



# CANNIBAL ISLE

By Albert Richard Wetjen

Gunman, pirate, killer — Stinger Seave was all of these. Yet, when a friend called for help, though it were half a world away, Seave came with roaring guns!

**I**F “Stinger” Seave was a terror to his enemies he was sometimes no less a terror to his friends because of the unreasonable lengths he would at times go to serve them. It was just one human trait in the otherwise iron little man.

He loved Big Bill Gunther as he might have loved a son or brother. Between the two there were twenty years and more of such a friendship as is seldom seen.

The first meeting of the two men was utterly dramatic. Gunther was entering Montague Bay on the coast of New Britain one hot afternoon, bent on a recruiting cruise for the Queensland plantations. In those days New Britain was sudden death for the unwise, and Montague Bay averaged two ships cut off a year. Gunther therefore was busily directing the rigging of barbed wire round his rails while his mate overhauled the whaleboats and stored dynamite capped and fused in the lockers, when all hands were astonished to see a ship’s boat shoot out from behind a mangrove-covered headland and head for the sea. It altered its course apparently on seeing the schooner, and Gunther, snatching up his glasses, saw a frail figure in stained ducks balanced in the stern sheets and holding the tiller with one hand.

He called to his mate to stand by with a line as the whaleboat sheered alongside with a slatting of canvas and there clambered rather slowly to the ship’s deck a slender, sandy-haired man with a ragged little mustache, very clear and light blue eyes, and a great red stain all down one side of his ducks.

He halted before Gunther, peered blinking up at the big, black-bearded sailor, and said, quite gently, “Can you oblige me, sir, with some .45 shells?”

Gunther almost dropped from astonishment. It is, you understand, rather amazing to have a perfect stranger board your ship off a coast where you don’t expect to see

a white man at all and then ask you point blank for ammunition.

Gunther choked, “What?—Shells?”

The stranger stood, swaying a little, but perfectly cool and composed, though he was quite obviously badly wounded.

“Forty-fives,” he repeated, nodding. “I will have to pay you later.”

“Come aft!” snapped Gunther, turning and striding away. “You’re crazy.”

The two men went up on the poop and down to the main cabin, followed by the eyes of all the astonished crew. In the main cabin Gunther pulled open a drawer, took out a box of shells and tossed them on the table.

“What next?” he asked grimly.

“If I may suggest,” the little man murmured, “perhaps some whiskey.”

Without comment Gunther got a bottle and some glasses and poured drinks. The stranger finished his, poured another and finished that. He seemed to feel better, and producing a gun from under his left armpit proceeded to load it with a dexterity that bespoke long practice.

When he had finished he blinked up at the bearded sailor and said, “Thank you very much. I’ll have to pay you later, I’m afraid.”

Picking up the open box of shells he started quite coolly for the companion. It was too much for Gunther’s patience and his teeming curiosity.

HE bellowed, “Hi! ... Sit down and do some explaining. Who the hell are you?”

The stranger turned, very polite and apparently anxious to please.

“I’m in rather a hurry,” he murmured. “You must excuse me. My name is Seave.”

“Seave?” echoed Gunther in an altered voice, and he seemed to shrink a little. “Not ‘Stinger’ Seave?”

“I have been called that,” murmured his visitor.

“Oh.” Gunther seemed at somewhat of a loss. A vast politeness had come over him, though he was a hot-tempered, imperious man and famous in the south as a seaman and adventurer. “If you’re in trouble, captain, I’d like to help.”

“I always arrange my own affairs, sir,” responded Seave, obviously restraining his impatience merely because the other had obliged him. “From your beard and size I take it you are Captain Gunther, though I’ve never seen you before. I’m sure you will understand my position. I have a ship in Montague Bay with a crew I took aboard at Apia. I stripped a pearl bed at Pondo, and there was some disaffection over the shares to be apportioned. There was a mutiny about two hours ago, and I ran out of shells. I was forced to take to the whaleboat and leave my ship temporarily.”

“And you’re going back to fight?” burst out Gunther. “Don’t be a fool! You’re wounded, man! Let me patch you up and give you a feed, and I’ll come with you. We’re both sailors ...”

“I always attend to my own affairs,” Seave broke in gently. “I think that’s all.”

“But you can’t fight a crowd!” choked Gunther, who was genuinely good-hearted, and a man to his finger-tips. “By Heaven, I’ll send a boat-load with you. How many men were you carrying?”

“Ten,” said Seave, unperturbed and still humoring the other. “But there are now only seven.”

“You got three!” Gunther’s face lit up. He loved a fighter.

“Just three,” murmured Seave. “It should be six. I never miss, usually, but I might mention my coffee was drugged this morning and I could hardly see.”

The gentle voice was troubled, for of all things Seave prided himself on, if he could be said to have pride, his astonishing accuracy with a gun was the chief.

Gunther strode across the main cabin,

and without a word took down from a peg a heavy cartridge belt with a full holster. He began to buckle it on. When he had finished he poured out two more drinks. Seave took his because he needed it, Gunther because he was shaken to the core. It is not everyone, sick with drugs, who can hit three times out of six. It was very clear that all the mad and wonderful tales of the man they called “Stinger” Seave throughout the Islands were in no whit exaggerated.

“I should feel honored,” said Gunther grimly, “if you would allow me to come with you.”

“I’m a very impatient man,” the Stinger murmured. “I seldom argue so much. But you will please mind your own business.”

He was gone up the companion before Gunther could recover from that. When the big sailor reached the main deck Seave was clambering painfully down to his whaleboat again and was off.

Gunther’s mate stood with dropping jaw, but eventually blurted, “Where the hell’s he going now?”

Gunther roared, “Mind your own damned business! He’s going to die, but remember you’ve seen a man this day!” And then, as the mate still stood petrified, he added, “Get the Winchesters on deck and prepare to anchor. Then stand by for trouble!”

THE *Gottenheim* tacked to windward, and made for the entrance to the bay, where the whaleboat was already speeding. An hour later she slid round a headland. Gunther saw lying at anchor in the bay a rakish-looking schooner with her sails furled, and two whaleboats beside her fast by their painters. Climbing up a rope-and-wood ladder was the slender form of Stinger Seave. On the schooner’s deck two men were standing near the midship house, drinking out of a black bottle. That was all the sign of life there was, and Gunther kept his glasses glued to his eyes.

The two men on the schooner's deck suddenly saw the *Gottenheim*, and stopped drinking to shout. They started toward the rail. At that moment Seave's head rose to view, and they stopped, stupefied.

Gunther, intent on the scene, choked back an excited oath. He heard two shots, followed by a third, and saw the two men stagger and drop while Seave drew himself upright on the schooner's deck and waited, swaying from weakness. Gunther guessed his weakness was such he did not dare try to leave the support of the rail behind him and seek out the other mutineers.

The Stinger's reappearance with fresh ammunition must have been somewhat of a shock to men satisfied he had escaped to a quick death without provisions or shells, for Gunther saw three or four variously dressed figures rush on the poop from below, then halt to stare at their former captain.

Gunther's mate, a burly, black-mustached man with a thorough knowledge of the Islands and the sea, was standing behind him and getting restless. He had his own pair of glasses, and had watched everything that had transpired. Now he turned to Gunther with some hesitancy, for experience had taught him the temper of the big sailor. But he said, firmly enough, "Don't you think we ought to chip in, sir? One man against six or seven, and mutineers at that..."

Gunther swore. "Don't you know me well enough to know I'd be there if I could? That man's Stinger Seave! He'd kill me if I interfered."

"Stinger Seave?" stammered the mate, staring with all his eyes at the schooner. "Is that him... But he's wounded, and we ought to ..."

"It's none of your damned business!" roared Gunther, irritated and furious because he had the gun-itch himself. "Get ready to anchor!"

The mate shrugged and went for'ard.

Gunther muttered to himself and kept the glasses screwed to his eyes. The *Gottenheim* was now scarcely a quarter of a mile from the schooner, and Gunther flung a curt order to the helmsman that altered her course to bring her abeam. Meanwhile the mutineers on the schooner's poop were advancing slowly along the main deck, and Gunther caught the glint of sun on steel.

There was a sudden volley of shots. Seave turned half around, as if something had plucked at his sleeve. One of the mutineers fell. Another reeled and caught at a backstay to steady himself. Gunther roared to his mate, and the *Gottenheim* dropped anchor scarce a cable's length off the schooner's beam. Descending to his main deck, her captain rested his arms on the rail and settled impatiently to watch the rest of the tragedy. Even now he would have braved Seave's anger and gone to his aid, but he remembered the icy killer's glint in the little man's eyes when he had warned him to stay away, and he remembered also the many, many tales of Seave's eccentricities. He decided to wait. Perhaps the Stinger, magnificent shot that he was, would yet win.

The surviving mutineers, startled by the roaring of the *Gottenheim's* anchor cable, had halted again, and were alternately staring at the fuming Gunther and the drooping form of the swaying, defiant Seave. Eventually, after some consultation, they decided apparently that Gunther did not intend to interfere, and being desperate they charged.

SEAVE shot three times. It was a sign of his condition that he missed two shots completely and only wounded a man with the third. A knife caught him in one thigh and sent him to his knees, while a belaying pin numbed his left arm so it hung down useless.

Gunther tore at his beard, but still held back. Then he saw a legitimate excuse to take a hand. A man had climbed the main rigging

on the side of the schooner away from Seave and was coming cautiously down over the Stinger's head, obviously intending to drop and knife him before he could turn. Seave was too far gone to notice this move, for though Gunther waited until the last minute, the little man did not shoot. He was intently watching the mutineers grouped near the break of the poop and talking together.

Gunther snatched a Winchester out of the hands of one of his crew and shot twice, hastily but accurately, so that from the main rigging there came a scream and a dark body suddenly curved down and plunged into the sea.

"He can shoot it out if he wants to," snapped Gunther, his patience at an end. "But I'm not standing for getting him from behind."

The mutineers fled. If the strange ship was going to take a hand after all, they were beaten. Seave clawed up until his bloody, drawn face was on a level with the schooner's rail. He called thickly, "You keep out of this, damn you!" and then collapsed in a heap on the deck.

Gunther laughed. For some reason it struck him as very funny indeed. He roared to his mate, "There's a man after my own heart! ... Get a boat clear. I'm shipping in on this, if he plugs me afterward!"

When Gunther finally landed on the schooner's deck with half a dozen men he found Seave lying on one side and quite unconscious. The deck under him was stained red. He was wounded in three places, beside the original wound in his side. He still held his gun in the hand that rested across his breast. His left arm was badly bruised and quite useless.

He revived for a moment as Gunther bent over him, and he muttered, "I didn't ask you to interfere. Get to hell out of here! I'll handle my own affairs."

Gunther took his gun away from him as easily as if he had been a child. He snarled

protests and then lapsed into unconsciousness again. Gunther stood up and thumbed the hammer of his own gun.

"Carry him aft, two of you," he snapped. "I'm going hunting."

He strode toward the poop, followed by four men, and the mutineers, expecting to be hung if they were ever taken back to Apia, opened fire from the cover of the main cabin scuttle. Gunther charged them, utterly reckless, furious with himself for remaining neutral for so long, and roaring like a bull. He killed one man, wounded another, and the survivor gave in.

Then he spent an hour or more doctoring Stinger Seave.

Such was the beginning of the friendship. Seave was a man who was scrupulously exact in all his dealings. He never obligated himself to anyone unless he repaid in treble measure. He hated help from others. He was a lone wolf of the Islands, a shark, something of a pariah, and he handled his own affairs or went under. But as Gunther had come unbidden to his aid, undoubtedly saved his life, the Stinger was forced to recognize the bond. He did it unwillingly at first, but during the long days he was convalescing in Montague Bay under Gunther's care he discovered a genuine liking for the big, bearded adventurer, a liking which Gunther quite patently returned.

When at last the ships were ready for sea again and the men shook hands, Seave said, "Thanks for the men you've lent me. If you ever need me let me know. I'll come."

"Sure," answered Gunther, smiling and looking down good-humoredly at the notorious little man. "And maybe we can be partners some time. With your shooting and my beef we'd sure tear hell out of the Islands. S'long."

"S'long," said Seave, smiling his wintry little smile and with something of what might have been a twinkle in his eyes. He put

to sea an hour after the *Gottenheim*, and for the first time felt a real regret at parting from a man.

Gunther told his mate that night, "He's a queer card. I like him a lot. He's a killer, but he shoots square. D'you know he really feels quite ashamed because he passed out before he could clean up that crew of his? Why the hell he should I don't know! If I could stand up, filled with drugs and wounded, and shoot it out with seven men, I'm damned sure I'd feel pretty chesty!"

IT was a year before Seave paid his debt to Gunther. He had not seen the big man since the Montague Bay affair. He had only heard of him at rare intervals, from traders, other schooner captains, planters and *beche-de-mer* fishers. But he had not forgotten. Seave never forgot anything.

He fully recovered from his wounds, and spent some months fretting about his shooting skill because he had missed so many shots during that mutiny. It was not until he creased the gun hands of three men who were making for him in a saloon on Woodlark some months later that he set his mind at rest. And then, like a bolt from the blue, he heard by devious channels that Big Bill Gunther had been cut off at Ysabel Island, and was presumably dead.

Seave was in Port Moresby when he heard the news. He was about to close an agreement to take some stores for the Administration to the police post at Cape Nelson. He called the deal off abruptly, hurriedly fitted out his ship, and set sail. The Assistant Resident Magistrate he had been dealing with was quite astonished, and demanded some sort of explanation.

"Personal business," Seave said gently. "A friend of mine died quite unexpectedly, and I think there should be mourners at his funeral."

Which was quite mystifying to the

A.R.M. He confided to his wife that evening that Seave was a little out of his head.

Be that as it may, the Stinger arrived off the coast of Ysabel some two months after the reported death of Gunther. He had with him this time a crew of men he had carefully picked from many ports. He had picked chiefly such as were on the bad books of the Administration, men who were hard fighters, hard workers, old in the Islands and not given to talking too much. It was often wondered why Seave kept this crew so long, why they did not pay off and go in other ships. The reason was that Seave paid them double wages and a share of any very profitable venture, for he needed desperate, faithful men in his acts of semi-piracy, seal and pearl poaching, and to aid him in the little private wars he frequently became involved in. Seave needed them now to further the unreasonable plan he had in mind.

He anchored, his schooner in the mouth of the river where Gunther had died. The charred and ruined hulk of Gunther's *Gottenheim* lay on the mud of one shore, in plain view, and so at least verified the cutting-off. Thereafter, and for three days, Seave did nothing but doze in his big canvas chair on his poop under an awning, while two of the crew kept armed watch and the rest slept. No man could hope to find a native village in the tangle of jungle unless he had an army at his back, and the natives always took their own good time on that coast in showing themselves.

After three days, curiosity overcoming fear of any reprisal for the looting of the *Gottenheim*, several canoes appeared, paddling round the schooner at a great distance and cautiously drawing closer. This strange ship might not be off its guard as had been the other.

Presently a half-caste Fly River boy stood up on the schooner's rail and shouted friendly words, and the canoes drew closer

still. Gifts were flung to them. They were given to understand that the captain wished to see their chief. Two more days of this followed, and at last a chief appeared.

He was a monstrosly fat man. He had necklaces of sharks' teeth and babies' finger bones. He had a belt studded with brass, obviously from some murdered sailor, and he wore a long stick thrust through the cartilage of his nose, so that his heavy breathing made a whistling noise. He was coaxed aboard with half a dozen cans of salmon and a bottle of trade gin, though he insisted on bringing a dozen men with him.

This was against all common sense and Island lore in a place where a ship had only recently been cut-off, and where the natives were notoriously treacherous. The crew was a little worried, but Seave had placed them carefully, two men aloft with two Winchesters each and belts of cartridges, two on the top of the fo'c's'le house, two on top of the midship house, two on the poop, and two smoking lighted cigars by the open boxes of capped and fused dynamite on the main hatch. Seave himself received the chief sprawled in his canvas chair and with the half-caste interpreter behind him, for the Stinger had not yet mastered the various dialects.

The chief waddled up to Seave, smiling expansively, and squatted down on the deck with his attendants behind him, all armed and all very nervous. He was using his eyes to good advantage, picking out the weak spots in the barbed wire that covered the rails, estimating the value in women and heads of various treasures he saw.

SEAVE opened gin. He poured drinks for the chief alone, though the other natives seemed anxious to get some. He brought up more presents and he set the interpreter to work.

At first the chief was cautious. No, he had seen no other ship since the charred wreck had drifted in from the sea one day all afire.

No, she had no crew. Yes, he would provide men for laboring on the plantations.

So the talk went. The chief grew drunker and drunker, and he began to boast. His escort grew more and more nervous when this stage was reached, for the chief began to talk of "long pig" and of the crew the burned ship had had.

Seave opened gin for the natives, and they began to join their chief in his loud talking. It was then, as the story became clearer, the astonishing information was dropped, first as hints, then as boastings, that several of the looted ship's crew had been taken alive; that most of them had already been used at sacrifices at various ceremonials, but that the chief, Big Bill Gunther, the tall man with a beard, was being kept for the period of the full moon and a great "long pig" feast.

As the excited interpreter explained this to Seave the little sailor merely blinked and tiny hard lumps of muscle appeared each side of his jaw. He slid a hand gently inside his coat and caressed the butt of his gun. That was all the emotion he betrayed. But inwardly he was possessed of a calm feeling of satisfaction.

It had been his original intention to discover which of the natives had actually taken part in the killing of Gunther, capture them, and hang them, after the grim, iron custom and code of the Island men who lived outside the law most of the time and never bothered the Administration either for help or revenge. But this news that Gunther was still living made it possible for the Stinger fully to pay his debt, and he was grateful. His cold, clear mind snapped on the only possible plan immediately.

"Is Captain Gunther at this man's village?" he asked the interpreter, and the half-caste plied the natives with questions. Drunkenly and incautiously they replied.

"They traded him to the natives of the

hills for twenty heads and ten young women, but they will go to the feast," said the interpreter at last.

Seave nodded. The fat chief was beginning to look dazed and his eyes closed sleepily. His followers were still in the boasting and hilarious stage when he finally flopped on one side and began to snore stertorously. Seave regarded the gross hulk for a long time, his clear blue eyes turning to ice and his thin lips shutting to a straight line.

"Go for'ard," said the Stinger finally to his interpreter. "Have the mate and two men patrol the rail and shoot anyone who tries to board us. Bring the rest of the men aft in a body and surround these swine. When I nod take away their weapons. Stun any who resist. Then bring some small line and lash them fast."

"There will be war," announced the half-caste nervously. "The villages will come and attack. Besides, the government will say ..."

The half-caste had not been with Seave very long. The little sailor blinked.

"I flogged you once for answering me back, Toto," he said metallically.

The half-caste took one look into the awful, icy eyes and fled. Fifteen minutes later every savage on board the *Sulu Pearl* was bound and unconscious, while the canoes that had been paddling idly about, waiting for their chief, began to circle ominously, while their occupants stood up and brandished weapons. They had seen the hubbub on the poop and thought their chief dead.

SEAVE called to his interpreter. "Tell them I have taken their chief and his men captive. Tell them they must bring back here Captain Gunther and any other white man they have on Ysabel. Each day that passes until this is done I will shoot a man."

The half-caste grinned. He could appreciate that. It appealed to his own savage

sense of humor. Not that he thought any white man would kill a native in cold blood. He had seen enough of white men to know they were possessed of queer and unreasonable ideas of the preciousness of life. But still, it was a good bluff. So he stood on the rail and shouted, and some canoes came closer to listen. A long conversation ensued.

"They say," said the half-caste, "that they no longer have Captain Gunther or any white man. The captain they have traded away with another man, and the rest are dead. They offer gifts for their chief."

"Tell them they must get Gunther back," replied Seave, unperturbed.

"They say they will have to go to war. A trade in flesh cannot be unmade."

"That's their affair," said Seave and smiled his little wintry smile.

He called to a seaman. Buckets of water were flung over the unconscious chief until he stirred. Two seamen then lifted him upright with some effort, and punched and pummeled him awake. He roared and struggled, but he was securely lashed. When this dawned upon him he went gray under his coat of dirt and brown, and was suddenly sobered.

"Explain to him!" snapped Seave, and the interpreter compiled.

The chief broke out jabbering. It was impossible. A flesh trade could not be undone. And if he or any of his men were killed there would be war, and the ship looted as the other had been.

Seave merely smiled. "Throw him in the forehold with the rest. Two of you guard them and see they're fed.... Repeat my message to the canoes, Toto. The first man dies at sunrise."

CANOES circled the ship's all night, and torches burned in the mangroves. There was a vast amount of shouting and beating of drums. All that section of the coast seemed to be in an



uproar. Seave was satisfied he had as a prisoner some quite important chief, and, from what the interpreter gathered while taking food and water to the captives, also some of the sons of the more important men of the villages.

Sunrise came and there was no trace of Gunther. Seave had his nervous captives brought up on the main deck and lined against the rail, facing the canoes, each man lashed to his neighbor, and the lot lashed to a dead-eye to prevent them flinging themselves overside. The crew stood by, heavily armed and smiling a little. To a man, hard cases as they were, they believed Seave was bluffing.

The little sailor, with the interpreter beside him, walked the poop smoking a cigar, apparently quite oblivious to all the excitement. When the sun was well up he hailed the canoes and gave the interpreter his instructions.

"They say," the half-caste reported, "that they have sent runners, and the hill villages will not undo a flesh trade. They would have to go to war to get Captain Gunther."

Seave shrugged. "That's their business."

He walked to the poop taffrail and stood for a moment looking down on the line of bound savages. They were brutal, depraved-looking men, wearing the emblems of many "long pig" feasts and of looted ships.

So abruptly no one saw the move Seave drew and fired. The native at the end of the line nearest him reeled and then sagged, a neat hole just above his right ear.

"Cut him loose," said Seave gently, "and throw him overside. Tell them tomorrow another one dies."

From the watching white men of the crew went up a long sigh, almost of horror. They had never for a moment believed Seave would do as he threatened. They had not been with the Stinger long enough to know his utter

ruthlessness. For a moment they were appalled; then, as they cut the dead man loose and tossed him to the sharks, they remembered Captain Gunther a captive in the hills and destined for the "Long Pig" ovens. It would take an army to win him and achieve a rescue. Perhaps Seave knew what he was doing, after all.

The horror of the crew was nothing compared to that which swept the remainder of the captives, especially the chief. He bellowed and called savagely, threateningly, pleadingly to the canoes. Their occupants were silent, almost awed. The abrupt execution had bitten even under their calloused hides.

With a scream of rage the natives dug their paddles into the water, and the canoes charged.

Two men climbed hastily aloft and opened fire with their Winchesters. The others lined the rail and shot hard and fast. The mate and the interpreter lighted cigars, and as soon as the canoes came in range began tossing sticks of dynamite into them.

Seave lounged on the rail of the poop, firing slowly and deliberately with his stubby revolver, and every shot went to the mark.

The air whined with spears and showers of stones and arrows. Two of the crew were wounded before the attack was beaten off. The sharks made the water boil as they fought over the bodies from the canoes, some of which were sinking. The captive chief and his men continued to bellow.

Seave went below to his breakfast and ate well and with relish, though the steward eyed him askance and seemed almost afraid to set a dish before him. Why he was called Stinger Seave his crew now understood.

ALL day the drums hammered. All night they kept up the noise, and torches flamed in the mangroves. Toward dawn another attack, in force, was tried against the schooner, and this

time the savages actually got a foothold on the fo'c's'le-head. The slaughter was terrible. Seave lost two men, and had two others so badly wounded they had to be considered as non-combatants thereafter.

The survivors came aft in a body at dawn.

"We can't stay here, sir," said the spokesman. "A couple more attacks like that and we'll be finished. We ought to run north and see the officials about it. They could send a gunboat down and get Captain Gunther...."

"I see," said Seave pleasantly, looking quite fresh and alert despite the fact that he had not slept for over three days, what with one thing and the other. "Now listen to me. We are staying here until Captain Gunther joins us. If you want to live you'd better raise the barbed wire along the rails and learn to shoot straighter and faster.

"If the natives get too much of a foothold on this ship, appear about to capture it, I've got enough dynamite stored below to blow the *Sulu Pearl* to smithereens, which is what will happen, because I shall save a shell for that purpose. I think that's all. Get for'ard and do as you're told."

There was no more talk from that crew, and no more suggestions, either on that venture or any other. They looked, each man, into the Stinger's icy eyes, and went for'ard without delay.

At the same time that morning as on the previous one, with an audience of perhaps twenty canoes, Seave deliberately shot another of his captives. Almost at once a canoe came forward to parley. This was something the savages could understand. The little white man meant what he said. Neither could he be destroyed, for twice they had tried it and risked his killing off all his captives out of hand.

"They say," said the interpreter when he had talked a while, "that they cannot make a great war for Captain Gunther unless they

have their chief to follow. They offer to send his two sons as hostages if you will let him go."

"If they are his sons I don't mind," said Seave. "But how shall I know?"

The interpreter grinned. "They are like him, it is said."

Seave frowned. That was not much evidence.

The canoe surged fearfully alongside, its occupants scowling but very nervous. Two somewhat fleshy but lithe youths came timidly through the gap opened in the barbed wire, and stood looking round with wide eyes and quivering bodies ready for a leap overside at the first sign of danger.

"Tell them they must be bound," Seave directed.

There was some argument about this, but the chief bellowed, and at last the youths submitted to having their arms tied and linked to the line of the other captives. Then the chief, still bound, was freed from the line and held by two men while Seave walked slowly along the main deck, and, stopping behind one of the hostages, whipped out his gun and rammed it against the black back. The chief whimpered and cried out, and Seave smiled.

"It's his son, right enough," he said and put his gun away. "Tell him I give him three days. For three days no one dies, but on the fourth his first son shall die, on the fifth his second, and on the sixth the other man I hold."

The chief imbibed all this quietly enough, and was seemingly resigned. When he was freed he waddled with some dignity to the side, dropped to the waiting canoe and with a gesture directed the paddlers to push off. All the other canoes fell in line behind him and disappeared up the river. Two returned later, apparently to watch the schooner.

"He may be figuring on another attack," Seave told his mate. "As soon as it's

dark you will light a flare every twenty minutes and set it adrift on a board, so we won't be surprised. We'll also rig some tar barrels to light as torches if a fight begins. It's shooting in the dark that causes us to be so hard pressed."

There was no attack that night. The new dawn came and the day passed uneventfully, except that the two watching canoes kept up a ceaseless circling of the ship.

The second day passed, and the drums that had throbbed continuously in the jungle suddenly stopped.

THE third day was half through when a seaman called from for'ard that a fleet of canoes was coming down the river.

Seave seized his glasses, and, carefully scanning the bigger and leading craft, saw Gunther. The chief sat behind him, and was apparently guarding him from all harm with as much care as he might have guarded a very hard-won head.

Gunther was dirty, unshaven and almost naked. His beard needed trimming very badly, and there were great pits under his eyes that told of fever. He was so weak he could hardly climb up to the *Sulu Pearl's* main deck, but he managed a smile as he saw Seave.

"How the devil you worked it I don't know!" he said. "I was due for a 'long pig' affair next week. The chief told me you were

wiping out his young men, and my body alive and well was all that could save them. They had quite a fight getting me. Surrounded the village I was in one night and ripped it open."

"Cut those natives loose," said Seave to his mate, and holding Gunther steady with a hand on his arm led him aft.

"I had to take some drastic steps," he admitted gently, as Gunther sank gratefully to a chair in the main cabin. "I take it none of your men survived at all. Too bad."

"You might have been wiped out yourself," said Gunther wearily, settling back and slowly pouring himself a drink. "I understand they've made two attacks.... I'm a sick man for a bit, Seave. And I'm hungry."

"You're my friend," said Seave, quite simply. "When I heard you had been cut off, I came to make your passing memorable along this coast. And then I discovered you were still alive. I don't allow my friends to be turned into long pig.... Dinner will be in half an hour."

"I can never thank you for this—" Gunther started to say.

"I should be much obliged," said Seave a little coldly, "if you would not mention that. There was a little debt outstanding from Montague Bay, when a man climbed in the rigging above me.... Will you have another drink?"