

L. RON HUBBARD



Tomb of the Ten Thousand Dead

GALAXY
P R E S E N T S

The Pottery Jar

I have been asked to tell this story a hundred times. I have only told it once—to the British government, when they were quizzing me about the slaughter of the Lancaster-Mallard Expedition to Makran, Baluchistan.

My part was a major one only because I was the only man who escaped with his life. And that was strange because I had no real interest whatever in the findings of this expedition.

I am a pilot. Let it suffice to say that I was hired by Lancaster, a professor in a small Midwestern college, to pilot the cabin job they had bought across these awful wastes.

The expedition was boring most of the time until . . .

Tyler lay on his face in front of my tent. The morning sun was shining upon half the blade of a dagger. A spreading stain welled out over his back. Furrows were in the sand where his hands had clawed in the last agonies of death.

I blinked in the morning sunlight, unable to realize that young Tyler was really dead. No one had any reason to murder him. He was harmless, good humored. I was seized with the awful premonition that I might be next. Something was afoot, something horrible.

I stepped over the stones and knelt beside him, looking

at the knife. In the silence I could hear his watch ticking, *clickety-click*. Funny that it was still running while Tyler was dead. Funny that a machine should outlast its master.

Dazed by the sudden discovery, I looked blankly about me. A small pottery container was lying on the earth beside him. I remembered seeing it before. It had contained some document Mallard had unearthed.

I put out my hand to touch the knife.

“Don’t touch it!” a voice behind me cried. “I’ve got you, Gordon. I’ve got you!”

Amazed, I turned slowly and stared into the muzzle of a revolver. Mallard’s hand was shaking and his eyes were cold. He had me covered and I did not know why.

He was a big-headed, narrow-shouldered man. He was the kind you see poring over ancient skulls and ancient pottery finds in museums. He was as dry as the dust of the bones he found.

“Put away the gun,” I said.

Lancaster, a brawny giant with a black beard, came out of his tent and stood there, staring at the tableau.

“Look what Gordon’s done,” said Mallard in a shaking voice.

“Wait a minute,” I cried. “What do you mean by that? My God, Mallard, I know you’ve been ill and that you’re upset, but don’t get the idea that I’d kill Tyler.”

Lancaster’s eyes were baleful as he looked at the dead man. “I think you did. You quarreled with him the other day. No use to try to lie out of it, Gordon. We’ve got the drop on you. Here, what’s this?”

Lancaster stooped and picked up the vase. He looked inside. "It's empty! Damn you, Gordon, where's that map?"

This was all coming too thick and fast for me. I stood up. "Don't jump at conclusions, Lancaster. I know nothing about your damned map."

"He's stalling," said Mallard. "He knows what that map means. He knows we've come out here to find—"

"Shut up," barked Lancaster. "Gordon, you'll throw your revolver this way and you'll march into your tent and stay there, understand? We're holding you for Tyler's murder."

Our native guide, a Dehwar named Kehlar, shuffled out of the cook tent and leaned indolently against a pole. He had an amused expression on his face.

"You won't shoot, Mallard," I said. "In the first place you haven't got the nerve, and in the next place, if anything happened to me, who'd fly that plane out of here? I'm the only man here who can fly and if I'm killed, you'll starve in this desert. This place has swallowed up the better part of three armies. There isn't a water hole for fifty miles. Go on and shoot, Mallard."

I walked toward him, deliberately. I thought I had the upper hand for the moment. Suddenly Lancaster dived for me.

He was bigger than I was and when he hit me I skidded ten feet through the coarse sand. I lit with him on top of me. He started to let me have it with his fist, but I jackknifed and threw him away from me.

Mallard stood back, gun limp in his hand, an expectant stare masking his nervousness.

Lancaster flipped and came at me again. Sand spurted in tan geysers when he hit the ground beside me. He whipped one into my jaw and sent me reeling.

The ferocity of his attack was something which would not be withstood. His hands were great things, as big as basketballs, and when those knuckles struck they left a deep and heavy mark.

I tried to make my wiriness count as much as I could, but it was a losing fight from the first. I had to stand up and slug with him.

His fists came like cannonballs and each time he landed on my body or face, great, round lights soared up and exploded behind my eyes. He was standing there, letting me have it, and I couldn't get away. I tensed myself for one good crack at the point of his jaw before he knocked me out.

I let drive and connected so hard that it numbed my whole arm. He rocked on his heels and then crouched down. I struck again, furiously. Blood pinked his cheek.

He cuffed out with his hairy fist and rocked me into a pile of stones. I staggered up, stunned, and walked into his left. He sent me reeling again. I could taste hot, salty blood.

I went down into the swirling dust and Lancaster kicked me deliberately in the side. Mallard brought out a length of rope. They held me down and tied my hands behind me. Kehlar, unmoved, helped them carry me into the tent.

I spat out a mouthful of blood. "You'll have a hell of a time getting out of here without me," I raged.

"I think you'll fly us out," said Lancaster with a growl.

“You’ll fly us far enough when we want you to. And we’ll turn you over to the British and let them hang you for this. I think that’s best. Yes, and it’s simple. You’ll fly and when we contact a British patrol, we’ll turn you over to them for trial and execution.”

“You are correct,” said Mallard in his weak, piping voice. “I came out and saw him kneeling there, making sure that Tyler was dead.”

“He’s been too sly, anyway,” said Lancaster. “Maybe if we search his stuff we’ll find the map.”

They searched and failed to find anything but shaving cream and a pair of socks I had thought long lost. They finally gave up and posted Kehlar outside the tent with a rifle to make sure I didn’t get away.

And there I was, in the center of the Makran wastes, on my back and helpless, waiting for a British patrol.

And who would believe an unknown pilot when his word was stacked against that of two eminent scientists?

Nobody.

That was the way it all started. And I lay there while the sun fanned down its barrage of heat and cursed the flies, Lancaster, Mallard and Kehlar.

We had been scouting this bleak section for months, looking into the archaeology and ethnology of the place. So far we had had little trouble. Mallard and Lancaster, spouting Latin and Persian and Greek, had dug happily in the sands and scorching rocks, getting excited over bits of pottery and other relics of the past. Tyler had not had much enthusiasm for that

sort of thing. He had been more interested in the material, adventurous side of life.

Tyler had been in bad several times. He was the black sheep of the expedition. I minded my own business because I was too tired from nerve strain to do anything else. Tyler had had additional energy. Several times he had been in fights with the natives over women and such, but I had liked his devil-may-care way of doing things. He always had a grin which contrasted wonderfully with the sour expressions of the two professors.

And now Tyler was probably wooing the angels and getting the dickens for it, and I was lying here in the heat, swearing and going mad with the flies.

After a little I quieted down and began to wonder who would pilot the cabin plane if I wasn't there. Neither Mallard nor Lancaster knew anything about flying, as evidenced by their demands that I land in impossible places so that they could inspect their beloved mounds.

Moral people, Lancaster and Mallard. They had always lectured Tyler on his taste for living and had always reproved me for my lack of interest in ancient things. They thought we should have availed ourselves of this beautiful chance to improve our minds and we had not.

Then I began to think that this was a rather flimsy excuse for nailing me down this way. They knew that I liked Tyler. Why had they suddenly turned on me like that?

Certainly these men were not so foolish as to think they could get away with anything under British law. Certainly

they realized that without that plane they would be in a bad spot.

You don't just start out and walk through Makran. Tens of centuries ago some people tried it. The mythical woman scourge named Semiramis had started into it with an army and had come out of it with nothing but her life. Cyrus the Great had entered it unadvisedly and had lost his army to a man.

Water was so scarce as to almost be nonexistent. The dry, wasted, rolling dunes and gray rock were without habitations. Only at dawn was it cool and then so briefly that it only succeeded in accentuating the daily scorch.

Frankly, at the time I knew nothing about this map they had found. Who cared about a map when you had to keep an engine ticking under these terrific conditions? When you had to shoot landings along runways so studded with rock that the smoothest glide turned into a pogo-stick race as you touched?

But they had found this thing and now Tyler was dead and the only thing I knew was that such a map must be damned valuable.

I heard shovels clicking and knew that they were burying Tyler, giving him an unmarked grave under these foreign skies, so far from his native Virginia. It angered me and I did not reason that you don't leave the dead out in the sun. Not in the deserts of the Makran.

Soon Lancaster and Mallard departed to inspect a mound we had sighted the night before. I had noticed something

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feverish about them when we spotted it. But then they got that way on the slightest provocation. They would jabber for hours over a piece of junk I could have bought for a dime near any Hopi village at home.

Maybe education makes men that way. A mere pilot couldn't be expected to understand.