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UNDER YOUR SPELL

by

Henry Kuttner

The Pursuit of a Fantastic Heritage

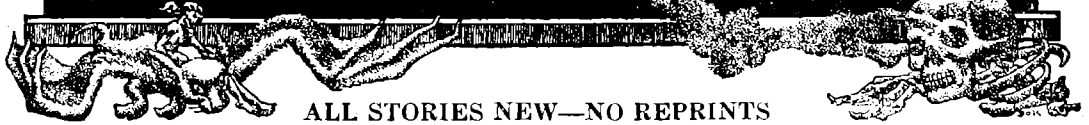
FLIGHT INTO DESTINY

by

VERNE CHUTE

A Novelette of Contrasts

Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

MARCH, 1943

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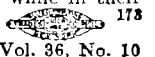
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Flight Into Destiny

By VERNE CHUTE



*They said the strange malady could come only from the Brazilian jungle—
and how can a man catch jungle fever on the fifteenth floor of a
New York office building?*



THE blond young giant, Eric Jensen, was more than a clerk in the firm of Westbrook & Company, Exporters; Wayne Westbrook had seen to that. Of course the big jovial Westbrook would have insisted Eric's rise in position had nothing to do with Eric's having received a legacy of fifty thousand dollars from an estate a year before, nor would he have admitted that, with the able help of his niece, he was trying to divert Eric's fortune into the company, without relinquishing any of the company's control.

If Eric was aware of all this he gave no indication. It was as if he was already

reconciled to the idea of spending the rest of his life at his desk.

It was late enough in the afternoon for Wayne Westbrook to have caught the 4:45 to City Manors, the reports of the day to be filed, the evening mail sent on its fifteen floor journey down the mail chute. And it was late enough for Ann Allen to be irritated at being called by Eric Jensen to take dictation.

Yet there was nothing unusual in the procedure of Eric's clicking one of the small pearl switches on the dictograph at his desk. Nor in his mumbled words through the box to Ann. In Eric's ten years

with Westbrook & Company, this day was to end no differently than any other, apparently.

Yet this day was to be different. In the space of a half hour's time everything was to be changed. Destiny was ready to step in.

"All right, I'm coming," Ann said, looking at the clock. A hard little smile spoiled her nice mouth.

When she got up from her desk she shot a baleful glance through the glass door of the bookkeeping department. But her mumbled words were not for Old Mosby, who was busy putting the company's books to bed, her words were for Eric.

"If he mentions that Ingrid again—" she cried. Her words were subtle threat.

Going noiselessly through the door into Eric Jensen's office, Ann stopped, stared.

Usually Eric would be hunched stoop-shouldered over his desk, half-turned away from the window as if he were bracing himself against the freedom that lay outside.

SHE saw a different Eric now. Lean face flushed, nostrils dilating with each deep breath he took. His eyes burned straight ahead, as blue as the deepest blue on the canvas painting on the wall at which he stared.

It was not the first time Ann had come in to see Eric staring at the picture. The picture seemed to bolster him, seemed to give him a vicarious thrill of freedom by the mere looking at it. But his gaze was far different now. At that moment, with the dying sun streaming against his flushed face, with his sea-blue eyes and light hair, Eric himself might have posed for that picture, had he winged headgear and stubby beard.

The picture was a seascape, with a blond-haired Viking standing boldly in the prow of the longship gazing ahead; a roving pirate staring into the unknown.

Eric, like thousands of others before him, had been tricked by fate into the wrong kind of job—an inside job. The city cramped him, crushed him. Perhaps the picture on his wall wasn't good for Eric, perhaps it was the sight of his distant ancestors instilled in him the desire to throw off the yoke of salaried servitude and be free. Once he had been free—like when he won his football letter at Minnesota; or like a few years ago when, with his own plane he chased the clouds through the sky, matching his skill with the winds.

Ann slipped into the red-leather chair near Eric's desk and waited. It is a known fact that no young lady likes to be ignored, especially one who happens to be the boss' niece. She rapped impatiently with her pencil. "Yes, Eric," she said.

Eric swung around, startled. He nearly dropped the small bronze paper weight he had picked up from the desk, a replica of a Norseman's battle-axe. His voice was husky, a hurried whisper:

"Take a letter, please, quickly—"

Ann looked puzzled. Her notebook automatically balanced itself on her knee. "To whom, Eric?"

"Why, to Lars Thorsen—" Eric stopped before he had added an "of course." He shook a cigarette out of a brown package, put it into his mouth but did not light it.

Ann repeated the name as she wrote it down in longhand in her notebook: "*Lars Thorsen. Lars Thorsen*—where shall I send it, Eric?"

Eric's eyes came away from the picture of the yellow-haired sea rover again. Small beads of moisture stood out on his puzzled brow. "Why, just send it—send it to Lars Thorsen—" His voice stumbled some more, came to a dead stop. Then he admitted: "I guess I don't know where to send it!"

"Oh."

Eric gave a short, embarrassed laugh. He looked at his desk clock, at the squared

corners of his glass-topped desk, at the water cooler in the corner—all were modern things. The cloudy, feverish look in his eyes disappeared. He said, "Let's get out of here—Ann. I'll drive you home."

THE girl's face paled. She rose to her feet, peered into Eric's face. "Don't you remember? We're driving out to Uncle's tonight for dinner—"

Eric's shoulders drooped again as if something inside him had collapsed. "Oh, yes, Mr. Westbrook asked us to come. At seven, isn't it?"

But Ann had another question, and another searching glance. "Mr. Eric Jensen, who is this—Ingrid?"

"Ingrid?" The name itself was enough to soften Eric's thin face. And it brought life to his blue eyes. He pushed back his chair, got to his feet, looking suddenly like a small boy who was being forced to disclose something he wished to keep secret. Finally he said: "You wouldn't know her. I don't know her myself—"

Mr. Westbrook's niece spoiled her nice mouth again. "It's very funny!"

Eric looked into the girl's angry face. But there was no trace of rebellion in his own; he gave Ann a half-hearted smile, then waded across the thick rug toward the clothes closet. When he heard the girl close the door behind her, he turned, spoke to the empty room: "Who is——Ingrid?"

He turned the name over on his lips. His glance went to the bookshelves in the corner as if searching for an answer to that name. On the shelves were books of Norse mythology, of Viking lore, Sagas of Norway from Harald the Fairhair to King Haakon VII. In the books were tales even of the Norsemen's experiences with the North American Indians, the *Skraelings*, centuries before Columbus was born.

Eric's inheritance had allowed him to indulge in his hobby of collecting. The far corner of the room was filled with

Norse spears, shields. A huge iron battle-axe hung from the wall.

When Ann made an abrupt entrance, Eric was back at the closet getting out his coat. "I'm sorry," he said. "Perhaps I've been reading too much—let's get out of here before—something else—happens—"

"Did something happen?"

But Ann didn't press him for an answer, and as Eric didn't offer any further explanation, the subject was dropped.

THE evening went off well enough at Wayne Westbrook's home, with Ann's suspicious eyes always on Eric's face, and Wayne Westbrook watching them both. The big exporter was a widower of several years, but he had a houseful of servants to do his bidding.

Ann and her uncle did a lot of whispering together, but Eric seemed unaware that he was worrying them. The next morning found him at work as if nothing had happened.

At thirty-five, with ten years Westbrook Exporting Company under his belt, it even looked as if Eric was girding his belt for another ten years. When he first received his legacy, he had gone to Westbrook with his resignation and a happy plan for getting out of an office. But Eric found that he was already too late. The big man's hold on him was as secure as it was on everything else he touched. Westbrook put it nicely—The company couldn't get along without Eric Jensen; it has been found that Eric had great executive ability. Because of this executive ability, he was allowed to "invest" twenty thousand dollars in Westbrook's concern.

When Ann came into Eric's office that morning, Westbrook waited just outside the door. Yet Eric's strange condition seemed to have passed. He was on the job.

In fact it was Westbrook who was the first to show any irrationality that morning.

Just before noon he came tearing into Eric's office.

"Eric!" he cried sharply. Then he pulled up. A startled, odd look came to his wide brow. He stared. "Your face, man!"

Eric's face was mottled, looked like a basket of pink and white roses. The hand that he pushed back his yellow hair, shook. The same hand went on to gesture negatively, as if everything were all right.

"Man!" muttered Westbrook again. Ann came in, gave a faint cry. She quickly shut the door after her to cut off the gaze of the curious office workers.

WESTBROOK looked scared, but there was something he wanted to say, to clear up before he left the room. "I was just talking to Rankin of the Atlantic Forwarding Company. He said you told him on the phone 'to be patient, that if the natives rushed, to go to higher ground and wait!'—what does that mean, Eric?"

Eric's brightened eyes flared in a look of suspicion at the Norseman on the wall. Then he shook his head wearily, sunk his flushed face into his hands.

Wayne Westbrook said to Ann: "Call Doctor Chalmers! Quick!"

After Ann had run from the room, Eric got up from his chair and went to the window. He watched the teeming traffic of a cross street fifteen floors below for a moment then came back to the desk. "It's nothing," he told Westbrook. "It'll pass." He smiled a little strangely. "The only thing I've had to drink in the last twenty-four hours was two cocktails out at your place and a small beer with yesterday's coldplate."

Westbrook, who was about fifty-five, tried to get fatherly. "I know you've got a fever, bad. But, Eric, there's other things—" He patted Eric on the shoulder. "Come, come, you know we don't have any secrets—not you and I. What is it, Eric? You and Ann fall out over some-

thing? Another girl? The hot weather? A bad break on the market—or did one of your horses finally win at Saratoga?"

Eric looked furtively at the window again, his glance suddenly like that of a caged animal. "I feel hot," he said, adding firmly, "but I don't feel sick!"

Doctor Charles Chalmers didn't waste any time coming up from his office, two floors down. Yet in spite of present haste, he had the look of a man who had examined half of New York's tired business men who wanted him to prescribe a vacation in the Bahamas, or two weeks in Miami under the palms.

"There's nothing the matter with me," Eric told him. He looked at Westbrook. "Shall I take off my shirt?"

Doctor Chalmers gave them both a quick look. Then his gray eyes widened slightly at the strange color of Eric's face. "Keep your shirt on, Mr. Jensen."

HE FELT Eric's pulse, noted his fevered cheeks. Then he looked at Eric's tongue. That was all superficial examination, but the strange irregular splotches—"Hm-mm," he said.

From that small "hm-mm" Dr. Chalmers allowed himself one sudden curse of excitement. He caught Westbrook's arm. "Your man's got the fever all right. Jungle Fever!"

"Jungle Fever?" Westbrook looked at Eric and laughed nervously. "Impossible," he nearly shouted. "Eric's been right here all the time. Besides, this is an office building, not a swamp. This is the fifteenth floor of the Equitable Eastern Building, New York City."

Eric apparently felt well enough to look amused.

The doctor was dead serious. "New York City or the Amazon—it's Jungle Fever!"

Even Eric was impressed by the fervency of the doctor's reply. Chalmers went on:

"I guess I should know. I put in four hectic years with a rubber company in South America." He moved back, stared at Eric as if he were some new kind of specimen. "Say, how in hell can a man catch the Jungle Fever on the fifteenth floor of New York office building? That's one for Ripley."

In the crisp silence that followed, the doctor still had the floor. He dived into his bag, then came up shaking his head and looking at Eric again. "I'm afraid it'll take more than quinine for you, lad."

A smile forced its way through Eric's set lips. He shook his head savagely, pulled himself to his feet. He appeared to be suddenly trying to fight something off.

Color flowed and ebbd from his face, small beads of moisture came popping out on his brow. From lips, now white against his face, he cried:

"Hast thou a shot of mead?" His voice, strangely pitched, came again: "Thrall, a drinking horn! Mead!"

"Mead?" echoed three voices.

One of the voices, the doctor's, muttered, "Mead, the drink of the old Norsemen—" He caught Eric's arm, pulled him toward the couch.

Westbrook and Ann still stared open-mouthed. But Chalmers was a doctor and couldn't let anything appear to surprise him. When Eric sank to the couch, Doctor Chalmers propped his head up, thrust a small thermometer under his tongue. He kept talking in a comforting professional tone.

"Nice bunch of trophies you have. Partial to Norse antiques, aren't you? I suppose you read a lot of Viking lore?" Doctor Chalmers turned from the seascape to the thermometer he took from Eric's mouth.

Eric was muttering again, his words coming as from another world. "Ingrid," he said. His face was so indescribably soft

and tender, his eyes so wistful that it made the old doctor turn away.

THEN Eric's voice filled with alarm. "It is to thee, Lars Thorsen. Higher ground. Protect her till I come. Rally thy men, Lars Thorsen—" His words broke off. He stared at the three white faces around him, then caught the doctor's arm, seeming suddenly irritated. "Haste, man, danger is afoot!"

Eric raised himself from the edge of the couch, looked toward his trophies in the corner and slid unconsciously to the floor.

Ann screamed. Westbrook leaped forward, his cold cigar drooping from his mouth. He helped the doctor get Eric back on the couch.

"Nothing to be alarmed at," said Doctor Chalmers, more for Ann's benefit than Westbrook's. The big man turned to his niece. "Yes, Ann, we'll take care of things—you go ahead and watch the outer office."

When the girl closed the door behind her, Westbrook touched the doctor's arm. "Ann's excited, naturally—they're engaged, you know—Now, about this fever—is it contagious?"

The doctor looked up from bending over Eric. He snapped. "No, this kind of fever isn't contagious. And, Wayne Westbrook, if those two are engaged, I'll bet it's your doings. Do you think that a girl who's in love with a fellow would be in the next room now, watching the front office?"

Westbrook gave a snort and let it go. It was evident that the doctor was one, at least, who wasn't controlled by the big man's will.

The doctor bent over Eric who was breathing steadily now. When he straightened up again he took out a card and handed it to Westbrook. "Tell Miss Allen to call this number. We'll have to take Jensen to a hospital."

Westbrook objected to that. "You'll do no such thing," he said. "Take him to my place. And say, what kind of a fever did you say it was?" He clicked the switch on the dictograph, told Ann to come in.

Dr. Chalmers smiled and gave in. "Okay, your place," he said. His voice turned serious again. "Now, Wayne, we've never kidded each other—so let's not start now. At least, I won't kid you. Here's how it stands: Eric has got what's called Irrahuarro Fever."

Westbrook exchanged the sodden lump in his mouth for a fresh cigar. "Yes, go on—no, wait."

ANN came in, asked about Eric. Then she went out again to arrange for a car to take Eric out to Westbrook's.

The doctor came back from the wash-room with a wet towel in his hands. He didn't seem to mind the interruption. "Eric Jensen has somehow contacted one of the strangest maladies in the Amazon country. Along the River Irrahuarro are a number of small swamps, and from these black vinetangled morasses comes the fever known only to that locality."

"But, my God, man, this isn't a swamp. It's New York City."

"That's what you said before!" Dr. Chalmers draped the towel over his patient's brow. "Now, this fever is paradoxical—no headaches, no heaviness of thoughts, sluggishness of body. Rather it's like a stimulant. A man's body feels light, he is oftentimes giddy in talk and action and at other times completely at the mercy of his subconscious mind. The victim dies unless he's removed from further exposure. This usually means getting the victim away from the swamp—" He smiled at Westbrook. "But—this is New York."

Westbrook had got his cigar lit by the time Eric came around and was sitting up. Eric looked tired, but otherwise seemed to

show no ill effects of his faint. He dug a cigarette out of his pocket, glancing at the doctor. "Say, what happened to me?"

Dr. Chalmers reached down and pulled out a cigarette from Eric's pack. Westbrook's match lit the two.

"You've got some kind of fever here. You're going to have some rest and quiet, just take it easy until this fever wears itself off."

Westbrook stepped back into the conversation. "Yes, Eric, Dr. Chalmers thinks it would be a good idea if you come out to my house for a week or two. I'm sure everything will clear up by that time. Ann can go with you. Lots of room."

Eric seemed bewildered by all the attention. Ann came in with a suddenness that betold her standing behind the half-opened door. "I'm sure they know what is right—Can you walk all right, dear?"

Eric hesitated. The look he shot toward the open window, at the picture on the wall was appealing. Doctor Chalmers saw that look and smiled thinly at Ann and Westbrook. He let out his breath slowly and did not voice his thoughts.

Then Eric was on his way out of the room with Ann. She had a prescription and the doctor's orders.

Doctor Chalmers began putting his things back into his little black satchel. "I'll stop in at your place in a couple of hours to see Eric. Nothing I can do now. If it's that kind of fever it'll just have to burn itself out—that's the best way we found to get it over with. Right now, I want to have a talk with a specialist."

"That's fine," said Westbrook. He grinned in the direction Ann and Eric had gone.

Doctor Chalmers shut his bag with a bang. "Wayne," he said evenly, "that's an awful nice boy and I'd hate to see anything happen to him. He seems more like a prisoner behind bars than a co-worker."

Westbrook hid the hard look around his

eyes with a smile. His eyes said for Chalmers to tend to his own business, but his smile said: "You're an old-fashioned fogey. Eric can take care of his own business."

Two hours later Eric was.

Ann's wild voice came over the phone to Westbrook. "Eric's gone," the girl cried. "I was just out of the room for a few moments—"

DOCTOR CHALMERS had just come into Westbrook's office. He leaned closer, could hear Ann's wild voice: "We'd only been here a half-hour. He seemed all right, asked me to go to the store for some cigarettes. . . . Yes, I know he's gone. I've searched everywhere. . . ."

Westbrook hung up, stared at the doctor. "That's your fault," he growled. "You should have gone out with them—"

"Yes—to a hospital." He nodded Westbrook into the next room. Chalmers was giving the orders now. "Get one of your men you can trust and get him out hunting for Eric. This fever might take him anywhere.

"We can't have him running loose, not in his condition."

Westbrook made a half dozen phone calls, got a man out to look for Eric. "I guess that's all we can do for the time. Perhaps he's just out for a walk and will show up again—at least, Ann will scour City Manors."

"Doctor Smelzer corroborates everything I've told you," said Chalmers. "It was Irrahuarro Fever." He picked up his bag, started toward the door. "Give me a buzz if you hear anything."

But they didn't hear anything that day or the next. Eric had been swallowed up as completely as if he had fallen into a well—even the police in their city-wide search had nothing to report. As is often the case, the simplest, most logical places to search for news were neglected. Westbrook didn't think of the shipping circles

nor of the bank until the morning of the third day.

His belated inquiries brought quick fruits. A ship, the *S. S. Para*, had cleared for a South American port the night Eric had disappeared.

The rest was easy. A radiogram to the captain of the *Para* brought back news of a lean, yellow-haired stowaway. The man's pockets were full of securities, money.

Dr. Chalmers was with Westbrook when he got the relayed message from the ship's owners. He didn't say a thing, just stared out the window. A faint smile was on the doctor's lips. Westbrook was already on the phone, ringing the bank.

"This is Wayne Westbrook of Westbrook & Company. Oh, hello, Johnson. I want to find out something about Eric Jensen, our man. Was he in there a couple of days ago? . . . He was? . . . Closed his account? Big bills, securities? . . . Oh, no, nothing wrong. Thanks. Good-by."

"Oh, no," said Westbrook mockingly after he had hung up. "No, everything is just fine!" He turned excitedly to the doctor. "Now it's a crazy man we're after, loaded to the gills with at least \$25,000 on him."

Doctor Chalmers gave a short laugh. "A funny situation, Westbrook. A funny kind of fever that can keep a man's mind straight until he's settled up the financial part of his business! I'd say that, except for one thing, Eric was doing nothing more than escaping from a life that hated—"

Westbrook put down the phone book. "What's the one thing?" he demanded.

"Come into Eric's office, I'll show you. It's something I found yesterday. It's impractical enough to make a fellow dizzy, but it kind of gets you."

INSIDE Eric's office, the doctor stopped in front of the seascape on the wall. The light was just right for the picture. The Viking's eyes were as blue-green as

the water that splashed against his heavy, well-muscled thighs, his hair that showed below the winged helmet as yellow as the sunlight that streamed all over the picture. "Take a good look at it," said the doctor. "It'll help to understand this other thing I'm going to show you."

He went over to the bookcase, took out a large, flat notebook wedged there. He came back, opened the book flat on the table.

"Eric's handwriting! Now, Westbrook, listen to this:

"... and so this Viking longship never reached Vineland, the land first found by Lief Ericson. Lars Thorsen and his men, together with their families, were blown far off their course by the Great Storm that lashed the seas for twenty days. Lars Thorsen, a jarl in his own right, was leaving Norway to find a new home. Centuries before, the Vikings had been forced to do this very same thing—all because of the fateful words of the princess, Gyda. To Harald the Fairhair, she had said: "I marry thee when thou art King of Norway" whereupon Harald had conquered or driven out all noblemen and barons. The ones who took to the sea became Vikings.' "

DOCTOR CHALMERS paused. Ann had come in while he was reading. Now she said, breathing hard: "That's it. That's the name—Lars Thorsen! He—Eric, started to dictate a letter to Lars Thorsen the day before he disappeared—" "Yes, I remember your telling me," said Westbrook. "But, say—this Thorsen was one of those Vikings! He's been dead for centuries!" He looked quickly at the doctor for co-operation.

Chalmers grinned like a man passing a lonely graveyard at dusk; and he was as silent.

"The man's crazy," insisted Westbrook. "I'll wire the ship to have him held. Ann, take this message to the ship:

CAPTAIN LAMBERT, S.S. *PARA*

PLEASE HOLD MAN IDENTIFIED AS ERIC JENSEN AGE THIRTY-FIVE HEIGHT SIX FEET TWO WEIGHT ONE HUNDRED SIXTY BLUE EYES LIGHT HAIR

Sign it with my name, Westbrook Exporting Company."

Ann dotted the last period and hurried into the reception room where Doctor Chalmers saw her twirl the telegraph button to summon a messenger. He said: "You can't make it stick, Westbrook. Your will won't be enough to get you action this time."

And thus it was proved. When the radio wire came back, it was collect; it said:

ERIC JENSEN PAID PASSAGE TO PORT OF CALL PARA BRAZIL

CAPTAIN C. LAMBERT

WESTBROOK raved until the doctor gently informed him that Eric, after all, was a free soul and that, fever or no fever, he had a right to go where he chose. "Even," said Chalmers, "if he was trying to run down a lost Viking."

"Is that what you think?" cried the big man.

Chalmers shook his head. A strange look spread across his kindly face. "Frankly, Westbrook, I don't know just what I do think. I've just found another page that was stuck by the wet ink; listen: 'So nothing was ever heard of this sea baron, whose faring before the storm could have ended in a thousand different inlets—'" Eric's handwriting ended here, but farther down the page, near the bottom, was the name "Ingrid" and "Rush to higher ground and wait—Eric."

Westbrook was too practical to see anything in that writing, although he did bite deeper into his cigar at the "rush to higher ground and wait—Eric." If that thought stirred his imagination at all he promptly covered it up with a sarcastic, "Now the whole thing's explained, huh?"

Doctor Chalmers swung around. "No, but in this Ingrid business there's a nice little love story, Westbrook. A hell of a nicer one than you arranged between Eric and Ann." He turned the pages of the notebook backwards, shoving it under Westbrook's eyes. Eric had done a lot of modern doodling and in the margins were penciled drawings he had made of battle-axes, spears, ancient swords—all arranged in more or less intricate designs. Inside each design, as if put there to be protected, was the name of Ingrid. As the doctor turned the pages the name of Ingrid was sure to be some place in the margin, the top or bottom of the page.

"So what?" growled Westbrook. "What does it mean?"

Chalmers shut the book hard. He went over to the window, looked out a minute. Then he came back. "If you weren't such a hard-headed, unimaginative old fool I could tell you what it means."

Westbrook's eyes gleamed. "Okay, let's have it!" he demanded.

Chalmers nodded. "All right, mister. But I can already hear you saying 'rubbish.' It's this girl, Ingrid. Eric's in love with her. In love with a girl he's probably never seen. A girl that probably doesn't even exist—"

"Rubbish!"

The doctor grunted. "All right, that's over. Now think back, Wayne. Remember back as far as the sixth, seventh grade and your first love, little Mary Anderson! Remember how you used to write 'Mary' all over your books—"

"It was Alice," said Westbrook brusquely.

"Well, this one is Ingrid. And this one's Eric's first love. I don't know where he's going. But let him go, Westbrook. Don't try to stop him."

Ann came back in the room just as Westbrook caught up his hat. The big man stopped at the door. "I'm stopping Eric

and having him held. Any captain on any ship can hold a crazy man and I'm getting a wire out from authorities that even Captain Lambert will heed. And I'm chartering a plane to Para!"

"You're an old fool," said Chalmers under his breath as he watched the big man stamp out. He turned and smiled into the frowning face of Ann.

"Doctor Chalmers," the girl said coldly, "I'd like to talk to you. A little while ago you gave the impression you thought we were holding Eric here against his will."

"Did I? Probably just concern for my patient, my dear——"

ANN waited. But evidently that was all there was going to be of an explanation. Her eyes smouldered when the doctor attempted to hide the pleased look on his face. "I think you're happy about the whole thing, about Eric's danger!" she cried.

"No, Ann, it's not that. It's just that at times I'm quite of an imaginative old cuss myself. Don't worry. It's probably all over already and the inexplicable touch of jungle fever has passed, and Eric will be detained at the port of call. I could have told Westbrook that Eric couldn't land without a passport, but Westbrook likes to think of those things himself. Anyway, for a few days, until the fever passes, Eric will be with the girl he loves—a girl who doesn't even exist!"

Doctor Chalmers put Eric's notebook back on the shelf dripping with Viking lore, back among the books where legend had it that Lief Ericson, reputed son of Eric the Red, had first discovered America. Then, under the cold eyes of the girl, he started toward the door.

"I'll be in my office downstairs. If anything comes up, please let me know." He gave a last look at Eric's treasures, sighed and shuffled out of the room.

As soon as the door closed, Ann rushed to the bookcase, tore down the notebook. Breathing hard, she swept through the pages. Unladylike words cut from her curled lips as she tore the book into many pieces and threw the pieces into the wastebasket. After a while she picked up the wastebasket, took it down the hall and dumped it into the trash bin. Then she came back and sat down to wait for Westbrook's phone call.

Before Westbrook phoned, the doctor was back again. "Oh, excuse me, Miss Allen," he said. "I just wanted to see Eric's book again."

Ann was busy with a couple of customers. But her laugh was a loud, shrill challenge. "Go ahead," she cried. "Help yourself!"

But Doctor Chalmers didn't get to see that book then or ever. The phone rang. It was Westbrook and he wanted to speak to Chalmers. He said:

"I've seen the proper authorities, Doc. Under certain conditions they can hold a man on a ship, and this is one of those conditions. They can't exactly arrest him, but they can hold him in sick bay. Crazy, see? The *Para's* got a plane aboard and they'll bring the 'sick man' into Para town a day ahead of schedule. Hold everything, I'll be right up."

A MOMENT after the doctor hung up the phone rang again. Ann, taking the message, nearly dropped the phone. After a minute she hung up, looked at the longhand message she had taken in her notebook. She passed it over to the doctor. "This is from the Steamship Company's office—a message back from the *Para*." Chalmers read it:

Eric Jensen detained after furious struggle. It took seven men to finally overpower him.

This was but one of a series of startling

messages that were phoned into the Westbrook office. The second message came a few moments after Westbrook came wading into the office:

Eric Jensen escapes the ship's brig. A madman, with the strength of a dozen seamen, says the captain. Armed with an axe from the ship's carpenter shop, he is holding half the ship's men at bay.

A half-hour later came the next and final message:

Captain Lambert reports that Eric Jensen has reclaimed his money from the purser. Before anyone could stop him he departed with the ship's plane. He left five thousand dollars behind.

"Hell and tarnation!" cried Chalmers. He danced around the room as if he had just heard that the Terrymen had beat Brooklyn.

"I can't believe it," cried Ann. "Eric was always so gentle, backward—I can't believe it's the same Eric!"

Chalmers' eyes danced. "It's a different Eric all right."

Westbrook was breathing heavily. His gray eyes had just a flicker of admiration in them. But even now he didn't give up. "I'm taking that plane to Para. It still goes. I'm leaving in an hour!"

Doctor Chalmers held his breath. Then he began muttering admonitions to himself. "Get any foolish ideas out of your head. You've got a practice to care for. You've got contacts—" His voice rose louder, and it was plain that he had no intention of heeding his own advice. "I'll throw some things into a bag, Westbrook! I'm going with you!"

ERIC JENSEN was rapidly nearing the Brazilian coast in the ship's plane. He was alone. And he was free. The fever still burned in his eyes, unshaded by the afternoon sun which hit against his

hair flying in the wind. Somewhere along the line Eric had lost his hat. But that was behind him and Eric's gaze was ahead, never backward.

Suddenly below him showed the wide expansion of discoloration where the muddy waters of the mighty Amazon pushed back the sea. Soon came the mouth of the mighty river, with its hundreds of small islands, then the river itself.

He kicked his rudder, turned straight up the river, searching for a familiar landmark. Searched for it in a place which was as foreign to him as it would have been to a jarl from Norway. A few moments later he was out of sight of the sea, following a huge silvery snake that wound in and out of the jungle. Then again he was back at the lake-wide Amazon, now following its course as unerring as a bird returning to its nest.

His parched lips opened in a soft spoken admonition. "Patience, Ingrid—"

Soon he gave a soft cry and kicked the rudder over. Again he followed a silvery snake off into the jungle. This time it was the right one. The Irrahuarro.

Now the jungle looked like a huge billowy carpet of green. More terrifying to aviators than the sea with a clear horizon, for to crash here was to crash out of the zone of a passing ship. A plane breaking through the upper branches of jungle trees might impale itself and be lost forever.

But Eric's eyes were searching only ahead. His steadily droning plane sped across that jungle, as straight as if Eric knew exactly where he was going.

Miles from the sea coast a small hill rose slightly above the darker green. Here the vegetation was slighter, in places the rocky ground could be seen. Then Eric saw a clearing far below. A small expanse of meadow at the bottom of the hill's slope. A wisp of smoke floated skyward.

Eric cut off the gas. The plane's motor popped and stuttered above the primeval

forest, while Eric circled the clearing and prepared to land.

THE wisp of smoke showed him the wind direction. He lost altitude rapidly, concentrating on the difficult landing. He didn't have time to notice the scurrying natives below or see their wild faces turned skyward. He held the stick steady, called out the directions as if he had memorized this special landing:

"Now drop it between those trees . . . slip it . . . nose it in . . . flatten out. Cut the switch . . . kick over the rudder!"

With the wild skill of a stunt pilot, Eric had dropped his plane into that small landing place. Damp, clinging dust rose from the ground as the plane ploughed to a stop. Even as his plane came to a stop the wild cry of howling natives filled Eric's ears.

He leaped from his plane, a wilder cry coming from his feverish lips. A shout of challenge!

The battle was already on. Yet it had stopped momentarily when Eric's plane came vaulting out of the sky. The sound now was of fear, fear coming from the throats of naked blacks scurrying back into the jungle.

Then Eric saw the Norsemen. He yelled a mighty cry of greeting and ran up the slope toward them.

The Vikings of old were making their last stand on higher ground. There was Old Lars Thorsen, the yellow-haired leader, with an ox-horned helmet upon his head. There was Avaak, the red-haired, Jorg, foster son of Hilgard; in all, a score of gigantic warriors, helmeted and mailed. Great lean men they were, with hair nearly reaching their broad shoulders, huge swords and battle-axes in their hands. Their blue eyes still blazed as some peered toward the jungle into which their foes had run.

Eric ran toward these waiting men. He

knew them all. They were his friends, the friends whom he had never before seen.

And here, too, was Ingrid.

A SLIM slip of a girl, barefoot, clad in a single garment—that was Ingrid. Her eyes were wide, her face as radiant as the sunshine of her hair which flattened against her soft cheeks and fell in a single braid across one slender shoulder. She took a step forward, the white gown clinging to her limbs, showing the flesh beneath.

The girl hesitated, stopped. She seemed like a white goddess in that jungle wilderness. But the wistful, appealing look she gave Old Lars when she turned toward him was entirely human. When Old Lars nodded, Ingrid gave a soft cry and waited no longer.

"Eric!" she cried, running to meet him. Her two hands were outstretched and the look that came over her white face was incredible in its softness. "Eric, beloved. Is it really thou?"

Eric clasped her into his arms. "It is, Ingrid. I have come to wed thee." His blue eyes looked deeply into hers, found that which sealed their pact. The Norsemen looked on with friendly, approving eyes.

Suddenly the weird throb of drums began to come from the jungle. The Norsemen straightened—all except Old Lars who had stood braced on his two legs. The Viking chief leaned heavily against one of his men, and Eric, looking at him, saw that he was wounded. Watching, he felt Ingrid's body tremble against his.

The old Norseman's eyes shone brightly, proudly as he looked at Eric. "Come, my son."

Eric's arms still entwined with Ingrid's as he moved toward the gaunt Viking. The girl disengaged her arm, her voice in Eric's ear. "Go alone, Eric. It is council for thee and Lars Thorsen alone."

Eric's eyes followed those of the old

Viking. Halfway down the slope were several fire-blackened squares where, doubtless, buildings had stood. But Old Lars said not a word about that, his actions and looks were enough. He drew his battle-scarred sword, handed it hilt first to Eric. His voice was low, vibrantly alive: "Lead them, my son."

THE beat of the jungle drums came louder, increasing in tempo and volume—a prelude to attack. The sinister throb of danger was a fit attendant to Eric's acceptance of the sword of leadership.

A far cry from the fjords of Norway, all this, and the Brazilian jungle. As strange as the circumstances which had brought the giant warriors halfway around the world to meet their destiny. As strange as the man who had once been a slight, stoop-shouldered office executive—Eric Jensen, far removed, but still a direct descendant of Harald the Fairhair. With twenty good Norse warriors behind him, he stood waiting, his blue eyes blazing down the slope.

The native drums stopped, ending on a booming beat. A hundred naked savages came leaping from the jungle, straight for the slope. A few went swarming to the plane, battering it to pieces.

This time the natives' attack stopped halfway up the slope. It was met by a young Norseman whose wild battle cry froze the blood in their veins. The ferocity of the yellow-haired leader with the up-raised sword brought terror to their hearts. More terrifying even than the giant Norsemen with upthrust spears who came leaping down the hill behind their leader.

"Hew the Black *Scraelings!*" cried Eric.

The Vikings charged on. Bronze-spiked leather shields graced their left forearms, tunics flapping madly against mighty muscled thighs, steel swords flashed in the sunshine. But thrown spears came first.

Then the two forces from the different ends of the earth met in mortal combat.

Native arrows glanced from mailed chests. Then the Norsemen were in close, fighting with short swords, swinging battle-axes.

Eric's wild laugh rang above the din. He leaped at the leader of the Black *Scraelings*.

His huge sword cleaved through the wooden shaft of the chief's spear, thrust on through the native's breast. Eric yelled out, "Saavad! Jorg!" and led on.

No human flesh could stand against the attack of the Vikings and their terrible battle-axes that cleaved through bone and muscle. And it was too much for these natives of the upper river. A wounded *Scraeling* cried out:

"It is a white god! He has come from the sky to avenge his people!"

The natives did not linger to stare at the golden-haired Eric nor to look at the settlement houses they had burned. With a cry of new terror they fled into the jungle, leaving their dead behind.

Eric leaned on his ancient sword and watched them go. All danger was now past. To his side came the slip of a girl, the lovely Ingrid. Her eyes were wet with happiness.

"Thou art my king, Eric," she said simply. She held out her hand. "Come."

IT WAS two days later when Wayne Westbrook and Doctor Chalmers arrived at Para, where they chartered another plane, a small cabin Amphibian. Soon they had crossed the jungle to the Amazon. The Brazilian pilot kept one wary eye on the tangled mass of jungle and swirling water, sparing a look every once in a while at his two passengers, whom he probably thought were crazy.

Chalmers' eyes were bright with excitement as he tapped the pilot on the shoulder. "Watch for the Irrahuarro River!" To Westbrook he said. "The whole length of the Irrahuarro is full of small swamps—the only place Eric's fever could

have come from! If Eric can be found at all it'll be there."

Westbrook nodded. He sat silent, staring below. Finally he said to the pilot, "Did you ever hear any tales of huge white men, jungle goddesses in the jungle?"

The swarthy pilot, watching his instrument board uneasily, nodded. "Oh, yes, *Senhor*. Everyone has heard of them." He scoffed at the idea, giving a little laugh. "I like the goddess of the Narajos best; she comes riding down a moonbeam to visit with their dead—"

At last the pilot waved below. "This, perhaps, is the Irrahuarro, *Senhores*," he cried.

Doctor Chalmers didn't try to hide his excitement. "Up it, man."

They flew on until the eagle-eyed pilot said "hello" and pointed down.

Westbrook and Chalmers saw it now—a slope of a hill, a small clearing. A smashed plane. From the air the plane looked like a broken bird. "Down lower," Westbrook ordered, and the pilot began to circle, losing altitude.

Doctor Chalmers stared and the expectant, hopeful light went out of his eyes. He sighed and gripped the seat of the plane. "If he's alive it's a miracle," he breathed.

"Land us down there!" ordered Westbrook. At the startled look in the pilot's eyes he cried out: "A thousand dollars."

The pilot's eyes turned craftily; he tugged at his small mustache as if it were part of his flying mechanism. "American dollars, *Senhor*? The Indians are bad!"

"Yes, American dollars."

THE flyer nosed the amphibian plane down the river, watched the top of the trees to see which way the wind blew. Then he came back up the river and made an easy landing on the muddy stream. He was even able to taxi up to the shore of the clearing. Under the pilot's grinning ap-

praisal of his own craftsmanship, Doctor Chalmers and Westbrook leaped ashore and ran toward the wrecked plane.

"Take it easy," shouted Chalmers. "Nobody could have survived a crash like this."

Westbrook nodded. But he had to be sure. A moment later he was crying excitedly from the inside of the broken plane. "Hey! Eric's not in here. There's nobody in here."

"My God!"

The strange light of hope that had been in Chalmers' eyes was born again. Breathing hard, he stared around him, stared at the cold fires where the huts had burned. He started up the slope, stumbled over something in his path. Reaching down he picked up an ancient winged helmet. "My God," he cried again. "A Norseman's helmet in a Brazilian jungle!"

A cry from Westbrook tore his eyes away from the ancient relic. "Look here!" shouted Westbrook. He pointed to the side where a native's dead body was impaled by a spear.

Chalmers came up, shaking his head in bewilderment. He ran a shaking hand over the rusty shaft and muttered under his breath. "This is Norse, too. And the native is an Irrahuarro from the upper river—I know the tribe."

Chalmers leaped ahead. "Here's another. And another, all dead. This one looks as if he'd been cleaved with—with a—" He looked askance into Westbrook's face.

Westbrook looked sick, but he finished the sentence for him. "A broad-axe?"

"Yes, a broad-axe!"

They found other naked savages on the way up the slope. All had jagged wounds, the like of which the jungle had never before seen. The two white men looked at each other. Then they hurried on. Each appeared to be fearing what the other would ask.

But no sign of Eric did they find. The

puzzle was still unsolved, more mysterious than ever. Westbrook made a faint half-hearted attempt at an explanation—"When Eric landed he cracked up. He was either killed or wounded. After the natives got over their fright at seeing the plane land, they took away the body of Eric—"

"But the others?" Chalmers waved his hand down the slope. "You can't explain away those bodies. Or the manner in which the natives died. No, Westbrook, it's got to be a better explanation than that!" Chalmers shook his head slowly and the odd hopeful light flamed in his eyes anew.

"Then, what?"

"I don't know. I don't want to appear stubborn, but I'll bet my practice that somehow Eric's— Oh, damn it! A man that had the guidance that Eric had couldn't have come to an ignominious end by crashing to death in a jungle. No, Westbrook, it had to be different than that. It's got to be different!"

They had made the top of the hill, which was only a few feet above the jungle. Below, the pilot of the chartered amphibian was looking curiously at the wreckage of Eric's plane.

Westbrook apparently didn't know what to say. He looked at the broken shaft of the old spear he had picked up on his way up the hill. He poked idly into the rectangular patch of underbrush directly in front of him. The spearhead tapped against stone. Westbrook swished aside the brush and grass. He stared. And suddenly exclaimed.

CHALMERS leaped to his side, stared, too. He staggered a little, caught himself and tore aside the underbrush. The squared effect was caused by its having once been an enclosure. Inside this enclosure a tree had grown around a rusty broad-axe, leaving but a glimpse of the rusty blade, part of the handle.

A number of stone markers still showed through the underbrush. Ancient graves!

Doctor Chalmers pushed aside a branch from the largest of the stone markers. Still visible were the markings, telling who slept below. Chalmers' voice was filled with awe as he read the inscription; it sounded strange and hollow in that jungle wilderness.

"Lars Thorsen."

Chalmers and Westbrook looked at each other. Then they pushed through the ancient graveyard looking at each one of the markers. They met again, shook their heads. This indeed was something beyond any sort of ordinary explanation.

Westbrook breathed aloud. "There was no Ingrid," he said. He looked quickly, added, "And there was no Eric."

Chalmers cleared his throat and looked at the ground.

Sometime later the two men were back in the chartered plane. Their half-hour's further search, apparently, had been to no avail.

The pilot looked at them curiously, but he said nothing; the Americans were good pay. He took a last look at the smashed plane, made a note of its make and position in his book. "Shall we go now, *Senhores?*?" he said at last.

Westbrook looked around for the last time. "Might as well," he said. He shuddered, twisting his mouth toward Chalmers. "I'm afraid that's the last we'll hear of Eric Jensen. I never thought I'd ever run up against anything that couldn't be explained. But somehow this fever preyed on his brain and brought him back to the place of its origin. How? We'll never know that. We're up against a mystery too great for our puny minds to grasp—let alone explain."

Doctor Chalmers made no comment until he had stowed away a winged helmet he had brought along for a souvenir. "I think Eric would like to have it put in his

collection; he hasn't got one."

Westbrook grunted.

"We go, *Senhores,*" said the pilot as he prepared to start the engine. His eyes nervously scanned the river for anything that might interfere with the takeoff.

Westbrook, taking a final look at the small hillock, didn't see the look of peace which had come over Doctor Chalmers' face.

IT WAS more than that. It was an unholy look of exultation, which had no right to be there. No man had the right to look like that in the face of such phenomena. But Doctor Chalmers sat back in his plane seat, grinning to himself, as a rabid baseball fan might have, after he had just watched a member of his team put the ball over the fence to win the game in the last half of the ninth inning.

Doctor Chalmers' keen eyes had seen something that Westbrook had overlooked. He had seen marks that showed where a small dugout canoe had slid off the soft dirt bank into the river. In the sliding tracks of the dugout were the imprints of a girl's bare feet and the unmistakable rubber heel prints of a white man's dress shoes. The two pair of tracks had been very close together—

Doctor Chalmers sighed happily as if he could see far down the Amazon a good two days below the tributary Irrahuarro. If a small dugout was there, it would be floating on toward the sea—

And in it would be two persons, fair-haired, blue-eyed. Eric and Ingrid. Intact in Eric's pockets would be his negotiable papers and United States currency, which the fever had not stopped him from claiming in New York. Fully he had come into his strange fantastic heritage. With Ingrid at his side he could now look forward into a future no man could envisage, for a modern had become one with the ancient gods.



Fever and Fantasy

VERNE CHUTE sent us along this interesting story behind his story, "Flight Into Destiny." The strange functioning of the human mind under the influence of fever and sickness is an experience that some of us have had. The distorted perspective and ghoulish images conjured up by a feverish nightmare can sometimes rival the wildest flights of a fantasy writer's imagination.

Mr. Chute's letter follows:

The strange and inexplicable always has been of great interest to me, as has the peculiar workings of the mind under the influence of certain maladies. Tropical fever, especially. Pouring its toxic potency into the blood, tropical fever exerts a mesmeric influence that sometimes leads man into strange, off-the-trail journeys, opening certain doors heretofore closed to him.

So when, in *Flight Into Destiny*, a staid young business man in a lofty office building in New York is suddenly afflicted with tropical fever, something is bound to happen. Especially if this certain type of fever is known only to a small, closed-in area far up the Amazon River.

Of an ancestry traceable back to the days of Eric the Red, this character could not lose himself in profits and business. His nostrils quivered to other things—the tang of the wind from off the sea, the inspiration of the picture of the yellow-haired viking on the wall above his desk. Under the spell of the fever he rushed straight for the Amazon, fighting odds and delays like a madman. Was he not

on his way to save the life of a Scandinavian princess in the depths of a South American wilderness? And, only one person did he take with him to this forbidden section—the writer.

But leaving the esoteric for the more practical and personal, a paragraph or so of my own qualifications. After leaving school, I had the uncontrollable desire to see what things were all about. In hunting for my niche I worked experimentally at many different vocations, with none seeming to be the right one. Declining a position in my father's jewelry store, I worked on a farm, in hotels, canneries, as a salesman, for a time as rider for a cattle outfit, and even as a shipping clerk in an Arizona power company. I gave the latter up because of lack of appreciation. I thought I was doing all right until a pair of boots were returned which I had sent out to a line rider. His curt note was included—"My feet are both the same size." But perhaps my most interesting job was driving a truck on the Mexican Border. There was much shipping to do from the Mexican side. Often I would pull a load of merchandise into the Mexican customs and have to wait all day for it to be checked over. This gave me much time to pry into the secrets of the Border town.

Ten years went into the new, old and out-of-print book business, and it was during this stage of my life that I was bitten by the writing bug. The out-of-print section of the business probably was the real reason for my desertion of the straight and narrow, for in this category were to be found the more flavorful books which in scope were both mystical and esoteric. . . . When my writing greedily took up more and more of my time, something happened to the book business . . . I hardly remember its passing, so gently and completely did it fade away.

And in parting, thanks for listening. I deem it a great privilege to be able to express myself through the pages of the *Eyrie* and through the fictional medium of WEIRD TALES.

Verne Chute