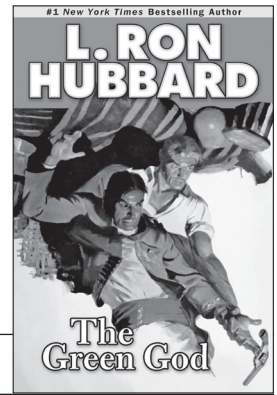


L. Ron Hubbard's *The Green God* Discussion Guide

(also includes the short story
Five Mex for a Million)



STORY SUMMARY & OVERVIEW

Lieutenant Bill Mahone of Naval Intelligence enters Tientsin's dangerous Native Quarter searching for the Green God, a jeweled jade idol whose disappearance has helped plunge the city into panic and violence. After being attacked, captured and nearly buried alive, Mahone escapes and tracks the idol to the House of So-Liang. Captured again, he faces a horrifying death but uses his surroundings to escape and start a fire. Seizing the Green God, Mahone battles through the burning building and carries it across the riot-torn city. Exhausted and badly wounded, he reaches Naval Intelligence and delivers the idol so it can be returned to its temple.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: AMERICAN NAVAL INTELLIGENCE AND CHINA

The Green God is set in Tientsin, now generally known as Tianjin, a major northern Chinese port city. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, foreign powers maintained concessions and military interests there. The story's reference to an International Settlement reflects the broader system under which foreign communities in Chinese treaty ports enjoyed special political, commercial and legal privileges. This setting gives the story a recognizable historical background of foreign military and political involvement in China, but the author combines that background with the conventions of 1930s pulp adventure fiction. Mahone is an American Naval Intelligence officer moving between a foreign-controlled district and what the story calls the "Native Quarter." His disguise and intelligence mission reflect the espionage and international-intrigue elements popular in adventure fiction of the period.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

📖 Mahone believes that restoring the Green God to its temple will end the panic sweeping Tientsin. Discuss how symbols can influence the behavior of entire communities. Does an object need to possess actual power if enough people believe that it does?

📖 The people believe Tientsin will fall because the Green God has disappeared and their fear contributes to rioting, looting and murder. Discuss how fear can become self-fulfilling. Can believing that disaster is inevitable sometimes help create the disaster people fear?

📖 Mahone enters the tomb area alone and disguised, knowing that recovering the idol may be essential to restoring order. Discuss the difference between courage and unnecessary risk. When might an intelligence officer be justified in undertaking a dangerous mission without support?

📖 After being captured, Mahone overhears his enemies discussing their plan because they believe he is already dead. He learns both that the Green God is being moved to the House of

So-Liang and that he is about to be buried alive. Discuss how Mahone responds to apparently hopeless circumstances. What role does information play in restoring his determination?

 While being buried, Mahone realizes that a knot has loosened and gradually frees his arms. He then deliberately allows dirt to enter the coffin, stands upon the accumulating soil and digs upward toward the surface. Discuss how problem-solving changes under extreme pressure. Why might controlling panic be as important to survival as physical strength?

 After escaping from the grave, Mahone could attempt to reach safety. Instead, despite his wounds and exhaustion, he continues toward the House of So-Liang because the Green God remains there. Discuss the difference between personal survival and commitment to a larger responsibility. At what point, if any, would retreat have been reasonable?

 Mahone's disguise allows him to pass through the riot-torn streets because his appearance resembles that of the people around him, but his gray eyes eventually expose him. Discuss the strengths and limitations of disguise in intelligence work. Why must successful deception involve behavior and observation as well as appearance?

 The Green God is not merely a religious or cultural object; it is also made of valuable jade and decorated with pearls, rubies and diamonds. Discuss how the idol can possess several kinds of value at once—religious, symbolic, cultural and monetary. Which type of value seems most important to the different groups in the story?

 When Mahone faces torture, he notices that the silk draperies above him are highly flammable and turns the torch intended to harm him into the means of his escape. Discuss how observation and adaptability contribute to survival. Why can an opponent's apparent advantage sometimes become a weakness?

 Mahone eventually uses the Green God itself as a weapon while fighting his way down the stairs. Discuss the irony of using the object he is risking his life to protect as an instrument of survival. Does protecting something sometimes justify risking damage to it?

 The story presents events almost entirely from Mahone's perspective and frequently describes Chinese characters through hostile stereotypes and sensational imagery. Discuss how considering the story's 1930s pulp-fiction background can help modern readers separate its adventure plot from its cultural assumptions. How might the same events appear if told from the perspective of a Chinese resident of Tientsin?

 At the conclusion, Mahone delivers the Green God and is told that he has “saved the city.” Exhausted, he looks at the smiling idol and says, “I hope he appreciates all I did for him tonight.” Discuss how this humorous final line changes the tone after so much violence and danger. What does it reveal about Mahone's attitude toward the Green God and everything he has endured?

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L. Ron Hubbard's *Five Mex for a Million*

Discussion Guide

STORY SUMMARY & OVERVIEW

Fugitive soldier Captain Royal F. Sterling arrives in Peking with only five Mex and impulsively spends it on a mysterious chest. Inside he discovers Sandra Kolita, kidnapped to lure her wealthy father away from his Mongolian holdings. Sterling rescues her and uncovers General Hseng's scheme to betray China, seize Kolita's territory and enrich himself with a million-Mex payoff. Pursued across the Gobi, Sterling and Sandra capture Hseng, rescue Kolita and defeat Hseng's soldiers. Sterling gains Kolita's protection and Sandra's affection—and discovers that his reckless five-Mex purchase has also left him holding the million.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY CHINA AND MONGOLIA

Five Mex for a Million takes place against the political instability of northern China and Mongolia during the early twentieth century. The story presents a region where Chinese military commanders, Japanese interests, Russian émigrés, foreign businessmen and local power holders compete for influence. Sterling himself is described as formerly serving in the 20th Route Army, while General Hseng commands forces in northern China and is accused of secretly accepting Japanese money.

The story's references to Japanese expansion reflect genuine anxieties of the period. Japan had established increasing influence in Manchuria and northern China, while Mongolia occupied a strategically important position between China and the Soviet Union. The fictional plot imagines Hseng accepting money to abandon the frontier and then attempting to establish his own power in Mongolia.

CHAPTER ONE

📖 Sterling enters the Peking club expecting help from men who once treated him as a valuable friend, only to discover that they now avoid him because he is wanted for murder. Discuss what this change reveals about friendships based upon usefulness, influence or social position. How can difficult circumstances reveal the difference between genuine friendship and convenient association?

📖 Sterling admits that he killed Liang-Tsi-Wu but insists that he fired only because Wu was about to kill him. Discuss the difference between being legally accused of murder and being morally responsible for murder. What information would an impartial observer need before deciding whether Sterling was justified?

📖 With almost no money and desperately needing clothing for a disguise, Sterling instead spends his last five Mex on a locked chest simply because he is curious about it and attracted by the inscription promising "Good luck! Long life! Happiness!" Discuss why people sometimes make irrational choices when circumstances seem hopeless. Can taking an unreasonable risk ever restore a person's sense of possibility?

CHAPTER TWO

📖 Sterling accidentally carries the chest directly to General Hseng's house—the home of one of the men most dangerous to him—and then decides it may actually be the safest place to hide. Discuss the logic of hiding where an enemy would least expect to find you. When can an apparently foolish decision become strategically sensible?

📖 When Sterling opens the chest, he discovers Sandra Kolita instead of treasure. He immediately tries to revive her and later tells her she is free to leave, even though helping her could make his own escape more difficult. Discuss what these actions reveal about Sterling's character beneath his reputation as a dangerous fugitive.

📖 Sterling reasons that Sandra was kidnapped not primarily because someone wanted her, but because someone wanted her father to leave the security of his Mongolian holdings to search for her. Discuss how Sterling reaches this conclusion from limited evidence. What is the difference between a good deduction and an unsupported assumption?

CHAPTER THREE

📖 Sterling believes he has been mortally wounded by machine-gun fire, yet continues fighting because Sandra still needs to escape. He later discovers that the blankets he was carrying absorbed the bullets. Discuss how believing that someone else depends upon us can affect our ability to act during extreme danger.

📖 Sandra takes control of Hseng's Benz and drives Sterling through the gates of the compound under fire. Compare Sandra with the helpless kidnapping victim Sterling discovered in the chest. How quickly does the story change the reader's understanding of her character?

📖 Sterling discovers that Hseng's automobile has been specially equipped with enormous fuel capacity, maps, binoculars, food, alcohol and other supplies for a long journey. Discuss how seemingly ordinary details can become evidence of a larger plan. Why is noticing something that does not fit the circumstances often important in solving a mystery?

CHAPTER FOUR

📖 Sterling is heavily outnumbered beneath the bridge, yet continues fighting long enough to create an opportunity for escape. Discuss the difference between courage and desperation. Does Sterling make careful tactical decisions during the battle, or is survival largely a matter of luck?

📖 Sandra prevents Hseng from shooting Sterling at close range, allowing Sterling to overpower him. Throughout the story, Sterling frequently thinks of himself as Sandra's protector, yet Sandra repeatedly contributes to his survival. Discuss how their relationship challenges the traditional rescuer-and-victim pattern of adventure fiction.

📖 The valise reveals large amounts of American, British, Chinese and Japanese currency, allowing Sterling to connect Hseng with a larger political betrayal. Discuss why money can provide evidence of political motives. How can following financial interests sometimes reveal motives that patriotic speeches or public reputations conceal?

CHAPTER FIVE

 Sterling and Sandra must cross an enormous distance through the Gobi knowing that Kolita may already be traveling directly into Hseng's trap. Discuss how distance, weather, fuel, communication and uncertainty become part of the conflict. In what ways does geography function almost like another opponent in the story?

 When Sterling discovers that Kolita has already been captured, he cannot defeat Hseng's soldiers by direct force. Instead, he disguises himself in an officer's clothing and enters their camp. Discuss why successful improvisation often depends upon recognizing what an opponent expects to see rather than simply hiding from him.

 Sterling offers Hseng's soldiers one thousand Mex each to put down their weapons, using the very money Hseng obtained through betrayal. Discuss the irony of this strategy. What does the episode suggest about the ability of money to create loyalty—and the weakness of loyalty that has been purchased?

CHAPTER SIX

 Sandra deliberately shoots out the campfire and later turns on the truck's headlights, changing the battlefield so that Sterling and Kolita can see their opponents without being silhouetted themselves. Discuss how controlling visibility and terrain can be as important as weapons in combat. What does Sandra's initiative reveal about her development in the story?

 Sterling finally defeats Hseng not simply by gunfire but by revealing to his soldiers that Hseng accepted a million Mex, abandoned them during the fighting and intended to betray his supposed partners as well. Discuss why exposing a leader's motives can sometimes destroy his authority more effectively than defeating him physically.

 The story begins with Sterling possessing only five Mex and desperately needing thousands of dollars to escape. It ends with Sandra, Kolita's protection, the prospect of a new life in Mongolia and the forgotten valise containing a million Mex. Discuss how the final reference to the chest's inscription—"Good luck! Long life! Happiness!"—brings the story full circle. How much of Sterling's extraordinary change in fortune results from luck and how much results from the choices he makes?

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