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# The Hidden Monster

By DAVID H. KELLER

*Strange are the ways of China, even when transported to this country—a detective story of Chinatown and the exploits of an amateur sleuth in the Temple of T'ien*

A NEW temple had been opened in Chinatown. In spite of its mystery and peculiarities, the worship of the new god was rapidly replacing the former modes of religion. The temples of Buddha, of Confucius, of Taoism were sadly neglected for the wonderful sacraments of the latest idol.

The temple was simply an old store, remodeled for the purpose. Furniture there was none. Altar there was none. There was simply an idol. It must have been a very old idol, for, while the name, Shang Ti, meant the Supreme Ruler, still, the features of the god, the body of it, showed a peculiar combination of human and reptilian features that marked it as belonging to the dawn age of anthropomorphic sculpture.

It was a Dragon God. But the head and the face were human, with a look of hatred and malignity that spoke unutterable wo for all those who failed to obey its commands. It sat on scaly haunches, the long tail coiled around its body and the legs outstretched, ready to spring forward and kill the traitor and unbeliever. But this was not all! The visible part of the god was not the real god. Within the body of the dragon another god lived, more terrible in his threat and mighty in his far-reaching rule. This inner god was the real one. This was the *T'ien*, the *Almighty Ruler* of the destinies of mankind.

Its image reposed in the belly of the larger god. What the image was, what manner of god, man or animal it represented or resembled was known only to

those worshippers who had dared to look in upon it. In speaking of this real god, this hidden idol, people used the most respectful and fantastic terms in public, while in private they referred to it as the Hidden Monster.

The worship of this inner god was most peculiar. Two priests sat on either side of the dragon and there took the votive offerings. This was not in flesh, fowl or the first fruits of the harvest, but in hard cash, gold, silver or honest paper money of the United States. This offering to the Inner God was carefully counted by the priests and then the worshipper was permitted to go on with his religious rites. With shoes and stockings off, he climbed over the tail and lower legs of the dragon and up the body till his head was on a level with an opening in the upper belly of the thing that was half man, half beast, and all god. Into this opening the head of the worshipper was thrust, and thus he obtained a view of the ancient god inside. While the head was thus swallowed by the larger god, the devotee supported himself by holding firmly with both hands to the outstretched arms of the dragon. There he remained till the period of prayer was over and then, withdrawing his head, he descended to the floor, made a final bow of reverence and walked out of the temple.

For many days a steady stream of Chinamen came to worship at this shrine. Rumors of the new divinity reached the police, the anthropologists, and scientists of the city. Several white men, who were

considered friends of Chinatown, asked for permission to visit the new temple for purposes of scientific study. In every case this permission was refused by the priests, and the students of Oriental religion had to be content with little pieces of hearsay, picked up here and there.

Professor Charles Quarley was one of these disappointed scientists. He even went so far as to call on the head of the police department. The chief heard his story and shook his head.

"That is against our policy. When it comes to religion, we feel that it is best to leave the Orientals alone. They do not like to have everybody musing around in their temples. It causes hard feelings, and they are hard enough to deal with as it is. There is no way that I can get you into that temple except by force, and that would be undoing the work of years."

"But, Chief," urged Quarley, "I have lived for years in China. I can dress so that I look like an Oriental myself. I know the language. There is nothing I love more than to 'go native' for a while."

"You play at it," sneered the officer. "Why not do something worth while? For example, there is a lot of opium coming into the city now and none of my men are able to find out how it is being done. We have discovered and stopped ninety-nine channels, but so far the hundredth one has blocked our efforts. You go and find out about it and then I will give you credit for being a real detective instead of just a little play-child."

Quarley looked him square in the face and then stuck out his hand.

"Let's shake on that. I have the time and the money. I am not only going to find your opium for you, but I am going to get into the temple."

The chief only laughed at him.

However, from that time the new tem-

ple was kept under the watchful eye of the detective department of the city. The chief even went so far as to make a list of the noted Chinamen who came to worship. He found that the temple was drawing devotees from Seattle, Los Angeles, Denver and even as far east as Chicago. It was apparently becoming a factor of national importance in the religious life of the American-Chinaman. It was doing something that had never been done before. It seemed to be fusing Oriental religions. Among the dozens who paid to worship at the shrine of the Hidden Monster were those who had formerly followed Taoism, Buddhism, Mazdaism and even Mohammed.

The chief was a routinist. He had been, in his youth, an original thinker, but age had destroyed much of his initiative. Had this temple been a restaurant, a shop, or a gambling joint, it would have been raided months before. The fact that it was a temple protected it. The chief gave orders that under no circumstance was the sacredness of the temple to be violated by any member of the police force. The new god, *T'ien*, was becoming too important to be insulted in any way by white men. Things were fairly quiet in Chinatown and the chief wanted them to stay that way.

QUARLEY lost no time following his conference with the chief. His collegiate training had taught him that the shortest distance between two points was a straight line. He wanted to go and see just what this new god looked like. The only way to do so was to go as a Chinaman. He believed that he could do this without discovery. He was an admirer of Burton and felt that if the Englishman could go into the Holy City without being detected, an American ought to be able to duplicate the performance to at least a slight degree.

After an intensive and nauseating diet of carrots to yellow his skin to the appropriate shade, he drifted into Chinatown as a desolate and opium-hungry laundryman, out of a job. It did not take him long to find at least a retail source of opium. All he needed was money, and that he had in spite of his apparent poverty. Disappearing for a few days, he came back with better clothes and more money and a greater craving for the food of the gods.

After several such disappearances Chinatown guessed the secret of Ming Foo. He was a killer. The Tongs at once entered into a spirited rivalry. Every secret society wanted him as a member. He finally selected and joined one of the more respectable types. Money came his way and he opened a store. After that he occasionally drifted into the new temple and worshipped the Hidden Monster. Quarley was having the time of his life.

Some months later the chief received a letter. It was short, yet it caused the head of the department a great deal of worry. It read:

Dear Chief:

There may be a riot in Chinatown at any time. When it happens, instruct your men to search all the dead for a white carnation under the cap. If found, take the body direct to your office. Keep constant watch around the new temple.

QUARLEY.

The chief had almost forgotten that there was a man by that name. Then he suddenly remembered both the man and the conversation. He called in his assistant.

"There is a fool amateur detective working on his own in Chinatown. I do not know what he is up to, but he thinks that he is going to raise hell. Read that letter and weep! At the same time we had better do as he says. Pass it around among the boys and put a few more men on duty down there."

FROM that time on, the temple of the God *T'ien* was under the most careful observation. There seemed to be nothing new. Just the usual line of patient Chinamen, waiting for their chance to worship. The next day the line grew longer, but was still, silent and patient. After that, however, there seemed to be a gradual development of excitement, for even the Oriental can become excited under certain circumstances. Little groups of Chinamen gathered on the corners near the temple, engaged in earnest conversation. Now and then an orator talked to them in low but excited tones. Night simply increased the number of irritable Orientals.

At six the next morning a mob of rabid Orientals rushed down the street and broke into the temple of *T'ien*. Shots were fired. The trouble might have been anticipated; at least there was some feeble resistance, but the mob swept everything before it. Windows were broken, doors torn from their hinges, and in a few minutes the Dragon God was out on the street and torn to pieces—a rather easy thing to do; since it was only made of papier-maché. The damage done, the mob tore on, evidently in pursuit of one of the priests. The other priest lay dead on the street, and near him was another Chinaman, his face covered with blood. The riot squad of policemen arrived just in time to see the last of the mob dash around the corner. The two dead men and the fragments of the once popular god littered the street.

Among the first to reach the dead was a Secret Service man. He looked at the priest and found he was hatless. But the other man's head was still fully clothed according to the best Oriental style. The detective took off the black cap, and there—was a white carnation.

He hailed a passing taxi, and called to one of the bulls, "Hey, Murphy! Take

that one Chink to the morgue. I am going to take charge of this other one. Orders of the chief. Sure! It's all right. You know me, Murphy. Jones of the Secret Service. Here, one of you take this stiff's feet and the other his hands and in he goes into the taxi and the blood all over the seat. Sure we will pay the bill for cleaning; and now, Charlie, my lad, step on the gas and beat it to headquarters."

FIFTEEN minutes later the body was carried into the chief's private office.

"Here is the man with the white carnation under his hat, Chief," announced the detective. "Dead as a dead rat."

"Sure enough dead?" asked the chief.

"You bet! Must have a dozen holes in him. Look at the floor."

"Well, push the rug over. We can clean the linoleum. I will have to identify him and then some of the boys can take him to the morgue. Write me a full report. I hear that they cleaned out the temple."

"They certainly did. Tore the old dragon to bits, killed one of the priests and are after the other—and this guy, he got popped off."

"Musta something gone wrong. Good-bye. On the way out, send John in."

The assistant came in at once.

"Lock the door, John," the chief ordered. "Do you know that stiff on the floor?"

"Just looks like a dead Chink to me."

"He is more than that, John. I have it all figured out. That is a smart white man who tried to find out something about the Chink's way of doing things, and when the time came they bumped him off. They knew he was white all the time, but they just waited till they were ready. That thing on the floor,

John, was once Professor Charles Quarley. Now he is just one hundred and fifty pounds of dead meat. Pity! I wish I knew just what he did, or tried to do."

At that the dead man sat up.

"Really want to know, Chief?"

The chief nearly swallowed his cigar.

"You! You! What are you doing? Play-acting?"

"Sure. I am not even scratched, but I thought it best that all my old friends should believe that Ming Foo was really dead."

The chief dropped in his chair. At last he was able to speak.

"John, take the professor in and help him wash up, and then we will listen to the story."

Five minutes later the professor sat across the table from the chief, while the assistant, notebook in hand, was taking down the high spots of the story.

"You look sure enough yellow," commented the chief.

"I know it. That comes from my diet of carrots. It is better than any dye because it will not wash off. Now there is not much to tell you. I did just what I told you I was going to: I 'went native.' For the last two months I have been Ming Foo, much-respected killer and Tong member and storekeeper in Chinatown. And no one suspected that I was a white man. I had a most unusual and interesting experience, especially the night I was initiated into the Tong. I became an opium addict—at least they thought so. And I went into the temple of *T'ien*. Went right in, all dressed in my best with a fine black silk cap on, and gave the priest my two hundred dollars and climbed right up and stuck my head in the hole and worshipped the god like all the rest of them."

"You did what?"

"I climbed up on the dragon and stuck my head in the hole so that I could look

inside the abdominal cavity of the dragon and see the real god inside."

"Well, go on! Whatinell did you see?"

"Don't run your words together that way, Chief. Language is so much more effective when there is a distinct hiatus between the words. I saw nothing but a hand reach up and take my hat off. Yes, and then put it right back on again. Of course I was expecting it. My friends had intimated that this would happen. So then I climbed down and walked back to the shop. But I found out about the opium."

"You mean the way it was coming in?"

"Yes. I have one of the caps on now. Take a knife and rip it open. See the flat tin can under the lining? Looks like any other black silk hat, but there is the opium in the can. That is the way they were distributing it. Every Oriental wore a silk cap when he went to worship, but when the hats were changed he was richer by so much opium. All the time his hands were in plain sight. You could have watched the whole performance from the outside and never suspected that they were selling opium."

"After that I did a little real detective work. I found that they were receiving shipments of these black silk hats from Canton. I saw one of the shipments. It was all easier because I was a member of a Tong and had a reputation for being a killer. Anyway I found out when the next shipment was expected and I duplicated it in every detail, even to the tin can under the lining. Then when the ship arrived I did the old substitution trick, and at the present time the shipment of caps with the opium is in my apartment. The priests received their shipment and kept right on selling the caps, but there was just black mud in the tin cans. Naturally the worshippers of the Hidden Monster became fretful. Two hundred dollars is a big price to pay for

a black silk cap and a few ounces of black mud.

"They knew in Chinatown that I was a killer. And the Tong I belonged to stood for honesty in business. So when the dissatisfied customers came to us to talk matters over I was naturally selected to investigate the matter and stop the trade—in mud. Of course the priests did not understand about it. They might have thought their customers were irritated on account of the price they were charging. So I did a little propaganda work, and when the time came we just naturally wrecked the place and I died on the field of battle, covered with mercuriochrome that ran from a dozen broken bladders. I must admit that every one who saw me thought I was dead. You can do as you think best with the opium, Chief, but I think that you had better put a death notice in the papers in regard to Ming Foo."

The chief simply kept on looking at the professor. At last he managed to speak.

"I suppose you realize that you just had beginner's luck? The next time they will kill you. I have been hanging around Chinatown for years and I simply can not understand how you did it."

"It was the carrots, Chief. I certainly was thankful that I had eaten so many of them, especially the night I was initiated into the Tong."

"What about that night?"

"That is another story, Chief. Suppose you get me up to my apartment in some way, and on the same trip you can take charge of that opium. I am tired of being a Chinaman. I think I will enjoy being a white man for a while."

"But how about your expenses?" asked the chief. "You must have spent a lot of cash."

"I certainly did, but I had a wonderful holiday—that is, all except the carrots."