not as yet," Doc admitted.

"I have hesitated to mention this before. But the *whistling* may have significance."

"How so?"

"I myself did not hear this sound, of course. But the footman and the chauffeur both claimed that they did. They repeated it to me and I was quite astonished by what I heard."

"Go on."

"It matched exactly the folk lament known in my country as 'The Funeral March of Old King Fausto'. Perhaps you know the story."

"I have heard a version," Doc admitted.

"This was during one of the periods of political strife in my country man, many years ago," related General Frontenac. "King Fausto was a wicked ruler who burdened the good Meridan people with unjust laws and unfair taxes. In time, there was a popular revolt and King Fausto was seized.

"As punishment for his wickedness, Fausto was sentenced to death. The Manner of his execution was to be chained in the lowermost dungeon of the Royal castle as -- brick-by-brick -- a confining wall was constructed before his unrepentant eyes. Do you understand what I am saying?"

Doc nodded. "He was entombed while still living."

The General shrugged.

"Those were crueler times, of course. At any rate, the bricks sealed him in a small space and death was expected to be slow. Yet a day later when the people went down into the dungeon to tap at the brick wall for signs of life, they were astonished to hear a *whistling* refrain emerging from behind the bricks."

At this point, General Frontenac pursed his thin lips and essayed a tune. It was -- for a *whistle* -- very close to a dirge.

A Scotsman would probably have enjoyed it. The patient Federal men -- hearing it -- developed long faces. It had that effect.

At length, the General stifled the melancholy refrain. He continued his tale.

"For days, whenever the people ventured down into the castle dungeon, the king's sad *whistling* mocked them. Taunted them with the bitter knowledge that the hated Fausto yet lived. There were those who called for the wall to be broken down and the despot put to the sword. Others insisted that the slow lingering death by asphyxiation or starvation had been the sentence meted out and it must stand. Still others claimed that the king was already departed and it was his *shade* which whistled."

The General drew in a ragged breath.

"For 7 days they argued. And for 7 days the people stood at the brick wall and listened to the maddening *whistling*. On the 8th, the wall was ordered taken down."

The General paused, obviously for dramatic effect.

Then he went on in a low, doubtful tone.

"When the brick and mortar had been set aside, they discovered the limp, dangling chains in which Old King Fausto had been gung. But of the king, there was no sign."

One of the listeners gasped.

"No body was ever found," General Frontenac went on. "Although the entire dungeon was taken apart brick-by-brick, no secret doors or panels or possible escape route ever came to light. All that remained was the memory of the *whistling* defiance of the despot Fausto."

"Huh!" a G-man grumbled. "Another missing king."

"Since those days, there have been tales told of Old King Fausto -- or his *ghost* -- roaming the royal castle. Whenever a calamity befell the kingdom of Merida, always someone -- a chamber maid or page -- would later claim to have seen the dead king's *shadow* or heard his dreadful *whistle*."

"Superstition," Doc said.

The General adjusted his monocle and his eyebrow took hold of it again.

"So too did I think. But of later, King Fausto's *ghost* has been seen about our royal palace. Many have reported the sad, bittersweet sound of his *whistling*."

"Anyone can imitate a whistle," Doc stated. "You yourself have just demonstrated this."

"Ah," said General Frontenac quickly. "But no less than His Highness has confided to me that with his own eyes he beheld King Fausto -- or his *shade* -- roaming the palace halls attired in kingly robes and fingering his long white beard as he made his rounds. His Highness -- although a brave man -- was so shocked by this sight that he retreated to his bedchamber until the *whistling* could no longer be heard. What do you think of this, Domnule Savage?"

"A fanciful story," Doc stated mildly.

"*Intr'adevar* (Indeed). But the *whistle* was heard before His Highness vanished. And it is a popular belief in my country that the *shade* of Old King Fausto exists only to bring harm to the royal line. It suggests a threat to the ruling family of my country, does it not?"

"Possibly."

"And we have but one enemy in the entire World. And that is the territorially-ambitious president of our Balkan neighbor -- Carrullana."

"With whom you have been having border disputes."

"Correct."

"Perhaps this suggests a line of investigation?" General Frontenac said pointedly.

"It does," agreed Doc.

The General <clicked> his heels elaborately, taking his monocle from his eye and executing a reserved bow.

"Ma bucar (Good). If I can be of service in any way, I shall be most grateful for the opportunity."

"Thank you," said the **Bronze Man** and without a word he left the death room with the Federal agents in tow.

Outside the hotel, Doc Savage was met by an entourage of the "Fourth Estate".

Every police station has a reporter assigned to it. And the call for a hearse and detectives naturally brought curious scribes who had stationed themselves outside the hotel in ghoulish anticipation of a body.

The Federal men flashed their badges and formed a "flying wedge" about the *Man of Bronze*. They bulled their way through the crowd of reporters. Doc Savage ignored the question shouted at him.

"Is it true that the King has been found murdered?" one newsman demanded, evidently giving voice to a popular rumor.

He was ignored.

At one point, a mousy-looking young woman pushed her way to the edge of the swarm of scribblers. She was a very determined woman in the manner in which she employed her elbows to knock huskier rivals out of her path was any measure of single-mindedness.

"Mr. Savage! Mr. Savage!" she cried, waving a stenographer's pad. "I'm Barbara Bland of the *Denver Globe*. I would like an interview, please."

This brought an outburst of laughter from the others. Wry smiles quirked the otherwise stolid faces of some of the G-men.

"No interviews," Doc said firmly.

"Haw!" said a reporter unkindly. "What a she-cub! Doesn't even know the **bronze** guy never gives interviews."

"Darn!" said the woman calling herself 'Barbara Bland' angrily.

The Federal men made it to the cars and got the doors closed. The autos were surrounded. But that lasted only long enough for the sheeted body to be brought out.

Reporters surged for the hearse. But they were too late.

The back was clapped shut and the hearse took off with the government cars in close pursuit.

The body was taken to the District of Columbia morgue and separated from the **blood**-soaked footstool and ceremonial sword worn -- according to reports -- by King Egil the First just before his eerie disappearance.

The autopsy was brief. It turned up no cause of death other than the obvious one -- impalement. Doc Savage assisted. Off all his specialties, he was foremost a surgeon.

The body was then wrapped in a sheet and rolled into a refrigerated drawer. The sword was wrapped in oilskin and laid to one side with a tag on it. It was evidence and so would not be returned to the Meridan government until the matter was concluded.

No one could venture a guess as to when that would be.

The next day -- with the headlines still dominated by matter of the missing monarch -- Doc Savage did a strange thing.

He visited a museum.

Before he did so, he called his New York **Headquarters** which was situated on the 86th floor of Manhattan's most impressive skyscraper. The voice that answered the phone was distinctly familiar.

"Hello, cousin," it said.

It was a very buoyant voice.

"Pat," said Doc with a distinct lack of enthusiasm.

"The very same," Patricia Savage said cheerfully. *"And don't sound so darned 'delighted' to hear my voice. You'll give me a complex or something."*

"I had thought," he said dryly, "that you had already left for Canada. And your fishing vacation."

"I did. But I came back. Forgot my fishing tackle. Can't catch fish without tackle now can I?"

"It is not like you to be so forgetful. This does not have anything to do with this Washington matter that I am presently investigating, does it?"

"Exactly what are you trying to accuse me of?" Pat demanded.

"Exactly what might be expected."

Doc Savage sounded weary.

"You think you smell some **excitement**. So you have forgotten all about your vacation."

"Find the mislaid Monarch yet?"

"No."

"Swell! I have me some solving notions. I'll be right down."

"Not for a minute!" Doc said swiftly. "You started a vacation. Go ahead and take it."

"But Doc! You know I dote on excitement!"

"Pat, there is a difference between *excitement* and **Danger**. My objection applies to the latter. Catching a game salmon can be just as exciting ..."

"As Renny would say: 'Holy cow!' "

"We have been over these arguments before, Pat."

"Yes and ..."

But the **Bronze Man** cut Pat's protestations off."

"Are Monk and Ham at hand?"

"Haven't seen hide-nor-hair of them. Renny, Johnny, or Long Tom either. It's positively spooky up here all by my lonesome."

"Renny, Johnny, and Long Tom are absent from New York," Doc stated.

"I stand ready to serve in their stead," Pat said jauntily.

The men named were Doc Savage's 5 assistants. An unusual group, the Five.

*Each a lover of **adventure**, of **excitement**. Each -- above all -- an admirer of the amazing Man of Bronze.*

They had been with Doc for some time. Whether because they had such an admiration for him or whether they liked the excitement that the association got them was difficult to say.

Doc considered.

"Perhaps there is something you might do to help out," he said at last.

"What's that?"

"Contact the Denver *Globe*. Give a fake name. Do not let them know that you are asking on my behalf."

"Sounds mysterious."

"Ask about a reporter named 'Barbara Bland'."

"Who is she? Some femme fatale after your scalp?"

"Claims to be on the Globe staff."

"And you don't believe her?" Pat questioned.

"There is reason not to," Doc admitted.

"I'll get right on it."

He terminated the connection and -- after donning his gray hat and drawing the collar of his tan topcoat up to the level of his ears -- went down to the hotel lobby and claimed a waiting taxi.

But although he was bundled up to avoid recognition, his passage through the lobby did not go unnoticed.

The door to a telephone booth popped open and a mousy young woman stepped out. She slipped up to the great revolving doors and overheard the **Bronze Man** give instructions to the hack driver.

"The museum, please."

In Washington, there is really only one museum of consequence.

The National Museum -- popularly known as the Smithsonian.

The mousy girl (the airport reporters would have identified her as Barbara Bland) jumped into the next cab in line and rapped: "Smithsonian! Please hurry!"

It was a short distance to the sprawling museum and the hackman had his work cut out for him in beating the first cab.

But he managed it.

He pulled up and deposited the young lady who tipped him excessively and disappeared into the great entrance.

The National Museum is located on the west side of the "Mall" -- the broad strip of park which is situated in the center of Washington between the grandeur of the Capitol dome and the masonry finger that is the Washington Monument.

Starting at the entrance and going completely through the museum so as to observe all the exhibits and read the cards stating what they were might very easily take up an entire week's time.

Various wings of the museum were given over to Archeology, Geology, Anthropology, and other branches of scientific knowledge.

Doc Savage arrived ... paid the admission fee ... and went directly to the *Mayan* exhibit.

This was dominated by cases containing artifacts pertaining to the Mayan Indians of Central America. A tribe that as far as its once-advanced civilization was concerned had fallen into decline centuries before Columbus came.

They had never been built more than a handful of cities. These ruins were subsequently covered over by jungle.

The Mayan people had all-but-vanished from their haunts. It was exceedingly difficult to find traces that they had ever existed. And so archeologists therefore considered them very important.

Doc Savage moved among these exhibits, pausing every so often. There were life-sized wax replicas of Mayan people in their habitats. Dioramas. Everything looked astoundingly lifelike.

It was not a busy time for the museum. Few patrons were inside. In fact, there came a moment when the *Mayan* room was empty except for a single, rather bored-looking guard.

Soon, several men percolated into the room. Most were nondescript. One, however, stood out.

He was a **big** man. But not in the way of Doc Savage whose **size** was evident only when he was near something to which he could be compared.

This man was a human hulk. His shoulders were road as was his chest. His head had a roundness to it, also.

Not that the newcomer was fat. He was not. The way he rolled into the room making soft sounds with his feet told one that. If anything, he had something of the aspect of a football player. A linebacker, perhaps.

He moved to a case containing a broken tablet of some sort and began studying it.

The men distributed themselves about the room and gave their attention to various exhibits. From time-to-time, they stole quick furtive glances in the direction of Doc Savage and the guard.

One man sidled up to the **big** hulk of a fellow and whispered: "That's him, Hike. Tan topcoat and gray hair. Just like the Chief said."

"Okay. Get set," said the one addressed as 'Hike'.

The first man moved off and jointed the other two.

The Bronze Man seemed oblivious to all this furtive activity. He was gazing intently at a display case containing an array of *Mayan* weapons. Stone-handled knives with wicked blades shaped from obsidian (a black volcanic glass which when chipped to a smoky brown edge has the butting ability of a modern straight-razor). A prominent **bronze** plaque named '**Clark Savage, Sr.**' as the donor.

Clark Savage, Sr. (now deceased) was Doc Savage's father and the man who had placed Doc in the hands of scientists for the work that he now pursued.

Few knew it, but Clark Savage Sr. had discovered a tribe of Mayans still holding away over a valley deep in Central America. In repayment for certain kindnesses, the leader of the tribe had promised to supply the son with a limitless supply of *Mayan gold* to help finance his remarkable career.

In turn, Doc kept the secret of their existence from an intruding world and was fabulously wealthy as a result. *[read "The Man of Bronze (#001)"]*

The hulk named "Hike" remained at the case which held the tablet covered with *Mayan hieroglyphics*.

He coughed softly.

The other two men ripped blackjacks from under their clothing and promptly applied them to the head of the unsuspecting guard.

The use of force was excessive under the circumstances. If it had been intended to silence the guard before he could give outcry, the raiders were very much mistaken because the guard emitted a mere *bleat* of a shock (perhaps reflexive) before crumpling to the polished floor.

This, in turn, captured the attention of the *Bronze Man*. He turned.

The others (there were now four led by the hulking Hike) were advancing on him with grim purpose.

Obviously preparing for a fight, the *bronze giant* shucked off his topcoat and let his gray hat fall to the floor.

He stood revealed now. The *bronze* of his hair was a little darker than the *bronze* of his features. The hair was straight and fitted so close as to give the impression of a metal skullcap.

Not the least thing were the incredible *tendons* visible under the *bronze* skin and hair.

Most arresting of all were his eyes. Uncanny *eyes* like pools of *flake gold* always in motion. In the dim illumination of the museum, they seemed to *scintillate* faintly.

Doc Savage stood his ground and did not look particularly perturbed at the prospect of imminent violence. Neither did he register (as far as appearances went) any great excitement over what he was doing.

This was one of his peculiar traits. Only on the rarest occasions did he show any undue excitement.

But the same could not be said for his would-be assailants.

Spreading his arms to hold back his fellows, the hulking Hike stopped short, a flabbergasted look making face roundly incredulous. Had he been confronted with a large and obviously hungry lion, he could not have looked more shocked.

He said suddenly: "Careful, boys! Careful! We're standin' right in the open door of Hell!"

His companions did not all agree with him. Two of them sniffed and drew weapons which seemed to be ordinary children's water-pistols.

Doc Savage showed he was not recklessly brave, then.

He faded back, mere inches ahead of twin streams of some pungent chemical.

His keen sense of smell identified it in an instant. Hospital **chloroform**! A potent knock-out solution IF the fumes were inhaled deeply for several seconds.

Still moving away from the splashing streams, the **Bronze Man** held his breath. The water-pistols were of the cylindrical type. Thus their capacity was not great.

This fact was demonstrated a moment later when the tiny nozzles ceased discharging.

"We're outta gas!" a man complained. "And he ain't down for the count yet."

Hike growled: "Need a job done right, a man's gotta do it himself!"

And the hulking bruiser rushed the *bronze giant*, arms out, ready to grab his foe.

He made a confident clutch ...

... and got armfuls of air.

Hike gaped at the empty space where the **Bronze Man** had stood. Off balance, he teetered.

He did not see the hand that sent him sliding on his face to mash his nose up against a rude stone idol!

He recovered enough to get himself organized.

Hike yelled: "Sic 'im, boys! If you lick 'im, your names will go down in History!"

The others produced additional weapons. Tiny flat automatics, easily concealable and -- at close quarters -- as deadly as heavy-caliber Army automatics.

"Nix!" Hike barked. "This guy won't bluff and you've only got blank cartridges in your guns!"

The next instant, the *bronze giant* had grabbed the bun. He pointed it at the hard marble floor and <snapped> it.

It roared. But no bullet hit the floor. *Blanks, right enough.*

The fact that the men should have blank cartridges in their guns was surprising enough to cause Doc Savage's unusual *golden eyes* to widen.

He flung the weapon aside and began treating his attackers in a similarly careless fashion.

A man would attempt to grasp his coat ...

... only to find himself bouncing off walls and other hard surfaces.

It soon became clear that the unexpected was about to transpire.

The amazing **Bronze Man** who had a fabulous set of *muscles* was going to whip his several foes.

Had them whipped, in fact!

He crowded them back bruised, panting into a corner. Each man who tried to rush past him, he drove back with blunt, awful **blows**.

"Our mothers'll sure be proud of us for this!" Hike puffed.

He turned ... yanked a stone-bladed hatchet off the wall at his back ... and let fly.

It was deftly dodged by the **giant Man of Bronze**.

Hike now demonstrated that he was not the halfwit his laughable operations had made him appear.

He seized the unconscious guard and bore him back up the hallway, obviously intending to use him as a shield against the mighty *bronze giant's* wrath.

Doc Savage -- as soon as he could tear himself away from his foes -- wheeled and pursued him.

Hike had gained a few yards. He turned as he ran and saw that the **Herculean bronze man** was pursuing him alone.

"Run!" Hike howled at his men. "Get yourselves clear! I'll handle the rest!"

The men obediently turned and ran for the nearest exit.

Hike had an unusual set of muscles himself. He made time, bulky as he was.

But he was not a rabbit which he needed to be escape. The *bronze giant* overhauled him.

Hike suddenly hurled the limp guard back against his pursuer. This delayed the latter slightly.

Doc caught the man as if he were no more substantial than a feather pillow. Mindful of the guard's injured skull, he kept the man from falling to the hard floor.

Hike wretched open a door and popped through it, slammed it!

There was a bolt on the inside it. He threw it.

He did not stop there but dashed away.

It was evident that Hike knew every recess of the great museum because he scuttled through remote passages, occasionally hunching over to knock aside a shouting guard. He left by a side door.

He found his men grouped anxiously on a side-street.

"Run!" Hike gasped. "If we get outta this, we'd all better go to church on Sunday."

"We gonna let one guy put the kibosh on us?" a man snarled.

"Yep," Hike to him. "Because that one guy happens to be **Doc Savage**."

"Doc Savage?"

"The 'Man of Miracles' himself," Hike puffed. "Come on!"

They ran.

In the meantime, Doc had lowered the insensate guard to the floor and made sure that he was alive. He ascertained that dynamite or a cutting torch was the only way of opening the door immediately.

He whipped back out of the museum through the same exit employed by Hike's gang just moments before and immediately observed the erstwhile kidnappers legging it down a side-street.

A few yards to the left stood a young woman. A rather plainly-attired young woman whose gray eyes were wide with amazement at the goings-on.

The **Bronze Man** ignored her and raced after Hike and his accomplices.

But the latter had 2 large automobiles waiting. Leaping into the machines, they took off.

Doc Savage -- observing a taxicab parked down another side-street -- whipped toward it. The cab was a mossy-green thing, ancient. The driver stuck his head out.

The driver had his cap yanked down over a somewhat thin face. In the back of the car sat another man. But his figure was indistinct. A bulky fellow, though.

Doc Savage stopped. He shouted!

His words were not English. They were in a tongue that would be understood by more than a dozen men in the so-called Civilized World. Ancient *Mayan*, the pure strain.

The car instantly left. Its speed was surprising for such a ramshackle-looking old vehicle.

The Bronze Man seemed to lose interest in the 2 cars in which Hike's gang had fled.

He did, however, repeat the license numbers once forward and once backward. Which was enough to fix them almost permanently in his trained mind.

A newsboy -- unaware of what had happened -- stood on a nearby corner. He waved a paper and yelled the headlines.

"All about phantom potentate!" he shouted. "Goz still gone! *Extra!*"

III -- The Persistent Mouse

After the ancient **green** taxi had departed the vicinity, Doc Savage turned back into the museum.

He was promptly accosted by the young woman that he had passed.

"Mr. Savage," she said anxiously. "Perhaps you remember me. I'm Barbara Bland. With the *Globe*."

Her eyes were a sparkling gray. And her lips were probably all that could be asked for. When they were not held in such a grim line.

Seen up close, her lack of make-up did not detract from her natural beauty so much.

"You followed me here," said Doc.

It was not a question but a statement.

And it was not challenged by the girl calling herself 'Barbara Bland'.

"I really, really must have an interview for my paper," she said in a wheedling tone. She actually wrung her hands together and brushed at an eye as if to intercept a tear.

"It is not my policy to give interviews," Doc said flatly while re-entering the museum.

He moved briskly toward the spot where had left the unconscious guard.

"Let me explain," Barbara Bland said breathlessly, running a little in an effort to keep up. "The *Globe* hired me on a trial basis. I need this job very badly. The editor -- he's an old meanie, I guess -- promised that if I could furnish some good copy on this missing king matter, he would make me a permanent part of his stuff. So you see, I'm in a fix. Oh, won't you take pity on me?"

"Sorry."

This was not the answer the young woman reporter expected.

"In heaven's name, why not?"

"In our line of work," he explained, "publicity is bad business. Enemies could learn useful items that could be turned against us. As a matter-of-fact, for the past several months we have been keeping our pictures out of the newspapers and been buying up all copies of magazines and newspapers containing our photos all over the Country. We have managed to have the radio commentators cease mentioning us. It seemed to be getting results."

Barbara Bland was carrying a handbag. She pulled a rolled-up magazine (it was of the 'True Crime' variety) from within.

"Then how," she challenged, "do you explain this?"

Doc Savage's **golden eyes** flicked to the cover. A nearly imperceptible frown darkened his *metallic* features. It was the magazine which had cover-featured him.

"A regrettable event," he said. "And the chief reason I have been forced to try solving this present mystery *incognito*."

They reached the guard. He was no longer alone. A fellow guard had found him.

The latter looked up and seemed about to reach for his sidearm ...

... then recognized the approaching **Man of Bronze**.

"Mr. Savage!" he said. "What do you know about this?"

Doc dropped to one knee and moved his strong *metallic* fingers about the back of the guard's skull. He seemed satisfied by what he learned and wiped a tiny amount of **crimson** off his fingertips onto a handkerchief.

"No fracture," he pronounced, coming erect. "This man should be hospitalized at once in case there is concussion."

"An ambulance is on its way. But what happened here?"

"He ran afoul of an attempted kidnapping," Doc explained.

"Yeah? Who'd they try to kidnap?"

"Myself, it would appear."

The guard looked dumbfounded.

"What kind of ignoramuses would try to snatch **you** of all people, Sir?"

"That remains to be determined," answered Doc. "Has anything been stolen?"

"Not that anybody's found."

Now Barbara Bland inserted herself into the conversation.

"Do you believe these kidnapers are the same ones who spirited away the King of Merida?" she queried.

The young woman might have been expecting any kind of an answer. But the one she got surprised her.

The **giant bronze man** seemed simply not to hear the question just as he had missed General Frontenac's interrogatives earlier in the day.

*That was a strange trait of this remarkable **Man of Bronze** (frequently a most aggravating one). When there was something he did not want to discuss, he suddenly became deaf to all queries on the point.*

"I asked if you thought those men you were chasing had anything to do with the King's disappearance," Barbara Bland persisted.

But Doc Savage continued to ignore her.

He went to the display case that had been donated by his father and -- satisfied that it had not been damaged in the fracas -- moved away. His weirdly active **eyes** were questing about the **Mayan** room.

The other guard went into the next room to check on the exhibits.

Barbara Bland <tapped> a shoe on the floor angrily and said: "Well?"

But that did not good.

At last, she changed her tactics and tried cajoling.

"Please! Can't you tell me something? Anything? I am terribly desperate."

Before the **Bronze Man** could reply, there came an interruption.

From somewhere about Doc Savage's person, a voice emerged.

"Calling Doc. Renny calling Doc."

From under his coat, the **Bronze Man** extracted a small case equipped with knobs and a grille. It would have filled out his inner coat pocket completely. He spoke into the grille.

"Go ahead, Renny."

"We trailed those birds to an apartment house across from the Capitol Building. It's in a rat hole called Dingman Alley. The name on the door says 'Hike Ewing'."

"Hike is the large fellow," Doc advised.

"Fits him," grunted Renny.

The girl -- gazing wide-eyed at the case -- said nothing. Renny's voice boomed out of the compact case again.

"This 'Hike' made a telephone call a few minutes ago. Long Tom was unable to get his electrical listening-in device close to the right telephone wire in time to catch the conversation, though."

The girl made surprised shapes with her colorless mouth.

"That thing is a radio receiver!" she gasped. "And so small."

Then she added: " 'Renny' and 'Long Tom' are two of your assistants. I have just been reading about them. You had them at the museum and they had their work assigned to them. You certainly do not overlook any bets, do you?"

Doc Savage seemed not to hear her.

Renny asked: "What do you want us to do about this, Doc?"

"Sit tight," the **Bronze Man** advised. "I am on my way."

Doc put away the case as a contingent of District of Columbia **bluecoats** arrived.

They asked many questions. They were deferential in the manner in which they questioned the **Man of Bronze**.

After Doc had explained that the hulking Hike and his men had escaped (he left out the fact that his own men had trailed them to Dingman Alley), the police turned their attention to Barbara Bland.

"And what's your role in this?" one demanded.

"I can vouch for her," Doc said unexpectedly.

The men-in-**blue** calmed down as if oil had been poured on their troubled waters.

Barbara Bland looked at the **bronze giant** and for the first time seemed to become aware that he might be more than a big fellow named '**Doc Savage**'.

He was strikingly handsome. And furthermore apparently not aware that a very attractive young woman stood at his side.

An intriguing combination to the young woman concerned.

"If no one minds," Doc said, "I must continue my investigation."

No one minded. In fact, the police all-but-curtseyed the Bronze Man out of the museum.

Barbara Bland hurried after him, saying: "You owe me a favor."

"How so?"

"You neglected some items back there. Like the 'minor fact' that your two associates followed those men to a house."

"My aides and I prefer to work unencumbered," the **Bronze Man** explained as they stepped out into the cool air of the day."

"Mind if I tag along?"

"It would not be advisable. There could be **danger**."

"I'll chance it. I simply must return to Denver with a story or my poor mother and I will be thrown out of our home."

Doc Savage seemed to favor the notion -- unappealing as it was from the standpoint of danger to the earnest girl reporter -- further thought.

But before he could reply, Barbara Bland interjected.

"And you'll have to admit, it would be better than my going back to those policemen and telling them exactly where to find those crooks."

The **Bronze Man** agreed that it would.

But the lack of gratitude in his tone was something that the young lady seemed to find vaguely aggravating.

Doc signaled a taxi and it bore them toward the nearby dome of the Capitol Building.

"Have you made any progress in locating King Goz?" the girl wondered after several silent moments had passed.

"None so far," Doc admitted.

"Then you cannot explain how he vanished from a moving car traveling along Pennsylvania Avenue?"

"I have a theory."

Barbara Bland raised a plain eyebrow.

"What is it?"

"It is best not to say at this time," Doc stated.

When he did not elaborate on that (in fact, did not say anything more), the young woman nipped her lips in an exasperated manner.

She had decided that this *bronze giant* -- who as far as personal appearance and ability went had everything -- was one of the driest conversation wells that she had ever tried to pump.

While she sat there and gently sharpened her teeth on the **emerald** setting of a ring which was not on her engagement finger, she pondered.

Could it be that he was scared of pretty girls? She was half-tempted to ask him.

In the shadow of the Capitol dome, 2 men hunkered down on an apartment house rooftop.

One was a tall gloomy fellow with a face that was long and pleased. Conversely, this meant that Colonel John Renwick was unhappy.

As an engineer, "Renny" (to use the form of address he preferred) was without peer. Bridges, railroads, and dams from Texas to Egypt bore his stamp.

He was bending over a boxy bit of apparatus which had been set near the roof combing. A telephonic headset was clamped about his ears as he <tapped> one earpiece experimentally.

The second man came scuttling up, moving low so as not to be seen. His physical build was nothing to brag about. And his complexion (it was the color of mushrooms) always started people worrying about his health.

But in actuality, Major Thomas J. Roberts (aka "Long Tom", oddly enough given his lack of stature) could whip most men he chanced to encounter and give those that he couldn't a memorable workout. He was an electrical engineer by trade and tops in the field by reputation.

"What's wrong?" Long Tom asked sourly.

"Dunno," thumped Renny in a 'whisper' that started a robin off a nearby magnolia bough.

He transferred his <tapping> to the amplifier box.

"You'd better not have broken my listener, you big oaf," Long Tom complained.

"Hold your durn horses," said Renny, getting up.

He glanced over the edge of the roof. A pickup mike dangled by an electrical cord before an open window below.

It was hardly likely that the occupants of the apartment below had seen the microphone. But no sound was coming from the supersensitive listening-in device.

Hands with which Renny made the adjustment were incredibly huge. Either **fist** would more than fill a quart pail.

Both **fists** obviously had been mistreated in the past. Their scarred appearance and anvil-like texture lent considerable credence to Renny's favorite boast that he could knock the wooden panel out of any door with either fist.

He turned up the volume control.

A fly buzzing near the microphone made an airplane noise.

Renny had to cut the volume briefly. Then he turned it up after the fly had moved on.

He heard certain very small shuffling sounds.

"It's working," the big-**fisted** engineer said at last.

"It should," huffed Long Tom who took great pride in his devices and disliked anyone other than himself working them.

But he had a separate apparatus to tend to with which he had tapped into the apartment house phone connection. Too late (as it turned out) to pick up anything other than the close of a cryptic conversation.

The missed opportunity rankled the undersized electrical wizard.

Listening, Renny asked: "Seen anything of Johnny?"

"Johnny" was another of Doc Savage's little coterie of assistants and a renowned geologist and archeologist.

"Not yet," Long Tom admitted. "But the long string-of-bones said he'd be here about now."

"He'll be here," murmured Renny.

His voice was not made for murmuring. The robin had just alighted once more on its favorite branch and now it took wing again. This time it did not return.

Suddenly Renny raised a shushing! finger.

Long Tom crowded close. "Got something?"

Renny clamped the headset more tightly to his big head.

Frustrated, Long Tom grabbed one headphone loose of the giant engineer's ear and put his own ear close to it. It was a big ear, designed for capturing sounds.

A rumbling voice was saying: "Boys, this is bad. This is real bad."

"Sounds like Hike," Renny said.

"How would you know? We haven't identified his voice yet!"

"Pipe down," Renny rumbled.

The conversation continued ...

"Damn that Elvern D. Kastellantz! Why'd he put us up to this? That's what I wanna know."

"Relax, Hike" came another voice. "We shook Savage. We're in the clear."

*"You don't get it, do you? Guys what mix with that **bronze** guy ain't ever in the clear! He'll remember us. He'll hunt us down. We gotta blow town!"*

A rustling sound like a newspaper being picked up filled the receiver.

"*That King Goz business is still all over the front pages,*" a new voice said, evidently attempting to change the trend of the uncomfortable confabulation.

"*They find the old boy yet?*" the second voice wondered.

"Nope," said the other. "It's got everybody mystified."

"*Mystified hell!*" snorted bull-voiced Hike. "*What mystifies me is why this Kastellantz character hired us to snatch Savage without even tellin' us who the guy was. Dumb clucks that we are, we actually went after the guy armed only with trick water-pistols!*"

"*Maybe it had something to do with missin' King,*" a fourth man interjected.

A finger<snapping> sound broke in. It was quite loud! Big hands had made that sound.

"*Hey! You got an idea! I hadn't thought of that. Maybe it does at that.*"

"*But how does this Kastellantz hook up with a king?*"

"Dunno," Hike said meaningly. "*But the minute that egg gets here, we're gonna shake it out of him. Get me?*"

Renny and Long Tom exchanged wide-eyed glances.

"The guy behind this is coming here!" Long Tom hissed.

"Holy cow!" rumbled Renny using his pet expression. "If this Elvern D. Kastellantz they're talking about is involved in the King mystery, then we can land on the whole gang once he gets here."

"Right. And won't Doc be pleased!" agreed Long Tom.

An unexpected voice (quite friendly, actually) now piped up directly behind them.

"That," he said, "I rather doubt."

Renny and Long Tom started. They were too practiced in the silky work of trouble-busting to make any unnecessary moves.

So they did not jump, evade, turn around, or otherwise give the man who had slipped up behind them any excuse to shoot.

"In case you are wondering about your rather skeletal comrade," the voice added pleasantly, "he is sleeping off a headache in his car where I found him."

"Holy cow!" Renny said thickly.

IV -- Man Flash

"Stand up!"

Gloomy Renny Renwick and pale Long Tom Roberts obeyed the harsh command from their unknown captor.

"Turn around."

They turned.

They were not surprised to find a **pistol** pointed in their general direction.

It was a revolver. The blunt lead noses of the bullets resting in the cylinder openings looked ugly.

The first thing they noticed about their captor was that he was nattily attired. His clothes were not by any means spectacular. It was just that they were elegantly cut and he filled them out without an ounce of adipose tissue.

The fellow had a long nose which came to a sharp point; eyes which looked as if they were made of black glass; and his bluish cheeks bore traces of powder as if he had shaved recently.

His hair was a distinctive **red**. Not bright -- more of the color of dully glowing copper.

Neither Renny nor Long Tom had ever seen him before in their lives.

"Now," the **copper**-haired individual invited, "Slowly raise your hands and take that rig off your ears, Long-and-Happy."

Renny lifted his monster **paws** and let the headphones drop to the roof.

"It is well-known that you gentlemen carry certain frightful weapons," said their captor. "I would like them taken out and set at your feet."

His voice was very smooth.

Renny and Long Tom took infinite care in spading their hands under their coats.

They came out holding intricate pistols not much larger than oversized automatics. They were fitted with curled magazines.

These were examples of a machine-pistol which Doc Savage had perfected and constructed. The only samples of this gun ever fabricated were in the hands of his Five(5) aides although the design would likely have brought a fortune from any one of several war departments. The **Man of Bronze** had no intention of adding to the array of devices which man has made to kill man.

In fact, they were usually charged with so-called "mercy" bullets (i.e., hollow shells which broke upon contact with human flesh and containing a fast-acting anesthetic potion).

"I shall take those," said their captor, putting out a hand.

The faces of Long Tom and Renny fell. But having no choice in the matter, they complied.

The weapons made quite a handful and the other dipped his knees when one of the tiny weapons started to tumble from his grasp.

He caught it, simultaneously jutting his revolver at Renny who was in the process of lowering his massive **hands** for a quick grab.

"Not so fast!" the gunman snarled.

The huge engineer subsided. His big **paws** lifted once more.

"Very good," said the **copper**-haired man, regaining his composure. "Now we will join my followers below."

Renny and Long Tom were marched along to a roof trap and urged down this.

Moments later with hands still lifted ceilingward, they stood to one side while their **red**-headed captor used one of the machine-pistols to rap on an apartment door.

"Who is it?" a bellowing voice demanded.

"You know my voice!"

"Just the guy I wanna see," gritted Hike Ewing, throwing the door violently open and shoving out his rounding face.

He saw the man ... then his eyes shifted to the helpless Renny and Long Tom.

Hike Ewing's mouth dropped like the jaw of a flummoxed steam shovel.

"Mother of men!" he croaked. "Where'd you find these two?"

"Inside! Quickly!"

The giant engineer and the pale electrician were hustled in.

Hike Ewing's men came out of the chairs in which they had been sitting. There were more of them than either they had expected.

A full seven(7). Toughs. With hard faces.

They looked as if they should -- from force of habit -- line up and do the prison lockstep once they started moving.

"Who're those characters?" one demanded.

"Don't you guys know nothin'?" Hike groaned. "Those are two of **Doc Savage's** boys!"

This brought quiet, thoughtful expressions to Hike Ewing's underlings.

The **copperhead** bushwhacker then answered the question that was on every mind.

"I found them on the roof eavesdropping," he explained. "They tapped your phone and stationed a microphone outside a window."

"Lotta good it did, then," Hike grunted. "They couldn't have heard nothin' from us. Because we don't know nothin' to start with."

"Precisely," returned the other, motioning Long Tom and Renny to take seats on a long, threadbare divan.

Several gunmen moved out of the way. Renny Renwick weighed in excess of 250 pounds and had the general build of an elephant. No one seemed eager to be caught in grabbing range of his knobby paws.

When the big-**fisted** engineer sat on his end of the divan, Long Tom's end actually lifted off the floor noticeably!

The **redhead** with the machine-gun turned to his hirelings (for that is what they were) and complained.

"Not only have you failed to carry out my instructions. But you also allowed two of Doc Savage's men to trail you here. This was stupid. I cannot have stupid men working for me."

The air seemed to have leaked out of big Hike Ewing's ire at being sent out to abduct the legendary Doc Savage unawares.

He swallowed his retort. He could not explain away the embarrassing presence of Doc's men.

"We were sure nobody followed us," Hike mumbled contritely.

"It is fortunate that it was only these two and not Savage himself who got on your trail. Otherwise you would not be standing here making weak explanations," the **redhead** said bitingly.

"You made your point," Hike muttered. "Now answer us this: What's this all about? Why do you want Doc Savage snatched? Don't you know he's poison?"

"Don't ask me any questions!" the other snapped. "You might give something away to Savage's pals here."

"Sure, Elvern," Hike said, thoroughly cowed now.

"That," the **redhead** snarled, "is going to cost you a week's pay!"

"What?"

"Mentioning my name."

"Gosh, Elvern. I'm sorry!" Hike exploded.

The man who was apparently Elvern D. Kastellantz said: "The other one -- Littlejohn -- is down in a car parked around the corner."

Hike began: "But ..."

"Don't ask questions, you fool!" Kastellantz ripped. "We'll see if we can use Littlejohn for bait to decoy Doc Savage into our hands."

Hike motioned for two of his gang to go and fetch the third of Doc's associates.

"What about these two here?" Hike asked after they had shut the door behind them.

Kastellantz swore.

"Tie and gag them," he ordered.

This was done. Renny and Long Tom continued to sit on the divan, looking abashed and angry by turns.

"We can get them out of the alley without anybody seeing them," Kastellantz said. "We'll take them to a place I have set up and burn them in the furnace."

Through his tight gag, Renny Renwick expelled a polysyllabic grunt that was probably his pet expression again.

"I thought you didn't want any killin'," Hike protested.

"It is Doc Savage that I did not wish killed," said the smooth Elvern D. Kastellantz. "And even that rule is subject to revision once I learn what he knows about the disappearance of the Chief of the Sons of the Falcon."

"Which?" <blinked> Hike.

"King Egil Goz the First," returned Elvern D. Kastellantz. "He is a descendant of the Turkish Mohammedans who conquered medieval Merida during the Crusades. That is the title given him by the warrior tribe of his birth."

"So this does have something to do with that king fella!" Hike blurted. "Listen. This may be too big for us. We're strictly second-story men by trade."

"Nonsense. You men have only to follow my orders and you will be handsomely rewarded."

At that moment, the *tramping* of feet rattled on the stairs. It sounded like 2 men walking awkwardly as if sharing a burden.

"That must be Hank and Cy with Savage's man," Hike said, going to the door.

He threw it open ...

... and was yanked from sight by a pair of *metallic bronze* hands!

Stunned silence greeted this feat of legerdemain.

While all eyes ogled the empty doorway, Renny Renwick lurched up from the rear and tore his bonds asunder.

One big **paw** swiped off his gag. The other grasped Long Tom's bonds ... gave a wrench ...

... and the puny Electrical Wizard bounded off the cushions and socked the nearest Hike Ewing underling flat!

The room became a boil of fighting men.

Pulling his gag loose, Long Tom Roberts fell upon another gunman.

The man misjudged his seemingly undernourished assailant and wound up to deliver a roundhouse right.

It never landed.

The pale electrician was all over him like a human flailing machine!

Renny was surrounded by 3 men. They looked like terriers nipping at a rhinoceros.

One fellow started a haymaker ... was lucky ... and connected. But Renny only <blinked> reproachfully.

The man began to moan, then pinch and knead his hand trying to make his poor knuckles look natural again.

They had not used their guns. So it was evident that the weapons they flourished remained unloaded from their earlier effort to run a bluff on Doc Savage.

A man whacked Renny's head with a gun.

Renny promptly knocked him down.

"Cripes!" another gunman choked. "They're rock men!"

Using his **fist** like a circus maul, Renny brought it up over and down on the gunman's head. The unprepared man's knees knocked together, then twisted as he fell to the floor.

Doc Savage was in the room now -- *a flash of Metal!* The mighty **Bronze Man** confronted the last remaining member of Hike Ewing's crew. This one had snatched up one of Doc's own supermachine pistols which he tried to use.

The *bronze giant* twisted the weapon out of his hand and shoved the man toward Renny.

Doc was driving toward the open window through which **redheaded** Elvern D. Kastellantz was endeavoring to squeeze his natty form.

Seeing the *Man of Bronze*, Kastellantz whipped out a purloined supermachine pistol and pointed it at Doc's head.

"I don't know if this thing is charged with real lead or one of those trick bullets you use," he growled. "But either way, a burst in your face will stop you in your tracks."

Doc Savage was brought up short. The man spoke the truth. Although he and his men habitually wore chain-mail undergarments that would resist lead, they were vulnerable to a head shot.

"I know who you are," Doc said.

Elvern D. Kastellantz <blinked>. His eyes rolled upward to his forehead where a disordered lock of **copper-red** hair dangled.

"I must remember to dye my hair," he returned.

Then he eeled through the window. The sound of his feet hitting the alley below was a single *click*.

Scooping up the remaining superfier, Renny lunged for the window ...

"No!" Doc warned.

Renny was well-trained. He managed to drop into a slide just as the window shattered into pieces as a flurry of bullets ripped it apart.

"Durn!" he moaned. "Musta been Long Tom's cannon. Mine was charged with mercy bullets."

"That was an ordinary pistol report," Doc hazarded. "He had not time to figure out our special safety latches."

"That'll teach Renny to stick his neck out without looking first," Long Tom gritted. He was in a corner, still beating on the gunman who had raised his dander.

"Stay with Hike's men," Doc rapped while surging out the door.

The **Bronze Man** took the stairs 3-at-a-time ... gained the lowermost landing ... then flung himself outside.

Across the alley was another apartment house. *A door was slipping closed ...*

Doc Savage knew better than to tempt Fate. It was enough for a fleeing person to push a door open and move along, creating the illusion that he had entered.

On the other hand, the wily Kastellantz might indeed have entered and be lying in ambush.

The *bronze giant* circled the dwelling. It was a decrepit thing of cracked brick and loose crumbling mortar.

He saw no sign of the fleeing Elvern D. Kastellantz.

He noted a door on the opposite side of the building. A reasonable exit opportunity to a fleeing man. It was unlocked.

He got through it in time to make room for at least **5 bullets** to come down the hallway.

The shot sounds were dull, like hard blows on a big drum which had been left out in the rain all night. It was not the sound of one of his supermachine pistols.

Doc waited. He never carried a gun. He believed that carrying one led to too much dependence being placed on it. A gunman without a gun is a helpless creature.

The **Bronze Man** pulled out of a pocket a case containing little glass capsules which were filled with his special anesthetic gas.

He flung some of them down the corridor. Then he held his breath. The gas would produce quick, harmless unconsciousness but was ineffective after mingling with the air approximately a minute.

A minute crawled past.

Came *furtive* sounds of movement. Cautious *shuffling*. He knew then that the foe was acquainted with the anesthetic gas. Not strange. He had used it for a long time.

Someone somewhere barked at him to put up his hands.

Someone else barked at the first man not to be a fool and shoot. That the sound would draw the police. This was evidently a well-known criminal hangout.

None of the voices resembled the smooth tones of Elvern D. Kastellantz.

Doc palmed more gas capsules and pegged them at long intervals. He was taking a chance. Although his ability to hold his breath was prodigious, it was nevertheless not infinite. He had learned the skill from the masters of the art -- the pearl divers of the South Seas.

A figure collapsed in the gloom. He waited. His keen hearing apprised him of steady breathing. A tense person could not have duplicated that relaxed rhythm.

Cautiously, he moved forward ...

He found Barbara Bland crumpled behind a hallway door.

His *trilling* noise -- the small fantastic note which he had made in the Department-of-Justice Building garage upon discovering *red* human hairs in the Meridan king's limousine -- came into being briefly.

The sound was a tiny thing which he did unconsciously in moments of mental turbulence. Or upon making a surprising discovery as he had now.

He throttled it.

Wordlessly, the *metallic giant* gathered the mousy girl reporter into strong corded arms and bore her out of the apartment building.

A few heads poked out of windows and cracked open door enough to permit viewing. They were hastily clapped shut. **Doc Savage** was instantly recognizable now that was hatless.

He went to a sedate sedan where 3 men slumbered. Two in the back were the Hike Ewing henchmen who had gone for Johnny Littlejohn. They had fallen victim to the *Bronze Man's* might.

The one seated behind the steering wheel was that august personage himself.

William Harper Littlejohn craned his long neck out of the window. He was a tall and wonderfully boney individual blessed with a high forehead and a shaggy mop of hair cut at what is politely called "scholastic length". In the vernacular, he resembled a musician of the "longhair" variety.

"I'll be superamalgamated, Doc! Who is she?"

The tall string-bean sounded groggy. It was evident that he had just awoken.

"No time," Doc said. "Seen anything of a well-dressed man with *red* hair?"

"No," said Johnny.

The lanky archeologist-geologist was addicted to the most amazing words on most occasions. Jawbreakers beyond the comprehension of the average man. It was suspected that this affectation was a way of showing off.

But when he was with the *Man of Bronze*, he did not use them. Johnny was well aware that Doc Savage's command of esoteric vocabulary exceeded his own arcane knowledge.

Noticing the pair in the back seat, he asked: "Who are they?"

"Hike Ewing's men. Come on! There is a lot to do."

Johnny unfolded himself from behind the wheel. The term "beanpole" might have been coined to describe his general physiology. He came near to standing 7 feet tall.

William Harper Littlejohn -- in the days before he had won the cognomen of "Johnny" -- had been an eminent professor in a great university. He usually maintained some of his professional dignity except for his clothing. Which probably always had looked -- and always would look -- as if it had been contributed by a cornfield scarecrow.

Additionally, he wore a monocle on his lapel. But he did not bring it to his eyes. It was, in fact, a magnifying glass -- not an eyepiece -- and quite handy in his work.

Doc Savage left Barbara Bland in Johnny's place and locked the car. It would not do to be seen carrying on unconscious woman about in daylight.

In Hike Ewing's apartment, there was shambles.

"No luck?" Long Tom asked sourly when Doc and Johnny entered.

The **Bronze Man** shook his head.

"Holy cow!" said Renny, knobbing and unknobbing his **fists**. "What was that guy, Doc? From what we overheard, he hired this Hike to snatch you."

"He fits," Doc Savage said, "the description of the chauffeur who drove King Goz's limousine to the White House gate on the night that the King vanished."

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed. "So it all ties in!"

"Just how, we do not yet know," Doc said while bending over the groggy form of Hike Ewing.

The big bruiser probably weighed no less than 275 pounds. But the **Man of Bronze** yanked him up to a seated position by his coat lapels with no visible exertion.

Hike was not unconscious exactly. He was as loose and lifeless as a marionette. But his eyes were wide open. *Wide and staring.*

Doc reached out to his neck and with **metallic** fingers began to perform certain spinal manipulations. Hike shivered and his arms and legs began to shake as if palsied.

He gave his round head a last shake and looked up the towering form of **Doc Savage** with sick eyes.

"Wha-what'd you do to me?" he asked thickly.

Doc said nothing.

Terror grew on bulldog Hike's face.

"Talk," rapped the **Bronze Man**.

"What'd ya wanna know?"

"Everything. Or the paralysis you just suffered could become permanent."

Doc Savage's *golden eyes* were cold, remorseless.

The big man wet his lips and stuttered: "Then I'm in a huh-hell of a j-jam because all I know is that a guy named Elvern D. Kastellantz hired me."

"What is your business?"

The man hesitated ...

"I'm a gu-gunman."

"At least you are frank enough to admit it," Doc said. "Who is this man 'Kastellantz'?"

"No clue. He called us up and offered a bundle to do his dirty work for him. We didn't know it was you he wanted snatched, Savage. Honest!"

"How did you know to go to the National Museum?"

"Kastellantz called a second time. I got the idea he 'greased' a hotel doorman to keep tabs on you for him."

Doc Savage was an excellent judge of character. He knew that the frightened gunman was speaking the unvarnished truth.

The **Bronze Man**'s cabled fingers reached out again and went to work.

Hike went limp and his eyes started jerking about in his skull. The *eerie* spell had returned.

Doc moved among the others. Some were out cold and needed no further attentions. Others were subjected to the same weird chiropractic manipulation that produced helplessness.

It was the result of long study, that trick. He had merely applied pressure to certain nerve centers and volition thereby departed. But consciousness did not. Inasmuch as they would be awake and acutely aware of their helplessness, the crooks were suffering a well-deserved scare.

Doc went to the telephone and put in a call. He spoke quick orders, then hung up.

"They going to '*college*'? Renny asked.

The **Bronze Man** nodded.

"They can tell us no more."

"Too bad," Long Tom offered, tugging on a big ear. "You had the right idea, Doc. Going to a public place, figuring it would draw out whoever's behind this mess into trying to get you out of the way so we could then nail them."

"It has worked before," Doc agreed somberly.

The **Bronze Man** next placed another call, this one to his skyscraper *Headquarters*.

"Pat, have you had any luck digging up the facts on Barbara Bland?"

In a tone so shrill that it filled the room with its terrified vibrations, the voice of Pat Savage came.

*"Doc! Never mind that phony. I found your missing King. In your **Reception** room! I got him cornered in the office safe! Come running!!"*

The connection terminated with a <click>.

Doc Savage turned to his men. His words were clipped.

"Renny, is our plane still parked at the Washington airport?"

"Yeah, Doc. Just what you wanted."

"I must return to New York immediately."

"Holy cow!"

"You three carry on without me," said Doc. "These prisoners should keep until collected. Endeavor to find Elvern D. Kastellantz."

Renny boomed: "Where do we start? He could be anywhere!"

"Remember -- Kastellantz has one of our machine-pistols."

Long Tom <snapped> his fingers.

"Of course! It should be a snap. I got everything we need in my equipment case. We'll get right on it, Doc."

Johnny reminded: "What about that she-reporter Barbara Bland?"

"See if she won't accompany you."

The lanky archeologist-geologist raised an eyebrow.

"Is that smart?"

"Her role in this affair may prove larger than hitherto suspected.

And with that, the **Bronze Man** left the room.

His departure was as silent as a passing cloud.

V -- Far-Fetched Yarn

Doc Savage disliked publicity. But this did not mean that he was not exactly human as some individuals had concluded on certain occasions.

Fame is a wine which even the modest find pleasant. But with the Man of Bronze, it was a question of whether-or-not he remained in the world of the living.

He had enemies (even he did not how many) and any publicity connected with his movements was likely to lead to traps.

He had not given the monthly "True Detective" magazine an interview for the basis of its article. As a matter-of-fact, there had been no interview. The writing staff had gone on its imagination and on rumor. The result -- if not fact -- had been pleasant reading and interesting not to say sensational. It had also boosted the circulation over the million copy mark.

There was a crowd in the lobby of the skyscraper which held Doc Savage's *Headquarters*. Readers of the magazine, autograph bugs, and probably some individuals (perfectly normal) who had nothing better to do than to stand around and watch for a glimpse of a famous person.

The crowd knew what it was looking for. The magazine had carried a picture of the *Bronze Man* snapped without his permission. An artist had colored the photograph to show his unusual *metallic* coloring. The throng was keeping its collective eye peeled for such a personage.

Not even a second glance did anyone give to a stooped figure in a shiny, threadbare black overcoat which hobbled into the lobby of the magnificent building.

This individual wore a derby hat which looked as old as some of the observers. He had a hooked nose and black whiskers which could have stood a good combing. His old shoes were out at the toes and he assisted himself along with a cheap cane.

If this person had started mumbling that he bought old clothes, no one would have been surprised.

The shabby stooped figure entered an express elevator.

"Eighty-sixth," he said in a quavering voice.

He was carried up and deposited in a corridor which was very plain and seemed to have only one office door. This bore a legend in small *bronze* letters:

Clark Savage, Jr.

When the stooped figure approached the door, it opened as if by magic.

Out of the room beyond came 2 voices engaged in a furious altercation.

One of them sounded as if its source might be a small child. The other was suave, well-modulated. One obviously accustomed to much public speaking.

"You're nuts, Ham," affirmed the childish voice.

"Monk you thick-headed missing-link," said the other voice. "You not only have the voice of a child. But also the mind of one, too. Believing in such things!"

The newcomer with the derby, the whiskers, and the old overcoat walked into a **Reception** room which was equipped with luxurious rugs, a massive inlaid table that was undoubtedly costly, numerous expensive comfortable chairs, and an old-fashioned safe of which a bank would have been proud.

Abruptly, the pair broke off their argument. They made quite a picture.

One (he had been addressed as 'Monk') was not very tall and almost as wide as he was high. His arms, remarkably enough, seemed thicker than his legs. His neck was negligible and so was his forehead. But his mouth wasn't. It looked as if it were fashioned for taking an entire grapefruit at a bite.

He was scarred in places. And the hair growing out of his leathery hide very much resembled **rusty** wires.

His resemblance to a full-grown gorilla was marked. His full name -- Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Blodgett Mayfair -- was such a mouthful that few ever called him anything other than "Monk".

The other was slender and wasp-waisted and attired in faultless evening dress. It was said that Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks (who was often called "Ham" by those who were not afraid to) was often followed down the street by tailors enraptured by his sartorial splendor and ability to wear clothes as they should be worn. His face was sharp, his dark eyes intelligent.

He was waving about a lean dark **cane** as if on the verge of "braining" the seemingly brainless Monk Mayfair.

These two looked at the newcomer with the derby, the beard, and the old overcoat.

The dapper Ham indicated his apish companion.

"If you're buying old clothes, you might make a deal for those he's wearing. They are ready for the rag barrel.

The simian Monk looked indignant.

"Beat it," he told the fellow who had just arrived. "I'm gonna slaughter this fashion plate and you might be gored."

The newcomer now spoke.

His voice was entirely different from the one that he had used on the elevator operator. Its modulations, its unmistakable suppressed **power**, its pleasantness were little short of startling.

"What are you two arguing about now?" he asked.

The two dissenters -- Monk and Ham -- jumped as if they had suddenly found their feet in cold water.

"**Doc Savage!**" Ham exclaimed.

Monk recovered from his surprise and emitted several squeaks of mirth.

"What's the idea of the disguise, Doc?"

Doc Savage straightened and removed the derby, the black whiskers, and the old overcoat. He became a *bronze giant* of unusual stature but with a good deal more than size to make him striking.

He seemed to have grown in height and stature. That was impossible of course, the apparent phenomenon being due to his having carried himself previously so as to seem not only less tall but also less conspicuous.

"That magazine article seems to have stirred me up a public," he explained. "They looked friendly enough. But there might have been an exception among them."

Monk scratched his nubbin of a head. He did not look the part, his dwarfed skull seeming to afford no room for brains. But he was admittedly one of the greatest of industrial chemists.

"I know the guy who owns that magazine," he said. "He might fire the editor who printed that story."

"They have to make a living," Doc Savage told him quietly. "And it did not contain enough facts to do us harm. It might even conceivably do some good because it certainly bears down on the moral that 'Crime does not pay'. However, it has undone our recent efforts to downplay our unfortunate notoriety."

Monk nodded ... seemed to dismiss that matter ... and turned on the nattily-clad Ham Brooks.

"Listen, shyster. If Pat say's it's so, then it's so."

"Only a superstitious ape such as yourself would believe such a ridiculous yarn," Ham sniffed. "There are no such beings as *ghosts, spooks, phantoms, shades, revenants, apparitions, or specters!*"

"Tell it to Harvard!"

Doc Savage studied the pair as he finished removing his disguise. They were the remaining two of his aides who assisted in the strange work to which he devoted his life. They were experts in their particular professions and invaluable. Ham Brooks was one of the most astute lawyers that Harvard had ever turned out.

Each of these two had -- on occasion -- risked his own life to save the other. But a stranger would never have imagined it by watching them. They squabbled continuously on anything.

Doc asked: "Where is Pat?"

"In the **Library**," replied Ham.

"Lock her in?"

"Naw," offered Monk. "Pat's trying to prove that what she saw wasn't no hallucination. Said your **Library** was probably the only room in the joint that wasn't haunted."

"Something was said about the safe," Doc reminded.

Monk squeaked: "We ain't tried to open it, Doc."

"No reason to," added Ham. "Even if Pat is your cousin, Doc, her story is just too preposterous. She told it us when we got back from kenneling our pets Chemistry and Habeas Corpus and then flew into a huff when I expressed disbelief."

The **Bronze Man** asked: "Kennel?"

"We," Monk announced proudly, "have turned over a new leaf."

After a cursory glance at the big office safe, Doc Savage went into the next room. It was filled with substantial bookcases crammed with thousands of tones (all ponderous-looking) on shelves and in cases. The books were on technical scientific subjects -- erudite things which would never be found in an ordinary library. Incidence Lines of the Neutron was a typical title.

Light was splashing in through a tall bank of windows illuminating spirals of dust motes like fading galaxies.

Doc saw his cousin.

"What took you so long!" asked Pat, leaping from a leather divan.

A thick book she had been consulting clapped shut as it was tossed onto the cushions.

"Difficulties," said Doc without elaborating.

Pat marched up to the big **Bronze Man**. She was a striking, outdoorsy-looking girl. Her frock was tasteful yet fetching. She had a wealth of **bronze** hair (much like the color of Doc's) and her **eyes** were a **golden** tint.

They were snapping now.

"That-that fashion plate Ham had the nerve to question my story," Pat said excitedly. "I came in here to see if one of your reference books could explain it."

"Something was said about a king in my safe," Doc reminded.

"Something!" Pat huffed.

She seized the **bronze giant's** arm and marched him back into the **Reception** room.

He did not resist. He knew better than to stir up the vivacious Pat. *She could be a tigress when aroused!*

Monk and Ham wisely made way as Pat piloted Doc to the massive safe. It was as tall as the *Man of Bronze* himself. Which was to say that it was not short. It was of laminated construction and elderly.

"Open it," Pat insisted.

"First, your story," Doc said.

"I've been waiting hours to see this box cracked!" Pat snapped. "And I won't wait any longer!"

"If there is something inside the safe, it is not going anywhere," Doc said reasonably.

"No some 'thing'! Some 'one'! Your missing King! The monarch that they're turning Washington upside down to locate. I saw him with my own eyes!"

"Describe this person," Doc requested.

Pat looked odd. Her face settled into calmer lines. I was quite pretty that face. She could have been a magazine cover-girl or a movie queen.

"What do you expect? He looked like a king!" She said exasperatedly.

"Details, Pat,"

Pat sighed and the tension went out of her voice. With one *golden eye* on the imposing safe, she began rattling off description.

"He was dressed in a *red* robe with an ermine-trimmed cloak for starters. He had the biggest *gold* crown you ever saw perched on his head. And hanging off his face was a long white beard Old King Cole would have envied."

"Old?"

Pat reflected.

"I didn't see his face clearly. I was in that wizard's workshop you call a *Laboratory* and thought I heard a noise. I raced right into the *Library*. That's when I spied him coming through that door."

Pat pointed to the connecting door.

"In this direction."

"Go on," Doc prompted.

"I caught up with him right here," Pat said, scuffing the spot on where she stood. "He was looking about curiously and playing with that silky beard of his. I yelled at him but he didn't seem to hear me."

Pat swallowed some air as if getting her second wind.

"This is the part that gets goofy," Ham interjected.

"You stay out of this, you-you skeptic!" Pat snapped.

Ham clutched his dark cane tightly and said nothing.

"As I was sneaking up behind his back," Pat resumed, "he walked into the safe."

"It was open?" Doc asked sharply.

"No," said Pat in a suddenly small voice.

Doc Savage rarely betrayed emotion. He gave a slight lift to one eyebrow which Pat took for an expression of extreme doubt. *Which it was.*

"Don't you go looking at me like that!" she flared. "I saw what I saw! He walked right up to the safe door ... **and through it!**"

"Through?"

"Yes!"

"You are certain?"

"Yes!"

Doc Savage regarded his attractive cousin at length.

Pat made a grim face back.

"What do you think, Doc?" Monk asked in his small voice.

"I think," the **Bronze Man** stated, "that it is high time the safe was opened.

The big safe (the much-faded floral design on its door attested to its great age) bore a combination lock. Doc gave it a preliminary spin.

Strangely, he ignored the dial thereafter. Instead, he placed the tip of one **metallic** finger against certain petals and leaves of the floral design in which an enameled **red rose** predominated.

Doc yanked down the handle. The safe door rolled ponderously open.

The explanation was quite simple.

The steel door concealed a sensitive thermostatic device. Warmth from his fingertip touching the proper spots in a certain sequence unlocked the safe. The combination dial was actually a dummy.

The safe interior proved quite spacious. It was possible for an average-sized man to enter it without having to bend. Doc nevertheless was forced to stoop as he stepped inside.

He had out a spring-generator flashlight of his own devising. He speared the narrow beam into the gloomy interior. The quarter-sized light disk roved about showing shelves, cubicles, and other cubby-holes.

But no King. No living being at all. And no sign that one had ever dwelt within.

"I waited at the door with my six-gun ready," Pat said unhappily. "But he never came out."

Doc Savage said nothing.

Pat whirled on Monk and Ham.

"Unless...unless these two fell asleep on me!"

"Not us," squeaked hairy Monk. "Nothin' came out of the safe while we were here."

"That is because nothing went in," Ham said. "It is not possible. No living being could enter a locked safe without first opening it."

"That's the part that gets me," Pat muttered uncertainly. "What if he wasn't living. What if he was a ..."

She swallowed ...

'a **ghost**?' The word sounded weak.

Ham snorted!

Monk scratched his nubbin of a head and looked dubious.

Doc Savage -- his examination concluded -- stepped out of the safe. He closed it.

His next words were unnecessary. But he spoke them anyway.

"There is no one in the safe, Pat."

Pat stamped a well-shod foot.

"I know that!" she blazed. "But I tell you, someone went in. He was rigged up like a fairy-tale emperor. In a **red** robe, ermine-trimmed cloak, **gold** crown, orb, and **bejeweled** scepter. The whole regal works."

"He could not have entered a closed safe," Doc pointed out.

"He *melted* in!" Pat insisted. "After that, I put my ear to the door. I could hear him *whistling* some infernally morose tune!"

Doc Savage's *trilling* came briefly. It sounded this time like a forlorn and lost soul in search of its own grave.

"What is it, Doc?" Ham inquired.

"Pat," the **Bronze Man** said in a level voice, "you have just described Old King Fausto."

"Who?"

"A monarch of medieval Merida. Long dead."

That so stunned the bronze-haired girl that she vouchsafed no immediate reply.

"Then the mystery Monarch hasn't been found after all?" she muttered.

"Unfortunately no," said Doc.

Pat squirmed her exquisite eyebrows thoughtfully. Her tanned face brightened.

"Swell!" she said cheerfully. "That means there's still something for me to horn in on."

"You don't ..."

*The **Man of Bronze** looked vaguely indignant.*

"Now Pat. You know you cannot get mixed up in ..."

"Can't I?"

She stamped a foot.

"I'm already in it!"

They stared at each other tight-lipped in a struggle of wills. Neither weakened.

"Match you," Pat offered.

"I do not gamble," the **Bronze Man** said.

"All virtues and no vices!" Pat said indignantly. "Such a guy! You're not human."

"You started off on your Canadian vacation," Doc said firmly. "There is still time to reach your destination if you leave now."

Pat folded her pretty arms stubbornly.

"Aren't you going to ask me about your Barbara Bland?"

"Not if there is a price tag attached."

"Could be important, you know," Pat said in an enticing tone.

"I already know that she is a fake," Doc advised.

"How'd you find that out?" Pat exploded.

"Hah!" Ham said gleefully. "That's one time you outfoxed yourself, Pat."

Doc Savage stepped up to the **Reception** room door. It valved open again without him touching it. He carried a radioactive coin on his person, the emanations of which tripped an electroscope relay which in turn operated the door-opening mechanism.

The **Bronze Man** made room for Pat to depart.

"Out you go," he invited.

"You haven't heard the last of me!" said Pat, grabbing a capacious metallic handbag off the inlaid table and flouncing out.

*In the past, pretty Pat had aided Doc Savage in some of the often fantastic adventures which frequently befell the **Bronze Man** as he pursued his strange Gallahadian life career of righting wrongs, aiding the oppressed, and battling evildoers too clever for ordinary justice. She had aided just often enough to get the fever.*

They all knew her departing promise was not an idle one.

Doc Savage turned to his remaining aides.

"I have left Renny, Long Tom, and Johnny to pursue the Washington avenues of the matter," he explained.

Ham's dark eyes gleamed in anticipation.

"Anything for us?"

Doc quickly recounted his recent experiences.

Then he said: "Pat's story -- wild as it sounds -- cannot be discounted. It is plain that she saw something. What, we cannot adequately explain. I suggest we conduct a thorough search of our **Headquarters**."

They started with the **Reception** room ... found nothing out of place ... then passed into the scientific **Library** which was equaled for completeness by possibly only one other (which Doc Savage maintained in the mysterious spot known only to himself and designated as his **Fortress of Solitude** to which he retired periodically to experiment and study).

The only thing out of place they found after some investigation was the heavy book that Pat had dropped. It was a dictionary.

Doc lifted it up and consulted the still-open pages.

"Find anything?" dapper Ham asked.

Doc set the book open on a stand.

"Pat was evidently looking up the definition of a word."

"What word?" wondered hairy Monk.

A **bronze** finger came to rest on a specific definition.

"At a guess, the word 'ghost'."

"Ghost?" Monk said, ambling up to the book.

His gimlet eyes narrowed as he read along.

"Says here a 'ghost' is the spirit or soul of a person which manifests itself after death."

"Bosh!" Ham snapped. "Such phantasmagoria cannot be."

"Yeah, shyster? Then why do they got the word in a dictionary? You don't see them puttin' in words for things that don't exist, do you?"

"I am certain that dictionary is full of words for nonexistent items," the aristocratic attorney returned in a superior tone of voice.

"Oh yeah?" said Monk, riffling through the wide pages.

He looked up.

"Nope. It's not here."

"What?" Ham inquired.

Monk grinned. "There is no such word as 'lawyer-honest'. Proves my point."

Ham purpled! But he could think of no retort.

Crossing the **Library**, the **Bronze Man** next entered a **Laboratory**-workshop (also of unusual completeness).

Pat Savage had dubbed it a "wizard's workshop". And it was certainly that.

It was by far the largest room of the **Headquarters** setup. Glass-topped benches held apparatus and cases of rare chemicals and metals. Strange machines crouched in corners. Devices that only one of Doc Savage's fabulous scientific learning could fathom.

They gave this room the most attention even though Pat had not seen the superannuated *apparition* in this **Laboratory**. The **Bronze Man** overlooked few bets.

They examined every nook and cranny of the big room. Their operations revealed numerous runways within the walls and secret passages between rooms. It was evident the floor was a labyrinth of mechanical secrets.

At the end, Monk and Ham expressed a disheartening lack of result.

"Looks like nothin's been touched" was the way Monk put it.

Doc Savage was examining a bank of instruments set in a black Bakelite board. These consisted of rolls of graphed paper on which a stylus would ink a line if any the many guard approaches to the *Headquarters* were disturbed. They were part of the elaborate monitoring system that honeycombed the 86th floor.

Noting the absence of wriggling lines, he said: "There is no indication that an intruder has entered our premises."

"That settles it then," Ham said firmly. "That means there was no *ghost*."

"On the contrary," said the **Bronze Man**, "**it means that there was**."

Ham goggled and separated his cane ... revealing to be a sword-cane of the finest steel.

"Huh?" Monk blurted.

Doc turned from the instrument bank. Vague, disturbed eddies troubled his weirdly active *flake-gold eyes*.

"We all know Pat," he said. "She is a very excitable young woman. But she is not subject to hallucinations. If Pat said she saw something, then she did. The fact the indicators show no signs of intrusion means that **Pat clearly did encounter a phantom presence of some sort.**"

"Blazes!" Monk squeaked.

Ham unsheathed his sword cane with a sound like a skull's jaws clicking shut.

VI -- Caspar

Pat Savage had absolutely no doubt that she had seen a *ghost*.

She repeated her conviction as she took Doc Savage's private speed elevator to the skyscraper lobby.

"I don't know what I saw. I just know that I saw it," she muttered under breath. "And I'm going to prove it!"

Unlike the elevator which the Bronze Man had taken up while in disguise, this one was fully automatic. There was no operator.

It dropped like a dornick off a bluff, literally lifting Pat's high-heels off the floor. She grabbed the rail to steady herself for the expected stop. The elevator had not been designed with feminine footgear in mind. Par had broken more than one heel riding in the thing.

The elevator stopped abruptly and Pat was all-but-thrown to her knees.

"Darn this overactive dumbwaiter!" she fumed.

Straightening, she checked her heels. They were intact.

Then -- donning a pair of colored glasses and wrapping an unflattering kerchief about her trademark *bronze* hair -- she stepped out into the modernistic lobby.

The autograph hounds were still there. But their eyes were on the main bank of lifts.

Pat had stepped from a blank panel in a secluded corner of the spacious out of their sight.

She crossed to the entrance all but unnoticed.

A tall sandy-haired young man loitering by a cigar stand happened to catch sight of her. He folded a magazine under one arm and followed her out onto the busy avenue.

Pat hailed a taxi and directed the driver to take her to Pennsylvania Station. She was sufficiently upset by her unsettling experience that her voice carried.

The sandy-haired individual who was following her overheard. He rushed around a corner where he climbed behind the wheel of a roadster of moderate price.

The machine scooted out into traffic and began wending its way downtown. The driver showed good judgment and made no attempt to follow Pat's cab. Manhattan is literally awash in cabs. Trying to follow a specific one can be folly.

Pat was fulminating in the back of hers. She had -- as she had informed Doc Savage -- departed on her Canadian fishing vacation. She had not forgotten her tackle. Not all of it, anyway. That much was a fib.

She had learned of the news that Doc had been reported in Washington during a Montreal refueling stop and abruptly decided that hunting a King would be more interesting than catching salmon.

Pat had immediately flown back in her seaplane. But she was not returning to it now.

She had intentions of taking the next train to Washington where Renny Renwick, Johnny Littlejohn, and Long Tom Roberts were pursuing clues and elbowing her way into the growing mystery.

"If I can't nab one king, I'll find another," she said aloud.

"What say, miss?" asked the cabby.

"Mind your driving," sniffed Pat.

At Pennsylvania Station, she alighted and went to a ticket counter. She paid no attention to the bustle around her and was oblivious to the sandy-haired young man who had taken up a position behind her in line.

After Pat had asked the agent for a round-trip to Washington's Union Station, the tall man made a pretense of having misplaced his wallet and stepped out of line, patting down his pockets nosily.

He followed Pat to her track and got in front of her without warning.

"Excuse me, mystery maiden," he said grandly, doffing his hat.

Pat stopped. She was still swathed in her dark glasses and kerchief which hardly concealed her undeniable beauty.

"Do I know you?" she asked suspiciously.

"No. But I know you," the man said gallantly. "You see, I've seen you when you were your 'true self'."

"Do tell."

The tall man bathed her in the pearly luster of his smile.

"Honestly, after I first saw you I went home and put my clothes to be and almost hung myself in the closet."

"And beat your wife, I'll bet," returned Pat snappily. "Listen! You nave saw me before. My name is Enola Emmel."

She tried to step around him. But the smiling young man was too quick.

He waived a magazine which had been folded back to an inside page. It showed a picture of Pat in all her glory. It was the same "True Crime" magazine which had caused the *Man of Bronze* such inconvenience.

"Your name is Patricia Savage," he said. "Pat for short. Cousin of that amazing man of mystery -- Doc Savage."

Grinning, he folded the magazine and added: "I could be a wife-beater if I had someone as ravishing as you to beat. How about it?"

"Scat!" Pat directed. "I have a temper."

"You also have lots of money. Which makes you even better. I always wanted to marry a rich girl. It's outrageous those prices you charge in that place you call a beauty parlor and gymnasium for ladies. Say! Did you know a sinister-looking man has been trailing you?"

Pat looked him up and down.

"Not until this moment."

The man grinned disarmingly.

"Thanks. But you're wrong. I mean a tall, stoop-shouldered old lad with long white Father Christmas whiskers. Listen! I'm not kidding. Oh yes ... my name is Prestowitz. Caspar Prestowitz."

Pat studied him. He was tall, athletic-looking, and possessed a face with character rather than handsomeness. His eyes were a faded blue as if he had overworked them. He seemed a brazen zany. But she thought she detected some earnestness in his manner.

"Were you kidding about the whiskers, my suitor?" she asked him.

"Thanks. But no. Honest!"

Pat made a thoughtful face.

Moments before, she had been in a rush to reach Washington where a swell mystery awaited. Just now, however, this young swain promised at least a measure of intrigue.

She decided to draw the man out.

"It is going to take some selling to make your story take effect," Pat said, fibbing again. "Right now, I don't believe it."

"He trailed you here. I followed him. And you. But I lost him on the street. I think he's still there."

"I'll look," Pat agreed. "But seeing an elderly man with whiskers does not necessarily prove anything. Lots of old gentlemen in New York wear white beards."

"Granted," said Caspar Prestowitz.

His smooth brow gave a pucker.

"I don't know whether I care for a wife who thinks I'm a confirmed liar. I'll have to reconsider my matrimonial intentions. Come."

Pat decided to go along.

It was very strange, she realized suddenly. The last time she had tried to go on vacation, she had stumbled upon a fantastic International plot during a tour of the Orient. By the time it was all over, she had ended up in more trouble than even she could have imagined [*read "The Motion Menace (#063)"*].

Her Canadian fishing vacation had started out as a real one. But **the 'Trouble'** bug had bitten her again despite her purest intentions.

"Coincidence," she murmured as they mounted the stairs.

Prestowitz asked: "What say?"

"This white-bearded gent," Pat wondered. "By chance, was he tricked out like Old King Cole?"

"Not unless Old King Cole wore **blue** serge. Did he?"

"Not in my girlhood storybooks," Pat replied.

There were not many persons on the street at this later hour. And no man -- young or old -- with a beard. Garbed in **blue** serge or otherwise.

But Prestowitz was not abashed.

"He's around somewhere," he declared, unfazed. "We'll take a ride in my car. He'll follow us. We'll seize him."

"I have a train to catch," Pat pointed out.

"Not a good idea. If the old duffer with the whiskers is after you, a train is not a good place to be found. No place to run to."

The suggestion made sense.

One of the clocks on the Paramount Building tower near Times Square was visible from where Pat stood. She had nearly an hour before her train left. Time enough to see if the white-whiskered one was skulking about.

"My coach awaits, princess," said Caspar Prestowitz.

He didn't exactly bow. But he came close.

Pat decided that he had a vaguely Continental flavor to him which she found appealing.

She took his arm and allowed him to escort her around the corner.

The arm-taking served a dual purpose.

It gave her one less male arm to worry about.

Plus she could still get to her commodious metallic purse in which reposed a huge single-action which she had long ago learned to wield to excellent effect.

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The gallant (if impulsive) Caspar Prestowitz escorted her to a nice-looking roadster, the top down and in a boot. It was polished as if new. Pat's opinion of the man went up a notch.

And then another when he opened the passenger door for her and shut it carefully before taking the wheel.

The clutch, however, needed fixing. The car gave a jump when it started off. After that, it ran well enough.

"Watch behind for the old gink with the beard," he suggested.

Instead of looking around, Pat turned the rear-vision mirror so it would serve the purpose.

In the next half-mile, she saw no one.

"I thought so," she said.

The young man's next words gave her a start.

"I lied about the gent with the Father Christmas beard," he said casually enough.

Pat took off her colored glasses. Her *golden eyes* narrowed suspiciously.

"Just tell me this: Who are you?" she demanded thinly.

"Someone who happens to share your abiding interest in royalty," he returned.

"Royalty?"

"Don't play coy. Although I must admit, it becomes you," he gushed. "Wonderfully."

*Pat shared a number of her famous cousin's peculiar qualities. His love of excitement; his apparent fearlessness. But one trait she had never managed to master was the **Bronze Man's** habitual poker face.*

Try as she might to resemble a *bronze*-skinned sphinx, Pat looked surprised.

But only for a moment.

She forced herself to frown, hoping to cover the betraying lapse.

Was the young man merely doing some guessing? she wondered. He might be a journalist on the trail of a hoped-for story.

"Does the name H. Startland Drago mean anything to you?" he asked abruptly.

It didn't. Pat shook her **bronzed**-haired head.

"Not surprising. He operates Drago&Company -- the bond house. I work for him. Or did. Until he vanished."

This statement piqued Pat's interest.

"Vanished?"

"Mysteriously. Oh, not as mysteriously as King Goz the First. But mysteriously nevertheless."

"Any connection that you know of?" Pat wanted to know.

"One. **H. Startland Drag was King Goz's investment banker.**"

"Hmmm," said Pat.

"Is that a hmmm of interest, prithee?"

"Just a hmmm, thank you."

"How very disappointing."

"Sorry," Pat sniffed. "I believe in long engagements."

"You're old-fashioned," Caspar Prestowitz said. "What say we leave the bustle of the city behind us. Then we'll have a heart-to-heart talk. I think I'm going to interest you."

"Don't let your hopes run away with you," Pat suggested dryly.

Caspar Prestowitz sent the big machine through the Holland vehicular tunnel and into New Jersey. After many minutes of driving, they came to a more rural portion of the state. Roads narrowed and lost their coating of macadam. Farms and barns became visible along the sides of the road.

Eventually they turned into an even more desolate area.

There were no fences. The road had never been graded. Wheels had beaten it down and had pounded plenty of ruts.

Every so often, the car jumped like a jack-rabbit. Pat looked at the speedometer. Too much. 50 mph.

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded.

"No questions. We're almost there."

His voice was now cold, remote.

The sudden change was so abrupt that it prompted Pat to announce: "I have changed my mind. I prefer to catch my train after all."

"Too late," the other clipped.

Pat drew in a double lungful of shouting air.

"Help!" she screeched. **"Murder!"**

It couldn't do any harm, she thought. But it nearly did, though.

Caspar Prestowitz's suddenly rattled driving left some fender paint on a tree.

"Please, Miss Savage," he admonished mildly.

At that point, Pat decided that she'd had enough of the forward young man and drove a hand into her big metallic purse.

But the man was ready for the move.

Keeping one hand on the steering wheel, he reached across and grabbed at the bag.

He had a long reach and Pat's weapon was no derringer. It was heavy as an anvil and very long of barrel. Also, it boasted a fanning spur in lieu of a trigger. Getting all that assembled hardware out of the closed bag was no simple operation.

The bag, gun, and all was snatched out of her hand. The drawstring opening loosened and the ivory grips popped out.

She tried to recapture the weapon. But Prestowitz gave the wheel a savage jerk to the left throwing Pat hard against the right-hand door. She had to grab the hanging strap.

By the time she got herself organized, the maw of the old-fashioned frontier six-shooter was pointed in her direction.

"You wouldn't shoot a woman," Pat said confidently.

But he did. Once. In the upper arm.

The pistol **roared!** She grabbed her bare shoulder and saw a trickle of **blood** leaking between pretty **bronze** fingers.

Pat Savage stared at him very much as if he were a mother dog that had been caught eating her young. Then the air went breathily out of her parted mouth and she slumped against the cushions.

Caspar Prestowitz noticed the smoke curling up from the long barrel and gave it a nonchalant puff.

"So much for Calamity Jane," he said, sounding very pleased with himself.

VII -- Gold-Leaf Trail

"An interminable tedium," muttered scholarly-sounding Johnny Littlejohn as he watched the landmarks of Washington, DC fly past his car window.

"Say it in English, professor," Renny Renwick thumped, holding the steering wheel steady in his monster **hands**.

"A crashing bore," grumbled Johnny.

"Pipe down, you two," Long Tom Roberts called from the back seat.

His pale eyes were fixed on a boxy object in his thin lap which housed a bell jar.

From time-to-time, the car took a corner, forcing the limp form of Barbara Bland up against his puny shoulders. Scowling, Long Tom nudged her back into place each time.

He ordinarily had little to do with the so-called "gentler" sex. And in this case, he was positively exasperated by the annoying feminine presence!

"Any chirping yet?" Renny called back.

Long Tom was staring at the bell jar. And particularly at 2 strips of gold leaf affixed to electrical contacts. They were touching like hands in prayer.

"Not so far. Try driving south."

Renny complied. They were cruising along Constitution Avenue now. Passers-by continually hailed them, not noticing (or perhaps not caring) that the taxi's flag was 'down'. It was a warm Summer's day and the tourist sights were soaked in sunlight.

"What if he ditched the superfirer?" Renny wondered in his bear-in-a-cave voice.

"At least we'll recover the thing. It won't do to have one of Doc's pistols in bad hands."

"Not much good to him unless he figures out all the safety catches," Renny pointed out. The intricate little weapons were equipped with cunning concealed latches, the disengagement of which was necessary to allow them to be discharged.

A loan moan filled the cab's interior.

"A resurrection," Johnny said suddenly.

"Which?" asked Renny.

Johnny turned in his seat and indicated Barbara Bland in the rear.

Her eyelids were fluttering. Fingers -- held tight -- now loosened.

"Coming out of it," Renny opined.

"Rats!" muttered Long Tom unhappily.

Barbara Bland came to wakefulness in slow states. Her body constricted itself more tightly as if the nerves were gathering themselves. Her mouth compressed and she made thick tasting noises with her tongue.

The flutter in her eyes died ... picked up ... and died again.

Then they came open, showing a clear intelligent gray color.

Focus was slow in coming. She looked about the car bewilderedly.

"Who-who are you men?"

There was no detectable fear in her tone. Just a muted curiosity. The woman had nerve.

"We are associates of Doc Savage," Johnny told her using small words.

"W-where is Mr. Savage?"

"He had to return to New York very suddenly," the lank Archeologist-Geologist related. "He asked us to keep an eye on you."

This sunk in.

"The last thing I remember was seeing a man run from the apartment house and into another," she said slowly. "He had a gun. I realized he must be one of the gunmen. I-I chased him into it."

"That took guts," grunted Renny.

"Very foolish," sniffed Long Tom sourly. "You could have gotten killed."

"I had a gun," she revealed. "Normally I carry it for my own protection. In this case, I thought I could do Mr. Savage a favor and he would in turn agree to sit for an interview."

This brought a trio of differently pitched *snorts!* from the *Man of Bronze's* three(3) men. For a moment, they sounded like a distinctly unmusical barnyard symphony.

"Doc isn't much on interviews, miss," Renny offered.

"So I gather."

She eyed the bell jar on Long Tom's lap.

"Isn't that an electroscope?" she inquired.

Long Tom <blinked>.

He looked up and over to Barbara Bland as if seeing her for the first time. His usually sour expression lost a dash of vinegar. *But not too much.*

"Yes. But how do you know?"

Barbara Bland pointed at the praying leaves.

"Those gold strips. Tinfoil of gold leaf, aren't they?"

Long Tom grunted.

"Why are you carrying it like that?"

"We're chasing that **redheaded** guy you fumbled," Renny explained.

"I'll tell it!" Long Tom snapped.

Everyone was surprised. The puny Electrical Wizard rarely took notice of any woman. But he seemed to be taking a marked interest in plain, gray-eyed Barbara Bland.

"The guy lifted one of Doc's supermachine pistols, see?"

"Yes?"

"We've always been worried about happening. So we took precautions. In the handle of every one is a small fragment of Radium. You know what that is?"

"Yes. Of course. A substance that gives off certain *emanations*."

"Yeah. Right, exactly."

Barbara Bland's voice grew softer.

"Ah, I understand now. We're driving around hoping to detect those *emanations* with this electroscope. When the leaves fly apart, we shall have found the gun."

Long Tom was so taken aback by the girl reporter's understanding of his specialty that his jaw hung slack with wonder.

"But isn't that dangerous?" she wondered. "People have been known to die of *radioactive* poisoning?"

"The quantity is too small to cause harm," Long Tom said in a thin voice.

Some moments passed as they circumnavigated the city without any hint of a stir from the silent electroscope. They were on the outskirts of the Nation's Capital now near the U.S. Soldiers Home.

Presently, Barbara Bland broke the protracted silence with a question.

"This man whom we are seeking. Who is he exactly?"

"Calls himself Elvern D. Kastellantz," Long Tom offered.

"And who is Elvern D. Kastellantz?"

"You ask a lot of questions, lady," Renny put in.

"I'm a reporter," she said smartly. "It is my job to ask questions."

Pallid Long Tom added in a voice that could have almost sweetened cream: "Doc Savage thinks Elvern D. Kastellantz -- IF that is his real name -- is the chauffeur who was driving King Goz's car when he up and evaporated."

Barbara Bland's pale, mousy eyebrows shot upward.

"Oh," she said. "Oh."

"We find him and maybe we'll get a line on the missing King."

"I just remembered something," the girl reporter said abruptly.

"Yeah?"

"I must call my mother back in Denver. She worries about me so."

"I dunno," Renny said slowly.

"Look! You're not getting anywhere. And it will only take a minute," she pleaded.

The big-**fisted** engineer hesitated ...

Finally Long Tom said: "Give her a break. She's been through a lot."

Barbara Bland reached over and patted the puny electrician on his hand.

"Thank you. You are very kind to a working girl."

Grumbling, huge Renny Renwick pulled up to a filling station where there was a coin telephone.

"I shan't be a moment," Barbara said, getting out.

Watching the girl journalist enter the booth, Long Tom was heard to remark: "Isn't she something?"

"Kinda plain," Renny thumped.

"Symptomatically androgynous," inserted Johnny Littlejohn.

"You two watch your language!" Long Tom barked hotly. "Don't forget ... Doc told us to keep an eye on her."

"That could mean she's a bad apple," Renny said pointedly.

Long Tom's face regained its normal sourness. His bulging forehead gathered in wrinkles and he said after some cogitation: "One way to find out."

"How's that?"

"By listening in."

He reached down to the floorboards where various apparatus reposed. He had a case of electrical equipment that he took on adventures. It was remarkably varied for all its compactness. The inactive electroscope was one component of its array.

The electrical wizard brought out a contrivance with a reflector attachment.

"Pickup mike," he said, clapping earphones to his big sail-like ears.

He cranked down the taxi window and pointed the parabolic reflector in the direction of the phone booth, then <tripped> a switch.

Barbara Bland was speaking. *"They say his name is Elvern D. Kastellantz. They believe him to be the missing chauffeur who is in turn suspected of complicity in the murder of the King's footman -- the only other person in the limousine at the time of the King's disappearance."*

"That is all?" asked a detached male voice.

"Holy cow! That thing is picking up what's coming out of the telephone diaphragm too!" Renny exploded.

"What did you expect?" said Long Tom. Now shut your trap."

"What should I do?" asked Barbara Bland anxiously.

"The chauffeur is the only lead anyone has. Follow it."

"And if Doc Savage's men find the missing King?"

"Perhaps," said the voice who was definitely not Barbara Bland's mother, "you will be famous after the fashion of Joan of Arc."

"I'll take my fame some other way," retorted the girl. "They cut her head off or something, didn't they?"

"Nothing like that is apt to happen to you. Report as needed.

She hung up and Long Tom hastily packed away his listening device.

As Barbara Bland reemerged and walked back to the waiting taxi, Johnny was heard to remark: "A maternal impossibility."

"Huh?"

"He means," Renny said, low-voiced, "that Bland gal wasn't talking to her mother just now."

Long Tom said: "Musta been her editor then."

Then the girl's return put a damper on further conversation.

"How's your mother?" asked Renny with a straight face.

Barbara Bland slipped inside.

"Fine. She's such a dear to worry about me so. I am her only daughter."

Renny grunted skeptically.

Long Tom covered the sound by complaining: "This electroscope isn't reacting at all."

"Could it be broken?" Barbara asked innocently.

"Not a chance. I put it together myself, he said as if the fact was the last word on the subject.

Which it was.

"Have you gentlemen considered returning to the place where you lost the trail of this man Kastellantz?" the girl suggested.

"What do you mean?" Long Tom asked.

"Surely you have heard that famous saying that criminals return to the scene of their criminal activities."

"Yeah?"

"Might not this man return to that awful alley?"

"What makes you say that?" Renny asked suspiciously.

"I assume the men who attempted to seize Doc Savage are in police hands by now?"

No one said anything to that. An uneasy silence followed.

Some time ago, Doc Savage had established in upstate New York a region that was remote and mountainous an institution that was rather unique.

The patients of this place underwent a delicate brain operation which wiped out all knowledge of their past life. There they were taught a trade and schooled to hate crime and criminals and become

good citizens. Then they were released, often to be given a job in one of the many industrial institutions that Doc Savage controlled.

No crook -- however bad an actor he had been previously -- had ever gone back to crime after being graduated from Doc Savage's unique scientific "**College**". It was to this place that Hike Ewing and his gang had been spirited.

Its existence was one of the **Bronze Man**'s deepest secrets.

And so no one disabused Barbara Bland of her assumption.

"This Elvern D. Kastellantz may not know this," she continued. "He might think he can contact his men again."

"Unlikely," Johnny said.

"Or recruit new ones," Barbara added.

Long Tom brightened. "A possibility.

"A dubious one, Johnny said flatly, polishing his monocle magnifier elaborately.

"I don't see any rushing progress being made otherwise," Long Tom pointed out.

That settled the argument.

Renny muscled the wheel around the taxi (they continued to be hailed despite the flag being 'down') whine back in the direction of Dingman Alley.

"This is quite a machine for its looks," Barbara noted.

"This is one of Doc's special jobs," Long Tom offered helpfully. "There's a 16-cylinder motor under that hood and the sides and glass are bulletproof. Doc keeps a few of these garaged in larger cities in case we ever need one."

"Doc Savage is quite a remarkable fellow," Barbara Bland said approvingly.

"You don't know the half of it," said Long Tom proudly and began to regale the mousy girl with stories of the **Bronze Man**'s exploits.

Up front, Renny and Johnny looked violently unhappy.

They would have missed the electroscope leaves flying apart except that Long Tom had the leaves set to trip a contact which started a buzzer **buzzing** noisily.

Everyone's attention flew to the electroscope then.

"We're getting' close to Dingman Alley," Renny warned.

"You were right!" Long Tom said loudly to Barbara Bland.

She bestowed upon the puny Electrical Wizard a smile that was radiant with approval.

There was no way to determine how close they were to the *radioactive* element embedded in the stolen supermachine pistol. The electroscope only registered the nearness of the isotope -- not the direction or its exact proximity.

They parked the cab a short distance from the disreputable alley and got out.

"You stay here," Long Tom told Barbara.

"Nothing doing! I'm here for a story and I'm going to get it!"

There was a short interval during which Renny, Long Tom, and Johnny debated the wisdom of allowing this.

"She has spunk," Long Tom insisted earnestly. "And I say she tags along."

Renny and Johnny exchanged doubtful glances.

In the end, they caved in.

Long Tom had a temper. It was legendary. Although he was the least physically imposing of the Doc Savage outfit, Long Tom Roberts was crossed only at an offender's peril.

"Stay behind us at all times," Renny warned as they approached.

They entered the alley. It was dark now. Window shades were pulled down (where windows had shades, that is).

"Maybe we should split up," Renny suggested.

"A tactical convenience," big-worded Johnny agreed.

Long Tom turned to Barbara Bland.

"You can stay here with me," he offered gallantly.

Which suited the other two men perfectly fine!

As they moved off in different directions, Renny had one final mutter for Johnny.

"My money says she bops him on the head and teaches him a lesson in trust," he thumped.

"Indubitably," Johnny agreed.

They selected separate doors in the apartment house and entered them.

It was not Long Tom Roberts or even the careful Renny Renwick who fell into difficulty but scholarly Johnny Littlejohn.

The latter had selected the apartment of the would-be kidnapper of Doc Savage -- Hike Ewing -- as the first place to be searched.

The door was closed. But not locked. It had been left that way by the "College" attendants who had picked up Ewing and his underlings.

"Hold it!" a voice advised.

The lanky archeologist felt the pressure of a hard barrel in his skeletal ribs and made an accurate deduction.

Since the man evidently had a gun, Johnny decided to take the advice.

The light switch <clicked> on.

Johnny possessed excellent eyesight despite the foppish monocle affixed to his lapel. He had good peripheral vision. He did not have to turn around to recognize **redheaded** Elvern D. Kastellantz.

"Don't do anything fatal," Kastellantz cautioned.

"An univocal recapitulation," Johnny murmured.

"Eh?" growled Elvern D. Kastellantz.

"Your last word describes your intentions," Johnny translated grimly.

"One word describes what's going to happen to you if you don't obey me to the letter!" Kastellantz ripped.

"What is that?" Johnny demanded.

"Scragged," Kastellantz returned. "In case you don't know that one, it means some that a bullet or a knife does to you."

Neither man said anything for a while.

Presently, Elvern D. Kastellantz ordered: "Call your friends."

"Eh?"

"You heard me. Get them in here. I came back to hire more men to locate you and your chief. But it seems that you have saved me the trouble. I assume Doc Savage is somewhere in the vicinity."

"A distinct negativity."

"My English isn't the same brand as yours," warned Kastellantz, poking Johnny's lathe-like ribs again.

"Doc has returned to New York," Johnny volunteered.

"The truth?"

"The truth," Johnny said quietly.

Elvern D. Kastellantz seemed to consider this turn of events.

"Call your friends anyway."

Johnny was prodded to the window and threw it up. He leaned out ...

Before he could speak, the muzzle gouged the hard bumps of his spinal column along his back painfully.

"No tricks!" Kastellantz warned suddenly.

Johnny hesitated.

*He had been planning to insert a few words of ancients **Mayan** -- the language to which Doc and his aides often resorted when they wished to communicate without fear of being understood by outsiders. The **Bronze Man** had used that trick back at the National Museum to instruct Renny and Long Tom to follow the fleeing Hike and his men.*

But here it was too risky.

"Long Tom! Renny! Come to Hike's room," Johnny shouted.

He was promptly yanked back from the window.

Renny Renwick was the first to arrive. He lunged in through the door and tripped over a small table that Elvern D. Kastellantz had placed in the way. He went down on all fours and when he looked up ...

... the sad-faced engineer decided to remain where he had landed.

"Crawl over to one side," Elvern D. Kastellantz warned.

Renny did so, looking ridiculous like a crippled bear.

"Some prognosticator you are," he muttered at Johnny.

The gaunt archeologist-geologist offered no reply. The expression on his face was indignant.

Long Tom came next with Barbara Bland in tow.

He managed to avoid taking a tumble but still barked one shin on the edge of the obstacle. He grabbed a place under his knee painfully.

"Hold on to that knee," ordered Elvern D. Kastellantz.

Barbara Bland popped in next. She stopped. Her mouth became thin and more colorless than usual.

She neither shouted nor complained. Which raised Renny's and Long Tom's estimation of her instantly.

This newfound respect took a wild twist as she was walking over the join Long Tom and the others, impelled by a wagging gun.

Abruptly, she got wobbly at the knees.

One hand flew to her mousy hair. "Oh ... I think I'm going to faint."

"Go ahead. I've got you all now," Elvern D. Kastellantz gloated, keeping his captured weapon trained on the others.

"I don't care what you've got!" snapped Barbara Bland suddenly. "I've got a gun. It's a little one. But it will kill a man. It was hidden in my hair. Look at it!"

Everyone looked. It was indeed a gun. A derringer to be exact.

The gray-eyed girl <cocked> the hammer. She had the drop on her captor and this was reflected in the latter's face.

Slowly, Elvern D. Kastellantz lowered the supermachine pistol.

"Good work!" said Long Tom fervently. "You saved our bacon."

Barbara Bland whirled, stepping away from them.

"Stay back! You're my prisoners too. All of you! And we're going for a little ride!"

Long Tom Roberts gaped at the tiny pistol. It was pointed at his underfed midsection.

His pale face became **crimson**.

"You sure can pick 'em, Long Tom," Renny rumbled.

VIII -- Grief for Pat

"I am deeply sorry it was necessary for me to shoot you, my dear Miss Savage," said the voice of the man who had wounded Pat Savage.

The voice seemed far away. As if the person were speaking at the other end of a long tunnel.

Pat roused ... murmured something under her breath ...

... and then her sparkling *golden eyes* snapped open.

She looked at her hands. They were looped together at the wrist by strong hempen cord.

It all came back to her then.

She was still seated in the nice roadster. It had stopped. They were in a patch of murk on a field. The Moon was high and very bright like a Chinese lantern hung against a black curtain stitched with stars.

Zany Caspar Prestowitz was still sitting behind the wheel. He looked relaxed, confident, and untroubled by the fact that he had just shot a young woman with her own six-gun.

"You-you could have killed me!" Pat accused.

"I aimed at your arm."

"And if there had been lead in that cannon instead of one of Doc's mercy bullets, I could have bled to death!" Pat retorted hotly.

"I figured that you had probably taken to carrying them in your gun," Prestowitz said unconcernedly.

Pat's *eyes* grew suspicious.

"That's mighty clever figuring."

"Thank you," returned the young gallant. "But not really. You see, I'm very aware of Doc Savage's policy against taking human life and the mercy bullets his men are compelled to use. Since you have developed a penchant for joining him in his escapades, it was only reasonable to assume that the **Bronze Man** had cooked up a supply for your rather charming antique."

"How long was I out?"

"Oh, about a half-hour. I have whiled away the last few minutes observing the endearing way your face wrinkles in slumber. Did you know that you snored?"

Pat grew indignant.

"I do not!"

"More of a hum, actually. But a nice hum. Musical."

"Humph," Pat said, testing her bonds. There was no give in them.

She looked out through the windscreen for the first time and saw the plane.

It was an amphibian, a late model. But it was not a racer like her personal seaplane. And it was hardly in the class with Doc Savage's private armada of planes.

Still, it was no crate. It had cost money. Rather like the roadster.

"What are we waiting on?" Pat asked.

"For you to wake up."

"Eh?"

"I really didn't care to carry you to the plane. Not when you can walk under your own power."

"I'm not getting in that thing," Pat said flatly.

Caspar Prestowitz lost his faint smile. He took up Pat's long-barreled six-shooter from the door pocket and pointed it in her direction.

"On the other hand," he said, "I can put you out again and carry you after all. I just prefer to do it the other way."

Pat considered. She had not completely shed her initial impression that this young man was a harmless -- if impulsive -- whelp. She received no strong sense of danger in his presence. And he represented *excitement* of a sort. Pat had a weakness for such situations even if they did involve a salting of peril.

"Lead on, Macduff," she said grudgingly.

At this, Caspar Prestowitz laughed. It was a healthy laugh.

He then got out of the car and went around to assist Pat out.

Pat's legs were linked by a short stretch of hemp. Not enough to impede walking totally. But running was out of the question. She would trip over her own feet.

Getting to the plane was a matter of a short walk through the warm summery night. Prestowitz carried a bulky package under one arm that was tied with common twine.

Pat allowed herself to be helped onto the float and into a door. She took a seat. There were only two.

Stowing the package, Caspar Prestowitz got the engine cans going. He fed juice to the throttle and the wheels began bumping along, gathering speed and lift. The plane took off.

Pat Savage had learned flying from a master of that art. The remarkable man who was her cousin -- **Doc Savage**. She had to admit this zany aviator knew what he was doing. The ship climbed beautifully. It headed north.

"Maybe I'll get my fishing done after all," she said.

"That reminds me," said Caspar Prestowitz.

He took a cloth roll of some kind and gave it a shake. It proved to be a sack. Burlap.

It settled over Pat's kerchiefed head like a scratchy shroud.

"I can't see," Pat complained.

"The very idea," returned Prestowitz in good humor.

Then the plane began to undergo some very elaborate gyrations. Looping, Banking, and the like.

"What's happening?" she asked in an unsettled voice.

"Turbulence."

Pat had nothing to say to that. She was not fooled in one respect.

They had started north. But after she was blindfolded, the plane made several turns with the idea of confusing her.

And it did. She had not the slightest idea in which direction they flew.

Pat settled down for a possibly extended flight.

In that respect, she was mistaken. After no more than an hour-and-a-half, the plane slanted down and the hissing of water cascading along either side of the floats came to her ears. Water drummed and splattered along the side cabin windows.

The plane coasted some distance ... settled ... and the floats bumped something. Propeller clicking, the motor died.

"Here we are," Prestowitz said, pleased with himself.

Pat was taken by the arm and helped out of the plane. Only when she was standing was her sack blindfold removed.

It was quite dark. She looked around. Trees stood about like dark giants. They were at the end of a small lake or large pond. There was insufficient moonlight to tell.

The plane had been tied to a solid rock shore. Ropes to hold it had been looped about boulders.

Caspar Prestowitz gave these a testing hitch and -- satisfied -- took her by the elbow. He had his package under one arm.

"They have laws against this sort of thing," Pat pointed out.

"Laws don't concern me."

"And then there is my cousin," Pat added pointedly. "**Doc Savage** will take you to the cleaners so fast your head will swim ... Swing, I should say."

Caspar Prestowitz only laughed at that as they walked along.

Pat thought about that laugh for a moment. It had not sounded forced.

Caspar Prestowitz -- as he called himself -- really did not seem afraid of the *Man of Bronze*. Yet Doc Savage had a reputation that often caused habitual criminals to take sudden vacations when he came to town.

They walked for a time in a forest of some sort along a path that was horny with worn stones. Pat nearly fell once. And then pretended to a second time.

"You could," she suggested, "lead the way for a lady."

"Won't run away, will you?"

"Cross my heart and hope to marry a rich prince one day," said Pat in the darkness crossing her fingers.

Caspar Prestowitz took the lead.

He glanced back a time-or-two ... seemed reassured by Pat's easy compliance ... and concentrated on his feet.

Pat Savage was a very strong young woman thanks to the hours spent daily demonstrating reducing exercises to the wealthy fat lady matrons in her New York beauty establishment.

She made her brown right hand into a fist that was much harder than anyone would have expected.

She picked out a spot behind the young man's right ear and **let him have it!**

Caspar Prestowitz's head rocked forward, taking the rest of him along for the ride.

He must have hit his head on a stone because he didn't get up immediately.

Quickly, Pat knelt beside him and started going through his pockets. She found a clasp knife ... fought it open ... and began sawing at her wrist bonds.

She worked furiously! This was no place to be caught trying to escape.

The ropes parted and -- her hands free now -- she attacked her ankle bonds.

When Pat stood up, she was holding her six-shooter which Caspar Prestowitz had been carrying tucked into his belt.

Holding the big bore trained on the man, she hauled him over. He was out cold. A trickle of **blood** had run down out of his scalp.

Pat resisted an urge to wipe it clean. He had been such a charming rogue that she now felt a pang of pity for him.

It was clear that Prestowitz would enjoy a long period of unconsciousness. So Pat decided to reconnoiter the vicinity. The mysterious package could wait, she decided. It looked rather ordinary. Too much so to arouse much curiosity.

She stepped off the path where footprints would not show. It was quite dark now. The Moon had ghosted behind a cloud. Somewhere an owl hooted.

She walked as far as she felt confident in one direction and then abruptly changed course. It was her idea to walk in a "box" -- always keeping the path and Caspar Prestowitz fixed in her mind. If nothing in the "box" proved interesting, she would switch to another approach.

Pat was walking in a line that corresponded to the second side of the imaginary "box" when she heard a snarl.

She froze.

It came again. Low, guttural. Unhuman.

"Uh-oh," she said, her eyes darting about.

Standing in one place, Pat tramped her feet about, slowly sweeping her six-gun about her, ready to fend off any danger.

She saw the eyes then.

They were **greenish-gold**. Small. But High.

Their eyes belonged to a low-crouching shape with tufted ears in a nearby tree branch. They were looking at her.

Once, they <winked>.

It was a **creepy** wink. Patient. Unafraid.

The **bronze**-haired girl knew what it was then. Her "oh" was very small in the darkness.

The bobcat was not a dozen feet distant. Such animals are not customers to meet at that range. Not even with a high-powered rifle.

Pat's earlier days had been spent in western Canada. Her entire life, in truth, until a series of incredible and amazing adventures had taken the life of her father and might have resulted in her own end except for the intervention of that unusual man -- her cousin Doc Savage *[read "Brand of the Werewolf (#011)"]*.

Wildcats aplenty had been in her part of Canada. They were man-killers.

The thoughts that lashed Pat's brain the next instant were chaotic. She did not think about her past. She thought how deceptive looks can be.

A bobcat is not a large animal, all told. But its *ferocity* more than makes up for its lack of muscular bulk.

The thing was a crouching shape in the darkness. She began to sense the shifting outlines of its fur. It was gathering itself now, ready to pounce ...

Pat steeled herself. She lifted her six-shooter and took careful aim while wishing that this was one time she was packing solid lead and not mercy bullets.

Big-game hunters often used "mercies" to bring down large animals humanely. But the tiny shells that Doc Savage had perfected contained an anesthetic designed to leave no lasting effect on a human target.

How effective they would be against a live bobcat was another question.

There was no time for more than thought of failure to flick through her mind. The bobcat sprang!

Pat fired! 2 shots.

Then she threw herself off to one side, feeling the harsh fur graze one arm.

The *bronze*-haired girl rolled ... came up in a crouch ... and got off another shot.

It was wild. There was no aim involved. She was making noise in an effort to frighten off the bobcat.

But it was a wasted effort as she found out when she got herself organized.

The bobcat lay on its side, fangs bared in a stiff snarl. Its lambent eyes were open. But it was out cold. There was a smear of *crimson* on one spotted tawny shoulder.

More cautious now, she resumed her trek.

The house appeared through a break in a stand of trees as if a curtain had been drawn aside. The moonlight helped that effect.

It was a big house. Rustic. But no log cabin.

From a distance, it reminded Pat Savage of a hunting lodge. Not quite so large but built along those same substantial lines.

There were lights 'on' in the windows. So Pat began walking toward the house.

The closer she got, the larger it loomed. It began taking on the look of a hunting lodge after all.

There was a circular driveway in front paved in crushed stone, surrounding a rather generous ornamental pool edged in marble.

A plain dirt road led to this. And coming up the road so suddenly that Pat dropped to the grass before she was quite certain it was the proper course of action were twin funnels of light that were busy with gnats.

Headlamps of an automobile!

The machine came into view a moment later. A taxi. **Green** and somewhat dilapidated.

Pat watched it wheel around the circular driveway -- tires making gritty noises -- and stop. Doors opened. Darksome figures began stepping out.

One towered over the others by a rather large head. He looked familiar.

He threw up monster **hands**.

A deep booming voice said: "Holy cow! A hunting lodge!"

IX -- Snow-Bearded Specter

At the sound of Renny Renwick's foghorn voice (for the booming voice without question belonged to the gloomy-faced engineer -- Pat Savage shed all her caution.

She popped up out of concealment waving her six-shooter over her head. She lifted her voice.

"I was going to count to three and then start cutting loose with this shooting iron!" she announced. "Anyone still on their feet at three is bound to lose ears, noses, and assorted fingers!"

A slow counter could have counted to 20 in the silence that followed her words sinking in.

"One!"

No reaction.

"Two!"

She never got to three.

Instantly, the dark knot of forms beside the taxi became a frantic boil!

A voice (unmistakably Renny's) shouted "*She's a madwoman when her dander is up like that!*" and leaped into the pool.

In short order, Johnny Littlejohn and Long Tom Roberts followed.

Pat started shooting then.

She picked the handiest form. Her pistol roared! The figure promptly dropped from sight.

With her muzzle, she followed the remaining figure on his feet.

She got off a shot. It struck the car body as the runner reached it but otherwise did no harm. (Mercy bullets have little penetration power. Besides, the cab was armored.)

The 5th figure got behind the wheel and the starter ground noisily.

Headlamps blazed into brilliance as the taxi swung around roaring in Pat's direction.

The bronze-haired girl ran smack into its path, hoping to run a bluff. She took dead aim at the shadowy face behind the wheel.

The driver stomped on the gas! The taxi surged ahead. He (or she) held to their course. Pat flung herself out of the way just in time.

She sent a spiteful bullet snarling after the whining machine, knowing that it would do no good. But it did make her feel a little better.

Still, she assayed a pungent "**Darn!**" in the darkness.

Pat Savage walked up to the marble pool where Renny Renwick and the others were lying flat on their backs, making bubbles.

Pat gave the marble rim a hard <tap> with the butt of her six-gun.

3 dripping and unhappy faces surfaced and <blinked> at her reproachfully.

"You boys do this thing often?" she asked cheerfully.

"What?" Renny demanded, blowing moisture off his puritanical mouth.

"Go swimming after midnight with all your clothes on?"

"We are hunting a mermaid," Johnny retorted.

"That," Pat said, "lets me out. Anyway, mermaids are found on the bottom of the sea. Not swimming around on top. You fellows had better go down on the bottom."

"Rats!" said Long Tom.

They clambered out and began wringing their clothes free of moisture.

"One got away," Pat said unhappily.

"Elvern D. Kastellantz," Renny mumbled.

"Who's he?" Pat wondered, her pretty brow crinkling.

"We think he's the guy who drove King Goz into the afterlife. Or wherever he ended up."

"Too bad he got away then," Pat said while striding over to the fallen figure that she had brought down with her well-placed mercy bullet.

It was a girl.

Noticing the plain-looking form lying in the driveway, she remarked dryly: "She could stand a little sprucing up at my beauty shop."

"That's Barbara Bland," Long Tom said quite sourly.

"Do I detect a note of extra disdain in your voice, my sourced-on-Life friend?" Pat asked.

Renny piped up then.

"Long Tom took a 'shine' to her. Then she up-and-gloomed us!"

"Tsk, ts," Pat said. "Didn't anyone ever tell you never to trust women, my son?"

Long Tom's neck turned red.

Finally he grunted: "Listen, Pat. How'd you happen to be way out here?"

"I'm taking a hand in this!" she said emphatically.

"Does Doc know about it?" the pale electrical wizard asked.

"Knowing me," Pat said, "Doc probably won't be surprised when he finds out."

"Probably not," Long Tom agreed dryly.

"Doc will not be pleased, of course," Johnny interjected.

"Does he think he's got a corner on the *excitement* in this world?" Pat flung back. "Does he think nobody but him gets a kick out of a little **trouble**? Just who does he think he is, anyway! And you are you to be telling me..."

Renny interjected at that point.

"Listen! Let us settle this later. This Bland gal has a story to tell."

"If that is her name," Pat sniffed.

"What do you mean?" Long Tom asked.

Pat indicated the slumbering girl with the muzzle of her six-shooter.

"Doc asked me to check her story," she explained. "It didn't pan out. They never heard of her at the *Globe*."

Renny grunted. "A phony, huh?"

"Be a while before she comes to," Long Tom said thickly.

"In the meantime," Pat invited sweetly, "you strapping fellows can do a gal a favor and collect my traveling companion Prestowitz."

"Who?"

"Caspar Prestowitz. A rascal of recent acquaintance. He flew me down here. Wherever 'here' is. I left him back up the trail after I conked him one on the noggin."

"He kidnap you?" Long Tom asked.

"He," Pat said airily, "underestimated me."

"Like some others I know," she added tartly.

"Let's fetch him," the giant Renny said, starting off.

Pat led the way.

She was listening to their story of being captured when -- without any preliminary warning -- a sound filled the spruce woods.

It was a *whistling*. A harmonic, inexpressible sadness.

It seemed all around them suturing the woods, tugging at the heartstrings, and making them looking in all directions at once in an effort to ascertain the source of the morose melody.

"What's that," Renny rumbled.

"A spectral evanescence," Johnny muttered, bringing his monocle magnifier up to one eye.

"It's that *spook!*" Pat gasped. "Here!"

"Spook?" Long Tom exploded.

"Old King Mysterious!"

"*Huh?*"

"If I tell you," Pat sighed, "you're not going to believe me. But watch out for an old goat straight out of the Brothers Grimm."

Keeping together, they continued down the unlit path. The woods pressed close to them.

Johnny brought out one of Doc Savage's tiny spring-generator flashlights and speared light into the trees. An owl hooted in annoyance and swiveled its head away from the intruding *blaze* of illumination.

But they saw no one who might be the author of the unearthly melody.

The *whistling* seemed to invade their brains, depressing their spirits. It played on the nerves like an unending dead march.

They trudged on.

Eventually, they came to the pond (or modest lake) where the sporty seaplane lay at anchor.

"Something's wrong!" Pat hissed urgently.

"What?"

"I left that Prestowitz on the path. We should have stumbled across him before now."

"Well, we didn't," Long Tom pointed out.

Pat started back. "Come on! Let's find him."

"What is producing this infernal *whistling*?" Johnny wondered, digging at an ear.

"The phantom King," Pat shot back.

"Huh?"

"Or maybe it's the same one, I don't know," Pat said distractedly. "Just come on!"

A *scream* -- high and shrill -- pierced the night.

"Barbara!" Long Tom exclaimed, starting.

"Nope," Pat puffed. "Unless I miss my guess, that's my bobcat."

"Your what?"

"Ran into a bobcat and brought it down with a mercy bullet. Guess it woke up."

The *scream* came again, short and ferocious. This time it sounded distinctly feral to their ears.

Bobcat. There was no doubt.

They veered off the trail in the direction of the sound. As they ran, the mournful *whistling* (which had not abated in the least) grew. Not louder so much as clearer.

"We're coming up on Pat's spook," Renny ventured.

"Don't remind me!" Pat hurled back.

Sometimes in Life, timing is all-important.

They had been tearing through the dark woods avoiding low-hanging boughs and obstructing tree holes, not quite certain why they should be so anxious to meet up with a loose bobcat.

Perhaps it was the bobcat's *screech*. It was a warning sound as if it were about to pounce on prey.

Knowledge that Barbara Bland or Caspar Prestowitz might be the prey impelled them to run their hardest!

What they expected to find when they came upon the bobcat, none of them could rightly put into words.

What they saw was another matter entirely.

Renny -- the tallest of the tiny band -- saw it first.

"There's the cat!" he thumped, leveling a knobby forefinger.

All eyes followed his monster **digit**.

The cat was a dark hump in the high bough of a hickory tree.

Johnny brought his light up and it washed the crouching feline in calcium **brightness**. Its coloration was **yellow-brown** and mottled with dark spots.

As if the light were a thorn in its hide, it sprang downward.

Johnny jumped the light down. So they saw it clearly.

A tall, slightly stooped figure all in scarlet and draped in an ermine-trimmed red cloak.

Bony hands clutched a heavy gold sphere surmounted by a filigreed device (like the back end of an old-fashioned dungeon key) and **bejeweled** scepter (also of **gold**).

Atop the *apparition's* head was a heavy **golden** crown, ostentatious with **emeralds**, **rubies**, and other brilliants. It was fantastically **large** and ornate and made the head below seem ridiculously small in comparison.

The crown was tilted back and the face of the apparition stared up -- unafraid -- of the snarling bobcat. It was an old face. Like a gnarled-with-age tree carved along human lines with a knothole for a mouth.

The **whistling** was coming from the dried orifice, they knew.

It stood as if rooted, its long Rip Van Winkle beard hanging like an icy waterfall.

"Pat's spook!" Renny grunted, sounding very surprised.

There was too much distance between them and the snow-bearded **specter** to affect the outcome.

The bobcat -- its foreclaws outstretched -- went for the revenant's thin wrinkled face.

The claws struck the unflinching countenance ...

... and passed on through!

It happened in the blink of an eye. Had they not been looking squarely at the scene, they would have missed it entirely.

What happened next confirmed the impossible tableau as no trick of the eye.

The bobcat landed behind the Kingly vision in a spitting ball of fur. It rolled furiously and found its paws. Snarling, it slunk back.

The **apparition** turned. Slowly, gracefully. Its face -- etched in Johnny Littlejohn's flashlight -- was a mask of benign power. Its profile was somehow eagle-like, predatory, the dark eyes unwinking.

The ermine trim of the regal scarlet cloak settle back as the bobcat leaped for its wearer.

One bony handmade passes in the air with the scepter as if writing cabalistic signs in the murk. The ceaseless **whistling** continued, unabated and depressing to hear.

Again, the bobcat passed through the unflinching form to land -- sprawling -- among the pine needles.

The witnesses to this eerie spectacle found their voices then.

"Holy cow!"

"I'll be superamalgamated!"

"It can't be!"

"You three are witnesses!" Pat said as she brought up her six-shooter.

But Renny clamped a titanic **paw** on the cylinder, inhibiting the weapon's mechanical action.

"What are you doing?" he thumped.

"I'm going to bag me a spook!" Pat retorted.

Renny thought about that a moment.

Then -- releasing the weapon -- he growled: "Be my guest."

"Thanks."

Pat shut one **golden eye** ... gave her delectable lips a precautionary moistening ... and drew a bead.

She fired once ...

... then gun **thunder** and a saffron lance of ignited powder split the night.

The **wraith** of a vision turned at the sound ... saw them ... and its wizened face split in a cracked grin on some sort.

The morose **whistling** ceased.

Then it pursed its lips again and the **sound** resumed. It was distressingly glum

"You missed," Long Tom said.

"My eye!" Pat snapped. "I plugged him dead center! He just refuses to go down."

Renny fetched up a fallen hickory branch. He gave it a whirl!

It went sailing toward the *apparition*'s snowy head.

They all saw it go clean through and carom off a spruce directly behind. It struck the bewildered bobcat who promptly lit off for parts unknown.

They got very, very quiet after that. Even the disconsolate dirge grew thin and spectral.

Looking at the strange old fellow began to make them feel as if someone were pouring a trickle of something *cold* down the middle of their backs.

Then -- abruptly -- the *whistling specter* presented the rear of its *scarlet* cloak to them and floated off down a hickory corridor.

The sound of *its* going was not discernable to the ear. In fact, there seemed to be no attendant sound at all. The *whistling* had abated entirely.

"Come on!" Pat urged. "He's getting away!"

They trotted after it, noting that -- for a *spook* -- it betrayed none of the usual phenomena associated with ghostliness.

True, it was unsettlingly silent. But it did not shine, appear transparent to the eye, rattle chains, or moan as the popular conception of roaming spirits of the Dead are reputed to do.

Although they had to admit that the unceasing *whistling* dirge was as nerve-wracking as any ghostly moan a fiction writer might conjure up. It seemed to hang in their minds now -- even after it had left the air.

Big-worded Johnny Littlejohn was using his flashlight to keep *it* in sight. It was not very quick on its feet and the group was overhauling it by degrees.

"Are my eyes playing tricks on me," Long Tom muttered uneasily, "or is that *thing* walking though some of these trees?"

"I was hoping it was my eyes playing tricks," Pat puffed.

There was no question of it now. The *regal vision* didn't exactly walk through the trees. But *it* certainly seemed unconcerned by the obstacle they presented to its departure.

The trailing *cloak* and sometimes its arms and elbows simply brushed through inhibiting tree boles. This enabled *it* to move in a straight line whereas its pursuers had to wend their way through the wild woods.

"An incorporeality," Johnny said at one point.

"A which?" Renny rumbled.

"An *ectoplasmic* enigma."

"I should've settled for the first choice," the big-**fisted** Engineer muttered.

The flashlight began to fade.

Johnny gave its crank a hasty spin and the light strengthened.

A little farther along, he had to repeat the operation. That was when they lost sight of the uncanny *apparition*.

When they caught up to the spot where they had last seen it, they found no trace. Not even footprints.

"Lost him!" Long Tom murmured. "Better backtrack to the prints."

"I have a news flash for you boys," said Pat. "I've been watching the ground. And there aren't any footprints!"

"Hah!" Renny snorted skeptically.

But when they retraced their steps, it was true.

The only prints they discovered were their own.

"We all saw it," Renny said aloud. "How could it be there and not leave prints? This ground is pretty darn soft."

"How could it be there and be bobcat-proof?" Pat returned.

No one had an answer to that.

So they fanned out and sought any sign of the lamenting liege.

It took some time before they gave it up.

"Goose eggs," Long Tom reported.

"Ditto," said Johnny, momentarily at a loss for a word more jawbreaking.

"Let's find my 'pal' Prestowitz," Pat said fiercely.

Retracing their steps, they found the path and worked along it.

Soon, they came to the spot where Pat had "brained" the unpredictable Prestowitz. There was no sign of him or the package he had been carrying.

Pat knelt and found a trace of blood where he had hit his head on a bald stone.

Footsteps led up to the spot. None led away save their own.

To be certain, they pressed their shoe soles into assorted footprints until all prints were accounted for.

Except for Caspar footprints. Which led up to the stone but not lead away again.

"He might have walked backward, stepping into his own prints," Renny opined. "You know, using the old Indian trick."

"Wouldn't he be in the plane, then?" Pat pointed out, reasonably enough.

"We can look."

They looked.

There was no one in the tiny seaplane.

"Baffling," Long Tom said.

"Suppose that *spooky* old gink lit off with this Prestowitz character?" Renny wondered aloud.

"On a night like this," Pat said in exasperation, "anything is possible!"

She took stock of her surroundings ... blew into the palm of her right hand ... and then made it into a fist. She blew into the palm of her other hand and made that into a fist.

Then -- fists tight -- she strode purposefully back up the path in the direction of the hunting lodge.

"Where are you going?" Long Tom called after her.

"If I can't snag me a *spook*, then I'm going to spook me a fake," she said meaningly.

Everybody understood exactly what she determined Pat Savage meant by that.

They all-but-tripped over one another in their haste to get out in front of the grim-faced young thrill-seeker.

"Barbara Bland is our prisoner," Johnny pointed out.

Pat snapped: "Hah! You lads were her prisoner until I stepped in! And lucky for you that I did, too. Not that anybody here is in a mad rush to give a gal proper credit."

"We got nothing against you mixing in with our troubles, Pat," Renny said plaintively. "You know that. But if anything happened to you, Doc would have our hides salted, cured, and skinned."

Pat stopped suddenly.

"Cut a deal?"

The others looked doubtful.

"What?"

"Put in a good word for me with Doc."

"Sure," Renny allowed suddenly. "We can do that."

Pat resumed her mad march.

"I," she said, "shall hold you gentlemen to that promise."

Barbara Bland -- when they found her -- could no longer be numbered among the unconscious.

But she wasn't exactly the most clear-eyed person that they had ever encountered, either. She sat in the crushed stone drive, her gray eyes dazed.

The girl got up, apparently, just to see if she could stand.

Then she sat down again.

"How long have I been out?" she murmured weakly.

"Half-an-hour, approximately," Long Tom said in a subdued voice.

"You," Pat Savage said grimy, "Have a passel of explaining to do. Starting with the rank falsehoods you've been feeding everyone. Reporter for the Denver *Globe* my foot!"

Barbara Bland's eyes seemed to clear a little then.

She struggled to her feet ... took a moment to spank the dust off her plain frock ... and swallowed a time-or-two.

"I am afraid that I have been going about this all wrong," she admitted in a soft contrite voice.

"What do you mean?"

"I am not Barbara Bland. There is no such person."

"Hah!" Pat crowed. "The truth will come out!"

They regarded the erstwhile 'Barbara Bland' expectantly.

"My actual name is Joan Manville," she explained. "And I am the niece of H. Startland Drago. If he is still among the living."

X -- Missing Mogul

Pat Savage was not a girl who could be accused of being unnecessarily demure.

In fact -- if polled on the matter -- those who were numbered among her small circle of friends would have been unanimous in saying that the beautiful cousin of Doc Savage could probably have stood a strong dose of demureness in her mental makeup (if such a thing could be injected by needle).

Pat <blinked> speechlessly at the mousy bogus reporter who had called herself 'Barbara Bland' and was now claiming to e 'Joan Manville'. Her mouth went round; her *eyes* became *gold* slits; and her brown fists turned pale at the knuckles.

"Something wrong with her story?" Renny wondered.

"H. Startland Drago!" Pat burst out, startling the others.

"Y-yes," stuttered the erstwhile 'Barbara Bland'.

"H. Startland Drago of Drago&Company?"

"That is correct."

"The international bond broker?" Pat persisted.

"That is his profession."

"Who is also the personal banker to King Goz?"

This time, it was the turn of the others to lose their composure.

"Holy cow, Pat!" Renny boomed. "Where'd you dig that up?"

"My missing chum. Prestowitz. He claimed to be working for Drago. Said he vanished."

Mousy Joan Manville (if that was her true name) brought colorless nails to her colorless mouth and squeaked: "*Vanished!*"

"That," Pat said, eyeing her coldly, "was his story."

"Where ... where did you meet Caspar?"

"So you know him, eh?" Pat clucked.

"For years. He is in my uncle's -- Uncle Startland's -- employ. He has been looking into the matter of the recent threats against Uncle Startland's life."

Renny Renwick inserted his imposing **bulk** into the conversation at this point.

"Let me get this straight," he rumbled. "The mug that drug Pat clear down here at gunpoint is a friend of yours?"

"Caspar would never do that," Joan Manville protested.

"Why not?" Pat snapped at her. "You pulled the same stunt on Renny and the others. You even tried to 'vamp' poor Long Tom in the bargain!"

Joan Manville **colored**. The color rose from her slim throat and made burn **spots** on her cheeks.

Suddenly -- as if a magic wand had been waved -- she looked easily 3-fold more attractive than before.

"As I said," she offered, weak-voiced, "I have been going about this all wrong. My uncle asked me to come to Washington to look into the matter of King Goz's disappearance. That is why I undertook the imposture of being 'Barbara Bland' of Denver, a nonexistent person."

"Doesn't explain kidnapping us," Renny thumped.

"I can explain that."

"We're listening," Long Tom growled.

"Uncle Startland was afraid to leave his home because of the threats," Joan Manville continued.

"Threats?"

"Uncle Startland had reason to believe that the person threatening him was -- is -- responsible for the weird thing that happened to King Goz of Merida," Joan explained. "When I learned that **Doc Savage** had entered the investigation, I reasoned that he might lead me to the person responsible. Who seems to be named 'Kastellantz'.

"I-I guess I was overwrought by anxiety. But I thought that by bringing you all here, I could get to the bottom of it."

Her tone shrank.

"Now if what you say is true, Uncle Startland has disappeared also."

"Ass Caspar Prestowitz to the growing list," Pat said tartly.

The effect of this sudden statement was to make Joan Manville (they were still thinking of her as Barbara Bland) flinch and leak slow tears from her eyes.

Her lower lip quivered. Choking, she was forced to turn away.

"Th-this is Caspar's home," she sobbed. "It-it was where we to l-live after our ma-marriage."

"Humph!" Pat sniffed unsympathetically. "If that's the case, you haven't lost much, sister. That masher spent half his time proposing to me. I finally to my fist to the back of his thick skull and put an end to that!"

Joan Manville only sobbed more loudly at Pat's uncaring words.

Long Tom sidled up and whispered in Pat's ear: "What's the point of rubbing it in?"

"Gone soft on us, eh?" Pat remarked.

The electrical wizard colored and subsided.

"Look," Renny said suddenly. "We're not getting anywhere standing here jawing."

"Then make a suggestion, Mr. Big Fists!" Pat snapped.

"It's gonna be light soon. Let's stick around and hunt up that *spook* in the Old King Cole getup."

"You wouldn't find him!" Pat said hotly.

"And why not?" Johnny demanded in his precise voice.

"I had him locked in Doc's office safe and he still managed to give me the slip!"

The gawking that she got after that admission slipped out prompted her to explain the events that had transpired at Doc Savage's 86th floor Headquarters.

"Go ahead and bray if you donkeys want," Pat said after she concluded her account. "Just remember that you saw him too!"

No one so much as smirked.

It was a fact. Their minds were still wrestling with the impossibility of it all.

Finally, Johnny said: "Expediency is mandatory."

Which not only communicated the need for haste in searching the woods but also demonstrated that the scholarly archeologist-geologist had recovered his big words.

The dawn came up like smoldering fingers through the thick woods and they began their search. It was careful and methodical.

And it proved of no value whatsoever.

They did find the bobcat shivering in a hollow tree trunk.

Renny called them all to it with his big **bellow** of a voice. They stood about looking at the frightened feline in thoughtful silence. Its tufted ears were laid back close to its taped skull in defeat.

"The sole fruit of our endeavors," Renny stated morosely.

After that, they made plans.

"We still have to find this bird Kastellantz," Renny pointed out.

"Yeah. And now he has one of Doc's armored machines and all three of our superfirers," Long Tom said, sour-voiced.

"Someone should escort Miss Manville to Doc," Johnny suggested. "He will want to interview her."

Everyone looked to Pat that point.

But she wasn't buying.

"Nothing doing!" she said huffily. "I'm staying here with you all. This is where the mystery is"

"Sounds to me," Renny interposed, "that there's a whole different branch of the mystery taking shape up in New York."

"You boys just don't want to face Doc about the mess you've made of your end of this," she sniffed.

The silence that greeted Pat's accusation said it all.

*There was some foot-scuffing, a little throat-clearing, and such a general air of little-lost-boyiness about the 3 Doc Savage associates that the **bronze**-haired girl caved in.*

"All right, all right," she relented. "I'll go. But at least one of you could volunteer to accompany a gal. To put in that good word with Doc."

"No room," Long Tom said quickly. "That crate seats only two."

Which settled that.

Joan Manville was surprisingly docile about the whole thing. She evinced no great liking for the spectacular Pat. But offered no protest when the plan was outlined for her.

They trekked down to the seaplane. It was at that juncture that Pat <snapped> slim fingers and asked: "Say! Where are we anyway?"

"Virginia," Renny grunted.

"Near Manassas," added Joan Manville.

"Picturesque isn't it?" Pat said darkly.

As Pat clambered into the tiny plane, she called out: "How are you all going to get back to Washington?"

Bony Johnny Littlejohn lifted a narrow ankle ... pointed at it ... and said: "Shanks' mayor."

Which immediately brightened Pat's spirits.

It would be a long, long walk back!

Pat got the prop ticking over. Renny cast off for her and she sent the tiny bus scooting along the placid water.

Giving the stick a short push and pull, the craft started climbing. It got altitude and moaned northward.

2 hours later, Pat set the little ship down on the Hudson River within sight of the dazzling spire that housed Doc Savage's *Headquarters*.

She throttled down the motor and sent the craft racing toward a sloping apron of concrete that led from the water up to the big doors of a long pier that was of ancient sooty brick and bore a faded sign that said:

HIDALGO TRADING COMPANY

It was her hope to anchor the seaplane at the foot of the ramp and step out on dry concrete.

But as the wheeled floats bumped the apron, the high doors rolled aside as if by magic, revealing a gaping manmade cavern.

Pat raced the throttle. The seaplane bucked and surged up the top of the apron ... came level ... and trundled into the dim cavernous space within.

Behind, the doors rolled back again.

Up to this point, Joan Manville had been a quiet passenger, no doubt immersed in her own downcast thoughts.

But now she asked: "Where is this?"

"Never you mind," said Pat, throwing open the cockpit door.

She poked her *bronze*-haired head out ...

... and just as quickly withdrew it, her mouth suddenly thin and tight.

"What is it?" Joan gasped.

"My day of reckoning -- too soon," Pat clipped.

A voice said: *"You may come out whenever you wish."*

"Doc Savage!" Joan exclaimed, throwing open the door on her side and stepping out eagerly.

"Might as well face the funeral music," Pat muttered and followed suit.

The **big bronze man** stood by himself in the vast length of the warehouse. Behind him rested an amazing armada of airplanes ranging from a **bronze**-painted tri-motored amphibian to spidery autogyros. Fast speedboats and even a large cruiser reposed in slips. An ungainly submarine sat in dry dock.

And farther along -- visible through an open door, seeming to bump the rafters of the great establishment -- a dirigible of modest size (for a dirigible) hung in silence.

"Waiting for me, cousin of mine?" Pat inquired.

"Most definitely yes."

"Looks like somebody squealed."

"Never mind that. I know everything that transpired."

"In that case," Pat said archly, "I needn't introduce you to your former 'Barbara Bland' now passing for Miss 'Joan Manville'. Which, if you ask me, is a name not to be taken on faith alone."

"I can explain everything," said Joan Manville hastily.

"And you will," Doc stated calmly. "After I have had a word with my cousin."

The **bronze giant** motioned Pat to step over to one side.

"Listen, Doc!" Pat began breathlessly. "Did Renny tell you that he saw the royal **spook** with his own eyes?"

"Something was said about that," he admitted.

"And it couldn't be shot, caught, or fought?"

"It is puzzling," Doc admitted.

"It's darned frustrating is what it is! Good thing for me that I followed my nose. I saved Renny and the others from dire fate at the hands of this female falsehood!"

"If there is not an old Chinese proverb that 'she who follows her nose runs the risk of having it chopped off'," Doc said dryly, "there should be."

"I earned my salt!"

His **eyes** seemed to twinkle briefly.

"Now you can go home, wash it off, and get on with your well-deserved vacation," he said.

"You're not throwing me out now!"

"Of course not," the *Man of Bronze* agreed.

Pat relaxed. She began to smile.

"You are going to leave under your own power."

"Listen, master of men! This is bald-faced discrimination against the fair sex and I won't stand for it!"

"**Out, please,**" Doc ordered, his voice now very stern.

"You haven't heard the last of me," Pat said as she was storming off.

Her high-heels tap-tapped away as if she were using them to drive railroad spikes into press board.

Joan Manville drew close to the **Bronze Man** after Pat had left the building. The look in her eyes was nothing if not deep.

During the flight, she had donned her "war paint" (i.e., rouge and some tasteful lipstick). The change was remarkable.

"You were very hard on her," she said.

"With Pat, there is no other way to be. She is very headstrong."

"I hope you will not hold it against me that I have misrepresented myself to you and your men."

Doc Savage did not reply directly.

Instead, he said: "According to my associates, you are the niece of H. Startland Drago."

Joan Manville nodded. "This is true. You know of him?"

"Drago&Company is one of the most important brokers in international bonds. Your uncle is a power in European affairs. In fact, he has quite a reputation."

"Yes, I understand they call him the 'Empire Maker'. And now I am given to believe he has vanished. Just as he had feared."

Joan Manville seemed to lose all of her composure then.

The tears flowed anew. She pressed herself close to the *bronze giant* as if drawing comfort from the strength of his presence.

Doc Savage -- it might be seen -- shrank slightly from the gesture. He had long ago formed a policy of no feminine entanglements, knowing that enemies would strike at him through any woman in whom he became interested.

"I have been making inquiries," he said without visible emotion. "I understand that your uncle has been under police guard for some time."

Joan Manville managed to nod. "Yes. At his home."

"Let us go there now," he invited.

Joan Manville plainly approved of the size and discreetly subdued paint job of the sedan to which the Bronze Man led her.

It passed through the landward end of the big warehouse, the doors opening magically before it and closing after the machine had rolled out into the street.

Like the trick *Headquarters'* door, this occurrence had a simple explanation.

A radio signal from a hidden car transmitter actuated the automatic door.

Joan Manville seemed too preoccupied to note the phenomenon. Nor did she remark at the big warehouse that was in fact a concealed combination airplane hangar and boathouse.

Its existence was unknown to the general public. There was an elevated express highway passing by the Hudson River waterfront. And it was unlikely that the motorists who used it daily realized that the Hidalgo Trading Company structure was anything other than an old, disused steamship pier warehouse.

In reality, there was no such business. Doc Savage was the 'Hidalgo Trading Company'.

He piloted the sedan north to the residential reaches of upper Manhattan and the fashionable West Side.

He broke the silence with a question.

"Have you any inkling of what is behind your uncle's apparent disappearance?"

Joan shook her head.

"Merely that he was being threatened for no reason that he could think of," she offered. "If it had not been H. Startland Drago, I doubt that the police would have assigned detectives on such a thin story. But Uncle Startland contributes heavily to the police pension fund."

Doc nodded.

He did not pursue that line of questioning further. Nor did he reprove the young woman for her earlier imposture.

He drove directly to the palatial home of financial titan H. Startland Drago on the upper West Side as if he had made the trip often.

An acre of ground surrounded the old heirloom. Which was fortunate because of the modern 15-story apartment houses all around.

Several gardeners were busy on the grounds trimming shrubbery and looking for the liquor bottles and trash which the apartment house tenants would throw out of their windows.

One out-of-place touch was a gigantic oak tree growing very close to the rear. Its spreading branches threw the place into shade.

The entrance was guarded by men in blue. They put on intimidating expressions as Doc's sedan rolled up to the gate.

But these melted when they got a clear look at the **big bronze man**.

"Mr. Savage!" one exclaimed. "How can we help you, Sir?"

Doc indicated Joan.

"This is Joan Manville, niece of the missing man H. Startland Drago."

"Missing?"

"I have information that he has disappeared," Doc revealed.

"Not that we've heard. He's just been holed up in his digs for 3 days now."

"Mind if we have a look?"

Mind?

*The guard detail not only did not mind but they also decided to accompany the **Bronze Man** to the front door and to shower him with their opinions on the situation.*

"Mr. Drago claimed the threats were just telephoned to him," one guard muttered as they strode along. "He says he can't imagine who or why. That sounds kinda phony to me."

"Nothing about H. Startland Drago is phony!" growled another guard.

He was a policeman assigned by Centre Street to the job.

"Drago is a deacon in his church; chairman of the biggest committees to raise money for the orphans; and an upstanding fellow. Everybody knows it. Some nut is threatening him!"

"That's my guess," agreed a third. "Some mental moron. A goof. Nobody but a goof would threaten such an upstanding citizen."

At the door, they were met by a butler.

He was a middle-aged fellow who looked as tough as sagebrush roots and was about the same color. He was bowlegged as if he had once been a cowboy. And he wore rimless eyeglasses at the end of an impressively sharp nose.

"**Miss Manville!**" he said. "Where have you been, Miss? I have been frightfully worried about you?"

"Washington," said Joan Manville, suddenly shedding her mousy demeanor.

She stepped in and demanded: "Where is my uncle at this minute?"

"I do not know."

"We have reason to believe that he is missing," Doc Savage said.

"Hardly," the butler drawled. "He is merely in seclusion."

Joan Manville inquired: "When did you see him last?"

The butler thought.

"Yesterday. But it is the Master's habit to spend long periods alone in study. As you know, you being his favorite niece."

"Take us to him," Doc directed.

The butler hesitated ...

"Now, Seymour," said Joan Manville sharply.

The butler took on a new attitude.

He led the way, walking in his peculiar bowlegged fashion as if his legs had been rubbed raw by chaps.

The old house *creaked* strangely. The **noise** grew as they approached the back.

It soon became evident that the sound emanated from the unpruned oak whose branches were rubbing against gutters with a sound like bones rasping together.

They were taken to a study that was closed by 2 ornate doors. Very heavy and quite solid.

The sound of the butler's knuckles <rapping> on these might have been the *click* of cat's claws on a marble floor.

Receiving no answer, he began to pound. Timidly at first ... and then **loudly**. The massive doors hardly shook under his compact fist.

Doc Savage stepped in and threw the doors open with **steel-cabled hands** as if the huge doors were made of paper.

The others followed him into a library that was large yet somehow cozy and walled with books and mementos of a rich man's comfortable life.

A radio broadcast receiver was on. It was a console model and tuned to a station that was broadcasting an orchestra recital.

That was all they found in the way of activity in the old study. H. Startland Drago was a nonexistent personage as far as the immediate vicinity was concerned.

They searched the next room ...

Then the master bedroom ...

The cellar ...

Virtually every room in the house except the attic which was padlocked and -- according to the butler (Seymour Holman by name) -- unopened in years.

There was no doubt about it.

H. Startland Drago -- noted financial power -- had departed the hoary dwelling.

Doc Savage checked with the guards who had remained outside. They nearly had fits when they heard the news.

"Impossible!" one insisted. "No one came or went in the last ... oh, 3 days or so."

"Since about the time of King Goz's disappearance," Doc said.

"It that's how you look at it," a detective replied. "Shall I call headquarters?"

"Not as yet," answered Doc.

The **Bronze Man** returned to the study where Joan Manville was looking puzzled, yet somehow determined. The radio was still playing. Dance music now.

She called in the bowlegged, bespectacled butler.

"Did my uncle say anything was wrong?"

"No, Miss," replied the flunky. "He said you were not to worry."

"There must be an explanation!" she insisted. "Tell me when you last saw him. And what was he doing."

The old butler made faces as he summoned up his recollective powers.

"I believe," he said at last, "he was about his safe."

"Maybe there's some clue in the safe," Joan said swiftly.

She moved to a corner of the study where 2 bookcases joined.

She fiddled with the left-hand case and it swung out, exposing a safe of squat-but-substantial potions resting on bird-claw legs in a large cubby-hole

"My uncle kept his most important papers here," she said.

Doc Savage asked: "You have the combination?"

"No. Only Uncle Startland knew it. He was very protective of its contents."

She turned.

"Oh! Could you perhaps open it for us?"

Doc aid "I will try" and knelt at the safe.

He gave the dial a test spin ... put an highly-developed ear to the door beside the dial ... and his sensitive *bronze* fingers went to work.

The old butler put in his oar.

"You uncle might not approve, Miss."

"Uncle Startland always approves of what I do," the young woman said confidently.

Doc Savage continued to work with the safe knob.

"The Master will not like that," said the bowlegged manservant.

The girl asked anxiously: "Do you think this is in the best interests of my uncle, Mr. Savage?"

"Under the circumstances -- and in my opinion -- yes," returned Doc.

"Go ahead then."

The old butler sighed, then craned his neck to inspect the safe door. Apparently he knew something about safes because he looked relieved and said:

"Begging your pardon. But you will never be able to open that without the combination.

Then the safe immediately fell open!

The bowlegged servant broke the somewhat strained silence which followed.

He had been goggling at the safe. Now he pointed at it.

"Begging pardon, Sir!" he exploded. "But how in ... I mean, how could you open that safe so easily?"

"This is **Doc Savage**," Joan Manville explained. "His business is helping people out of trouble. He has mastered many professions by intensive study and uses them in his work. I presume he has made a study of safes."

The old butler swallowed several times.

"Doc...Savage," he said in much the same tone a farmer would use to tell his wife the lightning had just struck the milk lot and killed all the cows.

The **Bronze Man** reached a **cabled hand** into the safe and withdrew sheafs of paper and other memoranda. He took these to a walnut desk and began going through them under the watchful eyes of Joan Manville and the sagebrush-colored butler.

He quickly separated the papers into piles, seeming only to glance the writing on each sheet so rapid was his speed-reading. When he was done with this sorting, he took up the smaller of the 2 piles.

"Have you discovered something, Mr. Savage?" Joan asked plaintively.

Doc looked up, his metallic face expressionless.

"According to these notes," he imparted, "your uncle has been gathering evidence on a financial operator known as Laurence Kingsley Goldwill."

"Yes, I know the name. He and my uncle have had dealings in the past. He has been a guest in this very home. That was before his crooked dealings came to light and he and my uncle had a falling-out."

"Goldwill -- according to your uncle's notes -- has had his hand in many a shady venture," Doc stated. "He lost a young fortune in the recent business depression speculating in silver stocks and has been attempting to recoup by promoting doubtful mergers and stock flotations."

Joan Manville nodded grimly.

"When these things came out, Uncle Startland refused to have anything more to do with man.

Doc Savage went on.

"These papers hint at a **scheme more audacious** than any that Goldwill had been hitherto accused of. But there are no details given.

"Do you ... do you think that this horrid man is behind my uncle's disappearance?" Joan gasped.

The **Bronze Man** lifted a sheet of paper on which there was extensive writing.

"Is this your uncle's handwriting?" he asked.

Joan Manville accepted the sheet ... looked over the crabbed tracks of ink ... and nodded.

"Yes."

Then she read the close lines. Her fingers dug into Doc's arm.

"Oh! According to this, Uncle Startland believed that Laurence Kingsley Goldwill in some manner engineered King Goz's disappearance. And that he himself was the next target of the man's crooked machinations. Why, this is beyond belief!"

"It is peculiar to say the least," Doc admitted. *He was acutely conscious of the hand on his arm.*

At that point, the dance music ended and a news commentator came on.

"Greetings, folks. Greetings. The New York grand jury today failed to indict Laurence Kingsley Goldwill on a charge of swindling investors. It seems that the wily Goldwill skated in-and-out through the technicalities of the Law and did not once let the ice break under him. The district attorney said that in his opinion, Justice miscarried through the inability of the Law to ..."

Doc shut the radio off.

"You probably prefer not to hear that," he stated.

"Thank you," Joan said.

The **Bronze Man** gathered up the papers and returned those not pertaining to Laurence Kingsley Goldwill to the safe. The others he kept. Then he locked the safe.

Joan Manville asked meekly: "What can we do?"

"First, we might inform the police of your uncle's disappearance. Then, a confrontation with Goldwill is in order."

"He should be hung!" she burst out.

Doc Savage said grimly: "Goldwill has been jailed twice. But there was not enough evidence to hold him. He is clever."

The police wore unhappy faces when they put in their appearance not many minutes later. The girl had called them.

They insisted on a complete search of the house being undertaken despite having it pointed out to them that this had already been done.

"Something might have been overlooked," one blustered.

The girl Joan Manville had a sharp tongue when necessary. And this she proved by the verbal pitchforking she gave the police.

The latter sailed about like a flock of jaybirds which had just found an owl in their favorite tree.

But in the end, it did no good. They agreed to skip any further searching.

"Which isn't to say that we won't do one later," one warned.

*The **bluecoats** departed, vowing to issue a pickup order for the missing H. Startland Drago.*

After they had taken their leave, Joan turned to Doc Savage and murmured appreciatively:

"I want to thank you for not mentioning my uncle's past connections with Laurence Kingsley Goldwill. It would do his business reputation terrible harm if it got out just now."

"We do not wish police interference in our own investigation," Doc said while gently-but-firmly disentangling his arm from her grasp.

XI -- The Empire Maker

On the way to the Wall Street office of Laurence Kingsley Goldwill, Doc Savage stopped at a newsstand kiosk and purchased a bulldog edition of a morning newspaper.

The matter of Goldwill had pushed the disappearance of King Egil Goz of Merida off the front pages. The sheets had already exhausted every angle in the case, it seemed. The Japanese and Russians were not having frontier incidents. And the Republicans had stopped for a breather. So news was slack, anyway.

The main streamer was big and black. It read:

GOLDWILL ELUDES INDICTMENT Accused Stock Manipulator Goes Free

There was a photo of Laurence Kingsley Goldwill emblazoned on the front page. It showed a rather self-important man with the general demeanor of a pouter pigeon. A pince-nez perched on a thin-bridged nose.

The photo seemed to have been selected with an eye toward drumming up reader antipathy for the accused financier. The accompanying article was brief.

An issue of common stock had been sold to the public, it explained. High-pressure methods and enticing phraseology had been used and as a result, poor people and small buyers had been the majority purchasers. An unloading on the widows and orphans in effect.

Then by a bit of fast-but-perfectly legal work, the common stock had become practically worthless. And the promoter of the scheme -- Laurence Kingsley Goldwill -- had made 4 million dollars. The monies were legal fees, salary, reorganization counsel fees, and so on.

It was evident from the article that Goldwill was a Wall Street money hog of the kind which gives the Street a bad reputation from time-to-time.

"The man is a thorough rascal," Joan Manville fumed as she read along. "He would stop at nothing to line his pockets.

Doc Savage was driving down Broadway (the thoroughfare that runs the length of the city). There were moving through lower Manhattan now where the rattle and slam of the elevated trains was a constant racket.

The building which housed the brokerage office of Goldwill&Son (the newspaper article had indicated that Laurence Kingsley Goldwill was the son, the elder Goldwill long since having departed this mortal vale) was not actually situated on Wall Street, home of the World's money troubles.

But it was adjacent enough that -- if it upset -- part of it would fall on the Street.

The structure was a grimy edifice and old enough that it might well have overlooked the "Curb" (as Wall Street is sometimes still called) in the days long past when traders actually operated at curbside, shouting orders to persons in office windows and banging on a swill bucket to denote the closing bell.

Still, it had an elevator (albeit a creaking one). They took this up to the office of Goldwill&Son.

It was a dingy place. They were met by a rather obsequious individual who offered profuse apologies. Laurence Kingsley Goldwill was not present. And furthermore, he was not expected back at the office until Monday at the earliest.

The spokesperson was very polite. In fact, a number of officials came to meet with them and all were polite. Excessively.

It was evident that their manners didn't mean anything. They acted exactly like what they were. A bunch of old stockbrokers bowing and scraping to a customer whom they were hopeful of relieving of his shirt.

"Where does Mr. Goldwill live?" Joan Manville demanded.

"And you are ...?" the first obsequious one inquired.

"H. Startland Drago's niece, I'll have you know!"

The old stockbroker looked startled.

The name of H. Startland Drago was one to conjure with. He actually paled as he wrestled with a horny dilemma.

Finally, he said: "I am deeply, deeply sorry, Miss Manville. But Laurence Kingsley Goldwill prefers to keep his home life separate from his business dealings. However, I will be pleased to convey any message you care to leave."

"Not necessary," said Doc Savage, abruptly piloting Miss Manville out of the rather gloomy office confines.

As they rode down in the rickety cage, the elevator operator seemed to be staring with frank admiration at the *bronze giant*. Doc took a great deal of pains not to notice this, himself looking intently at the floors as they dropped past.

Once more in the sedan, Doc fired up a shortwave transmitter clamped under the dash and reached his *Headquarters*.

"Monk here."

"Monk, I would like the home address of Laurence Kingsley Goldwill the stockbroker."

"You mean Laurence Kingsley Goldwill the slippery crook, don't you?" Monk countered.

"He has been convicted of nothing to date," Doc pointed out.

"Humph!" remarked Joan Manville.

"And the Devil ain't been brought up on charges either," Monk squeaked. "But that don't mean He ain't guilty. Anyway, I'll get right on it."

Doc Savage drove north on the theory that a rich man like Goldwill would live in upper Manhattan. Or possibly on Long Island which could be reached from midtown Gotham.

His surmise was correct as Monk Mayfair reported moments later.

"Tudor City, Doc."

The burly chemist gave an address, then asked: "Want to me you there?"

"You might do that," Doc related.

The doorman failed to rouse any answer from the occupant of Laurence Kingsley Goldwill's apartment. And at first, he refused them entry beyond the vestibule.

This building was an exclusive one. There was nothing so coarse as a doorbell to be rung. One had to receive permission to pass beyond the vestibule area.

Doc solved this impasse in a simple manner.

He made a telephone call ...

... and soon the superintendent of the building bustled up, shooing the doorman off and offering all sorts of assistance.

Doc Savage, it turned out, owned a part interest in the fashionable apartment building.

Still, the **Bronze Man**'s request to gain admittance to the private apartment of the shadowy stockbroker was unusual. What tipped the scales in Doc's favor was a simple fact.

"That Goldwill always rubbed me wrong," the superintendent said. "If you are investigating that man, it can only be for the good."

As a precaution, they buzzed the apartment once more.

When no answer was forthcoming, they ascended.

The superintendent opened the door with a master key. Doc asked him to remain outside. Which he agreed to do although a trace of disappointment flickered across his eager features.

The **bronze giant** pushed the door open with a hand. His **flake-gold eyes** seemed to whirl more quickly as he took in the parlor.

Red leather chairs predominated. Heavy as they were, they had been crowded into one corner. A wall tapestry hung askew. Taboret drawers were out of their receptacles, they and their contents scattered about the rug.

The others peered past him. Joan Manville gasped.

"The place has been ransacked!" the superintendent exclaimed.

Doc was already inside then. He took in the disorder of the parlor.

There had been a struggle. Or perhaps the apartment had been searched by uncaring persons.

There was a room beyond. A sitting room.

The curtains were drawn. And tied to a modernistic chromium chair sat a man. Dark eyes started at sight of the *Man of Bronze*.

Ignoring the man, Doc moved through the remaining rooms. He discovered no other persons and returned to the bound individual.

The bonds were ordinary hemp. Thick, tough, and knots would have done a sailor proud.

Doc Savage's **corded fingers** made short work of the, however. His fingers seemed no more to touch the various knots when they sprang apart!

The man lifted hands to his gag and pulled it down. A wadded handkerchief fell out of his mouth.

"Whoever you are, I owe you a great debt," he said fervently.

Joan Manville rushed into the room a moment later and threw her arms around his neck.

"Uncle Startland! I knew that was your voice! Oh, thank heavens you are safe!!"

"Yes. And no thanks to that rascal Goldwill."

Doc asked: "You have been held here by Laurence Kingsley Goldwill?"

The popular conception of a "plutocrat" is of a portly fellow, possibly affecting a pince-nez, with an ample belly and the jowls of a swine.

H. Startland Drago was a plutocrat. Of that, there was no doubt. He was a millionaire many times over (if not a billionaire).

He did not fit the public conception, however.

He was a lean, cadaverous fellow. His eyes brought to mind a raven's acquisitive gaze. His hair was likewise jet black and combed straight back. He possessed good posture and carried himself with an erect, aristocratic air.

Altogether, he was a striking individual (if somewhat saturnine) and cut a figure that the sartorially-conscious Ham Brooks would have envied.

He bore little enough of a resemblance to attractive Joan Manville.

Straightening very correct clothing, H. Startland Drago got around to answering the **Bronze Man's** question.

"It is merely surmise on my part. I never got a look at my abductor. I was at work in my study when I heard a strange noise."

"Noise?"

"A *whistling*. I had at first believed it was the radio. I enjoy listening to music as I do my work. But it quickly became clear that the *whistling* did not emanate from the radio set. I was in the act of turning around to investigate the sound when a curtain fell before my eyes."

"Curtain?"

Drago hesitated. His voice grew uncomfortable.

"Well, that is how I recall it. A darkness came over my vision. That was the last I knew until I awoke here bound-and-gagged. I do not know many hours elapsed."

"If you did not see your supposed abductor," Doc Savage questioned, "then why do you assume it was Goldwill?"

"Laurence Kingsley Goldwill," said H. Startland Drago, "is the only enemy I have in the entire World!"

"Uncle!" Joan Manville exclaimed. "This is Goldwill's apartment!"

"That would seem to settle that matter."

Drago now turned his intensely black gaze upon his Bronze rescuer.

"And you, Sir. To whom do I owe my rescue?"

Joan Manville burst out "Don't you recognize him, Uncle Startland? This is **Doc Savage!** Simply one of the most amazing of living men!"

H. Startland Drago did not look like a man who was ordinarily impressed by very much.

But he was impressed by Doc Savage. It showed in tiny ways.

The nearly imperceptible straightening of his spine. A flicker of interest that came into his black bird-like eyes.

And the momentary pause that inhibited his reply.

At last, he murmured: "I have heard a great many things about you, of course.

Doc cut through the soap.

"You have been assembling facts that point to Laurence Kingsley Goldwill's complicity in the disappearance of King Goz. What are your conclusions?"

This time, Drago actually started!

"How did you know that?" he demanded.

Joan Manville laid reassuring hands on the plutocrat's arm.

"When I discovered that you were missing, Uncle Startland, I invited Mr. Savage to investigate. He gained access to your safe and learned of your suspicions.

"Amazing. I would have thought that safe was impregnable."

Doc said: "Let me see if I have a clear picture. You are King Goz's personal banker?"

"Not only personal but official."

"Explain, please."

H. Startland Drago did not seem to be a man who was free with information.

He hesitated ...

... and then -- evidently recalling the debt he owed to the **big Bronze Man** -- launched into a recital.

"I own a bond house," he related. "International bonds to be precise. Much of the holdings of Drago&Company consist of various government bonds. Which, as you know, are promissory notes offered by governments to borrow funds to perform certain functions. Such as build railroads, bridges, or in some cases pay off war debts."

Doc nodded.

"King Goz of Merida -- despite his background as a war chieftain -- was a forward-thinking monarch. His country is poor. Even by the standards of the Balkans. Too poor to purchase bonds. Or at least, bonds that anyone would be likely to purchase in significant quantities.

"On the other hand, money can be raised through the speculation on the bonds of other governments. Currently, for instance, the American Liberty, the British Consul, and the French Rente are considered worthy securities."

H. Startland Drago paused ... then continued.

"As King Goz's banker, I have been buying and selling bonds on behalf of the government of Merida. Through this, His Highness hoped to acquire capital to modernize his beleaguered nation."

"It has been suggested that King Goz had been quietly amassing munitions and conscripts, evidently fearing that one of his neighbors might attempt a land grab," Doc Savage stated.

"His Highness was very concerned with the border disputes that the League of Nations is attempting to negotiate," Drago allowed. "But you will recall that a number of years ago, the King turned to Santa Bellanca for protection. Santa Bellanca is a very strong power in Europe. And there is a treaty calling for that nation's army to come to the defense of Merida should a neighbor -- say, Carrullana -- attempt mischief."

"Santa Bellanca has gotten into 'mischief' of its own in Africa," the **Bronze Man** pointed out.

H. Startland Drago shrugged.

"I concern myself with finances. Not politics," he said diplomatically.

Doc Savage abruptly changed the subject.

"How does Laurence Kingsley Goldwill fit into this picture?"

"Goldwill recently made certain business overtures to me," Startland said. "Overtures of a preposterous illegal nature having to do with the forming of an investment syndicate for the purpose of improper speculations. Naturally, I threw him out of my office, thereby incurring his enmity.

"Although he was cagy enough not to give away his entire plans, I learned enough that I am certain I could recognize his scheme once it is implemented. Knowing this, Goldwill has attempted to silence me."

"By holding you a prisoner?"

"I image that a ransom would have been involved."

"That is an unusual approach to silencing an enemy," Doc pointed out.

"Goldwill may be a scoundrel. But I do not think he is capable of murder. However, I could be mistaken."

"How does the vanishment of King Goz tie into this?"

"That," H. Startland Drago admitted, "baffles me, frankly. At a guess, the disappearance may be the first move in Goldwill's cunning game. And my abduction was the second. What comes next -- or how the scheme works -- I have as yet no clear idea. I do know that it involves speculation with bonds on a scale never before attempted. I regret I do not know which bonds are involved."

Doc Savage said nothing.

Joan Manville spoke up.

"What matters, Uncle, is that you are safe. And now we have proof that Goldwill is as crooked as they come. Don't we, Mr. Savage?"

"Your uncle's presence would seem to point an accusing finger in Laurence Kingsley Goldwill's direction," Doc admitted. "But there are a number of questions still be settled."

"Name them," challenged Drago.

"A man named Caspar Prestowitz has become embroiled in this affair. Know him?"

In the excitement of the moment, Joan Manville had evidently forgotten the man who was her fiancé. Her slim hands came off her uncle's arm and covered her mouth.

"Caspar! I had almost forgotten him. Oh, Uncle! He has disappeared too! What can it mean?"

H. Startland Drago hesitated.

"In my field, he said slowly, "it is sometimes necessary to gather facts regarding the economic well-being of nations who float bonds. These facts are jealously guarded and not easily uncovered."

"In other words," Doc prompted, "Prestowitz is a private investigator?"

"Nothing so common as that," Drago said with a trace of indignation. "He is a financial fact-gatherer and a superlative operator."

"He took my cousin Pat prisoner at gunpoint," Doc said.

"Over-zealousness. He knew that you were looking into the mystery and perhaps thought he could learn something from her."

"Perhaps," said Doc.

"I imagine the authorities should be brought into this now," H. Startland Drago said.

"It might be advisable not to," Doc Savage stated.

H. Startland Drago cocked an ebony eyebrow, making gullies in his tall forehead.

"A police search might only drive Goldwill into hiding," the Bronze Man explained. "I would like to station some of my associates at this building. And others to stand guard over you at your home if this is acceptable to you."

"I would be very grateful for any protection you can extend. Obviously, New York's Finest were not up to snuff on this occasion."

Joan Manville puckered eyebrows together.

"I still don't see how you were spirited out of your home under the very noses of the police, Uncle Startland."

She turned to Doc.

"What do you think, Mr. Savage?"

"The *whistling* heard before your uncle lost consciousness might explain it," he offered.

"How so?"

He said nothing.

They waited for him to speak, thinking that he perhaps was gathering his thoughts.

Instead, the **Bronze Man** turned on his heel and passed from the room.

They found him outside in the hall speaking in a low voice with the building superintendent.

Evidently an understanding was reached because without comment, the man ran them down to the lobby in the building elevator.

Outside, a gaudy roadster had pulled up.

Monk Mayfair.

At sight of presentable Joan Manville, his homely features split into a wide grin.

"Who's the number, Doc?" he asked unabashedly.

Doc Savage made quick introductions and said: "Monk, please convey Miss Manville and her uncle home. Remain with them. I will have Ham relieve you in a few hours."

"I left that overdressed ambulance-chaser at *Headquarters* like you told me to," Monk grinned, plainly relishing the idea of beating the dapper lawyer to a potential "conquest".

"He understands that he is to keep an eye on things?" the **Bronze Man** asked.

"Yeah, the shyster."

Doc started for his own machine. Monk called out.

"Say! Where are you going, Doc?"

"To look into another angle of this mystery," said Doc Savage, easing behind the wheel of his sedate sedan.

XII -- The Dispirited

In a room on the top floor of one of the more sumptuous hostelrys in Washington DC, 3 dejected men settled into comfortable chairs.

They immediately took off their shoes.

"Are my 'dogs' ever killing me," Long Tom Roberts grumbled.

Renny Renwick -- massaging **feet** as preposterously huge as his knobby **fists** -- said: "Holy cow! My corns have their own corns now!"

Oddly, lanky Johnny Littlejohn seemed the least drained by their long walk out of the Virginia woods after their nocturnal encounter with the *phantasm* that *whistled*.

The skeletal archeologist-geologist was blessed with the freakish endurance of a marathon runner. Plus there seemed insufficient meat on his bony feet to support blisters, too.

The uncanny experience of the preceding night had preyed on their minds all during the long trek which ended only when they chanced upon a helpful farmer driving an old flivver.

They hitched a ride to a modest Virginia town and from thence arrange for transportation to this very establishment which -- like many in the Nation's Capital -- was named after a deceased president.

As they tended to their aching feet, the big-**fisted** engineer happened to glance out a window and noticed a plane buzzing the city. He went to the window and threw the pane up.

"Something?" asked Long Tom.

"Plane," Renny said, squinting.

"You never seen a plane before?" Long Tom groused.

"This one's just flyin' aimlessly. Can't make it out from here. But it's not a passenger job."

"In trouble?"

"Not that I can see."

Turning suddenly from the window, Renny walked gingerly to the connected door ... hauled off ... and practically demolished the panel with one blow of his huge right **fist**. And this fabulous feat appeared to do no appreciable damage to his hand.

"Holy cow!" he rumbled. "What breaks we get! We could've cleaned up on the blamed chauffeur Kastellantz, made him talk, and maybe cracked this whole mystery wide open. Instead, we let him get away. We should've piled on him the first chance."

"Intriguisitic exercitation approaches indefectibility," Johnny said.

"Someday you're gonna die in the middle of one of them words," Renny predicted gloomily. "What'd you say?"

Long Tom offered: "He thinks using our heads was much better."

"Thanks," Renny grunted. "How'd you know what he meant?"

The pale electrical wizard sighed.

"It was either slaughter Johnny or take up the study of the dictionary. I'm against bloodshed."

"Since when?" countered Renny.

Gloom settled over the trio. They returned to administrating to their smarting feet.

Not long after, a crisp <knocking> came to their door.

"Now who could that be?" Renny thumped.

Johnny hazarded: "A revenant of our nocturnal perambulations, possibly."

"If you mean that *spook* of the sad song," Renny grumbled, going to the door, "I'm kinda leaning toward the idea that he never existed."

The huge engineer threw open the door ...

... and in walked vivacious Pat Savage.

"Greetings" she said brightly.

Consternation seized the 3 Doc Savage aides.

"More grief!" Johnny exclaimed, shock knocking the big words out of him.

"I thought you were in New York!" Renny accused.

Pat stuck up her chin.

"I was chased off! So I thought I'd see if there was any *action* left over from last night."

The bronze-haired girl stopped and noticed the unhappy trio lounging about in their stocking feet.

"We just blew in," Renny said by way of explanation.

Pat smiled sweetly.

"Now I don't feel so bad," she said tartly. "I take it there have been no interesting developments?"

"That depends on how interesting you consider blisters," Long Tom complained.

"Still smarting from your collision with 'true love'?" Pat inquired archly.

Coloring, Long Tom put more effort into rubbing his feet.

"I tried to tell Doc about that *whistling spirit* we encountered last night. But he wasn't in a listening mood," Pat offered.

"We," Renny said flatly, "have decided that there was no such entity."

Pat's pretty mouth came open. She shook a firm in their faces.

"Don't you all go skeptical on me! You saw that whiskered old goat the same as me!"

"We're prize suckers," Long Tom opined. "I'll bet that thing last night was some kind of night mirage."

"Night mirage!" Pat exploded. "Now see here ..."

"I never heard of a 'night mirage'," Johnny said slowly. "But there's no reason why there couldn't be one, maybe."

Renny harbored similar feelings.

"Last night chasing that *spook*, I was beginning to feel as if we were hunting for the proverbial foot of the rainbow," he said thoughtfully. "I did that once when I was a kid. The rainbow gets bigger as you go towards it. But it always keeps just ahead of you and finally disappears, leaving you feeling like a goop."

"Goop," Pat said snippily, "just about describes the three of you. Some 'Sorry Sams' you all turned to be!"

That sassy remark was met with no particular.

So Pat changed the subject.

"What about that chauffeur Kastellantz? Any lack tracking him down?"

"With what?" Renny grunted. "The guy ran off with Long Tom's only electroscope."

"So get another."

"Where? You can't exactly walk into a drug store and buy one on time."

"So you're going to just sit here and do nothing?" she said, aghast.

"Right now," Long Tom said bitterly, "it's all I can do to work the knots out of my toes."

"Me too," Renny chimed in. "I couldn't walk to the door now if there was a fire."

*But when the telephone **jangled** less than a minute later, all four leaped from the seats in an effort to beat the others to the instrument.*

Pat -- the nearest to the telephone -- won handily. Her cheery "Hello!" was triumphant.

Abruptly, her face went as white as the proverbial ghost.

Without another word, she passed the instrument to Renny.

Clapping a big **paw** over the mouthpiece, he asked: "You okay?"

Pat's mouth made speaking shapes. Only one word emerged ...

"**Doc**," she squeaked, pointing to the telephone as if it were a rattlesnake in disguise.

"Serves you right for being so quick on the draw," Renny grumbled.

Uncovering the mouthpiece, he said; "That was exactly who you thought it was, Doc. The pest just barged in.

He listened for a moment.

Then he lowered the phone and told Pat: "Doc said to barge right out again."

"Nothing doing!" Pat said vehemently.

Renny listened some more.

The others crowded about to catch what they could. All except Pat who was looking a little green of face. She had not expected to be found out so soon.

"On our way!" said Renny exuberantly, hanging up.

He turned to the others, his face gloomy (which indicated profound good humor): "Grab your kicks, everybody. We're going places!"

Instantly, the 3 men shed all traces of fatigue and yanked on assorted footgear.

"What's up?" Pat asked breathlessly.

Renny ignored her and said to the others: "Remember that plane I saw earlier? That was Doc using a radio locator to scout for that slippery Kastellantz. Says he's got a fix on him."

"Where?" Pat asked.

"In that hotel where the King's retinue are holed up. Doc's at the airport now and said he'd meet us there."

Pat brightened.

"Goodness! Progress now!"

They made a bee line for the door.

Taking up the rear, Pat suddenly found a big inhibiting **paw** in her face. Renny's!

"Nothing doing!" he rapped. "Doc told you to take your vacation. Now vacate!"

She sat fists on hips and struck a defiant pose.

"Need I remind you of our little understanding?" she said pointedly.

Renny scowled. The feisty girl him there. A promise had been made.

"I can't let you tag along," he rumbled slowly. "Doc would dislocate my fists."

"But you won't stop me from following you, eh?"

"After I shut this door in your face," Renny said unhappily, "you are on your own."

The door clapped shut, forcing her to hastily withdraw her perfect nose.

"Men!" fumed Pat.

The hotel where the retinue of King Egil Goz was ensconced was the Grant. It was one of the better hotels in the city. Which means that it often catered to diplomats and other foreign dignitaries.

It was a very conservative establishment. So a great deal of effort was expended on the part of the management to maintain a genteel decorum conducive to the peace of mind of its clientele.

So when Renny Renwick, Long Tom Roberts, and Johnny Littlejohn piled into the lobby like a trio of race horses just out of the starting gate, the deskman looked up from his duties ... acquired a displeased demeanor ... and signaled to 2 men quietly distributed among the lobby chairs reading newspapers.

They came up from their stations and sauntered in the direction of the unusual trio. They were swathed in gabardine topcoats despite the warmth of the season.

"Something we can do for you?" one asked in a less-than-welcoming tone of voice.

"Hotel dicks," Long Tom sniffed disdainfully.

"We're looking for Doc Savage," Renny thumped.

From behind the desk, the clerk offered a snooty comment:

"We have no 'Doc Savage's registered at this hotel."

"You heard the man," the second hotel detective said.

"How about an Elvern D. Kastellantz?" Renny countered. "Got one of them?"

To their surprise, the deskman hesitated.

"Well?"

"What is your business with Mr. Kastellantz?" the deskman asked grudgingly.

"Man-o-man!" Renny whooped, surging for the desk. "Now we're getting somewhere!"

The hotel detectives hastily got out of the giant engineer's way like rowboats beating away from an oncoming ocean liner.

"What's his room number/" Renny demanded.

The deskman stalled. So Renny gave the register a spin until it faced his side of the counter.

He flipped through the pages ... stabbed a spot with a thick forefinger ... and crowed: "Room 14-C!"

They made a dash for the elevators.

"Wait for me!" an anxious voice called after them

It was **Pat Savage**. The pretty young girl was hotfooting it through the lobby having just stepped from a taxi.

There was a uniformed elevator starter. Renny dropped a huge paw on his shoulder: "There's a fiver in it you run the doors shut in her face."

"I heard that" Pat shouted just as the cage closed.

The other elevators were in use and Pat could only fume and pace as she waited for a free cage.

At one point, the 2 hotel detectives made to approach her.

Casually, the bronze-haired girl extracted her antique six-shooter from her commodious handbag. She gave the cylinder a rattlesnake spin and remarked to no one in particular: "My father made this by hand to shoot grizzly bears with. In our neck of the woods, there was so much brush that you never saw a grizzly until you were right on him. Or her whichever the case may be."

The detectives swapped uncomfortable looks and resumed their seats, pointedly burying their blank faces in morning editions.

During one restless tour of the lobby, Pat's head came up and saw her **famous** cousin emerging from a cab.

"Just my luck!" she muttered.

Abruptly deciding to "take the bull by the horns", she hurried up to meet the **Bronze Man** as he came through the revolving doors.

"Doc! You're just in time!" Pat said excitedly. "Renny and the others have tracked that sneaky Kastellantz. He's registered in room 14-C in this very hotel! Brazen, huh?"

"Brazen," he said, his *flake-gold eyes* chilly, "describes all manner of inexplicable behavior."

"Now Doc ..."

"Since you are here, "the *bronze giant* said in a brittle tone of voice, "You may guard the lobby."

Pat flared up like Vesuvius.

"My foot! I want in!"

Doc continued on without breaking stride.

"The lobby or the door. The choice is yours."

It was rare that the *Man of Bronze* showed his displeasure so openly. The frostiness of his *metallic* tone told Pat that she had overstepped her unwelcome, as it were.

Seeming to shrink, she stopped, her buoyant mood diminished as if cold water had been dashed in her entrancing face.

Doc Savage disappeared into the elevator.

One of the hotel detectives jeered. "Looks like you met a 'grizzly' of another color!"

Pat directed the maw of her cannon in his direction and said: "My eyesight isn't so hot. Sometimes I just aim at any old growl."

An instant later, there came a *sound* far above.

It was a racket remindful of the bass string of a titanic bullfiddle being plucked violently. The noise was **ear-splitting!**

Hearing the familiar sound of one of the Bronze Man's supermachine pistols discharging, Pat made a face and said: "Darn it! Why do I always get left out?"

Then suddenly realizing that neither Renny, Long Tom, nor Johnny were in possession of their own superfirers -- and knowing that Doc Savage never carried one -- she went wide of eye.

"Oh ... *Oh!!!*"

XIII -- Infernal Device

One the 14th floor of the Hotel Grant, Doc Savage plunged from the elevator cage with one of his anesthetic grenades in hand. He knew that the bullfiddle **bellow** coming from this floor had not been triggered by any of aids in all likelihood.

He came out into the corridor and veered around a corner, his *golden eyes* taking in the numbers on the closed doors. Moving *stealthily*, he came to the door numbered '14-C'.

The portal lay open. A foot protruded from the gaping opening. He recognized it by the hole on the bottom of the well-worn sole -- **Long Tom Roberts**.

The puny electrical wizard -- notoriously penurious -- was wont to wear out his shoe leather to the thickness of vellum before having his footgear resoled.

The **Bronze Man** eased up to the door with the *soundlessness* of a great tawny tiger.

With a glass bomb readied for throwing, he stuck his head in the door ...

then withdrew it blurring speed!

No bullets sought the *bronze blur* that was his head. If any had, they would surely have missed. The bronze giant was fast as verichrome!

He threw the bomb. It made only a brief *tinkle* in breaking.

He waited, his breath pent, ears alert. He heard no movement, no fall of a body overcome by the quick-acting gas.

When it was safe to inhale, Doc Savage entered the room and examined Long Tom who lay on his stomach. He turned the frail-looking electrician over.

The latter breathed. In fact, he was actually snoring now that the Doc had shifted him.

His unhealthy-looking face was unmarked. A row of tiny rips showed along his coat front. No blood seeped through, however.

Examining the pallid hands, Doc found a modest wound on the palm of one. It had barely broken the skin. Mercy bullet!

Getting erect, the **Bronze Man** slipped into the room.

Johnny Littlejohn lay asprawl on an ottoman. His coat front too sported a stitchery of moist rents. The mercy bullet that got him had scraped a *red* line along the side of his bony skull.

Farther in, he found no one. And no trace of Renny Renwick.

Doc Savage went to a telephone and got the front desk.

"Connect me with General Graul Frontenac," he clipped.

A moment later, the Meridan general's stiff voice came.

"Da?"

"This is Doc Savage."

Silence.

He was about to repeat his statement when General Frontenac said: *"You catch me an inopportune time, Domnule Savage. I am in the throes of packing, having sent the King's retinue on ahead."*

"Ahead?"

"There are difficulties in my homeland. The forces of Carrullana are even now massing on Merida's western border. As deeply as it wounds me to do so, I must return to take command of the Royal Army. It is my duty."

"You should be advised that Elvern D. Kastellantz is loose in this hotel and is possibly on his way to you."

"And who is this Kastellantz person?"

"That is the name by which the missing chauffeur is going," Doc explained. "And he is armed with one of my supermachine pistols. It might be a good idea to lock all your doors until I arrive."

"Of course, of course. And thank you for calling. I await your arrival, Domnule Savage" said General Frontenac, terminating the conversation.

Doc Savage next made for the elevator bank with his *eerie golden eyes* alert. As he moved (a *bronze shadow*), he began humming under his breath.

The humming became louder and turned into words. Those of some exotica, guttural song in a foreign language.

Surprisingly, it brought no curious faces to doors. The habitués of the Grant were evidently respectful of other person's affairs no matter how noisy.

He listened. *No answer to his urgent musical questionings came.*

He had been singing in the *Mayan* tongues hoping that the missing Renny Renwick could and would answer.

Abandoning that strategy, the *Man of Bronze* took the elevator to the topmost floor where the retinue of King Goz had set up housekeeping.

Stepping off, he launched once more into his guttural song. And again with no discernible result.

Going to the door of the Meridian suite, he paused ... seemed about to knock ...

... and instead grasped the knob. He gave it a turn. *The door opened easily!*

The **Bronze Man** found himself in an antechamber dominated by an antique table resting on a vermilion rug. On the table reposed an envelope propped against a silver candelabra.

His sharp eyes easily read the inked legend on the envelope face. **It was addressed to him.**

His trilling came then. The exotic vibrations were very low this time, so ethereal that they could not be heard at a distance greater than a few feet.

Often, this sound came unbidden. This was one of those times. Doc Savage sometimes worried that one day it would give away his presence to enemies and result in a calamity.

But this was one instance when the *bronze giant's* unconscious habit possibly saved his life.

His trilling had only begun roving the musical scale ...

... when the antique table abruptly became a geyser of white-hot liquid!

Doc jumped back, impelled by trained reflexes. He brought the door shut with him.

Yet some of the *liquid heat* still splashed out into the corridor, igniting the nap in several spots.

There was a chemical extinguisher mounted in a fire cabinet. He seized this and returned to the blaze. Pumping the handle furiously, he directed the fire-retarding chemicals at the *burning spots* in the corridor carpet.

But he might as well have been attempting to water an oil fire. The chemical hissed and sputtered and the blaze only burned up anew.

Yet he did not seem at all surprised by this.

Redirecting the spray, he coated both hands with the foamy chemical retardant until his fingers were a powdery white. This bizarre behavior made sense in the frantic moments that followed.

Seizing one corner of the nap, he exerted his mighty **muscles**. A rip (like canvas tearing) came and the *burning* section of carpet came loose in *metallic* hands.

Dragging this to the smoking door, he tossed it into the room which was now blazing like the pit of Tartarus itself. Adding the carpet section to the *roaring* conflagration could do no harm. And it might possibly help contain the spread of the *blaze*.

Slamming the door, the **Bronze Man** raced to the elevator and commandeered a cage. He stopped on the 14th floor and collected insensate Johnny and Long Tom.

Pat Savage met him in the lobby, her six-gun in hand.

She saw the limp figures of the puny electrical wizard and the bony archeologist -- one slung over each of the *bronze giant's* broad shoulders -- and asked: "Where's Renny?"

Doc Savage said nothing.

With horror twisting her features, Pat brought a hand up to her face.

"No," she choked. "Not Renny!"

"Watch for Kastellantz or any other suspicious person," Doc said, sweeping past her like a grim presentiment.

He got the flustered hotel staff organized. A fire alarm was tripped. Anxious guests flooded down the stairwells and poured off the elevators like skim from a stew to collect in the street outside.

In the confusion, it was no wonder that Pat Savage was unable to recognize Elvern D. Kastellantz (whom she had never clearly seen).

Her grief did not assist alertness.

The fire department was the first to arrive.

By the time they reached the top floor, the fire had mostly burned itself out. Not that they would have accomplished much.

They dragged hoses that were too short to reach the 20 stories to the top floor. And the city water pressure was insufficient to direct streams of water into smoke-discharging windows.

Besides which -- they realized when they saw the fierceness with which the *blaze* had gutted the top-floor anteroom and surroundings -- mere water would have accomplished no useful purpose.

It was a chemical fire -- unquenchable by any means at their disposal -- and would have to be left alone to burn itself out.

They could tell this by the blackened skeleton in the ashes. The person caught in the blaze had been all-but-cremated!

Doc and Pat -- along with Long Tom and Johnny (both of whom were now ambulatory thanks to a counter-reactant which the Bronze Man had administered from a syringe carried in his equipment vest) - - stared at the vitreous remains.

The poked at the charcoal thing for any signs that it represented their comrade in *adventure* -- Renny Renwick.

One item turned up. It was most slag now. But some freak effect had allowed the snout of one of Doc Savage's unique supermachine pistols to survive the *inferno* intact.

This discovery had a pronounced dampening effect on their hopes.

"I can't tell," Long Tom said thickly. "Are ... are the finger bones **big** enough for ... for ..."

Words failed him.

"An imponderability," Johnny muttered.

Pat looked away.

The Washington police arrived next. **In force!** The importance of the persons who typically inhabited the Grant required this.

The contingent was led by no less than the captain of the District of Columbia police. A red-faced man with a flavorful brogue.

They conducted a brief tour of the blackened suite and satisfied themselves that there was only one body. Although the incredible **heat** did not preclude the possibility that some portions of the warm ashes collecting their tracks might not have once been human.

"It is very clear what it was," announced the police captain grimly.

Pat Savage looked curious. "Yes?"

"Someone set a bomb made of that ... What do you call it? **Thermite** stuff."

"Thermite!" Long Tom exclaimed.

They all knew the awful properties of the deadly stuff. Often they used it in their work.

Additionally, the pale Electrical Wizard (who had fought in the Great War) had seen firsthand the damage created by **incendiary** bombs made of the chemical which burned with a terrific heat. The room had much of that aspect now.

"Musta been a wire laid somewheres," the captain mumbled.

"More likely copper filings sprinkled in the nap of the rug so as to make a contact with concealed electrodes on the bottom of the table leg," Doc Savage interposed. "The filings could have been connected by wires through the floor to the room below."

"Glory be!" gulped the policeman. "I never thought of that."

"It would be the simplest way of doing it," Doc told him. "Wires from the table would be discovered when the table was used. The rug has a **reddish** color and copper filings sprinkled in it would hardly be noticed. A thin layer of them deep in the nap of the rug would be invisible to the casual eye. No doubt a person hiding on this floor or the one below triggered the infernal device at the sound of my approach. Too soon, as it turned out."

"How...how can you be so cold-blooded about this?" Pat choked. "Renny may be dead!"

"No," said Doc calmly. "That is not Renny's remains."

"No?"

"The skull is too narrow. Furthermore, the femurs -- the leg bones that provide much of the stature of a given individual -- are too short for this person to be Renny."

Relief washed over the faces of Doc's associates. If the **Bronze Man** had satisfied himself on that score, it was more than good enough for them.

"And who are you thinkin' it might be, Mr. Savage?" the captain inquired.

"I had spoken with General Graul Frontenac just moments before the explosion. In fact, I was on my way to meet with him. He claimed to have been alone in the suite."

"You think that's the General?"

Doc let the question slide.

*He had a habit of not hearing questions when they concerned some point about which he was absolutely clear. The **Bronze Man** was not given to casually broaching theories no matter how plausible.*

He also said nothing about the elusive Elvern D. Kastellantz. The police seemed reluctant to press the matter.

"So where's Renny?" Pa wanted to know, a bit of natural timbre creeping back into her voice.

"If you did not see him leave the building, Doc stated, "then he must be on the premises."

So they went hunting for him.

They found him.

But the big-**fisted** engineer was only located after a protracted search.

Renny lay on his back in a seldom-used stairwell. He was quite senseless.

"It was an ashtray," he rumbled when they revived him.

"Talk sense," suggested Long Tom.

"A glass ashtray," he repeated. "Kastellantz picked it up and popped me."

Doc Savage murmured without particular emotion: "So Elvern D. Kastellantz knocked you out. Then disappeared."

"That makes a long story short," Renny said sheepishly.

A thorough search was conducted for Elvern D. Kastellantz. But no one seemed unduly surprised when they failed to find him.

*Nor did any indication that it was not General Frontenac who had been consumed by the **thermite** death trap come to light.*

They did, however, find evidence that the old **green** taxi that Kastellantz had commandeered back the Virginia hunting lodge of Caspar Prestowitz had been parked briefly in the hotel garage. A few of the hotel patrons still milling about the sidewalk awaiting word that it was safe to return to their rooms attested to that intriguing fact.

Close questioning brought out the fact that no one had caught so much as a glimpse of the driver. The hack itself was noticed only because of the high rate-of-speed at which it had quitted the area. Which had resulted in some comment.

After all search possibilities had been exhausted, Doc Savage collected his men together and got their story.

They had attempted to barge in on Elvern D. Kastellantz in his room when the latter -- caught by surprise -- had opened up on them with one of the stolen supermachine pistols.

Johnny and Long Tom (themselves bereft of weaponry) went down despite their bulletproof undergarments. The rapidfirers boasted a rate-of-fire that was withering.

"I got clear and faded back to lay for the guy," Renny said, taking up the story. "After a while, he slid out and went for the stairs. I followed him. The guy musta heard me or something because as I was climbing them steps, he jumped out of the shadows and conked me one."

"Humph!" Pat sniffed. "So much for the superiority of the male sex."

"And your presence here, young lady, should have an explanation attached to it," Doc Savage said firmly.

He was looking, however, not at Pat but at long-faced Renny Renwick.

"Gosh Doc," Renny said mournfully. "We did try to run her off. Honest! But you know Pat. What can a guy do? What can 3 guys do? After all, Pat is no ordinary gal!"

"Yeah," Long Tom said. "It's easy enough to tell her that around us is no place for a woman. But that's all the good it does.

"Indubitably," Johnny chorused.

Pat said cheerfully: "You're really being the best old grandpas to me."

Doc said: "Kastellantz -- assuming that it was he driving our machine -- may still have possession of at least one superfirer. Our best course of action is to get up in our plane and attempt to trail him with our locator advice."

"If you ask me," Pat said sassily, "it's your only course of action."

Saying nothing, Doc Savage led them from the hotel.

As they followed in his wake, Renny muttered to Pat: "If I was you, I'd sort of keep my yip shut until Doc kinda gets used to you being around."

"You," snapped Pat, "were going to persuade Doc to let me in on this excitement!"

"Well you're here, ain't you?" Renny demanded.

"Through my own efforts, young man!" Pat assured him. "Through my own efforts!"

They taxied to the Washington airport and boarded the big **bronze** speed plane in which Doc Savage had come from New York.

In the air, Renny flew while Doc (assisted by Long Tom) manipulated the locator device which functioned on the order of an electroscope but on a much more sensitive scale.

It was a cumbersome knot of wires, coils, and vacuum tubes surmounted by an ordinary radio loudspeaker. It was suspended over a great lens of glass inset in the floor of the plane cabin on a swiveling mount.

Often in the past, the device had filled a tremendous need. In his career of righting wrongs and punishing evildoers, Doc Savage had all men outside of the Law as his enemies. These foes often to strike at him through his Five(5) aides.

There had been occasions when the need was urgent that he find one of his associates in order to remove him from peril. Hence, the Radium in the supermachine pistols and the locator device.

This present usage, however, was unique because no one had ever before come into possession of one of the **Bronze Man's** superfirers. It was a worrisome development. This was written over the faces of Doc's assistants.

They circled the District of Columbia and environs for better than 2 frustrating hours. Once, they got a reaction. A brief wailing.

But it proved to be a sample of Radium in a Maryland hospital.

"Now what, Doc?" Renny asked from the cockpit.

"We are wasting time here," Doc said, shutting off the locator.

"Land?"

The **Man of Bronze** shook his head.

"Home."

A silence descended upon the soundproof cabin of the great plane.

It was rare that Doc Savage admitted defeat, much less abandon a chase.

But he was doing so now.

They flew northward in a depressing silence.

Not even the normally irrepressible Pat Savage vouchsafed any of her usual unbridled optimism.

XIV -- The *Strangeness*

With his sword-cane tucked under one natty arm, Brigadier General Theodore Marley Brooks (ret.) presented himself at the door of the estate of H. Startland Drago at 3:00 in the afternoon.

"My good man," he told the butler who answered, "I am here to relieve that infamous ape Monk Mayfair."

"You must be the lawyer."

"The very same," Ham drawled in a self-important voice.

"The one with the wife and 13 half-wit kids."

"What has that insect been saying about me now!" Ham exploded, losing his dignity and -- for a moment -- his cane.

He snatched it up in one gray-gloved hand before it could clatter to the hard bricks of the walk. He entered the vestibule in a huff.

Monk appeared then. His grin was broad.

"Hiyah shyster," he said. "I see you made my pal Seymour's acquaintance."

Tucked under the homely chemist's arm was the afternoon newspaper with a front-page editorial lambasting the inability of grand juries to indict persons who had perpetrated notorious swindles. Laurence Kingsley Goldwill's name was not mentioned. But there was not much doubt as to whom the item referred.

Calmly, Ham picked a heavy sculpture off a decorative table and without a word used it to brain Monk. The latter sat down hard.

"That," said the dapper lawyer while replacing the sculpture in an unruffled manner, "is for telling tall tales about your betters."

Monk got up and blew on his fists. Ham grabbed for his sword-cane, separating it.

They squared off. Violence appeared imminent ...

"I've been waiting to test this new batch of dope I use on the end of this!" Ham said flourishing the blade, the tip of which was sticky with some brown substance. "I'm afraid it's strong enough to kill my victims."

"Get set for a new set of teeth!" Monk raged.

The bowlegged butler Seymour hastily beat a retreat into the confines of the big house.

He returned moments later with cadaverous H. Startland Drago and presentable Joan Manville.

"See here now! What's the meaning of this?" Drago demanded.

Instantly, Monk and Ham subsided. The former put on his best demeanor while the latter glared and rubbed his bristled head absently.

Ham informed everyone of Washington events and the apparent death of General Graul Frontenac.

Saturnine H. Startland Drag started!

"General Frontenac ... Dead? You are certain of this?"

"The remains have yet to be conclusively identified," Ham admitted.

The bond broker's eyes grew sad.

"I knew him well," he uttered.

His gaze abruptly sharpened.

"And King Goz? Nothing of his whereabouts have been learned?"

"Not as yet."

"Has ... has there been any word of Caspar?" Joan Manville asked.

"I am sorry. But no," Ham said gallantly.

"I cannot understand what came over Caspar," Drago offered. "It is not like him to be so uncommunicative. And this business of him abducting Doc Savage's cousin. It simply does not like the Caspar Prestowitz I know."

"If Pat said he tried to kidnap her," Ham said firmly, "it is so. I admit Pat has her 'moments'. But she would not lie about a matter of such gravity."

A silence settled over the bond broker and his niece.

At length, Joan Manville murmured: "I wonder ... Could Laurence Kingsley Goldwill be responsible for all this? He is obviously attempting to strike at my uncle through his business associates."

"Perhaps," H. Startland Drago said slowly, "too many have suffered due to Goldwill's enmity. It might be better if he was allowed to finish what he has begun."

"Oh, Uncle! No!"

"Allow me a moment with this furry lunk," Ham stated.

Monk and Ham withdrew just out of hearing.

"He would do as an uncle-in-law," the apish chemist grinned, careful that the good-looking young woman and her uncle did not hear him.

Ham made gargling sounds of startled rage.

"You haven't proposed to her already have you?" he demanded.

"Wel-l-l, "Monk said evasively, "that happens to come under the heading of my own personal business."

"What did she say?" Ham demanded anxiously.

Monk sounded as if the discussion had become abruptly painful.

"She said she wouldn't have a husband who went around with somebody always trying to kill him," grumbled the homely chemist.

"Then you'll be leaving Doc's gang for matrimony?" the aristocratic attorney queried (still anxiously).

"Heck no!" snorted Monk. "I'll do my fighting out of wedlock."

Ham purpled.

This discussion (Monk had probably never proposed to the young lady at all) was carried on quite seriously and with utter disregard for the appearance of clownishness it lent them. Monk Mayfair and Ham Brooks were a pair who seemed unable to get along. If buried side-by-side, they would argue in their coffins.

Monk suddenly remembered something.

"Say, Shyster! What's the idea of showin' up early? You know Doc don't want our **Headquarters** left unguarded after what Pat saw that time."

"Pat," Ham drawled, "saw only a figment of the feminine imagination. Such an experience could not possibly happen to me."

Monk snorted!

"Yeah? That's on account of you got no imagination. Feminine or otherwise!"

At that moment, a remarkable animal strode into the foyer, its hooves *clicking* happily.

It was a pig, the equal of which probably did not occur in the porker strain once in an age.

It possessed the long legs of a dog; a snout built for inquiring into deep holes of small diameter; and a body that was negligible.

"Hey Habeas!" Monk called over to the pig. "This shyster left our *Headquarters* unguarded. Can you believe that?"

The pig stopped ... sat down ... and lifted phenomenally long ears ceilingward.

"Then phooey on him!" it seemed to say.

At this, Ham emitted words in such a violent rush that he fairly hissed.

"What is that ... that HOG doing here?" he howled.

"Habeas? He's just keeping me and Joan -- I mean Miss Manville -- company," Monk said nonchalantly.

"But...but you were to keep that beast in his wallow," Ham sputtered. "And in return, I was to keep Chemistry out of your sight. It was to have been a trade."

Ham Brooks had a peculiar fixation against pigs. And pork in general.

This dated back to an incident in the Great War when Ham had taught Monk certain French words. Telling him that they were polite terms fit for flattering a French general. A practical joke which put Monk in the guardhouse.

A bit later, the dignified and highly-touted brigadier general had found himself framed on a charge of stealing pork from the Arm larder. He stood court-martial on it.

After that, he had been known as 'Ham'. It was a name he detested. And to this day, he had never been able to prove that Monk Mayfair had framed him.

It was to further bedevil Ham, the dapper lawyer strongly suspected, that Monk had adopted the ungainly shoat [*read "The Phantom City (#010)"*].

In turn, Ham had acquired the runt ape that he had dubbed 'Chemistry' in South America on a previous adventure [*read "Dust of Death (#032)"*].

Chemistry was a remarkable a specimen of the simian race as Monk's pig Habeas Corpus was of the porker family. No one quite knew what Chemistry was. A baboon of some new tailless variety was the most popular theory.

For his part, Monk referred to Chemistry as the "what-is-it". The homely chemist ordinarily loved every little living thing. But Chemistry was an exception. It bore a distressing resemblance (albeit in miniature) to the hairy chemist himself. It was that simple.

After interminable months of a 4-side feud which had climaxed with all participants having gotten a bad case of fleas and each own blaming the other's pet, the apish chemist and the sophisticated attorney had come to an agreement to leave their pets at their respective homes for a while.

"If you hadn't showed up early," Monk countered while absently scratching a knee (he didn't have to stoop much to do that), "this mightn't've happened."

"Then you should be getting on your way," Ham said pointedly.

Monk stooped and picked up the ungainly porker. He turned to the others.

"Unless Doc says otherwise, you're stuck with this lilac-water tort."

H. Startland Drago composed his rather forbidding countenance.

"If no one objects," he stated, "I shall repair to my study. Fortunately, I am able to run the affairs of Drago&Company by telephonic communication from here."

He withdrew.

On his way out the door, Monk hissed to Ham.

"Keep an eye on that little clunk Seymour. I don't like his looks."

Monk stopped at his Wall Street penthouse on the way to Doc Savage's *Headquarters*.

It was one of the flashiest in the city with a goodly portion devoted to an enormous chemical laboratory where the simian fellow had perfected numerous discoveries which had garnered him both his reputation and his fortune.

In one room had been installed a marble-and-silver wallowing place for his unusual pet pig. It was filled with perfumed mud and equipped with health-ray lamps and other creature comforts designed to promote the ultra in porcine contentment.

The public had read about this wallow in the newspapers and thought it a scandalous extravagance. A waste of money which could have been devoted to relieving some of the suffering in the World.

But the hairy chemist didn't care. He doted on Habeas Corpus.

"In you go, Habeas," said Monk, depositing the ungainly shoat beside the wallow.

With a piggy *squeal*, Habeas leapt into the mud. Soon, only his long rabbit-like ears were visible.

"That's your reward for playin' along with my little *ventriloquism* trick," Monk said approvingly. "It gets under that shyster's thin skin every time."

Since it was quicker than driving, Monk took the subway to Doc Savage's *Headquarters* and was soon sauntering through the modernistic lobby. Autograph hounds -- hopeful of an encounter with the *Man of Bronze* -- descended upon him. No great believer in modesty (false or otherwise), the homely chemist obliged all comers.

Then they began to follow him to the concealed speed elevator. Monk foiled this by pointing to a tall individual exiting the building through a revolving door and exclaiming: "Hey! Ain't that Doc there?"

Human nature is a funny thing. The person that the apish chemist had pointed out resembled Doc Savage not in the slightest. But there was an immediate exodus on the part of the autograph seekers. Outside, they caught up with hapless man, surrounding him.

"Sometimes," Monk muttered to himself as he thumbed the elevator call button, "I think we'd be better off operatin' from a cave somewhere."

The door opened instantly.

Doc Savage's speed elevator was a private conveyance and unknown to the general public. Only the Bronze Man, his Five(5) aides, and Pat Savage enjoyed free use of the cage.

So when the door opened showing the cage to be occupied, Monk Mayfair would have naturally raised an eyebrow.

But the sight of a white-bearded figure caparisoned in ermine-trimmed **scarlet** silk, burdensome **gold** crown, empty belt scabbard, and other kingly regalia brought his jaw dropping to his chest.

"The *spook!*" he squeaked.

The superannuated monarch said nothing. Avid black eyes like opals set in a gnarled tree branch regarded Monk with faint amusement.

Hastily, the hairy chemist stepped aboard.

He reached inside his coat. That garment had no conspicuous bulge.

Yet Monk produced one of Doc Savage's compact supermachine pistols which could put out bullets with only a little less speed than buckshot could be poured out of a cup.

"No funny business, you phantasm," he advised.

Inasmuch as the *apparition* clutched an ornate scepter in one withered hand and balanced a heavy **golden** orb in the other, there was not a lot of "business" it could do funny-or-otherwise.

Except *whistle*.

It knotted its dryish lips and filled the cage with an ineffably doleful air.

The squat chemist reached for the elevator control and threw it.

What transpired next happened so fast that for the remainder of his natural life, Monk Mayfair was never quite certain that it had happened at all.

- The cage shot up taking Monk with it.
- The *regal apparition* did not ascend, however.
- The floor of the speed elevator seemed to rear up and swallow him. Or perhaps it was that he simply dropped through the apparently solid floor.

With an abruptness that took the breath away, Monk suddenly found himself the sole occupant of the rapidly moving elevator!

Seeing the weighty **crown** drop through the floor, the simian chemist immediately discharged his tiny weapon. It **moaned**, sending a stream of smoking brass cartridges rattling around the floor. The hollow shells splashed along the opposite wall, low the floor.

The lift was so speedy that it traversed the height of the shaft before Monk could do anything more than stare at the spot on the floor into which the regal crown had seemingly melted. His eyes were bugging from his head. He had been thrown to his knees by the speed of the ascent (a sensation he normally enjoyed).

"Blazes!" he gulped weakly. "Blazes ..."

Clambering to his feet, he gave the control a downward bat.

This time, the hairy chemist seemed to lift off the floor as if weightless.

He kept the muzzle of his superfirer trained on the exact spot where the crown had vanished. One hairy finger was on the trigger as if in expectation of the *phenomenon* reproducing itself in reverse.

But when the cage settled, no king had appeared. There was no one else in the elevator at all.

The cage door opened and a lone autograph hound offered a piece of paper and a pen.

"Nix! Nix!" Monk said, shutting the door.

He sent the cage back up with a peculiar expression on his unlovely features.

He was still wearing that when he stormed into the **Reception** room of the 86th floor **Headquarters**. He took care -- even in his agitation -- to step over a cork mat set immediate inside the **bronze** portal.

The room proved to be deserted. Monk made a circuit of the layout and found nothing amiss. But the presence of the revenant in the speed elevator could only mean the uncanny **being** had lately been prowling about the floor.

His face wrinkling, Monk went to the big office safe and placed a bullet-scarred ear to it. He heard nothing.

Not that he expected to. The laminated walls were all-but-soundproof.

There was a shortwave broadcast transmitter in the **Laboratory**. It was always kept warmed up and tuned to the wavelength used by the **Man of Bronze** and his men for instantaneous use.

He hunkered down before it and attempted to contact Doc Savage en route from Washington. The latter's well-modulated **voice** came soon.

"Yes, Monk?"

"Doc, I'm at **Headquarters**," Monk said excitedly. "That *musical monarch* was here again!"

"What?!"

"I think I chased him off though."

Renny Renwick's voice now cut in.

"And you didn't grab him?"

"He wasn't grabbable."

"What do you mean, Monk?" Doc asked.

"I was just returning from Drago's dig," Monk replied. "I go to step on the speed elevator and when the door opens, there *he* stands big as life! I pull my superfirer on him and hit the control. The elevator goes up. I go up. But the *King* don't. He slips clean through the floor or something."

"What did I tell you!" Pat Savage interjected. "It was a *ghost!* A certifiable *ghost!*"

"I don't know what it was," Monk said in his small voice. "But it's got me buffaloeed like nothin's ever buffaloeed me before."

"We shall," Doc said quietly, "be there directly."

They arrived by elevator not long after.

Doc Savage entered first, assisting his cousin Pat over the same cork mat that Monk had earlier taken pains not to trod.

The others -- seeing this -- gingerly stepped over the mat too.

Monk crinkled an eye at pretty Pat Savage and remarked: "I thought you was on vacation."

"Don't give anybody ideas!" she hissed.

Moving with long space-eating strides, the **Bronze Man** passed from the **Reception**-room to the **Library** and on to the great **Laboratory**, stopping to check on the monitoring devices scattered about.

Meanwhile, Renny, Long Tom, and Johnny opened cubby-holes, wall runways, and other hiding places performing much the same investigation that Doc Savage had done after the *regal apparition's* first foray into their preserves.

"You won't find nothin'," Monk predicted good-naturedly.

"Says you," Renny grumbled.

But it was true. The indicators plainly showed that no one had entered the setup except for themselves. The radioactive token required to open the doors made that conclusion an apparent undesirability.

When that was ascertained, Doc announced: "No one has tripped any of the alarms in our absence."

"Maybe I caught *him* going up, not coming down," Monk pondered.

Pat ran slim fingers through her hair and murmured: "This is all becoming more baffling every minute."

She looked at Doc.

"Do you think *Old King Mysterious* has any connection with the disappearance of King Goz down in Washington?"

Renny snorted! "That tall tale about King Fausto's ghost is nothing but a bunch of hooley."

But the Bronze Man said nothing.

"Does anybody," Pat said suddenly, "care to check the safe?"

The thought seemed not to have occurred to anyone.

But Doc Savage -- without acknowledging Pat in any other way -- walked up to the big safe and repeated the fingertip-on-rose-petals operation and unlocked the ponderous door.

He pulled it open.

No one (perhaps not even Pat) had actually thought that the safe would disgorge anything unusual. So they had not approached the big depository.

Doc's *trilling* (sounding furiously shocked!) brought them running.

They crowed around the *bronze giant*.

"What is it? **What is it?**" anxiously asked Pat who had been caught by surprise and was not attempting to see over the heads of the others by standing on tiptoe. "I can't see!"

Doc stepped in, then knelt to examine something crumpled on the safe floor.

It was a corpse.

There was no doubt but that it was a corpse because of the quantity of *blood* that pooled on the safe floor. A bit of it seeping over the edge began to dribble to the rug.

The cause of death was apparent to all.

It was a **sword** -- quite long and ornate -- which had been driven into the dead man's open mouth to exit out the small of his back.

Renny boomed: "Holy cow!"

"I'll be superamalgamated!" Johnny gulped.

"Anybody know who that is?" Long Tom -- more nervy than the others -- asked.

No one seemed to.

Until they realized that Pat Savage had nothing to say for nearly a full minute. As one, they turned ...

The **bronze**-haired girl was slowly backing away after having finally gotten a good look at the dead man's face and the hideous thing filling his mouth.

Her **gold eyes** were stark. Her tanned hands showed white around the knuckles.

"Now do you understand why Doc don't want you seeing such sights?" Renny rumbled.

"I...I-I..."

Closing her eyes, Pat swallowed and then tried again.

"I know him!"

"Huh?"

"**Tha-that's Caspar Prestowitz!**"

XV -- Grief and More Grief

It would have been difficult to calculate which was the more astounding revelation.

The fact that despite all evidence to the contrary, there was a body in Doc Savage's private safe. Or that the dead man would be the missing Caspar Prestowitz.

Assorted expressions of amazement and perplexity crawled over the faces of the **Bronze Man's** present associates. They groped for words; some theory to offer; anything that would explain the impossibility that there should be a corpse in a safe whose combination was known only to Doc Savage.

This was modern New York. Radio, Television, subway trains, and airplanes. And people knew all about hobgoblins and sea monsters and ghosts. Science had proved that they didn't exist except in fertile imaginations.

But there he was, looking for all-the-world like some gluttonous sword swallower.

"This is all that fashion plate's fault!" Monk gritted. "He wasn't supposed to relieve me until you guys got back from Washington!"

A chime went *do-re-mi* with a beautiful tone.

Doc went over to the inlaid table and leaned over it, seemingly absently resting his hands upon its ornate surface. An inlay that looked like ancient ivory became a picture of the hall outside the door telephotoed by some mechanical device.

A rare frown crossed his *metallic* features for an instant.

"That *spook* come back?" Monk asked.

"Police," Doc rapped.

He moved to the safe with a speed that showed the urgency of the situation. He pushed the ponderous door shut, locking it.

A *buzzer* shrilled. The doorbell.

At a nod from the **Bronze Man**, Monk answered the door.

"Police" a man announced unnecessarily. He possessed a big frog voice (it sounded like the sailor in the movie cartoons) and was short and wide and dressed in a shiny serge coat.

On either side of him stood 2 uniformed patrolmen wearing the sheepish expressions of sinners entering a church after a protracted bout of waywardness.

Without another word, they started in.

"Watch the mat," Monk said hastily. "Some careless person spilled a little acid.

A plainclothes individual who had harness bull written all over his square face and 2 police officers took pains to step over the mat. Once inside, they looked around wordlessly.

The square-faced man addressed the *Man of Bronze*.

"We got a call about a body," he said in his hoarse croaking voice.

"What body?" Doc asked politely.

"The caller didn't say. He just said to come up to this place and we'd find a body."

"You see any body?" Monk inquired in an innocent voice.

"Who-the-hell are you?" the square-faced one demanded.

"Monk Mayfair."

"You said it like it means something" was the sarcastic reply.

"Oh yeah?" retorted Monk, cocking a thumb toward the silent figure of the *Bronze Man*. "That there's **Doc Savage**. Put that in your corncob and smoke it!"

"I don't give a damn if he's Santa Claus with a coat of **tan**!" snapped the plainclothes man. "This is police business."

"Doc Savage holds an honorary commission as Inspector on the New York police force," Johnny Littlejohn put it.

The other snorted! "Did you know that the new Commissioner has canceled all of them fancy honorary commissions?"

The way that Johnny clipped his lips together showed that he did. He fumbled with his monocle.

"I've heard all about you, bronze guy," growled the plainclothes man. "And I don't like you horning in on my pasture. You got your men guarding that Drago. Don't think I don't know about it."

He scowled at Doc.

"And I'm going to have a look around this fancy joint like it or not."

"Be my guest," invited Doc, touching an inlay on the big table.

The doors to the *Library* and the one to the *Laboratory* beyond valved open.

The frog-voiced man strode through, looking not at all impressed by the minor display of scientific magic.

"Watch them, you two," he instructed the 2 patrolmen.

The pair remained, shifting their feet and looking uncomfortable.

Doc Savage asked them: "Who is that gentleman?"

"Saul Sampson," sighed one. "He's the new inspector in charge of Manhattan Island. They call him 'Push-'em-Down' Sampson on account of he likes stepping on the backs of necks belonging to people who get in his way.

From the **Library**, Inspector Sampson's bullfrog voice called back.

"If I find so much as one of the big books is overdue from the library, there'll be trouble. You may have amounted to something in this town in the past, Savage. But from now on, you don't draw any more water than the next guy."

"Old Push-'em-Down is honest and tough," the second officer breathed. "He's just getting off on the wrong foot. He's a right guy once you get to know him. You'll see."

"Where did he come from?" Doc questioned. "I thought I knew most of the New York police officials. But Sampson is a stranger."

"He's being pounding a backwoods beat on Gravesend for the last 3 years," chuckled the first cop. "Got himself promoted at last. I guess he pushed down on the right necks for a change."

While this exchange was going on, Pat Savage retired to a corner to compose herself. The others stood about with various poker expressions making their faces look blankly guilty.

Noticing the seepage of **gore** dripping down from the lip of the close safe door, Monk Mayfair stationed himself in front of it. He planted his wide feet on the stains and made soft scuffing sounds endeavoring to rub the seepage into the colorful Oriental rug.

Not long after, Inspector Sampson stamped back in.

"I didn't see any body," he announced.

"Do tell," Long Tom muttered.

"But that don't mean there ain't one," Sampson added.

He marched up to the **Bronze Man** who towered above him.

Inspector Saul Sampson gave the impression of being constructed of great building blocks. His square head sat on squareish shoulders which in turn were part of the rectangle that was his body. His legs were short and ended in feet like leather barges. Squared fists resembled bricks that had been chipped by careless hammers.

"Know a bird named Caspar Prestowitz?" he demanded.

"I have never met any individual by that name," Doc stated truthfully. "Why do you ask?"

Instead of answering, Inspector Sampson turned on Monk, Long Tom, Renny, and Johnny and roared: "What about you misfits? Know this Prestowitz?"

"Never met the gent," Monk offered.

"That goes double," Long Tom said.

"Me neither," added Renny.

Noticing pretty Pat Savage, Sampson demanded: "What about you girlie?"

"You have not answered my question," Doc interposed quietly.

Push-'em-Down Sampson gave the **Bronze Man** a flinty look.

"The voice that called in the complaint said I'd find Prestowitz's body up here."

"As you can see, there is no body on the premises."

"Something was said about the safe," muttered Sampson meaningly.

He added in a voice that indicated otherwise: "I neglected to mention that earlier."

To the astonishment of all present, Doc told him: "You may examine the safe if you wish."

"If I wish!" Sampson grunted, bearing down on the ponderous object. "Hell's Fire!"

Monk Mayfair -- stationed in front of the safe -- gave a final surreptitious scuff and stepped aside.

Sampson looked at the safe ... noticed its age and air of antiquity ... and put out a truculent lower lip.

"Who's got the combination?" he growled.

"The dial," Doc said coolly, "has not been operable in some time."

"Prove it!"

The **Bronze Man** went over to the safe and gave the dial a spin. It spun freely without any of the resistance or clicking of a working combination dial.

"As you can see," he repeated, "it has not functioned in some time. It belonged to my father and is something in the nature of an heirloom."

"One side," Sampson rapped.

He ran the dial back-and-forth with one ear clapped to the floral pattern. He made various faces.

Not liking what he heard, he gave the handle a hard yank! The stubborn door refused to budge.

"When was the last time this safe was opened?" Sampson demanded, whirling.

Doc said: "That I shall not answer."

"You mean you can't answer. Or you won't?" Sampson barked.

"Won't, if you prefer," the **Bronze Man** told him.

"We'll damned well see about that. I'm going to be back with a court order to have this box cracked!"

He stormed for the door.

"Watch the mat," Long Tom said sourly. "You don't want acid eating your bunions."

"And another thing," Sampson threw back. "I don't want your men guarding Drago. Something fishy's going on. And I got an idea who might be in back of it."

Inspector Sampson would have slammed the door shut behind him except that it closed on its own, forcing him to scoot to avoid it.

"That **spook** planted that body, wantin' to frame us!" Monk said fiercely.

He looked down at the rug before the safe door. As it happened, it was fairly **red** where the nap ran up against the safe. His scuffing had been successful.

"What makes you say that?" Renny wanted to know.

"He had a scabbard at his belt," Monk explained. "It was just long enough to carry a sword as big as that one in the dead guy's back. And it was empty to boot!"

Long Tom demanded: "Doc! What's this all about?"

Instead of replying, the **Man of Bronze** strode over to a locker and got from it a device resembling a folding box camera except that the lens was quite black. There was a switch on the side which he turned on.

No light came forth. Nevertheless, he fell to directing the lens about the floor.

"New **ultraviolet** lantern you've got there isn't it, Doc?" Pat asked hopefully.

*The **Bronze Man** seemed not to hear.*

She continued. "And I suppose you fellows all still carry that chalk which leaves an invisible writing that can be brought out by that ultraviolet projector. How do you carry the chalk now? Buttons on your clothes?"

"Yes," Renny admitted while glancing at Doc (who had his back turned) and then shaking his head admonishingly at Pat.

A moment later, he got his chance and whispered at her.

"Quit riding Doc! You know he's right about wanting to keep you out of danger. If you had a man's gumption, you'd know that!"

Pat declared: "If I had a man's gumption, I wouldn't consider I had any to speak of."

If Doc Savage heard this exchange, he gave no sign. He was preoccupied in the seemingly pointless activity of directing the nonexistent light on the rug. He paid particular attention to the area surrounding the big safe.

"I don't get it," Pat whispered.

Monk indicated the cork mat which everyone had been studiously avoiding.

"It's coated with grains of that *fluorescent* powder we use," he explained. "Anybody stepping on it will track the stuff all over the rug. Doc set it up earlier."

"I don't see any glow," Pat said slowly.

There was none.

Only when Doc backtracked to the mat did anything glow.

*The mat itself. It became a square of ghostly *blue* light.*

Doc Savage went back to the safe. He opened it and directed the invisible so-called "**black light**" on the contorted body of the late Caspar Prestowitz.

He gave particular attention to the soles of the man's feet.

No *glow* sprang up.

"Well," Pat said. "That proves my *ghost* was a ghost."

"Not necessarily," Johnny said. "The body could have been carried in."

"By who?" Renny wanted to know. "A person would have to give a little jump to clear that mat. Prestowitz is no child. It would take a spry man to jump it with that kind of burden."

"Or a spry *spook*," Pat insisted.

"That **black**-eyed *phantasm*," Monk grunted, "was no 'spring chicken'."

"And you should invest in some spectacles," Pat retorted. "He had *blue* eyes."

"I stood nose-to-nose with him and I say they were **black**!" the homely chemist insisted.

Doc Savage's *trilling* began ... then quickly died.

His strange *golden eyes* took in the quarreling pair.

"You are certain of his eye color?" he demanded.

"Natch," said Monk.

"Sure," frowned Pat, suddenly sounding unsure.

"A polychromatic chimera," Johnny inserted thoughtfully. "Identification preponderately suggests dualism."

Everyone looked at him.

"Perhaps there are two phantom potentates," he explained.

"That don't explain how either of them got up here without leaving tracks," Renny rumbled.

They were stumped. Flummoxed might not have been too strong a word for their collective state-of-mind.

"Hey!" Monk exploded suddenly. "Maybe he snuck up from the floor below somehow."

"How?"

"Why don't we take a look."

"Waste of time!" Renny snorted.

"Don't you ever get tired of packin' them **fists** around?" Monk wanted to know.

Renny said: "You start riding me like you do Ham and the first you know, you won't know anything."

The homely chemist grinned.

"Okay, okay. I just got the habit. But what about Old King Fausto or whoever he was?"

"The floor below," Doc said quietly while shutting off his lantern, "would be an excellent place to store the body until this matter is cleared up."

"Gotcha Doc," said Monk, entering the safe to gather up the grotesquely impaled figure of Caspar Prestowitz.

Pat averted her eyes as Monk reemerged with his unpleasant burden.

The floor below had for a time been tenated by an insurance company. But so much violence had occurred around the Bronze Man's layout that the office employees of that company had become

unnerved. At any time of the day, they might hear shots and screams and other manifestations of grim happenings.

The employees had come to the point where they could not do their work. So the insurance company had vacated. The floor was now empty.

Doc Savage was paying the rent on this floor as a matter of kindness to the owner of the building. But that was beside the point.

The operators of the building would have preferred to get rid of a tenant who drew as much violence as did the *Man of Bronze*. But it so happened that Doc owned a large slice of the building himself. They couldn't throw him out.

"Want me to take the secret way down?" Monk asked Doc.

There was a concealed stair in the great **Laboratory** that terminated inside a fire cabinet on the floor below.

The **Bronze Man** nodded.

"There may be police lurking in the stairways and elevators."

Monk carried the body (sword and all) from the room as if it were no more than an inconvenient sack of flour.

After the simian chemist had gone, Pat Savage was heard to say: "There's only one explanation."

Everyone looked at her.

"That king's *spook* must have snatched Prestowitz from where I left him down in Virginia and brought him here."

"Brought him here how?" Renny demanded.

Pat threw up her hands.

"How do I know? By broomstick or however *spooks* travel!"

"What I would like to know," Johnny murmured in his scholarly voice, "is how that sword came to be here."

"Simple," Long Tom snorted. "It's not the same sword that did in King Goz's footman down in Washington. It's a duplicate."

But it was the same sword.

Doc Savage proved this with a long-distance telephone call to the District of Columbia morgue.

At first, the coroner did not wish to volunteer the embarrassing truth. But Doc identified himself as a Federal operative. Which cut through the man's reluctance.

"As you know, Mr. Savage," he said uncomfortably, "we removed the sword from the body of the murdered footman. It was being stored here."

"The sword's present whereabouts, please," Doc prompted.

"It showed up missing this morning. That is, during an inventory of the dead man's effects. It was no longer with the rest of his possessions."

Silence.

*"I personally spoke with the guards," the coroner added hastily. "None of them had seen the sword or any suspicious persons. Except for the **whistling**."*

"Whistling?"

*"Yes. Two of the guards swear that just before the sword was discovered missing -- last night -- they heard a mournful **whistling** in the property room. When they went to investigate, they found no one. And no source for the **whistling** which faded before they entered. The sword was not discovered until later."*

His voice grew abashed.

"I...I cannot explain it."

"Thank you," said Doc, hanging up.

The Bronze Man had been speaking on an instrument with a loudspeaker attachment that reproduced both sides of the conversation. His associates had heard everything.

"Now what?" Pat asked in a small voice.

Doc ignored the question and instead said: "Caspar Prestowitz is Joan Manville's fiancé. Under the circumstances, it will be best if she learns nothing of his death at this time. Nor should H. Startland Drago be informed. Instead, we will take turns guarding the two of them as well as keeping a close watch for the missing Laurence Kingsley Goldwill."

"Anything we can do in the meantime?" Renny asked.

"Yes," said Doc. "Put Pat on the next passenger flight to Canada."

"With pleasure!" Renny said with enthusiasm.

"Wait a minute!" Pat protested. "Isn't this kidnapping?"

"Maybe," Renny whispered. "But judging from the look in Doc's eye, going along would be a darn sight better than the alternative."

"Which is?"

The gloomy-faced engineer cocked a thumb like an uncooked sausage.

"Being locked in that there safe for the next hundred years."

Swallowing hard, Pat went without further argument.

XVI -- The Worst Kinds of Luck

The next 2 days were relatively uneventful.

Inspector Saul "Push-'em-Down" Sampson had returned.

But he was met by Ham Brooks whom Doc Savage had recalled for the express purpose of fending off an examination of the office safe which had been chemically scoured of all traces of the late Caspar Prestowitz.

Stymied, Sampson had stamped off, vowing to be back with a court order proof against the esteemed attorney.

Thus far, he had not.

There had been no progress on the dragnet for Laurence Kingsley Goldwill.

There had also been no sign of missing Balkan King Egil Goz who was fast becoming the most celebrated missing person since Judge Crater vanished.

In fact, the Goldwill matter had pretty much pushed the other off the front pages except for dispatches from Europe reporting border friction between the kingdom of Merida and its Balkan neighbor Carrullana.

In Geneva, the League of Nations Council was meeting over the matter in the hope of averting a land grab. Ominous noises were emanating from the dictator of the European nation of Santa Bellanca which considered itself the patron and protector of Merida. The 2 nations -- which faced one another across the Adriatic Sea -- were bound by treaty to come to one another's aid in the event of hostilities.

For its part, there was much silence from the capital of Merida. Rumors of General Graul Frontenac's disappearance had been reported. And possibly his death as the result of fire.

But Washington had ordered the matter hushed up lest the heads of other nations fear to visit the U.S.

Quietly, Doc Savage had performed an autopsy on the body of Caspar Prestowitz. That was not quite the term for the grisly process inasmuch as there was no doubt as to the cause of death. Separating the victim from the death weapon -- the traditional sword of Meridan royalty -- was the real purpose of the **Bronze Man's** efforts.

The sword went in Doc's safe. The body was sealed in an air-tight trunk and returned to a closet on the vacant 85th floor.

The only noteworthy event occurred when an express package came to the 86th floor addressed to Doc Savage on the second day following the advent of Caspar Prestowitz's body in a place where it could not be.

As was his custom, the **Bronze Man** gave the package a thorough examination before opening it.

He put a stethoscope to it to detect any suspicious ticking. He sprayed it with a chemical designed to change color in the presence of deadly gases (no matter how minute). Finally he put the thing under a fluoroscopic screen.

Doc Savage had many enemies. Such precautions were routine with him and had saved his life many times in the past.

Monk Mayfair happened to be on hand and sidled up to screen as he operated the controls.

Doc's *trill*ing suddenly came. Low and puzzled.

"Bomb?" Monk asked.

"Pat," Doc said, indicating the screen.

Monk peered at what the screen revealed.

Bones. Rows-and-rows of them. Quite small.

When Doc opened the crate, the smell was disagreeable enough to cause the ordinarily imperturbable *bronze giant* to back away hastily.

"Phew!" Monk said, grabbing his pug nose. He looked into the box.

There lay a dozen salmon. Neither wrapped nor in ice. In fact, no effort had been made to delay decomposition.

There was a note. It read:

Here Is A Bunch Of Stinkers For A Bunch Of Stinkers.

Love, Pat

P.S. You Jokers Find Any Kings Lately?

"Pat," Doc said while reclosing the box and placing it in a locker, "is obviously having a successful fishing vacation."

"Next time," Monk muttered, "tell her to send posies."

Doc suggested: "It is about time for you to relieve Johnny at the Drago estate."

"Hot dog! Powder River!" the homely chemist enthused. "Am I glad that Long Tom had a bad time with Miss Manville. He keeps refusing his turn to guard her and her uncle."

He wrinkled his low brow.

"Where is that runt anyway?"

"With Renny," Doc replied. "Watching the Wall Street offices of Goldwill&Son."

"If you ask me," Monk opined heading for the door, "Goldwill would have to be pretty dumb to show his face by now. He might get himself strung up!"

Two of Doc Savage's men -- Renny Renwick and Long Tom Roberts -- were discussing that very possibility while seated in a couple not a block away from the Goldwill building.

The auto belonged to Long Tom. In fact, he had recently purchased it. Faint on a rear window was a legend: "**Special Value - \$375**". The pale electrical wizard had kicked about the price even though he had knocked the dealer down from an even \$400.

A young news vendor stepped out from a corner drugstore and began hawking his wares.

"*Extra! All about the Goldwill financial squabble!*" the urchin proclaimed. "*Extra!*"

"There goes any chance that Goldwill mug will show up now," Long Tom said sourly.

"You said it!" Renny echoed.

They listened with interest as the cries continued.

"*Investors threatened with nervous breakdown!*" shouted the newsboy. "*Say there is no justice in World! Wall Street has new jitters!*"

Big-~~fisted~~ Renny rumbled softly: "Holy cow! Laurence Kingsley Goldwill sure laid it on Wall Street!"

"It has sure raised a mess," Long Tom agreed.

"I'll say! If Goldwill had stolen the White House, he couldn't have stirred up more of a stew. People want to boil him in oil!"

"And I think the feeling is the result of a public trend."

"What kind of trend?"

"Against the methods of certain financial sharpers who legally relieve people of their money," Long Tom explained. "America is getting tired of the way that Big Business as a whole has turned into a 'skin the other fellow if you can' game. I mean, of course, certain financial moneybags who follow that policy and not the American businessman in general. I think the public is sick of it. And I think that is why Goldwill is sure to get lynched. If he ever turns up."

"Probably," Renny agreed. "Which means he won't."

The wait had been a boring one.

To kill time while the huge Renny watched the building entrance, the feeble-looking Long Tom was sorting through his equipment case swapping tubes. He sometimes bought tubes secondhand to save

money despite the knowledge that certain species of storefront crooks had taken to giving old tubes just enough juice to warm them up ... only to die after a few hour's usage.

Long Tom had once purchased an entire gross of bad secondhand tubes with the result that a piece of equipment failed at an inopportune time. It was enough to teach him a lesson. But not to cure him of his penny-pinching ways.

He had just replaced a worn tube in a spare electroscope and had turned it on when the gold leaves flew apart and the contrivance *buzzed* angrily.

"Words," Long Tom muttered.

"So far," Renny grumbled.

"It picked up the Radium in your superfirer right away, didn't it?" Long Tom said indignantly.

"My superfirer is in the glove compartment which is lined with lead," Renny rumbled. "It must be reacting to yours."

Long Tom <blinked>.

"Mine's there, too."

Renny turned around, his mournful face comical with surprise.

Then the buzzer stopped.

"You thinking what I'm thinking?" the big-**fisted** engineer muttered.

"Don't just sit there you overgrown oaf! Drive around!"

Renny got the car into traffic. They made a hasty tour of the Wall Street sector. The couple showed symptoms of carbon knock.

Once the electroscope *buzzed* briefly ...

... then it cut out again.

"Go back!" Long Tom urged.

Renny doubled back.

The *buzzing* returned anew.

Soon they narrowed it down to a car. It was a rather ostentatious town car. A well-known model nicknamed the "Ten Thousand" because that was the purchase price of the machine when new. It was a dazzling white hue polished to perfection.

It was wending its way south.

"Try to get alongside of it," Long Tom urged.

"Think it's one of our missing superfirers?" Renny rumbled while jockeying in-and-out of traffic.

"Radium doesn't exactly come two-for-a-penny," Long Tom shot back. "And I'm registered a good-sized chunk of it."

Eventually they came to a traffic cop and Renny was able to pull up beside the expensive town car. They peered into the driver's seat, trying not to be obvious about it.

At first, they did not recognize the man. They had never seen him before, they thought.

Then it hit them.

His coppery **red hair** was now as **black** as jet and as shiny as patent leather. But the powdered profile was unmistakable.

Elvern D. Kastellantz!

"Holy cow!" Renny exploded.

It was an unfortunate outburst. Kastellantz heard it.

He turned his head ... saw them ... and sent the long supercharged machine into the hum of cross-traffic.

The move caught Renny flat-footed. Literally.

One big brogan came off the brake pedal and tramped the other. He fed the machine gas and gears. It lurched into the honking screeching tangle created by the lunging town car.

With a clattery con, the engine died!

"Durn!" Renny complained, smacking the steering wheel so hard that it broke.

"My new car!" howled Long Tom.

"You call this heap 'new'?"

"I paid almost \$400 for this chariot!"

"Which," Renny muttered darkly, his eyes on the escaping town car, "explains a lot."

"Don't just sit there! Start her up again!"

"You see the crank?" Renny grumbled as he gave the starter a turn.

The engine caught. Pistons began knocking and slapping.

On the corner, the traffic cop blew his face red emitting shrill warning whistles. That only made things worse.

Motorists -- thinking that the cop was warning of an approaching fire engine or similar emergency -- tried to clear the intersection. Wheels climbed onto curbs. The sidewalks collected automobiles. Pedestrians scooted into the relative safety of doorways.

Renny and Long Tom popped into the street.

"Hey Clancy!" Renny called. "Clear this mess! We're Doc Savage's men!"

The cop looked abject. His shout back carried an apologetic tone.

"Sorry. No special favors. Orders from Centre Street."

"You mean from the block of bone 'Push-'em'-Down'?"

"Sorry," the cop said again wading into the know of impatient machines and simultaneously waving his arms and blowing on his attention-getting whistle.

By the time the boulevard had been cleared, the white town car had long departed the scene. Drive as they might, the electroscope failed to buzz.

"Lost him," Long Tom said sourly. "He musta left the island."

"Maybe not," Renny said.

"What do you mean?" Long Tom asked hopefully.

"Could be a bad tube in there," Renny said.

Horror coming over the pallid electrical wizard's face, he began swapping tubes with wild abandon as Renny grimly drove about lower Manhattan.

The net result was that no sign of the elusive chauffeur Elvern D. Kastellantz or the dazzling white town car was brought to light.

Renny summed it up. "Any way you slice it, that's the second time your durn nickel-squeezing has cost us."

They contacted Doc Savage by shortwave radio.

Johnny Littlejohn answered.

"Salutations," he said.

"Doc there?" Renny asked, not in the mood for Johnny's big words.

"He is in the **Reception**-room working on the ceiling," Johnny reported, evidently sensing the big-fisted engineer's mood.

"He what?"

"I will be glad to convey any message."

"Tell him we spotted that Elvern D. Kastellantz. He's in New York!"

"Supermalagorgeous!"

"But we lost him," Renny added glumly.

"One moment."

Johnny came back a moment later, saying: *"Doc says to return to guarding the Goldwill offices."*

"What about Kastellantz?" Long Tom wanted to know.

"Doc has asked me to endeavor to find him with the locator," Johnny said, sounding pleased with himself.

Renny switched off and said: "That long hank of bone just stole our thunder thanks to you. A sawbuck says he finds Kastellantz, too."

Long Tom later collected on that bet.

He looked almost pleased as he accepted the twenty even though it meant that Elvern D. Kastellantz had eluded them completely and they were no closer to solving the growing mystery than before.

"This will replace that steering wheel you broke," he told a glum Renny.

It was only after things had settled down that they started wondering what Elvern D. Kastellantz was doing in Manhattan. It was a profound mystery.

They had no inkling that it was about to take a turn that would make all that had come before seem insignificant.

XVII -- Reign of Terror

The next morning, newspapers throughout Washington began receiving an anonymous letter.

The editors were urged to send their best reporters to the U.S. Treasury and have them inquire concerning 50 million dollars' worth of government bonds latterly-printed and ready to ship to purchasers. The newspapermen were to ask to examine the bonds and to have an expert along.

It was rather an asinine suggestion this letter. And most of the editors put it down as the work of a crank. Then wished they hadn't.

Some number of journalists -- still in town and lamenting their inability to drum up copy on the King Goz matter -- went to the Treasury Building and argued until the bonds were brought out.

They got their money's worth!

The government bonds (they were Liberty Bonds, Issue of 1927) were bogus. Counterfeits.

And fresh ones to boot! The ink had not quite dried.

The Treasury officials had spasms. They wondered wildly how many counterfeit bonds had been sent out as genuine.

The newspapers also wondered. In their headlines.

The counterfeiting job was good. And for the life of them, the Treasury people could not explain how bogus bonds had taken the place of the genuine certificates.

The news went out on the press wires. The next morning, hundreds-of-thousands of people got their government bonds out of safety-deposit boxes and showed them to bank officials and anyone else whom they thought might be an authority.

That one well-publicized incident by itself made Uncle Sam's credit a bit shaky.

That same day, counterfeit bonds were found in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Kansas City.

Buying of government bonds all-but-stopped.

A fingerprint expert went over the cases which had held the counterfeit bonds in Washington. He found a single thumbprint and compared it with a record of prints in the U.S. Bureau-of-Investigation files.

It was found to belong to a man who -- as far as anyone knew -- had never been in the Treasury room where the bonds were kept.

The man whose thumbprint was on the case was **Laurence Kingsley Goldwill**. Of this, there was no doubt.

Goldwill had been thoroughly fingerprinted when booked for investigation prior to the failed indictment for robbing investors in his legal-but-detestable stock scheme.

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The editors who had earlier dropped the mysterious letters into wastepaper baskets now broke out the big black type reserved for scare headlines.

GOLDWILL BOND BUST SUSPECT! read one streamer in 6-inch letters. *And this was the most modest of the bunch.*

One newspaper (not a tabloid) filled its entire front page with just 3 words:

FINANCIAL CALAMITY STRIKES !

Another was more succinct:

PANIC !

That was the word of the hour -- Panic.

Wall Street was still reeling from the black eye caused the Law's inability to indict Laurence Kingsley Goldwill.

And now this. John Q. Public rushed his Liberty Bonds to redemption points.

Official Washington hurried to soothe jittery nerves.

The President of the United States gave a speech on a nationwide broadcast hookup carried by all radio networks. It was a good speech, full of simple well-considered words. It was designed to restore trust in financial institutions which were only now beginning to find solid footing after the most recent panic.

The President began with a simple statement of the purpose of a government bond. He called the issuance of these bonds a loan made by the purchaser (ordinary citizens for the most part) to the country floating the bond. Such a loan, he told the Nation, supersedes all other government obligations.

The faith and credit of the entire Nation and all its units and peoples is pledged to honor its obligation. And taxes may be levied accordingly without regard to the needs or sacrifices of any subordinate community or corporate body.

A national loan, therefore, is a veritable mortgage on the integrity, wealth, and taxable assets of the entire population, the President continued. And when such a loan ceases to be safe, the no other known security or investment based on any property within that nation will have any dependable market value.

The default of a national obligation, he concluded, would be an absolute calamity to the entire commercial structure and credit of its people.

The currency of such a nation would become virtually worthless.

In other words, listeners understood, before Uncle Sam would welsh on his bonds, the Government would go bust and collapse. No one believed that would happen.

This speech had a brief soothing effect.

On the floor of the Senate, John Thomas MacPartney made a speech of his own.

Senator MacPartney was in charge of the Financial Affairs Committee. He was one of the most power lawmakers in Congress and well liked by his fellows.

In a short-but-eloquent address, he promised to enact legislation calling for the replacement of the counterfeit bonds with sound ones or with refunds (whichever the purchasers preferred). Inasmuch as he was a vocal opponent of the President, this made an impression.

This brought Senator John Thomas MacPartney a rare standing ovation from his colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

In the press gallery, news photographers' flashbulbs began exploding. limning of the proud legislator in his hour of courage.

Within hours, those photographs were printed in the evening papers. A few editions showed up on newsstands under the following headline:

**PRESIDENT ASSURES NATION !
MacPartney Vows Bond Relief!**

These editions were hastily recalled and replaced with nearly identical ones. Except that the main streamer now read:

MACPARTNEY ASSASSINATED !

For within hours of giving the climactic speech of a long and distinguished career, Senator John Thomas MacPartney was discovered in his Senate office seated behind his desk **impaled to his chair by a gold-hilted sword encrusted with expensive jewels.**

The sword had entered his mouth with sufficient **force** to shatter his false teeth.

There was a note (stained with **blood**) affixed to his necktie. It was brief.

I am about to force the World to embark upon the greatest experiment in human history. The United States has been selected to be the first test case.

The end result of my legislation will be the banishing of what has been called by sages since time immemorial the "root of all Evil".

I propose to eliminate money.

Such a momentous and fundamental change cannot be undertaken at once. My substitution of government bonds with counterfeits is but the first of many steps.

It is up to the Government to take the next step.

If the Liberty Issue of 1927 is not declared void, I will eliminate another personage of great importance.

The note was signed: "**Laurence Kingsley Goldwill**"

Extras hit the streets with the hour.

"GOLDWILL BEHIND PANIC!" one screamed.

"FINANCIAL OPERATOR BLACKMAILING UNCLE SAM!" howled another.

Doc Savage turned up in Washington before the headline ink had dried.

The **Bronze Man** quietly presented himself to the Department-of-Justice and asked to examine 2 items. The thumbprint found on the cases in which the first counterfeit Liberties had been discovered. And the sword used to assassinate Senator John Thomas MacPartney.

The Bureau of Investigation had possession of the cases. Doc was escorted to these with the same deference earlier shown to him. His difficulties with the New York constabulary had no bearing on his Federal standing.

The solitary mark had been brought out with fingerprint power. It had been blown clear, leaving only a rather distinct thumbprint that looked as if it had been pressed into a smudge of coal dust.

From his vest, Doc extracted a small atomizer. He jetted spray onto the black thumbprint. The spray itself was colorless.

Federal men stood about, expectation writ large on their stolid features.

But nothing happened.

The **bronze giant** straightened from his work, pocketing the atomizer.

Doc Savage seldom explained his actions. But he did so now.

"The reagent spray is a type which reacts to perspiration oils normally left by the human finger. It causes the oily deposits to show as a visible stain."

There was no stain.

"Fingerprint powder must have soaked up the oil," someone muttered.

"Possibly," Doc said.

Then he asked to view the body of Senator John Thomas MacPartney.

The body had been taken to the same morgue that had earlier held the body of the late footman to King Egil Goz of Merida (now virtually a forgotten man amid the rush of late developments).

"**It's the same sword,**" the coroner said as Doc Savage entered escorted by Government operatives.

"What's this?" a Federal man demanded.

"Mr. Savage inquired of the sword earlier," the coroner explained. "The one that had killed the footman to the Balkan king who disappeared. It had disappeared too. There was no trace of it. The only thing anyone noticed was the *whistling*."

"*Whistling?*"

"It sounded must like the descriptions the papers carried of the sad *whistle* heard just before that king vanished."

The Federal men didn't know what to say to this. They fell to watching the **Bronze Man** work.

Doc went over to the sheeted form and removed the covering. He exposed only the agony-ridden face that was dominated by the hilt of the ceremonial sword. His active *flake-gold eyes* scrutinized the ornate knot of *gold* and *brilliant*s.

*His weird *trill*ing came again. Furious this time. Even a little edgy.*

"It's the same sword, isn't it?" the coroner gulped. "There's a scratch on the big *emerald*. I noticed it last time."

"It is," Doc said grimly.

He had noticed the scratched *emerald* when he had removed the sword from the body of Caspar Prestowitz and placed the inexplicably ubiquitous blade in his office repository for -- he believed -- safekeeping.

But he could not tell those present that. Not without having to explain the impossible.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Savage?" asked one of the G-men as they exited the building.

"Someone stole the sword and employed it to murder the Senator," said Doc, stating the obvious.

"How does this hook up with the disappearance of the Balkan king? And what does that *whistling* mean?"

"A visit to the murder scene might be in order," Doc stated.

"What do you expect to find there?"

"Some person who might have heard more *whistling*."

They found a Congressional page who heard a peculiar *whistling* (sad in its strains) right enough.

But only after questioning a number of persons.

"It was haunting," said the page. "I tried following it. But when I turned a corner, there was only a blank wall. The *whistling* seemed to be coming from inside the wall. Then it was gone. I didn't see what made it."

They were taken to the spot. It was a cul-de-sac in which the bust of a long-dead lawmaker stood on a plaster pedestal.

The wall was solid. They stared at it a moment in silence. *The bust seemed to stare back with equal blankness.*

Some of the Federal men had been present when General Graul Frontenac had been interviewed by Doc Savage.

"Sounds like the ghost of Old King Fausto is loose!" one breathed in a dumfounded tone of voice.

"Maybe we should take down this wall," suggested another who had heard the story of the entombed despot.

But Doc said: "It would be simpler to see what lies on the other side."

Shortly, they found the other side.

It proved to be one of the many cloakrooms for which the Capitol Building is famous.

It was a dead end. In a literal as well as a figurative sense.

Outside the Capitol Building, the Federal agents were wondering where the Bronze Man would take them next.

He surprised them with his next statement.

"I must return to New York at once."

And he promptly left.

Less than 2 hours later, Doc Savage was back in the **Reception**-room of his 86th floor **Headquarters**.

He had pulled a stool up to the center of the room and was standing on it. From the ceiling, he extracted a glass plate.

It proved to be a motion picture camera which was cunningly recessed into the modernistic ceiling.

Monk, Ham, and Renny were watching him do this. They showed no surprise as Doc brought the camera down and bore it into the massive **Laboratory**. It was one of the many amazing devices that festooned the skyscraper layout.

Doc ran the film through a quick-drying process of his own invention. Then he wound it on a take-up reel and put it in a projector in a miniature projection room in one corner of the great workshop.

Shutting the door to darken the cubicle, he turned it 'on'.

On a white wall, an angled bird's-eye view of the **Reception**-room appeared in brilliant **colors**. The **Bronze Man**'s scientific skill had played an important part in the developing of a color process which is now being widely employed by amateur photographers.

The images ran briefly each time that someone stepped into the **Reception**-room floor from either the corridor or the **Library**. Monk and Ham saw themselves and Doc come-and-go.

Monk asked: "What triggers it, Doc?"

"Photoelectric cell. Timed to run for 3 minutes after each interception to conserve film."

The home chemist nodded.

There was a lot of footage. The viewing of it grew tedious until the film came to a point showing the *figure* in **scarlet**.

"That dang **whistlin' wraith!**" Monk exploded.

It was the '**Whistling Wraith**' as Monk Mayfair had dubbed him. It literally melted through the office door and made a straight line for the safe. The **Wraith** passed into the big strongbox as if neither were solid.

The film ran on for its allotted span. Nothing further seemed to transpire.

During the wait, Renny Renwick made a comment.

"That happened during Monk's trick at the wheel."

"I was workin' in the **Lab**," Monk said defensively. "Nothin' was said about stayin' in the **Reception**-room all day long."

Ham Brooks -- normally quick to chime in and add to the hairy chemist's misery -- said nothing this time. His dark eyes were on the silent safe, white showing all around.

A moment later, the **scarlet figure** re-emerged. It still carried its **gold** scepter. But the heavy orb was now tucked awkwardly under its arm.

That was so that **it** could freely carry the Meridan royal sword which seemed no more substantial than a moonbeam. For **it** had come through the solid safe door without hanging up in any way.

The **scarlet apparition** passed through the **Reception**-room door as if the latter were composed of some **bronze**-colored light.

The film was silent. But those who had heard the regal specter's morose **pipings** imagined that they could hear those same strains now.

"The nerve of the blamed spook!" Monk howled when Doc <clicked> off the projector.

"Now we know how the sword was taken from the safe," the **Bronze Man** said quietly as they stepped out into the suddenly too bright **light** of the vast **Laboratory**.

"Gosh, Doc. I'm sorry," Monk mumbled. "I was only out of the Reception-room a few minutes.

"Perhaps this is for the better," Doc stated in a grim voice. "Now we know that we are up against something the likes of which we have never before encountered. It is apparently unsubstantial. Yet still opaque to light for it is visible to the naked eye and the camera lens."

Renny smacked one big **paw** into another.

"That's right! And it tripped the electric-eye traps you set, too. But what could it be?"

Monk screwed up his unlovely face in cogitation.

"Say! Ain't there a scientific work for what **spooks** are supposed to made outa?"

"If there is," Renny muttered, "I never heard tell of it."

"Ectoplasm," said Doc Savage quietly.

"What's that?" Renny asked, puzzled.

"A substance supposed to be disgorged by mediums or spirit guides during séances with the dead," Doc explained. "Ghosts are thought by some to consist of **ectoplasmic** matter."

"Holy cow!" Renny gulped. "Are you sayin' there is such a critter?"

The Bronze Man vouchsafed no reply.

Instead, he disappeared into **Library**, apparently to pursue some unspoken theory.

Monk and Renny noticed Ham then. The latter was standing in the open door of the projection room with his chiseled features as white as fresh linen.

"What's eatin' you, shyster?" Monk asked unkindly. "You look like you have just seen a ghost. Haw!"

The dapper lawyer -- who up until this point had been a vociferous skeptic of the existence of the *whistling apparition* -- moistened his lips repeatedly. But his mind was too busy trying to dig up a sensible explanation for what he had just seen to frame words.

He separated-and-unseparated his sword-cane with nervous hands.

"We know how you feel," big-**fisted** Renny put in dryly. "It floored us too."

Ham apparently tried to think of something to do or say. *But he wound up shuddering.*

A little while later after he had regained some of his composure, Monk engaged him in brief conversation.

"You know, I sure hope Doc don't change any."

"What do you mean" Ham asked sharply.

"We makes some of the darndest bobbles and get into some of the dangedst messes," Monk elaborated. "And Doc just kinda makes a guy feel he done his best and, after all, it ain't so bad. A lot of fellows would cut loose and skin a guy alive."

"Doc should do that to you anyway!" Ham snapped.

"Whatcha mean you overdressed shyster?"

"You let that ... that *wraith* in, didn't you?"

"I'll put you in one of your own pockets first thing you know," the apish Chemist promised.

They fell into a loud argument which proved that the unsettled Attorney had regained his nerve.

Not long after that, the *Man of Bronze* returned.

"Find anything, Doc?" asked Ham.

Doc said: "According to the teletype, H. Startland Drago has been requested to go to Washington and testify before Congress."

"Tarnation!" Renny thundered. "Why?"

"As one of the principal investment bankers involved in selling government securities abroad, Congress would like his opinion on the advisability of declaring the Liberty Issue of 1927 void."

"Congress ain't thinking of knuckling under, are they?"

"All of Washington is jittery over the murder of Senator MacPartney and the threat letter bearing the signature of Laurence Kingsley Goldwill."

"How cow!" exclaimed the big-**fisted** engineer.

Doc said: "Renny, I want you to accompany Drago to Washington. Take Long Tom and Johnny with you."

"You think that Goldwill will try to bump of Drago while he's testifying?" Monk asked.

"Anything is possible" the **Bronze Man** said as he returned to the seclusion of the **Library**.

XVIII -- Testimony

The arrival of H. Startland Drago in Washington occasioned something of a Press stampede.

This despite the fact that until the Congress of the United States had requested his appearance before it, the name of H. Startland Drago was one virtually unknown to the general public. Outside of financial circles, he was a complete obscurity.

This was because International investment bankers as a class do not business with the general public. The average man-on-the-street would have no need to enter the staid offices of Drago&Company. And so had never heard of him.

Eager journalists descended upon Wall Street. In their ignorance, they began asking questions of the wrong persons and received uncomprehending stares at the mention of the name of H. Startland Drago.

Some nimble legwork brought forth exactly the caliber of individual that was H. Startland Drago. The bond titan was, it came out, something of a mystery man despite his penchant for operating in International financial circles.

The national Press soon changed that ...

H. STARTLAND DRAGO TO ADVISE CONGRESS!

blared a headline. And suddenly the name 'Drago' was on everyone's lips.

Some facts (very few) dribbled into print. H. Startland Drago was of obscure origins. It was not even clear that he was a United States citizen. No one could say or find out for certain.

But of one thing there was no doubt. He was a rising financial power in Europe. It was Drago's financial acumen that had enabled many European countries to struggle up from the dire inflation that had buffeted the Continent in the wake of the Great War. Many heads of state counted him among their advisers. And not a few kings owed him their thrones.

For this reason, he had acquired his impressive cognomen -- **the "Empire Maker"**. He was a financial Merlin!

Some sheets took pains to point out that one head of state who enjoyed the fruits of H. Startland Drago's sage advice was the present dictator of Santa Bellanca. He was currently in international "hot water" for his conquest of a defenseless African nation.

But there were just as many European democracies which had enjoyed the benefit of Drago's wise counsel.

Some brief mention was made of the brewing trouble in the Balkans where the leaderless and beleaguered kingdom of Merida was quaking under the threat from neighboring Carrullana with the dictator of Santa Bellanca threatening to intervene.

A few papers bothered to mention the missing monarch of Merida - Goz the First. Very few.

With the financial foundation of the United States exhibiting distressing cracks, the average American could summon up little interest in events so far away.

Editorialists from coast-to-coast ballyhooed H. Startland Drago as the "Man of the Hour". The man who could advise Congress and the President of a solution to the dilemma posed by Wall Street renegade Laurence Kingsley Goldwill.

Radio commentators took up the refrain. The 'Empire Maker' of Europe, they agreed, would point the way out of the mess if indeed anyone could.

For his part, saturnine H. Startland Drago declined all interview offers.

This only fueled the raging fires of expectation.

So when the hour came for him to address Congress, anticipation was at a fever pitch.

H. Startland Drago arrived at the Capitol Building in a bulletproof limousine with the windows curtained.

The machine had been donated for the occasion by no less than the President of the United States. It was his official vehicle.

The car arrived before the Congress steps behind another machine. This one was occupied by Renny Renwick, Long Tom Roberts, and Johnny Littlejohn.

The appearance in public by three of the **Doc Savage's** associates would normally have created a sensation.

But they were all-but-ignored when the Presidential machine purred to a stop and the driver got out.

The door was opened for H. Startland Drago and he ascended the steps. He wore dark glasses for the occasion. It was not the sort of thing a financial genius would normally wear. But the reason for this soon became apparent.

Flashbulbs popped and flared in his cadaverous face every step to the Capitol entrance. (And there were many of those!)

"Holy cow!" Renny grumbled when they got Drago through the press gauntlet and into the impressive Great Rotunda. "Somebody hand me a cane and tin cup!"

"A visionary Erebus!" Johnny clipped, <blinking> furiously.

Thunderous applause greeted the arrival of H. Startland Drago in the House chamber. The Speaker of the House gaveled for silence. *He gaveled a long time.*

Finally, H. Startland Drago lifted a long-fingered hand and silence fell until breathing sounds could be heard plainly.

H. Startland Drago stood at the podium a long moment before speaking. He had removed his dark glasses. His intensely **black** eyes seemed to pierce -- like drill points -- each member of Congress as they swept along the aisles.

"None of you here know me personally," began H. Startland Drago, his voice repeated by loudspeakers stationed throughout the gallery. "But you all know my reputation.

"Yesterday, the President of the United States made a fine speech. He spoke of the importance of a government honoring its financial obligations. He spoke of the flotation of the Liberty Bond as a loan from the people to its government. He made his points very clearly so that all understood his meaning:

"The United States would never renege on its lawful obligations."

A pause came. Brows were wiped. It was a nervous moment.

"But he left out one significant item," Drago went on in his cold even voice. "That the good people of the United States are not the only purchasers of U.S. bonds. In fact, they are not even the majority purchasers of these instruments. Rather, foreign governments are."

He paused again.

Heads inclined forward. Bodies leaned toward him as if to catch his every word.

The 'Empire Maker' resumed his discourse.

"Through my bond house Drago&Company, I sell Liberty Bonds. They are considered the finest such bonds issued in the World. The financial instability created by the discovery that many of these bonds are bogus is grave. "To call these bonds will not erase or undo the damage already done. In foreign capitals, the credit of the United States is now regarded as unsound.

"Thus I must undertake the extraordinary step of offering to exchange any Liberty Bonds tha Drago&Company has sold abroad for equivalent instruments. With no questions asked."

A gasp -- large and singular -- floated over the vast chamber.

"I have done this for 2 reasons," H. Startland Drago continued gravely. "First -- because the reputation of Drago&Company is precious to me. More precious even than its solvency. Because an offer such as I have just made could very well bankrupt the firm. And the second reason is that knowing the criminal mind behind this, I believe that this reasonable body will soon have no choice but to capitulate to his mad demands and declare the Liberty Issue of 1927 void and worthless."

Another gasp came.

"Indeed, that is my recommendation to you today."

That final sentence, the climax of the speech went virtually unheard. Pandemonium had already seized the halls of Congress.

Lawmakers jumped from their chairs. They turned to one another in consternation. The Speaker of the House rushed to call the President of the United States. Reporters rushed to call rewrite men.

In the chaos following H. Startland Drago's dramatic statement, the 'Empire Maker' was all-but-forgotten.

Renny Renwick, Long Tom Roberts, and Johnny Littlejohn rushed Drago outside a side door to his waiting limousine. They were nearly trampled in the ensuing panic.

"It is best that I return to New York at once," Drago said, tight-voiced. "I must prepare my staff for tomorrow's workday. I only pray that Drago&Company will survive this terrible time."

"Holy cow!" Renny gulped. "Do you know what you just did?!"

H. Startland Drago said firmly: "I know Laurence Kingsley Goldwill as well as anyone. He will stop at nothing. Congress has no choice!"

"Not anymore anyway," Long Tom said sourly.

"Our plane is waiting," Renny added.

The limousine got rolling. The machine carrying Doc Savage's aides fell in behind it.

In the back seats, Johnny and Long Tom were grimly silent.

"A conundrum of labyrinthine unintelligibility," Johnny muttered thickly.

"I'll second that," Renny muttered.

"This is bad," Long Tom said. "This is damn bad."

"The Congress won't vote to void the issue," Renny said firmly.

But no one seconded that.

They knew the mood in Congress. It was uncertain. Anything was possible.

The trip to the airport was of short duration and tortuous. They stayed close behind the limousine carrying H. Startland Drago every foot of the way until it stopped before the hangar which housed their speed plane.

The chauffeur (it was Drago's personal butler, the bowlegged Seymour Holman) stepped out and went to open the door for his master.

He was still holding it open, knobby knees knocking together, when Renny and the others trotted up.

"What's the hold up?" Long Tom demanded.

Holman's natural color was sagebrush. Now he blanched. His eyes were dazed, his face slack.

He tried pointing into the machine. But his stabbing finger shook too much.

No stir came from the curtained rear of the limousine. So they peered within ...

... and their hair stood on end!

The hair erection did not come immediately.

It came some moments later when the true significance of what they were seeing (or not seeing) dawned on the trio.

"Holy cow!" Renny thundered.

Later, the others agreed that it was the most explosive such ejaculation the big-**fisted** engineer had ever authored. For their own part, Long Tom and Johnny were struck dumb.

Because the limousine -- the very limousine that they had followed closely all during the trip to the airport -- had somehow lost its passenger.

Of H. Startland Drago, there was no sign.

Renny spanked a big hand on the seat cushions. They were still warm.

"How cow!" he repeated. *This time, the words sounded very small.*

They accosted the chauffeur whose wobbly legs seemed ready to collapse.

"You didn't see nothing?" Renny demanded ungrammatically.

"No."

"And you didn't hear anything?" Long Tom prodded.

"Hear?"

"A manifestation of a sorrowful minuet," Johnny interposed.

Seymour Holman looked dubious.

Renny asked: "Hear a gosh-awful sad *whistling*?"

Seymour got some clarity into his eyes. He cocked his head to one side.

"Yeah. I did," he said slowly. "Back at that last stop sign. It made me feel like busting down crying, it was so sorry-sounding."

The Drago butler then attempted to duplicate the sound he had claimed to hear in a noticeably off-key tremolo.

The three Doc Savage men felt as if something with tiny **ice** feet were walking down their spines.

*They had heard that doleful **melody** once before. In a dark Virginia forest. And they had seen with their own eyes the uncanny untouchable **apparition** which had been its author.*

"And you didn't stop?" Long Tom asked in exasperation.

"Why would I stop?" Holman returned defensively. "I thought it was coming from the truck behind me."

They all remembered the truck then. It had pulled up behind the limousine at the stop sign.

None of them had thought anything of it and still weren't certain that they should. It had been an ordinary truck.

They backtracked to the intersection taking the trembling Seymour Holman with them.

They made a search of the intersection. And discovered nothing out of the ordinary.

A call to the business that owned the truck (it was a moving concern) produced the information that such a vehicle fitting the description they gave had been indeed trundling through the area filled with the household belongings of a family relocating to Baltimore.

It had no connection with the inexplicable disappearance of H. Startland Drago.

"This sound," Long Tom queried Seymour, "Could it have come from in back of your machine?"

The butler made thinking faces. He rubbed his sharp nose.

"Now that you bring it up," he said, "it could have, sure. But the partition was closed tight. So it would have to pretty loud to get through."

"There's gotta be a sensible solution to this," Long Tom said fiercely.

So they returned to the airport hangar and searched the limousine. They took pains with it because it belonged to the President.

But by the time they were done, it was clear that there was no trace of the missing international investment banker in the car. Nor was there evidence of any machine or thing which could have authored the **whistling** dirge.

Renny gave the tonneau roof a frustrated pound!

"Damn! Just like King Goz."

"That ain't the king I'm thinking of," Long Tom grumbled. "Remember Old King Fausto? Sounds like his **spook** is loose again."

Dejectedly, they repaired to the waiting speed plane and its shortwave transmitter to break the news to Doc Savage.

After Renny's mournful recital, Doc's melodious *trilling* permeated the cabin interior. The tonal reproduction was so true that it gave the 3 chastened aides a creepy feeling as if the *Man of Bronze* was somehow invisible and all-seeing and present in the cabin.

After it had trailed off, Renny muttered: "Doc, do you... do you suppose you could check the safe?"

The safe was checked.

Doc's voice came again.

"The safe," he said, *"is empty of cadavers."*

They all breathed a long sigh of relief over that.

But none of them could explain what had happened. Any of it.

Then they remembered the other matter.

Renny said: "Doc! Did you hear? Drago told Congress they should void that bond issue!?"

"It just came in over the teletype," the *Bronze Man* said.

"What does it mean?"

Doc Savage's voice was grim.

"It means," he said, *"that great mistakes have been made in the investigation of this affair. And I have only myself to blame."*

The 3 aides were speechless. Over a long association going back to the halcyon days when they had first met in the Great War [*read "Escape from Loki (#0183)"*], they had come to see their bronze Chief as infallible.

It was not the case, however, and in their hearts they understood this. Still, the admission was a rare one.

Renny asked: "What do you want us to do, Doc?"

"Return to Headquarters. We will need every man for the task before us."

"Pat too?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because when I went to collect Long Tom and Johnny at Drago's place, she breezed in and hornswoggled us into letting her guard Joan Manville while we're down here."

"We kinda made her a promise earlier and she twisted our arms," Renny admittedly gloomily.

The big-**fisted** engineer might have expected a rebuke from the **Bronze Man**.

But he did not receive one.

Instead, Doc said "*Bring Homan with you*" and cut the microphone out of circuit.

But when they stepped out of the hangar to collect the bowlegged butler ...

... he too had vanished!

XIX -- Void!

The disappearance of H. Startland Drago did not make the afternoon editions. It was not even reported. If it had been, it might have made Page 3 (at best Page 2).

Other things were happening.

The first *extra* to hit the streets proclaimed:

DRAGO RECOMMENDS VOIDING LIBERTY ISSUE !

The story was dropped to the lower front page of the next edition which read on top:

PRESIDENT ESCAPES ASSASSINATION !

Then: **CONGRESS VOTES IN EMERGENCY SESSION !**

By this time, the headlines were in **blood-red** ink.

Newsboys cried themselves hoarse trying to keep up. Papers were snapped up by pedestrians only to be tossed aside partially-read as new editions hit the streets.

People gave up buying newspapers and huddled around their radios. The wire services were getting the latest bulletins out much faster anyway. The sequence of events ran like this ...

News of the Drago recommendation that Congress void the tainted Liberty Issue hit Wall Street like a ton of TNT.

Stocks would surely have plunged except that it Sunday and the Market was not open. That did not mean that the financial titans of the Street were not hard at work preparing for the Monday morning opening bell.

There was **panic** in the air. Such *panic* on a scale never before witnessed. Something had to be done!

The President of the United States happened to be cruising the Potomac River in his yacht. But it was no pleasure cruise.

His famous brain trust was with him. They faced a momentous decision and they wished to argue and shout and argue some more the pros-and-cons of the matter without fear of being overheard.

A bullet from a high-powered rifle whistled in the direction of the presidential yacht. It split the skull of a Secret Service guard who happened to move in front of the Chief Executive at an unfortunate moment.

Unfortunate for the Secret Service man, that is. The move undoubtedly and unwittingly preserved the President's life. Churning water, the yacht hastily betook itself away.

A search was made of the segment of riverbank from which the shot had come. They found nothing. No footprints, no other sign, no empty shell casing.

The papers laid the blame for this heinous crime on the financial sharper Laurence Kingsley Goldwill.

It was in that atmosphere that Congress convened to vote on a hastily-written bill calling for the voiding of the Liberty Issue of 1927.

he session -- a rare joint emergency one held in the commodious House chamber -- was hectic, contentious, and rambunctious. In short, it was not different from many such past sessions. Except that more than pork and politics were at stake.

The members of Congress knew that the perpetrator of this audacious scheme -- possibly the most fantastic extortion plot of all time -- had made one attempt on the President's life. And had, in fact, successfully assassinated one of their most powerful colleagues.

None of them felt safe. And any of them could be next!

Much has been said about the moral backbone (or absence thereof) of Congress as a legislative body. Some of it undoubtedly true.

Arguments were propounded on both sides. The speechifying was furious. There were threats to filibuster. Invitations to step into corridors for old-fashioned fisticuffs.

But none came to pass.

At many points during the loud debate, the name of **H. Startland Drago** -- all-but-unknown less than 24 hours ago -- was invoked in thunderous tones.

A speech from the President -- an earnest plea for reason and a recess -- was read into the record.

And then ignored.

What the Congress of the United States might have voted under less fearsome circumstances, no one would ever know.

That they did vote (289 to 42 with numerous abstentions) was to declare null-and-void now-and-forever the Liberty Bond Issue of 1927.

"The Yeas have it," the Speaker of the House choked out as he gaveled the feverish session to a close. "The bill is passed."

Then he sat down in his Speaker's chair and trembled uncontrollably for the better part of 15 minutes.

It was done. No one gave a thought to the consequences of their vote. Or how to deal with the next promised escalation of the mad scheme of Laurence Kingsley Goldwill.

The only hope of a reprieve for millions of citizens and institutional investors was that the President would veto the legislation when it reached his desk.

No one knew what the President would do. Or what would be the reaction of Wall Street when it opened the next day.

The Nation held its breath.

When Renny, Johnny, and Long Tom arrived at the 86th floor New York **Headquarters**, the **Bronze Man** was in the **Laboratory** working on a piece of equipment that was familiar to them all.

It was his locator device which had failed to find the elusive Elvern D. Kastellantz anywhere in the District of Columbia 3 days ago.

Without looking up from his toil, Doc Savage made an announcement that was startling despite his low tone of voice.

"I have been in touch with the District of Columbia coroner," he said. **"The sword employed to assassinate Senator John Thomas MacPartney has vanished from a locked safe."**

Immediately, they began looking over their shoulders as if expecting a visitation from the soul of Death.

Doc resumed speaking.

"From the beginning of this affair -- and the beginning would seem to have been the disappearance of King Goz of Merida -- one thread has been running through all the trouble."

Johnny offered: "Laurence Kingsley Goldwill."

Doc shook his head.

"No. Elvern D. Kastellantz."

Monk Mayfair piped up.

"You sayin' that Kastellantz is behind this mess?"

"Not quite. But he is the key."

The Five(5) aides exchanged blank looks.

Ham Brooks opened his mobile mouth to put forth a question ...

... when a *buzzer* announced someone at the **Reception**-room door.

"If that's that 'Push-'em-Down'," Monk growled, "I'm in no mood for him and his court orders. The guy's worse than a pack of lawyers!"

But it was not the gruff police inspector.

Monk came back with Pat Savage and the presentable Joan Manville in tow.

"Miss me, anyone?" Pat asked cheerfully.

When no one answered, she snapped open a newspaper that she had brought along.

"The latest edition," she said, slapping the paper on the workbench for all to read. "Have a look, gentlemen."

The scareheads were stark:

PESIDENT TO DECIDE TONIGHT !

WALL STREET SLEEPLESS !

Doc Savage ignored the paper set beside his locator and turned his *golden eyes* on Joan Manville.

"I asked my cousin to bring you here so that you may answer some questions," he stated.

"I am afraid that I can tell you nothing of my uncle's disappearance," she said in a contained voice. "Really, it is as much a mystery to me as it is to you. I only know that Uncle Startland showed both great bravery and generosity in offering to replace any Liberty Bonds which his house sold. For such a move is certain to plunge Drago&Company into bankruptcy.

But Doc cut the woman off with a single no-nonsense statement.

"You may begin by telling us your true name."

"Hah!" Pat crowed. "I knew it!"

A strange look came over Joan Manville's features. She hesitated ...

"I...I do not know what you mean," she stammered.

"I have made inquiries into the background of H. Startland Drago," the **Bronze Man** told her. "He has no known relatives. Therefore, you cannot be his niece."

Joan Manville might have been an accomplished stage actress for all the outward reaction she evinced after the *bronze giant's* flat assertion.

She did not, however.

"Holy cow!" Renny rumbled. "Don't tell she's really Barbara Bland after all!"

"There is no such person," Doc said. "Any more than there is a 'Joan Manville'."

*His arresting **eyes** bored into the woman's own for a long moment. They seemed to **whirl** faster as if the fine **gold** flakes suspended within were coming to a boil.*

She turned her head abruptly.

"I will not be hypnotized," she said jerkily.

"Want me to get the truth serum?" Monk asked. "The latest batch is guaranteed to make a monkey sing 'The Star-Spangled Banner'. I should know -- I mixed it myself."

"You should know," Ham inserted archly. "Being an authority on monkeys."

"That might be a good idea," Doc told the apish chemist quietly.

But Monk Mayfair was destined never to get the truth serum.

Suddenly in the room all around them, the air was suffused with a low mournful **melody**. They all heard it, faint as it was.

They were looking about the room. Supermachine pistols came out. Pat hoisted her six-shooter from her handbag and pointed it in the direction of 'Joan Manville', saying:

"I have 6 western settlers -- that's shells to you -- in her. And if there's going to be a shooting bee, count on collecting your rightful share."

"Holy cow, Pat!" Renny rumbled, looked around warily. "You wouldn't shoot a female, would you?"

Pat <cocked> her weapon.

"You can never tell about a woman," she said tightly. *She did not mention that she had asked Caspar Prestowitz that same thing before he up-and-shot her.*

The depressing **whistling** grew louder ...

Then a new sound came. Musical but without tune.

Rising and inspiring, it was the awesome **souⁿd of Doc Savage!**

The 2 strains merged and blended as if fighting for supremacy. Both seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at once.

It was eerie, uncanny, and fantastic the way the vast white-walled room filled with voiceless song.

Then the **Whistling Wraith** entered the room!

It came through the door which was closed. Shut tight.

But the white-bearded *entity* passed through it as if composed of some hard-looking substance that defied natural law.

The *bejeweled* scepter of *gold* emerged first. It extended itself, seeming to pull a disembodied arm with it.

Then the golden orb broke the door's undisturbed surface.

Finally the dried bearded face and body came through.

Before the door, the *apparition* paused. Its robes were *scarlet* as was its ermine-rimmed cloak. The *golden* crown on its head was preposterous with *gems*. The weight of it seemed to make the regal head supporting it sway ungently.

Its mouth was a dried knot of a hole surrounding by snowy hair. And from it was coming the *whistling* that made think of a funeral procession.

"Old King Fausto!" Monk howled.

"I hope," Past said, "everybody has a good look at the old geezer now!"

Ham Brooks -- the most quick-witted of the group -- unsheathed his sword-cane and striking a fencer's pose lunged forward in an attempt to run the taunting *apparition* through. The tip of his blade was coated with a sticky anesthetic chemical designed to drop opponents in their tracks.

The tip of the blade pierced the *scarlet* silk of the *Whistling Wraith's* robes. Quickly, Ham withdrew it and stepped aside to let the figure fall.

But the *Wraith* merely stood there whistling. Its dark eyes held a merry light in contrast to its sad dirge of a song. The dapper Lawyer became very round of eye.

Then Monk Mayfair opened up with his superfirer.

The others quickly joined in. Pat fanned the spur of her six-shooter with grim-faced rapidity.

The racket split the air all around them! Joan Manville clapped hands over her ears and squeezed her gray eyes shut.

The wall behind the *apparition* quickly became moist with the colorless chemical as the hollow mercy shells broke open. And incredible quantity of brass cartridges littered the tiled floor.

Soon the amazing weapons ran empty. They consumed ammunition in amazing gulps. Renny and the others fished for spare drums from their clothing.

Roaring, Monk threw his weapon at the *apparition*.

When it passed harmlessly through the long Father Christmas beard, the hairy chemist beat his chest like a bull ape as if to frighten the taunting *figure* in *scarlet*.

Doc Savage -- his *golden eyes* absorbing every moment of the tableau -- moved then.

His *trilling* had not ceased. Nor did it now. But there was a quality of *excitement* and *vibrance* that was new to the sound.

The changed quality of the piping melody gave the others in the room a shock as if from an electric wire.

He flashed across the room ... got in front of Monk ... and drove a *metallic* fist in the direction of the *Whistling Wraith*.

The fist passed harmlessly through. No expression crossed the *Bronze Man*'s features.

Circling his opponent, Doc used his hands. *Bronze* fingers dipped into seemingly solid *scarlet* silk that might have been some fantastic intangible form of matter.

The tips disappeared from sight, seemingly sliced off ...

... when he withdrew them, they were whole again.

Joan Manville screamed out: "Don't touch it! You can't hurt it!"

With his strained *trilling* still permeating the air, Doc Savage used both hands to make shooing motions. He might have been trying to dissipate a dense *scarlet* fog become human form.

Nothing happened. Except that the *whistling* swelled overwhelming his own eerie *strains*.

Off to one side, Monk was jumping up-and-down and howling. "Let me at 'im! Let me at 'im!"

Plainly, the apish chemist wanted something to punch. And the *Bronze Man* was proving that there was nothing substantial to attack.

The *Whistling Wraith* then manipulated its scepter. It seemed only to raise it, tilting this way and that as if the bedizened rod were some heavy conjuror's wand.

No visible result seemed to be accomplished by this cabalistic gesture.

Then Doc Savage plunged a *bronze* hand into the chest.

This time he could not remove it!

His *trilling* stopped. Abruptly as if frightened into silence.

Such a phenomenon had never before happened. And it made those who knew the *Man of Bronze* run cold in their blood.

His mighty *muscles* bunching along his back, Doc Savage attempted to extract his hand.

It might have been encase in ice formed of congealed human blood. *Perspiration* popped out on his high metallic brow. His *flake-gold eyes* whirled with agitation!

Muscular *exercises* adhered to faithfully over his lifetime had given the *bronze giant* a strength which often struck strangers as being *superhuman*.

The *thing* which held his hand seemed to have clutched no more than fingers. Doc probably could have wrench and with his own strength alone tore the fingers off. That, of course, would have been foolish unless essential to save his life.

And the *thing* that he had contacted did not seem to be striking any blows. It just held him. An awful *agony* came from his captured hand!

Then the *Whistling Wraith* lifted its scepter. As the others watched helpless, it touched the Bronze Man's shoulder.

Doc Savage jerked as if from contact with a high-voltage line. Barely 3 seconds of time elapsed. But it seemed like an Eternity!

The *Man of Bronze* was helpless.

Monk Mayfair charged, howling!

Then the *Whistling Wraith* lifted the scepter and Doc Savage collapsed to the floor. Only the feeble twitching of his fingers told that he had managed to hold to consciousness. And Life.

"I told you not to touch it!" Joan Manville screamed. "It is the ghost of Old King Fausto! H. Startland Drago told me all about it. He believes it to be a soul encased in an indestructible body because its purpose seems to punishing the evil!"

The *Whistling Wraith* moved past the prostrate form of Doc Savage. Its black boots actually passed through body as if it were a mirage.

Monk -- coming on -- tried to gather up the phantasm in his great hairy arms.

His headlong charge proved to be his undoing.

He passed through it and landed on his barrel chest. Breath exploded out of him with a gusty "*Whoof!*"

The others -- more chary -- kept their distance.

Renny went to assist Doc Savage. But the Bronze Man was already coming to his feet, metallic features strange.

The **Whistling Wraith** took up a position in the center of the room. It made more weird gestures with its scepter. It might have been a wizard of Old weaving a spell of *black magic*.

It suddenly tucked the scepter under one arm and transferred the weighty **orb** to the other. With its free hand, it took hold of the ornate adornment atop the orb (which was remindful of a dungeon key's filigreed handle).

It began twisting this as if winding a clock.

Faint noise of a mainspring and gearing came to their ears.

"What's he doing?" Long Tom wondered.

The answer came when the **Whistling Wraith** calmly placed the heavy **object** at its booted feat and stepped back.

All eyes went to the **golden object**.

Then the keylike handle began to twirl in the reverse direction it had been wound.

From under the **golden orb** rose tendrils of **scarlet** smoke. Then eddies. Billows.

A with a mushy **whoom!**, a great cloud of the **blood**-colored stuff filled the immediate area. It smelled of garlic and toadstools (of all things!).

They were soon in a blinding world of **crimson** that smarted their eyes.

"Holy cow!"

"A lachrymator!"

"Some infernal exhalation!" Ham Brooks howled while swatting at the vile concoction with his unsheathed cane.

They all carried compact gas masks consisting of goggles, nose clips, and mouth filters. These came out of pockets in time to save their vision.

But seeing through the dense **cloud** was another matter. Soon they were bumping into one another and cursing.

Ham employed his cane to trip a moving figure. In response, Long Tom kicked out at Ham's shin.

In their floundering about, they might have passed through the ethereal entity that was the so-called **Whistling Wraith**.

But they never knew.

Moments later, a steady *humming* filled the room and the great ceiling vent began ingesting the **scarlet** swirls.

As the room cleared, they began to see objects again. They removed their masks and coughed their vapor-stung lungs clear.

The first thing they saw was that Joan Manville was no longer present.

Doc Savage pitched for the **Library** and raced to the **Reception**-room before the others could get organized.

He flung himself out into the corridor and around the corner to his private speed elevator.

It was already engaged. The *whine* of its descent was not loud.

3 other elevators also serviced this floor. Doc pitched toward those.

He was in luck. One came almost at once.

"Down!" he ordered the operator.

The boy obeyed. With a *whine* like an unhappy puppy, the cage dropped.

Out in the skyscraper lobby, the **Bronze Man** encountered confusion. Faces reflected disbelief. People stood about, faces white.

"It wasn't human!" a man kept mumbling.

The cigar-stand operator told it succinctly enough.

"Guy like a fairy-tale king went through the door. And brother, I mean **through**!"

"Girl with him?"

"Yeah. She didn't look happy about it either. She was as much a ghost as the other one."

Doc Savage was out in the street a moment later.

He followed a clear trail of amazed and shocked-white faces around a corner where a know of passersby were pointing into an alleyway.

As he approached, one of the knot (a woman) simply fainted where she stood.

He put on speed and whipped into the alley.

*Each day since he was a youth, Doc Savage had performed a 2-hour regimen of **exercises** responsible for his greater-than-normal physical development. It was the secret of his unbelievable*

prowess. No discipline was excluded. But strength, muscular coordination, speed, and reflexes were emphasized overall.

The **Man of Bronze** showed what he was capable of then.

He plunged into the alley. His **flake-gold eyes** picked out a fragment of black leather against the brick of the alley wall.

It was the back of a booted heel. ***And it was melting into the solid brick!***

He lunged for the weirdly disembodied heel ... realized the folly of trying to arrest it ... shifted abruptly and drove his hard **metallic** body against a steel door.

The door lost a hinge pin ... caved ... and Doc went through into darkness.

His flashlight came up and roved like a finger of fire. It speared 2 silent figures ...

The Whistling Wraith and Joan Manville!

The girl turned and blinked eyes in his direction.

The **Wraith** had been holding the girl by one hand. It now tugged.

Doc lifted his voice. **"Caspar Prestowitz is dead! He was slain by King Goz's sword!"**

Joan Manville's presentable face took a warp of **horror**. Gray eyes flew wide and round.

She hesitated ...

Then the **Whistling Wraith** tugged her through a solid wall.

They were in the kitchen of a restaurant. Moving fast, Doc Savage sought a door. But the only one that he found led back out into the street.

He hurried down the block in the direction that his quarry had been traveling, his **eyes** going to store windows in the hope of spotting the **spectral** pair.

His ears strained to catch the **Wraith's whistling** lament.

But for whatever reason, the snow-bearded **apparition** was holding silence.

After circling the block, the **bronze giant** was forced to abandon pursuit. Speed was no equalizer when confronted by a foe who could pass through solid masonry and hide within if need be.

He reversed direction.

Moving at a brisk clip, Doc Savage made for the entrance to his skyscraper aerie. Many passersby stared. But he walked too rapidly to give them time to get their curiosity organized.

Back in the lobby, persons were already expressing doubt about having seen what they did. Had there been some reason for the imagination to create something that could not be, it might have been slightly justifiable.

But it was bright daylight. A summer's day in New York City, a town noted for its hard-headed reality.

Since the *Whistling Wraith* had flitted through the lobby only a moment, glimpses of the graybeard *shade* had been brief. Those who had seen it clearly were now beginning to doubt their very sanity.

As Doc approached his speed elevator, his men piled out. The rigidity on the *Bronze Man's* inscrutable face told the tale.

"We'll turn the neighborhood upside down!" Monk vowed. "No spook makes fools of use and gets away with it."

But Doc shook his head.

"No time. Events are moving toward a climax now."

Renny exploded. "Holy cow, Doc! You sound as if you know a lot more than you've been telling us."

The *Bronze Man* rapped out quick commands.

"Renny, take Long Tom and Johnny to the home of H. Startland Drago. Search the place thoroughly."

"What about the shyster and me?" Monk asked plaintively.

"I have finished making improvements on our locator device. You two will help me mount it aboard our speed plane. It is imperative that we locate Elvern D. Kastellantz as soon as possible."

"And me?" Pat asked hopefully.

"Home. Now."

"Aw, Doc. You're not still sore over those silly fish..."

"No back talk, young lady. I want your promise that you are disassociating yourself from this matter."

"She wouldn't say yes. And she wouldn't say no," Pat murmured easily.

*They left the *bronzed*-haired girl in the lobby fuming like a hot-spring geyser between eruptions.*

XX -- Another Sword Swallower

Doc Savage, Monk Mayfair, and Ham Brooks took the speed elevator. In a breathtakingly short time, they were in the corridor leading to their **Reception**-room.

Monk had fallen to ragging the dapper lawyer again.

"Well, shyster. You seen Old King Fausto with your own eyes. What do you say now?"

"I do not believe in spirits," Ham said firmly.

"You and Carry Nation!" the homely chemist snorted.

Ham gave him a questioning stare.

"Another famous teetotaler," Monk grinned.

The sophisticated attorney swallowed and addressed Doc Savage.

"Doc, was it ... I mean, could it have really been a ghost?"

*The **Bronze Man** did not directly answer.*

"Your **radioactive** token, please," he said. "And yours too, Monk."

Ham extracted his from the watch pocket of his vest. Monk's was produced from a pants pocket. They were standing before the **bronze**-colored **Reception**-room door.

Then Doc Savage brought the coinlike disks up to the panel. It opened and they stepped through.

They noticed that Doc's movements lacked his usual sure grace.

"You okay, Doc?" Monk asked plaintively.

*The **bronze giant** did not reply.*

But he absently felt of the spot on his shoulder where the incredible **Whistling Wraith**'s scepter had touched.

The spot ached! And the skin was puffing up in strange little white mounds.

Seeing this strangeness, the others licked suddenly dry lips and felt their skin bunch and creep unpleasantly.

Doc Savage began speaking.

"To understand the uncanny phenomenon we have just witnessed," he said thoughtfully, "it is important to review a proven -- but difficult to comprehend -- fact of Physics. Namely that solid matter -- as we understand it -- is not truly 'solid'."

"Sure. Everybody knows that," Monk said.

Ham looked puzzled.

"Are you referring to the atomic nature of ..."

The warning chime sounded.

Monk flung himself to the inlaid table and engaged the telephoto device that reflected the corridor approach. The apish chemist's tiny eyes bugged out!

"Old Push-'em-Down again!" he squawked.

Moving with eye-defying speed, Doc Savage attacked the big safe. His features were dark with exertion as he tapped out the combination. The door jumped open in one *metallic* hand as if made of balsa.

There was a body lying on the floor of the safe on a swath of oilskin. A tarpaulin. Waterproof.

Because of the way the body lay and the obstruction of the *sword hilt protruding from the dead man's yawning mouth*, his face was obscured from view.

"Who-in-blazes is that?" Monk roared angrily.

"No time," Doc rapped as he gathered up the tarpaulin so that pooled **blood** would not drip onto the floor. Obviously the **Bronze Man** had foreseen such an eventuality as this though incredible as it was.

Ham pushed the safe shut.

The doorbell buzzed insistently.

"Stall, Monk," Doc clipped and headed for the Library.

"Hold your dang horses," Monk called to the door. "I'm talkin' on the telephone."

*The **buzzing** began sounding like a bumblebee trapped in a box!*

By that time, Doc Savage had carried his burden through the Library and into the Laboratory where he moved directly to one wall of the room.

He carefully altered the positions of glasses on a certain shelf. They were of varied weights. And although there was nothing outwardly suspicious about the shelf, it held a combination mechanism which the weighted glasses operated if placed properly.

A section of apparently solid wall opened. The **Bronze Man** stepped through with the body he carried. *His movements were rapid.*

Before him was a heavy metal pipe of some feet in diameter. It ran downward chimney-fashion through the masonry of the great building. An open hatch in its side admitted to the upholstered interior of a car which had a shape reminiscent of a big double-ended bullet.

He got in with his burden ... closed the hatches ... grasped a lever (not unlike the control on an ordinary elevator) and moved it.

A terrific **windstorm** seemed to spring up outside. Close observance would have shown that Doc Savage's feet completely left the floor for a time. The bullet car was descending with tremendous speed!

A moment later, it changed its course rapidly. In expectation of this, the *Man of Bronze* had braced himself against large cushions (which were plainly there for that specific purpose).

The **scream** of the bullet's progress increased. An engineer listening could have told that compressed air played an important part in the propulsion of the thing.

This conveyance had been constructed (the secrecy of this installation had added no little to its tremendous expense) as a means of passing between Doc Savage's skyscraper *Headquarters* and his combination aircraft hangar and boathouse on the Hudson River. Monk Mayfair frequently referred to it as the "flea run".

The bullet car began to slow, its braking devices whizzing.

It stopped. Doc flung the hatch open and climbed out with his burden. He bore the oilskin-enwrapped victim to a device rather like a large steel tank studded with valves and gauges.

It was a so-called "Iron Doctor". A device used by deep-sea divers to decompress after exposure to the often-crushing pressures of their work and to prevent fatal air bubbles from forming in the blood.

It would hardly do the impaled man much good. But it was the perfect place in which to store an inconvenient body.

Opening a hatch at one end, Doc Savage deposited the body inside. Without stopping to examine the man's features, he sealed the thing. Inasmuch as the vault-like hangar was generally unknown, it was unlikely that the corpse would be discovered.

He went to a wall panel ... opened it ... and <snapped> a switch.

Instantly, a violent exchange was reproduced by a nearby loudspeaker.

"And I'm tellin' you," Monk Mayfair was bellowing, "Doc Savage ain't here! You looked around. Ain't the evidence of your own eyes good enough?"

A frog-like voice slammed back.

"I have a dozen witnesses who swear Savage was seen coming into this building. He ain't come out. That means he's here. And I have a court order to open that box."

"So open it," Monk said casually. "See if I care."

"I will. After I find where that bad smell is coming from."

Doc <snapped> off the device (an ingenious intercommunications system).

Monk -- knowing that his **bronze** Leader could only have been headed for the secret pneumatic escape tube -- had obviously <thumbed> a table inlay which cut in a concealed pickup microphone installed in the **Reception**-room.

A number of vehicles were kept garaged in the warehouse setup. Doc selected a coupe and drove to his skyscraper **Headquarters** in short order.

He strode into the big Laboratory as Saul "Push-'em-Down" Sampson was complaining: "*Don't tell me I don't smell a body here. Because I do! I've been in this game long enough to recognize corpse stink when it tickles my nostrils!*"

"Perhaps," Doc's calm voice interposed, "I might be of assistance."

Saul Sampson turned. He resembled a human pile of building blocks.

"Where'd you come from?" he exploded.

"I just arrived."

Sampson's square face turned the hue of a freshly baked **brick**.

"There a back way out of here I should know about?"

*The **Bronze Man** ignored the query.*

"Something was said about an odor."

"Got a call we could find a body," Sampson bellowed. "A very **interesting** body."

Doc went to a refrigeration case and extracted a box.

"Perhaps this might explain the smell," he said offering it.

Push-'em-Down Sampson yanked off the lid and peered within. *His square face contorted.*

"Ugh! Fish!"

"Salmon," Doc elaborated. "Caught by my cousin and expressed as a present. The shipping label is on the side of the box. There will be a record at the express office if you care to check."

"I think," Sampson said sourly returning the odoriferous box, "that you waited too long. They don't look good to eat."

"We have been preoccupied with other matters," said Doc as he returned the box to the refrigeration case.

"I'll bet you have!"

Doc asked: "Would you like to examine my save? I understand you have a court order."

Sampson slapped a folded length of paper against the **Bronze Man's** chest.

"Yeah. One that will stick, too! It's proof against fancy-pants lawyers."

Ham Brooks opened his mouth to speak ...

But Doc Savage quieted him with a gesture.

They went to the **Reception**-room. The safe door lay open. Doc had opened it on the way in.

Saul Sampson took one look at the open depository and said in a suspicious voice: "I thought you said it couldn't be opened."

"I explained that it had not been opened in some time," Doc related truthfully enough. "That problem has since been remedied."

Saul Sampson looked into the great safe. He had a flashlight and used it liberally to examine such shelves and drawers as he found.

"Smells funny in here," he muttered.

"My good man, what do you expect?" Ham drawled. "It is a very old safe."

"It don't smell old. It smells like a dead wagon."

"Try sneezing," Monk suggested.

"Huh?"

"Might blow the fish stink out of your long nose."

"Bah!" snorted Push-'em-Down as he stepped out.

He stamped over to the **Man of Bronze** and began waving his court order under his nose.

"Don't think that I don't know about the way your boys barged in and took that Drago fellow down to Washington practically out from under the noses of my men," he grated.

"H. Startland Drago preferred it that way," Doc stated.

"And then he up and makes a speech that practically turns Washington on its ear."

"What are you trying to imply?" Ham put in.

"I smell something fishy. And it ain't fish. You get me, Savage? You're up to no good. I got a nose for such things."

"Haw!" Monk snorted loudly. "Go peddle your papers, copper."

"And another things," Sampson blustered. "Didn't you go down to Washington to look into that business of the King who vanished into thin air?"

"I did," Doc admitted.

Saul Sampson thrust big hands into pockets too small for them. He rocked back on his heels.

"Find him?"

"Not as yet."

Sampson made a face.

"Funny ..."

"What do you mean?" the **Bronze Man** asked.

"They say you have a lot on the ball, Savage. Usually get what you're after, don't you?"

When Doc declined to fill the silence that followed, Sampson offered: "I read where the only clue they had to that King disappearing was a funny kind of *whistle*. Ain't that a trademark of yours? A funny whistle? Makes an old harness bull me stop and wonder.

"Idle suspicions!" Ham inserted hotly. "You have no grounds to charge Doc and you know it!"

Saul Sampson only glowered at the *bronze giant*.

Doc said: "If you have no intentions of formally charging me or my assistants, we do have matters to attend to."

"You birds ain't heard the last of me!" Sampson vowed, abruptly turning on his heel and storming from the room.

The door closed after him.

"If that guy keeps it up," Monk said grimly, "we're going to be in Dutch one of these days."

Ham said: "As much as I detest agreeing with this lop-eared miscreant, Monk is correct. It is only a matter of time before this infernal *Whistling Wraith* succeeds in framing us. What can we do?"

"First," Doc Savage said purposefully, "we must locate Elvern D. Kastellantz."

XXI -- Sky Search

Minutes later, Doc, Monk, and Ham were in the great **Laboratory** crating the big locator for transport to the "Hidalgo" warehouse where it would be restored to its swivel mounting.

"Hey!" Monk said suddenly. "I just thought of somethin'."

"Even an ostrich egg will hatch if one waits long enough," Ham said without much sharpness. It was clear that his encounter with the **Whistling Wraith** had knocked the wind out of his shirty sails.

Doc said: "Yes?"

"That fancy **orb** of a thing. Where is it?"

"You did have a thought," Ham said as if the very notion astonished him.

They craned necks hunting with their eyes.

Monk spied the **orb** first and went to it. Bending down, he lifted it up to his homely face. His unlovely features mirrored ludicrously monkey-like curiosity as he turned the heavy sphere about in his hands.

On impulse, he gave the key-like ornament a hard bite.

"Yeow!" the apish chemist howled, nearly dropping the object.

"What is it?" Ham demanded.

"I dunno," Monk muttered. "But it ain't **gold**. It don't take teeth marks."

Then the **sphere** separated in his hairy hands. Inside was revealed a kind of generator mechanism designed to expel gas. He sniffed ...

"This smells awful familiar," he said, wincing.

Doc said: "Johnny called it a lachrymator."

The homely Chemist looked up.

"Tear gas!" he exploded. "That **red stuff** was tear gas mixed in with other things to make it smell spooky."

He frowned like a monkey who had peeled a banana only to find a carrot.

"Whoever heard of a **spook** that used tear gas?"

A light of understanding came into dapper Ham's dark eyes.

"Perhaps," he said slowly, "the gaudy entity is not a spirit after all."

"You saw it do what it did!" Monk snapped. "If it ain't a ghost, what is it then?"

Their eyes went to Doc Savage who had finished packing excelsior around the crated locator device.

"We will drive this to our Hudson River place," Doc said grimly.

"We'd better shake a leg, too!" Monk muttered. "No tellin' when that *spook* might turn up again."

"It is not a spook," Ham insisted firmly.

"Says you."

They took the speed elevator to the subbasement garage where Doc Savage maintained a small fleet of automobiles.

They placed the locator in the back of a delivery truck which they used because of its unobtrusive ability to blend in with ordinary traffic. The pneumatic tube to the Hidalgo Trading Company would have been too strenuous for the delicate locator to survive intact.

The ride was short. And soon, they had the device in place.

"Think it will work okay?" Monk asked when they were done. "I mean, did you finish workin' on it all right?"

"It will have to be tested," Doc answered. "You all have your superfirers?"

"Sure as tootin'!" Monk said, enthusiastically producing his.

His broad ear-threatening grin collapsed, however, when the **Bronze Man** wordlessly collected his weapon as well as Ham's and then place them in a lead box along with the 2 *radioactive* tokens earlier confiscated. He added his own to these.

"So they do not confuse the locator," Doc explained.

Monk <snapped> furry fingers.

"Hey! In all the excitement, I keep forgettin' to ask. Who is the second guy the *spook* left in our safe?"

"Simpleton!" Ham snapped. "The answer to that is obvious ... H. Startland Drago."

"Why him?"

"The *Wraith* kidnapped him, did he not?"

"Maybe," the hairy chemist allowed. "But the same thing happened to King Goz. And he didn't end up in our safe, did he?"

Doc Savage interrupted.

"The body is in the 'Iron Doctor'. You might take a look."

Monk and Ham piled out of the plane and threw open the hatch on the steel tank. Together, they peered into the 'Iron Doctor' and were astonished to discover two(2) bodies inside the dark chamber.

"Is that Prestowitz that I see?" Ham asked.

Doc's voice carried from the plane.

"It was more logical to store him here until we have matters under control," he said.

"Good thinkin'," Monk muttered, pinching his nose. "He smells worse than the dang fish."

The apish chemist reached a long arm in and took hold of the second corpse's hair, unceremoniously dragging it into the light.

Monk and Ham saw a rather florid face that seemed familiar to them.

Ham frowned. "That is not Drago."

Monk scratched his **bristled** hair.

"Danged if I place this guy, Doc. Who is he?"

*The homely chemist probably did not expect the **Bronze Man** to answer. Late events had been too headlong to allow for much investigation.*

But Doc Savage surprised them.

"That," he said, "is Laurence Kingsley Goldwill."

Monk's gimlet eyes all-but-bugged out of his head!

"But he's the guy back of this bond extortion!" he howled.

Doc imparted: "At no time has Laurence Kingsley Goldwill been the brains behind this incredible affair."

Ham jointed-and-unjointed his cane.

"Then who is?" he demanded.

*The **Bronze Man** seemed not to hear.*

He finished making connections and <snapped> on a switch. Visible tubes in inspection ports along the locator device warmed up.

"We need to move swiftly," Doc rapped. "We may have much ground to cover."

Monk and Ham clambered aboard.

Moments later, the big tri-motored speed plane was rolling down the inclined apron under power. It was an amphibian (i.e., at home on land or water).

Doc raced the throttles. The engines roared.

In a short time, the speed plane was on step and vaulting into the lowering sky. Night was coming. The next day promised dire happenings.

High over the turreted masonry metropolis that was Manhattan, they circled. Doc Savage had the plane's "robot pilot" on. This device -- designed to guide the ship without the need for a human hand at the controls -- was functioning perfectly.

The speed plane traveled with a muted *hissing* sound thanks to efficient engine silencers. Unless a person happened to look up, it could buzz the city without stirring interest.

Monk pointed at the box holding their own superfirers.

"You said you were going to test this thing, Doc. Want me to throw the lid open?"

"We will fly over Drago's home and see how the presence of Renny and the others registers," Doc replied.

The **bronze giant** disengaged the robot pilot. Under his skilled hand, the speed plane swooped upon the city.

Monk and Ham maintained silence. Both gazed at the intricate mechanism in the plane cabin.

Outwardly, it seemed no different than before. But they understand that their **bronze Chief's** great inventive genius had been brought to bear with an eye toward improving the range and sensitivity of the bulky device.

At a low altitude, Doc flew over the district which held Drago's place. The new apparatus was switched 'on' by Monk.

There was no expression on his **bronze** features, no expectancy. Doc Savage rarely showed emotion.

But he had expected some response from the device. This was demonstrated by the abruptness with which he banked the plane back for a second try.

"Ham, take the controls," he directed.

The dapper lawyer complied. All of Doc's aides, in fact, were accomplished airmen.

Doc maneuvered the locator mechanism from side-to-side on its swivel mounting. From the loudspeaker came only a loud hissing. This only indicated that the amplifier was functioning.

The *Man of Bronze* leaned over and opened the metal case which held the superfirers.

Instantly, a shrill *howl* came from the loudspeaker. It stopped when Doc closed the case.

This test proved that the apparatus was indeed functioning.

Ham sent the plane back. Once more, Doc Savage sought to detect the presence of Radium-salted supermachine pistols in the neighborhood of Drago's palatial home.

He said nothing when he was unsuccessful. But the weird sound that was his uncanny *trilling* seemed suddenly to fill the plane cabin, communicating to Monk and Ham that the *Bronze Man* was perturbed.

"Our friends are not down there," Doc stated. *The quietness of his tone was ominous.*

Binoculars (the most powerful type available) were in cases affixed to the cabin walls. Doc used a pair of these. Monk did likewise.

"There's Long Tom's clunker of a coupe," Monk muttered. "And one of our sedans is parked near it. Guess Johnny and Long Tom came in that machine. If they lit out for somewhere, they must have been in a powerful hurry to leave behind like that."

Saying nothing, Doc Savage cased the binoculars. Clipped to the ceiling were parachute packs. These were fitted with quick-snap-on harnesses.

He wrenched one of the packs loose and began donning it. *His intentions were obvious.*

"The air currents among them buildings are bad," Monk muttered uneasily. "Going down by 'chute is dangerous."

"Circle over the place," Doc instructed. "I'll signal you after making an inspection."

"What about Kastellantz?" Ham asked.

"We will get around to him."

The bronze giant opened the plane door and took a step out into space ...

Ham climbed the plane immediately. But it will still low altitude for a parachute jump.

Almost instantly, Doc pulled the rip-cord ring. Silken 'chute folds spurted like smoke from the pack.

There was a sound remindful of a blanket being shaken. Then a jar. And the lobe blossomed to its fullest.

Tall buildings came up. They resembled blunt hungry fangs.

Easing the shroud on one side, Doc tugged and the 'chute skidded, air spilling under one edge. Thus was the **Bronze Man** able to guide his descent to some degree.

Rooftops in the neighborhood of H. Startland Drago's home were flat. Doc desired to reach one of these in preference to dropping into traffic.

That desire abruptly.

An unseen high-pitched tuning fork seemed to pass close to his ears.

There was another sound as if a hand clapped hard against the 'chute top. The 2 noises were so close as to blend.

Doc's *flake-gold eyes* flicked upward. The 'chute lobe had acquired a tiny puncture.

Even as he stared, the combination of noises was repeated. Another small hole appeared.

He was being shot at!

Gathering in shroud line with both *corded* hands, the **Bronze Man** gave a tremendous yank! The 'chute all-but-collapsed. He plummeted downward at greatly increased speed.

His gaze switched over rooftops. Doc Savage possessed a remarkable knowledge of the layout of New York City. He had trained his memory to retain such facts.

From the air, he was able to locate with approximate correctness the house of H. Startland Drago.

On a nearby apartment house rooftop, 2 figures crouched. One -- a tall man -- had his face upturned. His hair was black. Only that much could Doc see clearly.

The black-haired one was crouched close to a roof hatchway. His posture -- even from Doc's altitude -- showed care.

The second man was doing the shooting. This fellow wore an overcoat with the collar upturned. A dark hat was down on his ears. In addition, he had his left arm across his face concealing it.

He fired again! Doc could see the recoil of the fellow's heavy automatic jar his hand. The bullet made tuning-fork noise somewhere near.

Doc released the 'chute shrouds. The lobe filled. It pitched about in the air current breathed upward by the street.

He landed heavily. But the shock was absorbed by massive leg *muscles*.

Pedestrians gawked slack-jawed at the giant *Man of Bronze*. Some recognized him.

"That's Doc Savage!" a truck driver shouted excitedly and quitted his vehicle in such haste that he fell headlong. He hoped to see the remarkable **Bronze Man** perform some of the feats of which he read in newspapers.

Doc freed himself of the parachute harness and was gone with suddenness little short of uncanny!

He had landed 2 blocks from the apartment house. He sprinted the distance in a time which would have challenged an Olympic runner.

Gaining the roof, he found exactly what he had expected ...

The birds had flown the coup.

From the rooftop, he heard an engine rumble to life. The sound came from the rear.

Doc raced the length of the roof, one hand plunging into his equipment vest.

He reached the parapet in time to spy a dark sedan race away. He gave the object which he had extracted from his vest a hard throw!

Wind and lack of preparation were against him. Too, the object he hurled had insufficient weight to impart much velocity.

It was a quite a tribute to the **Bronze Man**'s skill that the object struck the sedan squarely!

It broke. Nothing else happened, however. There was no explosion nor release of gas.

Just a *tinkling* ...

... and the sedan quickly lost itself in the gathering dusk.

Doc Savage watched it depart. No disappointment was inscribed on his cast-in-**bronze** lineaments. No expression of any kind roosted there.

He turned on his heel and floated away ...

XXII -- Dead Man Dying

A policeman standing on the street before the apartment house with a bewildered expression on his red face greeted Doc as he emerged from the building.

The **Bronze Man** pointed at the apartment house entrance.

"Happen to see who came out of there a moment ago?" he asked.

"2 guys," said the cop. "They dived into a car and drove off."

"Describe them."

"One of them was black-haired. Didn't see the other bird's face. He was all bundled up."

The patrolmen looked at Doc and shifted uncomfortably.

He had recognized the *bronze giant*. Not only did he know Doc's reputation, but he was also aware of an order posted in the precinct station signed by the Police Commissioner himself.

It directed that Doc Savage was to receive no further official police cooperation. No exceptions.

It became clear that the patrolman had no sympathy for the change in policy.

"Sure sorry I didn't get a look at him, Mr. Savage," mumbled the cop contritely. "They were gone before I could do a thing. You see, I heard some shots and was coming the street to investigate."

Doc Savage glanced upward. His speed plane was not directly above. It was spiraling slowly and moving across town as it did so. The antics of the tri-motored craft were meaningful ...

Monk and Ham were following the fleeing criminals.

The cop began again. "I'm sure sorry ..."

"Phone your precinct station," Doc directed. "Have a general pickup order issued for a man named Elvern D. Kastellantz. He is wanted by the Washington, DC police for involvement in the disappearance of King Goz of Merida."

He gave a rapid, accurate description of Kastellantz. A complete word picture which would have astounded the fugitive who had encountered the **Bronze Man** but once. And then only briefly.

"Also have a general search started for my men -- Renny Renwick, Long Tom Roberts, and Johnny Littlejohn," Doc instructed.

"What do they look like?"

"Your superior officer will have their descriptions."

"I'll do my best."

The policeman departed at a run for the nearest departmental phone. He would have preferred to remain, having heard much of the remarkable detective ability attributed to this *Man of Bronze*.

Had the cop looked on, he would not have been disappointed.

Moving swiftly, Doc Savage entered the old heirloom of a mansion. The front door was not locked. In fact, there were signs that the lock had been jimmied rather clumsily.

Inside, further indications of burglary were in evidence. The searching had been careless and hasty. It was not the work of his own men, Doc concluded.

As he expected, there were no other signs of Renny, Long Tom, or Johnny. The locator had already told him that.

He had instructed them to search this house and report back. Only some emergency or dire calamity over which they had no control could have moved them to vacate the premises before they had carried out his orders to the letter.

Signs of violence were absent. Doc had searched the house once before during his first visit. But that had been in the company of the mystery woman who had first called herself 'Barbara Bland' and was now claiming (falsely) to be 'Joan Manville', niece of H. Startland Drago.

Now he had free reign.

As he floated through the rooms with *golden eyes* animated with aureate life, he seemed to only glance about. He spent but seconds in each room ...

... until finally he stood at the foot of a short flight of steps that led to a padlocked door and presumably an attic beyond.

Intermittent *creaking* came from the other side. Doc had heard the sounds on his earlier visit. Now they were quite loud and as unsettling to the nerves as a penny nail scraping along old slate.

The *Bronze Man* eased up the old stairs and paused at the door ...

It was very difficult for persons with everyday senses of smell, hearing, and sight to credit that Doc Savage -- with faculties trained from childhood -- could nearly duplicate the feats of some animals.

For instance, had a trained bloodhound come to the door and by testing the air ascertained that the attic held no one, it would not only not have attracted undue notice but also almost anyone would have agreed that it was to be expected.

When Doc did something similar, it was called impossible, superhuman. But it was actually nothing of the sort. Rather, it was unrelenting training and practice from a quite early age.

Doc hesitated only a moment. But that was enough for his remarkable haring and trained nostrils to impart to him that the attic was untenanted.

He took a firm grip on the padlock with one *tendon*-wrapped hand and gave a quick wrench!

Immediately, the strong scent of *must* entered his nostrils.

Doc produced his generator flashlight and thumbed it on. The place sprang alive with **light**.

The attic consisted of a single paneled space. The long room was tall, arched, and hung with armor and weapons.

It was dark. Evidently there were no electric lights in the attic. Not even gas fixtures. Only candles in wall sconces. It was probably part of the atmosphere of the place which had less the aspect of a storage area than a private museum of some sort.

Glancing about, he decided the place stood a good chance of being soundproof. The walls certainly appeared thick enough.

He crept forward ...

The Bronze Man had seen such contraptions as stood about the place. Pictures of them had been in his history books when he was a youth.

A windlass affair for stretching a man's arms and legs before finally pulling them off (if it went that far). A forge, caldron, bars of lead. A quaint little funnel used for pouring the molten lead into a victim's ear. And a coffinful of spikes known as the "Iron Maiden".

It was plain that H. Startland Drago was something of a collector of antique weapons and related oddities.

Over in one corner was a round vat containing *acid*. But this was no medieval implement for inflicting torment. Redeemed bonds are usually destroyed in acid baths, Doc knew. Although the vat could have other uses, of course.

He hunted for signs of such use.

He found only a whitish pasty residue at the bottom of the vat. It was a difficult to disclose what it might be.

He moved on ...

There was a contraption of iron in one corner, Doc discovered next. No machine of pain, however. It was a crude -- but quite serviceable -- printing press.

He engaged the lever that separated the sandwich arrangement which ordinarily contained the printing plates in facing receptacles. They were empty.

A safe stood nearby. It too bore signs of age.

Placing an ear to the door, he worked the tumblers. *Some moments dragged ...*

Concentration was written on the **Bronze Man's** features. One who knew him well might have guessed that he was attempting to crack the depository in greater haste than he would have preferred.

The door came open in short order.

There were no shelves or cubbies inside. Just 4 sides and a back wall crammed with piles of official-looking paper.

He extracted a sheaf of them. **Liberty Bonds. Issue of 1927.** He fanned the stack, his eyes memorizing serial numbers.

His trilling came momentarily. An appropriately hollow sound in the musty dungeon-like confines.

He moved away, leaving the safe open.

Doc found the hidden door after a cursory examination. It as cunningly done but -- like every artifice -- left telltale signs of use. In this case, dusty cobwebs hung limp where a tiny spider was busily spinning a fresh web, indicating recent disturbance.

He got the hatch open. A simple catch sprung it.

The opening faced the rear of the grounds. It was large enough to admit a man. And was within easy reach of the spreading oak tree which had been allowed to grow uncomfortably close the great house (and which was the source of the unnerving *creaking* sounds).

Under proper conditions, a nimble person could easily exit the home by crawling along the thick branches to the ground and then slip away undetected.

Doc restored the hatch.

Pocketing a sample bond, he *glided* from the attic and down to the lower floors.

His *metallic* features held the grimness of cast *Bronze*.

Going outside, Doc Savage made an unpleasant discovery.

The speed plane was back, circling overhead. It was flying low. Monk Mayfair -- astonishingly gorilla-like viewed from below -- leaned half out of a window.

With his arms, he transmitted semaphore signals.

"G-o-t A-w-a-y," he gestured.

Doc flung his own arms at various angles, semaphoring.

"H-o-w?"

"S-u-b-w-a-y."

"M-e-e-t y-o-u a-t r-i-v-e-r," the **Bronze Man** signaled.

Doc Savage took a taxi to the riverfront. The speed plane was waiting for him, wallowing at the foot of the seaplane ramp.

Soon, it was again in the air.

"I watched their car with binoculars the whole time," Monk explained as they droned along. "The darn mugs were smart. They left their cart and dived into a subway. They'd have been gone before one of us could even have gotten down by parachute."

"See their faces?"

"Only one. Black-haired guy. The other guy kept his hand up to his phizz."

"The black-haired one was a member of King Goz's retinue," Doc informed them. "A courtier. I recognized him."

"Blazes!" Monk squeaked. "What was he doin' hangin' around Drago's joint for?"

Doc to what he had found in Drago's home.

"Renny and the others were either kidnapped or lured away after coming upon a person -- or persons -- in the act of ransacking Drago's home," he explained.

"That's bad," Ham groaned, twisting his sword-cane uneasily.

"I also found a safe of Liberty Bonds and evidence of a counterfeiting setup."

Monk and Ham took the bond that the **Bronze Man** produced.

"A phony?" Monk breathed.

"Real," Doc said.

"You mean to tell me that Drago had a safe of these and yet recommended that Congress void the issue?" Ham asked.

"Puzzling, isn't it?"

"Baffling," Ham returned. "Everything about this **Whistling Wraith** business defies logic."

"What d'you reckon happened to the girl that the **Wraith** grabbed?" Monk pondered.

"That's you!" Ham told the homely chemist sourly. "Shake a skirt in front of you and you forget everything else!"

"One more remark out of you, shyster," Monk promised, "and I'll give you debutante teeth."

"*Huh?*"

"Coming out!"

Doc Savage now took over the plane controls.

"We have one chance of finding them. The **locator device**."

He indicated the mechanism, newly installed in the plane.

Monk eyed the maze of wires, coils, and amplifier tubes.

"Over what distance is that thing effective now? I mean if they're 15 miles away and we point that trap at them, will it squeal?"

"No," Doc said. "It is just about as sensitive as it can be made. But it won't work over nearly that distance."

"Then what'll we do?"

"Just hunt."

The heart of New York City -- Manhattan -- is an island, rather long and not wide.

Doc Savage swung the speed ship up one side of Manhattan and down the other. Only a soft operation-*hiss* came from the locator.

"They are not on the island," the **Bronze Man** decided. "We will try Long Island next."

"Why there?" Ham queried.

"The town car that Kastellantz was driving when Johnny attempted to locate him the other day was in lower Manhattan on the East Side. Johnny found no trace of it. It stands to reason that the machine left the island. Johnny was in the air too quickly for Kastellantz to have gone west into the Jersey area without detection."

"But what does that have to do with any of this?" the dapper lawyer blustered.

"This will come out in time" was the **Bronze Man**'s only reply.

Queensboro Bridge was very near the section where the Kastellantz machine had last been seen. This bridge led to Long Island.

2 arterial highways feed the Long Island end of the bridge.

Queens Boulevard passes for 10 miles through a thickly populated district.

The other -- Northern Boulevard -- has adjacent to it certain sections which for some reason are thinly settled.

Doc chose the latter road.

The speed plane swooped over Long Island City and passed the industrial section of Long Island, volleying toward Sunnyside.

"Listen!" Monk yelled.

From the locator speaker was emanating a faint *sound*. It rose in volume steady and was soon a steady *wail*.

Doc gave Ham control of the ship and came back to manipulate the device.

He swung it to the right and the *wail* decreased. He angled it left and the sound *swelled*.

"Left!" he called to Ham.

They banked away from Northern Boulevard along which cars wound their way eastward. Being Sunday, traffic was sparse.

They flew southeast for some time and loudening wail *swelled*.

"We're getting' closer!" Monk enthused.

Then all at once, the *wail* began to die.

"Which direction, Doc?" Ham called back.

"Try due south."

The sophisticated attorney banked the plane again. Almost at once, the *wail* grew in volume.

A road below. It pointed south.

Darkness had clamped down upon the world. Their binoculars were useless now.

Doc and Monk employed an **infra-light projector** mounted on the ship's nose and goggles whose lenses were as large as condensed milk cans to "read" the invisible IR light.

It disclosed a solitary machine running with its lights doused. It was a white as polished ivory.

"I think I recognize that car!" Monk howled. "Ain't it the machine Renny and the others said that Kastellantz was drivin'?"

"It is," Doc agreed. "The make is popularly known as a 'Ten Thousand'."

"He must still be packin' one our superfirers!" the hairy chemist said. "What say I break out one of our own and use it to discourage him?"

Doc nodded.

"Endeavor to run him off the road. But be careful. We want no injuries."

"You betcha!" Monk said.

From the cockpit, Ham called back.

"Where do you think Kastellantz is headed, Doc?"

"This road leads to Brooklyn and environs," the **Bronze Man** said while continuing to track the fleeing machine.

Monk went to a window and shoved it open. He had taken a supermachine pistol from the lead box (after first switching 'off' the locator which had accomplished its difficult task) and changed ammunition drums. This one was dabbled in **red**. The other had been painted **blue**.

Latching the pistol to single-shot operation, he aimed carefully -- his tongue clamped between large teeth -- and fired once.

The superfirer made the sound of a pencil snapping-in-two thanks to a cunning arrangement of baffles and silencers.

But the bullet crashed like a **thunderbolt** when it struck a roadside boulder ahead of the car. It was a **demolition** shell!

The racing machine veered and swerved. But the driver had skill. He regained the road after running along a shoulder for a brief time.

"This guy's either stubborn or scared," muttered Monk.

He poked his head out for another try ...

A **great bronze hand** clamped down over his shoulder.

"Wait," said Doc Savage.

"Huh?"

"There is another car coming up from behind."

Monk craned his bullet head around for a look. In the stark **infra-ray** light, it seemed to be a dark sedan.

"Don't recognize it," he said. "It's not one of our special jobs so it ain't Renny or one of the others."

"Unless I miss my guess," Doc said, "Renny and the other two are in that lead car."

"What!" Ham exploded.

"The locator sound has been newly calibrated to register the quantity of Radium it detects," Doc explained. According to the indicator, more than one superfirer is in that lead car."

"But Kastellantz stole more than one, didn't he?" Monk demanded.

"There are least four(4) down there. Kastellantz had three(3). One was found destroyed at the Washington hotel amid the thermite bomb damage."

"Great Scott!" Ham said. "It must have been Kastellantz who ambushed Renny and the others at the Drago mansion!"

Doc nodded grimly.

"It is reasonable to think so."

"So who is the bird trailing Kastellantz?" Monk wondered aloud.

*The **Bronze Man** did not reply directly.*

Instead, he asked: "Do your **infra-ray** goggles show a luminous **splash** on the sedan's roof?"

"They do," Ham reported.

"I believe that the King Goz courtier and his mysterious companion are in the pursuing machine," Doc stated. "I managed to mark their roof with a capsule containing a chemical which **fluoresces** under infra-light. They must have doubled back for the machine after escaping into the subway."

"Think they're out to get Kastellantz for killing that footman and makin' off with their king?" asked Monk who tended to be bloody-minded.

Doc seemed about to say something ...

... but at that junction, the dark sedan overhauled the white town car.

It came abreast. The 2 machines paced one another.

"We'll see some fireworks now!" Monk predicted.

The hairy chemist was correct.

Ham dropped the plane in an effort to forestall violence. If Renny Renwick and the others were in the Kastellantz machine as Doc Savage believed, any gunfire directed toward it might bring them to harm. The great bulletproof plane might collect any vented wrath instead.

But that was not the way it happened.

A hand emerged from the driver's side of the town car. It was not empty.

A saffron tongue of **flame** flared. And the bullfiddle **moan** of a supermachine pistol came briefly.

Abruptly, the sedan lost the road ... sideswiped a telephone pole ... and piled into another one some yards ahead.

The town car roared on.

"Did you see that?" Monk howled. "That Kastellantz up-and-shot the other guy with one of our superfirers! And now he's getting' away!"

Ham called back.

"Doc! There's no place to land!"

For the briefest of moments, the **Bronze Man** hesitated.

His silence told his aides that he was torn between following the machine in which his missing assistants were undoubtedly captives and going to the rescue of the second driver.

Doc Savage had long ago sworn to hold all life sacred. And to parachute down would be to invite further gunfire -- some of which might be mortal lead.

"Land!" he rapped.

Grimly, the dapper lawyer sent the great airplane higher, scouting for an adequate landing spot.

He found one moments later.

It was an old disused field overgrown with scrub. But it was long enough for their purpose.

Dropping the wheels, Ham brought the plane down. It bumped along ruts until it rolled to a slow stop.

Doc Savage was the first out. Monk Mayfair bounced after him.

Ham remained behind to secure the plane.

A dozen minutes of hard running brought the **Man of Bronze** to the wreck.

It was on **fire**. There was a figure behind the wheel, a silhouette in the flame.

It slumped with a creepy slowness which told that the greedy **flames** were consuming one that was no longer living.

Doc swept about the **flaming** tangle, his **golden eyes** bleak.

He found the broken thing that had been the passenger lying in a ditch where the impact had thrown him clear of his mangled machine.

A low groan came from the man. He was on his stomach half in a ditch, his chin up on macadam and one hand clutching the edge of the road. In the glow of Doc's flash, there was a great deal of **crimson**.

Crimson on the man's hands. **Crimson** on the roadside. And **crimson** was hue of the hair of his head.

Doc knelt at the figure and touched its shoulder gently. This brought a sharp groan.

"I am Doc Savage," he said quietly.

"And ... I am ... finished," the victim rattled.

Doc did not contradict him. It was the truth.

Instead, he said: "You have been betrayed. And you have little time left. Some truth might be in order."

"I ... I lied about ... the ... sword," the other managed.

"I know," Doc said. "It was not in King Goz's possession when he entered his limousine. The newspaper photographs showed as much. In fact, I have known from the first how the King effected his mysterious disappearance."

"How ..."

"Not important," Doc clipped. "Where will I find the King?"

The man began to speak. His words choked off ... turned into a liquid gurgle ... and he began to heave and twist. **Blood** came out of his mouth in a rush.

Doc reached for the dying man's neck. He found the nerve centers that could cause paralysis and unconsciousness and manipulated them swiftly. This time, his touch produced a pain-deadening effect.

It was not enough save the dying man. Or to restore speech.

But there was time enough for the unfortunate to dip a forefinger into his own **blood** and hastily scrawl **2 words** on the smooth black macadam.

Then he died.

Doc Savage was examining the dying message under the glow of his flashlight when Monk Mayfair ambled up, his barrel chest heaving from a strenuous run.

"Croaked?" Monk wondered, his long arms dangling helplessly.

Doc nodded.

"Who is he?" Monk asked.

When the Bronze Man did not reply, the homely Chemist rather callously gave the body a nudge. The face came up to the backglow.

At first, Monk failed to recognize the man. He had never seen him before.

But his likeness had appeared in newspapers in the wake of the disappearance of Goz the First, King of Merida.

The dead man lacked his braided **crimson** uniform and monocle. And his formerly snow-white hair was now a cloud of **gore**. But the profile was unmistakable.

"General Frontenac!" Monk yelled. "But he died in that hotel. We found his bones!"

"Faked his death," Doc explained. "No doubt a courtier or some other functionary was left to die in his stead."

"Why?"

"Part of the scheme."

"What scheme? Is he hooked up with Goldwill and the **Whistlin' Wraith**?"

"It all ties in together," Doc said. "But not in a way that you might imagine."

Monk noticed the message in **blood** then.

"What's this he was writin'?" he asked, squinting.

The words were difficult to read. Fortunately, they were short so recognition was a matter of a moment-or-two.

The message was:

GRIM SEAS

"Guess he didn't get to finish what he wanted to say," Monk muttered.

"The contrary," Doc told him. "He has communicated the present whereabouts of King Egil Goz."

Monk made a perplexed face.

"What's it mean?"

Before the **bronze giant** could offer further explanation, the banshee **howl** of approaching police sirens came.

"Maybe we shouldn't stick around considerin' all that's happen," Monk said uneasily.

"An idea," Doc agreed.

They melted into the darkness at the side of the road and made fair time back to the plane.

They met Ham on the way and made short explanations while getting the speed plane back into the air. The pained expression on the dapper lawyer's chiseled face revealed that he was growing more -- not less -- perplexed.

Doc was at the controls. To Monk and Ham's surprise, he did not bank the plane southward in pursuit of the Kastellantz machine but winged back toward Manhattan.

Monk wondered: "Ain't we gonna follow that tricky Kastellantz?"

Doc said: "I know where he is going."

"You do?"

"To Staten Island by Brooklyn ferry. And *stealth* will be needed if we are to rescue our friends Renny, Long Tom, and Johnny from harm."

Monk and Ham swapped uncomprehending looks.

*They could not imagine how the **Man of Bronze** had deduced all this from just 2 cryptic words.*

XXIII -- Harried

Doc Savage was a man of precautions. It was rare that he was ever caught flat-footed.

But throughout the affair of the **Whistling Wraith**, by his own admission he had been hoodwinked more than once.

He began restoring his reputation for foresightedness as he "dragged" the Hudson River prior to setting down.

Abruptly, he pulled back on the control wheel causing the big ship to claw for altitude.

"Something wrong?" Ham wondered, crowding forward.

"Examine the warehouse roof."

Monk and Ham went to a window and made faces as they tried to squint through the darkness.

There was no need for them to strain their optics as it turned out.

The reason for the **Bronze Man**'s abrupt change in plan was plain to see. It was an angry **red eye** visible at one end of the long warehouse roof.

"Hey!" Monk yelled. "That's our warnin' light! It means someone busted into the joint. But who?"

"A reasonable guess would be the authorities," Doc stated calmly.

Monk said: "The cops! But most of them don't know about the warehouse. It's a dang secret!"

"You forget that Joan Manville once visited the place with Pat."

"You think Joan Manville tipped off the police?" Ham demanded of Doc. "But she's a prisoner of the **Whistling Wraith**!"

"Joan Manville," corrected Doc Savage, "is in league with the **Whistling Wraith**."

This sunk in. Ham's doubtful expression worsened.

Monk asked: "So what do we do?"

The **Bronze Man** seemed to have already made up his mind.

"We land."

He dropped the big amphibian onto the Hudson. The ship bumped along ... slowed ... then settled.

He jockeyed the craft toward the sloping ramp that gave access to the cavernous place.

Monk and Ham -- with mechanical goggles over their eyes -- were examining the long gloomy structure by the aid of the **infra-ray** light.

"Seems quiet," Monk muttered. "We take a chance and go in?"

"We do," Doc said as he <snapped> a switch that transmitted a radio signal. At the river end, ponderous doors opened.

Doc Savage sent the great serial steed (still under power) lunging up the ramp.

He killed the ship's hammering engines after they were parked inside and the great doors were closing.

Monk and Ham peered out from every available window and port before the hairy chemist offered: "Coast looks clear."

"Be prepared," Doc admonished going back to the hatch and flinging it open.

They stepped out, caution in their movements ...

Abruptly, a **bullfrog voice** resounded through the great vault of a place.

"Reach for a rafter, Savage! The jig is finally up!"

"Push-'em-Down!" Monk howled, reaching into his coat for a superfirer.

"Easy," Doc warned.

Monk subsided.

Following the **Bronze Man's** example, Monk and Ham raised their hands high. They looked none-too-happy about it.

Out from a nest of cranes, fuel drums, and great ammunition cases stepped assorted **bluecoats** cradling riot guns.

In the lead brandishing a regulation Police Positive was the human building block that was Inspector Saul Sampson. He was wearing a grin that -- while not square -- had its rectangular aspects.

"You are all under arrest," he said exuberantly. "And won't the new Commissioner be pleased as punch!"

"On what charge?" Doc asked.

"Well, let's see," said Sampson, waving his pistol barrel carelessly about the air. "From the steel coffin back there, we pulled 2 stiffs. One guy I don't know. But the other dead one was an interesting specimen. He looked kinda like Laurence Kingsley Goldwill to me. And with that sword they keep finding in dead people down in Washington jammed clear into his gullet."

"There is an explanation for that," Ham retorted.

"Oh, I know there is!" Push-'em-Down snapped back. "It means that this whole bond scare; the fact that suddenly no one can find hide-nor-hair of H. Startland Drago; and maybe even the murder of Senator MacPartney, the attempt on the President's life, and that missing King business show your fine hand, Savage."

"To make his point, Saul Sampson whistled loudly. It sounded neither sad (like the *Whistling Wraith's* tune) nor mysterious (like Doc's *trill*ing).

But his meaning was clear.

"Absurd!" the celebrated attorney Ham Brooks said indignantly. "I shall have your badge!"

"We got the evidence," Sampson said flatly.

"Who tipped you off, short-and-hoarse?" Monk asked derisively.

"That Drago's niece Joan Manville. She called to complain that her uncle never came back from Washington after your men took him away. Said we might start looking for him in this place.

"The *Whistling Wraith* must have been prowling here," Ham murmured. "That Manville woman could not have know those bodies would be found on these premises."

Sampson looked doubtful. "The which?"

"You," Doc Savage stated in an unperturbed tone, "have been duped. We are innocent of those charges."

Sampson made a derisive noise.

"They all say that. But you can tell it down at the station house."

He wagged his gun muzzle upward.

"Now keep them hands up there while I slap some bracelets on well-deserved wrists."

Doc Savage seemed to clear his throat.

Monk and Ham immediately stiffened.

Then -- without any preliminary warning -- Saul Sampson and his *bluecoats* simply dropped to the floor and lay there. Sampson gave a single ripping snore and his breathing settled into a whistling rhythm.

Doc, Monk, and Ham lowered their hands and stood about unconcernedly. They seemed to be waiting for something ...

At length, Monk exploded.

"Good goin', Doc! They're sleepin' like babies!"

Doc Savage took off his coat ... reached in ... and pulled the linings of several hidden pockets inside out. Tiny sprinkles of glass collected on the floor. The explanation was quite simple.

The **Bronze Man** often carried in pocket hidden about his person tiny thin-walled glass capsules containing the colorless, odorless anesthetic gas that vaporized within less than a minute. Simply by expanding his bicep muscles, he had broken the globules and released their contents unnoticed.

The three of them had held their breaths until the potent stuff had mixed with the air, rendering it harmless. Monk and Ham had done so because Doc had warned them in the *Mayan* tongue. That had been the sound like throat-clearing.

"Well, we're framed but good," Monk said as he collected riot guns from insensate fingers. "If they make those charges stick, we'll all be sitting on the 'hot seat' pretty dang soon."

"Can't you think more pleasant prospects?" complained Ham who understood that the Law sometimes convicts innocent persons.

Meanwhile, Doc Savage was at a periscope device that allowed him to examine the landward entrance to the great warehouse hangar.

"There are police machines parked outside," he said. "But no persons in them. We must move swiftly."

The *bronze giant* strode to the side of the boathouse end of the great structure where various speedy craft lay in dry dock. He selected a low-slung racing boat -- a streamlined gem of mahogany and chrome trim.

"A boat?" Monk grunted. "How come, Doc?"

"Give a hand," Doc directed.

There was a wheeled cradle which could be used to hoist sea craft out of their dry dock and run them to the water. He was getting this into position.

"Ham," he said, "you might check on **Pat's** present whereabouts."

"You don't think she's mixed into this again?"

"We may have need of her before the night is over," Doc returned in a somber voice.

Monk lifted his eyebrows until they merged almost perfectly with his **rust-red** hair. He ventured a low whistle denoting surprise.

"Hope she don't faint when she gets the word," he grinned.

While Doc and the hairy Monk prepared the speedboat for transport into the river, the dapper Ham used the telephone.

Pat Savage maintained an apartment in the Park Avenue building that contained her beauty establishment.

Ham skipped the latter because of the late hour and tried the apartment.

After a wait, he shouted: "Not there."

"Try our *Headquarters*."

A moment later, Ham yelled: "Doc! Pat's holed up in our *Headquarters*! Says the authorities tried to haul her in for questioning and she skedaddled for *Headquarters* thinking she'd be safer there. Now the place is crawling with cops!"

Doc left off what he was doing and snapped up the phone.

"Pat, there is a secret way to the floor below."

"*The hidden stair in the Lab?*" Pat said.

She sounded as if she were enjoying herself after a breathless fashion.

"Right. Go to Drago's place. In the attic you will find an unlocked safe containing Liberty Bonds. Take them. Stash them in a secure place and wait until you hear from me."

"*That's all? Nursemaid some paper?!*"

"Or you can remain where you are until the police blunder their way in," the **Bronze Man** said.

"Oh all right. But this better not be a wild-goose chase because of that harmless fish prank I pulled."

Pat hung up.

Monk -- steadying the speedboat in its cradle -- grinned broadly.

"Maybe this once," he said, "Pat is gonna get her share."

Then sirens made a bedlam. They were close ...

*... and coming **closer**!*

Doc whipped to the periscope.

"What's going on?" Ham asked anxiously. "Those cars cannot be coming here."

"They are," said Doc.

"But how?"

"Wire tap."

"The cops tapped our phone!" Ham belated, aghast.

"Evidently."

Hearing this, Monk rushed to an identical periscope at the river end.

"Harbor police!" he yelled. "3 boats. We ain't getting' out this way either."

The *Man of Bronze* was moving toward the section housing automobiles.

"We have one chance," he said firmly. "We will have to drive through."

"This ain't gonna be no tea party," Monk said as they climbed aboard an auto. "Sounds like they mustered half the force!"

"What about the speedboat?" Ham asked anxiously.

"We will have to find another method of reaching our destination," Doc said grimly.

He got the engine going ... hit the dash switch that opened the landward doors ... and the car lunged for the opening.

They had their first piece of good luck in some time.

The police had tripped their sirens prematurely thinking perhaps that they were converging in such numbers that escape was impossible. And it was very nearly the case.

But the *Bronze Man* had selected a taxicab. One that was painted the horrible blue to which certain New York cabs are addicted.

It was an otherwise unprepossessing machine and such a common sight that he was able to scoot down a side-street in full view of the oncoming radio squad cars and not attract suspicion.

"Whew!" Monk breathed as they drove north. "Made it!"

"We are not in the clear as yet," Doc warned.

He drove without haste. Traffic was thick. It had rained briefly earlier and the day and the streets were still damp. The sky was clear now and as dark as lampblack. Whistles of traffic cops were the loudest noises on the streets.

Almost casually, a squad car with gold letters "P.D." on its doors fell in behind them.

Most of Doc's machines boasted low-number plates. But not this one. It was registered to a hack concern in which Doc owned a small interest.

In the back, apish Monk ducked from sight. Ham pretended to be a passenger.

The prowl car seemed to be doing just that -- prowling. The driver made no attempt to pull them over.

Up ahead, a motorcycle cop swung around the ponderous structure of Grant's Tomb and approached. His shield and polished Sam Browne belt glittered in the glow of the machine's headlights.

There was no avoiding what came next. There had been no time for Doc Savage to disguise his remarkable features.

The motorcycle cop spied Doc's **metallic** face in the headlight glare. His steed popping, he swung it about and fell in behind while waving a gloved hand to the radio car.

"We're in for it now!" Monk grumbled, coming up in his seat.

Doc floored the gas and began making evasive turns. A second motorcycle patrolman joined the pursuit.

Sirens set up a **wailing** that brought heads out of windows and curious citizens out of entries. The taxi speedometer rotor shook itself slowly past 70. Buildings, doorways, alleys, and parked cars blurred past. The taxi took great leaps at intersections where the pavement was higher.

Showing expert skill, the **Bronze Man** sent his machine west ... then east ... and then south, often beating caterwauling prowls cars to busy intersections just as traffic signals changed.

Numerous pursuers were foiled by Doc's lightning reflexes at the wheel. Although the taxi did not boast the bulletproof body or Tires of his regular machines, the engine under the hood was supercharged. It could make the hack do miraculous things!

"We're not shaking them!" Ham howled after glancing out the rear window.

Doc called back to Monk.

"Monk, can you put a penetration bullet in your machine-pistol and hit one of our tires shooting from inside the car?"

"Hey!" the burly chemist yelled. "What'd you say?"

"Can you?" Doc repeated.

"Sure I can! But can you keep the blow-out from wrecking the car? And what's the idea?"

"Go ahead," Doc said.

With strain all over his homely face, Monk fitted the penetration cartridge (a bigger power load and copalloy over a special steel bullet) in the breech of the machine-pistol. It was pretty much guesswork shooting for the tire on the left side.

The supermachine pistol made no great noise. But air leaving the tire did. It was as if a big piece of some hard-woven cloth was being torn with short jerks!

The cab only skipped about at first. Then it did just about everything but swap ends. There was a robe rail. Monk hung on to that.

The cab did not go over. Within a block-and-a-half, its speed was down to 20. They were now in the vicinity of the Battery on the East Side of lower Manhattan.

The motorcycles swerved in. The squad car came up close behind.

The men-in-blue looked strange. They had their hands close to holstered guns.

"Blow-out!" Doc called. "We're pulling over."

The bluecoats looked relieved. They swerved away from the swaying car.

"Get set," Doc told Monk and Ham. He did not sound excited himself.

The car bumped up onto the sidewalk. Brakes took hold. They were good.

The car skidded just enough ... straightened at the crucial instant ... and came to a rest with its nose half in a storefront.

The door -- knocked off its hinges by the impact -- wobbled briefly ... then fell over with a **bang!** stirring up quantities of dust.

Caught unawares, the pursuing vehicles traveled on for a short distance. Shouting, the motorcycle police struggled to get turned around without forking their front wheels.

"Into the store!" Doc rapped.

His voice -- without being lifted or excited -- was as effective as an explosion.

Monk dived out with Ham a step behind!

Dazed by things happening too fast, the dapper lawyer yelled: "But what good will ..."

Monk Mayfair -- showing a cooler head for once -- reached out, took hold of Ham's ever-present cane, and yanked it along. Since the aristocratic attorney would sooner part with his right arm than relinquish the affectation, he went with the stick.

The store was empty. Its front windows were soaped over.

Someone had broken into the place; moved out; and left a scuffed counter, some shelves, old boxes, and a lot of trash. Rear windows were boarded. There was no glass in the door.

They ran out the back ...

... and stopped dead.

Ham gave a low groan.

:They've got us!" he shrilled.

The reason for his expression of defeat was plain.

The back of the store was a vast vacant lot. There was a very good reason for the absence of buildings.

It was a marshland. It had been made a trash dump until filled in and the litter had been leveled off. Even a rabbit would have need luck to get across it with men and guns in on the hunt.

"Come on!" Doc rapped, urging Monk and Ham along with hard shoves of his **great arms**. He got them moving along in the lee of the building.

As was the style in New York's eyesore suburbs, the store was only one cell in a 2-story block-long string of buildings which might have been one long building since each cell was alike.

The second door to the left was open. Monk and Ham raced for the open door and piled in.

*Only then did they realize that the **Bronze Man** was no longer behind them.*

Doc Savage sprinted along the rear of the buildings in the direction opposite from the one taken by Monk and Ham.

He did more than one thing at once (a practice at which he was good).

He watched for open doors or windows.

He watched for the first pursuer to appear.

His right hand got a metallic object out of his clothing.

And he kept a lookout for junk on the ground which might trip him.

There did not seem to be a window or a door that was not boarded or locked. Virtually all of the block, in fact, was empty.

At the farthest cell in the block, Doc stopped. He rammed an elbow against a boarded-up window and made an opening. One glance told him that the space was no longer in use.

He gave a twist to the object in his hand. It was one of his explosive **grenades** which were enormously powerful for their tiny size. Its discharge could be delayed for almost as long an interval as could be desired.

Doc tossed the violent little thing inside and abruptly reversed direction.

The **explosion** sent brick and board vomiting from all directions. The noise was enough to startle the converging police into exchanging worried shouts.

"They're down at the other end!" one called.

Immediately there was a stampede of footsteps audible on the other side of the block and coming closer.

Doc put on speed. Timing would be everything if the diversion was to work.

He gained the door -- through which he had sent Monk and Ham -- and bounded in.

They were no longer there!

A hastily wrenched-free board off an opposite window told the tale.

Doc rushed to it ... took a chance ... and stuck out his **bronze** head.

Monk and Ham were pulling at the squad car doors. The hairy chemist spotted Doc. He grinned and waved one furry beam of an arm for him to join them.

If his aides had read his mind, Doc Savage realized, it could not have worked out more perfectly.

He stepped out through the open aperture ...

... then everything blew up!

No literally. There was no explosion.

What there was a flurry of **blue** uniformed figures coming at a dead run from the far end of the block where they had gone to investigate the explosion. They had guns out.

Monk bellowed: "Doc! Hurry!"

The **bronze giant** put on speed. Monk was behind the wheel now. He got the motor going.

A riot gun opened up! It shredded both tires on the far side of the police machine. The auto listed, rubber hissing.

With a horrified expression on his face, Monk waved Doc Savage away.

"Nix! Nix! We're cooked! Don't let 'em get you too!"

Doc skidded to a stop, hesitated. His hands became fists ...

... but he knew the hairy chemist had the right idea.

The car was now useless. The police were coming hard with their weapons up and ready for use.

One of the police motorcycles sat on its stand near the curb.

Veering, Doc mounted it in a blue or motion ... kicked the stand up ... and roared the engine to life.

"A cop yelled: "Savage's stealing my mount! Get him!"

Bullets would have sought him -- possibly with success -- had Doc Savage tried to get the machine turned around. But he did not.

Instead, the **Bronze Man** sent the motorcycle lurching up onto the sidewalk ... through a door that gave before him ... and out the back of the block.

By the time the police got to the rear, he was a popping in the night distance.

XXIV -- "Grim Seas"

Doc Savage's abandoning of his beleaguered aides might have seemed uncaring and disloyal.

But actually, it showed clear thinking in the face of insurmountable odds.

It was not unusual for him to go into action without his men. For all of their skill, the *Man of Bronze* was something of a "lone wolf" at times.

Not that Doc did not his assistants. he did. They gathered information and made many indispensable moves.

But when a climax came -- when there was a situation demanding the extreme, the unusual -- Doc Savage had a habit of acting alone, telling no one his plans and asking no help.

This was one such situation.

Monk and Ham possessed sense enough not to give the police cause to harm them. So he had left the pair to surrender peaceably.

Greater matters were at stake now, the *Bronze Man* knew.

Come the morrow, the Stock Market would open and all the nervousness engendered by the events of the past 24 hours would be certain to result in a panic the likes of which the Nation -- which was just struggling out of a long business slump -- had never before seen.

Doc Savage had but hours to accomplish his goals.

Like some ultra-modern knight, the *bronze giant* piloted his gleaming steed south to the lower end of Manhattan where he prowled the docks making inquiries about renting a motor boat.

He found one rental business open. But the only thing available was a tiny dory fitted with an outboard motor.

The owner demanded the full value of the craft as a deposit. Doc put up the money without objection to the exorbitant rental.

He climbed into the dory ... got the outboard going ... and *put-putted* out into New York Harbor.

A liner was coming through the mouth of the bay. A searchlight playing from the deck of the vessel splashed the up-flung arm of the Statue of Liberty on Bedloe's Island.

The *Bronze Man* set a course down the center of the bay heading to the right of the Statue. He seemed to have a definite goal in mind. The night air was warmish and the salt tang not unpleasant in the nostrils.

The dory made good speed under the kicking of the outboard. But the little craft was none too seaworthy as Doc discovered when the wave thrown out by the bow of a passing tugboat almost capsized him.

After that near disaster, he watched for the waves and turned the dory into them bow-on.

It soon became clear that his goal was the Borough of Staten Island.

The distance to Staten Island was approximately 5 miles, Doc knew. And it usually took him 20 minutes to make the crossing, all told.

Avoiding a night-prowling tugboat, he cupped hands before his mouth and shouted an inquiry.

"Ahoy! Know the *Grim Seas*?"

"Sure an' I've seen the scow," the captain replied. "Part of that ghost fleet."

"Where is she anchored?" Doc asked.

"Begorra, I'm not too sure," said the tug skipper.

He proceeded to describe the spot where the Grim Seas might be.

" 'Tis a 4-master with a steel hull," he finished. "And a stinkin' pile o' rust she be."

Doc thanked him and pulled away.

He located *Grim Seas* anchored close inshore -- a darker smudge against the shadow of Staten Island hills.

Whoever had named her might have been a prophet. Corrosive effects of the salt air had sanded her hull with a thick layer of **rust**. The sullen hulk rode her anchor like a forlorn forgotten thing.

Doc reviewed what knowledge he possessed of the so-called "ghost fleet" as he stared at the looming hulk.

The ships had been built during the War (some by profiteers) and put together with a speed that did not permit safe workmanship. After the cessation of hostilities, the Government had found the ships to be a string of "white elephants". They were not seaworthy, so nobody wanted them.

The derelicts -- condemned and representing many millions in public money -- were quietly tied up by the hundreds in out-of-the-way spots.

By far, the greater number had been anchored in the Hudson. Of these, a few were later found to be worth refitting to make them seaworthy. Others were sold for junk. The derelict fleet had dwindled gradually until only a few remained now.

His amazingly retentive memory had immediately identified the meaning of the cryptic message "**Grim Seas**" which General Frontenac had scrawled in his own life's blood.

The **Bronze Man** had not apprised his men of the phrase's meaning as a precaution against their possible capture. It turned out to be very wise in light of their subsequent apprehension by the police.

Even in the gloom of the harbor **darkness**, the *Grim Seas* looked like a derelict. The foremast was light a-cant and strings rigging drooped like cobwebs. He could discern no light aboard the craft.

With a canny **eye**, he gauged the distance of the vessel from shore and then the dory toward land.

Doc Savage landed the dory on a sloping mud beach fully 200 yards distant from the anchorage of the *Grim Seas*.

Standing in the craft, he stripped to the jersey short he habitually wore and which doubled as swimming trunks. He folded his clothes carefully and placed them in the stern.

He retained his padded, many-pocketed vest which -- in addition to being an arsenal of no small formidableness -- was bulletproof.

The water was not excessively cold. He waded until it came to his shoulders ... then struck out with an overhand stroke, keeping his head well above the surface. Water striking his smooth **bronze** hair seemed to bend up and roll away. *It was a peculiarity of his skin and hair that they shed water like the proverbial duck's back.*

As he drew near the old hulk, he slipped underwater. Weight of the vest was enough to keep him under the surface. But not so heavy that he could not swim with it.

He emerged alongside the hull, perhaps 100 feet back from the bow. Monster **rust** scabs clung to the steel plates. Some of these, he discovered, were large enough to support his head above the surface.

He treaded water for some minutes listening ...

... then released his grip and stroked for the bow anchor chain.

The **rust**-encrusted links of the chain were as thick as his wrists. Grasping one, he pulled his **bronzed body** half out of the bay and waited for the water to drain down his **muscular** legs.

Then he climbed the links like a ladder. **Rust** scales scraped his skin. Some broke off and clung to his flesh.

Doc Savage silently gained the hawsehole and paused with an arm thrust inside. The lifting of his body until his fingers hooked the rail he accomplished by an intricate feat of balancing.

He slid over the rail. **Rust** *crunched* softly under his bare feet as he planted them on deck. It was practically the first perceptible sound he had made.

There was life aboard the hulk *Grim Seas*. His sensitive hearing the mutter of voices somewhere near. But the words were indistinguishable.

A **match** flared amidships as it was applied to a cigarette.

Doc froze, seeming to become part of the surrounding **rust**.

The flame disclosed a swarthy face and thin lips. Obviously a guard.

The **Bronze Man** slipped silently into the lee of the low steel bulwark. Should a flashlight beam be thrown in his direction, he would be in plain sight. But no chance splash from the searchlight of a harbor craft would betray him.

He approached the loitering guard. As he drew near the man, he increased caution.

He went momentarily rigid as metal as the fellow walked to the rail and spat overside, then stood staring out over the harbor.

Exploring about, Doc Savage located a heavy rivet head. It was frozen to the deck by **rust**. But when the guard hawked loudly clearing his throat, **corded bronze** fingers wrenched the head free under cover of the unpleasant sound.

He waited a moment ... then tossed the rusty object overboard. Hearing it, the guard bent forward to peer in the direction of the splash.

Doc sprang to his feet and clamped **metallic** fingers on the back of the man's neck. No outcry was given.

The guard quivered but kept his feet. A leaky sigh escaped his lips and his eyes rolled up in his head. He sagged at the knees and **bronze giant** eased the unconscious figure gently to the deck. Coils of rotted rope and other waste created a serviceable covering for the conquered crewman.

That done, Doc moved on. He was a **metal giant** in a fantastic realm of **rust** and **corrosion**.

The *murmur* of voices continued coming from a spot back by the stern. He *floated* toward the sounds.

He found a companionway ... then hesitated.

The voices were more distinct now. But to the ear, they were not readily audible. This phenomenon became more understandable as Doc Savage eased down the companion.

The voices were speaking in a **foreign** tongue.

At the bottom of the companion stairs, he found an open cabin. Whatever it had been intended for originally, it had since been converted into a storeroom of sorts. Coiled hawsers, piles of chain, and unwieldy machinery littered the floor.

Going through it barefoot would have been a task in daylight. But in the darkness, it was **agony**!

The undertone of voices grew louder. Doc eased himself into another cabin and beyond it into a passage. The place was pale with light which came from the slash of a partially-opened door.

Doc faded back swiftly as the slash widened, accompanied by a squeaking of **rust**-cankered hinges.

3 figures stepped through. "Frontenac has failed," one said in thickly-accented English. "It is up to you two to locate and dispose of Drago. He must die for what he has done."

The second voice spoke distinctly American English.

"What good will that do? It ain't gonna change Congress's mind. They already voted."

"We will deal with that later!" snapped the first voice. "The President has yet to sign the bond bill into law."

"What about Doc Savage's boys?" asked a third voice, also American.

"Where they are, there is no need to do anything to them one way or the other," the owner of the first voice said.

"You mean just let them rot?"

"Rot? Ah, how appropriate a choice of words. Yes, 'let them rot'."

The trio passed the other end of the cabin through a zone of faint light. Their faces showed briefly.

Two were hoodlums of the American variety.

But the third possessed a face which Doc Savage had seen before. Not that he needed to see him in the light. The **Bronze Man** had already placed the man by his distinctive voice.

Elvern D. Kastellantz!

Doc waited until the trio had mounted topside (the monotonous **crunching** of their shoe soles on **rusty** steps going away) before he detached himself from a shadowy corner like a fragment of metal coming to life.

Back out in the corridor, he felt his way along. His hands and elbows accidentally scraping **rusty** walls brought pain. But none of it was reflected in his inscrutable features.

At one point, he paused to smear his gleaming body with **rust** collected from bulkheads. When he resumed his course, he appeared all-but-invisible.

As when so many highly-skilled feats are observed, there seemed nothing unusual about his progress. He just walked forward. *But he always seemed in shadow and he made no noise whatever.*

Doc traveled down a corridor. He took a chance and employed his flash beam, twisting the lens until it stabbed a thick bar of radiance ahead of him and found a narrow steel companion of metal.

He went down this. Flakes of **rust** made brittle crunching sounds and lacerated his bare soles. They left tiny specks of **blood** as they rose and fell.

The companion gave into an engine room where the **Bronze Man** wedged past the gutted remnants of internal combustion engines apparently of a power rather small for a vessel the size of the *Grim Seas*.

Beyond near a bulkhead was a steel wall panel. It gave inward with a complaining screech from the hinges.

Doc played his flash ray inside. He saw in a cramped space a table improvised out of a box.

More boxes had been placed side-by-side and covered with burlap bags to form a bench. One draping of burlap affixed to a wall seemed intended to pass as a rude tapestry.

This was part of the hold of the condemned rust bucket, Doc knew. The stench of foul bilge water was nauseating.

Still, he pocketed the flash and squeezed through the aperture.

With his beam out again, he lifted the sacks ... confirmed that boxes supported them ... and went to the one attached to the wall.

The lifted burlap revealed a wall safe. Small, old, but not in the least rusty owing to the quality of the steel of its construction.

The ship's safe.

Doc restored the burlap as it had been and passed on to a stout door on the opposite side of the hold compartment.

It was secured with a rust-eaten lever arrangement which had originally been intended to draw it sufficiently tight against a rubber batten to make it waterproof. He wrenched the steel panel open and stepped through.

He had his flash out. But he quickly doused it.

From the darkness of the malodorous area came sounds. *Buzzings*. Like frustrated bumblebees in search of honey.

Doc <thumbed> on the light and the bumblebee sounds ceased. They became something else.

Muffled grunts.

For the light had disclosed the bound-and-gagged forms of his 3 missing aides. **Renny Renwick, Long Tom Roberts, and Johnny Littlejohn!**

They had been trying to speak past their gags and -- that failing -- had hummed through their noses to attract attention to their plight.

Reaching back, Doc shut the door and threw the inside lever which secured the door.

He then went to them, undoing their gags.

Renny's hoarse "Holy cow! echoed tinnily in the murky unpleasant confines. "It happened to us again!"

Long Tom explained.

"We were bushwhacked by that Kastellantz. He was going through Drago's place when we barged in."

"Kastellantz got the drop on us with one of own mercy guns. The minute we put our hands up, he cut loose," Renny added.

"A lamentable repetition of concurrence," Johnny said unhappily.

"When we came to," Renny said, "Kastellantz tried to get us to tell where Drago was. Seems he's got it in for Drago something bad. But when we told him the truth, he refused to believe it. Not that I blame him."

"Know where you are?" Doc inquired.

Renny nodded his gloomy head.

"Ship somewhere by the smell," he rumbled.

"A ghost ship," Doc supplied. "Talk of leaving you to rot gave me a fair idea of your situation."

His bonds now off, Renny raised his monster **fists**. They were **liver**-hued from scrapes and cuts made by the tiny mercy shells which included a cauterizing chemical that prevented infections from taking hold.

The 3 aides climbed to their feet. They started stamping the floor and flexing their wrists in an effort to restore normal blood flow.

"Holy cow!" Renny said gloomily. "First blisters and now this. My left foot's asleep!"

Then the *grinding* of **rust** told them that someone had stepped into the compartment on the other side of the closed door.

Doc motioned for *silence* and doused his light.

Darkness clamped down. They held their breaths. (It was a good thing to do in the close air, anyway.)

Doc Savage set one **muscle**-cabled hand on the locking lever.

Grinding sounds continued, slow, tentative.

They grew near ...

... stopped.

Doc felt the lever on his side of the door quiver. He **tightened** his grip.

Fortunately, the levers on both sides worked off the same mechanism. The person on the other side could not budge his.

In the darkness, a silent struggle was waged. Doc Savage -- possessed of *muscles* gained over a lifetime of rigorous exercise -- was certain to win the contest of thews, his 3 assistants knew.

*But to fool the prowler into believing the **rust**-fouled mechanism was simply jammed was another thing.*

Then ... a **shout!**

"Hey! This lever won't budge! Maybe there is somebody creeping around down here after all!"

"Throw a slug through it and see!" suggested another hard voice.

Instant, Doc and his men sank to their knees.

"Will that door resist bullets?" Long Tom undertoned.

Doc shook his head in the negative.

The truth of this was demonstrated a moment late when a bullet smashed through the panel leaving a hole with outcurled edges. It spanked harmlessly into the back of the smelly hold.

The gunman called out: "I got a hole!"

"Put your eye to it!" a second voice said.

"Are you nuts?"

"Just checking your horse sense," the offered dryly. "Hold the fort. I'll go get the poison gas. That should solve the problem."

***Poison gas!** They would be helpless!*

Doc Savage came up from the floor like a thunderbolt! He wrenched the lever upward and yanked hard.

The gunman on the other side was so surprised that he only got off one shot.

It struck the oncoming **Bronze Man** square in his chest. But it hindered him only a little thanks to the bulletproof qualities of his special vest.

The *bronze giant* sent one **bronze** block of a **fist** sweeping up from his hip.

It connected ... broke a jaw ... lifted both feet and put the gunman on his back and out cold.

On his way out, Renny grabbed the man's gun (a blue automatic) and rumbled: "Lead the way, Doc!"

They got as far as the panel on the other side of the hold. The ugly snout of a submachine gun poked out and a voice growled:

"I thought that talk about gas would bring results."

"Holy cow!" Renny thumped, hopping on his one functioning foot.

XXV -- Monarch of Mystification

If Renny Renwick had not had one monster **paw** filled with the blue automatic, he might have made a grab for the threatening Tommy-gun. For all his bulk, he was fast and in a good position to do so successfully.

He was also in an excellent position to collect a bellyful of .45-caliber slugs. For that was where the rapid-firer muzzle was directed.

The big-**fisted** engineer looked questioningly to the **Bronze Man**.

"Doc?"

Doc Savage threw up his hands. "Surrender."

The others did likewise. Renny held on to the blue automatic, not wishing to startle the gunman by dropping it suddenly.

"One at a time," the Tommy jockey warned, "step out.

The muzzle nudged toward Renny.

"You first, Big Fists. And heave the roscoe ahead of you while you're at it."

Renny complied. He had to struggle through the aperture. The gloomy engineer lost some hid. Especially on his already-damaged **fists**.

One-by-one, the others passed through. Doc Savage came last.

Others had joined the gunman with the Tommy-gun. They relieved the **Bronze Man** of his equipment vest.

Not a few eyes bugged out at the sight of Doc Savage's exposed **midsection**. It was *tremendously* daunting even though powdered by **rust** collected during his foray below.

The man with chopper snapped: "Okay! Up we go topside."

Reluctantly, they went.

More men with guns showed themselves along the way. They were carrying shaded lanterns that made the **rusty** steel walls seem as if they were caked with gore.

These new arrivals were of a different character from the others who appeared to be "hired guns" of the domestic variety. The new ones had faces of **foreign** cast. Many were decorated by prissy little trick mustaches. There was nothing of the ordinary ruffian about them.

The man with the Tommy-gun offered a curt explanation for the untimely discovery of Doc Savage and the others.

"We heard you open that panel, smart guy," he told Doc. "Every hunk of this tub creaks and groans. It's the best burglar system one could have."

"Don't count your chickens," Long Tom warned, "until they come home to roost."

"An ornithological inevitability," Johnny chimed in.

Among their captors, strange expressions were exchanged between those who doubted that the big-worded archeologist-geologist's observation had been couched in English and those who questioned it was language at all.

Eventually, they emerged on deck where other foreign-looking men were waiting. Words were exchanged. The language was not English.

One of the speakers went to get someone. A moment later, he returned ...

... with no less than Elvern D. Kastellantz!

Very grim of face, Kastellantz strode up to Doc Savage and said: "You are very clever. But then, that is your reputation."

Doc held silence.

"Still, it behooves me to ask how were you able to locate my carefully-chosen hideout?"

"General Frontenac."

"He betrayed me!"

"You betrayed him."

Elvern D. Kastellantz's mouth became a thin line. There was a faint shadow on his upper lip as if he had begun a mustache.

"You mean Kastellantz and Frontenac were in cahoots?" Renny exploded.

"From the beginning," Doc stated, not taking his eyes off the smooth powdered face of Elvern D. Kastellantz whose hair was once more its natural **coppery-red**.

"I don't get it, Doc," Long Tom added. "What is this? A coup?"

"No. You might say it is the opposite of a coup."

Johnny Littlejohn <snapped? thin fingers over his shaggy head.

"An abdication!" he exclaimed.

"But Kastellantz did make King Goz vanish, didn't he?" Renny demanded.

"He did," Doc stated.

"When we first encountered one another," Kastellantz said slowly, matching the **Bronze Man's** steady regard, "you claimed to know how King Goz disappeared. You made similar representations to General Frontenac. I did not believe these statements. But I am willing to entertain the possibility."

"In other words," Doc said, "you would like me to explain my theory."

"It might be amusing."

*Doc Savage considered briefly. Only a flickering of his **flake-gold eyes** betrayed the thoughts behind them.*

Then -- perhaps concluding that talk would forestall any planned violence -- he launched into a crisp recitation of the known facts.

"Several witnesses saw King Goz enter his limousine outside Blair House," he declared. "A few journalists hoping to get the jump on a story, the usual tourists and sightseers, and the King's own retinue. No photographs were taken at that time. "These people witnessed the King enter his machine and his departure.

"The King's retinue -- including General Frontenac -- followed the limousine in their own cars. Some journalists took up the rear of the motorcade which took a circuitous route to the White House, ostensibly to enable the Press to prepare themselves. It was the testimony of all that the official machine stopped only once and that no person at any time left the automobile."

A smile quirked Elvern D. Kastellantz's mouth. His dark eyes shone.

"You doubt this?"

"The King did leave his auto," Doc said carefully. "The whole world -- almost -- saw him do so. That event was recorded by a newsreel camera at his destination. At the White House door."

Renny grunted. "Huh?"

"I don't get it," Long Tom chimed in.

"It is deceptively simple," Doc related. "King Egil Goz -- dressed in his military-style uniform -- entered the limousine. The footman closed the door behind him and took his proper place in the driver's compartment beside the chauffeur's seat.

"At this point, the journalists naturally rushed to their cars in order to follow the motorcade. "If any had tarried, they would have witnessed the limousine leave with the chauffeur plainly visible in the driver's compartment and the King -- presumably -- seated in the curtained tonneau. Which he was."

*Doc Savage paused. Somewhere, a bell buoy **clanged** like a forlorn cowbell.*

"The King's so-called disappearance occurred at a traffic signal en route," he continued. "It was all accomplished in a manner so deceptively simple that if the true facts were not known, it would baffle the imagination."

All attention was on the **Bronze Man** now. His voice -- normally pleasant and well-modulated -- gripped them *strangely*.

"While the limousine was stopped, the King simply rolled down the partition between the tonneau and the driver's compartment. He exchanged coat and cap with the man behind the wheel and then climbed forward, taking the latter's place. Then he drove on."

Renny's jaw was slowly going slack. He snapped it up and asked:

"But where did the footman go?"

"The murdered footman had been behind the wheel up to this point," Doc stated quietly.

Long Tom exploded: "But Kastellantz was the chauffeur!"

"Not true. After the footman first entered the driver's compartment, he simply donned a chauffeur's cap and liveried jacket and slid behind the wheel. In the excitement of the moment, no one noticed that there had been no chauffeur seated behind the wheel until the footman took it."

Johnny murmured: "Where does Kastellantz come in?"

"Elvern D. Kastellantz seems to be a nonexistent person," Doc explained. "At best, he was a borrowed identity. At no time did anyone other than the King and the footman enter the limousine. General Frontenac's story that he did was given to cover one of the greatest sleights-of-hand in modern times."

An inkling of the truth dawned on the *Man of Bronze's* men. Fact-by-fact, he had been leading them to the truth.

But a look came over the powdered face of Elvern D. Kastellantz then. A wise and knowing look. Almost crafty.

Doc said it a moment ahead of their collective gasps of recognition.

"The man standing before us is King Egil Got of Merida."

No one said a word. All eyes were on the **copper**-haired man whom they had come to know as Elvern D. Kastellantz, royal chauffeur.

Then he spoke.

"You are everything they say you are, Savage," King Goz the First said with what seemed grudging suaveness.

The **Bronze Man** went on.

"Your uniform and that of the footman driver were similar enough in appearance that the exchange of cap and jacket was all that was necessary to effect the switch. Of course, you had to shave off your mustache. Some of the hairs fell to the limousine floorboards where I discovered them. I recognized from their length and thickness that they were mustache -- not head -- hairs."

"So what's it all about?" Renny muttered.

"Johnny said it a moment ago. It was a bizarre abdication. Coupled with a nearly perfect scheme to abscond with the wealth of the Meridan people."

"Abscond?" Long Tom gulped.

"But too many knew about it," Doc continued. "The footman for one. When I arrived at the Washington hotel to question him, King Goz was in seclusion, passing as his own chauffeur. It was he who slew the footman out of fear that I would wrest the truth from him."

"That is a rank guess!" sniffed the revealed King of Merida.

"The footman was discovered in a kneeling position," Doc countered. "That suggested that he had been murdered by his liege who commanded him to kneel and then drove his personal sword into the victim's mouth."

"You mean the **Whistling Wraith** didn't kill the footman?" Renny rumbled.

Doc nodded. "General Frontenac -- as he admitted to me -- lied about the sword. It was not in King Goz's possession when he entered the machine. It was a fabrication to further confuse the issue -- just as was the claim by the disguised King and repeated by the footman -- that at the time of the King's disappearance, the mysterious **whistling** was heard. There was no whistling."

"But there was!" King Goz insisted. "I heard it in my very castle. And I saw the **shade** of Old King Fausto whistling down the stone corridors. I flung a dagger into its back and it walked on completely unaware. For the dagger had passed through its unsubstantial form."

"I'm not following this," Renny rumbled. "Does that mean that the **Whistling Wraith** didn't have anything to do with the King's disappearance?"

"It did not," Doc said.

"So who made Drago disappear from the President's limousine?" Long Tom wondered. "We know he didn't change places with that butler Holman. Although he vanished, too."

"Unless I miss my guess, Doc said, "the so-called **Whistling Wraith** was involved in H. Startland Drago's mysterious vanishing act."

"It is true, then?" demanded King Goz. "Drago has vanished as your men have told me?"

"yes."

King Goz broke into a broad smile.

"*Ma bucar!* Good! Then my enemy is no more. Perhaps Old Fausto will be satisfied with his soul and leave me alone."

"I fail to understand," Johnny chimed in. "Drago was your personal banker. How did he become your enemy?"

"These things do not matter," Goz snapped. "All that is important is that the vexing persons who could ruin my perfect plan disappear so that I may enjoy my wealth in peace and comfort."

His voice turned sad.

"I am sorry it is to be this way. Had you remained out of my affairs, *Domnule* Savage, none of these unpleasantries would be necessary."

The King's words were so smooth and unthreatening that for a moment, their true meaning escaped them.

Then Renny said it.

"Doc! They're gonna kill us!"

The moment of shocked silence which followed was just that ...

... a moment. Not long.

Then the warm sea air around them turned sad with *whistling* notes they knew all too well.

"He is here!" Goz shouted, looking about wildly. "How can this be?"

Guns which had been pointed unwaveringly at Doc Savage and his 3 men now swept about warily. Uneasy eyes raked stanchions, bulkheads, and the leaning masts of the rust-scarred old hulk.

And out from behind a darksome mast clutching the ubiquitous sword of Merida stepped a fantastic figure in **scarlet**.

The Whistling Wraith!

His long snowy beard swayed as he came forward. The approach was more of a "floating", it seemed. It was not silent. The mournful air emerging from the knothole in his gnarled face dispelled all quietude.

Whistling, he lifted his *bejeweled* scepter as if to menace them with it.

"Slay him!" King Goz howled, backing away.

The guns swiveled and began vomiting lead and noise!

The superannuated *specter* was standing before a *rusty* bulkhead. The wall visible around it began to hammer and give up little *puffs* like rusty ghosts where the bullets struck. Shiny spots suddenly peppered the *red* corrosion.

Most passed through the *Whistling Wraith* who took no notice of the leaden onslaught.

Once, it ceased his infernal *whistling* long enough to smile mockingly, its black eyes bright with humor.

But the gunmen were stubborn. The figure in *scarlet* looked solid to the eye. There was nothing of the *ethereal* about it. So they kept firing!

It was not long before they ran out of bullets. Doc Savage waited until the defiant reports had turned to futile <clings> before he acted.

The *bronze giant* swept forward ... picked up the shocked figure of King Goz ... and retreated.

Some of the gunmen took notice. They whirled, bring their smoking gun muzzles around.

Renny Renwick, Long Tom Roberts, and Johnny Littlejohn got between Doc's retreating figure and those worthies. **Fists cracked!**

Renny grabbed 2 men by their opposite ears and rammed heads together. Then he flung the victims in either direction. He reclaimed the blue automatic earlier surrendered.

The *Whistling Wraith* started forward then. And for the first time, **it spoke!**

"I have come for King Goz," it announced in a tone that brought to mind electric sparks. "He must sit upon the Meridan throne where I may bedevil him at my will."

"Nothing doing," Renny rumbled. "I've been wanting a crack at you for a while now."

The big-**fisted** engineer swept in.

Doc Savage's voice was a crash.

"Renny! Back away! Do not close with it!"

Renny probably heard. But his ire was aroused. He wanted a shot at the mocking figure.

And he got it.

The great sword swept around as if to decapitate the huge engineer. Renny ignored it. The blade sliced through his neck. Men turned away from the sight, expecting to see the head separate from the fast-moving body.

But both blade and man showed no effect of their flashing encounter.

"You had your chance!" Renny boomed.

One ham-line **fist** rammed into the whistling face ...

... and kept going, taking Renny with it.

Turning, the **Wraith** made a pass in his direction with the **bejeweled** scepter. It connected.

This time, things were different.

Renny jumped a foot and came down in an awkward pile of angular limbs that twitched on-and-on!

The fantastic figure passed over and through him. Men gave before it. It was not the weird confidence stamped on its wrinkled visage so much as the way it progressed. There were things in the way. Objects. Projections.

The **Whistling Wraith** paid them no heed. It simply passed through them where it would.

It was enough to unman the hardiest of souls. And not a few of the gunmen simply took the simplest way off the hulk and humped overboard.

Retreating with the King of Merida slung over one broad should, Doc Savage led Long Tom and Johnny to a bulkhead door.

It was locked.

It took them a moment to get the door open. The **Bronze Man** solved this problem by crashing a metal bar -- heaving it up from the floor -- against the lock. He shoved the door open. They piled through.

Long Tom stopped to shut the door behind him. It was a natural reflex. But absurd under the present circumstances.

The **scarlet** figure's hands started coming through the shut door as if neither were quite real.

Once through, **it** floated down the stairs. Its boots -- lacking substance -- seemed unable to find proper footing. They melted into the **rust**-caked runners.

But some species of momentum carried the apparition forward so that **it** did not sink entirely into the companionway but glided, its boots passing in-and-out of view with each step.

It reached the corridor, seemingly gliding along on the stumps of its booted ankles.

"What is that **thing**?" Long Tom said hoarsely, catching up.

"Keep moving!" Doc warned.

They pelted down twisting corridors seeking sanctuary.

Johnny stopped at a porthole. But it was blocked by a steel cover, apparently bolted to the outside hull of the *Grim Seas*. There was no quick dislodging of it.

They moved on and seemed to gain headway.

Coming around a sharply angled corner, they were unceremoniously brought up short.

Because there standing before them was the *Whistling Wraith*!

"How?" Johnny gulped.

"Cut through the solid walls," Doc explained.

"Talk about a shortcut!" Long Tom breathed.

Suddenly Doc Savage was passing the King to the puny electrical wizard's hands.

Once loose of the *bronze giant*'s inexorable grip, the King put up a fight. Long Tom socked him once ...

... and once was enough. Goz slumped.

"Retreat," Doc urged.

Johnny and Long Tom obeyed.

The *Man of Bronze* held his ground. He was bereft of weapons. The look in his eyes was wary. He might have been recalling his last brush with the unstoppable being.

The expression on the *Whistling Wraith*'s withered countenance was confident, thinly amused.

Doc Savage threw a punch.

The *Wraith* <blinked>. Doc's fist passed through its jaw, unresisting.

The sword that had slain so many sought Doc Savage in a backhanded swipe that was unsettling in its utter soundlessness. It bisected the *Bronze Man*'s left arm at the elbow.

Doc faded back, his arm whole. There had been no pain.

He swatted at the face again.

And again, he got the very human <blinking> reaction. But no other.

The *Wraith* came on.

Doc Savage next used one hand to swipe a layer of **rust** of a wall and dash it into the **Wraith**'s face. The action scraped **bronze** skin raw. It made the **Wraith** flinch satisfyingly, gaining time for the others.

Suddenly sheathing the sword in a long belt scabbard, the goat-bearded apparition began to weave the murky air with the scepter, making passes and circles that threatened the **Bronze Man** with terrible punishment.

Slowly, Doc was backed around a corner. He stopped. The **Wraith** faded back as if suddenly afraid. Its **whistling** abruptly ceased.

Doc eased forward, peering around the turn ...

The **Whistling Wraith** was no longer in the corridor!

Some intuition must have seized the **Bronze Man** then. There was no warning sound, no hint of danger.

But Doc whirled ...

... and the **bejeweled** scepter was plunged into his chest! Instantly, **agony** flooded him.

Before when it had merely touched him, he had been blinded, his whole **muscle**-cabled body shot with pain.

It was worse now.

Blackness in his eyes. **Thunder** in his ears. An awful **clutch** at his heart!

And as a **coldness** unlike any that Doc Savage had ever known swallowed his brain, he could hear a distant bullfrog voice shouting:

"Grab the rails, everybody! This is a police raid!"

And guns began crashing!

XXVI -- Downfall

The finger of Death is probably the most stimulating touch in Life. Nothing else will stir a living being to greater activity. It is a natural instinct -- this effort to go on living -- and not something that is dictated by the conscious mind.

The *pain* wracking Doc Savage's body was radiating from the *golden* scepter that had been thrust into his chest. His great body trembled. Perspiration popped out along his *metallic* skin sending rivulets of rust flowing down his legs.

As before, he was helpless against it. But this time, he found the will to wrench himself free of this agonizing power.

Blindly reaching out, the *Bronze Man* took hold of something (he never knew what) and -- with an arm whose *musculature* resembled piano wire bundles coated in *bronze* lacquer -- jerked his convulsing body hard, away from the impalpable death touch.

Instantly, the spasming of his pain-knotted body ebbed.

His vision restored, Doc took stock.

The *Wraith* -- surprise on its graybeard countenance -- seemed to waver. It *whistled* once. An eerie questioning sound that made *it* seem human for once.

Doc Savage was leaning against a corridor wall for support. He shook his head twice as if to shrug off some spell that had seized his brain. His legs were bent at the knees, seemingly averse to supporting him.

"It is folly to resist Fausto the Deathless," the *specter* said in his crackling tone. "I shall make an example of you, *Man of Bronze*."

Grinning, the *Whistling Wraith* started toward Doc. Its mouth pursed and began emitting that doleful funeral march.

Doc Savage knew that there was no resisting the apparition. Nor could he fight it.

Even had it been an ordinary foe, he was not up to a battle with the materialization (vision, haunt, shade, or whatever it was). All of his incredible *strength* had been sapped in the brief interval of agony. And the *Whistling Wraith* knew this.

Extending its punishing pain-giving scepter, *it* came on.

"The touch of Fausto," it intoned, "is death to all mortals."

So it seemed.

The *Bronze Man* made no move to escape. His *golden eyes* were strangely still as if they had died. He might have been on his last legs.

The scepter inched closer, its **gems** like spiders' eyes ...

Doc Savage -- doing the unexpected -- simply threw himself toward his foe, one hand flinging a cloud of rusty scrapings before it.

Caught by surprise, the Wraith recoiled. The hand clutching the scepter lifted to protect its eyes.

The **bronze giant** ducked under the deadly thing of **gold** and **jewels**.

... and passed through the startled apparition as if it were not there!

He stumbled briefly ... then kept going, not looking back, not concerning himself with his eerie foe at all. He was intent upon getting topside.

He emerged into warm moonlight like a statue of antiquity that had shaken off the rust of ages.

The decks were a pandemonium of men. Most were seeking companions or sheltering objects.

The brief flurry of bullets had abated. Holes had been punched everywhere snapping stays and perforating thinned-by-corrosion bulkheads.

Out in the bay, harbor police boats hung off, their searchlights raking the **rusty** hulk in great **blinding** funnels.

A familiar frog's voice called out: **"I said this is a police raid! Nobody do anything that might get them drilled!"**

Push-'em-Down Sampson! Doc spotted the boxy police inspector in the bow of one of the harbor boats.

Near the inspector looking very forlorn were Monk Mayfair, Ham Brooks, and Pat Savage -- prisoners.

One of the dark figures scuttling along the deck of the Grim Seas crept up to the rail ... angled a long pistol barrel over the edge ... and snapped off a single shot.

That ignited everything.

Police riot guns, submachine guns, and assorted revolvers returned fire. Bullets again began gnashing at the hull, the masts -- everything in sight! Clouds of **rust** commenced percolating.

Moving low, Doc Savage glided through this fall of bitter snow. The searchlights helped him. His equipment vest was visible on a coil of rope. He made for it, then pulled it on.

From a vest pocket he extracted one cartridge. He <snapped> something and then tossed the thing.

It rolled into a corner and -- hissing furiously -- uncoiled a long worm of **black smoke**.
archived at <http://www.stealthskater.com/DocSavage.htm>

"We musta hit something!" a voice from across the water yelled. "The old hulk's caught fire!"

Huddled under the rail, Doc fixed the voice.

Another cartridge came up. He gave it a <snap> and threw it high and over the rail.

"Hey! They're throwing smoke at us!"

And Doc knew that he had struck one police boat with his smoke grenade. The spreading **pall** was soon picked up by a steady breeze and distributed over the decks of the other harbor police craft in a sooty haze.

The shooting died. There was a lull.

In *Mayan*, he rapped out guttural words. A dazed answer came from nearby.

Renny Renwick!

Doc made for the sound. The smoke was still uncoiling on deck. So it was possible to locate the big-**fisted** engineer.

"Long Tom and Johnny!" Doc rasped. "Where are they?"

"Holy cow! How should I know! I just came to. Is that Sampson out there?"

Doc nodded, then asked: "Up for a swim?"

"Reckon so."

"Try to get Monk and Ham free. We may need them."

"Okay."

The gloomy engineer hunkered down ... made his way to the bow ... and clambered down the chain. Thanks to the prodigious scooping qualities of his gargantuan **hands**, he was an excellent swimmer.

Meanwhile, the Bronze Man was making his way to the main companion. He encountered various gunmen along the way. Some -- recognizing him -- attempted to impede his progress.

Doc seized wrists, tripped ankles, slammed heads, broke bones ... **he was a metallic juggernaut of vengeance!**

At intervals, he cast his *golden eyes* toward the bulkhead from which he had emerged with the *Whistling Wraith* in close pursuit.

Of the *apparition*, there was no sign. Nor any sound. It was quiet enough for its unutterably sad *whistling* notes to be heard.

But the **Wraith** did not always whistle as Doc Savage had finally come to understand.

Doc gained the companion. Voices were busy below.

He started down ...

... came a shrill whistle. A *ping! crack!* as a bullet snarled up at him.

He withdrew. He gobbled a sentence in *Mayan*.

From below, Johnny Littlejohn's returning gobble was cut off in mid-sentence. The gaunt archeologist got out enough to inform the **Bronze Man** that he and Long Tom -- driven by the furious storm of police lead -- had taken shelter below along with King Goz's minions.

Doc listened. Angry voices were volleying back-and-forth.

"I'm strictly hired talent," one was saying. "I got no stake in this beyond my cut."

"Yeah. And if the President signs that damn bill, our share goes up in smoke."

A *foreign-sounding* voice snarled back: "*Caineles!* Dogs! You have no vote here."

"Says you."

"With the King unconscious, I am in charge."

"Yeah? Well, it looks like he's coming around now."

Out on the water, Doc detected *splashings*.

He crept to the rail. Peering through a **rusty** rivet hole, he spied 4 figures eating toward the *Grim Seas*.

Renny, Monk, Man, and Pat!

A froggy voice cried: "*Stop them! Who let them get away?*"

The **Bronze Man** lifted his voice.

"Sampson! Let my friends get clear. It is in your best interest. Matters are coming to a head!"

"Nothing doing! They're escaping police prisoners. And ripe for shooting!"

Doc Savage had expected the ripping reply. he got out a small tear gas grenade ... set the charge ... and gave an overhead toss.

It landed (not by chance) at Saul Sampson's square feet and let go with a mushy *whump!*

Bawling, Sampson stormed about, his words incoherent. That settled any notions of shooting at Renny and the others.

Doc went to meet them at the anchor chain. Monk ambled over first. He wore a big grin as he wrung water out of his sleeves.

"What's the score, Doc?"

"Long Tom and Johnny are below. A battle is brewing between Goz's retinue and some hired gunmen."

"We gotta haul them two outta there," the hairy chemist said with enthusiasm.

Ham -- drooping and bedraggled -- was assisting Pat Savage over the rail.

"Am I steamed!" she hissed, looking somewhat like a half-drowned kitten. "Here I am in the thick of it at long last. And I don't have my trusty hogleg!"

"Later," Doc rapped. "Follow me."

Moving low, they reached the companion. They kept out of shooting range. Bay water was puddling about their bare feet.

Renny thumped: "Where'd that *spook* get to?"

"It hasn't emerged from below," Doc advised.

"You defeat it?"

The *Man of Bronze* shook his head grimly.

"The way the *thing* can go through walls," Monk said warily, "it could be anywhere on this tub."

Doc motioned for silence. From below, a voice was speaking groggily.

"We must escape these American police. I must not be captured."

"Who's that?" Ham hissed.

"King Goz the First," Doc supplied.

"Huh?"

The voice continued.

"Nothing matters but my escape. I will not return to Merida. I will be a puppet no longer."

Pat wondered: "What is he talked about ... 'Puppet'?"

Then they heard the *whistling*. It filtered up from the *rust*-fouled innards of the ship.

"What are we waiting on?" Renny boomed.

"Sharpshooter below," Doc advised.

"That so? I'll fix him."

And the gloomy-faced engineer produced the blue automatic he had earlier taken from a gunman. It looked like a toy in his gargantuan **fist**.

He pointed it downward and with his smallest finger (it was the only one that would fit inside the trigger guard!) fired.

The echoes were **deafening**. But a groan came back.

Doc pitched down, vaulting over a writhing body. The others pounded after him.

He called back: "Get that man on deck."

Pat and the others fell to that task.

The **Bronze Man** followed the *whistling*.

There was *shouting* now. A gun **banged!** A man *screamed*.

Doc Savage pitched forward.

In the litter-strewn stateroom, men were backing away from a *rust-red* wall ...

*... because coming through the rusty surface was the **Whistling Wraith!***

It paused as if to allow lesser mortals to drink in their own stupefaction. Then *it* spoke.

"King Goz of Merida, hear my curse. You have no wealth, no refuge, no escape. Throw yourself on the mercy of the American police and be returned to your country and your people. This is the decree of Fausto."

A frightened voice (not the King's) cried: "*Fausto is dead! Long dead!*"

"I am Fausto! And I have followed you all to this strange land to undo your wicked schemes."

"I will not go back!" Egil Goz screamed.

The **Wraith** advanced.

"Stop him!" Goz shrieked.

The gunmen ignored the command. They kept firing.

But the retinue of Meridan courtiers were used to obeying their monarch.

"Throw yourself at him!" Goz shouted. "You are my servants. It is your duty!"

Doc Savage lifted his voice then.

"Enough have died because of one man. It must stop here."

It was rare that the **Bronze Man's** voice had no effect. But the room was charged with emotion. All eyes were on the **Whistling Wraith**.

Cowering, King Goz began shoving reluctant courtiers toward the oncoming **figure**.

One tried to brain it with the butt of his gun. The scepter snaked out and the man fell twitching to the **rusty** floor.

King Goz grabbed a man. "You! Your turn!"

*It was too much ... The **figure** coming through the walls ... The inability of mortal lead to stop it ... The police outside ...*

The courtier who had been grabbed turned savagely on his monarch. Lifting the barrel of his gun, he shot the King from temple-to-temple, crying: "My brother died protecting your cowardly life!"

From the **Wraith** came a long, astonished howl of anger.

Like a **scarlet** bat, **it** surged forward and descended upon the man who had murdered his own king, felling him.

There was a mad rush for the exit. Doc got out of the way. He wall-but-ignored as the men charged out.

The **Wraith** started after them, its eyes cold and venomous.

Then -- as if changing its mind -- stopped and walked back into the wall from which it had materialized.

Doc Savage pitched deeper into the ship and collected Long Tom and Johnny who had taken refuge in the engine room.

"Come on!"

They worked their way back, rejoining Renny and the others who had returned after taking care of the wounded man.

Monk demanded: "Where did the dang **Wraith** go?"

"No time!" Doc rapped. "Make for the deck!"

"What about the **Wraith**?"

"The **Wraith** is up to something."

"What?"

"Something was said earlier about *poison gas*."

Renny thumped: "A bluff, right?"

"Maybe not."

The **bronze giant** swept them up the complaining steps.

Deep in the innards of the rust bucket that was the Grim Seas, an extended **hissing** began.

And like the breath of a cave-dwelling dragon, a **yellowish** cloud rolled along the rusty corridor.

"Move!"

Doc Savage had recognized the stuff. he knew the gas type and could duplicate it (in fact had). So he knew that without completely enveloping gas-proof suits, they were helpless.

The stuff settled. Therefore it would be thicker in the hold, in the boiler room.

But it was already sending creeping, sinuous **yellow** fingers up the companion. To remain would be inviting disaster.

They mounted the steps and ran smack into a young war!

The deck had cleared of Doc's smokescreen. The police below were shooting upward. Shooting at anything that moved!

On deck, the gunmen were returning fire. They had the advantage of height. But they were ineffective, their fire ragged. Also, they were not well-armed. Only one Tommy-gun was racketing.

Bullets snapped at the companion entrance and whined away.

"Trapped!" Renny boomed. "What can we do?"

The Bronze Man felt of his many-pocketed vest. His fingers came out empty. He had exhausted much of his bag of tricks.

His **flake-gold eyes** -- little fires in them -- went back to the **yellow** seepage collecting in the bowels of the hulk. The **gas** was mounting the **rusty** steps like a silent voracious beast.

He turned to the dapper Ham Brooks.

"Still carry that cigarette lighter?"

"Of course."

"Give it here."

"But why ..."

"Now!"

Ham surrendered the lighter. It was a jeweled thing of platinum. An affectation for the dapper lawyer did not smoke.

Doc thumbed the trinket to *flame*.

"Get set to go over the rail," he warned, running backward.

Monk Mayfair -- the chemist -- caught on and gulped.

"Blazes!"

"Exactly," Doc said tossing the lighter down.

They were taking a big chance. They all knew it.

If the *flame* went out before reaching the gas, they would be running through a thick fusillade of bullets. On the other hand, to delay would be to risk catching the consequences of Doc's action.

They were over the side when the condemned hulk shuddered from stern-to-rudder like a stricken thing.

It was not an explosion. Not as such. The sound was more a *whuff!* than a **Boom!**

But the bolted-over portholes here-and-there violently ejected their steel plates. *Fire* vomited out from chinks, empty rivet holes, companions, and vents along deck and *rust*-scabbed hull.

Doc Savage, his aides, and Pat Savage were dropping into the water by that time. They were forced to leap from the bay side of the ship (the other being too shallow).

They had luck. The shock of the *fiery* gases coming out of every seam and rent in the rusty old hulk had quelled police firing.

They bobbed to the surface and struck out for the harbor boats.

"Hold your fire!" Doc called.

"Why should we?" Saul Sampson shouted back.

"Because we surrender."

The police held their fire. But that was not the end of it.

The gunmen along the deck were trying to get out of the *flame*-licked ship too. They fought for the privilege of clambering down the anchor chain. Some jumped. Others ran around searching for a safe hiding place.

Then the *Wraith* showed itself once more.

In the water, Doc Savage and the others learned this when a hoarse *foreign*-sounding voice cried: "*It is the ghost of Fausto! It had emerged from the flames to punish us for Goz's perfidy!*"

They stopped their swimming and began treading water ...

... and saw the *Whistling Wraith* come out of a wall of *fire* that blocked a companion!

"Blazes!" Monk squeaked. "Even fire don't hurt it none!"

The *scarlet apparition* floated along the deck in full view. It was moving along the near rail, its face satyrlike in the *hellish* light.

A police sharpshooter took a shot at it.

In the dark, he was never sure if he struck it or not. *It* kept going.

"Somebody put a light on that thing!" Sampson called out.

A searchlight swung into play. It had been spotlighting the bow. Now it swept back.

The beam crossed the wizened face of the *Whistling Wraith*, struck it full in the eyes.

The *Wraith* showed its one human characteristic then.

It threw a hand before its black orbs to shield them from the **glare**.

Atop its head, the great oversized crown wobbled. The *Wraith* reached up with both hands to steady the ungainly object ...

... and a second **beam** of light caught it full in the face!

The light -- of enormous **candlepower** -- must have been painful to the optic nerves. Off balance, the *Wraith* brought protective hands down again.

It swayed. And the precariously-balanced crown tumbled off its head!

A simple thing. But the *Wraith* was suddenly galvanized as if some momentous fright had seized it.

It lashed out to recapture its splendid crown. Gnarled hands snatched and fumbled.

Whether it would have been successful, no one was ever to know.

A strange inhuman cry came from the *specter's* lips.

For the *Whistling Wraith*, leaning out, seemed to forget that it was no more corporeal than mist.

It passed through the unresisting rusty rail of the *Grim Seas* ...

... and floated down!

Like a *scarlet* feather almost weightless, it sank toward the water.

An uncanny sight. Crown tumbling ahead of it, kicking legs passing in-and-out of the rusty hull in ghostly fashion, *it* was madly clutching for the lost symbol of Royalty.

And when it struck the water, there was no splash. Just the heaving black water swallowing a fragment of *red* silk.

Without warning, Doc Savage plunged beneath the surface, his *eyes* wild.

The others -- swapping looks -- dived after him.

It was dark below. Police searchlights crossing and uncrossing sent out long questing fingers of illumination.

They could see then.

The *bronze giant* was swimming furiously. Swimming toward the *Whistling Wraith* who was continuing its slow downward fall.

The water seemed not to support it. Its mouth was open and gulping like a fish. No bubbles of air emerged.

It was still scrambling for its crown. And its scepter.

To no avail.

Doc Savage came up on the *thing*. He tried to capture it. But he might as well have been attempting to lay hands on a streak of red sunlight.

Bronzed fingers clenched, snapped, and clenched some more. Each time, the *Whistling Wraith* defied his touch.

But this time, the apparition no longer reveled in its awesome power to defy capture. Seeing the *Bronze Man*, it reached back as if grasping a straw. *A straw with no more substance than itself.*

Soon, it floated to the silty harbor bottom. And kept going.

Like a man drowning in quicksand, the Whistling Wraith struggled, floundered ... all to no avail.

Enervated by the urgency of the situation, Doc Savage attempted to scoop up handfuls of silt to keep the *specter* from dropping from sight completely.

But the situation was hopeless. The silt swallowed him from sight. The last glimpse they had of the *Whistling Wraith* was its head, black eyes stark and unbelieving. They held a doomed, mournful light.

The others pitched in then. Frantic fingers dug into the bottom of the bay.

But all they accomplished was to stir up cloudy murk through which police searchlights prowled silently.

Then their air ran out. They swam back to the surface.

They only noticed the presence of Inspector Saul Sampson in the water then. His eyes were wide and unbelieving liked skinned grapes. He followed them up.

Doc Savage -- with the power to hold his breath for prodigious lengths of time (a skill learned from the pearl divers of the South Seas) remained below.

After they got air back into their lungs, Monk, Ham, Pat, and the others returned to the bottom of the bay.

The silt had settled some. Doc Savage was swimming about searching, his bronze fingers feeling under the silt. In vain, they knew.

Monk Mayfair got the Bronze Man's attention and -- using the deaf-and-dumb sign language that they all knew -- signaled that it was hopeless.

The wild urgency went out of Doc's *eyes*. He signaled back.

"O-K"

Together, they returned to the surface.

XXVII -- Crown of Guilt

"Don't anyone ever tell *ghost* stories around me again," Pat Savage said after Doc's head broke the surface. "Brrr! I never believed in such things. But after tonight ..."

"It was no ghost," Doc said quietly.

"My foot! I saw it. You saw it. We all saw it!"

"Yes. But it can be explained."

"**Fine!**" bellowed the bullfrog voice of Push-'em-Down Sampson, bobbing not far distant. "I'm going to want to hear all about it."

A **searchlight** swept across the dark water blinding them.

Shielding his eyes, Doc said: "The fire should have burned out the poison gas. Much can be explained aboard the ship."

"I can hardly wait!" Sampson said fiercely.

They allowed themselves to be helped out of the water and on to the police boats where they set about the arduous task of wringing water out of such sopping clothes as they had managed to retain through the hectic events of the last several hours.

The police had already collected most of the gunmen and the remnants of King Goz's retinue. The fight was out of them. They looked dazed, spiritless. They stood about under heavy guard.

"You," Sampson told Doc, "are under arrest. The charges are counterfeiting, assassination of a high government official ..."

The **Bronze Man** lifted a palm that was scraped raw by numerous **rusty** encounters.

"If you will allow us some leeway, we can explain everything."

"Including that fright show I just saw?"

"You mean the **Wraith**?"

"That," Sampson said, "is a better name for it than I had thought up."

He added "And politer too" as he saw Pat Savage.

"The **Wraith** can be explained."

"And so can the counterfeiting charge," Pat added.

To Doc, she said: "Inspector Bullfrog here descended on me when I was trying to get those bonds out of Drago's place."

"Caught red-handed!" Push-'em-Down retorted. "Along with the counterfeiting setup that printed them."

"The bonds are real," Doc said.

"Hah!"

"If you check, you will find the serial numbers match the bogus bonds found in the U.S. Treasury. And others which ended up in investor hands."

"If you know that much, it makes you an accomplice with Goldwill and whoever else is involved in this extortion."

"That reminds me," Doc said. "Where is Joan Manville?"

Pat answered that.

"She showed up Drago's before Sampson did. Alone. I spilled the beans, Doc. I told her about Prestowitz's death. I figured it would jar some truth out of her."

Sampson demanded: "Who's Prestowitz?"

"She took it hard," Pat continued, ignoring the squat inspector. "When the police came, they had to take her away."

Doc turned to Inspector Sampson.

"You might," he said, "have Miss Manville brought here."

*Elaborately, Saul Sampson expectorated on the deck and considered the **Bronze Man**'s request at some length.*

Finally, he nodded to a patrolman who went to the ship's radio.

Then Sampson addressed the others.

"Somebody want to tell me who this Prestowitz is? And while you're at it, identify the bodies found in Long Island."

He gave Doc the eye.

"You should have erased that message, Savage. The one that said '**Grim Seas**'. I used to pound a beat a Gravesend, you know. The name meant something to me when I heard about it."

"Precisely why I did not obliterate it," Doc stated quietly.

"Tall talk!" Sampson snorted.

"As for Caspar Prestowitz," Doc said, "Miss Manville can explain him. But his was one of the bodies found in my warehouse place."

"And the two found at the Long Island wreck?"

"General Graul Frontenac of Merida and a fellow countryman."

Sampson arched a squareish eyebrow.

"The General that lost the King?"

"The very same."

"So this mess does hook in with the hullabaloo down in Washington!"

"It does."

"Hell's fire!" Sampson roared. "That does it! You're all going to the hold-over for questioning."

Monk put in: "You want explanations. Maybe you should listen and not shoot off your yap so much."

Inspector gave the hairy chemist an appraising look.

"I think I met your brother one time at the Bronx zoo. He peeled a mean banana."

Ham tittered mirth at that.

The Bronze Man offered: "This derelict ship was a temporary hideout for the retinue of King Goz. It is here that they were guarding something important."

"The king?"

"And more. If you care to see for yourself."

"Okay," Sampson relented. "Let's investigate that hooker."

The police boats warped alongside the Grim Seas. Lines were made fast. Under police guns, Doc Savage and his party were allowed to mount the deck.

Gingerly, they went down the main companion. The air was acrid with smoke stink. It was pungent. But not harmful to inhale. The *poison gas* had been highly **flammable**. One match had consumed it.

The *Man of Bronze* first took them to the litter-strewn storage room. The body of King Goz of Merida lay there. Dead. The quantity of brain matter that had been splashed about made further examination unnecessary.

"Who's the stiff?" Sampson asked callously.

"The missing King," Doc explained.

"Who croaked him? You?"

"His own people."

"That wasn't the missing King we saw fall into the ..."

The strange look came into Sampson's eye again.

"... the water?"

"No. It might have been reasonable to connect King Goz with the **Whistling Wraith**. But it was clear to me from the first time I beheld the latter that they could not be one and the same."

"Why not? White whiskers make a good disguise."

"The **Wraith** wore silk and ermine," Doc pointed out. "King Goz was a Mohammedan to whom the wearing of such animal products is forbidden."

Sampson grunted.

Doc next led them to the panel leading into the hold. Here the gas had been thickest. The **rusty** walls were now scorched to a black gritty finish resembling burnt toast.

"I ain't crawling through that rat hole," Sampson said of the aperture.

Fire axes were brought. Police made short work of the wall, widening it enough that they could step into the hold.

The burlap bags draped over boxes were singed and blackened. The one that had been hanging on the wall had fallen in a formless pile, revealing the combination dial and handle of the old hulk's safe.

"If you will allow me?" Doc said.

Sampson grunted his assent.

The **Bronze Man** worked the dial. It complained. A little of the **rust** that permeated the rotting derelict must have gotten into the mechanism.

But it surrendered soon enough. The door came open.

Sampson shoved his head in. The others crowded forward. By their expressions, most half expected to find a body ...

Instead, they saw stacks-and-stacks of wealth. Some of it was **gold** in small ingots. Others represented cash of various nations. There were bonds too. British Consuls and French Rentes.

But by far the greatest quantities of printed matter were Liberty Bonds.

Saul Sampson cocked a thumb.

"There the counterfeits?"

"Real," Doc said.

"Not more of the missing ones?"

"No. They have nothing to do with cache found at Drago's home. These represent -- in large measure -- the stolen wealth of the people of Merida."

"Yeah? Who stole them?"

"King Goz."

Sampson's blocky jaw dropped.

"You trying to tell me that Goz pulled his own disappearing act?"

Doc nodded. "The King was absconding with his nation's wealth."

"But why? He was the king for Hell's sake! Why would he need to do that?"

Just then, a voice called down.

"Inspector! The dame is here!"

Doc advised: "Miss Manville will be able to explain the rest."

"This," Sampson gritted, tossing the bonds back into the safe, "had better be one heck of an explanation. Or the lot of you are going to be making little ones out of big ones till Hell's fire freezes solid."

They repaired to the **rusty** deck of the *Grim Seas*. *The breathing was better there, anyway.*

Joan Manville had not been handcuffed. She looked the picture of defeat. Her natural beauty -- which could be enhanced by make-up or washed out to deceptive plainness -- was absent. She was pale, withdrawn, her gray eyes downcast.

"My actual name," she said without preamble, "is Jone Vernelle. And I am -- or was -- a secret agent in the service of Santa Bellanca."

"Holy cow!" Renny boomed.

Sampson snapped: "Shut up, you! Let her tell her!"

Jone Vernelle moistened colorless lips.

"I have lied from the first. But one thing was truth. Caspar Prestowitz is ... was my fiancé."

"I keep hearing that name," Sampson growled. "But not who he is."

"Caspar Prestowitz is one of the great inventors of our time," Jone Vernelle elaborated. "He invented a device which he realized could make him a fortune if he sold it to certain unscrupulous countries. He had no interest in doing so. Instead, he decided to hire out himself and the device to the highest bidder. The first country he approached was Carrullana which desired information about its Balkan rival -- Merida.

"Using this device, Caspar spied on the King of Merida and learned that he was planning to abscond with his nation's wealth. You might wonder why a king should do that."

"It had crossed my mind," Sampson allowed dryly.

"It is well-known that in recent years, the King was forced to turn to its European neighbor Santa Bellanca for protection against territorial encroachment. But there was a price attached.

"Officers of the Federal Army of Santa Bellanca assumed command of key Meridan military units. Santa Bellancan banks and financial advisers grew in power until their influence rivaled that of the King's.

"In time, this arrangement grew chafing. The King was reduced to being a puppet of the leader of Santa Bellanca. And having seen what happened to a defenseless African nation that Santa Bellanca coveted, the King feared for the absorption of his nation into the other.

"I begin to see where this leads," Johnny murmured.

"Hush!" Pat snapped. "I want to hear this from the mare's own mouth."

Jone Vernelle continued in a hollow, drained voice.

"King Goz decided to vanish, taking with him the wealth of his people, much of it invested in Liberty Bonds. He told only certain trusted aides. Men who were sworn to secrecy and who would participate in the faking of his disappearance.

"Caspar learned of this and realized -- greed had possessed him by now -- that this information was worth more to the dictator of Santa Bellanca than it would be to Carrullana's president. But he could not learn of the time, place, or method of the planned vanishing.

"By this time, it was too late to influence the King to abandon his plan. So Caspar agreed to assist in the dictator's scheme to force the King to return to his throne -- an obedient puppet of Santa Bellanca once more."

Jone Vernelle drew in a long sad breath of contrition.

"I was a part of that scheme, first playing the part of 'Barbara Bland' in an effort to learn where the King had disappeared to. Caspar was pretending to be a financial agent for H. Startland Drago. In fact,

it was Caspar who planted the counterfeit bonds in the U.S. Treasury. A scheme that was already under way in anticipation of the King's evanishment."

"Wait a minute!" Monk exploded. "Laurence Kingsley Goldwill's thumbprint was found on them counterfeit bonds."

"A fake," Doc said. "An impression was made of the thumb in wax and carefully planted."

"How did you know?" Jone wondered.

"Telltale perspiration oils did not come to light under a chemical test. That meant the print was not made by human skin."

Jone Vernelle nodded somberly.

"Somebody tell me how this Caspar fellow got in -and-out of the Treasury," Sampson demanded. "That place is a fortress."

"Caspar Prestowitz," Jone Vernelle stated, "was the person many mistook for Old King Fausto."

"He was?" Sampson's voice was a deep, astonished croak.

"The device he invented enabled him to pass through solid objects. It consisted of a helmet and a control wand. Knowing of the legend of the *shade* of Fausto, he rebuilt them to create the imposture so that if he were seen moving about the royal castle, it would be dismissed as superstition. Or explained away as a haunting by those credulous to believe in such things."

"Us? Believe in haunts?" Pat scoffed. "Never!"

"The crown was the helmet and the scepter the control wand," Jone explained further. "Vacuum tubes were sewn into his thick cloak and connected to the other elements by insulating wires. You see, the crown functioned as a kind of generator creating an electromagnetic field effect. In the event of an electrical problem, he carried a hollowed orb housing a tear gas generator so he could escape difficulty under smokescreen cover. The scepter -- which was tipped with an exposed electrode -- could also be used as a frightening weapon. It contained a powerful dry-cell battery which supplied the generator crown with current.

Renny rumbled: "So that's what laid me out that time! That rod sure packed a jolt!"

"It nearly finished me," Doc related grimly, "the second time I encountered its effects."

Saul Sampson -- who had been listening to all this with an increasing loose-jawed expression -- now exploded.

"I don't believe in ghosts! Everybody understand that? But I don't buy no gimmick that would make a man so he could walk through walls, either. That's bunk!"

"Not bunk," Doc Savage said. "But the application of one of the more fundamental rules of atomic matter."

"Which is?"

"That matter is not solid. It only appears to be."

Sampson pounded a square fist on a stanchion! It came away **redder** than before.

"You can't tell me that ain't solid."

"Matter as we understand it," Doc related calmly, "is composed of molecules. Which in turn are collections of atoms -- the smallest particles known to Man. As every schoolboy knows, each atom is made up of a central nucleus and electrons, all whirling in orbits. The model of a solar system with planets orbiting a star -- or the nucleus -- is a perfect illustration. These planet-like electrons orbit at incredible speeds, creating the illusion of a solid shell just as a whirling airplane propeller appears to be a solid disk to the casual eye."

"Sure," Monk said. "It's the positive electric charge of the nucleus that keeps the electrons in line, so to speak."

"On the atomic level, there are great spaces between nuclei and their electrons," Doc continued. "Most of the atom is, in fact, composed of empty space. Just as you cannot insert your hand between the blades of a spinning prop, electrons repel other electrons. If it were possible to manipulate the atomic constituent of an object so the tiny nucleus and its always-moving electrons filter between the atomic components of other matter instead of colliding, it is conceivable that an object thus treated will pass safely through another seemingly solid object without harm to either."

"Or a person," Jone Vernelle inserted. "Oh, I do not understand the theory perfectly. But it is much as Mr. Savage has said. Wearing the electric crown and control wand, Caspar could enter any room and pass through any object immune from harm. Because his atoms were charged so that they repelled the electrons and nuclei of any object he encountered when in the intangible state. Any person or object carried within the field was similarly intangible."

Johnny ran bony fingers through his longish hair. "Now we know how he got the fake bonds into the Treasury and the real ones out again. As well as repeatedly stealing that sword to confound us."

"Caspar found by experimenting," Jone added, "that it was sometimes necessary to adjust the field so that he was **semi-solid**. When climbing stairs or riding elevators for example."

"That explains how the **Wraith** was able to ride our elevator down," Ham said slowly. "But when Monk tried to take him back up, his atoms went through the cage floor like sand through a sieve."

"And how I could thrust my hand into the **Wraith's** apparently ghostly body and yet be unable to withdraw it," Doc added. "By manipulation of the wand, he effected a subtle change in his atomic state, making it more akin to a colloid than a gas or a liquid, his preferred state."

"Something don't add up here," Monk growled.

Jone Vernelle looked faintly curious. "Yes?"

"You say Prestowitz was the **Wraith**. But we saw the **Wraith** after Prestowitz turned up in our safe croaked."

Jone Vernelle paled visibly. She wavered on her feet.

Oddly enough, Long Tom came to her aid. He held her cool hand until she had recovered.

"Thank you," she said meekly.

Then the electrical wizard withdrew, looking thoughtfully at his shoes.

"Caspar was the first '**Wraith**' as you call it," she related, her voice itself a ghost. "There were two."

Pat Savage turned to Monk Mayfair.

"So that's why I saw a **blue**-eyed spook and yours was **black**-eyed. They weren't the same person!"

"I'll be danged!" the apish chemist shouted. "Makes sense to me."

Johnny asked: "So who was the second *specter*?"

"It should be obvious by now," Doc Savage said. "The man who masterminded the financial scheme to compel King Goz to return to his throne was the only man with the inside knowledge of the King's financial affairs and the power and influence to carry out the plot. A man who had close ties to the Santa Bellanca dictator and did not care if he wrecked the American economy in the pursuit of his aims. Or his own business enterprise.

"Yes," Jone Vernelle intoned. "**H. Startland Drago is the Wraith. The evil Wraith.** Caspar murdered no one. It was not in him to do so."

"I hope somebody is writing all this down," Saul Sampson muttered to no one in particular. "I ain't got the gray matter to hold all this."

Jone Vernelle went on in a faint voice.

"When H. Startland Drago learned that the Meridan footman had been murdered with the royal sword, he reasoned that it was the work of King Goz who was attempting to lay the blame on the spirit of King Fausto in whom he implicitly believed, having happened upon him in his own caste."

"And Drago hit upon the idea of stealing the sword, using it as a way to further confuse the issue," Doc stated.

Jone Vernelle nodded.

"We had been making no progress in our search for the King when the appearance of Doc Savage in Washington changed matters. H. Startland Drago ordered me to make contact with Mr. Savage in the hope that it would lead me to King Goz. While I was pretending to be 'Barbara Bland', Caspar had gone to Mr. Savage's **Headquarters** hoping to learn what he could of any progress by eavesdropping."

"That's when I spotted him!" Pat said. "Prestowitz waylaid me right after. I should have connected the two. But I didn't."

"As I understand it," Jone Vernelle went on, "Caspar was forced to assume his Fausto disguise in order to escape from Doc Savage's men in Virginia. He had already been instructed to steal the sword of Merida from the morgue and bring it to Drago."

"Drago, I now know, coveted the *Wraith* device. He knew if forced to embark on his scheme to void the Liberty Bond issue, Drago&Company would be no more. And Caspar's failed abduction of Miss Savage could not be adequately explained. Drago decided that Caspar had to die. I imagine that they fought. Or I hope they did."

She shuddered.

"I would hate to think that Drago murdered him in cold blood without a fight."

"From then on with his face aged by make-up, the *Whistling Wraith* was H. Startland Drago," Doc said.

Jone Vernelle nodded. "Unable to locate the King, he embarked upon his great plan. The Press was tipped off to the counterfeit bonds. That ignited a panic. Drago knew he would be summoned to testify before Congress. But to pull off his scheme, he needed a scapegoat. Someone to take the blame."

"Laurence Kingsley Goldwill!" This from Saul Sampson.

"He was perfect. Currently under indictment and reviled, he could never clear himself. Certainly not after Drago sent out all those demand letters in his name, implicating him in a fictitious plot to force America to abandon money. He was then murdered and planted in Doc Savage's office safe to close the books on him and remove Mr. Savage from the picture."

"A double frame!" Sampson breathed.

"And you fell for it, flatfoot," Monk muttered. "Hook, line, and sinker."

Sampson glowered. "Let her finish. This is interesting."

"If you like ghost stories!" Monk snorted.

"Where was Goldwill all this time?" Sampson prompted.

"A prisoner in Drago's attic. That had been planned from the start. To make it look good, Seymour Holman had tied Drago up in Goldwill's apartment to make it appear as if Drago had been kidnapped by Goldwill."

"It was a clever scheme," Doc Savage said. "I was hoodwinked into opening the Drago safe and picking up the false trail to Goldwill's where I found Drago a seeming 'prisoner'."

Renny Renwick -- a tower of bone and gloom in the night -- blurted: "Wait a minute! Drago was under police guard. How'd he come-and-go so easy?"

"A secret exit from the attic," Doc explained. "It was easy enough to climb down a great oak and slip away without attracting police notice. Drago did this while we were guarding him, too. His penchant for seclusion made his absences go virtually unnoticed.

"So when I left him with Ham that time," Monk exploded, "he just slipped out the back and beat me to our *Headquarters* where he planted Prestowitz in our safe!"

"Exactly."

Monk turned to Ham Brooks.

"Some watchdog you turned out to be, shyster!"

Jone Vernelle said: "That was my fault. I kept Mr. Brooks entertained the entire time, distracting him."

Ham colored.

"I could not let his knuckle-dragging gorilla get away with telling fibs about my matrimonial situation," he snapped. "I had to clear my good name."

The *Man of Bronze* picked up the explanations from there.

"Once Drago persuaded Congress to void the Liberty issue, it was necessary for him to disappear. He did this when his limousine was blocked by a truck. He simply donned the Fausto disguise and slipped from the solid car unseen."

Renny grunted. "I remember that Holman cut the car in front of that moving truck."

"Where is that little clunk anyway," Monk wanted to know.

"Forgot to tell you," Sampson said. "We found Homan outside your office. He didn't have a sword in him. But his throat had a sword-sized slash across it. I guess Drago was tying up all his loose ends just like that Goz."

Jone Vernelle said: "That happened after Drago faked his disappearance. It was Seymour who -- after giving Mr. Savage's men the slip -- took a shot at the American President. When Miss Savage took me from the Drago home to Doc Savage *Headquarters*, Drago -- as the *Whistling Wraith* -- came for me. To silence me, I now know.

"I thought I was being rescued. Otherwise I would not have gone with him. But Mr. Savage shouted to me the truth about Caspar's fate. Later, Drago denied it, then forced me to call the police to tip them off to go to Mr. Savage's warehouse. Drago was very frustrated that the police could not discover the planted bodies at the *Headquarters* and reasoned that they might be there."

"So how did you get free of Drago?" Ham asked.

"I am a secret agent, as I have told you. I have some skills and was able to fight him off and escape. I went directly to his mansion, knowing the evidence of the counterfeiting operation could be found there. The unused counterfeits had been destroyed in acid along with the plates. But there was enough evidence to take to the authorities. With Caspar dead, I no longer cared about anything."

"That' when we collided," Pat inserted. "I thought I had cracked the whole case."

She added archly: "That is, until the forces of the Law glommed us."

Saul Sampson ignored the jib.

"What I want to know is if Drago was that *ghost*, how'd he find out about the *Grim Seas*?"

Jone Vernelle seemed to have an answer for that.

"It must be that Drago deduced how I planned to expose him and trailed me to his home. He could have been secreted in one of the mansion walls listening when Inspector Sampson learned of the *Grim Seals* clue."

"Girlie," Sampson croaked, "I think you just hit the nail on the head. Too bad you got too late to do you much good."

Jone Vernelle hung her head.

"I am prepared to submit to any punishment the authorities of this Country choose to inflict."

No one spoke for long moments.

Then Saul Sampson turned to Doc Savage.

"Guess I was wrong about you, Savage."

"We all make mistakes," the **Bronze Man** said without rancor. "I am not without blame. Although I quickly determined how King Goz had managed his vanishing act and exposed myself to danger in the hope of panicking those responsible into making an attempt on my life, I did not at first suspect that 2 opposing forces -- the Goz group and the Drago group -- were at war with one another.

"It was not until H. Startland Drago testified before Congress that the true picture began taking shape. By then, it was nearly too late. King Goz -- realizing that Drago who had unwittingly helped him convert the stolen Meridan wealth into his Liberty Bonds -- was now attempting to bankrupt him and took steps to capture the banker at his home."

"Yeah," Renny muttered. "Capturing us instead. Holy cow! But there's sure enough 'facial egg' to go around if you ask me."

"This ain't over yet," Sampson said, indicating a hint of orange creeping up over the Staten Island hills. "Somebody's got to get word to Washington that the real bonds have turned up."

Doc cast his steady gaze upon Inspector Push-'em'-Down Sampson.

"I think you should do that."

"Why me?"

"My aides and I do not care for publicity."

Sampson made a skeptical noise deep in his throat.

"It's true," Pat said firmly.

Then looking toward her famous cousin, she added archly: "But we do like a little *action* now-and-again."

"Well, you got it tonight," Doc replied.

"Speak for yourself," Pat snapped. "All I got was wet!"

"Tell that to the ones who got dead," Sampson shot back.

Pat Savage made shapes with her pretty mouth, brows, and eyes while her brain tried to come up with a suitable retort.

In the end, she lost a few shades of tan and said nothing.

Matters were wrapped up rather quickly after that.

Inspector Saul Sampson got on the police radio and communicated with his headquarters. The booty in the *Grim Seas* was confiscated with the intention that it be returned to its rightful owners -- the people of Merida.

The safe also gave up the missing supermachine pistols, thus ending that particular worry. The tiny weapons were too dangerous to be floating around loose.

Doc Savage helped with the straightening out of details. Much of this was accomplished at Police Headquarters where he made a number of calls. Most of them of a trans-Atlantic nature.

The President was informed of the situation. The bond-voiding bill was promptly vetoed and ripped up. He went on the radio, calming jitters and promising that all counterfeit Liberties would be replaced with perfectly sound originals without exception.

Later, a few enterprising criminals would attempt to pawn off their own versions. But these were easily detected by comparing serial numbers with the recovered bonds.

Wall Street threw its collective hat into the air at the good news. 'The Curb' had a memorable day, gaining a substantial number of points.

In the Balkans, the encroaching legions of Carrullana withdrew from the disputed border. Nobody knew why. No one suspected that Doc Savage had let the government of that know -- in no uncertain terms -- that he would take a personal interest in any land grab.

The dictator of Santa Bellanca made public noises. But they were uncharacteristically muted. Not wishing to further the League of Nations was his stated reason. *But fear of Doc Savage was the real explanation.*

By evening, the truth had come out. Not all of it. But enough to explain what had to be explained. And no more.

In a manner little short of miraculous, Doc Savages and his aides had managed to fade into the background. Doc did his best to escape the credit for solving the affair. He succeeded to a degree. Some newspapers even came out with editorials stating that the famous *Man of Bronze* was probably overrated.

Going over the final details in the seclusion of his **Library**, the **Bronze Man's** attitude was not especially intense. He seemed, indeed, a little tired. It was a hectic life this one which he led with **excitement** following **excitement** and almost perpetually in peril.

Ham Brooks -- who was now acting as a legal representative (at a hefty fee!) to the lawful Meridan government -- hung up the telephone after a lengthy consultation with the Washington authorities. He made an announcement.

"The King's retinue have all confessed. Looks like they are to be deported for the unhung rascals that they are."

"Betcha they don't stay 'unhung' long," Monk Mayfair observed.

"One of them told an interesting story," the dapper attorney added. "He was the man who shot the King. Seems he was also the brother of Elvern D. Kastellantz."

Renny Renwick popped one giant **fist** into the other.

"There was a real Kastellantz?!"

"The King's official chauffeur," Ham elaborated. "It was his bones that were mistaken for General Frontenac's after the **thermite** bomb failed to take Doc's life. Frontenac murdered him to cover his own tracks so he could join the King in hiding. The brother had been steamed about it for days.

"Steamed, huh?" Monk observed. "Guess you could say he just blew a gasket in the end."

That evening, Inspector Saul Sampson showed up at Doc Savage's **Headquarters** unannounced.

He entered without his usual belligerent demeanor, his hat in fidgety hands.

"I was just talking with the Commissioner," he began.

"Yes?"

"He's restoring your special commission," Sampson beamed. "I wanted to be the guy that broke the good news."

They shook hands.

"A favor in return?" Doc asked.

"Name it."

"Jones Vernelle. A more humane disposing of her case might be in order."

Sampson rubbed his square jaw.

"She ended up being as much a victim as any of them, I guess. Got anything special in mind?"

"You will have to trust me."

Sampson shrugged. "If anybody rated the trust, you surely do. I'll have her brought over."

After Sampson had taken his departure, the others crowded around.

Monk and Ham had with them their strange-looking pets -- the big-eared, spindle-legged Habeas Corpus and the strange Chemistry.

The 2 animals were making threatening noises at one another. And soon their owners were acting likewise.

Long Tom asked: "She going to our 'College'?"

Doc nodded. "She has a lot to forget."

"Yeah, she does," said Long Tom. He seemed satisfied.

Monk had a thought. He expressed it to the **Bronze Man**.

"Say! You know how they're always saying that if you dug a hole deep enough, you'd fall straight to China?"

"Yes?"

"I kinda got a notion that's where that Greedy Gus -- Drago -- is headed right about now."

"The electromagnetic generator invented by Caspar Prestowitz represents a breakthrough whose loss to Science is very regrettable," Doc said thoughtfully. "It might be an idea to organize an expedition in the hope of somehow recovering it."

They were all for the idea if for no other reason than it promised a measure of diversion.

When she heard about the expedition to China, she had a remark to make.

"I don't know about this," she said. "I seem to have the vapors or something."

And Pat had never been known to be overawed by anything or anybody. Not even Doc Savage.

[StealthSkater note: There is a more likely theory for how solid matter can go through other solid objects. This requires taking advantage of the laws of Quantum Mechanics (QM). On the subatomic level, strange behavior occurs all the time. Such behavior that is never witnessed in the normal everyday world which is governed by General Relativity (GR). QM allows for instantaneous tunneling through prohibitive energy barriers (the tunnel diode is a practical use) as well as teleportation to any part of the Universe.

If an object can be made to fake out *Mother Nature* into thinking it was of quantum-size, then it could be free of the GR rules of behavior and take advantage of QM. Perhaps such a thing already occurred in the legendary Philadelphia Experiment where massive rotating and static magnetic fields caused a ship to transport (see <http://www.stealthskater.com/PX.htm>). Indeed, a private company has already received a patent for a QM starcraft (<http://www.stealthskater.com/UNITEL.htm>). Reports of metals merging with other substances have also been noted (<http://www.stealthskater.com/Science.htm#Hutchison>).

No one knows who -- or what -- the strange being who calls himself "X Man" truly is.

He was found wandering the ruins of a crumbling Roman fort dressed in a toga and speaking classical Latin. And clutching a handful of unearthly black seeds.

*Declared insane, the X Man patiently tends his weird plants until the day -- impelled by a nameless terror -- he flees Wyndmoor Asylum to unleash a cyclone of violence that is destined to suck the mighty **Man of Bronze** into the blackest, most unbelievable mystery of his entire career.*

For far from Scotland lies a domain of Death unknown to the World and called by the ancient Latin name of Novum Eboracum (New York!).

read "The Forgotten Realm (#190) !

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