

Find the Feathered Serpent

Linda Shadle

"Are you certain this is the right day?" Bon Chance Louie asked as he accompanied Jake Cutter to the pier where the *China Clipper* was coming in to land. "I mean, the *Clipper* comes in this way every two weeks. Perhaps it is the next time, eh?" he added hopefully.

Cutter shook his head. "Nope. Telegram I got from Micky last week said this week's flight specifically." He turned to face his friend. "What's with you, Louie? You act like you don't want to see Micky again."

The slim Frenchman looked pained. "It isn't that, Jake, but after that last time with that fever you wouldn't talk about and those nasty Germans trying to kill both of you.... And now there is Sarah to think about....," he reminded Jake. "You remember how she reacted with that lady spy you took up with."

Cutter nodded. "I remember, Louie, but I knew Micky long before Sarah ever showed up here...."

"Before Sarah ever showed up where?" a female voice spoke up sharply behind the two men, startling them. The slim, white-garbed American girl who sang in Louie's Monkey Bar stalked up. "Are you trying to avoid me, Jake Cutter?" she demanded angrily. "Just who is this Micky person anyway? Corky dodged my questions all morning and I couldn't find Louie." She eyed her boss balefully.

Jake looked uncomfortable. "An, ah, an old friend of mine, Sarah. An archaeologist who was here long before you arrived."

Sarah brightened visibly. "Oh. An archaeologist huh? Wonder if my father knew him? What's the last name?"

"Gray."

Sarah considered the name, then shook her head. "No. Don't recall the name.... But here comes the *Clipper*!" She had to shout to be heard above the roar of the huge plane's engines. "I'm interested in meeting him!"

Jake and Louie traded looks over her head. "I'll just bet you will," the pilot muttered under the noise, then shook his head. No sense in getting her upset so soon. She'd find out for herself about Micky Gray soon enough.

The dock quickly became crowded with locals, bar hangers-on and Corky, Jake's mechanic and best friend. He was trailed by Reverend Willie Tenboom, the local preacher (among other things). All waiting eagerly to see who got off the *Clipper* from Tagataya this trip.

When the engines finally cut off, a crewman cracked the hatch then stepped out and turned to help the passengers out. Jake craned his neck eagerly, watching for a familiar face to appear amidst the off-loading newcomers.

"Jake! Hey, Jake Cutter!" a voice yelled above the noise of the crowd. A slender dark-haired woman detached herself from the group by the plane, ran down the docks and threw herself into the pilot's startled arms. She kissed him long and

warmly, then pulled slightly away to look at him. "Missed you, ya big lug!" she exclaimed excitedly, hugging him tightly, then suddenly letting go when she sensed the four pairs of eyes watching them intently.

Sarah cleared her throat meaningfully. "I, ah, hate to break up such a warm reunion...."

Jake grinned sheepishly. "Oh, sorry." He turned the woman in his arms around to face them. "You remember Louie, Reverend Tenboom and Corky?" There was a sharp bark from the direction of their feet, everyone glanced down at the battle-scarred brindle and white fox terrier glaring up at Cutter out of one baleful eye. Jake grinned apologetically. "Sorry. And Jack."

The girl bent to scratch the little dog's ears. "Jack, he lost your eye," she commented concernedly. "Well don't be mad at him, Jack. He means well... And he didn't mean to forget you..." The dog barked twice on a dubious note and she laughed.

"I did not!" Jake exclaimed in indignation. Sarah glared at him as he hastily pulled the woman to her feet. "And this is Sarah Stickney White. She sings in the Monkey Bar. Sarah, this is Doctor Michelle Gray. Sarah's father was an archaeologist too."

Sarah was prepared to dislike Micky on general principles and the fact she and Jake were obviously on such good terms, but the older woman smiled engagingly at her and held out her hand. "I'm so pleased to meet you, Sarah. White? Your father wasn't by any chance Doctor Howard White who was killed in Egypt a year ago, was he? I was so sorry to hear of it. Indy and I read several of his papers. They were quite brilliant."

"Um, yes. Thank you." Sarah's jealousy melted away under the woman's warm influence. "Who is Indy?"

"Indy? Sorry. Dr. Indiana Jones. You must have heard of him."

"Yes. Yes, I have."

"Well, now that introductions are over, shall we go to the Monkey Bar for a drink?" Louie suggested brightly. "I'm sure Micky would like to freshen up after her long flight."

"Oh yes," the archaeologist spoke up. "I've been on planes so long I'm starved and I could sure use a hot bath if it's possible?"

"Mais oui. But of course, Micky. I have your room all prepared if you will follow me." He started up the dock.

"Wait a minute, Louie. I don't have my luggage yet," Micky called after him. He paused, looking back expectantly.

"Corky and I will bring it up as soon as it's offloaded from the *Clipper*," Jake offered. He was rewarded by a quick grin from Micky and flash of annoyance from Sarah which he blithely ignored.

"We'll be up in a few minutes."

An hour later a freshly bathed Micky Gray appeared in the Monkey Bar while Sarah was finishing a number. She had changed into light cotton slacks and blouse and looked much refreshed and radiant. Jake noted when she joined him and Louie at a table near the piano. Corky was playing accompaniment for Sarah while Jack dozed on top of the piano. The men smiled at Micky's approach.

"I feel so much better now. Thank you, Louie." Micky signaled the bartender. "Brandy, please," then sat down.

"I took the liberty of having your dinner set up in the back room so you may eat in private," Louie told her.

Micky flashed him a grateful smile. "That would be marvelous, Louie. Then Jake and I can catch up on gossip." She arched a dark eyebrow at Cutter. "You *will* join me, won't you, Jake?"

Cutter grinned back. "Of course." He rose, she joined him, together they disappeared into the billiards room. Sarah watched them with a jaundiced eye.

Part way through the meal Jake couldn't contain himself any longer. Reaching across the table he took her hand in both of his. "Micky, stop it," he said quietly.

She looked up, fork halfway to her mouth. "Stop what?"

"Stop talking. You're not making any sense. You're just saying anything that comes into your head to keep going and you've barely eaten a thing." Jake smiled gently. "So give, Micky. Tell me what's wrong. You didn't come all the way to Boragora just to look up an old friend."

Micky frowned. "Was it that obvious?" He nodded. She sighed. "I have a friend...a *good* friend...and I'm afraid something awful has happened to him."

"This friend of yours wouldn't by any chance happen to be your boss, Dr. Jones, would it?" Jake asked shrewdly. She nodded silently. "So tell me," he urged. "Your telegram wasn't exactly overflowing with information."

Micky shook her head. "I don't know where to start."

"How about the beginning?"

She smiled wanly. "I guess that *would* be the logical place, wouldn't it?" Micky took a deep breath. "I told you about Indy in my letters. That he collects rare artifacts in his spare time for the National Museum when he can get away from his teaching position at Marshall College. Anyway, about a month ago he received a box of old papers and books. Among the mostly worthless junk he

found an ancient ship's log. It was dated around fifteen twenty and written in rather bad English. It took a while to completely translate it into modern English but when he did, Indy was all excited. He came bursting into my office waving a handful of papers around. To make a long story short, the log spoke of coming across a great wooden canoe manned by Indians who were escaping horrible white monsters who had slaughtered their people, destroyed their cities, stolen their riches and mocked their gods. It appeared these men were priests who were attempting to save their most sacred treasure from being taken by these monsters. The canoe was filled with treasure which they offered to the English sea captain if he would help them escape with their most sacred pieces."

"English pirates, I assume," Jake interrupted. "So they had a treasure. What makes this particular ship so special?"

"Their sacred treasure, Jake. These priests were Aztecs. The treasure they were protecting was a solid gold statuette of the god Quetzalcoatl encrusted with priceless gems and supposedly given to their forefathers, the Nahuatl, by the god himself. It's thousands of years old and virtually priceless, and Indy decided he was going after it. Last word I had from him was that he had arrived safely in Hawaii and was taking the *China Clipper* to Tagataya and would charter a plane to wherever the statue was supposed to be hidden. Since then...." She shrugged helplessly.

"Do you know where he was going from Tagataya?"

"Yes. Apparently the English sea captain agreed to help the priests transport their artifacts. He claimed to have traveled what was apparently the Pacific and would hide them on an island he knew of. Truth is, he got greedy and wanted everything, especially the gold serpent god. He and his crew killed the priests and hid the loot on an island Indy pinpointed as being called Kona Kai. Do you know where it is?"

Jake nodded. "It's on the far side of the Marivellas, luckily still within the French mandate." He paused to stare into Micky's green eyes. "But I still don't see why you came to me. If your Dr. Jones has run into trouble of some kind the authorities on Tagataya would be your best bet."

Micky looked troubled. Her hand trembled in his. "Because I can't, Jake. Indy's artifact hunts aren't always legal. I'm sure the French government would not only confiscate the idol if he found it, they'd probably toss Indy in jail and throw away the key. So I came back here to ask you if you'll help me find him. You're the only one I dare ask. Will you help? I'll pay you anything you ask."

Cutter patted her hand reassuringly. "Don't worry about paying me. I'll do whatever I can, Micky."

She brightened visibly. "Just hearing you say you'll help takes a great weight off my mind. Thanks, Jake."

He leaned to cup her chin. "We'll find your friend. But I've got to be sure you trust me. Do I have your permission to tell Louie what you just told me?" She hesitated; he looked stern. "Look, Micky, Louie will be far more likely to help if he knows everything. You can trust him, and I'm sure he won't turn your friend in if you explain everything to him."

Micky was silent for several minutes, then, with a heavy sigh, she nodded. "You're right. Go get him. The sooner we can head for Kona Kai the sooner we'll find Indy."

It turned out to be another twenty-four hours before Jake was able to leave on Micky's quest. The *Goose's* port engine had been acting up and Corky refused to let them take the plane up until he had checked it thoroughly. Since new parts were impossible to get, he was forced to rebuild the carburetor and jerryrig everything else. He worked all night and far into the next day before he was satisfied that he'd done the best he could.

Louie was able to bring Micky some halfway encouraging news while she waited. He found the young archaeologist sitting on the dock listlessly watching Corky and Jake work on the seaplane. "I have some news on your friend, Micky," Louie announced when he reached her side.

She glanced up hopefully. "About Indy? Good news, Louie?"

The Frenchman shook his head ruefully. "Not entirely good. He chartered a plane in Tagataya to fly him to Kona Kai. The pilot was told to return in two days' time to pick him up, but he failed to return to the rendezvous point. The pilot waited for several hours then reported the incident to the authorities." He smiled encouragingly down at her. "At least you know he reached the island."

Micky smiled back fragily. "Thanks for the information, Louie. I know we'll find Indy alive. He's got more lives than a cat. He always lands on his feet," she said confidently.

"For your sake I hope he is, Micky. This Dr. Indiana Jones must be quite a man for you to go to such lengths to find him."

"He is, Louie. He is."

"So tell me a little more about this statue your friend went looking for," Jake said once they were airborne. Micky was seated next to him in the copilot's chair. Jack was in the back sleeping on his parachute bed while Corky dozed in one of the passenger seats.

"How much do you know about the Aztecs and their religion?"

He shrugged. "Not a whole lot really. This Quetzalcoatl--" He stumbled over the nearly unpronounceable name.

Micky laughed. "Not bad, Jake. It's Quetzal-co-atl," she supplied helpfully, pronouncing slowly each barbaric syllable for him.

"Thanks. He was some sort of serpent, wasn't he?"

She nodded. "A feathered serpent is his symbol. In the beginning he was the main god of the Nahuatl Indians, who were later conquered by the Aztecs. Then, in turn, absorbed the Nahuatl religion just like the Romans did with the Greeks. Anyway, Quetzalcoatl was a lawgiver and inventor. He was such a compassionate man he couldn't stand to hurt even a fly."

Jake glanced at her. "You make it sound like he was a real person."

For answer Micky shrugged. "Nobody really knows for sure. There are those who maintain he came to Mexico from some far off Celtic land or maybe even from lost Atlantis. But whoever he was, he was the one who gave maize to the Indians."

"What's maize?" a sleepy-sounding voice asked suddenly behind them. Corky, who had finally awakened, had come forward to see what was going on in the cockpit.

Jake looked back at his friend and gave him a brief smile. "It's the Indian word for corn, Corky."

Corky looked interested. "No kiddin'? Boy, those Aztecs sure got around a lot. That sounds a lot like the Spanish word makiz."

Micky smiled indulgently. "It is based on the Spanish word makiz. We never really learned what the Aztecs' own word was. They seem to have used the word maize only when referring to the corn which was their primary food source. It isn't really clear just where it was first called corn, as that word is of Latin derivation." She eyed Jake's handsome profile as he concentrated on flying. "Want to hear more?"

The pilot nodded. "Sure. I never knew all that much about the Aztecs or their civilization. I mean, I had to study some of that stuff in college but, I never went in much for ancient history."

Micky laughed. "I know what you're saying, Jake. Archaeology can be boring as hell but I always tried to make it come alive for my students. But there's only so much I can do with it. Let's see, there were priests for the god who were expected to live a life above reproach. They lived chastely and virtuously, never touching unclean things, or having unclean thoughts or even spending time with women. A lot like the way the Franciscan monks live."

"They must have been a real boring bunch," Corky opined from the hatch.

Jake glanced at Micky; they shared a meaningful look. "I guess so," Micky agreed. "You want to hear the rest? It's quite a long story but not terribly entertaining."

Jake shook his head. "Admittedly we've got a few more hours of flying to do, but absorbing all there is to know about the Aztec civilization just because of that statue isn't exactly my idea of a great way to spend the time."

"Well, I could," Corky said defensively. He looked at Micky quickly. "Of course if you don't want to...."

"Just a little more then. How about a translation of his name? It's made up of two parts. The first, 'quetzal', is a rare bird with green feathers, and 'coatl' which is the Nahuatl word for snake. However, the word 'coatl' is actually two words. A combination of 'co', the generic term for serpent in the Mayan language, and 'atl', the Nahuatl word for water. So Quetzalcoatl is a god who was at once water, earth in the guise of a serpent, and bird."

Corky whistled. "Wow! Those Aztecs sure had a heck of an imagination. This guy must've really looked wierd."

Micky nodded. "He did. I'd show you a picture but I left all my reference books back at the college. But just try to imagine a giant snake with feathers covering its body instead of scales."

"That was a swell story, Micky," Corky commented enthusiastically. "But...why'd they make up such a weird name for him? Ketzaco -- at-- Ah, Ketzaca-- Ah, the heck with it!"

Micky grinned mischievously back at him, a teasing gleam in her eyes. "Maybe you'd prefer his other name?"

"Gotta be better than Ketzal-- whatever-it-is. What is it?"

"Huitzilopoctli."

Corky winced and rolled his eyes ceilingward while Jake stifled a laugh. "You made that up!" the mechanic accused, eyeing her balefully.

Micky looked innocently back at him, held up her hand. "Honest, Corky. I had nothing to do with it. Blame the Aztecs. Quetzalcoatl is the Nahuatl name. The Mayans called him Kukulcan if that's any better."

"Least it's easier to pronounce."

Jake eyed the woman beside him while adjusting the gas mixture for the engines. "Let me get this straight now. You told me back at the Monkey Bar that these fleeing Aztec priests ran into a shipful of English sailors. Right?" Micky nodded. "If I remember by ancient history, neither the Aztecs nor the Mayans had seaworthy boats or even ventured out on the ocean so how'd this bunch get so far out on the Pacific?"

She shrugged. "They weren't sailors but fear and religious fervor will make men do might strange things when the need arises. You know that. They needn't have been very far out. For all we know they were blown out into the Pacific by some storm. No one will ever know what really happened, but the

fact remains that this English sea captain's log exists and it pinpoints the island of Kona Kai to the map experts we consulted." Micky sighed and settled back, eyes closed. "You should have seen Indy's face when he made the final translations. He was like a little boy at Christmas. He was so excited he could hardly rest 'til he had all his arrangements made and gotten Marcus to foot the bill for the trip." Her eyes opened, full of ill-suppressed fear. "I don't know what I'll do if something's happened to him -- *really* happened. Something he can't talk or fight his way out of."

Cutter reached across and patted her arm reassuringly. "We'll find him, Micky. Don't worry. Only a little over an hour to go."

Micky gave him a wan smile. "I hope you're right, Jake. I really hope you're right."

The rest of the flight was completed in small talk. Jake tried to take Micky's mind off her missing friend by catching up on things that had happened to him and Corky in the year since she had left Boragora. It wasn't hard and he thought maybe, just maybe, she'd had more exciting times once or twice, than he had.

"...Then Corky cleaned off the monkey once we got the thing back to Louie's place."

"That must have been a great find, Jake. I wonder why there weren't any write-ups in the scientific journals?" Micky commented. "It must be worth a fortune."

"Oh, it is...to a brass collector," Corky offered from the passenger cabin. Jake grimaced. Micky swiveled to stare uncomprehendingly at him.

"A brass collector?" She lifted an eyebrow quizzically. "What's he talking about?"

"The legendary gold monkey wasn't gold. It was made of brass."

She stared at him a moment, then started to laugh. Cutter looked annoyed. "What's so funny?"

"You," she gasped, wiping tears from her eyes. "I would give a year's salary to have seen the stupefied expression you must have had on your face, Jake. It must have been priceless!"

Jake glared out the window fiercely. "Yeah, well, four men died for that lousy brass monkey."

Micky sobered. "Fortunes of war, Jake. Lots of men will soon be dying over something just as trivial. You and I killed quite a few a year ago, remember?"

Cutter cleared his throat uncomfortably, then peered out his window again, squinting against the sun's glare on the water below. "Heads up, Micky. Kona Kai dead ahead."

She sat up, staring eagerly out her side. The island was small and oblong in shape, densely covered by tropical growth. "Not very impressive, is it? But it looks peaceful enough. There should be a small inlet on the leeward side. That's where

Indy's pilot set down according to Louie."

Jake studied the island critically. "I see it. Hold on. We're going down."

Once landed, Cutter shut down the *Goose's* engines and opened the tiny door between the two sets of instrument panels that led to the forward anchor hatch, Jack following close on his heels. "You stay put 'til I make sure nothing's gonna jump out at us," he told Micky just before he crawled through the door.

She glared at him. "Jake Cutter, I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself," she informed him somewhat angrily. "I'm *not* helpless!"

Jake paused in the open hatch to eye her. "You asked for my help, lady, and you'll take my orders or else," he said evenly.

"Or else what?" Micky challenged, miffed by his attitude.

"Or else I turn you over my knee and give you one helluva spanking, young lady! Do I make myself clear?" She gave him a sullen nod; he almost smiled. Jack barked at him from the beach. "All right, all right! I'm comin'!"

Jake clambered from the hatch and slid down the plane's nose to land with a splash in the shallow water, hauling on the bow line which he quickly tied around a nearby palm. Having checked his gun to make sure it was fully loaded, he quickly scouted the immediate area for signs of human habitation. Other than local fauna indigenous to the island, he found nothing to make him think anyone had ever been here before. When he returned to the *Goose* he found Micky already on shore calmly checking the load in a gun while Corky paced nervously, rifle in hand.

"I thought I told you to stay in the *Goose* until I checked out the area," Jake growled, annoyed.

Micky glanced up at him, no humor left on her attractive face as she slid the gun, a big Colt 45 revolver, into a worn leather holster strapped down on her thigh. "Sorry, Jake, but I don't take orders very well. Indy was always yelling at me about that. He said I was too much like him!"

She hadn't been idle while he'd been out scouting, Jake noticed. Gone was the pretty, fragile-looking dark-haired lady whose company he'd enjoyed while they waited for Corky to fix the starboard engine. In her place was a strong-willed, work- and adventure-hardened archaeologist who just happened to be a very attractive woman. She wore a pair of heavy hiking boots, heavy trousers, an old work shirt and, along with the gun, she also carried a long-bladed hunting knife on a loop on her gunbelt.

Jake appraised Micky's changed attire in silence, then pointed at the holstered and sheathed weapons. "You know how to use those?"

Micky nodded. "Bet your Flying Tiger jacket I do."

Jake turned to Corky. "Maybe you'd better stay here and keep an eye on the *Goose*," he suggested, well aware of the plight of being stranded on such a remote island with no radio to call for help.

Corky looked dubious. "What if you need help?"

"Don't think that'll happen, Corky. I can't see anything that Micky and I can't handle." He grinned at his friend. "Besides, I'd feel safer if the *Goose* wasn't left all alone and I can't think of anybody I trust more to guard her than you. After all, the *Goose* is our only ticket out of here. I need you here in case something does happen."

Corky brightened at the praise. "I could be sort of the Seventh Cavalry comin' to the rescue, huh?"

"That's right."

"Okay. Sounds like a good idea, Jake." He waded through the shallow water and hopped up on the plane's broad nose. "I'll just stay here and wait for you guys. But, Jake?"

"Yeah, Corky?"

"You two be careful, huh?"

"We will."

Jake drew his machete from its sheath on his gunbelt and headed for the dense foliage. "You stay behind me," he told Micky sternly and watched Jack scoot ahead of them into the jungle. "Jack'll warn us if anything starts trailing us, won't you, Jack?" From the bushes he heard one muffled bark. Making an exasperated face, Cutter began swinging the machete at the foliage.

It was slow, hard work. Both Jake and Micky were sweating heavily after only twenty minutes. Cutter paused in his machete-work to look back at the girl trudging gamely behind him. "You got any idea where we're supposed to be going, or are we just waiting for an invitation?"

Micky made a face at him then pulled a folded paper from her breast pocket. "This is a copy of the map Indy had." She shook it out and handed it to him. "It's not very good but it was the best the mapmakers could do from the description in the captain's logbook."

Jake examined the map critically. "You're right. It's *not* a very good map," he muttered half under his breath.

Micky looked outraged. "Well, I think it's a damn good job considering what Indy's friends had to work with, Jake Cutter!" she exclaimed hotly. "You could be a little more considerate and--"

Cutter grinned, clapping a hand over her mouth to shut off her angry retort. "Whoa there, Micky.

Don't get so hot under the collar now. I said it wasn't a very good map..." His grin widened; he removed his hand. "But it's good enough to navigate with." He pointed to a line drawing surrounded by trees. "I saw this mountain when we came in. Funny-lookin' one. Looks like it might have been a volcano that blew its top. Has a peak that looks kind of like a big snake head."

The girl stared obliquely up at him. "Is that supposed to be a joke?"

He shook his head. "It really does look like a snake, Micky. Honest." Turning around he stared into the jungle, a thoughtful expression on his face. "Did you see the mountain, Jack?" Two barks sounded from the ground. "Great! Know which way it is from here?" Two more barks. "Take us to it?" One dubious bark and Jake gave the terrier a hurt look. "Why not? There's nothing gonna eat you out there." Two barks and Jack turned his back on the pilot. "Jack!" Jake said exasperatedly.

Micky knelt down on the ground beside the dog and began scratching his battle-scarred ears. "Aw please, Jack?" she implored, rubbing and scratching along ears and jaw. "Do it for me?" she coaxed.

The little dog turned and stared up at her a moment, calculatingly, then barked twice.

"Good dog!" She kissed him on top of his head. Jack grinned up at Jake as if to say 'I got her to kiss me.' He wriggled all over with pleasure.

Jake looked annoyed. "Show off! Can we go now?"

Jack barked twice and headed into the jungle, the two humans hot on his heels.

Half an hour of tree and vine chopping and a lot of sweat brought them to a wide swampy river. Jake stood on the bank and stared unhappily across, then back at his companions. "Looks like we're gonna have to swim. I don't see any bridge or even a narrow spot where we could just walk across."

Micky and Jack looked dubiously at the river. Its surface was broken periodically by unseen things swimming below. Jack barked once then looked up at his master. Jake gave him an exasperated look. "Don't worry. I'll carry you so you won't get your precious feet wet." Stooping, he picked the terrier up, stuffing him into the front of his flight jacket then gave Micky an encouraging grin. "You *do* know how to swim, don't you?"

The girl nodded. "I can take care of myself, Jake." To prove her point she waded into the smelly water. Jake drew his Weatherby and watched a moment to make sure nothing went after her in the water. When nothing horrible appeared he followed.

Halfway across Micky screamed and began beating at something in the water. Jake floundered frantically to reach her. "Micky! What is it?" he yelled.

"Big snake!" she panted, trying to pull her knife. "Trying to wrap...itself ar-round me!" Before Jake's horrified eyes a huge multi-colored scaled head reared out of the water, staring with lidless amber eyes down at the woman thrashing in its coils. Jake struggled harder to reach her. His gun was next to useless wet. In his haste he let Jack slip from his jacket; the dog paddled rapidly to shore and stood barking madly.

To Cutter's horror a second huge snake appeared directly in front of him. He felt powerful coils encircling his body. He saw Micky dragged under the water, her lithe body already limp. Unconscious...or dead! Coils squeezed Jake's chest; his lungs were on fire from lack of oxygen. In a last ditch effort he tried to pull his gun away, but his right arm was pinned to his side by one powerful coil. His last conscious thought was that Corky would never know what happened to them. Like Micky's archaeologist friend, they would simply vanish, never to be seen or heard from again. As he felt himself being dragged inexorably beneath the surface, Jake heard a voice. A loud commanding voice speaking no language he knew. A figure appeared in his blurring sight. A fantastic human figure wearing brilliantly colored feathers and -- it had a snake head instead of a human one! Then, his strength gone at last, Jake slipped into merciful unconsciousness and sank in the monstrous snake's coils.

On the shore Jack witnessed the sudden appearance of the human apparition. He saw the thing raise its brawny brown arms and shout something that was definitely not English. When the apparition shouted, the two huge snakes that were drowning his friends ceased what they were doing and began dragging the bodies of their victims toward shore! That was all Jack needed to send him scooting into the underbrush, headed for the *Goose* and Corky. He had to get help -- and fast if Jake and Micky were still alive.

Consciousness returned slowly. And with it the pain of bruised and maltreated muscle and oxygen-starved lungs. Jake Cutter groaned and slowly opened his eyes. He wasn't dead after all! Raising his body painfully, he took stock of himself. Everything was still there: two arms, two legs, nothing missing. He gazed at his surroundings. He was in a cave and he was alone. Sitting up too quickly, his head began to pound so he waited a moment until the guy with the sledgehammer stopped trying to crack open his skull. He found he was resting on a rock-hewn shelf on a mattress of woven cloth stuffed with aromatic leaves of some sort. As he gazed around the cave he saw it was decorated with paintings -- paintings suspiciously Aztec in style but with a vaguely Polynesian look about them. As if someone had combined the two. It looked wierd.

This was all very interesting, but where was Micky? It was then Jake finally noticed that his clothing had been taken and he was now clad only in a knee-length kilt made of coarse undyed material. Nothing else.

A figure appeared in the cave's opening. Jake

looked up apprehensively, prepared to demand an explanation from whoever it was. Instead his face registered shock at first, then split into a big grin. He jumped up and ran to hug the newcomer warmly. "Micky! I thought you were dead!" He held her tightly; she returned the hug. "You all right? Did they hurt you?"

"I thought I was dead, too, but it appears we were saved by someone."

Jake drew back to stare down at her quizzically, noticing for the first time that she, too, had had her own clothing removed and been provided with an plain ankle-length skirt and tunic of the same coarse material. "What's going on?"

Micky shook her head. "I'm not sure. When I woke up there was a strange old woman in my chamber. She spoke to me and I could kind of understand her a little." She stared intently up at his face, unsure if he would believe her. "Jake, I know this is going to sound incredible but...the woman spoke Aztec...mixed with some Polynesian dialect!"

"Right now I'd believe anything you tell me," Cutter replied. "Especially after that run-in I had with those priests of Anubis a month ago. But how do we g--"

He was interrupted by a voice. Looking up they saw several armed men standing in the cave opening. Like Jake, they wore knee-length kilts but theirs were dyed and decorated. They carried wicked-looking spears and looked like they knew how to use them. In the sallow light cast by torches set in niches in the walls, Jake could make out nothing specific except one of the men motioned to them.

Jake glanced down at his companion. "Think he wants us to go with him."

"And we'd better humor them until we know what we're up against," Micky muttered and moved toward the entrance, Jake following. The guards surrounded them and stepped off smartly, herding their captives down the tunnel.

After a ten minute walk they entered a larger cave that had apparently been worked on, chiseled and hewn by human hands. The walls were decorated with more of the weird mixture of cave paintings. A man sat in a legless chair, head bowed, but he looked up when they entered. He eyed Jake and Micky critically, then rose lithely to his feet.

Since this particular cave contained more lighting, Cutter and the girl were able to study the man better. He was old, his skin incredibly wrinkled, his long greasy hair liberally streaked with grey. His skin was a rich mahogany, his face broad, and he had an extremely prominent nose that lent him the visage of a vulture. For clothing, he wore a short loincloth embroidered with colorful and fanciful patterns, and a cloak wound around his body under the left armpit and knotted over his right shoulder. It was decorated with a serpent motif.

The old man continued to stare at the two

silently for several more minutes during which Jake began to fidget. Deciding somebody had to do something he smiled and raised his right hand. "Hi."

The old man cocked his head curiously, then finally spoke. Cutter failed to comprehend what he said, although he thought he recognized several words. He wished fervently that Corky was there. He spoke bits and pieces of most of the island dialects. Beside him, Micky became excited and clutched his arm.

"I think I understand most of what he's saying, Jake!"

"Good. What's goin' on? Who are these people and why are we here?"

The archaeologist listened attentively, then replied haltingly. Surprise crossed the old man's wrinkled face. He spoke further; she nodded vigorously. "He says his name is Ce Coatl, and he is the hight priest of Quetzalcoatl."

Jake stared speechlessly down at her. "Not another one! You aren't pulling my leg, are you?" She shook her dark head. "Ask him if he's seen any other white men. Maybe he's seen your professor friend."

Micky nodded and spoke to the old man slowly. After he heard her out, he threw back his head and laughed! Jake nudged the girl. "What's so funny?"

She shook her head. "I don't know unless..." Micky spoke again, this time Ce Coatl replied, an unpleasant smile on his face.

"What'd he say?" Cutter demanded, not entirely liking the old man's feral appearance.

"He says we're the captives of the Great Serpent and as such are no more than slaves. It is to the Great Serpent we are to be taken and sacrificed in his honor!"

Before either prisoner could react to this piece of news, they were once more surrounded by guards. Led by the old priest, they were marched quickly down another tunnel into a huge torchlit cavern. On the far side of the cavern stood a huge stone statue of a serpent with feathers on its head and down its body. From where she stood, Micky guessed it to be on gigantic block of carven lava. In front of the statue was an ornate chair decorated with feathers. A huge stone rested on the floor in front of the chair. Jake saw rust-colored stains on the stone that ran down its sides and, he had an unpleasant feeling he knew what they were. His arms were held firmly at his sides as were Micky's. They were forced into a kneeling position in front of the huge lava rock idol.

The old priest, Ce Coatl, bowed to the statue and spoke to it at length, alternately pointing at the two captives, then at the stained stone block.

"He's asking Quetzalcoatl what he wishes done with the two white-skinned prisoners," Micky whispered, trying to struggle in her captor's hold, but his grip was firm.

"What usually happens to prisoners?" Jake asked, not sure if he really wanted to know.

"Sometimes they're simply sacrificed. Other times they were forced into gladiatorial combat and flayed after they were killed. Some they used to shoot to death with arrows. Others th--"

"Never mind!" Jake swallowed uncomfortably and stared up at the huge stone statue. It almost seemed that the snake eyes were watching them. "That can't be the statue those ancient priests were transporting..."

"It's not. Too heavy for the small boats they had, but just seeing these people proves Indy's theory. Obviously, some of those priests escaped the English pirates and interbred with the natives." She used her chin to indicate the priest and the guards. "One look'll tell you that much." Micky looked unhappy. "I guess they found him and killed him on that altar already. We'll be next." Her shoulders sagged in defeat. "I'm sorry I got you into this, Jake. It wasn't your problem."

"Cut that out! We're not whipped yet," Jake said quietly. "While we stay alive there's always a chance of escape. I'm sure Jack got away. He'll get Corky. If they can't get us free, I know they'll go for help." He smiled over at her encouragingly. "Besides, I agreed to come. You didn't hold a gun to my head. I came because we're friends."

Micky smiled gratefully up at him. "Thanks, Jake. Even though I've been through some really hair-raising adventures with Indy, there are times when my nerves go right down the drain pipe. And I have to admit this is the first time I've ever been scheduled for a human sacrifice to some ancient god."

The old priest, Ce Coatl, was speaking again. His words had the ring of an order in them. In response, the guards dragged Micky across the huge cavern toward two upright posts. She fought every step of the way while Jake struggled futilely in his own guard's grip. Leather thongs hung from the tops of the posts. Micky's arms were stretched upward; her wrists were fastened to the thongs, then her ankles tied to things at the foot of the posts so she was, in effect, spread-eagled between them. Minutes later Jake found himself similarly tied to a pair of posts on the other side of the statue of Quetzalcoatl. Satisfied that the two prisoners couldn't possibly escape, or cause any problems until the time of the ceremony, Ce Coatl left, taking all but two of the guards with him. Each man stationed himself beside one of the prisoners and became motionless, like statues themselves.

Corky sat half asleep on the roof of the *Goose*, a loaded rifle across his knees. Guard duty was boring as hell, but at least it was a safe job. He hadn't heard any gunshots so he figured whatever Jake and Micky were doing, nothing terrible had happened. He was about to doze off completely when he heard furious barking from the direction of the shore. Figuring Jack had preceded his friends, the

mechanic sat up quickly, a grin of welcome on his scraggly face. "Hiya, Jack. Where'er Jake an' Micky?" he called cheerily. "Didja find her doctor friend already?"

But the little dog only barked harder, running up and down the shore and making short rushes into the water. He was upset. Corky's smile faded.

"You tryin' to tell me somethin', Jack?" Two excited barks. "Did something happen to Jake an' Micky?" Affirmative. "They need my help?" Jack nearly turned himself inside out in his excitement. "O-okay, Jack. I'm comin'!" Corky scrambled down onto the *Goose's* fuselage and disappeared into the nose hatch. He reappeared shortly pocketing a box of shells for the rifle. Climbing out the passenger hatch he waded to shore. "Lead the way, Jack." Obediently the little terrier took off, Corky following as best he could. "Slow down a little, will ya, Jack?" Corky panted after several minutes. "You got four feet. I only got two!"

For the twentieth time in as many minutes, Jake tested the thongs that bound his wrists and ankles. They had been tied by someone who knew how to tie knots, and were not about to give even a little. He glanced across the cavern at Micky who was trying similar tactics with her bonds. "Any luck?"

She shook her head. "None. Whoever did these thongs knew his business." Micky stared up at the huge statue that loomed over them. "I just wish I knew for certain what happened to Indy. I knew one of these days that insatiable curiosity of his would get him killed!" She shook her head. "But what a lousy place to die!"

Somewhere deep within the huge warren of caves a muted gong sounded. Jake looked up anxiously. "Call to worship," Micky supplied. "Time for the evening's entertainment to begin." She gave Jake an apologetic look then smiled. "We're not dead yet."

From somewhere nearby a voice whispered, startling the archaeologist. "Keep that thought in mind, sweetheart." Micky's head jerked upright. She stared at Jake. "You say something?" He shook his head.

The gong sounded -- louder this time. Ce Coatl entered the huge cavern followed by what looked like close to a hundred people, men, women, and children, all dressed in either the kilt-skirt Jake wore or, for the women, a long skirt and loose over-blouse. The old priest was resplendent in a magnificent feathered cape and golden jewelry on arms, neck and ankles and, despite their dire predicament, Micky would have given her eyeteeth to study them.

In his hands Ce Coatl carried a cloth-wrapped object which he held lovingly against his chest. The crowd behind him chanted eerily. He circled Jake twice, then crossed to circle Micky before striding to the center of the cavern to stand at the block of stone and face the worshippers. Raising the cloth-wrapped object above his head, he

began to chant. As he did so, he suddenly whipped the cloth off. Nearer than Jake was, Micky caught her breath; the worshippers let out a collective gasp.

The object was a coiled serpent of gold the size of a man's head. Jewels flashed its entire length. What little Micky and Jake could see of it from where they were tied, it looked like the jewels were fashioned into delicate feathers on the head and along the body. It was a thing of rare, and exquisite, beauty.

"Quetzalcoatl!" Micky breathed in awe.

Ce Coatl ceased his chanting, turned and placed the statue on a pedestal behind him, then slowly, deliberately, he walked toward Micky. He stared at her for several seconds, then nodded to the hovering guards. They quickly unfastened her arms and legs and hoisted her bodily over their heads, carrying her to the stone altar with the ugly rusty stains. Again she struggled, yelling first in English, then in what she knew of ancient Aztec. It didn't help.

A voice called to her. It wasn't Jake's. "Call on the protection of Quetzalcoatl!" it ordered.

Micky thought it sounded like a dumb idea, but she was willing to try anything once. The men laid her on the stone. She fought desperately, finally breaking free. Dodging the men she ran to kneel before the gold, jewel-encrusted idol, holding her arms out in supplication.

"Quetzalcoatl, mighty serpent, protector of the ancient lands, hear my plea!" she called in halting Aztec. "I am not of your land or your people. I am a seeker of knowledge and I mean no harm. Grant that my friend and I may be freed from an untimely death at the hands of your priest. Have mercy on us, and allow us to leave."

The old priest growled something. The guards sprang on Micky, dragging her back to the stone altar. They were stretching her out on the cold stone when a voice rang eerily in the air, seemingly coming from the huge lava stone statue of the god.

Those in the cavern froze where they stood. Silence descended. Ce Coatl turned, unsure, to stare at the statue.

Again came the eerie voice. The assembled worshippers muttered uneasily.

Ce Coatl spoke to the statue. Jake imagined he was demanding to know why the god interfered in the ceremony. The voice replied coldly; Ce Coatl grew angry. In response, there was a blinding flash of light, smoke billowed from the front of the stone idol. When the smoke cleared, a tall, imposing figure stood there. From the feet up it was human but, where a man's head would have been, there was the glittering head of a monstrous serpent! Jake had the weird impression he'd seen this apparition before. The figure wore a floor-length cloak of magnificently colored feathers. Bright green, gold, red, and blue feathers seemed to grow

from the snakehead in place of scales. Gold ornaments decorated arms and ankles. Except for a multi-colored feathered strip of material wrapped around the hips with a wide strip hanging down in front, the figure's body was bare. In one hand it carried a gold and feathered snake-shaped staff.

The snake eyes glittered redly when the figure moved as it did now, stalking silently past the stunned priest to stand towering over the prostrate archaeologist.

Micky stared up in open-mouthed wonder. The human part of the apparition was well-muscled beneath the feathered cloak. The snakehead turned its glittering red eyes on the guards. One by one they released their hold on the girl and stood back in superstitious awe. From beneath the feathered robe a hand appeared, taking one of Micky's and lifting her up. She slid shakily to the floor. So close she had come to a grisly death! The strange being turned. Greatly daring, Micky grabbed its hand. It paused.

"What about my friend?" she asked, pointing at Jake who stared like all the rest.

A booming voice issued from the snakehead again; a voice that spoke flawless Aztec, not the bastardized language the priest and his people spoke. Ce Coatl frowned, spitting out a reply that didn't in the least sound respectful. The old man snarled an order to his guards, but it was apparent the men were afraid to go near the feathered apparition. With a shriek of fury, Ce Coatl threw himself at the snake-headed one, brandishing a heavy stone knife.

The snake-one calmly raised a hand, finger pointed straight at the priest. From the tip, a beam of green energy lanced to bathe the man in eerie emerald flame. Ce Coatl shrieked, writhing in agony for several seconds. When the flames died, he was nowhere to be seen.

Satisfied, the spectre turned toward Jake. Terrified of the phantom's power, the guards sprang to untie him. The pilot quickly joined Micky and their mysterious benefactor -- whatever it was. The massed people remained silent, fearing to speak or do anything that might arouse the snake-one's anger again.

The god, or whatever he was, turned to face the crowd. He began to speak. Behind him Micky did her best to translate.

"He says the people have sinned greatly in blindly following the evil priest Ce Coatl. They have strayed far from the ways of their ancestors. He, Quetzalcoatl, never demanded blood sacrifice in his worship. He says he is not happy with such horrible acts and this must stop or he will depart from them forever. He says he is greatly angered and will depart from them so they can think about the error of their ways. They must decide for themselves."

Having finished, the snake-man turned to the two recent captives. From the pedestal he plucked the golden statue, placing it in Micky's hands. He paused to stare into their eyes, his glittering red

orbs burned deeply into their brains. They fell into a dark and dreamless sleep. To the watching Aztec descendents the three simply vanished, taking the statue of Quetzalcoatl with them.

When Micky awoke, she found herself lying on a soft bed of what felt like a mound of feathers. Jake was sitting on the edge of her bed, one hand on her shoulders, apparently trying to wake her up. When he saw she was conscious he smiled, relieved. "You okay?"

She nodded. "I guess so." He helped her to sit up. Micky looked around. They were in another cave. This one had torches in the corners and more Aztec paintings on the walls. There was an empty niche carved into the rear wall. "Where is he?"

Cutter shook his head. "Beats me. You're the only one in here besides me. Can you stand?"

With his help Micky got shakily to her feet, glancing down at the shelf she'd been lying on. Brightly glowing green feathers had, indeed, provided her bed. Unwilling to think on the implications of that, Micky instead, went to examine the paintings on the walls. "These are pure Aztec!" she exclaimed excitedly, turning back to Jake, her green eyes glowing. "From the looks of them, and this cave, they date back to the time Cortez conquered the Aztecs." Micky ran her fingers along the lines of one particular set of paintings. "Look here. This indicates the coming of the white-skinned, bearded gods in armor." Her finger moved on. "And here the escape of the priests with the temple relics."

She was silent a few minutes, tracing the route of the priests' escape depicted in the wall paintings. "Here it is, Jake!" Micky said breathlessly, pointing at the large canoe with the bearded white men on it. "There's the pirate ship...and here's Kona Kai." She looked up at him eagerly. "Jake, do you know what this means?"

He nodded. "Means your friend was right. Those English pirates *did* land here. But it's not going to mean a damn thing to anyone if we don't get out of here alive to tell anybody," he added soberly.

Ignoring his comment Micky traced a hand over a carved relief. "Some of those priests must have escaped, or those people out there wouldn't look the way they do, or speak a bastardized form of Aztec. The statue must have been the only thing they managed to take from the pirates."

A shadow loomed in the entrance. Quetzalcoatl, or whatever he was, padded noiselessly into the cave. He stood eyeing the two a moment, they watched him warily in turn. Micky noticed he held the statue which he placed reverently in the empty niche. Turning back to them, his hands went to his head covering. Both captives held their breaths. Jake was about to become belligerent when the apparition lifted off the head mask to reveal...

"Indiana!" Micky exclaimed excitedly and happily launched herself into his startled arms. "In-

dy, I'm so glad you're alive!"

Indiana Jones grinned and returned her embrace. "Easy there, Gray. You'll damage the headdress." He shifted the turquoise snakehead to a nearby ledge and hugged her warmly. "Why wouldn't I be alive?"

Micky pulled back and glared up at him. "What the hell's going on here, and why are you running around in that getup?" she demanded, indicating the feathered cape and brief, feathered loincloth he wore.

Jones casually removed the cape and seated himself on the bed Micky had so recently lain on. "It's a long story, Micky."

She looked adamant, standing over him, legs braced, hands on hips. Behind her Jake grinned. "We've got the time now. Spill it, Jones."

Sighing like a martyr, Indy gave Jake a long-suffering look. "Women!" Taking a deep breath he began his story. "When I chartered the plane on Tagataya, I didn't know I was being followed. Wasn't until the plane left I discovered my pursuers. Couple of shady-looking characters. They waylaid me up on the ridge above this place. Coshed me before I even knew they were there. When I woke up, I found myself in this cave." He pointed. "You can see the shaft. They musta thrown me in there, figurin' I'd either die in the fall, or from some injury." He grinned. "Lucky for me I landed on one of these feather beds. First thing I saw when I came to was that snake headdress an' this feather cape." He shuddered faintly, making an unhappy face, and Micky laughed.

"Indy is afraid of snakes," she explained, seeing Jake's mystified look. "Go on."

"Anyway, the statue wasn't here, so I spent a lot of time prowling these tunnels an' caverns lookin' for a way out. That's when I stumbled on that big cavern with the lava statue of Quetzalcoatl. I hid up in the rocks. There's a real convenient ledge over the statue, and watched that crazy old high priest." Indy shook his head. "He's really nuts. You wouldn't believe some of the things he did down there."

"Yes, we would," Jake put in feelingly, rubbing his wrists where the ropes had cut into his skin.

Indy glanced at him, wondering who he was, then shrugged and continued. "Anyway, I decided I didn't really like what he was doin' down there so I figured to use the headdress and costume to do something about the next sacrifice." He glanced up at his audience. "That was you two. Funny thing, too. The Quetzalcoatl cult never went in for such stuff as human sacrifice in ancient times." Indy rose and took Micky by the shoulders. "Mind tellin' me who your friend is and what you're doing here, Gray?"

"You remember me telling you about the business with that Nazi experimental drug?"

Jones nodded. "I kind of figured that's who

you were." He offered his hand. They shook solemnly, but Cutter thought he detected a bit of restraint on the archaeologist's part. Jealousy? Couldn't be. Just his over-strained imagination.

"You, ah, dress up like that very often, Dr. Jones?" Jake asked, indicating the loincloth and cape.

Indy laughed. "First time for everything, Captain. Actually, it's quite comfortable, but I'd rather have my regular clothes back. I'll be changing shortly and we can get out of here." He eyed Micky sternly. "And as for you, Dr. Gray, I told you to stay in the States until you heard from me. If I needed help, I'd have asked for it."

Micky's green eyes flashed dangerously. "Well, how was I supposed to know? When I didn't hear from you after you left Hawaii, I figured you were too engrossed in your search, so I flew out anyway. Then, when I couldn't find any trace of you from Tagataya, I got scared you'd finally bitten off more than you could chew, so I contacted Jake."

Indy eyed Cutter over her head, his fingers tightening involuntarily on her shoulders. "Why didn't you just wait?" he asked softly, although he knew the answer as well as she.

"Because I thought you might be hurt...or worse, and Jake was the only person I dared trust. I couldn't go to the French authorities. You didn't have permission to be here."

Jones' fingers relaxed. He nodded. "You're right, and I apologize, Micky. I do need help to get off this island." He indicated a dark pile lying on a nearby shelf. "Your clothes. Get dressed and we'll get out of here."

"What about you?" Micky asked while she sorted through the clothing. "Or do you enjoy running around like that?" She bundled up her things, tossing Jake's to him, then turned to eye Jones' half-naked body appreciatively. "I never took you for an exhibitionist, but I gotta admit I rather like you in that rig, Jones. Does something for you."

Indy glared at her. "Get dressed!"

Minutes later they were headed for the escape route Indy had found earlier. Jake and Micky walked ahead while Indy, carrying the snake mask, staff, and the coveted gold statue, brought up the rear. They had seen no sign of the native population, and for that they were grateful. Indy had no idea just what their reaction might be if they knew the specter of Quetzalcoatl was leaving -- with their idol.

"How far is it now?" Corky panted, trying valiantly to keep up with Jack. "I'm about ready to drop, Jack."

The little terrier paused to look back and bark. Corky grimaced. "A lot farther?" One bark and he looked relieved. "Good." The mechanic

leaned against a nearby tree and wiped his face with a grimy rag. "Just let me catch my breath a minute, will ya?"

But Jack didn't give him much time to rest before he was off again, urging Corky on with tugs at his pants leg and excited barking.

"Okay, okay, I'm comin'! Jeese, Jack, take it easy!"

A few more minutes of travel brought them within sight of a huge mountain with a peculiar rock formation on its top. Gazing upward, Corky gulped audibly. "Gee, Jake was right. That thing does look like a big snake." He looked unhappily up at the mountain. The only entrance he could see was several feet up its almost sheer side. "I don't think I can climb all the way up there, Jack."

Jack barked once then disappeared into the foliage, only to reappear minutes later running as if his life depended on it. "What's wrong?" Corky demanded as the dog scooted behind him. "Jack?"

Movement on the cliff caught his eye. Corky stared upward and froze. Three figures had appeared at the cave mouth. The mechanic squinted and stared harder, then grinned. "I-it's okay, Jack. That's Jake an' Micky up there. Don't know who, or what, that other guy is, but at least they ain't dead. Boy, what a relief! Come on, Jack." As he started forward, Jack ran in front of him, blocking his path. Corky frowned down at him. "What's wrong with you? That's Jake an' Micky up there. They might need help gettin' down. We gotta get up there somehow."

Jack barked once and Corky paused. "You think there's somethin' wrong up there, don't'cha?" An affirmative pair of barks. "Then maybe we oughta just hide an' follow'em, huh?"

Jake peered over the ledge they stood on. It was a long way down and nearly a sheer drop. "O-kay, how do we get down from here, Dr. Jones?"

"Indy, please. Dr. Jones sounds so formal." Indy grinned. "There's a way down, Cutter. I just thought Micky might like to see the view from here. And I also wanted to check for activities that could be detrimental to my health."

"Like those two men you mentioned?" Micky wanted to know.

He nodded. "The escape route is back here." They re-entered the cave and Indy gestured to a hole in the back.

Torch in hand, Jake ducked into the tunnel and paused until he saw Micky's face, then he led the way. It didn't take long to reach the bottom of the mountain and the exit. When they once more stood in the fresh air and sunlight, they all breathed a sigh of relief.

Jake stared off into the jungle. He was uneasy and not certain why. He took a few tentative

steps forward. Micky noticed and joined him. "Something wrong, Jake?"

He shook his head. "Not sure. I've just got this feeling there's something out there -- waiting." He turned toward her. "I know if Jack didn't get eaten by those snakes, he went to get Corky. Only trouble is, where are they?"

Corky and Jack watched their friends from the bushes. "I think it's okay, Jack. They look all right to me. They even got their guns." He glanced down at his small companion. "I suppose you wanta wait a few more minutes." Jack barked an affirmative. Corky frowned but stayed where he was.

Pulling his machete, Jake headed into the jungle, Micky in the middle, carrying the headdress and feather cape, while Indiana brought up the rear bearing his precious statue and the loincloth and staff he'd found in the cave. Corky and Jack followed cautiously in their wake.

The trip back to the inlet where the *Goose* was floating was totally uneventful. Jake was able to find the path he had originally cut through the jungle, so their return journey wasn't quite as difficult.

"By the way, how'd you manage to get those two big snakes that were trying to drown us to let go?" Jake asked. They were once again nearing the river where he and Micky had nearly drowned, and it reminded him of that narrow escape.

Indy frowned in puzzlement. "Me? I wasn't anywhere near this river when you two were caught."

Jake turned back, staring hard at the archaeologist. "When Micky and I tried to swim across, we were attacked by two of the biggest snakes I've ever seen. They were sort of rainbow colored. It almost felt like they were covered with feathers instead of scales. The last thing I saw before I lost consciousness was someone on the bank -- someone with a snake's head like *that*." He pointed to the headdress Micky still carried. "He spoke to the snakes in what must have been Aztec." He paused. Micky was unable to read the expression on his face. "Wasn't that you?"

Jones shook his head. "It would never be me. I hate snakes! First time I saw you two was when that old faker dragged you into the sacrificial chamber. Sorry, chum."

Jake stared down at Micky then back up to Indy. "If it wasn't *you*,..." His voice trailed off.

Indy was about to reply when he stiffened, turning back to face their backtrail. "Quiet!"

Then they heard it. The sound of twigs and underbrush being snapped by something passing

through the trees.

"Might be the natives," Jake offered half-heartedly. He had no great desire to get caught again, and this time they had no snake god to appear magically to rescue them at the last minute. "If I didn't say so before, thanks for getting us out of that cavern."

Jones nodded absently. "Later, Cutter. We got trouble." He turned to stare at the river. "Is there a bridge, or any way to cross?"

"Probably, but we didn't find it before."

"That's why we ended up almost getting drowned," Micky explained.

"Well, we'd better find some way over and fast!" Indy grabbed Micky's arm. "Come on." He half-ran along the bank, searching for a bridge of some sort, Micky and Jake following. "There has to be a bridge of some sort around here somewhere!" he muttered.

Jake drew his gun and kept a watchful eye on the jungle, while Indiana searched hopefully for a bridge or at least a shallow place to cross the deadly river. And his mind wandered. If it hadn't been the archaeologist who had saved them from the snakes, then who? Or what? And how had Jones managed the appearing and vanishing acts in the sacrificial chamber? And that business with the beam that had killed the high priest. Could that ancient Aztec god really exist? Might it have been Quetzalcoatl himself who had intervened on their behalf? Fairy tales! Shaking his head, Jake peered into the underbrush. "I've got this weird feeling we aren't alone out here," he muttered just loud enough for his two companions to hear.

"Quite correct," a strange voice answered suddenly. Startled, the pilot spun to find himself looking down the barrels of two guns.

Behind him, Indy and Micky turned also. At the sight of the two men who appeared from the jungle, Jones frowned and muttered an oath under his breath.

"These the two you told us about?" Jake asked. He hadn't dropped his gun yet.

"They're the ones."

One of the men, a short stocky man with a granite face and unkempt hair, smiled. It wasn't a pleasant smile. "I had a feeling you weren't out of our hair, Doc. Tell your friend to drop his gun or we'll be forced to kill him."

Jake shrugged. "You're gonna kill us anyway whether I drop my gun or not," he replied philosophically. "So why don't I just go out shooting, and take you two with me?"

He felt a touch on his arm and half-turned to see Micky standing beside him. "There's always a chance we can get away," she whispered. "Do as they say...for now."

Behind him Indy reluctantly dropped his own

revolver. Realizing Micky was right, Jake slowly did as he was told. The gunman smiled again. "Good. Now kick'em over here. You, too, lady." He hadn't missed the gun strapped to Micky's hip. "And the knife and whip too! Move!"

Once the three guns, Micky's knife, Jake's machete, and Indy's bullwhip had been gathered up, the spokesman eyed the pouch Indy wore. "The idol in there, Doc?"

Indy shook his head. "Never found it. These are just a couple of stone pieces I picked up."

The man laughed. "Nice try, Doc, but I'm afraid I don't believe you." He motioned with his empty left hand. "Hand it over, Jones."

Seeing no way to avoid giving up the golden idol, Indiana slowly walked the few feet that separated him from the two men. "Who hired you? How did you know I was coming here?" he demanded.

The squat man shrugged. "Fred here works at the college you and the lady teach at, Doc. He cleans your offices. Stumbled across your notes one night an' told me all about it." He smiled. "We figured we'd invite ourselves in on the deal."

"And help yourselves once the hard work was all done!" Micky finished for him hotly, her voice fairly dripping with scorn.

"Why should we mess around when we could follow the expert there? Right, Fred?"

Fred, a tall, emaciated-looking man with lank blond hair nodded. "Enough talk, Hal. Let's just get out of here."

Hal nodded. "After we get rid of the witnesses."

His partner didn't look pleased. "You said no rough stuff, Hal. I didn't like what you did to Dr. Jones up on the mountain an' I don't want a murder rap hangin' over my head!" He eyed Indy, Jake, and Micky. "They can't go to the authorities because Jones is here illegally. Can't we just take their plane an' strand'em here?"

Hal shook his head. "Still witnesses unless that pack of idol worshippers back at the cave get'em after we leave. I don't like loose ends, Fred. You got a weak stomach, then don't look." Raising his gun he took aim. The three victims held their breath.

"Hold it!" a voice commanded from the bushes.

At the sound of that voice, Jake's face broke into a huge grin. "Corky!"

His mechanic emerged from the jungle. Jack ran across the clearing to throw himself ecstatically into Micky's arms, ignoring his master. Cutter frowned. "Traitor," he muttered.

Corky retrieved the three guns, handing them to Jake to distribute. Indy strode boldly over to Hale. "I'll take that." He grabbed the shoulder pouch from the would-be thief, then turned to the

others. "Let's get out of here."

"We take these two with us," Jake said, indicating Hal and Fred. "Attempted murder." He turned back to Corky, eyeing his greasy coveralls. "How come you're not wet?"

"Oh, Jack found a bridge a mile downstream." Corky stared at Indiana who stood absently stroking his pouch. "That Micky's friend?" he whispered to Jake.

"Yeah. Corky, I'd like you to meet Dr. Indiana Jones. Indy, this is my mechanic, and best friend, Corky." The two men shook hands solemnly.

"We'd better get out of here," Micky suggested, glancing around nervously.

"Why?"

She pointed. "That's why."

Jake, Indy, and Corky turned slowly. While they had been preoccupied with Hal and Fred, the natives from the caves had managed to sneak up unobserved, and surrounded them.

Jake let out a great sigh of martyrdom. "What else can go wrong?" he implored the sky. There was no answer.

The spearmen raised their weapons menacingly. Jake, Indy, and Micky reluctantly dropped their own -- again. An old man, possibly the chief or another shaman, stepped forward, speaking rapidly, angrily. Every so often he pointed at Indy, the headdress Micky carried, and the professor's shoulder pouch. The two archaeologists appeared to be listening intently. Jake watched various emotions play across both faces. Corky leaned toward him. "What's he sayin'?"

Cutter shrugged. "How should I know? I'm not the expert here. They are."

Finally the old man stopped. Indy stepped forward. He spoke, but this time it wasn't fluent Aztec. Still, he apparently made himself understood. Micky moved toward Jake. "He's the new shaman and wants to know what we did to the god, how we got free, and he wants their idol back."

"He gonna give it to 'em?" Jake wanted to know. He really didn't want to be killed over some ancient idol, after all.

She sighed. "I don't know. Indy worked so hard to find it."

"You think they'll kill us if he doesn't?" Corky asked nervously.

Micky touched his arm reassuringly. Turning back she listened intently to Indy, frowning when he finished and the guards raised their spears threateningly. "Indy, that wasn't a good idea telling them the god was angry with them and wanted to leave."

"It's the truth," Indy replied defensively.

"How do you know?" she challenged.

He shrugged. "I just do."

"You will soon know nothing more, Dr. Jones!" a voice yelled behind them. Everyone looked up to see Fred and Hal aiming their retrieved guns at them. While they had been occupied with the natives, the two thieves had slipped away, retrieving their weapons from where they'd been thrown. Hal smiled nastily. "Now, Dr. Jones, throw me the idol."

Indy grew stubborn. "I've been through this before," he muttered to himself, then raised his voice. "You plan on killin' us an' all these natives as well? You haven't got enough bullets to do that before one of those spears guts you both."

Fred turned. "He's right, Hal. Let's just take the idol an' get out here."

"I don't want witnesses!" Hal raised his gun, aiming not at Indiana, but straight at Micky, pointing the muzzle at her head. "Hand it over, Jones, or I'll put a big hole through your lady's pretty little head."

The man wasn't bluffing. Indy knew by the ruthless light in his dark eyes. Sighing heavily, he started to turn, only to throw the shoulder pouch straight at Hal. The pouch hit the thief square in the chest. Micky ducked out of the line of fire just as Indiana and Jake launched themselves at the two men. The four grappled for possession of the guns while the natives, Corky, and Jack looked on helplessly. Jake landed a powerful haymaker to his opponent's jaw, the man ceased struggling and lay still. He glanced over at Indy to see how he was doing. Hal had the archaeologist on the ground and was striking him repeatedly in the face and body, but Indy stubbornly refused to give up.

Micky had gotten her gun back, and aimed the big Colt at a spot near the two fighting men. Squeezing the trigger, she thunked a bullet into the ground by Indy's head. "Hold it!"

Hal paused, startled. Taking advantage of the man's hesitation in the face of Micky's threat, Indy gathered his long legs under him and suddenly pushed upward, throwing Hal off him. The thief landed with a bone-jarring thud, but he still had possession of his gun. Jake and Micky started for him with the intention of wrestling the weapon away, but the man climbed groggily to his feet, gun in one hand, slipping the pouch containing the idol over his head. He waved the gun at them; they halted.

"Get back all of you! Or I'll kill the lot of you where ya stand!" he snarled and, taking advantage of Micky's momentary indecision, grabbed her arm, yanking her in front of him for a shield, twisted her arm agonizingly up behind her back, forcing her to drop her gun. She tried to struggle but he held her tightly and merely twisted her arm tighter. Micky moved with him as he began to back down the riverbank.

Out of nowhere came a sudden whistling sound.

The long, slim length of a bullwhip struck Hal's gunhand, wrapping itself around the weapon and wrenching it free. The man cried out in pain, releasing his hold on Micky. She stumbled forward into Jake's arms and Indiana Jones, whip uncoiled in his right hand ready to strike again, stood beside them, a ferocious gleam in his hazel eyes.

Seeing he had no more chances left, Hal turned and bolted for the river, Indy's shoulder pouch still hanging from his neck. Jones turned to follow his escape, a strange expression on his stubbled face. Slowly he bent to pick up the snake headdress, placing it over his head. Micky and Jake watched, speechlessly. From the mouth of the snake head boomed a powerful deep voice that was, and was not, that of Dr. Indiana Jones. It spoke words not in English; words that echoed across the clearing. Hal continued to retreat into the water until he was swimming.

Something began to move beneath the surface of the river. Something huge and menacing. For one of the few times in her life, Micky Gray screamed and clutched at Jake Cutter's supporting arm when a huge head broke the surface, rising until it hovered nearly ten feet out of the water on a long sinewy neck. It was a snake of gigantic proportions. Instead of scales, it was covered from its nose to where its huge body disappeared into the water by brightly-hued feathers! It stared with lidless yellow eyes at the group on shore, then at the man frantically trying to escape across the river.

The thing that now possessed Indiana Jones raised his arms. Again the voice came, commanding, powerful, and the snake obeyed. Lunging after the fleeing Hal, it wrapped its huge coils around the man who struggled to no avail. One horrified scream was all the watchers on shore heard before the hapless thief was dragged under by the giant serpent. The surface roiled for several minutes, then was still. Neither snake, nor victim, reappeared.

Micky and Jake turned back to Indy, watching silently, warily, as the professor slowly removed the headdress of Quetzalcoatl. Micky pulled from Cutter's arms and ran to Jones. "Indy! Wake up! It's Micky!" She grabbed him by his jacket, shaking him roughly. Indiana's staring eyes unclouded, he shook his head. "Indy?" Micky asked anxiously.

Indy turned dark haunted eyes on her, blinking slowly as if coming out of a dream. "I'm...all right...I think." He breathed heavily for several minutes then opened his eyes and smiled down at her. "What happened?"

"You don't know?" He shook his head. "I'll tell you later."

The shaman walked to the river's edge, bent and picked up a dark object that lay in the water. Opening the pouch reverently he held up the gloriously jeweled statue of the snake-headed god of peace.

Jake glanced at the two archaeologists. Indy was gazing intently at the idol. Its red eyes seemed to glitter for a moment as if they were

alive. The professor sighed and shook his head. "Not for me, I guess." He still held the snake headdress. "But I can have this." He put an arm around Micky's slim shoulders. "Come on, Gray. Let's get out of here."

But his assistant and friend stood her ground. "What do you mean the idol isn't for you, but you can have the headdress?" she demanded suspiciously, green eyes flashing from Indy's tired bearded face to the retreating natives.

Indiana looked down at her. "He told me."

"Who he?" Micky asked quietly, although she had a feeling she already knew what he was going to say even before he opened his mouth.

Indy gazed down at the turquoise headdress in his hands. "Quetzalcoatl."

A week later, everyone was rested and Indiana and Micky were scheduled to catch the *Clipper* for Hawaii. Jake, Jack, and the two archaeologists were having a last meal together while Corky sat at Louie's old piano playing accompaniment for Sarah.

Cutter was brandishing a knife and regaling them with his Flying Tiger exploits, while Jack laid on the floor looking bored. He'd heard all those stories before, had lived through quite a few of them. "...so, since my leg was shot up, I couldn't fly combat any more. Couldn't fly a P-40. General Chennault had me sent back to the States to recover, but this is as far as Corky and I ever got." Jake leaned forward, eyeing Indy speculatively. "That was some terrific bit of whipwork you did back there, Doc."

Jones smiled. "Thanks. Gets me out of some bad situations sometimes."

"Indy won't admit it, but he feels naked without that old ratty whip of his," Micky teased. "He considers it an extension of his arm. There are some who say he even *sleeps* with it."

Indy frowned at her. "Did you get the headdress and the other stuff packed safely?" he asked in an attempt to change the subject.

"Of course. It's already loaded in the *Clipper*. Marcus will be ecstatic when he sees it."

Jake leaned on the table, his expression one of mixed curiosity and wonder. "Ya know, there's still something that bothers me about your appearance in that cave, Indy."

The archaeologist looked up from his steak. "What's that? What appearance in what cave?"

Cutter smiled. "You know. When that priest was gonna sacrifice Micky and me, and you suddenly appeared wearing that head mask an' all. You spoke fluent Aztec then. Stopped the whole she-bang. But what I still can't figure out is how you pulled off that trick with that beam from your finger, killing the shaman and the appearing and disappearing act. That was some bit of magic. I was im-

pressed, I can tell you. How'd you do it?"

Micky put a hand on her colleague's arm. "Yes, I'd like to know the answer to that myself, Indy. And that business at the river, when Hal tried to escape with the idol."

Indy took a bite of steak, chewed reflectively a moment, then swallowed and shook his head. "As to the business in the temple, I don't know what you're talking about. I never got down there. All I know is you two suddenly appeared in the cave I was living in, along with the statue. I assumed you'd managed somehow to escape without my help. Now the lake's another matter entirely. I just sort of suddenly felt this powerful urge to put that head mask on and pronounce this old summons to Quetzalcoatl I knew and...he came. I don't know what else to call it. He sort of...possessed me you might say...to call up that big snake in the river. It's a guardian." Indy looked embarrassed. "There's something else. The...god...Quetzalcoatl...told me he...likes me..." His deep voice trailed off uncertainly. "Said I would make a perfect vessel for him to use. A good high priest," he added in an embarrassed tone.

Micky and Jake stared at him. "You're saying it wasn't you on the riverbank who saved Micky and me from drowning?" Cutter asked slowly. Indy nodded.

"I wasn't anywhere near that river until we tried to escape."

"And it wasn't you in the temple either?" Again the nod. Jake stared at Micky. "Then...who was it?"

"I can only speculate, Jake, but my guess is we were saved by Quetzalcoatl himself," Micky answered in a hushed voice.

When the call for passenger boarding was relayed to them, Micky and Indy hastily collected their things and headed for the wharf. Good-byes were said all around. Indy started for the plane only to realize he was alone. He turned back in

time to see Jake Cutter take Micky into a close, extremely warm embrace, and a kiss that would have taken Indiana's breath away if he'd been on the receiving end. He found he was frowning darkly. "Get your tail over here, Gray!" he muttered impatiently.

"Yes, sir!" She gave Jake a last small kiss on the cheek, then hurried to catch up with him. They disappeared into the plane.

Jake stood on the wharf, his eyes following the big plane as it revved up its huge motors and taxied away from the dock. He was still staring into the blue sky long after the *Clipper* had vanished into the distance. Someone bumped his arm. It was Louie.

"She is gone, mon ami. I do not think the eminent Dr. Indiana Jones will let her out of his sight for a good long time," the Frenchman said softly, wisely.

Jake grinned. "I dunno, Louie. Micky's got a stubborn streak a mile wide. I got a feeling we'll meet again some time." As he turned away, something bright lying on the plank caught his eye. Stooping down, Jake retrieved a brilliant bronze green feather from a species of bird unknown to him. He stared down at the huge feather, recognizing it as being of the same type as those that had formed the beds in Quetzalcoatl's shrine cave.

"What is it, Jake?" Louie wanted to know. "I do not recognize it."

"I think I do. Micky told me about a bird that lived in South America that had green feathers. It was called a quetzal by the Aztecs." He glanced at his friend. "You don't think...?"

Louie shook his head. "Impossible. Come. Let's have a drink." He started away, but Jake lingered, staring out to sea, the green feather clutched in his fingers. Something rose briefly from the water far out to sea. A long sinewy neck with a snake head. It was feathered all in multi colors, most predominant being green. It stared silently at him for several minutes before slipping quietly back beneath the waves.

WOULDN'T YOU THINK...?

...Jake and Corky would have discovered sunglasses, especially flying over water under the bright tropical sun? Or does the *Goose* have a polarized windshield?

...Sarah would keep a pair of hiking boots permanently stowed aboard the *Goose*, considering how often she's had to get out and walk?