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KING of the ISLANDS LAST CHANCE!

It's touch-and-go with the Boy Trader of the South Seas—Death goggling at him in the very moment that he lays his hands on precious Pink Coral. In the spot where that fortune lies he is likely to lay his bones!

By CHARLES HAMILTON

Torchlight on Spears!

"THE finish!" muttered King of the Islands, and clenched his hands with rage. The last glimmer of hope was gone. The mysterious island of Tunaviva, lost in the wastes of the South Seas, and Billy the Beachcomber's tale of the precious pink coral, had brought disaster to the boy trader of the Pacific.

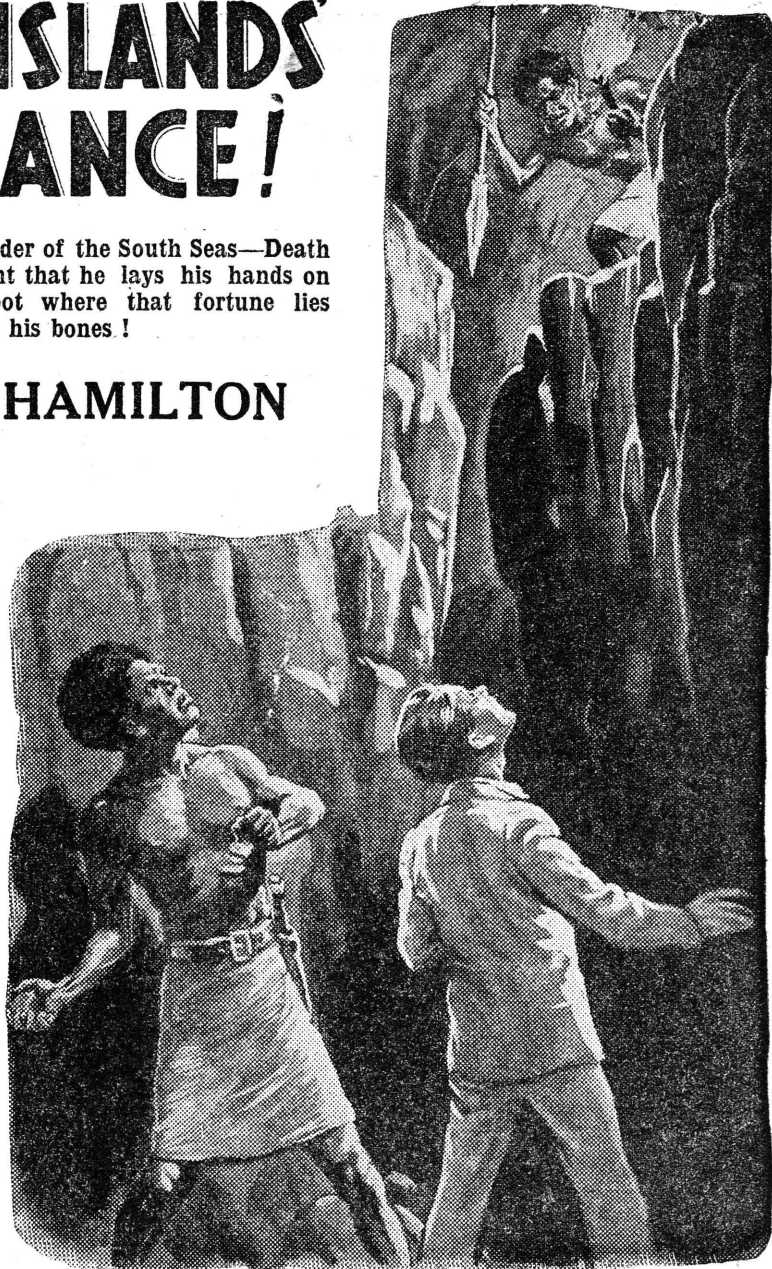
Standing at the bottom of a deep rift in the floor of a sea-cave under the towering cliff of Tunaviva, Ken looked upwards at the ruddy flare of torches overhead.

Koko, the Kanaka boatswain of Ken's ketch, the Dawn, leaned on the rock, impassive. He knew that there was no hope. He was not thinking of himself, but of the white master whom he had striven in vain to save, and whose fate he was prepared to share!

The darkness was broken only by the red flare of the torches in the hands of Tokoloo and Ko'oo, the two black Santa Cruz boys watching above. They flared over the edge of the rocky rift, and in the flare gleamed the broad blades of spears—ready to lunge if the prisoners below came within reach. Two black faces grinned down at the boy trader as he stared up. The pit in the cave-floor was deep and its sides steep, but the boy trader and his boatswain could have climbed out but for the spears that waited above. To climb was sudden death while the Santa Cruz boys waited and watched!

While King of the Islands stood there, clenching his hands with helpless rage, Pinto, the white man of Tunaviva, was gone with his crew to seize the Dawn, anchored in the lagoon. The ketch, manned now by the five Hiva-Oa boys, was at his mercy. King of the Islands had lost all—his ship and his shipmate, Kit Hudson.

All was lost—and for what? To give Billy the Beachcomber, the worthless outcast of Tahiti, a chance to hunt for precious pink coral on Tunaviva—a wild tale in which Ken did not even believe! And the beachcomber himself was a prisoner in the hands of the secret men of Tunaviva. He was still alive, but doomed when Mr. Jam, the half-caste



trader in false pearls—who was Billy's implacable enemy—arrived at the island. Mr. Jam's lugger had been signalled in the offing.

It was while Pinto—a white man from Mindanao in the Philippines, who had been left in charge of the island by Mr. Jam—was signalling to that lugger that Ken made his desperate effort to escape, only to be trapped in this rift in the floor of the sea-cave. And Koko, swimming to his aid, had shared his fate. Now they were doomed! The men of Tunaviva had triumphed, and no one outside that speck of land in the lonely Pacific would ever know what had been the fate of King of the Islands!

There was a cackle of laughter from above. Tokoloo leaned over the edge, to let the smoky torchlight fall on the upturned, furious face of the

Ken's eyes gleamed up at the jeering, spear-armed native. Swiftly, Koko grasped a loose lump of coral.

boy trader. He made a gesture with the spear in his other black hand.

"You feller go finish plenty close up!" grinned Tokoloo. "Feller Pinto, white master belong me, go take ketch belong you, sar! You stop along this place along you finish!"

Ken's eyes gleamed up at him. Koko moved from the rock, stooped, and grasped a loose lump of coral. With a sudden jerk of his powerful arm he sent the jagged lump of coral whizzing up.

There was a yell from Tokoloo as it crashed in his grinning black face. The torch fell from his grasp and fluttered down into the rift, dropping

beside King of the Islands. For a second it seemed that Tokoloo might follow it, and Ken's heart beat with a sudden hope. But the black man recovered himself, and squirmed back from the perilous verge, panting with rage.

"You plenty bad feller, black boy!" roared Koko. "You no talkee bad feller talk along white master belong me!"

"You feller Koko, you wait along me come along that place! Killy you plenty too much along spear belong me!" yelled Tokoloo.

Koko's eyes glittered. He snatched up the fallen torch and stared round for his bush-knife, which had fallen into some crevice when he tumbled into the rift. In the darkness it had been impossible to find it. But with the torch in his brown hand, Koko swiftly discovered it, and clutched it.

"My word, sar!" he breathed. "S'pose that two feller come along this place, we kill that feller close up, sar!"

KEN'S heart throbbed. Pinto had ordered the two blacks to keep watch, and spear the men in the rift if they attempted to climb out. Such an attempt spelled instant death under the lunging spears. But if the blacks descended to come to close quarters, there was a chance—more than a chance.

The long, heavy bush-knife in Koko's sinewy hand was a match for the spears, and Ken snatched up a lump of coral to use as a weapon.

If only Tokoloo, in his rage, came to close quarters, and Ko'oo came with him!

"You feller Ko'oo, you come along this feller Tokoloo! Killy that feller plenty too quick!" they heard Tokoloo calling to the other Santa Cruz boy.

"You plenty big fool, Tokoloo!" came Ko'oo's answer. "You stop along this place, all samee white master Pinto sing out along us feller."

"You too much fright along feller Koko!" jeered Tokoloo.

"Me plenty too much fright along big feller bush-knife belong that feller," answered Ko'oo coolly. "Two feller go finish along that bush-knife, along night he stop! Me no like go finish along that big feller bush-knife."

Ken gritted his teeth as Tokoloo jeered again at his companion, but made no movement to descend the rift. The mention of the "big feller bush-knife," which in his rage he had forgotten, had evidently daunted his courage. In a night attack on the Dawn, Koko had wielded that bush-knife with terrible effect, and it was fresh in the mind of Ko'oo. On second thoughts, Tokoloo also preferred to keep at a safe distance from it!

In breathless anxiety, Ken waited. But there was no movement from the blacks. They had settled down to watch again. They had the upper hand, and they intended to keep it.

"No comey," murmured Koko, in

deep disappointment. "That feller too much fright!"

"The last chance gone!" muttered Ken.

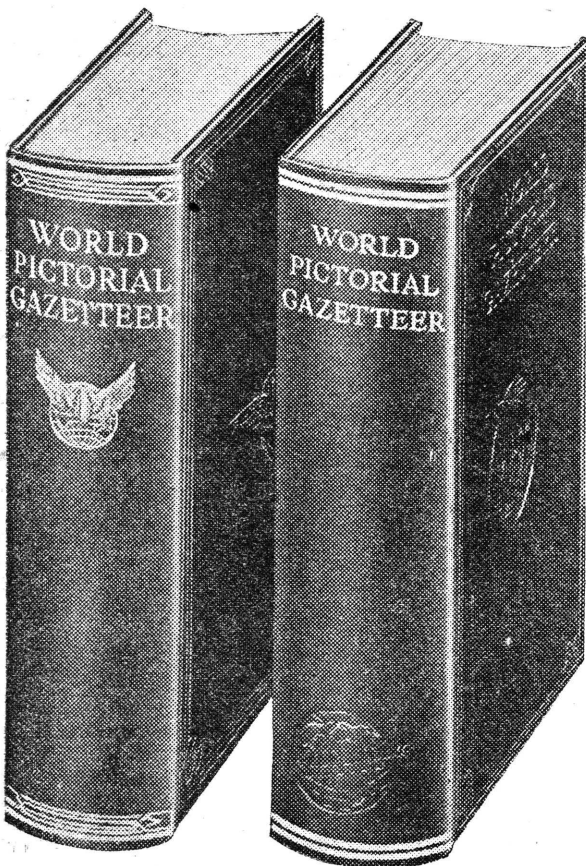
The blacks above did not look over the verge again. They kept out of the reach of another missile. Had a black, fuzzy head appeared in sight now that Koko had his bush-knife in hand, it would have meant sudden death to the black boy—for Koko's aim with a thrown knife was as deadly as any white man's with a fire-arm. But the blacks kept out of reach, content with watching, their spears ready to lunge if the men below attempted to climb.

Ken leaned wearily on the rock. The torch, stuck in a crevice by Koko, still burned, and its smoky light glimmered on the pale, desperate face of the boy trader. With an impatient gesture, he flung down the lump of coral he had clutched up to use as a weapon. It was useless now.

As it dropped close to the torch the rosy glimmer of it caught Ken's eyes, and he started. To the feel it was ordinary coral, such as formed the foundation of Tunaviva and a thousand other coral atolls. But as it lay in the light its colour was different, and a startling thought leaped into Ken's mind as he remembered Billy the Beachcomber's tale of pink coral on Tunaviva. Stooping, he picked up the lump again.

"My sainted Sam!" breathed Ken, staring at it. The colour was a pale rose pink—such a colour as was seldom seen in coral. Koko glanced at him,

(Continued on next page)



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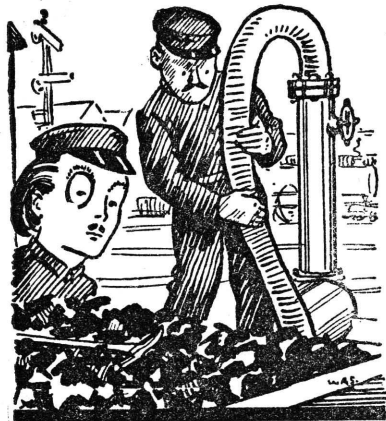
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**King of the Islands'
Last Chance!**

astonished. Ken stared blankly at the coral in his hand.

"My sainted Sam!" he repeated. "Pink coral! Billy was right, and there is a fortune on Tunaviva!"

For a minute Ken stood looking at that lump, glimmering rosy in the torchlight—worth fifty pounds at Sydney. He forgot where he was—trapped, his ship lost, his life to be counted by hours, if not by minutes. Then, as remembrance returned, he flung the precious lump down, with a bitter laugh.

Then there was a fortune on Tunaviva, and he had found it. There was the precious pink coral, and where it lay, in that den of death under the cliff of Tunaviva, he was likely to lay his bones!

The Capture of the Dawn!

"FELLER belong Tunaviva comey along this ship!" said Danny the cooky-boy, staring over the teak rail of the Dawn.

Lompo and Lufu, Kolulo and Tomoo lined the rail, staring across the shining lagoon at the approaching boat. There was deep alarm in the looks of the brown-skinned Hiva-Oa boys.

Four brawny Santa Cruz blacks were pulling at the oars in the boat, and four others squatted with spears in their hands. In the stern-sheets sat Pinto, the white man of Tunaviva, master of the island in the absence of Mr. Jam. There was a revolver in the grip of Pinto, and his dark eyes glittered from his dusky face. Alarm and uneasiness deepened in the looks of Ken King's crew as they watched him draw nearer and nearer.

The five Hiva-Oa boys were faithful to their white master, but he was away, and his mate was away—slain or prisoners in the hands of the enemy. And Koko, whose desperate defence had saved the ketch in the last attack, was gone also. The odds were heavy against them, and a white man was leading the attack. They stared at the boat as it came, and exchanged troubled and dubious glances.

Lompo picked up a rifle, but he allowed the butt to remain resting on the deck. Kolulo followed his example, then laid the rifle down again.

"Feller King of the Islands say killy Tunaviva feller s'pose he comey along this ship!" muttered Lompo.

"Feller King of the Islands go finish!" said Tomoo. "He no stop any more altogether."

"S'pose we shootee along gun, that feller along boat killy us feller close-up!" mumbled Lufu.

"King of the Islands no stop," said Danny. "Feller Hudson no stop. Feller Koko no stop! What name we makee fight along that feller along boat?"

The crew nodded assent to the cooky-boy. Left to their own devices, of what use was it to put up a resistance to overwhelming odds? Danny the cooky-boy, at least, had made up his mind. He went back into his little galley, leaving the four seamen

on deck. More and more uneasily they watched the nearing boat. Lompo at last lifted his rifle.

"S'pose that feller along boat plenty fright along gun belong me," he muttered. "S'pose he too much fright, he run along lagoon."

"He no fright along you," said Tomoo derisively. "He plenty fright along King of the Islands, plenty fright along feller Hudson, plenty fright along Koko, along big feller bush-knife stop along hand belong Koko. He no fright along you."

Lompo hesitated. The fierce face of the white man in the boat daunted him. But he resolved to take a chance, in a last effort to carry out the orders of his lost skipper. He levelled the rifle across the teak rail, aiming at the boat, now hardly five fathoms distant.

"You feller along boat, you stop along lagoon!" shouted Lompo. "S'pose you comey along this ship, this feller shoot along gun, all samee feller King of the Islands he say!"

Pinto, with a savage laugh, lifted his revolver, and the boat came on without a pause. He did not fear Kanaka shooting, even at close quarters. Desperately Lompo pulled the trigger.

Bang! roared the rifle, and the bullet kicked up the water a couple of yards from the boat. Splashes fell on the white man and the Santa Cruz boys. Pinto's eyes glittered over his revolver as he fired back with truer aim. But as he fired, Lompo dodged down under the rail, and the Filipino's bullet hummed away across the ketch, and whistled over the lagoon on the farther side. There was a yell from Lompo.

"You no shoot along this feller, sar! This feller plenty good boy along you, sar!"

THE boat bumped on the hull of the Dawn. The black boys hooked on to the rail, and Pinto came scrambling on board, his eyes gleaming, the smoking revolver in his hand. Danny peeped out of the galley and popped back again out of sight. Lompo, Kolulo, Tomoo, and Lufu backed away towards the fore-castle, holding out their empty hands in sign of surrender.

Four of the blacks clambered rapidly on board after their leader, their spears flashing in the sun. Pinto lifted his weapon, as if with the intention of sending a bullet among the Kanakas, and there came a howl from all four throats at once.

"You no shootee this feller, sar! This feller good feller along you, sar, along King of the Islands no stop any more!"

"This feller too much good feller along you, sar!" squealed Danny from the galley.

Pinto lowered his revolver, with a harsh laugh. He had expected an easy task in capturing the Dawn, now that the giant boatswain, as well as the two white masters, was gone. But it had been easier than he had expected.

Ship and crew were at his mercy. Only the night before, Koko had leaped among the assailants, brandishing his terrible bush-knife like a

madman in his rage, and driven off the attack. But Koko was no common Kanaka. Now that he was gone, there was no resistance left.

"You feller boy, you belong me now white master belong you no stop!" snapped the Filipino. "You stop along this feller island, you obey order along me, you work along black boy belong me, you savvy?"

"Yes, sar!" stammered Lompo, only too glad that he had not to pay more dearly for his hasty shot.

"Five feller boy belong me no stop!" said Pinto, by which he meant that five of the Santa Cruz blacks had fallen in the fighting on Tunaviva. "You takee place belong that feller boy, you savvy. S'pose you no jump along order along me, you makee kai-kai along feller shark!"

"Us feller good feller along you, sar!" said Tomoo humbly. "Us feller belong you, sar, along King of the Islands no stop any more."

Had King of the Islands suddenly appeared on the deck of the Dawn, his crew would have backed him up against the odds. But King of the Islands they believed to be dead, and they were thinking of their own brown skins. Unless the boy trader or his mate reappeared, Pinto had no trouble to look for from the Hiva-Oa boys.

White men he would have thrown into the lagoon; but natives were useful to him in the work, whatever it was, that went on on that island of mystery—useful as his own black crew.

What he and his crew were doing on Tunaviva, which had to be kept so

fatally secret from the outer world, was as deep a mystery to the Hiva-Oa boys as to King of the Islands and his mate. All they knew was that something was going on, on Tunaviva, under the orders of Mr. Jam, the trader in false pearls. But what that secret "something" was, no man on the Dawn had been able to guess.

A grin of triumph relaxed the dusky face of the Filipino. He made a sign to Danny, as the cooky-boy peered out of the galley, and Danny joined the seamen on deck.

Pinto rapped out an order; the Dawn's whaleboat was lowered, and the five Hiva-Oa boys crowded into it. They were ordered to pull for the beach, near the base of the high basaltic cliff, and they obeyed in silence. The oars dashed into the lagoon, and the whaleboat glided away. Pinto was left in undisputed possession of Ken King's ship.

"Feller lugger comey along reef, sar!" said one of the Santa Cruz boys, pointing.

Pinto stood by the rail, and stared towards the reef passage at the foot of the cliff. Beyond the rugged sides of the high cliff he could see far out on the Pacific, beyond the reef passage and the foam that broke on the teeth of the coral. A dingy lugger was beating down to the opening in the reef, and the Filipino stared at it long and hard. It was the vessel in which his master, Mr. Jam, was returning to Tunaviva.

There was no doubt of that, for it had signalled from far out at sea, and he had answered the signal from the

cliff summit. But it was not the same lugger in which Mr. Jam had left the island weeks ago—it was a small, dirty banana-boat from Mangareva.

King of the Islands could have told him that Mr. Jam's lugger had been wrecked in Tahiti seas, and that he had saved the half-caste from the floating wreck. But the boy trader had told him nothing, and Pinto was puzzled. Distant as the lugger yet was, he had a glimpse of a fat figure in white ducks, with a red cummerbund wound round the podgy waist, and he knew that it was Mr. Jam.

"You feller Lialo, you stop along this ship!" said Pinto.

He stepped back into his boat, and the black crew pulled back across the lagoon towards the reef passage. One of the blacks, spear in hand, remained in charge of the captured ketch, watching the boat as it pulled into the reef passage to tow the lugger in.

Running the Gauntlet!

MR. JAM, the half-caste trader in false pearls, stood on the deck of the lugger running down to the reef passage of Tunaviva. Fat and flabby, his enormous waist encircled by a crimson cummerbund, he was a conspicuous figure, recognisable at a good distance. The secret men of Tunaviva, watching from the high cliff or from the lagoon, could not fail to see him and send out a boat to tow the lugger in. He had signalled from the sea, his man on Tunaviva had answered the signal, and there could

(Continued on next page)

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be no suspicion that anything was wrong on the lugger.

But from the point of view of Mr. Jam, there was very much wrong on the lugger. The white man who crouched in the tiny, dirty cuddy could not be seen from the island, but from the tail of his eye Mr. Jam could see him and the revolver in his grip. And the sweat ran down his fat olive face with the knowledge that his worthless life hung on a thread.

The white man was Kit Hudson, King of the Islands' Australian mate. Tossed from the cliffs of Tunaviva, he had been swept out to sea and was on the point of drowning when the lugger had come along, towing its dinghy. Kit had grasped the tow-rope, climbed aboard the dinghy, and laid low until the opportunity occurred to get aboard the lugger and make himself master of it. Now he was coming back to Tunaviva, to rescue or avenge his shipmate.

To the three Easter Island boys who manned the lugger it mattered not a whit that the half-caste who had hired their boat at Mangareva was no longer in command. They stared curiously at Tunaviva, surprised to know that there were men on the loneliest island in the Pacific, reputed to be uninhabited.

And they jumped promptly to obey any order from the white man who kept out of sight as the banana-boat beat down to the reef. They had

obeyed Mr. Jam, little guessing that it was not his intention to allow them to sail away from Tunaviva when they had landed him there; but much more promptly they obeyed Kit Hudson.

Even more promptly than the Easter boys did the fat pearl trader jump to orders. The rage in his breast was beyond words. His black eyes burned when he glanced at Hudson. But his fear was greater than his rage. It was his own revolver that was in Hudson's grasp, and he knew that at a sign of treachery, the mate of the Dawn would shoot him down like a dog.

A shiver ran through his podgy limbs when he caught the glinting eyes from the dusky little cuddy. Under those eyes, he had to take the lugger into the lagoon of Tunaviva, or fall riddled with bullets.

And if a single shot rang from the cliff, it would be followed by one on the lugger—with Mr. Jam as the target. From the bottom of his rascally heart the trader in false pearls hoped that Pinto and his men would suspect nothing, and would let the lugger pass in peace.

Already, on the rock terrace high up the cliff, several Santa Cruz boys could be seen staring down at the lugger. Had they suspected that a foe was coming, they could have swept the little craft with rifle-fire.

Hudson, peering from the cuddy, could see the rock-terrace and the black men looking down—some of them, as likely as not, the very men who had hurled him from that

precipice, to be swept out by the tide and drowned helplessly in the wastes of the Pacific, as they supposed.

"You dog!" His voice came quietly but grimly to the ears of the half-caste. "They're watching us—take care! A single shot, and you're a dead man, you scum!"

Hudson had put on a grass hat belonging to one of the Easter boys, and had one of the blacks glimpsed him he could only have supposed him to be one of the lugger's crew. The Australian was very careful that his face should not be seen.

Mr. Jam shivered. The lugger was close to the passage through the reef now, and he had sighted the boat pulling out to tow her in. There were seven blacks in the boat, and Pinto sat in the stern-sheets, his eyes on the lugger. Seven brawny blacks and an armed and desperate white man—overwhelming odds for Kit Hudson had Mr. Jam called them to his rescue! But Mr. Jam was not thinking of calling. He was dreading that they might learn how matters stood and attempt to rescue him without waiting for a call!

The boat was within earshot now, and Pinto stood up and waved his hand. Mr. Jam snarled an order to the Easter boys, and the lugger heaved. The Tunaviva boat ran alongside, a black hand hooked on, and Pinto made a movement to leap on board. With a hurried gesture, Mr. Jam waved him back.

"Remain permanently in boat!" he snapped. "If presence on board

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