

CAPTAIN HAZZARD *in...*

the
Python Men
of the
Lost City

by **RON FORTIER** *and*
CHESTER HAWKS

with Illustrations by **ROB DAVIS**

CORNERSTONE BOOK PUBLISHERS



CAPTAIN HAZZARD : THE PYTHON MEN OF LOST CITY

by Ron Fortier and Chester Hawks
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THE ONE-SHOT WONDER

By Norman Hamilton

For many years, pulp enthusiasts loved to talk about the one-shot hero, Captain Hazzard. Hazzard had appeared in one issue of his own title, dated May 1938, from publisher A.A. Wyn's Magazine Publishers Inc. The dramatic, beautiful cover by Norm Saunders, portrayed a handsome, bronzed, chiseled-faced hero attempting to save a beautiful blond damsel in the distress from the clutches of *The Python Men of the Lost City*. It was pretty heady stuff, and clearly intended as a Doc Savage rip-off. The following month the title was gone and Captain Hazzard drifted into pulp obscurity. Or so he should have. But pulp fans are persistent if nothing else, and loyal to their heroes, even those heroes who only make one appearance.

Over the subsequent years, long after A.A. Wyn's outfit had morphed into the paperback company known as Ace Books, lovers of pulps kept Hazzard's memory alive by reprinting his one and only story over and over again. All legal rights to the character and story had long since expired and thus fallen into public domain. Somewhere in the late 1960s, comic fan Ron Fortier purchased a facsimile copy of the book from long time pulp historian and collector, Robert Weinberg. Fortier became intrigued by the character and promised himself to one day revive him if the circumstances were favorable.

Meanwhile, other pulp historians had been doing their own research into Captain Hazzard, and bit by bit a skeletal story about the hero and his origins began to emerge. In 1934, Wyn had hired a former Street & Smith editor, Paul Chadwick, to write for his line. Chadwick became the first, and principle, writer of their new Secret Agent X series. X was a bizarre attempt by Wyn's editors to combine the attributes of both the Shadow and Doc Savage into one hero. X was a master of disguises who operated as an independent agent battling America's foes. Chadwick's stories, and those of the writers who followed him, were published under the house name Brant House (obviously someone had a sense of humor). Chadwick wrote the bloodiest X stories and stayed with the character until 1936, when sales began to drop off.

Somewhere in all this, Chadwick had married a woman named Dorothy Lester. Dorothy had once been Lester Dent's personal secretary during the early days of his work on the legendary pulp hero, Doc Savage — a little known fact worth keeping in mind as our tale progresses. When Chadwick's editors came to him with the assignment to create and write a hero in the mold of the Man of Bronze, one has to believe he was savvy enough to pick his wife's brain for advice.

The similarities between Captain Hazzard and Doc Savage would be many. Both were super-intelligent and possessed many academic degrees. Giving a hero an honorific like *doctor* or *captain* was standard practice in the pulps. Both men would have a unique base of operations in or around New York City. Doc's was his suite/lab on the 86th Floor of the Empire State Building, while the Champion of Justice maintained an entire complex out on Long Island called Hazzard Labs. Each would go off on globe-trotting adventures accompanied by a group of highly loyal, brilliant and colorful aides. They each employed futuristic-like technology, arming themselves with all kinds of outlandish gizmos used in the fight against evildoers.

Here's how Chadwick verbally painted his new pulp star: "His name was Captain Hazzard. He was young, ruggedly built, broad-shouldered, dark-haired, with a face that was a mixture of dynamic

youth and mature power. It was hard to place his age. He seemed to be in his middle twenties. He might have been younger or older. There was a changeable quality in his blue-gray eyes as there was about his face. The irises had the clearness of blue flame, and darker glints glowed beneath.”

There were a few notable differences to set the two heroes apart, the primary one of these being Hazzard’s gift of ESP (extra-sensory perception). In the prologue, we are told that at an early age, his parents were murdered and he was blinded. Attending a school for the blind, the lad began to rely on his other senses, which had become heightened – a common occurrence among many blind people. But what was unexpected is that young Hazzard began to demonstrate extraordinary telepathic skills. By the time he was a teen, he could “see” things with his mind and transmit those images to others who were likewise gifted. When an operation restored Hazzard’s sight, he swore an oath to dedicate his life to fighting evil and injustice wherever they appeared in the world. To this end he would put his amazing mental and physical strengths.

Chadwick was comfortable writing suspense, urban melodramas posing as pseudo detective mysteries. But Captain Hazzard was high adventure. That Chadwick was out of his element is clearly evident in his putting African pythons in a South American setting (although *Anaconda Men of the Lost City* clearly wouldn’t have had the same zip as the actual title).]

The story Chadwick turned in is full of plot holes and under-developed characters whose names change from one chapter to another, making it difficult to keep track of who’s who. Most pulp tales were knocked off speedily. That was the hallmark of the style – write fast and often, or else don’t get paid at the end of the week. Still, the poor quality of this particular book would indicate Chadwick’s lack of enthusiasm for the project. One has to wonder if he really did not care if it succeeded or not.

Of course, it did not – not only because of the substandard quality, but by 1938 the country was in the midst of the Great Depression, and many companies were having to cut back on their output. By the time *Captain Hazzard: Python Men of the Lost City* was released, its

fate was predetermined, and so it disappeared into literary history. It would go on to exist in reprint after reprint until 2006, when Fortier, the one-time fan now turned professional writer, took it upon himself to bring back the Champion of Justice in a brand new series of pulp novel adventures.

Fortier launched the new Captain Hazzard series by first going back into the original and fixing it. He filled in the plot holes, reshaped the characters, defined them more clearly and added entirely new chapters to drive the narrative. By the time he was finished, an old, nearly forgotten pulp hero was ready once again to take on the minions of evil. Fortier enhanced certain story elements that previously had been given cursory attention, like the white scar that runs across Hazzard's left eye, the one visible reminder of his sightless youth and the murder of his parents. Now, when Hazzard becomes impassioned, the tiny white line reddens noticeably – an indication he is about to go into action. Fortier also revealed the hero's full Christian name as Kevin Douglas Hazzard. With the success of this revamped classic, Fortier and his Airship 27 Productions have gone on to bring us three additional Captain Hazzard novels; *Citadel of Fear* (co-written with Martin Powell), *Curse of the Red Maggot* and last year's *Cavemen of New York*. Fortier plans to begin work on a fifth novel later this year. He hopes to continue writing them as long as pulp fans want to read them.

You hold in your hand the second edition of a fast-paced, action-packed pulp thriller penned by Paul Chadwick (writing as Chester Hawks) and Ron Fortier – two writers separated by time and space but brought together by a love for pulp fiction. And that is how a one-shot wonder became a seventy-year-old classic pulp survivor. Not a bad story.

CAPTAIN HAZZARD

in

PYTHON MEN OF THE LOST CITY

by

Chester Hawks & Ron Fortier

Introducing - Capt. Hazzard

When we finished writing the chronicle of the “Python Men of the Lost City,” the editor asked us for a brief word of introduction for this column. To tell the truth, I didn’t know where to begin. For in the story, we told of how Captain Hazzard had been blind for fifteen years of his boyhood; and how he had studied and developed his mental powers far beyond those of an average person; how he had regained his eyesight, and then marshalled a group of assistants – scientists, chemists, mathematicians, adventurers –

and raised a challenge to the criminals of the world. So we were at a loss as to how to give you a real insight into the character of this remarkable man – until Hawks remembered what had happened on that glorious day when Hazzard’s eyesight was restored to him.

As the doctor unwound the bandages over the lad’s eyes, he warned that the eyes could only be used for three minutes the first day. Young Kevin Douglas Hazzard reached out and took my arm, saying:

“There are things I want to see. Will you get them for me, Hawks?”

I squeezed his arm in reply. In a quiet voice, Hazzard made his first request:

“Let me see a picture of my mother and father.”

That choked us all up. For both of his parents had died while he was blind. He had known and loved them, but had never seen their faces. “You shall see that picture,” Hawks said.

His next request was a simple one. Most of you see it every day of your lives. Hazzard’s voice had a strange thrill in it when he asked:

“I want to see the American flag. Those stars, and the red, white and blue must be a beautiful thing to see.”

I assured him that a person has to look a long way to see a more beautiful thing than Old Glory. And then came the his last request:

“The picture of Blind Justice – the lady holding the scales, with the blindfold over her eyes. I want to be her eyes from this day forth.”

Well, readers, this is the best way we knew of introducing a brave, dashing and sincere man – Captain Hazzard, champion of justice!

Chester Hawks

CHAPTER ONE

The Murder Curtain

Three men stood beside a dusty gray auto at one side of Pier 52, North River, and watched the American liner *Liberty* slide into berth. Their faces mirrored a tension mixed with a haunting, brooding dread. Some hidden conflict seemed to be twisting their nerves to spring-like tautness. Stark terror of a force outside themselves was lashing them pitilessly to do a thing they feared.

Dusk had come and gone hours earlier, leaving a sprinkling of stars amidst a cloudy night sky. Floodlights bathed the pier as the great ship touched the dock with a rumble of winches, a clatter of gangplanks, a shuffling of feet. White-coated stewards carrying luggage were the first to reach the pier. Then came the passengers, smiling, waving, calling excited greetings to friends and loved ones on hand to welcome them home.

But there was no love, no friendship in the eyes of the three men who stood beside the dusty, queer-looking auto.

One was tall, thin-lipped, with a sickly pallor accentuated by blue-black hair. Another had a powerful body, a heavy bloated face. The third was small, swarthy, vicious, his sharp teeth showing in a servile, hyena grin. He wore goggles and a chauffeur's cap.

They made no move to meet anybody. They stared fixedly through the door of the pier shed at the lights of the great liner. Not until all the passengers were off the ship and through customs did the tall, pallid man stoop and whisper something to the one with the bloated face. The heavy man nodded, set off at a fast walk diagonally across the street.

The swarthy chauffeur slipped behind the wheel of the gray car and started the motor. He sat on the front seat with the alertness of a cat waiting to spring. The pallid man climbed into the back and drew the side shades carefully. The car waited, its engine purring.

But something moved on the roof of the car as the man inside slowly cranked a handle. It might have been a collapsible radio aerial.

It rose up thinly, forming a tripod. The handle inside continued to move. From the top of the tripod, thick black rods pushed out of a tubular metal framework. They were slender, almost invisible to anyone standing more than a few feet away. But they crisscrossed into a design that was horribly like the antennae of some great insect.

There were still finer, hairlike rods branching out from them and these trembled with the vibration of the car's engine, reminiscent of the feelers of a giant deadly centipede getting ready to strike.

The man inside ceased turning the handle. He crouched forward, staring through a peephole in the side curtains at the big pier entrance. Once he moved to another peephole on the opposite side of the car and glanced intently in the direction that the bloated-faced man had gone.

There was an empty store diagonally across the street here, its windows broken and dusty. Dimly seen on the roof of this building was the rod framework of another small tripod. The hairlike antennae were invisible, but the metal tubes in which they were mounted reflected a faint gleam of light.

The dark-haired man's pallor increased, and his hands trembled. He again took up his station at the peephole nearest the dock. His black eyes held a savage gleam of impending murder.

There was excitement at the top of the *Liberty's* forward gangplank now. Several dapper ship's officers led a strange looking figure forward, a stowaway who had been discovered in one of the holds after the vessel had come through quarantine.

The stowaway's clothing was tattered, stained, his body emaciated. But the most startling thing about him was his face. It had the dry, scaly look of a reptile. All life seemed to have gone from the skin. Brown, dead looking, it cracked into unsymmetrical sections like the hide of an alligator.

Several officers kept at a distance from him, as though they feared that he might be contaminated. But two immigration officers, accustomed to handling all sorts of queer characters, came up and grabbed him by the arms. One said: "Come along, buddy. We're gonna take you places."

The reptile-faced man made no answer. His dull, glazed eyes were focused on some horror only he could see. He moved sluggishly, letting himself be pulled forward. The few people left on the dock recoiled as he passed, staring with wide-eyed amazement.

The immigration officers led him through the pier shed toward the exit. Here another man, short, stocky, keen-faced, pleasant looking, was lingering purposely. He stepped forward as the trio reached him. In his hands was a small notebook and pencil, freshly sharpened. On his jacket lapel was pinned a small card with the word PRESS printed on it. "My name's Crawley," he said. "Any idea where that chap came from? I picked up a message on the ship-to-shore telephone and heard about the stowaway."

One of the immigration officers waved him back. "You press people give me a pain," he muttered. "Our department will make a report when it's ready."

"The *Liberty* put in at several South American ports," persisted Crawley. "Maybe this man's an escaped prisoner from Devil's Island."

"Yes, and maybe he isn't!" snapped the officer.

Crawley shrugged, stepped aside. But he followed at a distance, feverishly jotting down notes from his keen-eyed observations. His

own car was parked outside along the block. He had instructions to learn the identity of this strange man who had somehow stowed away on a crack passenger liner.

He was fifty feet behind when the stowaway and the two immigration men passed through the exit. For a moment they were on a line with the gray car parked outside the pier and the metal tripod mounted up there in the darkness on top of the empty store building. Crawley was the first immediate witness of the shocking, extraordinary thing that occurred.

The night gloom outside the pier entrance changed suddenly. It grew lighter, with a wavering, eerie incandescence, as though the sky had been fired with the glow of an aurora borealis. Tongues of shimmering, uncanny light slid through the air, wavered, intermingled, touched and retreated, only to reappear again. But they were not in the sky. They were in the air close to the earth, forming a weird, pulsating, radiant curtain between the tripod on the gray car and the one on the roof of the building. It was a curtain of horrible death, for the stowaway with the reptile-like face and the two immigration officers who stood paralyzed in this ghastly web of writhing fire.

Muscles strained under their clothing. Veins stood out on their faces, swelled, seemed about to burst like over-ripe grapes. Their eyes started from their heads. Their mouths opened, tongues protruding. Fearful, smothered cries ripped from their quivering throats.

The two immigration officers sagged on legs gone limp as jelly. The stowaway took two jerky steps forward. He seemed to possess an inhuman stamina, for he almost stumbled out of the curtain of light. Then he too paused, staggered and dropped.

William Crawley did a strange thing for a reporter – a strange thing in the face of that maelstrom of murder. He calmly closed his eyes, seemed to go to sleep. His features looked peaceful, trancelike for a moment. He seemed almost bored by the terror of the night. What went on in his mind made no show in the visible world. But odd systolic vibrations stirred in the inner, unknown realms of etheric space. Crawley's horror and the image that fell on the retina of his eyes was transferred in the flash of a split second by telepathic influence to the brain of another man ten miles away.

This man was working diligently in a private chamber of a great complex on Long Island. The compound was made up of a half dozen structures, including several sophisticated laboratories, a mechanical workshop and two huge airplane hangars. There were high walls of reinforced concrete around the entire estate, electrically charged barbed wire on top of that, and then other walls of steel and hardwood. Still Crawley's mental image, his feelings, made their way through these barricades by telepathic impulse with the speed of light.

At the first twinge of the reporter's psychic signal, this unique man put down the equipment he had been calibrating and touched the fingers of his right hand to his temple. Closing his eyes, he breathed deeply and thought the single word: SEND.

Immediately this fellow began receiving the same images, the same impressions of horror. His mind, connected by the mysterious bond of extra-sensory impressions – which make up the new science of telepathy and clairvoyance, known collectively as parapsychology - actually seemed to see through the eyes of the newshound on the scene. The impressions came dimly at first, wavering, disturbing, out of a fog apparently, like an image from a projector being focused. Then they were clear, true, awful as the thing itself. And the man in the laboratory continued breathing deeply, gripping the edge of his table with tense fingers, staring fixedly at the blank wall before him.

His name was Kevin Douglas Hazzard. He was young, ruggedly built, broad-shouldered, dark haired, with a face that was a mixture of dynamic youth and mature power. A neatly trimmed mustache reminded many of the actor Clark Gable. It was hard to place Hazzard's age. He seemed to be in his middle twenties. He might have been younger or older. There was a changeable quality in his blue-gray eyes as there was about his face. The irises had the clearness of a blue flame, but when his moods varied, a wind seemed to blow across the flame, and darker glints glowed beneath.

He was a man about whom many legends had sprung up. Many strange stories had been told of his actions, his powers, his career. But hardly any of them as startling as the truth itself.*



"His mind, connected by the mysterious bond of extra-sensory impressions... actually seemed to see through the eyes of the newshound on the scene."

*AUTHOR'S NOTES **

Captain Hazzard, America's Ace Adventurer, was blinded in infancy and spent the first fifteen years of his life in total darkness. Denied normal pleasures and activities, he had been thrown back on himself, on his own cleverness and imagination. He had learned the Braille system of reading by sense of touch. More than this, in those long dark years when the outer world was beyond his sight, he had developed his latent mental powers to the point where they extended much farther than that of the average person. He had studied all the phenomena of the mind: hypnotism, the various schools of psychology, Yoga and other forms of Oriental mysticism including the shamanistic beliefs and practices of the Lamas of Tibet, and telepathy.

When a delicate surgical operation had finally restored his physical sight, he had dedicated his life to adventure, action, and the extension of man's knowledge of the world about him. He had gathered together certain chosen assistants, brilliant young scientists, chemists, mathematicians, adventurers. A few hand-picked men he tested for telepathic powers by means of card symbols, using the method of Doctor Rhine of Duke University. In this way, he had formed a small group of close associates who could send mental messages and images to him, and receive his in turn under certain conditions. The telepathic powers of the mind are not yet perfect, but someday, when the world is older, Captain Hazzard believes they will be. The common experiences which people everywhere have of telepathy, mind-reading, foresight, and psychic contact prove that mankind is on the threshold of new and more vast discoveries in the realm of the mind. Captain Hazzard is a pioneer in this great new branch of science.

And his brilliant research and inventions in his Long Island laboratory, as well as his startling world adventures, have brought him not only wealth and fame, but recognition from his government. For certain secret advice of a military nature, which has helped to make America safe against foreign attack, he has been given the honorary rank of captain in both the army and navy air corps.

In his mind's eye, Hazzard saw the stowaway pitch forward. He saw the two immigration men lying in huddled heaps. He saw for an instant, as did Crawley, that one end of that weird curtain of death was somehow connected with the parked gray car.

He stood at ease while the action unfolded, while Crawley, his agent, continued to send out the telepathic impulses that were registering in his own excited brain.

The strange curtain of livid light disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared. It flashed off, leaving the darkness darker. And in that darkness, the grinning chauffeur behind the wheel of the gray car touched levers and the car sped away.

Crawley pointed, cried through trembling lips: "Those men did it!" A policeman heard him, ran for a patrol car. Crawley himself turned and raced for the spot down the street where his own coupe was parked. He swung it around, tore after the gray car that was now only a ghostly blur up the long waterfront street.

Keeping the gray car's headlamps in sight, Crawley pushed his smaller auto faster, taking one sharp turn after another, not wanting to lose what he believed to be the story of a lifetime.

Captain Hazzard, in his private sanctum, grabbed the table's edge still more tightly, as though he himself were driving Crawley's coupe. Slowly it gained on the gray car. A police radio cruiser with a powerful motor nosed up and passed Crawley. It continued to outpace him, creeping up on the gray car ahead. Crawley stepped on the gas, hugged the wheel more tightly.

Then Captain Hazzard gasped and turned from his work bench as an idea struck him. He broke into the telepathic reception he was getting from Crawley, sent out a mental warning of his own: "Look back, Crawley! There may be another car behind you. Tripod! Curtain of death!"

The message flashed through etheric space to Crawley's mind. Crawley got it, faintly at first, then more clearly as he felt the powerful brain impulse of Captain Hazzard. He looked up at his rearview mirror and hastily adjusted it. Then his mouth opened in surprise. Coming up behind him was a second gray sedan with a duplicate tripod affixed to its roof.

Crawley jerked his steering wheel to the right and bounced over the curb just as a flash of hot light sizzled through the air, ripping up the tarmac behind him. Unable to control the car, he plowed straight into a steel streetlamp and came to a jarring stop. His grill smashed, the reporter's head snapped into the steering wheel. He saw stars.

Captain Hazzard breathed an oath as all went blank in his mind, because Crawley has stopped sending, stopped receiving. Something had gone wrong! It was as though a switch on a radio had been turned off.

Back in the coupe, Crawley, blood trickling down his forehead, raised his fedora and saw the villainous second gray car whiz pass. It was moving up behind the unsuspecting patrol cruiser. Crawley saw the tripod crackling with another deadly charge and then succumbed to the pain in his head. He slumped over the wheel unconscious.

The hand of Captain Hazzard dropped to an inter-office telephone. He snatched the instrument up, barked a swift order:

“Tell Randall to warm the up Z2!”

He slammed the instrument down. In ten quick strides he crossed the room and yanked a door open, walked down a short passage and through another door made of case-hardened molybdenum steel. He passed by a glass-partitioned office where focused young men huddled over long desks, passed a machine shop where other men were working, and a laboratory where white-coated chemists stood quietly in front of instrument-strewn tables. He crossed a foundry room where the latest scientific electric crucibles were mounted and where molten metal hissed.

Heads lifted as Captain Hazzard's tall, erect figure moved past. Men saluted or nodded in respectful greeting. He was the brains, the heart, the soul of one of the greatest private laboratories in the world. Loved as a close friend by the men around him, his word in this whole, vast, busy building was law.

At one particular door, Hazzard stopped and peered inside.

Leading a group of white-jacketed researchers was a bald man with steel-rimmed glasses resting on the edge of his nose. Hearing the door open, he looked up and smiled. “Kevin?”

Professor Washington MacGowen, renowned physicist, was a life-

long friend and mentor. Thus his familiarity in addressing Hazzard by his Christian name. Like his employer, Wash MacGowen also possessed strong ESP talents. He immediately sensed his friend's concern.

"Trouble?"

"Crawley seems to have tripped over something that may require our attention. I want the team assembled in one hour!"

MacGowen nodded, waving his clipboard in salute. "You got it, kid. They'll be here if I have to carry them."

That taken care of, Hazzard continued down another passage, stepped into a small automatic elevator that shot him up to the roof of the plant. The hum of a powerful airplane motor warming up filled the night air. The water of Long Island Sound gleamed close at hand. The plane itself was standing on a catapult, such as are mounted on the decks of battle cruisers.

It was a single-seater amphibian with twin pontoons, retractable landing wheels and a giant radial motor of six-hundred horsepower. Because the main section was an oval constructed from a transparent see-through plastic polymer, the craft resembled a giant egg with a propeller attached to its wide end.

A tall, grave young man in the cockpit was watching the temperature gauge intently. He stepped out and saluted as Captain Hazzard approached.

"She's almost ready, sir," Tyler Randall said.

"Stand by to release me," Hazzard replied.

He got into the narrow cockpit, adjusted flying helmet and safety belt, watched the temperature gauge creep up. In thirty seconds, he raised a gloved hand and Randall pressed a button.

There was a dull explosion, a hiss of compressed gases. The catapult boom swung forward and literally hurled the amphibian out into space away from the roof.

It shot across the water, sailed in a long trajectory, dipping down till the motor burst into a full song of throaty power. Then it lifted, banked, climbed into the night sky on its silver wings and whining steel propeller.

Hazzard made the ten miles to New York's waterfront in exactly three minutes. His plane banked high over the city, shot down like a

bolt from the heavens, came to rest on the river close to the stern of the *Liberty*. He taxied into the slip, threw a dockhand a rope, made his plane fast and climbed up a ladder.

Radio police cars were gathered around the three dead men.

Cops formed a stalwart human barricade. They bristled when Captain Hazzard pushed through the crowd of curious people that had gathered. Jim Chambers, the inspector of detectives, recognized him and nodded. The police opened a path to led him through.

Inspector Chambers said: "This a hellish business, Captain Hazzard. Five men have been murdered, and the criminals have got away."

"Five?"

"Yes. These three poor chaps here and two officers in the pursuing radio car. They were knocked out the same way as these fellows. An electric ray or something. A car sneaked up behind them with a tripod gadget on it and lined them in a death zone with the car ahead."

"What about a reporter named Crawley?" asked Hazzard tensely.

"He was trying to follow the killers, too, Captain. He must have got nervous and lost control of his car. He swerved and hit a lamp post. They've taken him to the hospital with a concussion. I think he'll pull through all right."

Captain Hazzard breathed more easily. But his face was masklike in its harshness as he looked down at the three dead men. The blueness of his eyes had given way to a wintry gray.

Morgue attendants were preparing to take the bodies away on stretchers. Hazzard looked down at the still figure of the strange stowaway.

The top detective said: "It'll be hard now to find out who he was, Captain. We've been through his clothing. Nothing there to identify him. And look at his face! I doubt that he will ever be identified. His own mother wouldn't know him."

Hazzard nodded, bent down and examined the dead man. He took it for granted that the police had searched the clothing thoroughly. But something might have been overlooked. And suddenly, Hazzard's hand darted to the corpse's thick hair. His fingers slipped through,