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# THE UNDERWORLD OF THE EAST

BEING EIGHTEEN YEARS' ACTUAL EXPERIENCES  
OF THE UNDERWORLDS, DRUG HAUNTS  
AND JUNGLES OF INDIA, CHINA,  
AND THE MALAY  
ARCHIPELAGO

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE RHINOCEROS

As I sat in the sampan, moving slowly up the river against the tide, keeping near to the bank so that the Malays could use their poles, I felt very lonely. Mulki, who had arrived back from India, was asleep under the covered portion at the back. She was a little hurt because I would not allow her to have her new monkey, which one of the Malays had caught in the jungle, and which was now tame, in our sampan. I had relegated it to the small one which was following with our personal belongings.

It would take about five days before we would arrive at Pia Tarantang, the headquarters, where we were going. There was plenty of work waiting for me to start there, and I could be spared from the loading wharf now.

The night was cool and still, and far over to the west, there was a beautiful light of many tints in the sky. A hollow booming sound floated on the air, sounding as though it came from a great distance. It was a hollow piece of tree trunk being beaten in some native village deep in the jungle. The sound was strange, resembling some sort of primitive tune.

I thought of the crowds of well-dressed people that would be moving along the Strand and Oxford Street, the busy restaurants and hotels, and I wondered how many of them ever thought of the lonely places on the earth, where white men sometimes have to live.

Over in the direction from which the sound was

coming, but further inland, was the country of the Head Hunters. I shuddered to think of leaving my head in this country, and having it hung up as a decoration in some village, yet really our lives on this earth are but a very brief span, and about as much importance in relation to the universe as a germ in a drop of water in the sea is, and even the earth itself is of no more account among the billions of suns, planets and other bodies in space, than a grain of sand is to the sea shore.

Yet we see the heads of the many different religious bodies, squabbling among themselves as to which is the true one, and whether it is right to burn incense in the churches, or whether unbaptised babies will go to an imaginary place called Hell.

A true sense of proportion seems to be wanting.

If the size of the universe is, as some scientists estimate, two hundred million light years in diameter, it is difficult to realise the insignificance of our earth.

Let us in imagination lay it down to scale; it will have to be a very small one.

Lay off a straight line about two and a half miles in length, and let it represent the extent of the universe.

Now imagine a miniature railway train travelling along this line at a speed of sixty miles an hour, for two hundred million years, keeping to the same scale. Then at the end of that time it would have moved along the line only a distance of one sixty-fourth part of an inch; about the thickness of a sheet of thick paper. It has been travelling for two hundred million years, yet on the scale it has hardly moved.

What must have been the thoughts of the first astronomer who tried to find the distance of one of those stars—which are a million light years or more away—by triangulation. First he would probably lay

off two points on the earth's surface as far from each other as possible, to serve as a base line, and then observe the star from each point. He would find the lines to the star apparently running parallel to each other, and he decided that the base line wasn't long enough.

Then he had a bright idea. He clamped his telescope on the star, with the centre, where the hair lines cross, exactly on the mark. Now he waited six months, until the earth had moved away to the opposite side of the sun, about 186,000,000 miles across, and then looked through the telescope again. Imagine his surprise when he found that it was still on the centre of the star. The 186,000,000 miles was so small a distance in comparison with that of the star that it was negligible. Light would travel the former distance in about eighteen and a half minutes while the other would require a million years to do the journey.

"This being the case, where is Heaven they preach about, and how long does it take us to get there? What happens to the person who is just not quite good enough for Heaven; does he go to the same place as the cold-blooded murderer?"

Of course there may be many stages of life on other worlds, between the highest and the lowest. The soul may have some changeable quality, some affinity of attraction, which takes it automatically to the world it is destined for; a happier world, or a more cruel one, just according to the quality of the soul.

It may travel through space with a constantly-increasing velocity, like that of a falling body, invisible, and insensible of time or anything else, until born again, on a new world.

This is a strange idea, but there may be many natural laws in the universe of which, as yet, we have no

knowledge. Who, a hundred years ago, would have believed that wireless and television were possible?

I always enjoyed these river trips; the long rest, reclining on my mattress in the shade of the attep roof of the sampan, dreaming, living other lives, in other places, made life a thing of joy. I always had something to look forward to; always was I on the eve of a new and fascinating experience.

The scenery and the jungle on the river banks was constantly changing; it was full of life, sound and beauty.

Frequently we passed strange animals drinking at the edge, and the river was teeming with fish.

Giant crocodiles lay basking on the sandbanks, or came floating down the stream like logs of wood.

Beautiful orchids and strange flowers everywhere, with tall palm trees, and ferns, making the scene one of beauty and colour.

The river was getting narrower, and the banks higher, while sometimes we passed stretches of almost open country where we could see hills in the distance.

Arrived at the spot where we had to leave the sampan, it was a job to get our stuff as well as ourselves ashore, for the bank was high and the water shallow near the edge, and deep in mud into which I sank up to my knees.

We had about a couple of miles to walk to get to the camp, but a rough road had been made through the jungle.

There had been a great change here since my last visit. Four good-sized European bungalows, with wide verandahs all round, raised high above the ground, had been built, and a large area cleared and roads made.

The number of coolies was not many yet, as the mine would not be started until we got a lot of the

other work done; probably there were a hundred Malays and Chinese altogether.

My first job was to scheme out a water supply for drinking and domestic purposes, making provision for the large number of coolies and others who would arrive later.

The settlement was built on a hill, so that made the problem of the water supply more difficult; there was no way of getting a steam boiler here, and petrol motors were hardly known in those days.

Searching the near-by jungle, I found a small stream flowing down the side of a high hill. It was beautifully clear water as it flowed over rocks and pebbles, and wound its way down to the valley below where the coal seam outcropped.

Having made my calculations, I ordered from Singapore all the necessary piping of various sizes from 2-inch diameter down to  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch diameter, with valves, bends, etc., and the tools required, including a portable forge and riveter's outfit.

I also ordered twelve wrought iron tanks, 5 feet square, to be made with  $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch plate, all ready bent and with holes drilled ready for riveting up here.

Having got off my order for all requirements, I started to build, at a convenient place in the settlement, a platform of timber, about 2 feet high, for the tanks to sit on, allowing for four rows of three tanks, with a space of 2 feet between each; all being connected together by a 2-inch pipe at the bottom of each.

When the material arrived, I riveted up the tanks with the assistance of a Chinese fitter and some coolies, put them in position, and connected them up on the platform.

Next I ran a 2-inch pipe from a stop cock on the tanks, up the stream to a higher level, where I constructed a small settling tank of cement concrete.

From the iron tanks I ran a 2-inch pipe through the settlement with branches of 1-inch pipe off it, to the bungalows, and coolie houses.

Everyone had to be content with a simple pipe standing up out of the ground near their house, with a stop cock on it. No expensive plumbing here.

The erection of the heapstead was a bigger job. The building would be about 40 feet in height. I had several Chinese carpenters working on it. The best carpenters in the world are the Chinese, I think, if they have someone to do the thinking part for them.

Meanwhile we were pushing on with the railway from this end, to join up with the other section from the loading wharf.

Of course it was more difficult working here, as we had no locomotive, nor could we lay any steel rails; we could not get them up this far. We were only clearing the jungle along the survey line and preparing the embankments and cuttings and bridges.

But for the abundance of fine timber right on the spot, this railway would cost about twice as much to build.

No steam launch or lighter could get up this far and each sampan load of rice and food took about five days' poling by four Malays. There were parts of the river, even, where the coolies had to get out and push it over a sandbank.

Transport was a big problem until we got the railway completed.

My bungalow was not quite ready, so Mulki and I had a room in the bungalow of a Dutchman, whom I will call "Otto." He was a very decent sort of chap; somehow I have always found Germans and the Dutch fine people, and good to get on with.

He was of a scientific turn of mind and had a large trunk full of books, so we spent some pleasant evenings

together, and I had tried his favourite beverage "bols," a Dutch drink like gin.

We were sitting in Otto's room which was at the front. It was nearly midnight and Mulki was in bed and asleep in our room, which was on the other side of the passage. There were two back rooms also which were used as a dining-room and a storeroom.

Behind the bungalow, situated about 20 yards away, was the cook house and a room for our Chinese boys.

The floor of our bungalow was raised a good six feet above the ground, and there was a verandah at both back and front.

Outside everything was so quiet that we could hear our servants talking in their hut; it was practically the only sound with the exception of the eternal croaking of frogs. The bungalow was isolated, well away from the coolie bongsals and the other European houses. I was thinking of turning in, and I got up to go to the window, which was simply a shutter. It was a dark night but the sky was frequently lighted up by flashes of sheet lightning in the distance—the silent kind.

As I looked out on the jungle, my first warning that there was anything unusual was a shaking of the ground as though some giant footsteps were treading it.

Otto stopped speaking and looked at me to see if I had noticed anything.

"What is that?" he said.

I put my hand up, to indicate silence, and I noticed that the servants at the back had also stopped talking.

The footsteps approached, fairly shaking the bungalow, some large animal weighing many tons must have been approaching.

Otto slipped off his shoes and crept silently into the back room for his gun, but I saw at once that if it came to shooting, my Cape gun would be the only

one of any use, because he had in his hand a Winchester repeater of small bore.

I got my gun as quietly as possible and put a cartridge in each barrel.

Tiptoeing silently to the window we looked out.

Just then the whole bungalow gave a lurch, and we heard some great animal moving under the floor; it had most likely brushed against one of the piles in passing. Now it seemed to be almost under our feet, then it passed round to the back.

From the servants' hut there was not a sound, and I could picture them all sitting in terror in the dark, in a room right on the ground, and with nothing between them and the animal but a thin bamboo partition, which it could easily walk through.

Our position was different, because we were raised over six feet above the ground, with a good floor under our feet, and both of us well armed with rifles; whereas the coolies only had knives, and perhaps a kitchen axe. Worse than useless.

Now we could hear it at the back of the house, so we crept silently into the back room and peeped out of the open window.

It was quite dark, but we could make out a great black shadow, and we could hear it breathing in snorts.

Just then another flash of lightning occurred in the distance, and the whole compound became plainly visible, and there, standing sideways to us, with its head raised slightly, trying to get the scent, was a large rhinoceros, the creature with almost the keenest scent and hearing of all animals.

It was puzzled because it was getting two different scents from directly opposite directions; one from us, and one from the coolies in the cookhouse. It had not the brain to puzzle this problem out.

We knew that there was not much likelihood of it seeing us; it is a very short-sighted animal.

"If we fire we might hit the coolies," whispered Otto to me.

Quiet as the sound was, the creature heard, and the sound confirming his scent he charged.

"Crash!" went one of the piles, while the whole bungalow rocked, and a scream came from Mulki, who had been awakened.

We could now hear it snorting in the front of the house, and we hurried round to that side.

"Never mind the noise now," I said. "It has located us."

The next flash of light showed it quite distinctly; it was just getting ready for another charge.

We both fired together, and then it was dark again.

Straining our eyes, trying to pierce the gloom, we could just make out its dark bulk moving slowly about, when Otto started pumping bullets in a steady stream, and I fired both barrels.

The ground vibrated and the bungalow shook, there was a sound as of some heavy body falling, and the next flash of lightning showed it lying stretched out on the ground.

We did not go out at once, but waited some time, watching it every time we could see.

When we finally ventured out we found it quite dead. I always regret having to shoot any animal, and I would not have shot it if it had not charged.

In the case of a man-eating tiger it is different, and I would kill it with pleasure.

This was a dangerous jungle, even the tiger was more fierce than its Indian brother.

The Chinese working on the line never strayed away from their gang, but the Malays were bold and fearless,

and three or four of them together would stand up to a tiger with their parangs.

When maddened by arack, they are bloodthirsty, and will cut and slash right and left at anything or anybody.

I myself had a still which I made, and I could make spirit of many different kinds.

Many kinds of vegetation contain some volatile essence, and this is the first to be turned into vapour when heat is applied. This vapour is then condensed.

We are all drug addicts in some form or other. What is tobacco smoking, tea and coffee drinking, liquor drinking and many other forms, but drugging?

The South African war was on, and I had noticed a great difference in the bearing of the Dutch and German assistants towards me and all Englishmen. There was none of the former friendliness, and I found the half-castes were the worst, but I took no notice of them.

These islands, and even Singapore, were simply swarming with half-castes, who were bubbling over with delight. One saw them in twos and threes gloat-ing over a newspaper in the bars in Singapore; reading with wide grins and excited chatter, an account of some fresh British reverse.

The stock of the Englishman had gone down in this part of the world.