

L. RON HUBBARD



Trick Soldier

GALAXY
P R E S E N T S

Trick Soldier

THEY stood looking at each other through the hot haze of evening, and as they stared ten years went by and they saw again the swirling dust of parade grounds and heard the monotonous voice of a drill sergeant counting cadence.

Ten years and three thousand miles to that sweaty field, but they bridged it and the jungle about them faded away, their bars were forgotten, their formalities swept aside by recognition. They were once again “boots,” not *gendarmerie* captain and *gendarmerie* lieutenant.

Brittle gray eyes clashed with arrogant brown ones. Fists doubled into white-knuckled knots.

The new arrival had said, saluting briskly, “Lieutenant Flint reports to Captain Turner for . . .” And then he had seen. His hand had dropped insolently, his mouth had curled thickly and recognition had come.

Captain Turner’s own hand had stopped halfway to his helmet. He too had remembered. And there they stood, facing each other, rank, jungle, command all thrown aside.

“They . . . they sent me you,” muttered Turner. “You!”

Flint’s dark face relaxed into a malicious smile. His glance roved up and down the *gendarmerie* captain, slowly, hatefully. “Turner,” said Flint, his voice thick. “Turner the trick soldier.

So you're here, huh? So they boosted you up, huh? *Captain* Turner, is it?"

Flint studied the smaller man. Turner's face was finely molded, the face of a gentleman. Turner wore a small, spiked mustache, waxed to perfection. Turner's shirt was obviously tailored, fitting in close to his slim hips. The man wore lace boots instead of leggings, and the boots were cordovan mirrors. Even the khaki tie looked stiff, too perfect.

"*Captain* Turner," repeated Flint with a hard, ugly laugh. "The trick soldier. Boots, starch and wax." Thereupon, Flint unfastened his tie and opened his collar, letting his beet-red throat shine through the gap. He removed his pith helmet with its black inverted chevron—the insignia of second lieutenant in the *Gendarmerie d'Haiti*—and thrust it under his arm. He took out a greasy handkerchief and swabbed at his narrow brow.

"And I marched all this way in all this rig, just to report to *you!*" Flint let his mouth curl with disdain as though he smelled something very odorous.

Turner straightened his spine. His nostrils quivered. "Attention, you fool! Take a hitch in that collar and put on your hat. I don't care if you're Jesus Christ, I'm in command here and you're to be second in command. *Second*, do you hear me? Attention, I said. Those devils are watching us. Do you want to wreck half a year's work in this damned jungle? Now, salute and report."

Flint looked down upon the smaller man. Flint's shoulders bulged under his issue shirt, Flint's neck swelled as his anger mounted.

Flint's close-set eyes, sunken into his bloated face, drew tight until only the dark pupil showed. "Military martinet. Trick soldier. Aw, get the hell off your high horse. This is the jungle. We're fifteen miles from Cap-Haïtien. We're lost as far as the regiment is concerned."

Insolently he looked at the men who stood in a semicircle, at a respectful distance behind their commander. These men were soldiers of the *gendarmerie*, native Haitians, trained and temporarily commanded by transferred officers of the Marine Corps. Because they considered all whites as lower in the social scale, because they would even refuse to defile themselves by eating with a white man, they were hard to command, hard to keep under discipline.

But Flint grinned at them and caught the returning flash of white teeth in ebon faces. "Native soldiers," commented Flint, "commanded by a tin general." He gave a sudden start.

Turner's black .45 had been swinging on his hip, flap buckled back, allowing the butt to protrude. The automatic was now in Turner's slender, small-boned hand and the muzzle was trained on Flint's brass belt buckle which glinted in the patterns of sunlight that filtered through the trees.

"Salute," said Turner. "Fast!"

Flint goggled at the gun and then replaced his hat. When he started to raise his hand, Turner rapped, "Fasten your tie. Button up those pockets."

Flint buttoned the pockets and arranged the tie. Then, his size-eighteen neck straining at the collar, mouth warped in a half smile, he said in a mocking voice, "Lieutenant Flint wishes to report to Captain Turner, commanding Company X,



"Salute," said Turner. "Fast!"

gendarmarie. Lieutenant Flint requests an assignment to quarters and duties.”

“Go into my tent,” said Turner, putting the gun away. “I must clear out MacLeod’s quarters for the lieutenant’s occupancy.”

Flint looked at the men and grinned again. Then he bowed his head and entered the small field tent which faced the cleared square, the drill ground of the post.

Turner’s palms were sweaty, but not from heat. He was nervous. He turned on the men. “Get to your quarters!” he barked, and they scattered.

Walking with stiff, uncompromising stride, the diminutive Turner made his way to a tent some thirty feet away from his own. Behind the tent, watched over by a rudely lashed cross, was a red rectangle, bare earth, startling and gruesome against the green.

Turner entered the tent, trying not to glance at the blazoned earth. Not twenty-four hours past he had buried Sergeant MacLeod there. Lieutenant MacLeod of the *gendarmarie*.

The field locker was open beside the cot. The white blankets with USN stamped upon them were spread neatly on the bed, ready to be unrolled. A Springfield, shiny with polishing and burnishing, hung from the edge of the cot, upside down. A belted holster, sagging under the weight of the .45, coiled over the edge of an ammunition case MacLeod had used for a desk and dressing table. The razor, wiped dry, was laid out, ready for use. A cake of red soap was still damp in its saucer.

Turner stopped in the dim interior and stared about him.

His chest was leaden. A girl's face stared at him from the opened locker, smiling with promise—for MacLeod.

Turner's knees felt wobbly. He seated himself on the cot and stared at the girl for a space of minutes. Then he fumbled with the Springfield's lashing and saw that his hands shook. He sat still again, looking back at the girl.

Twenty-four hours before, MacLeod had died with the sun, his chest ripped open by a soft-nosed slug, never regaining consciousness. He had been killed on patrol, from ambush, by the *cacos*. He had been buried at sundown without taps, with a few half-remembered phrases, wrapped in an OD blanket, six feet down in the sticky clay soil.

Turner started. He thought he heard MacLeod's explosive laugh outside. He had been hearing it for six months, and now he would hear it no more. But the echos were still there, haunting him.

Turner covered his face with his hands, to hide the smile of the girl, to support his heavy, aching head. He remained there for a long time, thinking, trying not to think, his thoughts as heavy as a wall of water when he tried to dam them back.

It was hot. It was silent. Not a breeze stirred the drooping, sinuous jungle. No, not silent. Something ticked unceasingly close by. Turner listened to it but minutes went by before he was conscious of it. His hand wandered down from his face to the dressing table and field desk. There in papers covered by the scrawling writing of MacLeod ticked the watch.

It was a big watch, very heavy, made of brightly polished silver. MacLeod had been proud of that watch. It ran without winding for six days, it struck bells instead of hours. A German

watch. Without knowing that he read, Turner saw the name on the face.

Idly he snapped open the back and read, "To Mac from Nina. Always Faithful." MacLeod had glued her picture there and she was smiling at him again with the same promise.

Angrily he snapped it shut. He stood up, swept all the scattered effects of the desk into the top of the field trunk.

Still angry, he ripped the Springfield from its lashings, wrapped it with the belt and .45 and wrapped both in turn with the blankets. He slammed the top of the locker and turned the key. He stood silent, then, and gazed at the gay company striping on the top. Stenciled in blue was the inscription, "Sergeant G. E. MacLeod, United States Marine Corps."

Turner looked at the canvas wall, seeing through it, imagining the rectangle of raw earth, the crude cross.

He shook his head impatiently as though clearing his eyes. "I'm getting soft."

When he started to leave the tent he remembered Flint and stopped. Once more he sat down, and the silent effects seemed all the more painful.

"Trick soldier, tin general," muttered Turner. "I thought . . . I had left . . . all that behind."

"Yellow" Turner, the tailor-made Marine. The years back to Parris Island when he was a "boot." A long, long time ago, and though he was just twenty-seven he seemed very, very old. Old and worn.

But had it been his fault? Was he to blame that fists had never occurred to him as fighting equipment? Or had he been yellow? Ugly word, yellow. Terrifying.

They had been boots together, Flint and Turner. Flint, overbearing, with the strength of an elephant and the mind of a fighting bull. Flint must be thirty-five now, but he had always looked the same. Would always look the same.

Flint had come into the corps with a reputation as a boxer. Had fought himself into prominence through the Pacific Fleet, was known as a killer.

But Flint had been a boot then. Raw and uncertain, sure only of his ability to knock men sprawling with his loglike arms and iron-hard knuckles.

“Yellow” Turner, trick soldier. They had dubbed him that after . . . He had had some military training. He had known the manual of arms. Had known it well. Had known even the flashy Princess Pat manual. He knew his IDR by heart and studied it all the more at Parris Island. He was a joy to drill sergeants. He had a military swing to him. The slender body of a runner. A handsome face.

And Flint, overbearing, always out a step, a legitimate target for all the endless curses of a drill sergeant, had been told to look to Turner for example.

The thought of patterning himself after Turner’s small self had been too much for Flint. And then, as such things happen, one night behind the barracks, Flint and a crowd had found Turner walking alone.

“Trick soldier,” they had said. And Flint branded him an officer’s darling, a drill sergeant’s dream. And Flint had forced him to fight.

But Turner’s fists had never been trained. Turner knew no way to stop those sledgehammers which sent his brain

reeling through a universe of blasting red lights. He had been knocked to his knees in the dust with the blood pouring from his face, leaking through his fingers and lying in scarlet beads on the sand.

And no man knows what he will say in such condition. Neither knowing nor caring about anything else but the blows, Turner had begged for mercy.

But a trick soldier does not long go unnoticed by officers, especially a soldier who wants to learn and who is quick to adapt himself.

And each time Turner was called out to demonstrate the manual in the day, he was waylaid and beaten at night. He had developed a horror of Flint's fists which amounted to insanity. He would slink through the corridors of the barracks. He would hug the walls to avoid dark shadows. He would ask everywhere for Flint so that he could avoid him.

"Yellow" Turner, trick soldier.

Ten years ago. But now it had all come back. He was jailed in the jungle with Flint and an unruly lot of soldiers. He was faced with *cacos*.

He went out of the tent and to his own. Flint was going through his papers.

"Move into the other tent," said Turner, his face a mask. "I've sent your baggage over. You go on patrol at seven in the morning. The sergeant will show you the ground. If you want anything to eat, tell the cook."

Flint lolled back against the blanket roll and blew a blue cloud of unfolding cigarette smoke up toward Turner's face. "Yeah? Seven in the morning, huh? What's the matter? Afraid

to make the patrols yourself?” He laughed extravagantly as though at some huge joke.

“I take the afternoon patrols,” said Turner, his voice well modulated, his gaze steady.

“Oh, so they’re less dangerous, huh?” And Flint laughed again. “Scared of your men, scared of your patrols. Wonder what they’d say at regiment if they knew that.”

“Get up and go to your quarters,” said Turner, without emotion. “The *gendarmerie* is hard to handle.” He took off his khaki sun helmet and looked at its inverted captain’s chevrons. “I’ve kept these so far, not that they’re so valuable, because my men respect me. I do not intend to have that respect marred by your presence and attitude.”

“You sound like a general order,” said Flint, drawing on the cigarette and stretching out his legs.

“I am the general order here, all personalities put aside. Through these hills are scattered *cacos*, bandits. Our job here is to bring quiet to Haiti and oversee their reformation of government. The job of this company is the policing of this district. *Cacos* raid often and savagely, and when we try to look for them we find only peaceful farmers hoeing their corn and tobacco and cane. That’s the job we have to do and we’re doing it. Nothing will interfere with this duty.”

“Yeah? What if I don’t feel like going on patrol? Maybe,” said Flint with a warped mouth, “maybe I’d like to sleep in tomorrow.”

“Maybe you’d like to,” said Turner, “but you’re not going to. If you don’t hit that trail at seven o’clock, you’ll be either under arrest or dead.”