

# Bluebook FOR MEN

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The writer who has been called "the John O'Hara of the suspense story" spins a weird and frightening tale of modern voodoo in the Congo that'll raise the hair on your scalp.

# "A Dark People Thing"

By John D. Macdonald

**B**ECAUSE the tub-thumpers are now trying to turn Kirk Morgan into some kind of a folk hero, I have decided to tell the world what happened to him. I can't tell you *exactly* what happened to him, but he certainly didn't die of some jungle bug contracted under heroic conditions, like it said in the newspapers.

When Kirk Morgan died, so did El-Bar Productions, that small California corporation roncemed with, excuse the expression, packaging television serials. Nobody will ever see the 40 half-hour tapes we put in the can when we were on location last year in the Belgian Congo.

But, because of all the previous television work he did, there must be a hundred million people in this country who, at one time or another, have looked at that stern, handsome, manly face, and felt a little glow of delight when it broke into that wonderfully boyish grin from which he made, and kept, upwards of one million bucks.

I don't want to malign the deceased. But you can't get the whole picture unless you understand I despised him. In that I do not stand alone. I stand shoulder to shoulder with everybody in the movie and television industry who ever had to work with him. Also in this group you can find a couple of hundred beautiful women who got too close to him.

When he was 19 he made up that name, Kirk Morgan, hitch-hiked out the Coast, and spent twelve thin years before he finally hit it big in that first packaged series. I have heard some of the stories of those lean years from people who knew him then, and they are not tales to tell the kiddies. Some people explain him by saying that it took so long to hit it big, he got very hungry, but I think that even if he had hit it big the first month he got out here, he would have been the same monster, only younger.

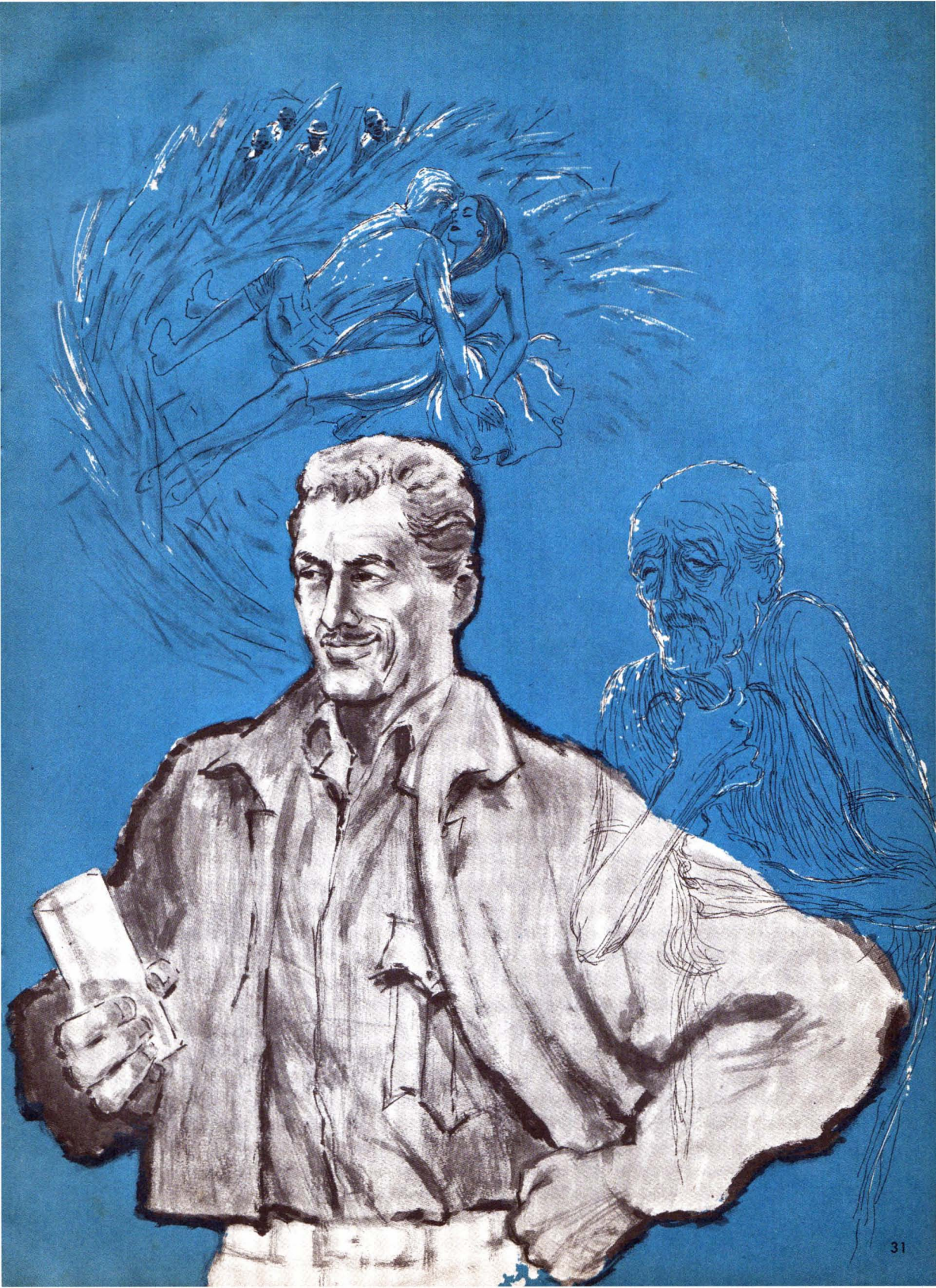
Here is the way this Africa series, that'll never be shown, came about. It was to have been called SAFARI, by the way. Morgan could have continued in GUNNER'S MATE another couple of seasons anyway, but the ratings had slipped just a little, and he got restless and said he was going stale and he wanted a new vehicle for his quote talent unquote.

I was working as a Unit Manager with El-Bar, mostly on those items where Barry Driscoll was the producer-director. Morgan was able to bite off a pretty good stock interest, of course. While Barry, who is a nervous little guy with better taste than he's able to use, was looking for a new series suitable for Kirk Morgan, an old pro named Mark Weese hit us with this safari idea, and some sample scripts. It was a first look, and it hung together, and it had some pazzazz; so Barry sold the idea to Kirk Morgan, who said fine, maybe because he liked the way he looked in one of those white-hunter helmets. El-Bar blew over seventy thousand making two pilot films with a faked background, and the agency loved them and the sponsor adored them, so we were in business.

For a lot of tax reasons too complicated to go into, it was decided we'd shoot all the scripts in the Congo. Barry Driscoll has that rare knack of getting a lot of good work out of pickup talent, so the only cast we had to transport was Our Hero, Kirk Morgan, his True Love, Nancy Rome—who is a shrewd, tough, talented broad, and a joy to work with, the Comedy Relief—Sam Corren, a fat whiner who is scared of germs and heart trouble, and the Other Woman, Luara (no, that is not a typo) Walden, a new, slinky type, and a devout reader of the scriptures.

Aside from Barry, Mark Weese and me, we cut the rest of the production crew down to eight guys, eight top guys, (Continued on page 73)







## "Dark People Thing"

Continued from page 30

armed with Ampex stuff treated for tropical use. That cut it to the point where we could fly in. I flew to Leopoldville early last June, taking most of the shooting crew and a lot of the gear with me. Our experts had told us that you get the right weather from June through September. Hot dry days and cool nights, and no rain at all.

I got us settled into the Regina Hotel and made arrangements for air-conditioned accommodations for the whole group. I put the big letter of credit through the Banque Centrale, located a Frenchman with good English who knew the local scene and, through him; began to arrange transportation, power, labor—all the hundreds of things that have to be lined up before you can shoot the first frame. His name was Rene du Palais, a lean sad-faced joker about 40, an importer with time on his hands. You didn't have to tell him anything twice. The Banque Centrale had recommended him.

When the rest of our group and the rest of the gear arrived ten days later, I was feeling almost optimistic, which is a dangerous state of mind in this business. I was further along than I had hoped to be, and I had the childish faith that this was one time when things would go as smooth as butter.

Barry Driscoll acted jittery but fairly cheerful. Kirk Morgan was half-drunk, noisy and foul-mouthed. Mark Weese, who had been working day and night getting scripts blocked out, looked exhausted. Nancy Rome hugged me and said I was the only thing in Africa she was glad to see.

On the way in from the airport, I explained to them about how this was two cities, with 20,000 whites in one and 400,000 blacks in the other, with the blacks commuting over to work each day. I said I had almost all the documents and licenses and permissions lined up, and how we had found a dandy man in this Rene du Palais.

I got them all sorted into their rooms, and when I had my first chance to be alone with Barry Driscoll, he explained Kirk Morgan's foul mood to me. Kirk had known better than try to move in on Nancy, who wouldn't have touched him with a barge pole, and so he had tried to set up one of his typical relationships with our Luara Walden. But, after a good start, he had tried to rush it too much, and she had righteously slugged him with a very heavy historical novel and told him to watch his language when in the company of ladies.

"Morgan needs a conquest to mend his self-esteem, Joe," Barry told me. "Will he have any special problems around here?"

On the basis of my ten days of observation, I said I didn't think he

would have any problems at all, and Barry seemed relieved. "Whoever the lucky lady turns out to be," he said, "our only problem will be keeping her off camera. Morgan likes to make big promises."

I knew from experience that Kirk Morgan was going to be an amalgam of all the heroes he had played in the past, and he was going to posture for twenty-four hours a day, but with luck I wouldn't have to be exposed to it too long. Once we were really rolling we hoped to average out at two sequences a day, so that we could wrap up the whole ball of wax in three weeks.

We were in, I suppose, deepest Africa. But the climate was fine and, except for the pressure of work, the living was easy. The locals were friendly and helpful. I won't go into the plots we were setting up to shoot. Let's just say they were adequate for the medium involved.

You would be seeing one of them every Tuesday evening this season, and Kirk Morgan would still be an active menace to maidenhood, had not Rene du Palais been damn fool enough to bring his 19-year-old daughter to watch the first day of shooting. Her name was Therese. She had been educated in a convent. She was engaged to be married as soon as her young man finished his army service and came back home to Leopoldville.

I met her mother later, a dumpty flabby woman whose muddy skin tones spoke of complex racial mixtures. Perhaps, once upon a time, she had looked like Therese. It was hard to believe. Therese was slender, shy, innocent, with smoky hair, huge gray eyes, skin of velvet, ivory and gold. The agents of kings used to search for just such women.

**R**ene brought her out in his antique Renault, brought her proudly, in dust and clatter, to watch the Americans perform their tribal rites.

Exposing Therese to Kirk Morgan was as predictable as tossing a fat grubworm into a hen yard. And it happened almost as quickly.

Though Morgan had muffed the approach to Luara Walden, don't look on him as a clumsy clown. He usually adjusted his stalk to fit the quarry. Though for the past week and a half he had been ordering Rene around on childish errands, the moment Morgan took one long look at the girl, Rene and his daughter somehow became the special and honored guests of that great star, Kirk Morgan. We all saw it beginning, and if any one of us could have thought of a good way to stop it, I like to think we would have. Maybe we all hoped he wouldn't be able to get her away from her father's watchful eye.

I guess he set her up with the greatest of care, because she was so obviously worth great care. Though he had shown absolutely no interest in any part of Equatorial Africa, he suddenly became a tourist in need of a guide. An elderly female relative

chaperoned them. She did not have much English, but Therese had more than enough. They saw the view of the city from Mount Leopold. They ferried across the river to Brazzaville. They saw Point Kalina and the Cristal Mountains, the Stanley Pool, the Belvedere and de Bock Park.

I remember talking to Barry Driscoll about it over some midnight bourbon in his hotel room, saying, "I've hinted to Rene, but all he says is that Therese is a very good girl and Mr. Morgan is being very kind to her, and it was a boring life for her before we arrived."

"At least," Barry said wearily, "Morgan is easy to get along with on the set. Think of her as a sacrifice to creative harmony, Joe."

"Can you think of her that way?" "Hell, no! And so maybe he scores and somebody blows his head off, and then what happens to this crummy deodorant series? Remember, Joey, the public worships him. So we are all making money. Go to bed."

When we had seven shows in the can, and were beginning to roll pretty good, something went clunk in the sound recording system, and we had no spare for it. It is ever thus on location. After urgent cablings, I arranged to get the frammis or whatever it was airshipped out, but it would be three lost days, and so we folded operations.

At midnight, Rene came to the hotel and woke me up. The fabulous and vulnerable Therese was missing. She had outwitted her panic-stricken chaperone. He wanted words with our star, and I knew even before I looked that he would be missing too. All the agitation and concern went out of Rene's face. He looked sick, tired and old as he turned away.

On the evening of the third day, Mark Weese and I were sitting in my room checking the prop lists against upcoming scripts, when Kirk Morgan came in without knocking.

"Ready to roll in the morning, Joe?" he asked me.

"Yes. And where the hell have you been?"

He gave us a smile of wicked contentment, muffled a theatrical yawn and said, "Place name of Goma, at the Hotel du Grand Lac. Very clean, very comfortable. Good food. Good service. I recommend it." He slouched over to pour himself some of my liquor.

Mark's pouched old face twisted into a look of distaste. "How about the French chick, Morgan?"

He turned and sipped his drink, and said, "Tasty. *Very* tasty. But three days does it, men. A dull child at heart, you know. Once the bloom is off the blossom, they tend to get emotional."

"Walk out on her?" I asked. He winked at me. "You insult my honorable instincts, Joey. I just now let her off at her own garden gate. Blubbering and snuffling." He yawned again and ambled out, taking the half drink with him.

"Wouldn't it be nice if somebody killed him?" Mark said earnestly.

"Somehow they never do."

"Poor scared little chick," Mark said.

"Yeah. Sure. This number sixteen, author, you got a lion cub written in, and Rene says we can get a local leopard cub a lot easier and cheaper. Okay?"

"Okay. And don't let's either of us show we feel real sick right now."

Rene du Palais was at the Regina Hotel early the next morning. It was not as rough as I had thought it would be. He brought a small, round, smiling man with him, and introduced him as Jules Boudreau.

"I can no longer, in self respect, work for you, Meestair Connolly," he said quietly. "It would be humiliation for me, because what has happened is now known to everyone. Do you not understand?"

"I understand. I am sorry it happened, sorrier than I can tell you."

"It is my own stupidity at fault. I now think of the many times you tried to warn me. I believe you are a decent man. I could not know that this Morgan could be . . . so cruel an animal."

"How is your daughter?"

Only the truly French can shrug with so much meaning. "Unwell," he said. His voice became businesslike. "I have brought you here Jules Boudreau who will do the work perhaps better than I have done. He understands the things I have been doing, and he will continue for you. There is some small money due me which perhaps you will give to him to bring to me when it can be arranged. Goodby, sir."

I said goodbye to him and I held my hand out. He looked at my hand and then into my eyes with that anguish no actor can reproduce. "I am so sorry," he whispered. "I could not yet shake the hand of any of you. I am so sorry." He turned and fled through the shadowy lobby and out into the white sunshine.

Jules Boudreau was not as good as Rene, but all the worst problems had been solved before he took over, so we made do with him.

The day after we packaged and sealed up number fourteen, Jules took the afternoon off and attended the funeral of Therese du Palais. She had dressed in the wedding gown she would never wear, slipped out of the house at dawn, bicycled to the quays along the Congo River, and jumped in. Some dock workers saw her go in. It had taken them thirty minutes to recover the body.

I was there when Barry Driscoll told Kirk Morgan what had happened.

Kirk Morgan looked mildly astonished. He licked his manly lips, fingered his sculptured throat, swallowed hard and said, "A hell of a silly thing to do. The kid must have been missing some marbles. She wasn't what you call real bright."

Barry slowly and carefully called Kirk Morgan a series of graphic, precise and unprintable things. When they began to sink in, the hero face turned dull red, and the hero roared, "You want to make this stinking series, Driscoll, and make a bucket of bills, or you want me to cable Manny and say I can't work with you and send somebody else? You want to make a little test case? You want to see who gets backed up?"

I saw Barry think it over, and I saw all the spit and steam go slowly out of him. "Okay," he said softly. "Let's just get this job the hell done and get out of here."

"Okay," Morgan snarled, "and it's the last of mine you do, pal."

"I couldn't be more grateful," Barry said softly.

So we were pros, and we kept rolling along like pros, and the stack of completions kept getting taller in the corner of my room. I've been around long enough to know it was good tight work.

The Ampex tape is nearly two inches wide, and each sequence went into its own dull-finish aluminum reel can, almost as big around as a table at the Blue Angel. The closure all around the outside edge was sealed with tape, and the coded show and script number was put on the center label of both the reel and the can.

*I can make a lord, but  
only the Almighty can make  
a gentleman—James I.*

I think we were just past number twenty when Nancy Rome made the first comment about Kirk Morgan, one night while we were having dinner.

"What's with Our Hero?" she asked me.

"I try not to notice him. Should I?"

She frowned. "I don't know what it is. He seems to be getting . . . kind of strange and subdued and remote. Barry's having trouble getting him to project all that famous Morgan charm and energy."

So I started watching Kirk Morgan, and I soon saw what she meant. He seemed dull, dispirited, lethargic. Barry had to roar at him and prod him to get him to give his lines any zing.

It made one hell of a problem, and it seemed to be getting worse. The whole operation represented a very fat investment, and if we couldn't make it work, there were going to be heads rolling in the dust.

Barry, Mark Weese and I had a nervous policy meeting about it.

"The guy is going dead on me, and it's getting worse all the time," Barry said.

"He eats and his color is good, and he hasn't lost a pound," Mark said, "but I get the kookie feeling he's

sort of fading away. You know what he does when he isn't working, eating or sleeping? He sits and stares at the wall, hour after hour."

After we argued it all out, we had a plan of action, but we weren't happy with it. First, we'd move as fast as we could on the fourteen or so we had left at that time. We would get him checked over by a doctor. And Mark would do as much as he dared to change approved scripts to give Morgan less meat and fatten the lines and action for the other players.

We got him checked over, and it turned out he was in perfect health except for a very low metabolic rate. That figured, because he acted like a machine that was slowing down. So we started stuffing him with thyroid extract and dexedrine. It helped a little.

By the time we were left with only three to go, we knew the quality had sagged badly, but we hoped we could bull it through on the momentum of the first twenty weeks.

Mark Weese and I got ourselves loaded on the night before the last day, when we hoped to knock off the final three. I remember Mark peering drunkenly at me and wagging his finger and trying to be mysterious, but looking more like a gossipy matron on a resort hotel porch. "It's a hex," he said. "Deepest Africa. Witch doctor stuff. Revenge, Joey. For the dead girl. For Therese."

I was in an air-conditioned room in a town where I could buy Coke, Kleenex and Time Magazine, and I wasn't about to buy any hex theory.

But I remembered it the next day, and thought about it. We finished the series that day, without quite having to jab splinters under Morgan's fingernails to keep him in motion. Let us just say his acting was what they call wooden.

So that night I pumped Jules Boudreau. I had not learned very much about that little round man. He did not have as much English as Rene. His approach to life was earnest and apologetic, without Rene's automatic dignity. I had learned that his continuous smile was a reflex, a grimace without meaning. It was merely the way he had learned to hold his mouth.

I took him up to my room after dinner and we spent an hour going over all the details connected with closing up shop and disposing of rented and purchased equipment. As usual with such ventures, I expected to be the last man to get away, and I had no urge to prolong my stay.

When the work was over, I fixed Jules another drink and I said, "Morgan seems to be getting worse. He has to be dressed and undressed. They'll have to lead him aboard that airplane. Tell me, Jules, you've lived here a long time, have you ever seen anybody get like that before?"

"Sometime," he said, without disturbing his smile. "Not so many time."

"What causes it?"

"Pipple say many t'ing."  
"The local people are talking about him?"

"Oh, yes! It is a sad scandal with this Therese, of course."

"What do people say?"  
He shrugged plump shoulders. "You know the mamá, she have tribe connections way back, a rare strong pipple, knowing dark t'ings, they say. Also is true the child, she was cared for in the home by servant pipple loving her, so ver' savage not so long time ago. She dead in her wedding t'ings, and it can be much hate. So they say is medicine made against him. In some places of the worl' is called gris-gris. Some is voodoo. Some is hex. A dark pipple t'ing."

"What do you think, Jules?"  
With a sweep of his chubby hand he included all of Africa. "Some t'ings in this land, is better I t'ink we don't look at so close. But all this is maybe done with pictures."

"With pictures?"  
He leaned forward, lowering his voice slightly. "A savage man, he does not want pictures taking of him, no? It is this reason: He t'ink a picture steal a piece of him, of his soul, take it away on paper, leaving him smaller."

"I've heard of that, sure."  
Jules stood up. "This time somebody fix it so it truly happens to Morgan. All the time the cameras turning, sucking away his soul." He walked over to the double stack of film cans, touched them with his fingertips and turned and aimed his small smile at me. "In here now, he is laughing, talking, fighting, making the love being brave and handsome, no? It is all in here, nearly all of him, so he can walk around, yes, but more like the king beetle when the spider she is nearly finish. How you say it? A husk."

I could feel the small hairs stir at the nape of my neck. "But doesn't a man have to believe that such a thing is happening to him for it really to happen?"

Jules came back and sat down. "So in what part of the mind is the believing 'eh? In the top where you know it for a certain t'ing, or buried down where it is lost in the darkness of the soul, eh?"

"I think it's a lot of damn nonsense!" I said.

Jules stood up abruptly. "In the morning I will be here. Thank you."

After Jules left, I learned I was a little too conscious of the twin stacks of film cans. I had been aware of them all along, as a sort of visual index of our production. I went over and stared at them. In one very logical sense of the word, Kirk Morgan was imprisoned in those fat aluminum discs. Each one was good for a hundred showings. But copies would be made from the mint masters as soon as the cutting was done. For several years Kirk Morgan would be released over and over again to go

through his frozen motions and say his canned words, before being locked up again.

I sat there on my heels and told myself this was merely a symbolic point of view, a sappy and poetic point of view. Morgan's soul was not sealed into those cans. Yet I had the fancy that if I held my ear close to them when the world was sufficiently still, I would hear the thin, insectile cries of anguish.

I shivered and took some mighty hacks at what was left of the opened bottle before I went to bed.

I was partially dressed the next morning before I happened to notice the tapes were gone. It startled me for a moment until I realized that Barry Driscoll had probably awakened with one of his fits of early energy and had begun to organize the trip home. He could have wangled a key from the management and had some of the crew carry the cans out without disturbing me.

When I went down to breakfast he was sitting alone, staring bleakly into what was probably his third cup of coffee. I knew it was unwise to attempt to join him, but I stopped by the table for a moment and said, "Was I snoring?"

He stared up at me. Huh?"  
"When you people came in early and carted off all our packaged genius, man."

"What the hell are you talking about, Joe? You know I don't like humor this time of day."

"I never touch it myself. All the cans are gone."

"What!"  
"They were there when I went to bed. They're gone now."

He sprang to his feet, with a color like damp ashes. As we stared at each other, I felt the bottom falling out of my career.

It was Tuesday morning. We assembled the whole unit. Nobody knew one damn thing. Nobody on the hotel staff knew one damn thing. With the aid of Jules Boudreau, I alerted all the police power of the Crown Colony, right up to the Governor General. Barry approved posting a reward of 100,000 Belgian Congo francs for the return of our epic. To use an unfortunate tourist expression, this was \$2,000 in "real money". Barry canceled the flight reservations out. Everybody tried to be very helpful. Police swarmed all over the place.

On Wednesday morning Barry placed a phone call to Manny in California. It had to go via Brussels, and it wasn't put through until five that evening. Mark Weese, Nancy Rome and I were playing three-way gin in the lounge off the lobby when Barry Driscoll joined us as soon as the phone call was over. He had a dull stare, a sagging jaw and trembling hands.

"How is dear Manny," Nancy Rome asked.

"I learned something new," Barry said. "I learned it is possible for a

man to scream in a whisky baritone. He didn't roar. He screamed."

"So what's the deal?" Mark asked.  
"If they are gone for good, we stay here and we shoot them all over again. It's the only way to cut losses. You and me, Joe, we go off salary. We work for free. If we have any objection, we can get out of the industry."

Nancy stared at him. "But Mighty Morgan is in no shape to work!"

"I tried to explain that. He kept yelling at me to get Morgan sobered up. I said he should ship me a new lead. He said we peddled the deal with Morgan aboard, so that is the way we shoot it."

"So what do we do?" I asked him.  
"We sit here and we pray we find those cans, Joe."

After the four of us had sat there for maybe fifteen minutes making wild guesses as to what could have happened to the cans, Jules Boudreau came smiling in, accompanied by a tall Belgian official in a resplendent uniform, and a withered, timid, apprehensive native in a mustard brown tweed suit originally designed for a much larger man.

The native was a traveling merchant from Matadi. He had been picked up in the native quarter of Brazzaville when an informer told the French police of a strange story the man was telling. The French had released him to the Belgians for interrogation. The man had taken an early ferry across the Congo River. It is a twenty-minute ride from Leopoldville to Brazzaville. He had seen two tall natives, well dressed, each carrying two large, cheap, heavy suitcases. They had come aft and opened the suitcases near the rail, and had proceeded to hurl a great many large silvery disks into the broad river. They sank immediately. When all were gone, the strangers had closed the empty suitcases and walked slowly away.

The ritual had mystified the merchant and, being a stranger in this part of the land, he had asked about it in the bazaars.

I went and got an empty can out of stores and took it down to them. Even before his response was translated, I could tell from the way his face lighted up that this was exactly what he had seen dropped into the river. They had been dropped out near the center. No, he could not identify the two men. He had not looked at them closely. They were strangers to him. They were dressed as clerks of the government, or bookkeepers in small places of business.

When he had been assured the man was not lying, Barry gave him a reward of 500 francs, which both astonished and delighted the man.

Jules soon disabused Barry of any attempt to retrieve the tapes. It was a deep murky river, with fast currents and a bottom of glaucy mud. There were no divers. Nothing had ever been recovered from it.

When the four of us were alone again, Barry said, "But it's so damned pointless! What good does it do anybody?"

Nancy, with an odd expression, said, "Maybe it's a kind of primitive justice, Barry. Maybe they thought Morgan was the boss man. He gives that impression. They knew we were here to do the films. That lovely child threw herself into the river. So . . ."

"It could be a form of primitive artistic criticism," Mark Weese mumbled.

"Let's everybody make funny jokes," Barry said. "We're cooked. There's only one thing left to try, and that's to get Morgan out of his stupor. Somehow. One time I directed a snake-pit movie. We did some research at the funny farm. I saw people there acting like he does now. They called them catatonics."

"Maybe Manny can ship us a head shrinker," Nancy said.

"Tomorrow," Barry said, "I shall try to think. Today has been all I can take. Tonight I drink. Tonight I abuse my ulcer. Where's that waiter?"

About six hours later, when all good people were in bed, I found myself tiptoeing with tipsy guile along the hotel corridor, with Nancy Rome's hot little hand clasped in mine. We were whispering and giggling. It does not matter where we were going, or what had led up to this venture, or whether, once it was interrupted, anybody ever got a rain check.

Just as we were passing Kirk Morgan's door, the sound came through the dark heavy wood. Now I've worked westerns, and once I saw a stunt bungled so badly a horse snapped its spine. As it struggled to get up, it screamed. I had never been so rattled by any sound in my life. It's eyes were mad and rolling, and it screamed and screamed until somebody located a real bullet and put an end to it.

This was almost the same sound, a high, wild, tearing scream. It stopped, and when it began again there was a sickening liquidity to it, a bubbling, gargling, strangling sound. And then there was silence. I was cold sober. I stared at Nancy. Her eyebrows were right up to her hair line, and she was sober too, now and she was sinking her nails into my hand.

I tried the door. It was locked. After I bounced my shoulder off it one time, I knew ten of me couldn't crash in that way. I sent Nancy to round up Barry Driscoll and I went down and roused a sleepy, surly, indignant manager. They were getting very tired of our little group. He came up with a pass key. Barry and Nancy were waiting there for us. The manager opened the door and turned on the lights, walked stolidly over to the bed, stared down for perhaps two-tenths of a second, then whirled and departed like a good wingback running an off-tackle fake. He no longer looked indignant.

After I took a look, I wouldn't let Nancy look. I made her go back to her room. Barry and I waited out in the corridor for the doctor. His name was Dr. Arcenaux. He examined Kirk Morgan and pronounced him dead.

\* You will remember the dramatic coverage in the newspapers, about how Kirk Morgan had contracted some tropical bug, but had insisted on completing the SAFARI series before he folded, and how the warm, human executives of El-Bar, after viewing the series, had decided that Kirk Morgan had been so ill a posthumous release would do his critical reputation no good; and so, in honor of his memory, they had vowed never to release those forty scripts done under such valorous conditions. (Actually, Manny is making a forlorn effort to get some of his bait back by jamming the market with reissues of old junk, before the public forgets who Kirk Morgan was.)

Yet somebody has to tell the truth.

After various documents were signed and verified and authenticated, and the body had been taken down and out through the rear to a place where it could be kept refrigerated until it could be shipped to the Pastures of Heaven, California Branch, Barry and I had a drink with Dr. Arcenaux in Barry's room. The doctor was brisk, young and tidy, with a pair of extremely cold blue eyes.

"Without the medical doubletalk, Doctor," Barry said, "what was the cause of death?"

"Pneumonia."

"Who are you trying to kid?"

"I never make jokes about my profession, Monsieur."

"I'm sorry all to hell, but it didn't look like pneumonia to me."

The doctor raised an eyebrow. "You are qualified in medicine, Monsieur? All germs, all viruses, work more quickly in Equatorial Africa. The fluids came quickly into the lungs, perhaps filling them in a mere matter of hours beyond the point where life could continue."

"So . . . in a manner of speaking, he drowned?" I asked.

"In the suppuration, in the fluids of infection draining into the lungs, yes, it could be an unscientific way to speak of it." He inspected a gold watch. "I must go. My fee will appear upon your hotel bill." He stood up and sighed. "It is a sadness to see the strong young ones go so quickly."

"Why did he scream?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Terror, perhaps. The feeling of slow strangulation. It is not one of the more pleasant ways to die."

After we were alone, I knew I had to share a part of what was in my mind. And so, trying to play it for nervous laughter, I briefed Barry Driscoll on my voodoo chat with Jules Boudreau, and told him the theory Jules had come up with.

He slowly shredded a cigarette and said, "So the . . . essence of Kirk Morgan was slowly being packed in the cans."

"An up-to-date, modern hex," I said, and my attempt at a laugh died too quickly.

Barry dusted the shreds of tobacco off his hands. "I suppose . . . that after . . . seventeen or eighteen hours at the bottom of the river . . . a pretty fair amount of water would have seeped past the tape into those cans."

I surprised myself by jumping up so quickly I overturned my drink. My voice was thin and high and fast, and I could feel my mouth twisting into a smile, like Jules Boudreau. "I don't think we ought to talk about this," I said. "I don't want to talk about it, and I don't want to think about it. I want to get on a plane and get out of here."

But I couldn't help seeing the expression on his face just as I turned away from him and left. I knew his mind had followed the same horrid pattern of illogic as mine. We were both remembering our final look at Kirk Morgan. The horror was not as much in the congested bloat of his face, with the bulge of terror fixed there by a bad death. True horror was in the puddings and spillings on pillow and sheet, the green-brown fluids that filled the silent room with the rich, jungly stink of the Congo River. •

# Blue Notes

*Some assorted background facts  
on who wrote what, and why, in  
this issue of Bluebook*

**J**ohn D. MacDonald is a lad who spends six months of the year in Florida, six months in New England, and twelve months turning out the best damned suspense stories ever spawned. And we say that knowing that everybody who owns a typewriter has tried the suspense bit in recent years, and most of them pack about as much suspense into their manuscripts as you'll find in the average grocery list. To all of them we say, buy yourself a MacDonald yarn, and learn yourself a lesson. And while you're waiting for your change, read "A Dark People Thing" on pages 30-31.