

# Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the



BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME VI

NUMBER 3

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 408 Holliday Building, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States; \$3.00 a year in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. English office: G. M. Jeffries Literary Agency, Hopefield House, Hanwell, London, W. 7. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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*Something Besides Friendship Prompted  
Chung Wo-lung's Fiendish Gift to Tommy Kee*

# The Flying Halfback

By ROBERT S. CARR

*Author of "The Composite Brain"*

CHUNG WO-LUNG was meditating, his bland Celestial face giving no hint as to the nature of his thoughts. As the lengthening shadows darkened his little room, his heavy-lidded almond eyes slowly narrowed till they became thin slits of windows through which the leaping flames of the seething brain within occasionally gleamed with a startling fierceness and intensity. By degrees the lofty-browed, intelligent, philosophical face of the Chinese scientist lost its appearance of a polite, well-bred mask and reverted to the horribly sinister countenance of a cruel, shrewd fighting man of Old China, an Oriental lover who would tolerate no rival.

His thoughts went back to a not-long-gone night, the night he had asked old Fu Chan-sing for his daughter's hand in marriage. The old Chinese diplomat had been pleased with his offer, this chance of family relationship with so honored and learned a man, acclaimed by some the greatest living inventor and scientist in the world.

At that moment Toy Sing, the maiden in question, had entered with (may the Seventh Curse of Confucius fall upon him! thought Chung) Tommy Kee.

How Chung Wo-lung hated Tommy Kee! He hated him for his mighty stature, for his remarkably handsome yet vividly Oriental face, but most of all for his fame as a football player.

Tommy Kee, whom the sports writers hailed as the most phenomenal half-back in the history of football; Tommy Kee, who had brought glory to himself and to the greatest college in America by his unique combination of the analytical thinking qualities of an Oriental philosopher and the brawn and agility of a natural athlete. Chung remembered the scene that had followed as distinctly and vividly as if it had been stamped on his consciousness in burning characters. There had been a moment of tense silence, then Fu Chan-sing had said: "My daughter, the time has come for you to choose between these two men. They await your words."

Chung Wo-lung's long, delicately tapered fingers gripped the arms of his chair as he remembered the frightened, childlike look that had flitted across Toy Sing's exquisitely molded little lotus-bud face as she had looked from the pale, dignified countenance of the great Chinese thinker to the virile, rugged visage of the great Chinese athlete. Then she had buried her face in her father's bosom, sobbing.

Fu Chan-sing had caressed his daughter soothingly.

"You must go," he had said to the men, "she will decide for herself, later."

Another moment of vibrant silence, as the subtle flame of two Old World loves clashed in a New World way. Then Chung Wo-lung had thawed

suddenly and had said with an unnatural geniality: "Yes, Tommy Kee, we must let Toy Sing choose between us."

They had walked home side by side, silently. Then the scientist had shut himself up in his mysterious laboratory for a week.

And now, at the end of the week, he was able to sit and smile evilly to himself, for his work was nearly completed.

**C**HUNG WO-LUNG arose with a peculiar catlike spring, crossed the room and entered his great laboratory. From a massive safe he extracted a number of delicate instruments. Then, after locking every door, drawing every blind and assuring himself that no curious eyes were spying upon him, he opened the innermost compartment of the huge vault and took out a leaden box. Although the amount of metal should have made it quite heavy, he carried it as if it were light as a feather.

He seated himself at his elaborately equipped work-bench, turned on a strong drop-light, donned a pair of green eye-shades and bent to his exacting task. As if handling a lighted bomb, he drew the lead container toward him. Very cautiously he drew the lid back a trifle. One would have inferred from his motions that he expected something alive to spring out suddenly. A strong beam of light gleamed out of the little crack in the box, noticeable even through the bright illumination of the work-bench light.

He did indeed act as if he were anticipating the sudden escape of some living thing caged within, for he held a small wire net above the opening. The glow from within grew dazzling in its brilliance as he slowly drew the lid farther back. Suddenly, with a blinding flash of ruddy light, a tiny globule darted straight up out of the box, eluded the scientist's sweep of

the net with incredible swiftness, and struck the low ceiling with a sharp crack!

Chung Wo-lung swore softly and leaped to the top of the bench. The shining little ball was pressing tightly against the ceiling, as if trying to make its escape through the lath and plaster. The scientist captured it in the wire mesh and climbed down. Strange as it may seem, he had great difficulty in keeping the net in his hands, so vigorously did the dazzling object push upward.

Seated once more at his bench, he found to his annoyance that it was necessary for him to direct his utmost efforts to keeping the scintillating little thing in his possession. At last he hit upon the plan of weighting down the handle of the net with a heavy iron anvil, but even so the strong wire netting strained under the upward pressure of the tiny gleaming ball.

He settled back and regarded the imprisoned globule with interest. It seemed to him like a trapped animal, struggling to force itself between the unyielding bars of its cage. Truly it was remarkable, he reflected; who would have dreamed of the existence of such a substance as corbine? And yet he had it; had isolated a small quantity of it from compound. He dwelt over the eventful hour of its discovery. It had been at this very bench, and he had been experimenting with radium ore in hopes of obtaining some novel results in the matter of radioactivity when suddenly a small particle had risen straight to the ceiling.

That his secret substance, corbine, was allied to radium he was certain, for it was radioactive to a marked degree. But by far the most remarkable feature of his discovery was that corbine reacted violently against the force of gravity. It was capable of lifting many times its own weight.

Step by step he mentally retraced his experimenting. Then, he had reasoned, since corbine is radioactive, it surely must have its antipathy—some substance on which it has no effect. He had found that, he hoped, in the shape of a certain rare element combined with hard rubber. Till now, he had been forced to utilize lead to keep his energetic discovery on this plane of existence.

He glanced at his watch, then at an electric oven near by. The second part of his great experiment ought to be ready for trial by now, he thought, whereupon he opened the oven and removed two objects, both consisting entirely of the nullifying hard rubber composition he had named anticorbine.

The first was a tiny black box bearing a knob and a dial numbered in minute figures. The second was a hollow disk of the same substance, about the size of a silver dollar and perhaps a half-inch in thickness. He inspected them carefully and was highly satisfied. They had baked just long enough and had come out precisely as he had hoped.

Very well. Now he had a means of caging his corbine, but how was he to regulate its activity? He chuckled at this question and set his long, agile fingers to work, reasoning the while in his methodical fashion.

Corbine could be controlled by electricity. He was a wizard with things electrical. Therefore with the proper pains he would be able to control corbine. Having arrived at so logical a conclusion, he worked on with redoubled energy.

With infinite care he placed in the tiny box a minute electric wave transmission set so delicate, so complicated, and yet so perfect and so powerful, that it seemed to be the work of skilled fairy fingers. Then he laid this aside and took up the net containing the rebellious particle of corbine.

As one would subdue a struggling animal, so did he subdue the dazzling little ball with steel forceps. Holding it down by main strength, he pierced it with one end of a hairlike coil of wire which terminated in the hollow anticorbine disk. Instantly its movements ceased and it became passive, lifeless, a dull red pebble slightly larger than a pea.

He secured the fine wire coil and the corbine within the disk and resumed operations on the dialed box. It was a matter of minutes for his expert fingers to pack the tiny controller in a resilient padding that absolutely protected it from injury by jarring or jolting. He clamped the little lid on and secured the minute instrument to a leather wrist strap.

Now for the final step. Would the ether waves from the little control box govern the activity of the now inert corbine? He hoped they would. Very, very carefully he turned the dialed knob on the tiny anticorbine box to 1, so that only the most extremely weak electrical wave would be released. Like a flash the black disk leaped upward. Only by quickly turning off the motive power was he able to keep the device from dashing itself to fragments on the ceiling. Powerful stuff, that! He'd have to be more careful.

He stepped forward and deftly caught the round, flat object as it fell. Then he strapped it firmly to the heavy anvil, placed the anvil and the instrument on a large pair of scales, stepped back, turned the tiny knob on the control box slowly forward and awaited developments.

When the dial was at zero, the heavy iron registered its full weight—150 pounds. Chung Wo-lung turned the knob to 10, and the scale pan rose as if propelled by an unseen hand. The anvil weighed only 135 pounds now. His eyes widened. He turned the knob to 20. The scale arm fell back to 120 pounds.

His eyes shone: he had not expected things to turn out as fine as this! Patiently he increased the dial numbers by tens and watched the scale numbers decrease by tenths, till at last when the knob on the tiny control box rested at 90, the heavy anvil weighed but 15 pounds!—the numbers to which one turned the knob were in inverse proportion to the weight of the object upon which the anticorbine disk was secured. To decrease the weight by nine tenths, one had simply to turn the knob to 90. To lessen the weight by one half, place the knob on the control box at 50. It was indeed simple, he told himself.

He smiled suddenly and very evilly to himself and bent over his workbench till late that night.

**T**HE next being the day before the big game, Tommy Kee did not attend his classes, but lay in bed. About 10 o'clock he received a telephone call from Chung Wo-lung, who wished to see him at once on a very important matter.

"Sorry, Chung, I don't believe I can; I'm supposed to be resting up for the game," he replied.

"But this has a great deal to do with the game. If you come, your school will most certainly win tomorrow. I will drive past your house in twenty minutes. Please be ready." With that he hung up.

Though somewhat mystified, the gridiron star obeyed. He quickly dressed and met Chung promptly.

The rivals in love drove some time in silence. Then the elder spoke:

"Tommy Kee, if you were able to jump thirty or forty feet at a single bound, could you win the game tomorrow?"

The athlete regarded him curiously a moment, then grinned.

"Say, what are you trying to do, kid me?" he asked. It was strangely incongruous to hear slangy American

college vernacular spoken by a person so strongly Oriental in appearance.

"No, I am serious. I have in this case a little device which, when properly operated, relieves an object from the pull of gravity to any desired degree. Equipped with this you could reduce your weight to fifteen or twenty pounds and thus be able to perform miraculous feats of running and leaping. Would you like to try it out?"

His companion looked at him dubiously, then nodded assent. They drove to a lonely field, some distance from the city. After satisfying himself that no one was near, Chung Wo-lung opened the case and handed it to the other man.

"Strap this to my back, please," he said, indicating the disk. This firmly secured, he turned the knob on the little box and gave a slight spring. He rose about three feet in the air and alighted some distance away, then ran half way around the field, covering ten feet at a bound. Presently he halted before the younger man, smiling.

"Now watch," he exclaimed.

Holding the box in front of him, he ran swiftly for a short distance, gave a mighty leap, soared lightly some ten feet above the ground and alighted easily more than thirty yards distant.

Tommy Kee's eyes widened.

"How do you work it?" he inquired a moment later.

"It is very simple. When you turn the knob to the number 10, it decreases your weight ten per cent. To make a leap such as I just made, it should be turned to about 90, which reduces your weight nine tenths. Of course, if it were turned clear over to 100, a body would have no weight at all and would be carried by the force of the leap out into space. However, this is so regulated that it can not be turned past 90, which makes it impossible for such a thing to happen. Now, do you want to try it?"

Again the younger man nodded silently.

Fifteen minutes later Tommy Kee alighted gracefully by the inventor's side and said huskily: "With this little thing, one man could beat the best football team in the world!"

Chung Wo-lung smiled. "Another thing; you need not carry the control box with you, it operates at any distance."

"But . . . don't you think that it would be better for me to carry it with me on the field, for I will only be able to use it occasionally, and when the time comes, I shall be the only one who will know the exact time to turn it on."

"Yes, I believe that would be better. But above all things, remember this—this affair is to be kept absolutely a secret. No one, not even the coach, is to know about it. Do you agree to that?"

Tommy Kee nodded.

"And if I were you," said Chung Wo-lung on the way home, "I would conceal the apparatus so that you can put it on between halves, and not use it the whole game, for when you have it you can score at will."

CHUNG WO-LUNG sat stolidly through the first half of a heart-rending game and watched his countryman's team steadily outplayed, till at the end of the first half the score stood 13-0.

As the teams left the field at the whistle, he heard grumbles and complaints on all sides.

"What's the matter with China Boy today?" asked the man behind him of his companion; "he isn't half playing." The motionless figure before him could have replied that he was saving himself for the most spectacular demonstration in the history of football.

Five minutes later, the "China Boy" trotted back on the field with his teammates, the black disk securely strapped beneath his sweater, pro-

ected by a layer of padding, and the control box under his jersey at his wrist.

At the end of a fifteen minute struggle, during which he did not so much as get his hands on the ball, their opponents were on their ten-yard line and by all indications would put the ball over in the next few minutes.

The teams lined up. The quarterback called his signals slowly and distinctly. Then, with a lightning shift, the ball was in play. A speeding back rounded the end and bore down upon the goal line like a charging lion, when suddenly his defense man immediately in front of him stumbled and half fell in his path.

There was the sickening impact of flesh against flesh, and the ball was knocked from his grasp and bounded crazily toward the side line. Tommy Kee saw his chance. With one of his famous, low-crouching, irresistible plunges, he tore through the tangled group of players and scooped up the ball. Then, as seventy thousand spectators shrieked their dismay, he stopped and began to fumble foolishly at his wrist, while four tacklers raced toward him.

Suddenly he seemed to realize his danger. He crouched low to the ground, and when the nearest man was scarcely a yard away, he gave a powerful leap, soared lightly into the air, cleared the shoulders of the on-rushing players by inches and touched the ground several yards away where, with long, effortless bounds, he quickly gained the open field. He slowed his pace, fussed with the wristband of his jersey, then broke into the swift, gliding run the sport fans knew so well, and was over the line for a touchdown before his opponents could recover from their surprize.

The entire action took but a few seconds and happened so quickly that the sight could scarcely follow Kee's movements. For a moment the great

amphitheater sat in open-mouthed amazement, hardly daring to believe their very eyes, then slowly the deep thunder of an incredulous astonishment began to rumble along the close-packed tiers of humanity as the realization drove home to them that they had witnessed a leap equaled only by the most phenomenal Olympic champions.

It took perhaps twenty seconds for the last witness to recover from the shock. The mighty rumble swept around the monster horseshoe stadium with terrifying volume, always gathering speed and intensity, till at last the huge steel-and-concrete pile rocked like a paper house and the earth trembled with the tremendous vibration caused by the awful sound.

Pandemonium reigned on the players' benches. The grim and stolid old coach was as excited as a child as he saw the possibility of making a world's champion high-jumper out of China Boy. He had cleared a good five feet eight inches *from a dead standstill* and in heavy football togs! Had he been in track shoes and had proper training—! The coach rushed back and forth along the side lines like a crazy man. Cheer leaders screamed in a vain effort to make themselves heard above the titanic uproar. The police struggled desperately with a mob of frenzied students who were determined to gain the field. Hats, cushions, confetti, overcoats—in fact anything that was loose—filled the air, propelled by excitement-mad hands.

**B**EFORE a hoarse, shrieking, delirious bank of madmen, the moleskin warriors took their places for the try-for-point play. Tommy Kee hid a furtive grin as he took his place behind the line.

"I'll give 'em something to yell about this time!" he muttered under his breath. He remembered the sight he had witnessed the day before in the lonely field, and was confident of

his prowess. He backed up even farther and made as if he were going to drop-kick.

In a twirling brown leather spiral the ball shot from between the center's legs straight into the outstretched hands of Tommy Kee. The air was rent by mad shouts and hysterical shrieks from all sides as he calmly tucked the ball under his arm and fingered foolishly at his wrist. Suddenly he darted straight for the line of scrimmage, covering ten feet at a step. Gathering every ounce of strength in his muscular body, he closed his eyes and gave an immense leap.

As if by magic he rose over the heads of the astounded players, cleared the high goal-bar by several feet and soared lightly onward through the air.

If up in the stands, any persons should have happened to take their eyes from the field of action long enough to look at Chung Wo-lung, they would have been horror-stricken at the expression on his distorted face. He snatched from his pocket a box identical to the one on Tommy Kee's wrist and with a single fierce twist of his long fingers, turned the dial needle around past 100.

A deathly, awed silence settled over the great throng as the solitary figure of the China Boy rose thirty, forty, fifty, then a hundred feet above the ground. The writhing, swiftly-rising form uttered a single horrifying shriek and tore madly at his wrist. A tiny object, from which dangled a broken strap, fell unnoticed to the ground, where it was trampled to bits by the terrified crowd that streamed out over the field to catch a last glimpse of the fast-disappearing speck in the sky that was Tommy Kee, while Chung Wo-lung walked rapidly homeward, the strong yellow fingers in his overcoat pocket still holding the knob on the duplicate control box around past 100.