

BATS AUTOGRAPHED BY THE AUSTRALIAN TEAM OFFERED INSIDE!

The POPULAR

Week Ending
July 5th, 1930.
No. 597
(New Series).
EVERY
TUESDAY.

2¢



"THE BURNING JUNGLE!" Full-of-Thrills Adventure Tale in This Issue.

The BURNING JUNGLE!



By Charles Hamilton.

"O Chako!"

The brawny, black soldier advanced.

"O Mofolongo, my ears hear you!" he said.

"Mluki-Mluki, the Wise One, does not come," said Mofolongo. "It is not fitting that a chief should wait, even for a wise man who talks with ghosts and devils. It is now many hours since the white man was delivered to Mluki-Mluki to be tortured and slain. But the Wise One still lingers in his house in the jungle."

"It is true, O Mofolongo," answered Chako, "and long ere this time the Mzungu must be dead."

"Yet the Wise One does not come," said Mofolongo. "My eyes do not see him, neither do my ears hear his footsteps."

His eyes glinted.

Any man but Mluki-Mluki who had kept the great chief waiting would have been ordered to death under the spears of the soldiers, or under the small knives of the skinners.

But Mluki-Mluki, the Wise One, was almost as terrible as the chief himself, for he was the chief of the devil-doctors—a talker with the black ghosts of the night—and if he was angered he had but to wave his hand and the rain would fall no more on the fields of Indian corn, the spears of the hunters would be blunted, and the Lukuli river would dry up in its sources. Or so, at least, the Lukuli believed.

Even Mofolongo dared not send his soldiers to slay the witch-doctor in his house, as often he had sent them to slay those who had offended him.

But his anger was growing.

"The Wise One grows old, and he has perhaps forgotten," said Mofolongo,

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Mofolongo Waits!

THE drone of the drums came incessantly.

The sun was setting over the forests of the Congo, in a bed of crimson and purple. Already, in the deep forest the shadows were dense. But the wide fields of Indian corn that surrounded the city of the Lukuli were still bathed in light.

In the fields no one was to be seen. The Lukuli were gathered in the great square of the city, where a fire burned before the huts of the chief Mofolongo.

The square swarmed with black humanity, their numbers increasing every moment by crowds pouring in from the long streets.

In his ebony chair of state sat the chief Mofolongo, magnificent in leopard skins and golden necklaces.

Round him were gathered lesser chiefs of the Lukuli, and in long ranks stood the soldiers, spear and shield in hand.

The steady ranks of the soldiers kept back the swarming crowd—hundreds and hundreds of them—for all the city had gathered for the great feast.

The chief's drummers beat incessantly on the drums, and the air throbbed with the unending drone.

From where he sat Mofolongo, the chief, looked down a long street of grass houses to the open fields, and at a distance across the fields he saw the jungle that surrounded the house of Mluki-Mluki, the witch-doctor.

Beyond that patch of jungle was open country, till the circle of the great forest closed the view.

Mofolongo could not see the house of the witch-doctor, for the thick jungle hid it from sight. None of the Lukuli were permitted to look on the hidden den, where Mluki-Mluki, like an old wolf, dwelt amid bones and blood.

Mofolongo's face expressed his impatience.

Night was at hand, and with the fall of night the great feast was to begin. Carcasses of goats and sheep were cooking at many fires, but these were for the common people. For Mofolongo and the chiefs there was choicer meat—at the thought of which a white man would have sickened. But the Lukuli were a

Blazing Red Jungle Fire Saves White Explorers

From Black Savages!

cannibal people, for they held the belief that the courage of an eaten enemy passed into the hearts of the eaters. And of all their enemies none was braver than Grant Strong, the hunter of Uganda. He had slain many of the Lukuli before he had been made a prisoner, and they respected him—and their respect was to be shown in their own terrible way.

More and more impatient grew the countenance of Mofolongo. For Mluki-Mluki was late. And the chief called at last to Chako, the captain of the guards,

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"for indeed he is very, very old, and the old are foolish."

Chako listened with a troubled face. He feared the anger of Mofolongo, which was liable to turn on anyone near at hand if its just object could not be reached. But still more he feared the terrible powers of the Wise One. And he had no doubt that the hidden ghosts that served Mluki-Mluki, carried to his ears the reckless words of the chief.

"Take you a drummer, Chako, and go to the jungle that hides the house of Mluki-Mluki," said Mofolongo, "and you will tell him that I, Mofolongo, wait, and that all the people of the Lukuli wait, and that it is not fitting that so mighty a chief as I should wait. And you will tell him, Chako, that the anger of Mofolongo is terrible, even to a wise man who talks with ghosts and devils." And Chako took one of the chief's drummers and walked down the long street to the fields; but he went with a troubled face, like a man who takes his life in his hand.

And the eyes of Mofolongo, and of all the swarming Lukuli, followed him as he walked out of the city into the maize fields that were red in the sunset.

Their eyes followed him by the narrow field-paths, till he reached the edge of the circle of jungle that hid the house of the witch-doctor.

And there, where a narrow, winding bush-path led through the jungle to the hidden house, they saw him halt; and the drummer beat on his drum, and at a gesture from Mofolongo all other drums were silent, so the tap of Chako's drummer reached all ears in the city.

And they watched for Mluki-Mluki to appear from the jungle path to talk with Chako.

But they watched in vain, for Mluki-Mluki did not appear.

The Answer of the Drum!

LYN STRONG set his lips. He was watching from the jungle before the house of Mluki-Mluki.

Bobolobo, the Kikuyu, lay in cover by his side, watching. And they saw Chako and the drummer leave the city of the Lukuli, and advance by the field paths.

"O Bwana," murmured Bobo, "the Lukuli grow impatient, and Mofolongo has sent a soldier to see with his eyes and hear with his ears."

Lyn nodded. "Get back to the house," he said. He hurried by the winding bush-path to the clearing in the centre of the jungle, where the huts stood.

In the hut of Mluki-Mluki Grant Strong sat, with Pip Parker and Fatty Page. Mpoko, the bushman, squatted at the door.

They waited longingly for the fall of night.

As yet no man in the city of the Lukuli dreamed that Mluki-Mluki and his torturers had been slain, and that Grant Strong was a free man, among those who had trekked from far Uganda to save him.

But not till darkness covered the face of the earth could the hunter and the scouts venture to leave their cover.

Grant Strong rose quickly to his feet as his son came hurrying into the clearing before the huts.

"What is it, Lyn?" he asked quietly.

"A soldier and a drummer are coming from the city!" answered Lyn. "It must be a message for Mluki-Mluki."

Grant Strong nodded. "They expected to see the brute before this!" he said. "The feast was fixed for nightfall. Mofolongo is growing impatient."

Pip and Fatty picked up their rifles. If the final tussle was coming, the Popolaki Scouts were ready. And Bobolobo slipped his shield on his arm and grasped his fighting-spears.

Well they knew that in seeking Grant Strong in the wild land of the Lukuli they had walked with death dogging their footsteps. And if the finish had come, they were not afraid.

"If the brutes would have waited another half-hour!" said Pip. "But I rather thought it was too much luck to expect."

"We'll make some of them hop, anyhow!" said Fatty Page.

Grant Strong made a gesture. "We may have time yet," he said. "They dare not enter the jungle—they fear too much the spells of the witch-doctor. Not unless they learn that he is killed, and that I have friends here who have saved me. Listen!"

From the direction of the city the throbbing of drums died away. In the silence that followed, the tapping of Chako's drummer was clearly heard.

The scouts listened tensely. Chako was giving the signal that he was there, awaiting word with the witch-doctor, as was the custom.

If Mluki-Mluki did not go to meet him—
What would happen then?

If the witch-doctor did not appear, and did not answer, surely the suspicions of the Lukuli would be roused? Tap, tap, tap, tap! came from the drum.

Grant Strong gritted his teeth. "That is not merely a signal—it is a message!" he said. "They are tapping out a message to Mluki-Mluki. If there is no answer—"

Lyn drew a deep breath. It was yet half an hour to dark, and flight was impossible. Hundreds of eyes would have been upon them at once.

Yet if no answer was given to the drummer, the Lukuli could not fail to divine that something had happened to the witch-doctor in his hidden house; that the prisoner, though delivered bound into his hands, had somehow turned the tables on him.

Fortune had favoured the Popolaki Patrol since they had set out from far Uganda to save Grant Strong. But it seemed that fortune was failing them at last.

Then in the dead silence that lay on the group before the witch-doctor's hut, the low chuckle of Mpoko was heard. All glanced at the little bushman.

He had picked up a drum from the hut. And his little black face grinned at the Scouts.

"What are you about to do, O Mpoko?" asked Grant Strong.

"This filthy bushman he sabbeey, sar!" answered Mpoko. "He sabbeey drum talk, sabbeey plenty Lukuli drum talk."

"My hat!" breathed Pip.

"O Bwana," said Bobo, "have I not said many times that the Small One has the cunning of many serpents?"

"Speak with the drum, O Small One!" said Grant Strong; and Mpoko tapped out an answer on the skin of the witch-doctor's drum.

The tapping across the jungle ceased

as Chako listened to the drum-taps from the witch-doctor's house.

Lyn and his comrades stood silent. They knew that all depended now on the message that Mpoko was tapping out on the witch-doctor's drum. Tap, tap, tap! beat the stick in the little bushman's hand; slow taps and swift taps, telling their own tale to the ears that listened beyond the jungle.

Mpoko ceased. The Scouts listened with strained attention.

From the distance, where Chako stood, came swift tap-tapping in reply. Then there was silence.

Mpoko chuckled softly. "What have you said, O Small One, in the drum-talk of the Lukuli?" asked Grant Strong at last.

"This dirty bushman he talk same Mluki-Mluki!" grinned Mpoko. "This bushman he clever old johnny. Yes, sar! Mo say—" Mpoko's English failed him, and he went on in Swahili: "I have talked, O Bwana, with the tongue of Mluki-Mluki, and I have said to the messenger of Mofolongo that I have had speech with the ghosts that give me counsel, and that the ghosts command that the feast shall not take place until the moon rises, lest a curse fall upon the Lukuli, by the great power of the white man's magic."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Fatty Page. "Mean to say you could tap all that out on a drum?"

"Easy-easy, sar!" said the bushman. Grant Strong smiled grimly.

It was such a message as Mluki-Mluki might have given; it was not likely to rouse the suspicions of Mofolongo. It was common enough for a feast or a ceremony to be postponed when the omens were not favourable.

"You think it will satisfy them, father?" asked Lyn.

"I think so," answered the hunter.

He spoke to Bobo, who clambered into a tall tree close by the witch-doctor's hut, whence he could spy across the jungle to the city.

In a few minutes Bobo came slithering down with a grinning face.

"O Bwana M'Kubwa, the soldier and the drummer walk back to the city!" he said. "They carry the message to Mofolongo."

The sun sank deeper behind the forests of the Congo. Dark shadows rolled from the east.

From the city came no sound; the drums were silent. Evidently the supposed message from the Wise One had satisfied the Lukuli and their chief.

Darkness at last fell; a velvety blackness that lay like a pall on the forest and the plain and the crowded city.

And in the darkness the hidden ones at the witch-doctor's house stirred. It was but an hour ere the moon rose; and by moonrise they hoped to be far away.

By the winding path they left the jungle and entered the fields that lay between it and the forest. In daylight, or by moonlight, they must have been seen from the city; but in the thick darkness they flitted silent and unseen.

The great forest received them at last, and with deep relief they plunged into the darkness of the trees.

When the moon rose and glimmered down on the city of the Lukuli, the safari were far away, treading a game-path through the forest, their faces set towards the east. And no man among the Lukuli knew of their going.

great lava rock—the stone of sacrifice—lay glimmering in the moonlight.

But there was no victim stretched on the stone of sacrifice, and of Mluki-Mluki and his torturers he saw nothing. He stopped before the huts and called out with a loud voice:

"O Mluki-Mluki, come forth and let my eyes see you, for I—Mofolongo—have come hither to slay you with my spear."

There was no answer; a deathly silence reigned in the house and in the surrounding jungle.

He waited long; and then, with desperate courage, he entered the hut of the witch-doctor.

He found it empty; and, in surprise and alarm, he searched the other huts. But the four slaves of Mluki-Mluki, the torturers who helped him in his fearful work, were not to be seen; neither was there a sign of Grant Strong, the white man who had been handed over to Mluki-Mluki to die.

And then a suspicion of the truth came to Mofolongo. He glared about him with searching eyes; and in the brilliant light of the moon he read many tracks in the clearing, and he knew that he was looking at the tracks of white men—for he knew that white men covered their feet and did not walk with naked soles like the Lukuli.

A spasm of rage shook him from head to foot.

White men had been there, other than Grant Strong. They had come and gone, and they had taken the doomed man away with them. And it was easy to guess that they had slain Mluki-Mluki and his torturers. That was why the witch-doctor had been silent—because his voice had been silenced for ever. The magic of Mluki-Mluki had not been strong enough to save him from the white men—neither him nor his slaves.

Choking with rage, Mofolongo strode away by the bush-path again and came into sight of his people.

He passed the body of Chako and strode on to the city; and when he was in the midst of his people again he spoke in a terrible voice.

"O Lukuli, I have seen the footsteps of the Mzungu in the house of Mluki-Mluki!" he said. "The white men have come and they have slain the Wise One and taken away the one who was to die. Let my soldiers take spear and shield and follow me, and let them know that if the Mzungu escapes alive from this land my terrible wrath shall be quenched in blood!"

And with spear and shield the Lukuli streamed out of the city by the hundred, to follow through the forest the track of the fugitives who fled towards the rising sun.

From the Jaws of Death!

THE hot wind blew down from the slopes of the low, sandy hills, burning and stinging the faces of the safari.

They faced it with bent heads, panting for breath, and tramped steadily on with weary limbs and aching eyes.

Fatty Page incessantly mopped streams of perspiration from his plump face. Even the cheery little Pip was silent. Grant Strong's iron limbs seemed to feel no fatigue; and the gigantic Kikuyu and the tiny bushman kept pace with him—Bobo striding with great strides, Mpoke trotting by his

side. Lyn kept steady pace; but, like his comrades, he was aching with fatigue. The three Boy Scouts were strong and hardy, but that terrible safari was telling on them severely. And more than once Grant Strong had slackened pace, and slackened again, or the boys must have fallen behind.

For a night and the greater part of a day the safari had pushed on without a halt. They dared not halt, when any moment might bring fierce black faces into view behind.

But at last Grant Strong halted.

Lyn glanced anxiously at his father.

"Father, we can keep on—we must keep on!" he muttered. "We can stand it. Every minute now—"

"We can't stick it, sir," said Pip.

Fatty Page gasped spasmodically.

"The Popolaki Patrol never backs out," he murmured faintly.

Grant Strong smiled, but it was a grim smile.

"If it wasn't for this putrid wind—"

moaned Fatty.

"The wind may save us!" said Grant Strong.

"Oh, my hat!" said Pip, in astonishment.

The tall, lean hunter stood for some moments in deep thought. Then he turned to the Kikuyu.

"Bobo, your eyes have seen the sons of dogs who follow us through the jungle," he said.

"Lord, my eyes have seen them from the tree-tops," answered Bobolobo.

"And if we halt to rest, in how long a space will the foremost of the Lukuli reach us, O Bobo?"

"Lord, they will reach us in one hour's space," he said. "But the swiftest runners may reach us more quickly. And it is in my mind that Mofolongo has sent swift runners in advance, that they may hold us while the others come more slowly."

"We have a breathing-space," said the hunter. "We are weary, and we are hungry. Mpoke, light the cooking-fire."

Mpoke's eyes grew wide with wonder, but he obeyed at once. In a small open space in the jungle he gathered sticks and lighted the cooking-fire—and the smoke of it rolled over the jungle—a sure guide to the eyes of the Lukuli. For the fierce wind from the hills caught it and blew it in a straight line back towards the faces of the pursuers.

But the Scouts were glad to rest their aching limbs, and to eat and drink. They sat and sipped tepid water from their cans, and ate the roasted plantains that Mpoke served out. And the rest and the food brought new life and energy to them.

For half an hour the halt lasted, and by that time they could hear the Lukuli in the jungle behind them, calling to one another as they leaped and darted among the tall elephant grass and thorny bushes.

Grant Strong rose to his feet.

"March!" he said.

Weary but refreshed, the safari marched. Grant Strong signed to Bobo to lead the way, and after the giant Kikuyu, Lyn and Pip and Fatty trailed on. Mpoke was about to tread out the embers of the cooking-fire, but the hunter's hand restrained him.

"Leave it burning," he said. Mpoke stared blankly, for it was second nature with the bushman to tread out every spark lest a jungle fire should follow. But he bowed his head and obeyed, and at a sign from the hunter followed the safari.

Lyn looked back, but Grant Strong was now hidden in the jungle behind.

His heart was heavy with anxiety and doubt; but he had his orders, and he obeyed them. The safari tramped steadily on.

Then, at last, came a pattering of footsteps behind, and Grant Strong came rapidly up.

There was a grim, almost terrible expression on the face of the hunter.

"Push on!" he said.

They swung on up the slope, the fierce, hot wind searing their faces. But they had no hope now of escaping the Lukuli. For the half-hour's halt had brought the savages too near, and only a miracle could prevent them overtaking the fugitives. And when they came the odds would be hundreds to one, and there was no hope.

"Halt!" said Grant Strong suddenly. "O Bwana," said Bobo, "I see that it is your will that we should die under the spears of the Lukuli."

"O foolish Kikuyu," answered the hunter. "look back, and tell me what your eyes see in the Lukuli land."

The safari faced round. Behind them, on the lower slopes of the hill, was a rolling mass of smoke, with sparks and tongues of flame darting through it.

Lyn gasped.

"The jungle's on fire!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Pip.

And then the safari understood.

Not a wisp of smoke, not a single spark, came towards them. For the fierce wind that had tormented them so long stood their friend now. It tore past them, beating back the fire in the faces of their pursuers. Between them and the Lukuli the jungle was burning, and in the faces of their foes was a roaring furnace.

"Oh, my hat!" stuttered Fatty. "That was the game, was it?"

Lyn caught his breath as he stared back at the burning jungle.

Dry as tinder, after many days without rain, the elephant grass caught the flames, and right and left the fire spread with terrible swiftness. Back in the faces of the Lukuli it went, driven by the wind, in masses of smoke and pillars of flame.

No living man could pass that fiery barrier; indeed, it was only by the swiftest flight back the way they had come, that the Lukuli could hope to save themselves from being engulfed by the flames. And not all of them, swift as they might be, could escape, for the fire was swift, driven by the wind, and the safari knew that already many of the fighting-men of Mofolongo must be perishing.

Grant Strong drew a deep breath.

"It was a terrible resource," he said, "but life is dear, and it was not written that a Mzungu should roast on the cooking-fire of Mofolongo. Forward!" And the safari swung on, safe now from the pursuit of the Lukuli.

Many perils still lay about the safari, for the way lay through wild and untamed lands. But day by day they drew nearer to home, and at last the forest ways grew familiar to their eyes, and they crossed into the British land of Uganda, and at length they trod once more the shady streets of Masampwa.

THE END.

(Next week's story of the Popolaki Patrol is entitled: "COYGO FOSSI")