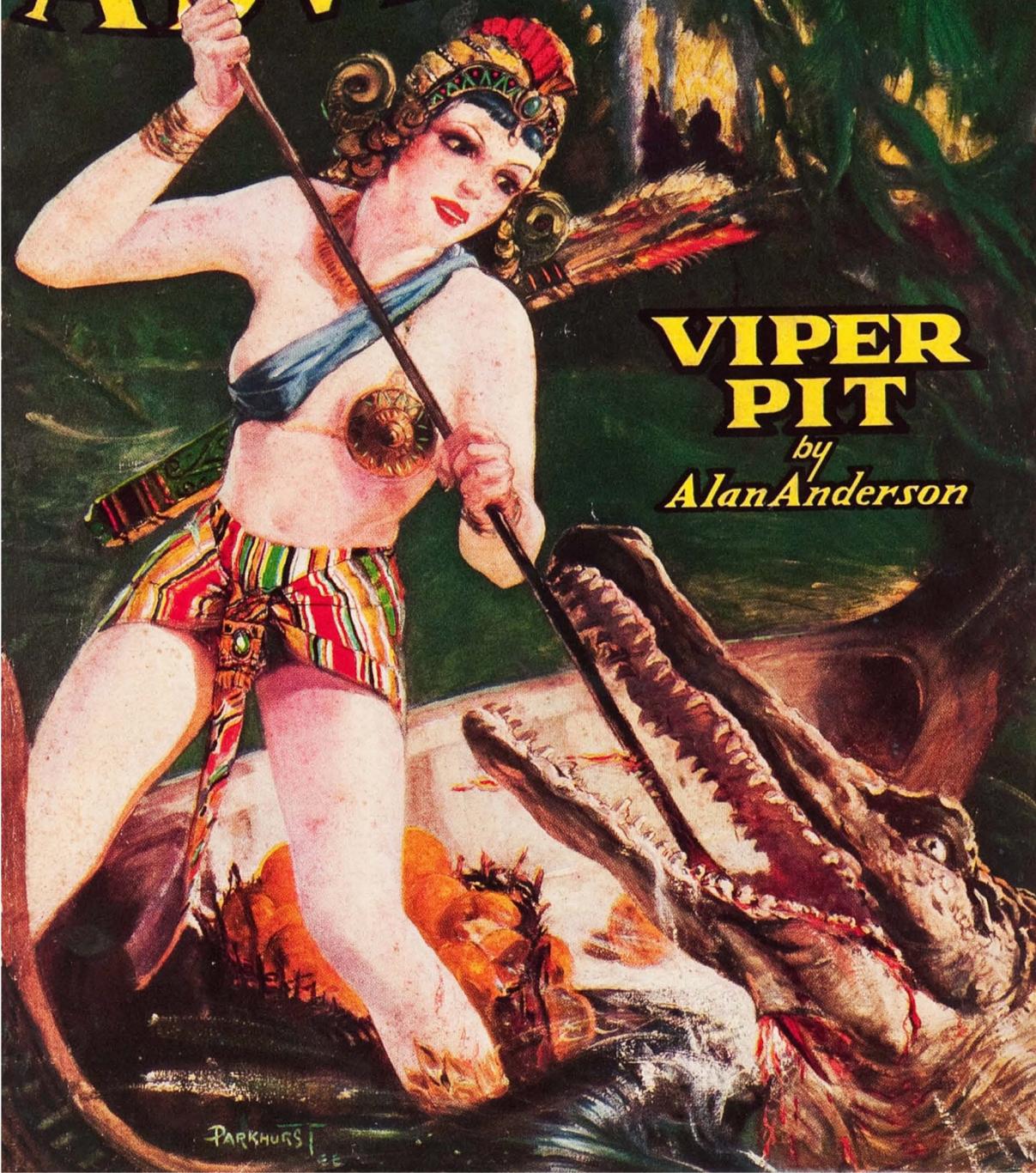


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# SPICY-ADVENTURE STORIES



## VIPER PIT

*by*  
*Alan Anderson*

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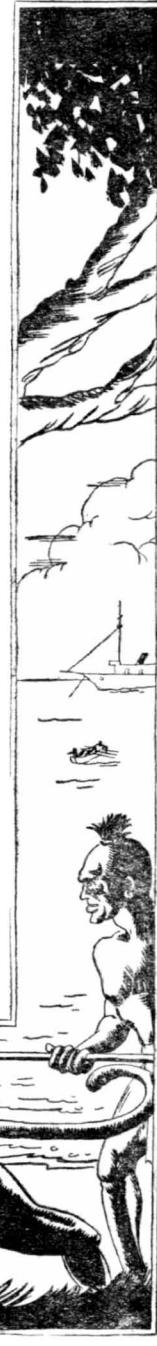
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# VIPER PIT

*The Princess Nadee was leader of the bandits. And she hated Americans! Cooper couldn't expect mercy when she captured him: the viper pit was kindness compared to the torture to come!*

By ALAN ANDERSON

When he saw she had been captured, Harley leaped into the midst of the Mongols without thinking.





**H**ARLEY COOPER was disgusted.

"The farther we get into the desert, the more I'm convinced that I'm the prize sap of the universe. I've sunk my last cent into this expedition, but for two pins I'd turn back."

"You think too much," said Liu, the tall northern Chinese, whose knowledge of the country and the language made him the logical leader of the caravan.

"What else is there to do? For days I've sat on this damned camel getting my guts shook up. I tell you, Liu, this is the most fantastic thing I've ever heard of."

"Many facts are fantastic. Once the religion of this country was Shamanism. Could not a remnant of that cult remain? And would not they guard jealously the possessions of their greatest warrior?"

"It sounds logical. Why are these camels belly-aching so much?"

"They dislike the fast pace. But fear not, Tserin gave them opium at the last stop. Their spirits will improve."

"But if what we're looking for is true, why hasn't it been discovered?"

"Outer Mongolia measures two thousand by twelve hundred miles. There is no transport save camels and ponies. It would take a thousand men years to explore this wilderness."

"But planes?"

"Venture not far into the interior. A good landing place often turns out to be a thin crust above soft earth."

"When do we get there?"

"In five days, or rather nights."

"Nights?"

"At noon we make camp. We will resume the journey at midnight. The danger of a bandit raid grows."

"We have submachine guns and pistols."

"A battle would be most unwise, Mr.

Cooper," said Liu in the perfect English learned in American schools.

**H**ARLEY'S camel became sulky again and he was forced to devote his energies to keeping it moving. The beast grumbled a bit, then went on, scuffing up a cloud of dust which stuck to Harley's sweaty face. The camels were shedding their long, silky hair. It got into everything. It was hell.

Harley cursed Outer Mongolia and the Gobi desert. The route they traveled, thanks to centuries of caravans, was a deep gully that wound deviously through the barrenness. Nothing could be seen save the slopes of the camel-made gully which rose some thirty feet on either side.

But faced with the danger of a bandit raid, Tserin, the Mongol leader, had posted a rider on the desert proper who was accompanying them like a military flanker. Everyone was tense. But Harley was too hot, too filthy with dust and too upset by the lumbering gait of the camel to care about anything.

Later the posting of the flanker proved a blessing. He sang out a warning and pointed to the direction of the danger—ahead.

Instantly the caravan came to a stop and the plan agreed upon and practised went smoothly into operation. Harley and Liu dismounted, got the submachine guns, and began retreating down the trail as fast as their legs would carry them. Tserin placed some of the luggage on the unladen camels. The flanker joined his companions. The caravan moved on. No one seemed missing.

Harley and Liu scampered up the slope of the trail and hid behind a dense growth of thorny sagebrush. The bandits, mounted on the shaggy Mongolian ponies, had circled the caravan.

The search would prove profitless. There would be nothing to reveal the presence of an American and a Peiping Chinese. Harley had the money. The map was well hidden. A clever man, Liu.

The bandits, the search fruitless, remounted and began advancing down the trail toward Harley Cooper and Liu. The American got out his binoculars.

Then he sucked in his breath!

**T**HE bandit leader was a woman. She wore blue Russian breeches and a cossack blouse a deep wine color. Her hair was black, her eyes blacker, and the oval creaminess of her face as beautiful as the reigning New York musical comedy favorite. She was the most beautiful woman Harley Cooper had ever seen. He saw that she was twenty-five or so, tall, slender, yet feminine.

As he watched, she raised her hand and the cavalcade moved to a canter. She rode with superb grace. Now the wind whipped back her blouse to mould the conical beauty of well-set, solid breasts which now joggled with exciting rhythm.

Behind her rode a mad-looking white man. The rest, some thirty in number, were cruel-visaged Mongols. They thundered by to leave a cloud of dust to mark their passing. Harley followed them with the glasses. He noted the girl's wide shoulders; also the Luger at her waist and the rifle booted to her saddle.

Harley and Liu returned to the caravan to find the men milling uneasily and looking in the direction of the vanished bandits. Harley felt a pang of fear. He'd never seen Mongols upset before. Tserin was talking to Liu.

"It was the Princess Nadee," Liu told Harley, "who heads the most feared bandits in all Mongolia. When they raid a village, the men are killed, the woman

outraged, then killed too. But above all, Princess Nadee hates Americans."

"Why?" asked Harley, the hair at the nape of his neck stiffening.

"She is white Russian. In Harbin she saw her sisters forced into brothels. Only she remained a maiden. America, she thought would aid a forsaken white race. It did not."

"Who's the man?"

"Her brother. He is a madman."

"Is she?"

"No. Only poisoned with hate. And cruelty."

"I wouldn't mind meeting up with her in a hotel lobby," said Harley. "But here—well, I hope that's the last we see of her."

It was a hope destined to be unfulfilled. Harley Cooper was to see Princess Nadee again.

**A**T noon they left the trail and went a safe distance into the desert where they made camp near an outcropping of porous rock.

They carried, not tents, but the native *yurt* which is a good-sized, igloo-shaped dwelling, composed of a collapsible wooden framework over which pieces of felt cloth are stretched and tied. They had three *yurts*, sufficient for their party of twenty-one.

While the men went about putting up the *yurts*, Harley and Liu sneaked some distance away and buried the submachine guns and the binoculars.

This had been Tserin's suggestion. The men were loyal, he avowed, but guns and glasses were such treasures to the Mongols as to excite murder.

They returned to eat mutton from the common kettle. Then they stretched out for sleep with the camp doubly guarded. The sun was hot but night would bring the cold air from the Altai mountains—

their objective. Harley dozed off. When he woke up, it was dark and much colder. He covered himself and went back to sleep.

He was awakened by a tumult so loud that he was on his feet before he was fully conscious. Shouts! Cries. Triumphant yelling. The thunder of hoofbeats. Now and then, shots. Then Harley smelled burning cloth and light filtered through the covering of his *yurt*.

He snatched out the pistol in his belt and ran outside. A burning *yurt* lighted the scene yellowly. Churning horses. Screams of terror. Horsemen wielding blood-stained blades. On the ground, corpses. Corpses everywhere. The desert dust was blood-soaked. He felt sick. Never had he seen such slaughter; such mutilated bodies.

A Colt .45 slug carries a terrific impact. His first shot knocked a rider from his mount. The second smashed through a pony's head. The horse did a somersault to fall on its rider. There came the sickening crunch of splintering bones. He fired the clip with devastating results. The light was failing. Kneeling, he slipped a fresh clip into the magazine.

Then something crashed down on his head. He pitched forward on his face. But before he went out, he heard a woman's amused laughter.

**W**ITH the first move of consciousness, he was jerked to his feet by two bandits. A fire had been built. The bandits were dragging the corpses into the desert. Princess Nadee was mounted and nibbled daintily on a chicken leg. Her brother, a sardonic smile on his face, stood beside her.

Then Harley Cooper experienced horror that left him weak and shaking with rage.

Before him lay the bodies of Liu and

Tserin, Liu's ears and nose had been cut off. Tserin's corpse was legless and strips of skin had been peeled from his naked belly. The agony of the torture still lingered on their lifeless faces.

"Ho! Handsome one!" called Nadee in fine spirits. "Only you survive. And only until I can devise a suitable death." Her eyes blazed and her lovely mouth twisted. "American dog!"

She spoke passable English: many Russians did, he remembered. No use to reply. He just glared at her.

"A white American," she mused very softly. "Very white. Golden hair; blue eyes." Viciously she threw the half-eaten chicken leg full in his face. "Where is the map to the temple of the Shamanist monks?"

"I don't know!" said Harley sick with dread. So she knew their objective; the purpose of their mission.

"Long have I known that Liu had a map and was awaiting a man to finance the journey. Ah, handsome one, the radio man in Peiping is Russian and we have a set. Thus do we know the movements of caravans. And only six months ago we captured a Shamanist monk who told of the girdle."

"Then it is true!" said Harley.

"Yes. Three hundred monks guard it, although they are monks in name only, for women abound there. To Genghis Khan the girdle was sacred. A jewel was set in it for every thousand deaths he wrought. I tell you this, O handsome one, that you can tell the great Khan when you get to hell that a woman now owns the girdle."

"I'll stoke up the fires for you," Harley promised.

"Enough! I weary of this. Tomorrow will be time for your torture. Until then, I'll have the guards toast that handsome white body of yours over a slow fire."

SHE laughed at that. But her brother who'd been wandering about, came to her side, grinned evilly, and spoke in his native tongue. Nadee slapped her thigh and smiled.

"You have been intimate with many beautiful women, I suppose, O handsome one. Have you ever felt the cold caresses of snakes? Yonder is your bed. Many snakes live there. Vipers, pit vipers. They're cold, poor dears. They'd relish the heat of your body, I think."

She snapped a command in Mongol and the men stripped the clothes from Harley's body. He stood there shivering in brief shorts. The girth of his torso, the flatness of his hips, and the compact muscularity of his body impressed the Mongols.

Another command and the men dragged him toward the rocks. There was a small indentation in the sand surrounded by boulders. He was shoved roughly, stumbled, fell, and rolled over on his back. He started to get up. Then he froze to terrified rigidity.

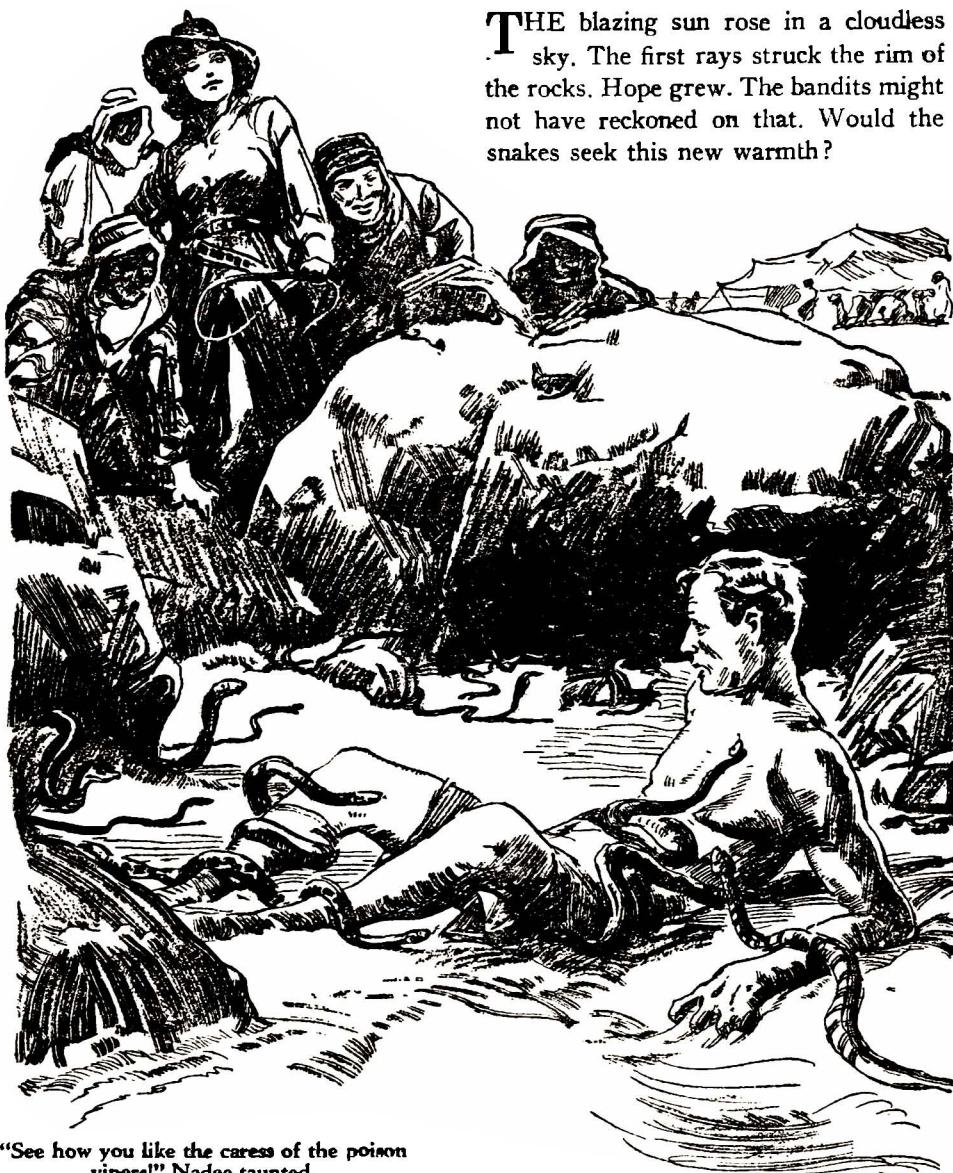
Snakes! By ones and twos they slithered from beneath the rocks. Vipers! Pit vipers! About the size of an American copperhead. Harley was numb with horror. He shivered. His forehead beaded with sweat. Reptilian coldness grazed his ribs. He choked down the cry of terror on his lips.

A snake crawled to the heat of his stomach and curled contentedly. Another, with terrifying slowness, wound about his arm. Snakes, more snakes. They covered him, a blanket of loathsome claminess. He gritted his teeth. He did not move. He lay very still.

"They are poisonous, handsome one! Move not. In the morning we will again discuss the map."

Laughing, they departed. Harley was alone in the darkness. He was chilled to

THE blazing sun rose in a cloudless sky. The first rays struck the rim of the rocks. Hope grew. The bandits might not have reckoned on that. Would the snakes seek this new warmth?



"See how you like the caress of the poison vipers!" Nadee taunted.

the marrow of the bone. Rage grew in his brain. He'd never dreamed hate could be so intense. He prayed for vengeance.

It was two hours before the dawn—to Harley, two centuries. The snakes quieted somewhat, but one or two were always in motion. His brain choked with rage.

They did. One by one they crawled to the pool of sunlight.

Trembling, Harley stood up. His muscles were numb and his joints ached. Anxiously he peered out. The camp slept. Even the solitary sentry dozed at his post. The battle had exhausted everyone.

Harley crawled to where the sub-machine guns had been hidden. The

corpses of the ill-fated caravan were strewn about. With shaking hands, he dug up a gun and unwrapped it. Carefully he blew away the stray grains of sand. Then he formed a small fortress of human bodies. He was ready.

The camp was late in awakening. Finally Nadee's brother came from a *yurt*. The sentry became alert. The brother walked over to the rocks looked wildly about, then blew a shrill whistle. Bandits poured from *yurts* rubbing the sleep from their eyes.

Harley was grim. His heart pounded. One man against a small army! Would they, as he prayed, group for instructions? Would the brother think he'd escaped through the desert?

He did. The brother lined up the men in a semblance of military order.

Harley was calm now, purposeful. He relaxed, took a deep breath and aimed the gun. He took careful aim. Kill his men! Torture his aides! Throw him to vipers! He'd even scores, and then some.

Slowly his index finger squeezed the trigger!

The gun burst into song: a blasting, flame-spitting weapon of wholesale destruction. The camels and horses jerked awake and began milling. The men were too stunned to move. Hard-hitting slugs tore into heads and chests. Men fell like tenpins. He traversed from right to left — fast. Two men escaped the barrage and began to run toward the horses. He cut them down with a short burst. The men were witless then, too terrified to fire a shot in return. But the brother had whipped out his pistol. A slug thudded into a corpse beside Harley. The gun thundered.

The brother's head was torn from his body. He aimed at the men on the ground; pumped a short burst into every

body. The gun silenced. He'd evened scores. He felt sick.

THEN Nadee ran from her *yurt*. She had on breeches and boots but white silk pajamas covered her upper body. She had the Luger in her hand. Harley cut loose a burst. A geyser of sand shot up in front of her. She neither cringed nor moved. Nerve there. She was boiling mad. She started to shoot. Harley ducked. Unwisely she shot the clip. He heard the fateful click of the firing pin. He looked up.

She'd thrown away the pistol and was running toward the horses. Harley was up and after her. She had a good lead but the boots were not made for running. Harley was unencumbered. He gained. His shoulders went down.

Then he tackled her around the knees — hard. Both fell and skidded across the sand. She was fighting before she hit the ground. A biting, clawing, kicking tigress of fury. He tried to hold her and couldn't. After a short tussle, he grabbed the neck of the pajama coat. It ripped from her body. Very white, conical breasts danced in the hot sunlight. Then he got her around the waist and lifted her from the ground.

Her breasts mashed against him with a warm, quivering softness. His arms tingled at the contact with her supple waist. She struggled. He flexed his arms and the breath left her body.

"Hell-cat!" he grinned. Then holding her with one arm, his free hand grabbed her hair. He yanked her head back. He kissed her then, hard. A brutal, savage kiss that fired his blood. Her lips mashed against his teeth — wet, cool lips. He kissed her until blood flecked her mouth.

Then he let her down. She fell to one knee. Her breasts swayed beautifully with her wild panting. The sun struck

her back to reveal its unblemished, milky, sleekness.

"Pig! Swine!" she hissed. "No one kisses Nadee."

"I did," he said with a grin. "Listen! forget this idea of bumping off the white race."

She glared at him; her high cheek bones a dull red. God, she was beautiful! He'd never dreamed breasts could be so full and yet firm. She folded her arms to conceal them.

"I am at your mercy!" she spat at him. "Do what you will."

"I wouldn't force love on any woman," he told her.

He meant it, yet regretted it. It would be glorious to test the suppleness of her flesh again: taste the sweetness of those warm lips. But he was a man of his word.

"What will you do with me?"

"Unless you talk sense," he threatened her, "I'm going to strip you tonight and see how you like sleeping with snakes."

She paled at that, but her black eyes were still defiant.

"Without me you cannot reach the temple," she warned him. "Without me you cannot reach the mountains."

"All right. I'll split fifty-fifty with you."

She thought a moment.

"I will need money to reform my forces," she mused.

"You must promise not to kill me or injure me."

"Yes, I promise. The map?"

"Will be my life insurance," he told her. "You guide me to the foothills. I'll pick up the landmark there."

WITH that, he turned and went to the nearest *yurt*. He sank wearily to a cot. The oven-like heat was blissful after the death chill of the viper pit. He slept.

He awakened after dark. There was a fire within the *yurt*. Nadee sat beside it. The Luger was in her hand. Harley sat up.

"You promised!" he warned.

"I but protect myself."

"From what?"

"Vipers seeking the warmth of the fire."

Harley froze. About the fire curled three vipers. As he looked, one stuck its head over the edge of the cot. It was crawling up!

Cursing softly, he reached up and broke off a piece of the *yurt*'s framework. Armed, he slew the snakes.

"Nice girl," he said to her with a sneer.

She shrugged. "I would not have broken my promise."

Harley put on a heavy Mongol costume.

"I have packed the camels I want," she told him. "You must attend to yours."

"What about your brother?"

"He is best gone from this miserable world."

"Where is he, I mean?"

"In the grave I dug."

"Oh! I expected you to leave him to the vultures."

She colored slightly, started to speak, then clamped her lips into a straight, unyielding line.

Harley went out and chose the three fastest camels. One especially he wanted. The precious map must be kept hidden. Nadee! He was heavy-hearted. She was beyond salvation. It was a pity. He could have loved the woman she might have been.

THE days and nights that followed brought no change in their relationship. Nadee did her share of the duties and by day they took turns sleeping in

the *yurt*. Sometimes Harley would, during his period on guard, sneak to the door of the *yurt* and watch her sleeping there. The thin black pajamas only accentuated the creamy whiteness of her flesh. She was gorgeous. Her half parted lips invited kisses. It was with difficulty that he stayed away from her.

When they reached the foothills, Harley picked up landmarks and, advancing in a circuitous route, they reached within striking distance of their destination on the morning of the sixth day.

They found a bottle-necked ravine where Harley piled stones forming a corral for the camels. The map he left where Liu had cunningly concealed it—in the shaggy tail of a camel. Harley, having consulted it while she slept, knew it by heart.

"It's three ridges east," he told her.

They got the guns and provisions and walked the rest of the way. The slopes of the rather steep ridges were covered with loose rocks and walking was difficult. But by taking care, they reached the summit of the ridge supposedly overlooking the temple.

Excitedly, they peered down. Harley's heart dropped to the soles of his boots. Nothing there except rocks. Then he saw, at the head of the ravine, a triangular garden!

"Those stones," said Nadee in excitement, "are not the floor of the ravine. They are spread over the roof of the temple!"

He saw that that was true. The temple had been cunningly concealed. Here and there in the roof were holes to permit smoke to escape from the fires within.

They began the dangerous descent. Here the slope was steeper and the stones more inclined to slip. But they moved with caution and were careful to take cover behind rocks. An hour before dusk

they reached the garden and stretched out behind the encircling hedge. To grow a garden in that wilderness was a real achievement.

They had two submachine guns, two pistols and food. What to do next was the problem. A man and a woman against three hundred! They knew nothing of the plan of the temple or where the girdle was hid.

Harley appraised the temple. It was a low, flat-roofed structure and vines at the garden entrance almost obscured the pillars there. He guessed that the other end was equally well hidden.

With success now a possibility but with no plan of action, Nadee and Harley became tensely silent. Shadows lengthened. Night fell. From within the temple came the yellow light of flares. Bright moonlight bathed the garden with a ghostly luridness. One by one the apertures in the roof began to emit smoke. It grew chilly.

Then from within the temple came a low chant of many voices, a chant increasing in shrillness and volume until Harley's blood chilled. Beside him, Nadee stirred uneasily.

"They must be at devotions," she whispered.

"I'm going to have a look," Harley told her and before she could agree or protest, he slipped into the deep shadows cast by the ridge.

**S**TONES were strewn outside the temple wall. He picked his way carefully but saw no windows. Nothing but a bleak expanse of stone walls. The front of the temple looked out on a wide valley. Here, too, the door was concealed by vines. The search profitless, he crept back.

When he reached the place where he'd left Nadee, he gave a startled look, then

snatched for his pistol. Then he sighed in relief.

Nadee stood there. But she had shed her mannish attire and stood with a heavy woolen cape about her shoulders. On the ground, bound and gagged, lay a Mongolian girl. Nadee's garments covered her.

"I knocked her out when she came to the garden," said Nadee. "Any luck?"

"No. You're shivering.

"It is the costume," she said and, with

a deft motion, threw back the cloak. Harley felt dizzy. About her ripe hips clung a tight black girdle from which hung a piece of cloth in front. Her long legs were amazingly white in the moonlight; legs slender, yet with firm thighs and



He leaped hard, tackled the fleeing girl about the legs. . . .

supple calves. Her breasts were bare and their projection made her stomach seem unusually flat. With a shiver she gathered the cape about her.

"You . . . you're not going in?" Harley stammered.

"Of course I am."

"No! No!" he protested and reached out a hand to stop her.

She shrugged, vaulted lightly over the stone wall, and entered the temple as if she'd lived there all her life. For a second Harley was frantic. Then he cursed himself for a fool.

What a sap. The roof! The openings to dispel smoke would reveal every room. He and Nadee had been to preoccupied to think of that.

He climbed. The stones made progress difficult. He skinned his knee and cut a gash in his hand. But he made the first opening all right. There, Mongol girls were seated about the fire clad only in loin cloths. He went on. The next room was empty.

He crossed the roof. When he peered into the smoke filled opening, he cursed softly and drew his pistol. Nadee had been captured! The cape was gone. Rope shackled her hands behind her back. Five Mongols stood leering at her and, as he watched, one reached out a grimy hand and smoothed the suppleness of her thigh. Then another slid a hand down her waist.

Harley acted without thinking. He leaped through the opening!

He struck the fire, fell sideways, but with a quick roll was on his feet. The pistol was out. He cracked the skull of the first man to rush him. The second he kicked in the groin. Nadee tripped a man. The other two rushed Harley with drawn knives. He ducked, caught one a hard blow in the belly and avoided the other. The man wheeled and charged. The pis-

tol butt fell; as did the man. There was a side room there. He grabbed Nadee, dragged her in and shot the bolt. The reviving monks began hammering on the door.

"This ends us, I guess," he told her. "I did it because I happen to be crazy as hell about you. I'd roast in hell rather than have another man touch you." He paused for breath, then asked: "Did you find the room?"

"Yes. It is across the corridor."

The hardness had left her eyes now. They were soft and not unhappy.

THEN came shots from the front of the temple! A volley of shots. Within the temple came shouts and orders and the patter of running feet. More shots broke the silence of the night. With trembling fingers, Harley untied Nadee. Together they stole to the door. Inch by inch Harley edged it open.

Monks were running toward the front of the temple. Some had ancient rifles, some sticks, and some carried no arms. All through the place was confusion.

Hand in hand they sneaked into the corridor. The new peril was their safe guard. The monks paid them no heed. They crossed the corridor, hid a second behind a pillar then quickly entered the room there.

Harley locked the door. He turned.

On the table there lay the girdle of Genghis Khan!

They stared at it spellbound. It was perhaps eight inches wide and completely incrusted with precious stones. The jewels refracted the light a million pin points of scintillating flame. Blues, reds, glittering whites. Before them lay millions. Riches beyond the dreams of man.

"Put it on!" Nadee ordered.

In a daze Harley raised his coat and buckled the girdle about his waist. They

went to the door. The corridor was deserted now but filled with the tumult of fierce fighting. Harley ran to the garden and got out the machine guns. Nadee joined him.

"There is a chance," Nadee told him, "if you leave now. Sneak along the wall of the temple and flee into the desert."

"Why not over the ridge?"

"The temple is surrounded by my men. Every day while you slept I radioed directions. Every night we were trailed. Awhile ago you fought for me, Harley Cooper. Then I ceased to be a barbarian. I love you. This will be my proof. I will stay here and block pursuit. The girdle you must keep."

"They'll kill you for this," he told her.

"I do not fear death. But go! Time is short."

"No," he told her very quietly, "life without you would be empty. I'll stay."

"You're a fool, Harley Cooper. A gorgeous fool. Kiss me!"

He did so and her lips were soft and moist. His hands touched the barenness of her body and she trembled against him. He wanted awfully much to live. To live and taste the sweetness of her love. Reluctantly he released her.

"If we are lost," she told him, "kill me yourself."

"I'll do that," he promised. "You are mine. No other man will ever have you."

Together they watched the bandits slowly forcing the monks through the temple. The fighting was centered in the middle of the temple now.

Harley's eyes roved about the moonlit ridges. There were men there. Could they sneak past? But no! He recalled the dangerous descent over the loose rocks. The only line of retreat would be up the ridge in line with the temple and there a great mass of rock jutted out. No getting by there.

Then suddenly he laughed! With appalling simplicity the whole matter was solved. He turned to Nadee.

"We'll escape. But it will mean wholesale slaughter. Well, I'm no killer. But I want to live. Be ready for anything!"

He raised the gun and deliberately aimed at the great mass of rock on the ridge!

**H**E saw the slugs shatter rocks at the base of the rock. He held the fire there. Then Nadee opened the other gun. They stood pouring lead into the base of the rock.

Then came a low rumble of moving rock! Very slowly the rock shifted on its base, tilted, then, with a great crash, the whole mass broke from its moorings and began thundering toward the temple.

The earth trembled as the avalanche gained power and movement. Fascinated, they watched. Then with a great roar the landslide thundered to the roof of the temple!

Then came the cracking of breaking beams. With a deafening crash the whole temple collapsed throwing up a great cloud of dust and ashes. Then came the deepening silence as the end of the landslide rattled to a halt.

They climbed warily over the ruins of the temple. In the valley beyond were camels. They advanced with caution. There were no sentries. Every man had taken part in the battle to win the temple!

They sorted out the camels, mounted, and rode into the desert with the pack animals trailing behind. Nadee had put on a coat but presently the sun arose and the coat became hot. She threw it away. She had on nothing but the brief costume she had taken from the Mongolian girl.

*(Continued on page 106)*

# VIPER PIT

[Continued from page 51]

Harley rode beside her, his eyes popping. Her legs were lovely and long and the jolting of the camel imparted to her breasts a pleasant, rhythmic movement. He liked the slenderness of her waist and his arm itched to encompass it. Her nude beauty made breathing very difficult and his heart was going like a riveting hammer.

"Aren't we far enough away?" he suggested.

She looked at him and smiled. Then she wet her lips and a twinkle came to her eyes.

"You do not like the looks of me?" she asked.

"Aw, honey, I could look at you forever. It's just . . ."

"Vultures have prying eyes," she said. "I would like the privacy of a *yurt*."

Harley slid to the ground and began running back to the pack camels. Nadee's eyes were warm now. Her lips smiling. She watched him anxiously.

Harley Cooper didn't know it. But he was about to break the Mongolian record for *yurt* erecting.