

WEIRD TALES

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

EDWIN BAIRD, Editor

Published monthly by THE RURAL PUBLISHING CORPORATION, 325 N. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis, Ind. Application made for entry as second-class matter at the postoffice at Indianapolis, Indiana. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$3.00 a year in the United States; \$3.50 in Canada. The publishers are not responsible for manuscripts lost in transit. Address all manuscripts and other editorial matters to WEIRD TALES, 864 N. Clark St., Chicago, Ill. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and publishers are cautioned against using the same, either wholly or in part.

Copyright, 1923, by The Rural Publishing Corporation.

VOLUME 1

25 Cents

NUMBER 2

Contents for April, 1923

SIXTEEN THRILLING SHORT STORIES
TWO COMPLETE NOVELETTES
TWO TWO-PART STORIES
INTERESTING, ODD AND WEIRD HAPPENINGS

The Scar	CARL RASMUS	7
<i>A Thrilling Novelette.</i>		
Beyond the Door	PAUL SUTER	28
<i>A Short Story of Gripping Interest.</i>		
The Tortoise Shell Comb	ROYLSTON MARKHAM	34
<i>A Fantasy of a Mad Brain.</i>		
A Photographic Phantasm	PAUL CRUMPLER	37
The Living Nightmare	ANTON M. OLIVER	38
<i>A Night in a House of Death.</i>		
The Incubus	HAMILTON CRAIGIE	42
<i>A Frightful Adventure in an Ancient Tomb.</i>		
The Bodymaster	HAROLD WARD	49
<i>An Amazing Novelette.</i>		

Contents for April, 1923—Continued

Jungle Death.....	ARTEMUS CALLOWAY	70
<i>A Story in Which Crocodiles and Voodooism Play the Stellar Roles.</i>		
The Snake Fiend.....	FARNSWORTH WRIGHT	75
<i>A Tale of Diabolic Terror.</i>		
A Square of Canvas.....	ANTHONY M. RUD	81
<i>A Story of an Insane Artist.</i>		
The Affair of the Man in Scarlet.....	JULIAN KILMAN	91
<i>A Weird Story of the Thirteenth Century.</i>		
The Hideous Face.....	VICTOR JOHNS	99
<i>A Grim Tale of Frightful Revenge.</i>		
The Forty Jars.....	RAY MCGILLIVRAY	105
<i>A Strange Story of the Orient.</i>		
The Whispering Thing.....		
.....	LAURIE MCCLINTOCK and CULPEPER CHUNN	116
<i>A Two-part Novel of Death and Terror.</i>		
The Thing of a Thousand Shapes.....	OTIS ADELBERT KLINE	139
<i>The Concluding Chapters of a Weird Novel.</i>		
The Conquering Will.....	TED OLSON	152
<i>Do the Dead Return to Life?</i>		
Six Feet of Willow.....	CARROL F. MICHENER	157
<i>The Strange Tale of a Yellow Man and His Beloved Reptile.</i>		
The Hall of the Dead.....	FRANCIS D. GRIERSON	163
<i>An Occult Story of Ancient Egypt.</i>		
The Parlor Cemetery.....	C. E. HOWARD	169
<i>A Grisly Satire.</i>		
Golden Glow.....	HARRY IRVING SHUMWAY	173
<i>A "Haunted House" Story with a Touch of Humor.</i>		
The Eyrie.....	By THE EDITOR	179

YOUNG & WARD, 168 N. Michigan Boulevard, Chicago,
Advertising Agents for WEIRD TALES

*Secrets of the Ages Were
Sealed in*

The FORTY JARS

A Strange Story of the Orient

By Ray McGillivray

THE sands of Bo-hai never quite are dark.

It matters not that a blood-red, maniacal sun deserts this waste; that sullen cloud banks close in with freezing chill of midnight. A misty, spectral light yet emanates from the sand—quite as if stored-up heat and light were retained by the layers of baked, anhydrous surface. At any time sharp eyes may discern the ghostly shadow of a man who walks, even fifty yards distant.

Mad creatures people Bo-hai, creatures that burrow deep beneath the Wall, from Ninghia to Langchau, coming out only for orgies of the night. Any Mongol knows that venturing alone to the salt shores of Gilestai means joining forever the flitting horde of Nameless Ones—for lepers, and the shades of lepers centuries dead, owe no allegiance either to living law or to the kindly teachings of Tao, the All-Wise.

They gibber in tongues ranging from the twanging patois of Jesaktu to the dry gutturals of Yunnan, and take to themselves either for screaming torture or for the slower, more horrid death of the White Dissolution, all whom their distorted, clawing fingers may clutch.

Driven on and on before food robbers the roving, famished mountain bands of Nan-Shan—Selwyn

Roberts had come to Bo-hai. He had not wished to come, for the excavations made by his expedition, which had proved most absorbing, lay in the neighborhood of Kulang, forty miles to the southwest.

Persistent attacks by the brigands of Nan-Shan—starving men who coveted the long train of food supplies with such frenzy of desire that even automatic rifles could not dismay them utterly—had necessitated retreat. Roberts, heading the expedition, saw that rich (in the Chinese conception), well-fed white men, bringing with them provisions for eight months' travel, could be naught save the most juicy, irresistible bait. He decided to return to headquarters in Taiyuen, thence shipping back what remained of his provisions as the greatest contribution to charity his purse could afford.

On the edge of the desert this altruistic plan met defeat. The flitting, fantastic shadows of Bo-hai accomplished by stealth and thievery what had balked the bolder spirits of Nan-Shan. Christensen and Porterfield, acting as sentinels, disappeared soundlessly—and with them all save a small remnant of provisions.

There were many tracks of bare feet in the desert—bare feet that rarely left marks of toes. . . . No clues pointed to the direction the can-

tives had been taken, unless scurrying footprints, criss-crossing the sands in every direction, might be considered clues.

These always ended in bare stretches of shifting sand. Their story was for the reading of a moment; next night wind and sand wiped the record clean. Though Roberts, alone now with his diggers and coolie bearers, attempted to trail the party which had come to his camp, the end of a day found him withdrawing to a position in the foothills which might be defended. The coolies, terrified into spineless, crawling things, clung to him because he represented their only protection. His diggers, strong, black-browed mountaineers of Shensi, gave no sign of fear. He could depend upon their loyalty, but not upon their shooting.

For them the half-light of midnight desert was peopled with strange, sacred shapes—*suan yi*, the giant horse, eighth of the nine offspring of the Dragon; *kuei she t'u*, the mammoth serpent which struggles continuously with a tortoise; these and countless others from Chinese legend. The diggers might defend camp valiantly in daylight combat; at night they were inclined to commend themselves to Maitreya (Buddha), and await his dispensation with fatalistic calm.

Roberts watched, his own rifle and revolvers loaded and ready, and a second rifle reposing before him in the midst of a dozen loaded clips of cartridges. Sunk in a grim, terrible fit of depression at knowledge of his comrades' fate and his own impotence, Roberts repeated over and over a defiance that was near a prayer.

"Let them come! Let them come! Only let me see them. . . !" fell soundlessly from his stiffened lips.

Without cessation, his eyes swept the semi-circle of open desert. At his back, a curious, overhanging basalt cliff denied attack. In front of him,

and to the sides, black figures of the Chinese lay or squatted.

Christensen and Roberts, experienced delvers in Oriental antiquity, had planned the journey. At the time they came to Kulang the crisis of Chinese famine had not arrived. They had taken with them Porterfield, an enthusiastic youth from the consulate at Shanghai. It was his first trip to the interior, Roberts, secure in his own reputation, had thought the trip—an investigation of certain definite clues regarding the old palaces of the Yüan dynasty, and particularly dealing with the possible identification of Kublai Khan, first emperor of the Yüans, with the semi-mythical Prester John of mediaeval history—an excellent chance to give a youngster whom he liked a toe-hold on fame.

To be balked by famine, and then to lose his comrade and protégé in the leper caves of Bo-hai! Strong teeth bit into his lower lip until the blood flowed unnoticed. Silently, Selwyn Roberts swore to himself with immovable earnestness that he would remain. Either the three white men would return together, or all would perish. Roberts, not in the least sleepy, though his body was fatigued, waited with restless grimness for the dawn of another day.

BO-HAI, the capricious and terrible, is not a silent waste after sundown.

With the descent of cold air from the heavens come buckling squalls of wind, plucking pillars of sand and dust from the surface and flinging them broadcast with a singing be-e-e of flying particles. Far out behind, carried on a wind from nowhere, reverberates at times the faint, un-rhythmic banging of *boutangs*, the wailing of *jins* and *nakra*.

And there are voices. At times a rising squeal of Chinese chant makes itself distinct for a second but most often a low, formless murmur, as of howling monkeys heard from a dis-

tance of miles, is the constant undertone.

Roberts heard all these, but it was sight, not sound which absorbed him. Flitting scarecrows from the caves might approach soundlessly over the sand, but he did not believe they could reach him unseen.

He had not calculated upon the sand and dust. A squall came up, beating upon the watchers with a fusillade of fine, choking particles, and raising a screen before Roberts' eyes. In the midst of this he heard dry coughs. Someone was out there, approaching with the shielding sand!

Still the watcher, alternately brushing grains of sand from his nostrils and eyes and peering along the barrel of his rifle, found no target. A sudden notion came to him that the marauders now were inside his camp, about to leap upon him.

He dropped the rifle, and seized two revolvers, shaking the sand and dust out of their muzzles.

As suddenly as it had risen, the veil lifted. Roberts, peering out eagerly, saw only a single bent, stumbling figure—a man who fell to his knees, head almost in the sand, and tried to arise. . . . A snap shot from the ready revolver stretched him flat, his breath leaving in a sharp exhalation like air drawn from a pneumatic tire.

In that instant Roberts stiffened. From out there ten paces had come a gasping sound. It was the wounded man, the desert rat.

"G'bye!" he wheezed. "G'bye. . . never come . . . back . . . now"

The words were English!

SELWYN ROBERTS, waiting only to draw on heavy gloves of Llama hide, ran, crouching, to his fallen adversary.

Catching the shrunken, bowed figure beneath the arms—arms which at biceps gave only a pinch of flesh and bone into his grasp—he scurried

back. Then, stationing the Chinese in a semi-circle further out, so that no marauders might enter without encountering opposition, he turned to the fainting figure of his victim.

Screening electric torch by flaps of jacket, he looked down at the man. He saw a yellowed, meager face, with eyes that had become long and narrow from much squinting in the desert. The man, unconscious now, had his head shaved except for the circle and queue usual among natives of Inner Mongolia. Except that no sign of leprosy showed, he looked the part of a desert exile. Tearing away his black cotton shirt, however, Roberts saw, with a sinking heart, that the intruder's skin was as white as his own!

Desperately, casting aside all caution in use of the flash-lamp, Roberts worked. He found the wound, a gaping hole from soft-nosed bullet, which lay just beneath the stretched ridge of the left clavicle. Probably the bullet had punctured the top of the man's lung. This was rendered plausible by flecks of reddish foam gathering in his mouth corners.

Roberts stanching the external bleeding, and fetched whisky from his personal pack. Forcing three tablespoonfuls of the potent fluid between the man's lips, he held forward the lolling tongue which would have shut off respiration. Ten seconds later the patient squirmed, trying to sit up. Roberts, a solicitous tyrant, held him fast.

"Not dead yet?" queried the man, ending his sentence in a ghastly cough. "What the hell. . . ?" He choked, spitting sideways to the sand.

"No, you're not dead, and you're not going to die!" replied Roberts with forced calmness. "Take it easy. You're among friends."

"Oh yes, I'll die," stated the man with conviction. "Where am I? Who are you? *I Ch'ueh shih hsiang*" His speech trailed off into

a Buddhist prayer unintelligible to Roberts.

"Never mind that now. The first thing is to make you comfortable. You are safe. Don't forget that. Later we can talk. I have many questions to ask you, but the night is long."

The slight frame shook.

"Something over six—maybe ten years. What year is this? . . ." His voice seemed to fail. He lay back, occasionally coughing, but for the most part silent.

A half hour dragged by. Roberts did nothing save inspect the wound he had made, and occasionally give a spoonful of stimulant to the prostrate man. The latter's heart action was faint, but constant. Roberts knew he would live till morning, at least.

"I have talked to myself, to the lepers' priests, to the ~~sands~~—in English," he said suddenly. "That's why I remember. My name's Bowen—Wade Hilton Bowen. Calligraphist for the Central Historical Society. My home was on Perry street, Montgomery, Alabama. A nice house, with barn for six horses. Box stalls . . . I have said this many times. . ."

"Montgomery has changed since you were there," put in Roberts, quietly. "I'll tell you more about it tomorrow."

"Tomorrow . . . tomorrow in hell!" he coughed, and then was silent again.

Roberts, bringing all his mental cohorts to bear upon the possible relation between this queer derelict of the desert and his two companions, made no attempt to string on the conversation.

One hour before dawn the man tried to sit up, strangled in a fit of terrible coughing, and then fell side-wise.

"Can't—can't lie on my back," he gasped. "Spine bowed. Hurts. How—how long have I got?"

"You'll get well," Roberts assured him. "I'll take care of you. Here.

try a little more whisky. I want to ask you a lot of questions when you're able to stand the strain."

"Um-m. Good whisky. Used to like it. Forgot there was such a thing. You've no notion how a man forgets. . . ." His voice was low, rambling, jerky. "Won't get well, though. Hope not. They fixed me. Found out I was immune . . . you know, leprosy. They all have it. Want everybody in the world to get it. But there are worse things. . . ."

Coughing cut short his speech for a moment.

"Not many," said Roberts with a shudder. "I thought you were one of them, and so I put on gloves. They've captured my two comrades. What I want to know as quickly as possible is whether you can help me rescue them. Can you?"

"Captured two men?" repeated the other vaguely. "Shouldn't allow it. Better die with a nice, clean bullet. That's the way I'm going to finish it. You've got a gun. You'll lend me just one bullet? I'm not dying fast enough."

His skinny hand made a weak grab for Roberts' revolver, but the latter shifted his holsters out of reach.

"No! I've got to have your help."

"Help!" sniveled the prostrate man in bitter impotence. "Don't you see what I am? I'm sorry about those men. They'll wish for quick death, but it won't come. Like as not they'll be put in the leper chambers. I was there for two years. There were six of us. All of them got it but me. They were Chinkies and played me dirt. or I'd have made *them* immune, too.

"But maybe it would have been better if I'd caught it. Then they'd have let me alone. They got jealous. Just seeing a healthy man makes 'em crazy. Most people wouldn't understand how mad they get. They want to kill, but not all at once. Oh, no! Death like that is quick and sweet. I used to be a coward about it, but

not now. Just give me that gun a minute, and I'll show you. . . . Why don't you let me?" His quaver sank in sobs and coughing.

"Mainly because I can't stand by and see a white man kill himself. Then, as I said, you must help me. If you haven't got leprosy, though. I can't imagine why you stay here—or why you want to die. Why is it?"

A light of wild derision gleamed in Bowen's eyes, upturned to the flash. Seizing Roberts' hand he drew the fingers along his bowed ridge of backbone.

"Algae," he gritted. "Algae from Gileshtai the Accursed. Puncture, you know. Scum grows in the spinal fluid. Every month I stoop more and more. The pain, you know. Now when I run I am bent like a question mark. Oh, I tried to escape a dozen times. Always they caught me. Couldn't travel far or fast, you see. And no food to take. They—they did this. They are clever. *Damned clever!*"

Roberts had no answer for this. He was chilled with horror. Such practices had come to his ears as whispered rumors, yet he had not believed. That his big, silent comrade Christensen, and the youth Porterfield, were this minute in the hands of the devils of the caves, perhaps suffering as Bowen had suffered, and certainly absorbing the awful, infectious dampness of the subterranean passages, undermined his nerve as no certainty of instant destruction could have done. He shuddered.

"See here, Bowen!" he cried. "We must get them out! You know the way. It will be terrible suffering for you, but you are a man—a white man! Even if it costs the life you do not value you must give these men their chance. I will have two of the diggers support you. . . ."

SOME of his intense earnestness caught hold in Bowen's dulled brain.

"You're right," he mumbled. "White men . . . like you and me. Yes, we can get them out, I think, but not yet. Wait till the sun rises. Then all the Yengi are below ground. They have no firearms. By quick attack through the Wall corridor . . . yes, we should succeed. But then? Do you know your peril in venturing, even for a moment, below ground?"

"My peril matters not!"

Bowen nodded slowly.

"You are brave," he mumbled. "But perhaps you have not seen them . . . the Yengi?"

"I can imagine," cut in Roberts shortly. "How many of them are there?"

"Hundreds. One never knows exactly. They are sent each week. Some die, of course, but most live on and on . . ."

"Can you shoot?"

Bowen grimaced.

"I used to," he answered. "I'll have to, now. Each of us will take as many guns as he can stow away. And plenty of ammunition. Enough so we can give arms to your friends. Merely reaching them will be simple enough. That will not finish it, though. We must go on."

"Fight our way out, you mean?"

"Oh yes, that of course. But first fight our way further in! It would not do simply to escape."

"Why not?"

Bowen grinned wryly. He fumbled in a hidden pocket, coming out with a flat bit of green stone oddly carved with interlaced dragons—a jade pendant.

"Know anything about this?" he asked.

The light of dawn was not yet sufficient. Roberts turned on the flash again. Then he nodded shortly.

"Interesting," he said. "A jade, probably of the fourteenth century, the Yüan dynasty. A week ago I was searching for things like that, but now . . ."

Bowen leaned forward, raising himself to a sitting position.

"Look!" he cried, his voice squeaking into a cough. A touch of his tapered finger nail had caused the pendant to fall into two halves. There before Roberts lay a tiny roll of tinted silk upon which vertical rows of black ideographs were revealed.

Roberts removed the silk carefully, spreading it across his knee.

"The key to one of the treasure caches of Kublai Khan!" shrilled Bowen. "It's mine. I found it. By using it, I managed to keep clean of body. It is the only hope for your friends—and you, if you venture in!"

Silently, and with a growing intensity of interest, Roberts deciphered the characters. The colophon furnished simple, straightforward directions, yet the tale it told was unbelievable.

"A—a cure?" he stammered shakily.

"Yes—or at least a preventive. I can answer for that."

"And is there plenty?"

Bowen cackled, raucous froth appearing on his lips.

"Forty jars!" he retorted. "Each jar with eight panels, and holding about a peck. Treasure, indeed! On those panels is carved the history of the reign of Kublai Khan!"

Roberts was on his feet.

"Let's start!" he commanded, his voice shaking with anticipation of high, terrible adventure. "There is the rim of the sun! Take one last drink of the whisky, Bowen. . . ."

ALL of the Chinese save two were left behind. This pair, stolid, fat, over-muscled giants who had been with Roberts for years, made a chair of their hands, and carried Bowen back across the rim of desert toward the Great Wall. All four of the men bristled with weapons, and had their pockets crammed with loaded clips.

To Roberts' surprise, Bowen direct-

ed the course of the journey back to the east, in the direction of Dadchin.

"Three corridors run the length of the wall in this section," he explained. "One corridor is not known to the Yengi. . . . It is how I got among them first. . . ."

Over tumbled ruins of wall climbed the four. At a black aperture, scarcely wide enough to permit the passing of a heavy man, Bowen signaled.

"Hang and drop," he commanded, speaking in a whisper. "The corridor floor is eight feet down. I know a better way to climb, but, going in, it is simpler to drop. . . ."

From the black slit an odor rose which made Roberts stiffen. He had caught a faint suggestion of it from Bowen's clothes, but now it came to him, fetid and strong—a scent of rank, damp decay.

He snatched one last breath of desert air, knelt, swung himself down into space, and let go. As Bowen had said, the drop was short, but Roberts, in the dark, fell sidewise to the slimy bricks of the passage.

In a second he was up, shrinking involuntarily from the contact. When Bowen was lowered from the slit of light, Roberts caught him and set him down carefully. The Chinese did not follow.

"I told them to wait there," Bowen whispered. "They'd be useless down here. There's no sense in spoiling two brave boys."

"But can you make it?"

"Yes, if I don't have to cough. When we get in the third passage it won't matter. No one is there. Come on. Hold to this rag. . . ." He placed a shred of his tattered blouse in Roberts' palm, plunging immediately into the blackness.

Roberts, stumbling blindly after—recoiling from each touch of the horrid, oozing walls—ran on tip-toe in order to match the silence of his bare-footed guide.

They passed spots of light. These showed openings to right or left—op-

emings to chambers lighted with flickering flames of green or yellow. Once Roberts looked, his flesh scrawl with morbid curiosity. He saw within the place three sprawling things of rags and decay, things which did not—perhaps *could* not—move. Thereafter he kept his eyes averted, and clenched one fist about the solid butt of his revolver.

After perhaps ten minutes of travel, Bowen, wheezing audibly now, bent forward in a silent convulsion which brought blood to his lips. Only at the last did he make a noise. Then a gasping inhalation was not to be controlled.

A second later he crowded back against Roberts, crouching at the side of the passage. A leap . . . a dulled groan . . . Bowen had brought down the butt of one of his borrowed revolvers upon the skull of a newcomer whom Roberts had neither seen nor heard!

A moment later they squeezed through another narrow opening, descended a flight of block stairs, and were in another corridor—one much more populous than the upper, to judge from the sounds. Roberts heard the subdued chattering of many voices. Here faint light showed.

Bowen led on hurriedly. At a point indistinguishable from the rest of the wall, so far as Roberts was concerned, he pushed inward a block of stone, which went to the horizontal, immediately swinging back when they had passed.

"Now we're all right for a minute" began Bowen. His long-repressed coughing attacked him then and he surrendered to it for the time. "Lungs . . . filling up. . . won't last long" he gasped then. "This corridor. . . no way out . . . get back in the other, if I am not . . . with . . . you"

"We'll manage *that*; don't you worry!" answered Roberts. "Lead me first to those two men. After

that, the Buddha I feel unclean already!"

Bowen incomprehensibly laughed at that—a shrill giggle, half-hysterical. But he led on, of a sudden turning, squeezing through to the second corridor again, and then, without warning bringing up two automatics. Two streams of fire . . . four shots

"Got 'em all!" he shrilled, laughing. "Come quick now!"

ROBERTS found himself dragged forward at a half-run.

Again Bowen's two guns spoke. This time, in the light of flashes, Roberts saw two crouching things succumb. Through a black doorway they plunged. Then a faint light from a single insufficient wick lighted a chamber perhaps twenty by ten feet in size. Chained, backs outward, Porterfield and Christensen were spread-eagled against the fetid, oozing wall!

They were stripped to the waist. Across their white backs, greenish now in the light of the floating wick, were the red criss-crosses of flagellations.

"Thank God you've come!" cried the usually silent Christensen, as Roberts shot away the rusted chains binding his arms and ankles to the wall. "This place . . . do you know what it is?"

"All about it!" answered Roberts, succinctly. "Here, take these!" He handed a brace of revolvers and a handful of clips to his Norwegian comrade.

Then he turned to Porterfield. Four explosions, and a series of wrenches set free the boy, who did not wait to have the dangling shackles shot off his wrists and ankles.

Bowen, stationed at the entrance, was shooting now. A gathering handful of *Yengi* crowded in the passage. These threw lances, or cut at the defending figure with knives that were long, keen and curved.

Bowen was unharmed, however, except for scratches. His revolvers had kept him out of serious danger. He seemed to take an inhuman delight in snapping away at every figure of a Chinaman that showed itself. When all had fallen between him and the turn of corridor, he still fired away. Before the four left, he had to reload all four of his revolvers.

Bowen and Roberts left in the van, Christensen and Porterfield were given the job of protecting the rear. The four hurried down the corridor, occasionally stopping for a second to pump out a shot or two at some unsuspecting, hurrying figure.

Throughout the underground corridors weird shouts resounded. Cries in a tongue that even Roberts could not translate called for reinforcements from the chambers. Somewhere an eerie gong clanged its resonance.

The four pushed on, led forward by Bowen, who seemed to have reached an exhilaration which thought nothing of wounds. His bent figure now was wracked by continual coughing, but he paid no attention, gasping in sufficient breath somehow. Each five or six yards Christensen and Porterfield paused, to throw backward a fusillade at the gathering throng of maniacs.

They reached a triple fork in the passage. Without hesitation, Bowen chose the center one, which led on a gradual slant downward. Fifty paces further a brocaded curtain shut the passage. Here the light was bright from many swimming wicks set in the side wall.

"Straight in!" cried Bowen, and flung himself upon the curtain. As his fingers clutched the cloth to pull it aside, a long keen blade reached out, puncturing his side in a swift flash.

"Ah-h!" he cried. "The priests! Kill them!"

He stumbled, and in falling, brought down the heavy weight of the

curtain across his body. Through the aperture eight wizened specimens, flourishing drawn swords, charged the invaders.

ROBERTS backed away, firing. From the floor, however, came the streams of fire which dropped three of the priests.

"They're the ones who fixed me!" shrilled Bowen, firing as fast as his fingers could pull triggers.

The last toppled. The doorway was clear.

"You'll—you'll have to drag me I'm done" Bowen continued, his voice suddenly weakening. "I'll show you"

Roberts stooped, picking up the slight figure as he might have lifted a tumbled chair, and darted inside the last chamber.

Here he stopped a split second in open-mouthed amazement. He had expected a statue of Buddha. The colophon was explicit. Yet what a statue! From the wide base to the top of the broad forehead was at least fifty feet! The altar, surrounded by fire at the base, though itself the height of a man, seemed a puny thing.

"Hold the doorway!" cried Roberts to his two rescued companions. "Now, Bowen"

But there was no need to ask the derelict. Reeling forward out of Roberts' arms, he pointed to a knob seven feet from the floor. "Turn turn that and press here and here!" he gasped, choking.

Roberts obeyed. A second later he was scrambling up to force further open a slab which swung creakingly. Perched there on the slab to hold it open—it was weighted, and after the initial swing of opening, began to close—he glanced inward. There, stacked before him, were tiers and tiers of the eight-paneled jars that Bowen had mentioned. One, as if it had been opened, stood on the floor

of the storage chamber. He seized it, finding it heavy in his hands, and leaped down.

Bowen clawed off the cover, reached in, and came forth with three greenish, soft masses clutched in his skinny fingers.

"The eggs!" he cried. "Seven hundred years old! Make make each of them eat one right away! We'll have a hard time . . ." He choked, flinging a thin, trembling arm in the direction of Christensen and Porterfield, who were having their hands full at the doorway.

Roberts seized his own weapons, ran up, and in terse sentences explained the situation.

"A a cure?" cried Porterfield, incredulously.

"Bowen says so. Try them, anyway. Eat one apiece. I'll hold the door. *Hm!*"

The last was an exclamation of pain. A thrown knife had sliced a six-inch cut just above his knee. He fired, conserving bullets now, for down the corridor as far as he could see the *Yengi* had banked themselves. Already a breastwork of Chinese bodies was growing in front of the chamber entrance.

Behind him, Porterfield sputtered over swallowing his portion.

"Awful taste!" he cried, grimacing.

"They're treated with something," answered Christensen, wiping his lips and leaping to Roberts' side with one of the ancient eggs.

Roberts stuffed half of the greenish mass into his mouth, swallowing it whole. The taste was not altogether unpleasant, yet acrid. As he fired on and on, emptying one after another of the revolvers, he caught himself wondering how long it had taken for the shells of those eggs to become resorbed. . . . He ate the rest.

The fight was hopeless from the first. Though few bullets missed a human target—the narrow corridor

was jammed with yammering, horrid humanity—and little damage could be accomplished by any of the *Yengi* at first, the inexorable pressure began to tell. Christensen, cursing in Scandinavian, plucked a lance from his shoulder. Later he dropped like a stone. The thin hilt of a knife quivered in the socket of his right eye.

Bowen, dragging himself to the entrance, diagnosed the reason.

"We're desecrating their shrine!" he yelled. "In a way, I don't blame them They're They're" Coughs ended his sentence.

And then, catching up the eight-paneled jar, and begging from Roberts the silk colophon, he threw his mangled body out before the breastwork of dead Chinese. High and shrill rose his voice, a fast, excited jabber which Roberts could not decipher. It continued

"Stop shooting!" Bowen flung back over his shoulder. The white men were glad to obey. Their ammunition almost was spent. Strangely enough, the *Yengi* of the front rank lowered their weapons. They turned, jabbering excitedly to others. Bowen flung out to them the square of ideographed silk.

"It—it's your only hope, my brothers!" gasped Bowen. "Take one jar—if you will"

At this he pitched forward, clawing with his hands at the body of one of the *Yengi*. Roberts saw that the dead Chinese had leather pads in place of hands at the end of his wrists. . . .

WITH the melting away of the horde of *Yengi*, Roberts—bearing Bowen, who was unconscious part of the time—and Porterfield found a way out. At the surface they saw full two hundred of the lepers, yet none of the latter moved to attack. The instant the white men left the opening, the *Yengi* fought in swarms to return.

"I told them cure
Maybe it is maybe not" gasped Bowen. He shuddered and lay still. Roberts held a dead man in his arms.

Nevertheless he stalked on to the place where the two Chinese had been left. Then he relinquished his burden. Porterfield gave over to him the eight-paneled jar which represented the whole of their achievement.

"On the way back each of us will eat a dozen of these eggs." stated Roberts. "Bowen may be wrong, but I believe what he said. Those old emperors knew. . . ."

At the camp Porterfield collapsed, sobbing. The full horror of what he had experienced had begun to seep down to his consciousness. Roberts cared for him.

"Then I take it you won't be with me—when I go back?"

Porterfield roused himself. "Go back?" he cried. "I would not go back for all the wealth of the Indies! You don't mean to say?"

"I do," answered Roberts grimly. "Within six months. Men may live or die, but history must be written. The *Yengi* may not have smashed *all* of those forty jars"