



Then de Reveski pulled a pistol from the pocket of his dressing-gown

NIGHT OUT FOR SUKI

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

*Murder, or Hara-Kiri, Are the Only Outs for a Masquerading Jap Officer—
Because No Camera Can Photograph an Inventor's Mind!*

“OH, AND Juan,” said the big gray-haired man from his wheel chair, “you may go now. Have yourself a night of it—but don’t spend all your money buying dances with the blondes at the Palazzo.”

“Yess, Mr. de Reveski,” said the little

brown man, bowing courteously.

He tried vainly to read the face of his master, seeking some enlightenment as to whether he was being made sport of. Then, turning, he walked from the room, his feet noiseless on the carpet.

He wondered, as he donned the white

linen jacket that was his night-out uniform, whether his master weren't the devil himself. The big Russian-American, with his monocle and his huge leonine head and his great bellows of anger or delight was like some strange stone god of his ancestors come to life to Juan Mendez.

De Reveski, former flyer in the Czar's air force, postwar designer of many of America's finest transport and most deadly military planes, seemed to the little Oriental to be strangely childlike in his lack of emotional control, strangely naive in his talk of plane specifications to his servant.

The big man might be a bit touched—*la ta*, as the natives of the East Indies say. He had accepted Juan's application to be his man-servant without question. And Juan's papers had been good. They should have been, coming as they did from conquered Mindanao. Still and all, times being what they were, it had seemed a little too easy.

So Juan Mendez—Lieutenant Togo Suki of the Imperial Japanese Navy to give him his full title—had entered into his menial job for the good of the Rising Sun with all the skill and conscientiousness at his command. He had been with de Reveski many hours of every day and night since—pushing the wheel-chair (the aviator-inventor had lost the use of his legs while testing one of his planes years before) from room to room of the huge bungalow.

Yes, it had seemed easy, and the net result of his labors to date had been exactly nothing. He was getting almost as desperate as his true masters, who saw American planes growing in numbers and quality daily, who saw parts of Tokyo in ruins, and large sections of the Japanese fleet destroyed.

First had come the affair of the bi-motored Reveski carrier fighter. It was,

according to its inventor, designed to land at a speed of sixty miles an hour, to be good for four hundred and fifty at an altitude of fifteen thousand feet. It had sounded impossible, yet it had more than come up to designed capabilities on its first trials.

SUKI had photographed the plans quite easily, thanks to de Reveski's foolish lack of precautions. He had sent them on to Tokyo by a devious route, to the great delight of his superiors. Yet, when they had built the ship, it had been barely able to fly, was full of ineradicable structural flaws.

Then had come the matter of the de Reveski combination dive and torpedo bomber—a ship designed, and successfully so, to scream at its target at more than the speed of a bullet and to zoom so rapidly it would be out of range of all but the longest range and least maneuverable anti-aircraft fire within a matter of seconds.

Again Suki had photographed the plans, and again Tokyo had followed them faithfully. This time the resulting plane had refused to come out of its first test dive, sending a valuable test pilot to the gods of his ancestors in glory, but depriving the Mikado's forces of a most valuable man. Already the American version had accounted for a Nipponese carrier and a light cruiser, and the fleet was only beginning to receive them.

Suki knew there had been no substitution of plans. Yet on each occasion something had gone wrong, dreadfully wrong. His superiors were growing quite unpleasant about it—and definite. He was to have one more chance before honor would demand that he send himself to the land of his ancestors via the ancient route—hara-kiri.

And this was the night. The new de

Reveski high altitude fighter, the great ex-Russian's mightiest achievement, was to be displayed on paper before a group of leading government officials and manufacturers. It was now or never.

This high altitude fighter, a multi-gunned, multi-manned monster with the speed and maneuverability of a Spitfire far above the Spitfire's maximum altitude performance, could knock the greatest bombers out of the skies with ridiculous ease. It could annihilate Zeros or Messerschmitts with only a fraction of its power.

Suki's hand shook as he buttoned his white jacket, saw that the deadly blade he carried in his sleeve was loose in its sheath. His ugly lips compressed as he thought of the hair-trigger timing this was going to demand.

The master—how he hated the term and the man!—would be sitting in the living room awaiting his visitors. They would not come for a good half hour. This time Suki could take no chance on a substitution of plans, even if murder were the price.

It was three chances to one that the inventor would be sitting there by the table playing with one of the grotesque models he delighted in manufacturing in his spare time—one of those grotesque caricatures of a plane he persisted in wasting his time on.

De Reveski's sense of humor, shown blatantly in the silly toys he concocted in his workshop with loving care, was another inexplicable facet of the inventor's personality that Suki, trained from childhood to be serious in all things, could not understand. The former Russian bellowed at jokes like the barbarian he was, and Suki, product of a civilization which had long since progressed beyond humor, hated him.

Suki glanced at the watch on his other wrist, a special naval watch designed to keep time to the split second. The split second had arrived.

He moved with even more than his usual stillness through the carpeted halls of the bungalow. Being crippled, de Reveski found it much easier to live in a one-floor establishment, so he had designed a home and workshop combined, atop a hill near Hollywood and the great plane factories of Southern California.

De Reveski looked up as Suki entered, smiled amiably, but with a slight sardonic gleam in his eyes that was half hidden by his monocle. Suki bowed politely, advanced toward him, his eyes taking in the picture before him.

IT WAS too good to be true. The inventor's chair was beside the heavy table in the middle of the room, and he actually had the precious blueprints in his lap. Beside him, on the table, was his latest grotesque toy, a little silver plane with an impossible superstructure, and with crazy cannon sticking out all over it.

"Yes, Juan?" de Reveski asked. "Are you short of money? What can I do for you, me lad?"

"I am sorry, sir," said Suki, inwardly cursing the politeness that a score of generations under the tortured trees of Nippon had drilled into him. "I must take the plans on your lap."

"Yes," said de Reveski, regarding him thoughtfully, almost humorously. "I suppose you must. It's the old hara-kiri if you don't, eh?"

"What do you mean, sirr?" asked Suki, taken aback. Would the fool joke even in a moment like this?

"Oh, you're welcome to them, Juan, or whatever your name is," said the ex-Russian. "As a matter of fact I was just

looking them over to be sure they were right—for you.”

Sudden panic froze Suki to the carpet as the inventor’s smile became sweeter.

“Just between us,” de Reveski went on, “you don’t really believe these plans will do you or your country any good, do you? After the last two?”

“You—knew, sirr?” Suki felt stripped naked, humiliated. He stifled a desire to wail aloud in his shame.

“Naturally,” said the ex-Russian. “Contrary to your fondest beliefs, I am not a complete fool. Your watch is a naval officer’s chronometer, very unlikely for a Filipino houseboy. The shape of your head, certain peculiarities of your speech. Oh, I knew all right from the first. But I thought perhaps you liked the little game we’ve been playing.”

So he had been playing a game—torturing him, Suki, a lieutenant in the Imperial Japanese Navy on a matter of life or death. Making him the butt of his barbarian sense of humor! It was too much! In his admission of defeat and horrendous loss of face, the little yellow man there and then resolved that since he could no longer go on living, he would take this mad and dangerous barbarian with him.

The knife slipped easily into his hand—and de Reveski, his smile fading, pulled an automatic pistol from the pocket of his crimson dressing gown and shot him through the heart.

“Rather easier than hara-kiri,” he said to the corpse, then shook his head sadly. “Good houseboy, too. Now I’ll have to break in another.”

High officials took the matter in charge on their arrival a few minutes later. There was to be no mention of it in the press. De Reveski, a cripple, had shot a would-be killer in his own living room. It was self-defense, and since the man was dead there was no need to waste the valuable time of such a valuable man as the inventor in a courtroom trial.

“The funniest thing about it,” said the ex-Russian, picking up his absurd toy plane, “is that he couldn’t have stolen the plans if he had wanted to, yet they were under his nose all the time in all three cases.”

“Heaven help us if anything should happen to you,” said a two-stripe admiral, mopping his brow. “We’d be without them too.”

“It’s quite simple,” said de Reveski. “And since this latest unpleasantness, I feel I had better impart it to someone. You see, this toy is not really a toy. It is the real plane in code. Every part of the fuselage is drawn one and a half times to scale, and the gun emplacements are backward, as in a mirror. The wings and motors are two-thirds of scale.”

“Amazing!” said a manufacturer, leaning forward in his chair. “Is this the system you used on the others? All we know is that you read us the specifications and we took them down and they worked.”

“No,” said de Reveski, shaking his lionlike head. “I never know just what form or measure of distortion I shall use until it is complete. That is my secret!”

“You’re telling us!” said the admiral.

His handkerchief reappeared, and he mopped his brow once more.