

## He Sought the Answer To A Witch's Curse Among the Very Fiends of Hell!

*First, a dancing girl tried to stab him.*

*Then a snake sprang at him out of thin air.*

*Finally, a phantom woman appeared in the darkness of his sleeping chamber—wicked, lustful, and seeking his death!*

It was then that Pyrrhas, the barbarian, knew that a curse was on him—a curse made with a witch-queen that could not be broken until he had followed her to the very nethermost pits of the hell that had spawned her.

Thus begins the vivid and gripping story of **THE WITCH FROM HELL'S KITCHEN**, a new, never before published novelette by the late master of mystic adventure, Robert E. Howard. Also in this new AVON FANTASY READER appear:

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**by Hazel Heald**

What was the thing from the unknown that terrorized that Boston museum? An eerie story of unspeakable horrors from a forgotten past. In the great Lovecraft tradition!

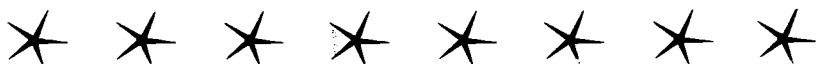
### **THE PHANTON SHIP OF DIRK VAN TROMP**

**by James Francis Dwyer**

On a far Asiatic coast, an exotic adventuress leads three men to a terrible destiny aboard a ghostly frigate.

Other rare and unusual fantastic stories by Dale Clark, Hugh B. Cave, Algernon Blackwood, and many more help to make this number an exciting experience in reading thrills.

*D. A. W.*



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AVON FANTASY READER NO. 18

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# *The Phantom Ship of Dirk Van Tromp*

by James Francis Dwyer

*James Francis Dwyer is one of those authors who manage to steep their yarns in the heady exotic essence of the Orient and the Southern Seas. Himself an Australian and a world traveler, he knows the lands whereof he speaks and loves their secrets and legendry. This tale is slightly reminiscent of the story of the Flying Dutchman though Dirk Van Tromp operates his vessel in different waters and with a stranger crew. An interesting editorial note about its story is its use of a German naturalist as narrator. Prior to World War One this seemed reasonable enough. Dwyer used this character as spokesman of a series of such stories. But after the war, the antagonisms aroused caused the author to change the naturalist's nationality to Dutch in a similar series he was to keep up for many years.*

THE TROPIC SUN, looking like a flaming truckwheel, lurched behind the blue smear of jungle that marked the horizon, and the heat-smitten trees waved their tops languidly, as if congratulating each other on the fact that the blazing afternoon had come to an end. A soft purring note came from the underbrush where the panting birds felt the first breath of cool air from the ocean. The purple haze of the dusk filmed the landscape, softening the outline of the distant hills that the rays of the westering sun had made wonderfully distinct.

Ford, the tall American, lifted himself upon one elbow and looked across the clearing. He called Hochdorf, the naturalist, by name, and, receiving no answer, sprang from the hammock and ran to the end of the veranda that extended the full length of the lonely bungalow. Here he stopped with a grunt of astonishment and gazed toward a clump of mohor trees to the right of the little dwelling. Hochdorf was kneeling in front of the clump, his rifle pointed at the shadows beneath the great trunks, and Ford watched him intently. Three times the German naturalist removed the rifle from his shoulder, and three times whipped it sharply back into place. The American was puzzled. He could see nothing, and he muttered to himself as he watched the kneeling marksman.

"It must be a wild boar," he breathed. "There's nothing—Gee! did you get it, Hochdorf?"

Ford had sprung from the veranda as the German fired, and the curiosity with which he had viewed the actions of the naturalist was increased a thousand times as he raced across the clearing. Hochdorf had dropped the rifle on the grass the moment he had fired, and when the American reached his side he was mopping the perspiration from his forehead with a large bandanna. He was pale and sick looking, and his deep-sunken blue eyes were fixed on the spot he had fired at.

"What it is?" cried Ford. "What did you shoot at?"

The German pointed at the underbrush with a shaking forefinger. "See, did I—I get him?" he cried. "Do not show him to me! I cannot look at such a thing!"

Wondering much, Ford approached the bushes, kicked them aside with the point of his shoe and disclosed a huge black rat, vainly attempting to drag its mutilated carcass to safety.

"Why, it's a rat!" he cried. "A rat as big as a prairie dog!"

"Ja, I know!" gasped the German. "Do not bring it out! *Himmel!* no! I cannot look at a rat without being sick. I am sick as the devil now!"

Ford dispatched the injured rodent and followed the big naturalist to the veranda of the bungalow. Hochdorf called for a glass of gin, and when the Dyak boy had brought a stiff nobbler, he drained it hastily and sank back in the big desk chair as if exhausted by the happening. For a few minutes he did not speak, then he turned to the wondering American.

"A rat is the only thing that I cannot handle," he said slowly. "I would sooner handle a king cobra or one of those little poisonous kraits that can put you in Charon's ferryboat inside three hours. I have been made sick by that rat. *Ach!* yet! Did I ever tell you of the Phantom Ship of Dirk Van Tromp? *Nein?* Well, it is hot indoors, and if you like I will tell it to you now. There is a countryman of yours in that story, and it might interest you."

Ford pulled his chair closer, and the German continued.

"He was a fine fellow was that American. His name was Delnard, and I owe him my life. He thinks I have paid him back, but I am not sure.

"Delnard and I were going from Trengganu to Pathia, and we had a passage on the *Lost Peri*, a schooner owned by a Singapore pearl buyer. The mate of that schooner was as much like me as one mangosteen is like another, and that was unlucky. It was mighty unlucky. The Malay boatswain had a grudge against the mate, and one evening when I was looking over the rail something fell on the back of my head, and before my knees had time to sag I was lifted up and tipped overboard. Before I lost my senses I had come to the conclusion that it was the mast that had fallen on my head. I did so!

"When I got my wits back, I found that the schooner had waddled off into the night, leaving me and the man who had rescued me to look after ourselves. And I knew that it was Delnard, the American, who had rescued me. Fill up your glass and we will drink to him. By the bones of St. Philip of Neri, he was a brave man!"

"After awhile we struck a fringe of mangrove trees, and Delnard hauled me ashore.

" 'How are you?' he asked.

" 'My head aches,' I said. 'Did the mast fall on me?'

"Delnard laughed when I asked that question. 'That Malay boatswain thought that you were the mate,' he said. 'He walloped you on the head with a jack-block and hoisted you overboard.'

"I started to thank Delnard, but he clapped his hand over my mouth, and I was quiet. I was mighty quiet.

" 'There is someone talking on the other side of this clump of trees,' he whispered. 'Don't make a noise till we see who it is.'

"That American started to climb through the slimy trunks of the mangrove trees, and I followed him. For about ten yards we crawled on our hands and knees, then we peered out through the branches. The moon was full and immediately in front of us was a patch of white sand that glittered like diamond dust.

"It was then that we saw the Green-eyed Woman and the monk. I shall always call her the Green-eyed Woman, *Ja*. I will! As we peered through the bushes her face was turned toward us, and her eyes shone like the two emeralds in the face of the cat-eyed goddess, Pasht, that they worshiped at Bubastis thousands of years ago. *Himmel!* They were wonderful eyes! When I saw them shining like that I thought of the stories that the Shans tell of the Queen of the Leopards who takes the shape of a beautiful woman so that she can torture the men who hunt the leopard folk. For that woman was beautiful. She looked like a naiad taking a rest on that strip of white sand, and Delnard and I stared with all our eyes.

"She wore the most wondrous sarong that we had ever seen. It was the most wonderful sarong that ever was made. It was purple—the peculiar wicked purple that they can make at Srinager and Saharanpur, and it suited that woman. She was wicked-looking. She was so. She was lithe and tigerish, and those green eyes and that mane of gold that fell down over her breasts, made her look unreal. Many a day have I wondered how she came by those green eyes and that golden hair. I have seen nearly every breed of woman between Blair Harbor and Okhotsk, but I never have seen one like her. Never!

" 'Look at the man,' whispered Delnard. 'Look at him!'

"I tore my eyes away from the woman and looked at her companion. He was a monk, a long, lean, bare-polled monk, wrapped in a yellow robe, and he stood in the center of that sand patch with one arm stuck out like the statue of Friedrich Wilhelm in Königstrasse. And he was talking. It was his voice that we heard when we were on the other side of the mangrove clump, but we could not hear him speaking when we were looking at the Green-eyed Woman. Her beauty had made us deaf to noises. It had so.

"But when we had wrenched our eyes away from the purple sarong and the curtain of golden hair, our ears got a chance to listen to what the monk was saying. He had some leaves of the talipot palm in his hand, and he was reading that woman a story. He was reading her a story, my friend, a story

that was more wonderful than any that Scheherezade told to the sultan. He would read a little and then he would explain it to her, and we listened to that story with every fiber of our beings. We could follow him in what he said, and we listened like two hill tigers waiting for the deer to come down to the watering place.

"Have you heard anything of the Phantom Ship? *Ja*, you have heard a little; I know. You have heard the stories that the old maids tell on the veranda of the Minto Mansions Hotel at Rangoon. I heard those stories when I first came to the East. They will tell you of the phantom ship that beats up and down the China Sea from Pulo Tiunan to Koh Pennan, but that bare-pollled monk knew more than those old women. He knew why that ship was kept in the South China Sea. Ay, he did so. He knew the history of the whole business, and he was telling it to the Green-eyed Woman when Delnard and I found them on the sand patch. My friend, there are things happening in the Orient today that are just as wonderful as the things that took place in the reigns of Omar and Osman and the gay old Haroun.

"That was a wonderful story that we heard. Dirk Van Tromp, a big-nosed Dutchman from Amsterdam, rocked round the Cape of Good Hope in his old high-pooped ship and came up to the China Sea with his nose sniffing the south wind to get the scent of gold. That was quite a few days ago. It was before Buxar, and before Plassey. The Dutch were great rovers in those days, and Dirk Van Tromp and his bunch were the toughest that ever crept out of the fogs of the Zuyder Zee.

"That Dutchman had a nose for gold that was sharper than the snout of a Colombo Chetty. He could smell a piece of treasure a hundred leagues away, and once he got a whiff of the yellow metal he would circle round like a vulture swinging over carrion till he got his big hands on the stuff.

"Van Tromp heard that there was much treasure in an old gray monastery that was tucked away in the hills above Tahkechi, and he swore on oath on his big flat blade that the treasure would be his in a mighty short time. He was a determined gentleman was Mynheer Van Tromp. Delnard and I lay in the shadow of those mangrove trees, and we listened to the bare-pollled monk telling the Green-eyed Woman how the Dutchman went backward and forward in his old high-pooped ship trying to think out a plan to get at that hoard. And the monks in that monastery knew that the big-nosed pirate was waiting to get a chance at the gold and jewels in the vaults. You bet they did. They looked out from their towers and saw that Dutch ship go up and down like a big white-winged bird of prey, and they didn't say any prayers for the Mynheer Van Tromp. Not any prayers that would do him good.

"Now the keeper of the keys of the treasure vault was a young monk who had never seen a woman. Never! Mind you, this is the story that the bare-pollled monk read from the leaves of the talipot palm. He told her that the treasure keeper had been found in a paddy-field by the monks of the monastery when he was a little baby, and they had reared him inside the

walls till he grew up and became one of them. He had never seen a woman at a distance even. That place was quite some distance from a village, and that youngster was not allowed to stray. But the monks liked him, and when he grew up they gave him the keys of the vault and made him the guardian of all the wealth that was stored there from the time of Tamerlane.

"For three months that thieving Dutchman rolled up and down the coast, and the monks stayed inside their walls and waited. The head priest gave an order that the big gate should not be opened while Van Tromp was on the coast, and, to make matters more secure, he asked that young monk to stay in his cell and keep the keys with him. They were afraid of the Dutchman, and they had good reason to be. He was a fiend. He waited for an idea to get into his big, round head, and at the end of three months that idea came. And it was a devil of an idea. *Ja*, it was.

"Can you guess what that Dutchman did? He went down to Sebah, and he got a temple dancing girl who was as beautiful as the singing houris in the seventh heaven. She was more beautiful than Mura, whose loveliness killed the Seven Nubians who dared to look upon her. She had eyes that she stole from Helen of Troy, and hair that was of the bronze tint that you see on the wing of the bird of paradise. That was what the monk told the Green-eyed Woman. Her little feet were so small that the children's slippers in the bazaar fell from them, and her hands were like the petals of a flower.

"When the bare-poll'd monk was telling of her hands and feet, the woman with the green eyes stopped him and put a question.

"Was she more lovely than I?" she asked.

"I am only reading what is written on the palm leaves," said the monk.

"But was she?" persisted the woman. "Tell me at once."

"No," stammered the monk, "she was lovely, but not as lovely as you!"

"When he said that to the woman she laughed in a way that chilled my blood. She gave Delnard a chill too. It was a devil of a laugh. It was a laugh of scorn, a laugh of contempt. If a man laughed in the same way you would have killed him with the nearest thing you could get your hands on. *Ach!* I have never heard anyone laugh in the way that woman laughed.

"The monk went on with his story, and Delnard and I listened in the shadows. Dirk Van Tromp and his crew took that girl up to the monastery one night when the moon was full, and I choked with temper as I listened. The window of the cell in which the young guardian of the treasure slept looked out over the wall, and when that young monk got up from his prayers on that night he looked out on the moonlit hillside. *Gott in Himmel!* It was a dirty trick to play on that youngster. When he looked through the bars of his cell window he saw that temple dancing girl pirouetting in the middle of that grassy patch, and she looked like a silvered houri!

"That Dutchman was a cunning devil, was he not? He was hiding with his men in the bushes, and that girl was dancing the Dance of the Seven Delights before the eyes of that monk who had never seen a woman till that

moment. He pressed his lean face against the bars and watched with eyes of astonishment. She was the first woman that he had ever seen, and she was one of the loveliest of her kind. It was not a fair trick, my friend. It was not!

"That girl danced and danced. That bare-poll'd monk described that dance to the Green-eyed Woman, and he described it so well that I could picture everything. I saw that moonlit hillside, and I saw the girl dancing that intoxicating dance to the poor devil in the cell, and I saw Dirk Van Tromp and his crew waiting in the shadows for the climax of that little performance. I never felt like smashing the bones of a dead man as I did on that night when we listened to that yarn.

"And the climax came to that affair. The dancing girl stopped dancing after she had driven that young monk half crazy, and she beckoned to him to come out to her. Beckoned to that poor devil who was wondering if she was a spirit from another world. He forgot all the orders of the head priest when she did that. He forgot everything. He only knew that someone more beautiful than the white orchids of the valley was waiting for him outside the walls, and he rushed madly into the corridor.

"It was then that the Lord Buddha took pity on that poor fool. He performed a miracle by stretching a silver wire across the corridor as the treasure guardian was hurrying along. A silver wire, my friend. But that monk was not in a fit state to see a miracle when it was performed right under his nose. His brain and his blood were aflame with the sight of the vision that he had seen in the moonlight, and he hacked that wire through with his knife. That is how the monk read it from the palm leaves to that witch-woman lying on the sand.

"The treasure guardian dropped his knife in his hurry, and he did not wait to pick it up. He ran on like a madman. But it was clean love that was drawing him to that girl, my friend. Ay, it was! And just because his love was good and sweet, Buddha performed another miracle. The Great one stretched a gold wire that blazed like a flaming thread across that corridor. The treasure guardian had no knife, but he had his two hands. He gripped that thread of gold and snapped it. Then he rushed down the dark passage.

"The blood pounded through my head as I listened to that part of the story. I believed that yarn! If you had heard that bare-poll'd monk read it to the woman you would have believed it, too. It was one of those stories where the truth shines through the little places between the words.

"The treasure guardian ran across the courtyard toward the big gates that the high priest had ordered to be closed while Dirk Van Tromp was on the coast, and as he raced across the yard, Buddha made another attempt to save him. The Holy One flung a rope in front of that youngster, a rope whose ends went up into the clouds, but that monk could not be stopped by anything just then. *Nein!* He had no knife, and he could not break that rope with his hands, so what do you think he did? He gnawed that rope through with his teeth, then he opened the big gates and rushed out to the



dancing girl who was standing like a silver statue of Aphrodite in the moonlight!

"In the morning the monks of the monastery found the treasure guardian trussed up like a capon, and they also found that the treasure chamber was empty. Dirk Van Tromp and his crew of cutthroats did not leave an ounce of gold behind them, and you can just guess what sort of a temper the head priest was in. The treasure guardian told him of the dancing girl in the moonlight, and the old ancient went crazy with temper. He sentenced that young monk to be buried up to the neck in the sand at the point where the girl stood, and when that was done they left him there, bareheaded, and the sun licked at him like the hot tongue of a dragon.

"Every morning for six mornings the monks paraded past that poor devil who was buried in the sand. His tongue and his lips were black and swollen, but they could see that he was praying for forgiveness. They could see that. He was sorry for what he had done, but he blamed himself. He did not blame the girl that had lured him outside so that the Dutch pirates could pounce on him.

"On the morning of the seventh day the head priest and the rest of the monks got a surprise. Ay, a big surprise. When they went out to look at that poor wretch they found the temple dancing girl lying on the sand close to the spot where he was buried, and she was dead. Dead and cold. She had become sorry for what she had done in bringing him to his ruin and death. She knew that it was love and not lust that had brought him out to her, and she had come back to tell him that she was sorry. But it was too late to tell him that. She found him dying in the sand, and when he would not let her dig him out of that pit she killed herself beside him.

"The young monk was still alive, and as he looked as if he wished to say something they put water on his swollen tongue so that he was able to speak a little. Then he told them something that made their flesh creep. He said that Buddha had appeared to him in the night, and that the Great One had told him that Dirk Van Tromp would never take the treasure out of the China Sea. Never! He said that it was written that the Dutchman's ship would beat up and down between Pulo Tiuman and Koh Pennan for all time. At every full moon it would rock past the monastery, and if there was a monk in that place who was brave enough to swim out to the ship and recover the treasure, the souls of the treasure guardian and the temple dancing girl would find peace. When the young monk told them that he uttered a little prayer to Buddha and died.

"That was a strange story to listen to in the moonlight, was it not? The bare-poll'd monk looked at the Green-eyed Woman when he had read all that was on the palm leaves, and the woman looked at the big moon that was swinging over the hills. Delnard and I watched her green eyes flash, and we thought things. All the wonder of the East was in those eyes. They were as cold as the icicle eye of a crocodile at times, and then they would soften suddenly so that one felt that he was being dragged toward that witch on the sand.

"'And you believe that the Dutchman's ship goes up and down the coast to this day?' asked the woman.

"'It is written here,' said the monk, tapping the palm leaves. 'They say it goes by on the night of the full moon. The monks of the monastery looked out many times after that happening, and they saw that ship go rocking by, the moonlight flashing on her gilt figurehead.'

"'And now?' she questioned.

"'I have waited for eight nights,' answered the monk, 'and I am certain that she will go by tonight.'

"'And you will swim out?' queried the witch-woman.

"'If you go with me,' muttered the monk. 'My heart would turn to water if you were not near me.'

"She laughed again, that cursed sneering laugh that made one wish she was a man so that one could strike her dead, and just as she laughed I did something that caused a sensation. A mighty big sensation. There were some wild capsicum bushes under those mangrove trees, and those bushes made me sneeze. *Ja!* I sneezed loud enough to wake the dead, and before I stopped sneezing, Delnard was out in the clearing explaining to the woman and the monk how we came to be there.

"That American had a smooth tongue. You bet he had. The monk looked right mad, but the Green-eyed Woman was not disturbed one bit. She listened to Delnard's story with a smile on her face, and when he finished she started to question him.

"'So you heard the story that he read to me?' she said, pointing to the monk as she spoke.

"'Yes, I heard,' said Delnard. 'It was a mighty good story, too.'

"'Do you think the ship will come?' she asked.

"'I do not know,' said Delnard, grinning at her, 'but if it does come along I'd like to go out with you when you board it.'

"She smiled when he said that, but I cursed him for a fool. That was not our business at all, and there was something in the night that I did not like. I had that sort of gooseflesh feeling that makes people say that someone has jumped over their grave. 'You can come with us,' said the woman. 'Sit down and wait.'

"Delnard and I sat down on the white sand, and I kept thinking of that story as I watched the woman with the emerald eyes. I was afraid of her. It was so. She had the appearance of a sphinx, a sphinx that had just come to life, and who would laugh as she crushed one beneath her feet.

"'Why do you want to stay here?' I asked Delnard. 'It is foolishness.'

"'We will stay for the fun of the thing,' he said, and he laughed because he saw that I was nervous of the woman. 'We will have to stay till dawn to find our way from this place, so we might as well stay close to a mystery.'

"'You are a fool,' I said. 'That woman's eyes remind me of the eyes of the hamadryad.'

"The night was a silent night, one of those nights when you feel that the *lieber Gott* has slowed up the wheels of the planet before doing some-

thing that will make you sit up and take notice. The silence came around us like a cloak, and the longer we waited the more annoyed I was with Delnard. I did not believe in phantom ships, but I thought as I sat there on the sand that it was the kind of night that you would expect ghostly things of that class to go wandering around.

"A wispy fog came creeping in from the Gulf of Siam, a creeping, low-lying fog that was wet and cold like the hand of a corpse. It swept over us, touching our faces as if it had a million invisible fingers, and it surged up the estuary. I was shivering then with cold, and suspense, and I cursed under my breath.

" 'This is foolishness,' I said to Delnard. 'It is nonsense to wait here any longer.'

"That woman with the emerald eyes turned her head as if to listen to what I said, and then she gave a little suppressed scream that made my blood run cold. It was not a scream of fear. *Nein!* It was a scream of amazement and wonder.

" 'Look!' she cried. 'Look!'

"She was pointing up the estuary, and we looked. *Ja*, we looked. We stared with our eyes popping out. That fog was thin and broken, and through a break in that curtain we saw something that startled us. The monk and Delnard, the Green-eyed Woman and I saw, my friend! Now you can laugh when I tell you what we saw, but I did not laugh that night. Waddling down through that rent in the fog, her broken masts thrust up like black fingers and her high poop tilted up like the tail of a Muscovy drake, was a ship that was out of fashion a hundred years before!

"*Himmel*, didn't we stare! I rubbed my eyes and I looked and looked, thinking it was a mirage, but it was no mirage. It was an old Dutch ship that was of the same type that Van Edels and Pelsart and Dampier and Van Deiman used when they first stirred the foam of the Eastern seas with bull-snouted craft that were built at Antwerp!

" 'Aie, Aie!' gurgled the monk, as he climbed to his feet and stared at the old ship that was heading for the open sea. 'It is she! It is she!' he cried.

"That monk was a mighty scared man at that minute. It was all right to read about the phantom ship, but it was a different business to watch that black hulk breaking through the wispy fog. You bet it was. That bare-pollled storyteller looked as if he was inclined to sneak away into the mangrove trees, but the Green-eyed Woman looked him up and down, and he seemed to stiffen under her eyes.

" 'Shades of Caesar!' cried Delnard. 'Did you ever see the like of that?'

" 'I did not,' I snapped, and my lips were dry as I spoke to him.

"That woman was the only one of us who did not lose their wits. While we were staring at the apparition that was drifting down toward the point where we were standing, she was calculating the distance and thinking which would be the best place to intercept that ship. The woman had nerves of steel. She was like that jade who was married to Menelaus of Sparta;

she could stand by and see battle and bloody murder without turning a hair. She could do anything.

" 'We'll swim out from here,' she said, pointing to the water. 'Get ready or we will miss her.' "

"Delnard looked at me, and I glared back at him. I was mighty mad with him at that moment.

" 'What will we do?' he asked.

" 'Do?' I snapped. 'We will do nothing! What has this fool business to do with us?' "

"That woman was standing in front of me when I said that. She was twisting that purple sarong around her hips, and she heard what I said. *Ja*, she heard. She took three steps into the water, and then she turned her head and laughed at Delnard and me. Laughed that cursed sneering laugh that she had turned on the monk when he was telling the story. Holy St. Catherine! I have never heard a laugh in all my life like that! It was like a whip of scorn. It would drive men to their death quicker than anything I know of. She called us curs with that laugh! Do you understand? It was a lash that made us feel like worms, and the next moment we were in the water, swimming beside her and the bare-pollled monk.

"We were swimming in a line, the four of us. I guess we were mad, my friend. It is foolish to sit out on the sand on moonlight nights and listen to stories of the kind that we had listened to that night. There is witchery in the air of this Orient, and one does foolish things under its influence.

"The fog closed in on us and blotted out the black shape of the ship, and I stopped swimming. I had what you call cold feet just then, but that laugh was ringing in my ears. I was tired of that business, and my head was aching from the blow that the Malay boatswain of the *Lost Peri* had given me. I could not see Delnard just then, and I shouted out to him.

" 'Where are you, Delnard?' I cried.

" 'Here,' he answered, speaking out of the fog, and just as he spoke, the thick curtain was split apart and I saw the black hulk of the old Dutch ship rolling down on us. *Ach!* I can see her now as I saw her that night. There was a little smother of foam at her forefoot, and she had a coating of barnacles that the Kiel shipyards could not peel off in a week. Then the fog closed in again, and I heard the voice of the Green-eyed Woman calling from above me. That witch-woman had got a grip on the side of that craft and she was calling the three of us to her.

"I made a clutch at the rotten timbers as the ship lurched past me, but my fingers slipped on the slime. I made another grab at her, and this time I caught the rotten timbers of a porthole, and I clawed myself up out of the water. That woman was calling out to us, and I knew by the shouts that came from the fog that Delnard and the monk had got a footing on the old hulk as she slewed by. Driving my toes into those barnacles and scratching with my fingers at the rotten wood I climbed higher, and presently that woman's fingers gripped my shoulder and dragged me over the side.

Delnard and the monk were close behind me, and when we hauled them aboard we stood a moment to get our breath.

"It was just as we stood there near the rotten bulwarks that the old boat drove out of the bank of fog. She lurched out of it suddenly, and the moon washed us in a bath of silver. That was when the monk gave the yell. He gave a yell that you could hear down at Sebah where the temple dancing girl came from, and he pointed to the deck in front of us. For a moment we did not see what he pointed at, then our throats went dry like as if we had been swallowing lime. That deck was alive! It was alive with rats!

"That is the reason why that rat turned me sick a few minutes ago. I think of those rats on the Dutch ship every time I see one. And those rats on that hulk were the biggest rats I have ever seen. The Paris sewer rats, the gray rats of the Orinoco, and the big black rats you see on the canals at Bangkok were small things compared to those devils on the rotten deck of that old craft. They were huge brutes, and there were thousands of them. Thousands! They were crawling up from the hold in armies that moved across the deck so that we could not see an inch of the rotten boards!

"Look out!" I cried. "They are attacking us!"

"I made a movement to drop over the side of the ship, but that woman was too quick for me. She was too quick for me. *Nein*, she did not block me with her hands. She laughed at me. I tried to fight against the feeling that came over me, but I could not. I would not have been a man if I ran when she laughed as she did. It would take a mighty good coward to run away when that sneer came from her red lips. You bet it would. Delnard had turned to the rail when I turned, but she stopped both of us. I do not know how the piece of wood got into my hands, but I guess she gave it to me. She was the only one who could think and act. She thrust that stick into my hands, and then I struck at the army that was circling toward us.

"Have you ever seen rats attack men? Once before I had seen it, but I had never seen anything like the charge I saw on that deck. Those rats were mad with hunger. That old boat had been stranded up that estuary for a century, and she had become a castle for those big rats. I do not know how the tide had shifted her, perhaps she had broken loose from the trunks of the mangrove trees, but that rat army had come with her, and when we boarded her they were hungry. They were mighty hungry. There were thousands of them there, and they were eating each other when that witch-woman brought three fools aboard, *Gott!* The sight of that brute brought it all back this afternoon, and I am sick yet. I will be sick for a week. I know I will.

"Fight them!" cried the woman. "Fight them!"

"It was our only hope, my friend. We had to fight like demons to hold those squeaking things off. The deck was covered with them, yet they were still crawling up through the rotten planks from below. It was a nightmare, and a terror struck into my bones. As I swung that stick I thought that the whole business was some devilish plan to get us on board that hulk, and I fought like a madman. So did Delnard. So did the monk, and the Green-

eyed Woman. As I watched her for a few seconds I knew that I was wrong in thinking that it was a plot against Delnard and myself. She was a crazy woman. She had become possessed with the idea that the old hulk was really the ship that Dirk Van Tromp had sailed in, and that monk was of the same opinion.

"Fight them back!" screamed the woman. "The treasure will be on the lower deck."

"We are insane," I cried to Delnard, but he did not hear me. That laugh had made him lose control of himself, and he was slaughtering rats with a plank that it would take a Samson to lift.

"The rats broke before us, and the woman led us on. Led us on across the rotten deck where the cross beams had crumbled beneath the three-inch planks of oak. You can hardly believe it, can you? I was sweating with fear, but I could not turn and run as I wanted to. There was a squeaking in the bowels of the ship that made me feel sure that anyone that ventured down there would go to his death, yet every time that woman gave one of her steely laughs I swung that lump of wood harder than ever. She was a witch, I am sure she was.

"Take a rest!" she cried, and we stopped for a moment to get our breath.

"But those rats were waiting for us to take that rest. They swept over the deck in one thick mass, and we were at it again. I stuck my foot in a hole and fell down, but Delnard lifted me to my feet again. Lifted me to my feet after three score of those things had rushed over me. And she laughed and rushed us forward against the swarms that were pouring out of the holes in the planks.

"It was then that the Almighty heard the prayer that I was making. *Ja*, he heard me then. As I picked my club from the deck after I slipped, my hand clutched some oakum, and when I stumbled on after that mad jade I got an idea. I got an idea that meant salvation to Delnard and me. You cannot guess what that idea was? I stuffed that oakum in my ears, my friend. I stuffed it in with one hand while I fought with the other. *Ja! Ja!* I knew that I could not turn back while that jade was laughing her laugh of scorn, so I made myself so that I could not hear her laugh. I fixed myself in just the same way that old Ulysses fixed his sailors a few thousand years before. I plugged my ears so that I could not hear the squeaking of the rats, or her laugh, and then I dropped my stick and rushed at Delnard. I ran him to the side of the ship, and when he fought with me I hit him a crack on the jaw and toppled him overboard as the Malay boatswain had toppled me some hours before.

"I had luck then. I sprang over and found him in the shadow of the hulk, and, grabbing him by the hair of the head I struck out for shore. Once I looked back, and I saw that old black ship moving towards the open sea and I swam faster. Fear was in my marrow just then. My teeth were chattering together, and I could hardly speak when I pulled Delnard ashore.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"She has gone to sea with the rats and the mad monk," I said.

" 'Glory be to God!' he said and then he broke down and cried. And my nerves were that bad that I cried with him. I have been in a thousand tight places, but I was never in one that made me feel so queer as I felt on that night.

"We fell asleep on the sand, and we slept there till the sun climbed out of the sea and pricked our faces and hands. There was not a sign of a hulk. We stared at the sea for ten minutes or more, then Delnard got to his feet and shook himself.

" 'We had better strike toward the south,' he said, and I went with him without making any protest.

"We walked about two miles without speaking, and then we found her. The Green-eyed Woman. *Ja!* We found her on the beach, her mane of gold covering her face as if the sea had tried to hide the staring eyes. In her left hand she had a tiny statue of Siva that had a Mogok ruby in its breast, and I wanted badly to get that little statue. But Delnard would not let me take it from her hand. He would not. We made a grave on the beach and we buried her there."