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The Green God

GALAXY
PRESENTS

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SWIFTLY Lieutenant Bill Mahone of Naval Intelligence pulled his automatic from its shoulder holster and crawled along the side of the coffin, screening himself from possible guards.

Against the dark sky he could see the outline of the mound which marked the tomb of General Tao Lo, and around it the many unburied coffins which might or might not house the dead of Tientsin.

It was a dangerous mission that had brought Mahone venturing into the night. He had convinced his commander that they would not be able to stop the constant looting and murdering that had cast a reign of terror over the city until the Green God was back in its temple.

Tientsin's Native Quarter was half in flames; the dead were heaped in the gutters. The Chinese were convinced that their city would fall, now that their idol was gone. Before long these fanatics might sweep into the International Settlement and wipe it out.

Mahone had received a slip of paper that one of the natives in the Intelligence Department had brought in. It had been found in the Native Quarter, and the Chinese ideographs had read, "A jade calling card for General Tao Lo." The general

had been dead for a year, but Mahone was convinced that the Green God had been hidden in his tomb.

Now Mahone, disguised as a Chinese coolie, had come alone to try and get the Green God from the general's tomb and save the city before it was too late.

As he crawled along the side of the coffin a cry rang out directly above him and he felt the bite of a knife in his shoulder. With a spring he catapulted away and looked back. A dark figure leaped to follow him! Mahone's automatic spat fire and the shadow by the coffin screamed in agony. In front of him he could see other shadows rising up like ghosts. The faint light fell on the blades of many knives. Vicious snarls were hurled at Mahone as the guards swept down on him.

Knives flashed. The automatic spat again and again. There seemed no end to these fanatics. Bodies hurled their fighting lengths upon Mahone.

With his empty automatic he clubbed and beat about him. He could feel the impact of his steel crashing down upon skulls, arms, bodies. Chinese were sweeping over him in a stifling mass. Knives bit into his flesh like white-hot irons.

He felt men go down upon him, beside him, as he brought his gun butt down. But each time he struck, another screaming demon leaped to take the empty place. His arm was aching with exertion. He was bleeding from many wounds, but he fought on relentlessly.

Feet kicked him in the face, talonlike hands sought his throat, knives lanced in for his heart. His hand was sticky from the blood of crushed skulls.



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By rolling over and over he managed to baffle the knives which flashed above him. Suddenly he brought up against a coffin. Then, protected on one side, he tried to gain his feet.

But each time he rose as high as his knees, a body would launch itself into him, pinning him again to the ground. He was partially protected by the inert Chinese he had either killed or knocked unconscious, and hope that he might be able to escape welled up within him.

His left hand fell upon the hilt of a knife and he snatched it up, lashing at the air before him. He felt that blade catch again and again, but each time, he pulled it from the flesh it had met and threshed out for new targets.

The knife blade was growing sticky and he felt a hot trickle of moisture running down inside his sleeve. The salty stench of blood was in his nostrils as he fought.

He was almost exhausted when the rush stopped momentarily. He sprang up and stood for an instant looking about him. Then the charge closed in again and the fiendish impact of bodies almost forced him to the ground once more.

With a leap he gained the top of a coffin lid and stood there a moment, thrusting down into the mass below him. They were closing in at his back. He felt a knife gash his thigh.

With the barrel of his pistol held tightly in his hand he beat down into the writhing shadows which struck up at him.

He sprang clear of the clutching hands and hit the ground running. A swelling roar of sheer rage met this tactic as the guards saw their quarry escaping. With one accord they plunged after him.

Running with all the speed he could wrest from his tired body, Mahone dashed around the corners of the grim boxes and skirted the mounds.

Suddenly a shot rang out ahead of him, to be followed by another. Mahone zigzagged and tried to change his course. Flame burst out at him again.

A bullet caught him in the shoulder, whirling him about. He lurched, stumbled, tried to catch himself. With the momentum of his speed carrying him forward, he plunged, almost horizontal, into the side of a coffin.

The yells grew dim in his ears and he felt himself slipping into the dread black of unconsciousness.

When he regained his senses he felt himself held tight between two wooden walls which crushed at him. He tried to move his arms but he found that they were bound to his sides. His legs were lashed out straight and he could not bend his knees. Not a foot above his face, he could feel the presence of wood.

Suddenly he realized where he was. He was bound tightly in a coffin. The heavy lid had been placed above him. He was sealed in. And the smell of rotting flesh was making his senses reel.

He was helpless in the hands of the men who had stolen the Green God, turning Tientsin into a bedlam of murder. Did they think he was dead? Would they leave him there beneath that heavy lid to die?

Although the lid was not nailed down, as Chinese coffin lids never are, its weight was sufficient to resist any effort to move it from the inside, even if his hands were free.

Straining his arms into his sides and then out again, he found that he was powerless to release the strong ropes which held him.

He stared up into blackness, a panicky sense of failure taking hold of him. He had failed in his mission to return the Green God to its proper place in the temple, and in that failure he was about to die horribly.

The fetid air closed in upon him and seemed to weigh down and pin him in his gruesome confines.

Then, through the thick walls of his prison, he could hear the murmur of voices. He pressed his ear to the wood to hear better.

The soft cultured accents of a Chinese gentleman came to him. "If this foreign devil knew where to find the Green God, others will also come. We will take it to the House of So-Liang and hold it there for the master when he comes for it. You will stay here, hiding in a coffin, and when the messengers come, tell them to go to the House of So-Liang."

Mahone's heart raced as he heard those words. They thought he was dead, and they were about to remove the Green God to a well-known lair of thieves in the outskirts of Tientsin. Then he had been right about the whereabouts of the Green God. If he could only get loose!

But his heart plunged sickeningly as he heard the next words. "You will bury this foreign devil so that his fate will forever remain a secret."

They were going to bury him alive! He knew what that meant. Slow suffocation, going mad trying to breathe the

poisoned air, buried alive and upright as the Chinese dead are buried. Suffocation standing upright!

The cultured voice came yet again. "He is bound securely and the devils within him will be thwarted in their attempts to escape. Thus we will be pursued by no demons. Have the men dig the grave."

Mahone heard the clank of a crude pick striking rocks and the scrape of a shovel picking up the dirt. He was lying there powerless, listening to the rattle of tools as they dug out his own grave.

They were digging a hole four feet square and eight feet deep. They would lift his coffin up and carry it to the opening. They would tilt it down and slide it upright into the hole. Then he would hear the rattle of stones and dirt coming in on top of him. And he would be sealed in forever, buried alive!

The thought gave him terrible strength and he threshed about in an effort to free an arm. Although freedom from this coffin would only mean a ready death at the hands of the fiends who were about to bury him alive, it was better to die fighting than passively. He struggled furiously.

After what seemed ages, he felt his coffin lifted up and felt it lurch as men carried it along. The silence was broken only by the soft footfalls of the bearers as they carried the box to the open grave.

But as they picked him up, another surge of strength had caused him to lift his arm upward with a jerk. The violence of the move made the bonds bite deep into Mahone's flesh, but hope flamed within him. For he had felt something give.