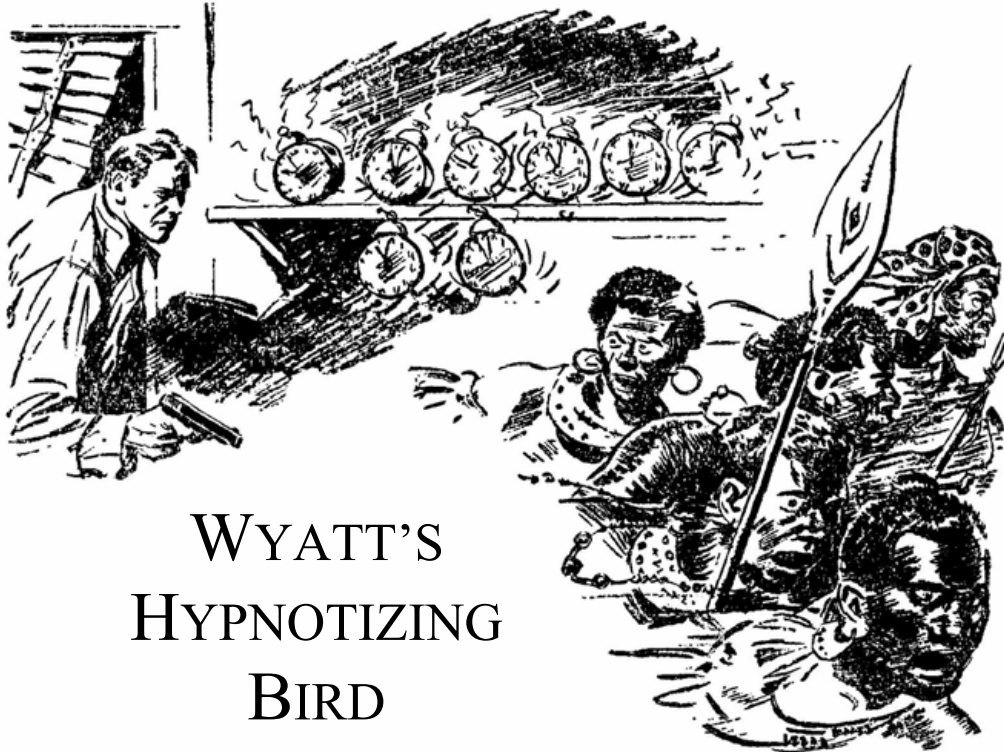


*A Man Who Claimed to Make His Law as He Went Along
Decided to do a Little Business on Singing Sands Island*



WYATT'S
HYPNOTIZING
BIRD

By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

Author of "Wyatt's Chinese Puzzle," "Pearls at Quarter Moon," etc.

"GODFREY mighty, mister! Who was you aimin' to shoot on my island when you got off that schooner this mornin'?"

Wyatt, owner of the bamboo hotel on Singing Sands Island, asked the question. Sumpter Everdene Smith, who had just signed his name to the register, took off his long-tailed coat and revealed in the back pockets of his duck pants a pair of automatic pistols big enough to blow a window through a barn door.

Smith plucked a cigar from his shirt front, bit off the end, spat it out and struck a match. "I heard you've got five thousand headhunters on this island." He was a tall man wearing a khaki helmet, yellow shoes and white spats with pearl buttons big as dimes, and with both front shirt pockets full of varied gear he suggested a walking Chinese bazaar. For all the fountain pens, pencils, cigars, a toothbrush and a comb, both Wyatt and myself were suspicious of the man before he let us see his guns.

"It's against the law to kill the natives here,"

said the hotel owner. Being from Cape Cod, Wyatt was a wary man and he had learned that visitors to remote islands in the South Seas were likely to be dangerous. Mostly. Wyatt's guests lied about themselves until the police from Lantu Vanna made them tell the truth—and the truth did not set them free.

"I make my law as I go along," said Smith. "Will you gents join me in a snort of gin and bitters?"

Wyatt went behind his zinc bar. "We never stopped anybody from spending money in this place—and the bar's open, Mr. Smith."

So we had a round on Smith even though the morning was young. I wanted to size the stranger up, suspecting that he had not come to get gold nuggets from the Mawa River. They grow there as big as a man's fist up the fiver where the headhunters live in tree houses and collect heads of white men. More than once I had been up in the hills for Mawa gold and have seen men die.

It seemed to me that Smith also sized me up as

we lingered at our drinks. I felt that he knew about my gold hunting on Singing Sands Island. He had a penetrating eye—a cold and deadly eye.

Chang Su came up from the beach with two of Smith's fat suitcases.

"Well, gents, I'll go down to the beach and make sure that my baggage is all there."

"How many pieces you got, mister?" asked Wyatt.

Smith turned back from the doorway. "Eleven bags." He went out, followed by Chang Su.

Wyatt swung his lantern-jawed Cape Cod face toward me. "Hell's bells! What have we drawn? Only a lady opery singer would have that much baggage!" His shrewd eyes were full of amazement and the set of his chin was severe.

"Where did he say he came from, Wyatt?"

"Burma. He certainly has been polin' around the country. Damn me! I'll bet the police are lookin' for him." Wyatt looked over toward the doorway at the pair of suitcases. "I wonder what he brung with him."

He came out from behind the bar and walked over to the bags. Glancing down at the beach to make sure that Smith was still there, the hotel keeper lifted a bag. "No heft to it! Light as a mor'gage forecloser's conscience." He shook the suitcase. The contents rattled.

"The stitchin' at the end is broken," I said.

Wyatt put down the suitcase and examined the end. "So 'tis." He thrust his hand through the broken stitching and forced out a small object which proved to be a cardboard box. He squinted at the label. "Hell, an alarm clock!" He thrust his hand through the opening again, felt around inside the suitcase, and announced, "*Full* of alarm clocks!" He walked back to the bar, puzzled look on his leathery face.

"So he's a clock salesman." I grinned at Wyatt.

"This is a hell of an island to sell alarm clocks on. I'm the only white man who lives here regular an' I got an alarm clock. An' what would a clock peddler pack a pair of gats for?"

"We'll watch him an' see what happens."

"Ayah. He'll need a mite of watchin'." Wyatt scratched his thinning sandy hair and his lips clucked with mystification.

SMITH came up from the beach with two bags, Chang Su behind him with two more of the light suitcases. Chang departed for the beach again

but Smith walked over to the bar, blotting the sweat from his forehead with a blue silk handkerchief. "More liquid nourishment, Mr. Wyatt." And to me, "Join us again?"

I nodded, noting that Wyatt's eyes bored into Smith as might the eyes of a basilisk. Smith drank and shuddered.

"Was you aimin' to hang around this landscape very long, mister, an' if so, might I put in my oar an' ask you about the nature of your business in these latitudes?"

"My specialty is introducing to the wild races of the world the modern inventions of civilization." Smith spoke like a lecturer. I felt that he was putting on an act for Wyatt's benefit.

Wyatt grinned. "These headhunters back in th' hills don't give a damn for civilization. They have more fun stayin' wild. But what is it you're sellin'?"

Smith put his elbows on the bar and regarded the bamboo ceiling through cigar smoke with reflective eyes. "Oh, I sell anything from Mexican jumping beans to electric belts that cure lumbago. I go in for anything that's got any money in it. I learned hypnotism in ten lessons and mopped up giving stage performances."

"Godfrey mighty, I know who you be! You're Snake Eye Smith!"

Smith's body shook with a nervous tremor. It struck me that he was alarmed by Wyatt's identification. "That's right. S.E. Smith, known in various parts of the world as Snake Eye. Been up in Burma selling elephant hooks to mahouts. Also Hindu prayers for charms. Printed the charm on a card press that I picked up cheap. I used to be a printer. Them prayer charms sold well, because I set the type in the original Sanskrit."

Wyatt wagged his head in admiration. "Don't it beat hell what an eddication can do for a man! An' back in Cape Cod we think we're all cultured up if we can speak a few words of Injun!"

Chang Su entered with two more suitcases, piled them with the others and went back to the beach.

I asked Smith, "What are you selling now?"

Smith waved a hand toward his baggage. "I'm carrying a line of the latest model streamline alarm clock, with a new patent on the buzzer bell that's guaranteed to make even Sitting Bull get up."

Wyatt simulated astonishment with a face that could be used to open a can of hash. "Alarm clocks

to sell on this island? There ain't nothin' here to wake up for—I got me one already in the cookhouse for my Chink cook. Hell, mister, you're wastin' your time here."

But Smith paid no attention to Wyatt. The new guest went to the suitcase, got a clock and brought it to the bar. "I'm presenting you with a sample to introduce the line. I've eighteen dozen with me."

Wyatt chuckled. "An' you'll take 'em away with you when you go, mister."

"But there's about five thousand natives on this island, Mr. Wyatt. They ought to buy my clocks just for curiosity."

Wyatt leaned confidentially across the bar. "Mister, you're in th' wrong pew, in the wrong church, in the wrong town—an' you'll be the curiosity after the natives here have took your head an' have got the rest of you threaded on a bamboo spear big enough to knock down a he elephant."

"I'll sell every one of my clocks on this island—or shoot the customers."

I asked, "Are you a good shot, Snake Eye?"

Smith turned to me. "I did exhibition shooting with my own wild west show when I was selling Cherokee Indian Long Life Elixir. I was doing well in a wild part of New Jersey until the newspapers found a Turk one hundred forty-two years old. My competitors in the medicine-show business doublecrossed me. They put out a Turkish medicine before I could change my labels from Cherokee to Turkish and things got so bad that my cowboys quit on me and went home to Brooklyn."

"I always had a kind o' hankerin' to learn th' hypnotizin' business," said Wyatt. "You sure as hell will need that part of your eddication sellin' clocks on this island." He jerked his thumb at me. "This gent is a friend o' mine an' he knows what I'm talkin' about. He's been up the Mawa River more'n once an' damn near got the liver scared out o' him."

Smith swung to me with eager interest. "Might I ask what you were doing up the Mawa River on this island?"

"Just looking for gold nuggets."

Smith had a poker face but his pretense of surprise did not fool me. "Gold?" he said casually. "Mean to tell me that gold can be found in the river?"

"No trick at all to pick up a hat full of nuggets in ten minutes—but it is a trick to get away with your head under the hat."

"Could I swap clocks to the natives for gold?"

"You might—and you might not. My advice would be not to try it unless you carry a lot of insurance and happen to be tired of life."

There was a silky wariness in Smith's voice as he asked, "Ever hear of a trader named Anderson down this way?"

"Anderson was a friend of mine. We were partners in gold hunting. The natives here got his head."

"You're the man I came looking for," said Smith. "I'd like to get you to go in with me and we'll try for some of that gold up the—" Smith broke off abruptly as he heard one of his suitcases crash to the floor from the top of the pile as Chang Su deposited a pair of bags on the others. Smith's face froze in horror. The suitcase had burst open and several objects rolled along the floor.

I saw Chang Su stoop to pick up one of the round objects which had rolled into the shadowed corner. Then the Chinese gave a screech that shook the braided walls of the hotel and rattled the dry thatch on the roof.

Without straightening out, Chang took off like a kangaroo through the open doorway, leaving behind his felt-soled shoes. He was jabbering hysterically in Chinese as he crossed the onion garden to the cookhouse in three jumps.

Smith jumped for his bag. He was swearing under his breath as he gathered the round objects from the floor. In frantic haste he stuffed them back into the open bag.

Wyatt stood behind the bar like a bird dog at point, head thrust forward and his narrowed eyes peering at Smith. "What in hell was it that scairt my Chink into a fit?"

THE three Chinese in the cookhouse were in an uproar of jabbering with Chan Su acting as yell leader.

Smith spoke with disarming casualness. "I don't know what scared him."

Wyatt came out from behind the bar. His long legs calipered across the floor toward Smith. The Cape Codder's knees were stiff like the legs of a bull dog when he goes into action. I knew that Wyatt was flaming mad.

Smith backed up to the pile of bags. He certainly was quick on the draw. I did not see him reach for his guns—but he had one in each hand. He snapped at Wyatt, "Don't you interfere with my

property, Mr. Wyatt.”

I pulled my gun from the left shoulder holster. “If you shoot, Snake Eye, I’m in the game,” I said.

“What you got, besides clocks in them bags of your’n?” demanded Wyatt.

“That’s my business—and none of yours, Wyatt.”

“You ain’t so damned private as you think you be. Open that satchel!”

Smith’s eyes drifted to my gun which was trained on him. In that instant Wyatt with both hands, moving with cat-like swiftness, swept the pistols from Smith’s grasp. The weapons clattered to left and right along the floor.

“Take it easy, Mr. Wyatt. No harm done.”

“Harm enough! Now, open up that satchel an’ no fuma-diddle.”

Smith seized the bag, lifted the snaps, and dumped the bag’s contents to the floor.

Wyatt stooped and looked down. I saw his fingers splay open as he clutched at his head with his hands. He backed away in terror and screamed, “Godfrey mighty! He’s got a lot of white men’s heads!”

Smith waved a cautioning hand at me as I rose from my chair. “Not real heads! Medical specimens—I had them made to order when I was selling Cherokee Indian Long Life Elixir.”

Wyatt staggered to the bar and drank from the gin bottle. His hands shook. “You scairt me—an’ Chang Su—bald-headed! I don’t want such fangle-dangles brought into my place. We got enough head business on this island.” He stepped to the door and bawled across the onion garden to the cookhouse, “Stop that jawin’ Chang! One piece-ee man got one piece-ee head, no cut-ee off walk-ee mans. Him no dead, but make-ee white man head-ee for doctor man topside.”

The excited tumult in the cookhouse stopped abruptly. Wyatt came back and said to me, “But for me pickin’ up the Chineese language I’d have a hell of a time handlin’ my Chinks.”

I walked across the floor and looked at the manufactured heads. They were made of rubber, brown parchment paper, doll hair and porcelain teeth—perfect replicas of the smoked heads of white men hanging in the headhouses of the wild tribes up in the mountains of Singing Sands Island.

I looked at Smith. “Snake Eye,” I said, “you never had those heads made to order. My friend Anderson, the trader, had a supply of these heads.

They were made for the government to sell to natives to stop them from taking real heads. Now, no nonsense! Isn’t that the truth?”

Smith sheepishly nodded. “Anderson had them in storage over in Australia, and he being dead couldn’t pay the storage charges. So I bought the heads cheap at auction. Heard there was a chance to swap ‘em down here for gold—so I came looking for you. I understood that you knew the game down here.”

“Good gosh!” exploded Wyatt. “Whyn’t you say so in th’ first place? No need for you to scare th’ pigtails off’n us all.”

Smith gathered up his guns and pocketed them. “Why can’t we three try tradin’ and split the profit three ways?”

Wyatt’s face brightened. “That sounds like a dicker. I’ll take a whirl at it. But who’s goin’ to call on th’ customers?”

I said, “We need Chang Su for that job.”

“By snum,” said Wyatt, “you’re right! We need Chink brains!”

“When’ll we talk it over with Chang?” asked Smith.

I suggested, “Put your clocks and the factory heads on the shelves there near the bar. Chang’ll get accustomed to the lot as stock in trade. A Chink understands anything if you show him how to make money.”

“Tell you what I’ll do,” said Wyatt. “I’ll take one of them heads over to th’ cookhouse an’ show my Chinks that they ain’t real heads. That’ll quieten ‘em down.” He picked up a head and left us.

SMITH and I unpacked three dozen alarm clocks and arranged them along the shelves after winding them. With them we put a row of the heads made for trading.

Wyatt came back grinning and reported. “Chang an’ the other two got the idee quick—an’ Chang says can do. By gorry, them Chinks’ll think up a way to turn them heads into gold.” But what I disliked about the business was that neither Wyatt nor Smith felt that the plan was dangerous. They would listen to none of my warnings.

While Wyatt and Smith walked in the palm grove during the afternoon, I had a bright idea. I wound all the alarms of the clocks and set them to ring at intervals of about ten minutes, beginning at midnight. Wyatt slept in a little room off the bar. I

had a room upstairs and Smith was to occupy a room across the narrow hallway from mine. As the flooring was made of split bamboo and about as tight as a basket, I knew that Smith and I would hear the clocks when they exploded—and get the benefits of Wyatt's fluent remarks.

We all went to bed a little after ten. At that time there was no light in the cookhouse behind the hotel. There was a white moonlight and not a palm top was stirring. The gentle surf on the beach was a soothing sound and I quickly fell asleep.

There was a window-like opening cut in the braided back wall of the hotel facing the jungled hills a few yards from the building. This opening was covered with copper screening. The moonlight cut through at an angle that illumined part of the hallway floor outside the open door of my room. The door that led to the upper front veranda was closed and fastened with *bejuca*—a dried rattan. All the doors and *kajangs* of the building were secured to make sure that no headhunters could sneak in on us.

I went to sleep grinning. But I didn't grin when I woke up. My ears had caught a furtive creaking of the bamboo floor out in the hall. As I lifted in bed on an elbow to listen the creaking stopped. My right hand went under the pillow for a gun.

Staring out at the moonlit patch in the hallway I saw something that crinkled the hair on the back of my neck. A naked brown man with long hair down his back and a headhunter's dilly-bag on his shoulders was crawling along toward my open door.

I watched the native slowly rise to his feet. He held a head-axe. I lifted my gun but held my fire until the headhunter made a better target. Then my eyes were blinded for an instant by a flash of orange-colored fire. I knew that Smith had fired from his open doorway a little beyond mine. The headhunter leaped straight up, curled backward, and his body dropped upon the bamboo floor and in the moonlit patch lay still. As Smith's bullet hit him the native had thrown his head-axe toward the rafters. The weapon fell across him.

Smith asked in a casual tone, "Think I got him?"

"He's flat as a wet mop," I answered.

Wyatt bellowed from below. "What'n hell's goin' on up there?"

Smith answered, "I had to shoot a customer."

WE HEARD the click of a lamp chimney and the violent scratch of a match under us in Wyatt's room. The lamp's flame threw a million pinpricks of light through the floor of my room.

"Blow out that lamp!" I yelled. "I can't shoot up here with an illuminated floor!"

Smith called to me, "Four more of them babies along the mopboard between your door and the stairs."

"Damn it all!" bawled Wyatt. He blew out his lamp. "I can't sleep in a shootin' gallery!"

Another naked native appeared outside my door. I caught a whiff of the coconut oil on his body. I fired. With his head-axe the native dropped across the man Smith had shot. The mosquito netting at the foot of my bed took fire from my muzzle blast. I smothered the flame with my left hand.

"Don't shoot my furniture up there full o' holes!" yelled Wyatt.

I was so annoyed that I deliberately fired at the water pitcher on the stand near my door. The pitcher crashed. Water rained down through the floor on Wyatt.

"If you'd stop swearing, Mr. Wyatt," suggested Snake Eye, "we could keep our minds on our work up here."

"I'll get me my shotgun," said Wyatt, "an' just blow hell out of th' first headhunter I meet up with."

Frantic Chinese yelling erupted from the cookhouse. Over that racket my ears caught the swift rattling of leaves and vines on the front upper veranda outside my closed *kajang*.

"They're coming up the vines of the front veranda, Snake Eye," I called. "Watch out!"

Below in the bar there was the sound of bursting rattan hinges. The headhunters were hacking with big knives at the *attap* walls to get in at Wyatt. Blades began to hammer at my *kajang* outside on the upper veranda. I fired three shots in that direction, got out of bed to get new cartridge clips, to get both my guns into action. Snake Eye was firing down the hallway to stop the attack from the back of the building. There were more yells from the cookhouse and I heard the swish of feet running swiftly through the dried onion tops in the garden. The Chinese were in flight.

Wyatt's shotgun let go two blasts. He swore with amazing venom as he clicked new shells into the breech of his gun. He let both barrels go again in a single blast. "Damn your skins! I'll l'arn y' to

keep out o' here!"

Against the background of moonlight on the bay as seen through the screen of my *kajang* I could see the outlines of a swarming mob of headhunters flailing with their big knives to cut their way through to me. I began firing at the wall at ten second intervals with both my guns. Snake Eye cut loose with lead from his room to the front veranda.

FROM Wyatt's swearing below I had a fairly good idea of the situation with him. He was still in his room, and as fast as he loaded and fired his shotgun through his partly open door into the bar, he would pull the door shut and reload. The barroom was overrun with natives.

I heard clocks fall to the floor in a second or two between shots. Then there came a terrific roar that made even Wyatt's shotgun sound like a popgun. The first clock had cut loose with the alarm. I realized that it was midnight. The throbbing hammer on that clock's bell almost drowned out the reports of our talking guns. The alarm stopped. I heard a wild scrambling below. The headhunters were stampeding in panic. An alarm clock was a novelty to them that threw them into terror.

Wyatt demanded indignantly, "Who sot that damned alarm?"

There was a sudden and amazing silence that lasted for a second. The jungle behind the hotel shook as if hit by a hurricane. There must have been five hundred headhunters, who did not like alarm clocks, on their way home in a hurry. Our front upper veranda seemed cleared of attackers.

We all held our fire.

Another alarm clock broke loose. When the clangor stopped, Wyatt yelled, "Damn that hypnotizing bird! I wish to hell he was back in Burma sellin' them furrin' prayers o' his'n! Bustin' clocks, baggage full o' heads that give me th' creeps, an' my damned hotel in th' middle of the night like a crew of Swiss bell ringers on a drunk." Then he let go with both barrels. Natives screamed and we heard the confusion of men running in panic.

"We're coming down, Wyatt!" yelled Snake Eye. We flashlighted our way along the hall. The copper screening was cut from the window opening at the head of the stairs. We knew then how the natives had got to the upper floor.

Guns ready, Snake Eye led the way into the bar. My flashlight over his shoulder revealed a scene of wreckage. *Kajangs* were burst inward, tables were overturned, spears, hatchets and blowguns were all over the place and dead hillmen were on the floor. Wyatt had been shouting for Chang Su, but he left off to examine the wreckage with us.

"You find you a customer all right, Snake Eye," he remarked, reloading his gun. "I'll take the whole stock of alarm clocks. They sure are effective against the heathen; eddication ain't such a bad thing."

He grabbed for a bottle of gin, drew the cork and poured the liquor down his throat while the yellow lamplight glowed cheerfully on the wreckage of the Singing Sands Hotel.