

Peace Child

By Don Richardson

Part 1

INTRODUCTION

The Sawi people of New Guinea are one of an estimated four hundred tribes in the western half of New Guinea, called Irian Jaya at the time of writing this book. Each of these tribes is distinct and unique, a little cosmos to itself with its own world view, its own set of legends, its own sense of humor.

In 1962, Carol and I went to live among the Sawi. As we studied their language and probed into their legends and customs, we found that we were living and working among a people who honor treachery as an ideal. In many of the legends that the Sawi people tell to their children around the campfires, the heroes are men who formed friendships with the express purpose of later betraying the befriended one to be killed and eaten. The Sawi expression for this practice is “to fatten with friendship for the slaughter.”

In recognizing that the idealization of treachery was a part of the Sawi view of life, we understood why we felt a certain culture shock in living among them. Yet we had been sent there by God to win them, to overcome within a few short years this idealization of treachery which had been part of their way of life over centuries, possibly millenniums, of time.

The key God gave us to the heart of the Sawi people was the principle of redemptive analogy—the application to local custom of spiritual truth. The principle we discerned was that God had already provided for the evangelization of these people by means of redemptive analogies in their own culture. These analogies were our stepping-stones, the secret entryway by which the gospel came into the Sawi culture and started both a spiritual and a social revolution from within.

As Carol and I ministered to the Sawi by means of the “peace child” and other redemptive analogies, we watched in suspense to see if the Spirit of God would actually use this means of communication for the regeneration of these cannibalistic, head-hunting people. He did!

In an age when all of mankind is rapidly becoming interdependent within a single global community, cross-cultural communication unavoidably becomes one of man’s highest priorities. *Peace Child* tells of the agony—and the triumph—of our attempt to probe one of the world’s most violent cultures to its foundations and then to communicate meaningfully with members of that culture.

The result, we believe, is an adventure in human understanding which will infuse the reader with an even greater and more compassionate regard for the earth’s endangered minority peoples.

Don Richardson

Chapter 1 AMBASSADOR TO HAENAM

As the sun rose, Yae gazed down through the floor slats of his Mauro village treehouse at the dark surface of the Kronkel River forty feet below. His calm, black eyes studied the slow drift of leaves on the waveless surface. The leaves were drifting downstream, but at a decreasing rate, evidence that the rising tide of the Arafura Sea, twenty-five miles to the west, was beginning to stay the seaward crawl of the Kronkel.

Soon the tide would reverse the river’s current completely. For a few hours it would force the black, algae-stained Kronkel back into the immense womb of the south New Guinea swamp which had spawned it. Yae had been waiting for this moment to begin his journey upstream, aided by the current.

Yae’s wife, Kautap, sat cross-legged by the central cooking place inside the treehouse. Her youngest child, still unnamed, lay asleep on her lap, cradled in the tresses of her heavy grass skirt. Leaning over the baby, Kautap sprinkled water from a bamboo cruse into the white sago flour scattered on the bark

pallet before her. Slowly she kneaded the flour and water into a paste, while smoke from the smoldering fire bothered her eyes.

Her older offspring, two-year-old Miri, was playing contentedly beside her on a woven mat. His only toy was a human skull whose sad eyeholes gaped vacuously at the smoke-blackened ceiling as it rolled about. Already polished to a bright ochre sheen by years of fond handling, the skull was kept as a memento of Yae's long-dead father, and also as a fetish to ward off evil spirits. But to little Miri it was only a shiny toy.

Yae spoke to Kautap without turning to her. "*Uvur haramavi maken; du famud, es!* The tide is about to turn: cook my sago at once!"

Her deft black fingers quickly worked the damp sago paste into a long, slender shape, wrapped it in *yohom* leaves, and laid it among the hot coals.

Yae meanwhile donned his ornaments in preparation for the journey. He covered his naked loins with the kind of narrow grass skirt which, in the Sawi tribe, could be worn only by men who had slain an enemy in battle. Yae had slain five. He had taken heads from three of his victims, and this was indicated by the three bracelets of gleaming wild boar tusks which hung around his left elbow.

His prowess in hunting was displayed next by his *sudafen*, a six-foot-long necklace of animal teeth which he draped in two loops around his neck. Each wild pig, crocodile, dog or marsupial he had killed had contributed one tooth to the necklace. Bands of finely woven rattan also were fitted tightly above and below the muscles on each arm and just below his knees. Into the pierced septum of his nose he proudly inserted a six-inch length of hollow bone carved from the thighbone of a pig and sharpened to a point on each end.

If he had been journeying to attend an all-night dance, there were other ornaments he could have worn as well—a flame-colored bird-of-paradise plume, a headband of gold and brown marsupial fur, a splay of white cockatoo feathers, as well as white and red body paint made from powdered sea shells and red earth. But Yae's mission was purely diplomatic and not festive, so he

was content simply to adorn himself with the white and gold of polished bone and braided rattan.

Kautap used a pair of tongs to remove the sago loaf from the coals, brushed off the charred leaves, and handed the steaming "swamp bread" to her husband. Yae ate half and placed half in his small sago bag made of woven fibers, along with a chunk of pork which Kautap had earlier smoked over the fire. Hanging the bag from his shoulder, he drew his six-foot-long bow made of black palmwood down from the overhead weapon rack. One end of the bow was tipped with a needle-sharp cassowary talon, so it could be used as a spear in close combat. Yae also selected a handful of sharply barbed, bamboo-shafted arrows. Grasping both bow and arrows in one hand, he took lastly his paddle which, along with his war shield, drum, stone axe, spear, canoe and bow, completed the main hierarchy of his earthly possessions.

The paddle was a striking example of Sawi artistry. Fashioned from a single nine-foot column of dark red ironwood, it featured a wide rectangular blade engraved with exotic designs, and at the upper end of its shaft, a boldly carved ancestral figure. Above the ancestral figure, the characteristic wooden barbs and cassowary talon warned that Yae's paddle, like his bow, could also double as a spear.

Yae stepped out onto the porch of the treehouse. Around him the six other treehouses of Mauro village seemed to float in the morning's golden haze, awkward, humpbacked, loaf shaped. They were all about forty feet in length, and ranged from thirty to fifty feet in height above the ground, soaring over the tangled underbrush on long spindly tree legs. In addition there were four longhouses at elevations of less than twenty feet.

Not all Sawi families had the incentive to build treehouses, choosing to leave themselves more vulnerable to surprise attack than were the treehouse dwellers, who commanded an easy view of all their surroundings. In a tall treehouse, women and children could cower in relative safety while their

husbands, fathers and brothers rained arrows down upon an encroaching enemy, or even descended to the ground to engage the enemy in *waru mim*, “spear play.”

As Yae began his descent of the long, vine-fastened ladder, Kautap raised her voice in complaint. “Why do you go so often to visit Haenam? Doesn’t your skin feel uneasy going there?”

Yae continued his descent. “If I had no friends there I wouldn’t go,” was his only reply. The ladder sloped back under the treehouse for shelter from tropical downpours and for shade. Yae descended the entire length without once touching a finger to the ladder for support, balancing perfectly on each precarious rung.

Near the foot of the ladder his younger brother, Sao, sat hunched on a log trembling with malarial chill, trying in vain to eke enough warmth from the morning sun which now glared into the village, causing steam to rise from dew-wet foliage. Yae spoke comfortingly to him, but Sao could hardly answer, his teeth were chattering so hard.

A few yards downstream Yae’s cousin, Wasi, and Wasi’s three wives were loading their sago-cutting instruments into a canoe for a trip to the jungle. Yae called to Wasi. “I’m going to Haenam. I’ll return just after dark. I’m going to invite my friends there to come to our *bisim* dance when the new moon appears.”

Wasi wished him well in his mission as he stepped onto the stern tip of his sleek dugout and pushed out into the channel. His three wives stood well forward in the thirty-foot craft, two of them with babies secured to their backs in small carrying bags fashioned for the purpose. The three wives raised their paddles simultaneously and plied downstream toward the mouth of the small tributary which would lead them back into the sago swamp. A reserve of hot coals trailed smoke from a little bed of clay near Wasi’s feet. With these they would later kindle a fire to cook their afternoon meat from the fresh sago they would harvest in the swamps.

Yae laid his bow and arrows in his canoe and embarked. With a strong, deliberate stroke he aimed the needle-nosed craft upstream, just as the leaves on the surface came to a full stop in their seaward drift. By the time he vanished around a distant bend of the river, the leaves were moving upstream after him.

Kautap watched her husband vanish, a frown of concern on her smokedarkened face. Then the baby on her lap began to stir and cry. She held the child to her breast and gave suck, wishing that Yae would forget his ambition to form an alliance between Mauro and Haenam.

A flourish of screaming cockatoos took flight as Yae’s canoe suddenly appeared from under the screening foliage at the river’s edge, still bearing upstream. A crocodile dozing on the tip of a sunken log awoke at their shrieking, gaped open-mouthed at Yae, and then belly-flopped into the water, waving his massive tail up to a vertical position as he plunged into the depths.

Yae glided on to the next bend and rounded it, reflecting once more on the series of events which had established him as Mauro’s only ambassador to the upstream Sawi village called Haenam. Seven months earlier Yae had unexpectedly encountered a party of five men from Haenam, while he was hunting wild geese near the source of the Aym tributary. Yae had immediately crouched in his canoe and reached for his bow, but the tallest of the five strangers had quickly greeted him.

“*Konahari!* Don’t take your bow! I know you—your name is Yae, and I am related to you!” said the tall stranger.

Yae raised his bow anyway, but did not fit an arrow to the string. Instead he asked, “What is your name?”

“My name is Kauwan. I am the youngest son of your mother’s stepfather,” was the reply.

“Why have you come to the Aym River? No doubt you and your friends are spying,” Yae challenged.

“Not so,” said Kauwan. “This morning I wounded a wild pig and we have followed its trail of blood this far. See, there is a fresh blood mark on the grass and here are the tracks where the pig floundered in the mud not long ago.

“Come let me embrace you! We are relatives!”

Yae had heard his mother speak of Kauwan, but still he hesitated. Kauwan then took a small piece of sharp bamboo from his satchel, cut off a lock of his stringy black hair, wrapped it in a leaf and offered it to Yae.

Reassured by this generally accepted token of sincerity, Yae paddled closer, took the gift from Kauwan and dropped it into his satchel. By this offering Kauwan had demonstrated that he desired more than just a passing acquaintance with Yae.

The two men embraced each other while Kauwan’s four companions voiced their approval. Then it was that Kauwan made his proposal.

“Yae, listen to me. For a long time the Kayagar people from the east have been raiding us and we have lost many to their spears. Thus we want peace with Mauro so that we can come freely in this direction to cut sago on our western borders.

“I have persuaded the men of Haenam that we need one man to act as a go-between who can travel freely between your village and mine. Surely you are just the man we need. I am now appointing you as that go-between.

If you accept, come to our village three days from now. I will be waiting to assure your safety when you arrive.”

Kauwan’s four friends added that they also would protect Yae’s life with their own if necessary. Yae’s heart began to beat faster. His own clansmen in Mauro had also begun to complain about the overpowering raids they were suffering from the Asmat people to the west. If peaceful relations with Haenam were established, the mature sago palms presently locked away in the no-man’sland between Haenam and Mauro could be harvested freely, relieving his people of the necessity to venture close to the Asmat borders for food.

In time Haenam and Mauro might even decide to join forces and inflict decisive blows against both the Asmat and the Kayagar, gaining respite for both villages from both directions. As the main engineers of that pact, Yae and Kauwan could both hope to rise to new heights of prestige within the Sawi cosmos. Men with marriageable daughters in other Sawi clans would surely be inclined to promise some of their daughters to Yae and to Kauwan, bringing each of them nearer to the Sawi ideal of possessing a harem of five healthy wives.

Yae had already gained two wives, but to his deep sorrow one had contracted yaws and wasted away with smelly, dripping sores and died, leaving him with only Kautap. Since the death of his second wife, Yae’s longing to replace her and gain still other wives had become a constant obsession. Now, suddenly and unexpectedly, the satisfaction of that obsession seemed within his reach, *if* he could bring himself to trust the promise of Kauwan and his four friends.

Yae eyed Kauwan critically. Kauwan’s eyes shone with evident sincerity. The fact of his relationship to Yae’s mother was a reassuring factor. He had also voluntarily committed a lock of his hair to Yae’s disposal. As for his story about Haenam being harried by the Kayagar and driven further west— Yae had already heard by the jungle grapevine that this was true.

On the negative side, Yae knew there were a number of people from the Kangae clan in Haenam who still bore unsettled grievances against Mauro. Could he be sure that Kauwan and his friends would be strong enough to protect him if the Kangae faction should opt for revenge when Yae appeared among them? The four pig-tusk bracelets adorning Kauwan’s left elbow showed that Kauwan was a warrior to be reckoned with. But perhaps Kauwan was related to the Kangae faction more closely than he was to Yae’s mother. Slyly, Yae questioned Kauwan to ascertain his relations to the Kangae people. Kauwan immediately guessed the purpose of his questions and assured Yae that the chief men of the Kangae clan had already said they would accept some token redress in goods as payment without demanding a human life. A few goods would be a small price to pay for all that Yae hoped to gain from this transaction.

Still, Yae delayed his decision for one further test. He invited Kauwan and his four friends to accompany him for a brief visit to Mauro, that they might discuss this matter further. If they were willing to trust him for protection in such a venture, this would be further evidence that their longing for peace with Mauro was truly deep-seated.

Kauwan replied with a broad smile: "We would be happy to go with you, but our wives and children are waiting by the Hanai River, expecting us to return with pig meat. We must find our prey, butcher it, and pack it home before dark."

This was a reasonable refusal, Yae thought. Now he must make his decision without any further test. If he refused, perhaps later someone else from Mauro would be offered the same honor Kauwan was now extending to him, and would accept it with consequent favorable results. How Yae would chafe inwardly if that happened!

Conversely, if he accepted, perhaps he would walk into a trap and lose his life! Yae's insides churned with the suspense of the moment, the same kind of existential suspense that formed a key ingredient of the Sawi legends that had fascinated him from childhood. Now *he* was the hero facing the dread-loaded choice!

Suddenly the decision came to him out of the vortex of his uncertainty. He took the little bamboo cutting edge from his sack, cut off a lock of his own hair and handed it to Kauwan, who accepted it with a smile.

Then Yae reached forward, gripped Kauwan's forearm firmly and said, "*Sarimakon, es!* I will surely come. It is settled!" "Then if we find the pig we are seeking, be sure I will keep half of its liver and preserve it for you to eat with us on the third day," said Kauwan. Yae replied, "*Timin konahari!* Thank you, friend!" and they separated.

Having given his word, Yae had virtually sealed whatever fate was in store for him. Unless he had strong evidence of treachery, he could not now change his mind without being branded a coward! He must go to Haenam on the third day.

And he must go alone. No one else would dare accompany him without invitation. So much the better; if he bore the risks alone, he would not need to share his subsequent honor with another from his village.

Chapter 2 FATTENED WITH FRIENDSHIP

The midmorning sun had drawn beads of sweat from Yae's forehead by the time he reached the entrance of the Hanai tributary leading into Haenam's territory. He left the shimmering two-hundred-foot-wide channel of the Kronkel and soon felt his skin cooling in the deep shade of the Hanai River's narrow jungle-walled course. He stooped to drink while still standing in his canoe, scooping water with his hand. But he did not drink the water from his palm. Rather he tossed each scoop into the air and caught it in midair with his mouth.

Any other way of drinking water from the river was beneath his dignity. It could also be dangerous. Harmful spirits lived in the river, and if one did not drink in the prescribed way, they might invade one's body through the act of drinking. Yae straightened up, and his eyes probed the bushes over-hanging the river ahead of him. There it was! The leering skull of a hapless Kayagar killed by Nair, one of the most feared warriors of Haenam.

The skull hung suspended from a branch, its eye-holes filled with bright red seeds embedded in black tree gum, giving it a most menacing appearance. Fluttering feathers hanging from each earhole gave an impression of hair. Nair had hung it there as a warning to enemies of Haenam.

Yae smiled as he recalled how the sight of that skull had made the hair crawl on the back of his neck when he had made his first tense approach to Haenam seven months earlier. Steeling his will, he had forced himself to keep plying his dugout past the skull and eventually had broken out onto the grassy plain where Haenam presently resided. The people had regarded his lone approach calmly, while Kauwan stood at the water's edge, welcoming him with outstretched arms.

As Yae beached his canoe and stepped ashore, Kauwan had suddenly lifted his bow and a handful of arrows out of a bush. Separating one arrow from the others and waving it in his right hand, he had turned his back toward Yae and faced his own people. With a mighty guttural shout he then leaped straight in the air and began to race back and forth between Yae and his own people. He shrieked a formidable challenge, punctuating it with fierce grunts of simulated anger. "My friend is welcome! He has come because I myself invited him! Who is there who might want to harm him? He will not be harmed! My hand is strong!"

This was a customary display of force called *saravon*, a means of reassuring a guest and at the same time giving pause to anyone who might intend hostility. Without this display of *saravon*, Yae would have felt very uneasy indeed. The men of Haenam had watched calmly from their porches. Most of them were sitting with one leg flat on the floor and one knee upright, each one resting his chin on the upright knee.

After the *saravon*, Kauwan had embraced Yae warmly. The other men of Haenam then descended one by one from their houses and followed Kauwan's example in embracing him—except the men of Kangae, who were waiting for reparation before they expressed any good feelings toward the stranger. Kauwan had led Yae up into the Haenam manhouse, the eighty-foot-long chamber which was the central structure of the village and where women might enter only by invitation. Kauwan had given Yae the place of honor on a new grass mat in the center of the long, rambling structure.

Soon Yae was surrounded by a circle of some twenty of Haenam's leading warriors, men like Maum, Giriman, Mahaen, Nair, Kani and Warahai, men whose names were feared by Sawi, Kayagar and Asmat alike. They had taken turns plying him with polite questions about his relatives. Behind them sat the younger men listening in respectful silence. Presently freshly toasted sago grubs cooked by the women in the family houses were brought in and served to Yae on a platter rich with intricate ancestral designs. He had waited courteously until his hosts had also been served and then began to eat with them.

Yae had noticed that gradually the conversation had turned to the matter of payment for the still unavenged grievances the Kangae clan held against Mauro. But Yae was ready. He had produced from his sack a number of stone axeheads, large sea shells, and other valuables which people of his village had sent with him to settle their debts with the Kangae clan.

A man named Giriman grinned with pleasure as he had gathered up the treasures and carried them out to the Kangae people, who were still waiting in their homes until payment was made. Meanwhile Kauwan produced the chunk of smoked pig's liver he had promised to reserve for Yae, and Yae had placed it in his sack to eat later.

Soon Giriman returned with the people of Kangae, who had touched hands with Yae and assured him that they had accepted the payment. They then joined the assembly, listening eagerly to every word.

Next followed a period when the Haenam people had heaped compliments upon Yae, saying they had heard of his prowess in fighting and hunting. After this the conversation turned to the wretchedness of both the Kayagar and the Asmat and the need for common respite by both Haenam and Mauro moving closer together and away from their enemies.

Yae had then risen to his feet and expressed his desire to return to Mauro. As he did so, he had trembled inwardly, knowing that if there was any treachery afoot, this was the moment it might be manifested. But instead they had willingly escorted him to his canoe and shouted the Sawi farewell,

“*Aminahaiyo!*” over and over as he paddled down the Hanai River toward the Kronkel.

Yae still remembered his elation during the homeward journey that day seven months before. He had arrived home at dusk, climbed up on the porch of his treehouse and shouted loudly to all his fellow-villagers in eloquent Sawi idiom: “Where is the anger Haenam has felt toward us? Today I have broken off all the tongues of anger! Today I have sewn up the trail to Haenam which had fallen into disrepair. I have sprinkled cool water (peace) in the midst of our villages!” He had then punctuated his speech with the Sawi cry of triumph — “EEEHAAA!” and listened with pleasure to the excited murmur of conversation his speech aroused in all the lofty treehouses around him and in the lower houses below.

That was only the beginning. In the past seven months he had visited Haenam a total of ten times and every time he had been received with the same warm welcome. His confidence had increased with each successive visit until now, as he found himself approaching Haenam for the eleventh time, not a single qualm of unease bothered him.

He now knew most of the men of Haenam by name and felt as sure of their good will as he did of the good will of his own clansmen in Mauro. He was confident that on this very day some of them would accept his invitation to accompany him later as guests to an all-night *bisim* dance at Mauro. After that, they would begin working out plans for a combined raid against either the Kayagar or the Asmat.

As before, Kauwan greeted Yae at the river’s edge and led him into the man house. Others, whose acquaintance he had formed, came in one by one and sat in a circle around him. The conversation waxed pleasant as usual, sprinkled with anecdotes and side-splitting laughter. Food was placed before Yae and he began to eat with his hosts. Then he voiced the invitation he had come to lay before them.

Giriman was the first to respond, “You have now become an old friend of mine. Certainly I will come to the *bisim* at Mauro!” Mahaen also gave assurance, as did Kauwan.

Soon a total of twelve men had accepted the invitation. Yae was delighted. Then they handed Yae a length of string made of twisted tree fibers and asked him to tie one knot in the string for each day they must count off before coming to the feast.

Yae accepted the string gladly and began to tie the knots. While he was preoccupied at this task, Mahaen looked at Giriman and raised his eyebrows ever so slightly. Giriman saw the signal and passed it on to Maum. Maum passed it on to Kani, and Kani to Yamasi. By that time all of the Haenam men present had noticed the signal. Mahaen slowly moved his right hand under the edge of the grass mat on which he sat and drew forth a long, needle-sharp bone dagger, carved from the thigh-bone of a giant cassowary bird.

Giriman, Yamasi and Maum stood to their feet very casually and pretended to stretch themselves, while drawing long barbed ironwood spears from the overhead weapon rack. Grinning wickedly at each other, they held the spears poised over Yae while he hunched over the string, tying knots. Others in the assembly likewise armed themselves. Stone axes and spears, bows and arrows appeared as if by magic from under grass mats.

Each man who was armed stood quietly to his feet and moved closer to Yae. The only host who did not arm himself was Kauwan. He simply leaned back against the sago-frond wall, smiling at Yae and maintaining the thread of conversation while Yae tied the knots.

Yae noticed it was gradually getting darker around him, and quieter. His skin began to crawl with an icy chill, but he forced himself to look up optimistically. First he saw the weapons, and then something even more horrifying—the eyes of his hosts. Every eye was riveted upon Yae, bulging with voracious anticipation, straining to observe the expression on Yae’s countenance. Then

they saw what they had been waiting for seven months to see—the change of expression on Yae’s face.

Gloatingly their eyes drank in the spectacle of serene confidence being devoured by abject terror, of cherished hope unexpectedly stabbed by black despair. For months to come they would indulge in avid descriptions of every detail they were now observing in this moment of truth. They would strive to outdo each other in depicting how Yae’s eyes became dilated, how his lips trembled, how his entire body broke out with cold sweat. The manhouse would rock with laughter at each oratorical nuance the subject produced.

As Yae sat transfixed, choking with terror, Giriman stepped directly in front of him, spear poised for the strike. Yae saw Giriman’s mouth open and heard the cruel, hissing voice say, “*Tuwi asonai makaerin!* We have been fattening you with friendship for the slaughter!”

It was an old Sawi expression, terse, deadly, which expressed in three words one of the deepest undercurrents of Sawi culture—the idealization of treachery. It told Yae that the men of Haenam had intended to kill him from the beginning, but being confident he would return again and again, they had decided on a long delayed execution. To have killed Yae in the early stages would have been to settle for a commonplace murder which anyone unskilled in treachery could have accomplished. But to sustain the deception of friendship over a period of months and then consummate it as they were now doing called for that special sophistication in treachery which was the elixir of Sawi legends.

The men of Haenam were fulfilling an ancient ideal. Yae also was aware of the same legends that now motivated the men of Haenam. His mistake lay in thinking those legends had become divorced from real life, in assuming that the political and personal concerns of the present moment were more concrete than historical imperatives.

While the spears still poised over him, Yae’s brain began to grapple with his situation. Why had he ever come to Haenam in the first place? It was because

he had trusted in Kauwan. Kauwan? Where was he now? Perhaps there was still hope in Kauwan!

A choked cry escaped Yae’s lips. “Kauwan! Where are you? Protect me, Kauwan!”

Kauwan looked down at him from between two of the armed warriors. He spoke slowly and calmly and sarcastically. “I kept telling them this was bad, that you are my friend and they should not do this to you. But Maum here has promised me his daughter in marriage if I would keep silent. Too bad, my friend. I guess I’m not going to help you.”

Yae screamed at him in anguish. “Don’t say that, Kauwan! Stand by your promise!”

He tried to rise to his feet, but Maum’s spear struck him in the side. A mighty roar of released tension reverberated around him, while other spears moved in closer. Yae sank to one knee and called again to Kauwan for mercy, while he tried in vain to pull the barbed spear out of his side.

Kauwan turned away and said simply, “You should have given me a peace child. Then I would have protected you.”

At these words, a vision formed in Yae’s mind, a pain-distorted yet tender vision of Kautap sitting cross-legged by the fire, with the still unnamed baby lying asleep across her lap. The baby! Only that baby could have saved him! But now it was too late.

A stone axe struck him from behind, just below his shoulder blade. He toppled forward onto the sago-frond floor, gasping in pain. An arrow pierced the back of his thigh, and its sharp prick aroused him to sudden rage. He roared to his feet, streaming with blood, and lunged at his tormentors as another spear pierced through the calf of his leg. They simply gave way before him, shrieking with amusement, but still they surrounded him.

Yae fell forward again and found himself looking down through a wide gap in the still incomplete flooring of the manhouse. Fifteen feet below he saw chickens cocking their heads to look up, disturbed by the uproar above them.

He remembered that he had left his paddle stuck in the mud by the river. If he could drop from the manhouse and get to his paddle, he might be able to use the spear end of it to take at least one life in return for his own.

He slid downward, head first, through the gap, but the spear which had pierced the calf of his leg caught on the floor poles on either side, leaving him suspended upside down. Writhing helplessly in midair, he could only wait while the occupants of the manhouse quickly descended the stairpoles at either end of the building and came running toward him, fitting bamboo arrows to their bows. Women and children also came running, delighted at this unexpected opportunity, for the victim was now within their reach as well.

While children shot their child-sized arrows up into Yae, women raised their sago-digging sticks to club him on the head. Village dogs darted in and out among the stamping feet of the tormentors, licking up as best they could the blood sprinkling down, emitting ear-piercing yelps whenever they were stepped on.

When at last Yae was dead, someone dislodged the spear from which he hung and let his body fall, crumpling bamboo shafts under it as it struck the ground. Warriors danced wildly around the corpse, shouting various victory cries, each one boasting of the part he had played in the treachery and subsequent murder. Some bent over and began pulling arrows and spears from the torn flesh.

Then came the tall, muscular warrior named Maum with a newly sharpened stone axe slung over his shoulder. As the one who had purchased Kauwan's silence, he claimed the right to take Yae's head. The others made way for him as he stood over the corpse and raised the axe high. Wide-eyed children winced as the axe fell again and again, slashing through the tendons and vertebrae until the head was severed.

Meanwhile Maum's friend, Warahai, drew near with his son, Emaro, beside him. Maum lifted the severed head high and held it in the direction of the boy. Warahai then turned to Emaro and said, "Your name is Yae!"

The name Emaro had been only a provisional name, to be used until such time as the boy could be given the name of a victim killed especially for him. While his close associates would still occasionally call him Emaro, his "name of power" henceforth would be Yae. Whatever supernatural power had attended Yae would henceforth be added to the life force of the boy named after him. Maum then sent word to a woman named Anai that Yae's jawbone would be given to her to hang around her neck during the celebrations called *eren* which customarily followed the taking of a head. When the woman received the message she cried out in jubilation and danced to celebrate her great honor. When Yae's corpse had ceased bleeding, a number of men lifted it and carried it up the narrow stair pole into the man house, leaving the dogs to lick his blood from the ground and from the bushes where it had fallen. In the center of the man house, banana leaves were first strewn on the floor and then Yae's headless corpse was spread out on the banana leaves. Gathering swarms of flies immediately descended upon the gaping wounds.

Yae's ornaments were claimed by various men and removed from his body. Kauwan had already gone to the river's edge and claimed Yae's elegant paddle. Then three men whom Maum had appointed to cut up the body came forward with razor-sharp bamboo knives. Onlookers excitedly shouted their claims to various parts of Yae's body, and Maum gave approval to each claim in turn. Then the butchering began.

While the men were preoccupied with the butchering, the women, who could not enter the man house unless invited, took down drums belonging to their respective husbands, fathers and brothers, and began to dance back and forth beside the man house. Sustaining a high-pitched rhythmic chant, they pounded in steady unison on lizard-skin drumheads glued on with human blood. Their heavy grass skirts flounced in time to the brooding thunder of the drums. Yellow bird-of-paradise plumes flashed in the sunlight. The day was at full heat, and sweat streamed from everybody. Naked children embraced each other, jumped up and down, or threw sticks in the air to work off the intense excitement which possessed them.

Those who had already experienced the taste of human flesh began to chide those who had not, assuring them it tasted just like pork or cassowary. Why should they choose to be *kerkeriyap*, “squeamish”?

Some of those chided replied, “*Fadimakon govay!* Certainly I will eat it.” Others giggled and said, “*Rigav bohos fat fadon, hava ke fadyfem gani?* Why would anyone want to eat human flesh?”

Eventually all would overcome their feeling of *kerkeriyap* and partake, if not on this occasion, then on some other. But no Sawi could ever forget the dread of that first eating of human flesh. It marked one of the major thresholds each of them must cross in order to know the ultimate essence of Sawi existence. In the day each individual ate of that flesh, it seemed to him that his eyes were opened to know both good and evil.

After almost every part of Yae’s body had been dissected and placed on wooden grills to sizzle over the various cooking places in the manhouse, all the unmarried men descended from the manhouse. Together with the women and children they retreated to the edge of the jungle beyond the village.

When Maum saw that they were at a safe distance, he laid Yae’s head on its side, took a narrow stone and a wooden mallet and crouched over the head. Another man held the head firmly while Maum pounded the stone tool through the side of the skull. Flies swarming on Yae’s long black eyelashes struggled to maintain their places as the blows fell.

The young men, the women and the children had first vacated the area because it was *apsar*, “forbidden” for them to hear the sound of the skull breaking open. When the operation was complete they came flocking back to the area of the man house, and the celebration resumed.

Meanwhile Maum began excavating the brains from inside the skull by way of the opening he had forced. His friends brought leaves and wooden platters of

various kinds to collect their share of the brains, to be eaten with the flesh when it was cooked. Maum himself would not eat of the brains.

After this, Maum performed a ceremony called *yagon* in which he hoisted Yae’s skull on the end of his bow and braced his bow in slanting position extending out from one wall of the man house. Then the cannibalistic feast began, followed by the complex rituals called *eren*, during which the women were invited to stand in one end of the man house, while Yae’s jawbone was presented to the woman named Anai, who hung it around her neck as a prized ornament.

Kautap, when her suspicion of her husband’s death was confirmed, shaved her head, came down wailing from the treehouse and threw herself in the mud of the river bank, writhing in uncontrolled anguish. She also took Yae’s stone axe and threw it in the river that his spirit might use it in the world of the dead. Other relatives killed the jungle pig Yae had tamed and raised especially for the planned feast with Haenam, in order that it also might accompany his spirit. Then the entire village began to wail over the death of Yae. Treehouses swayed as mourners stamped back and forth from end to end. For three months no drums sounded in the village out of respect for Yae.

As for Kautap, she composed a dirge, which she kept moaning over and over as tears streamed down her ash-covered cheeks:

“O who will deal with the children of treachery?
O who will overcome those who use friendship to fatten their victims? O
what will it take to make them cease?”

Deeply moved by her incessant repetition of this plaintive theme, Yae’s relatives sat down to plan revenge against Haenam. The possibility of any other answer to Kautap’s question was quite beyond their comprehension. And as word of Kautap’s dirge filtered eastward through the jungle, Maum eventually heard it. By that time the dry season had ended, the relentless monsoon

storms were swashing noisy blasts of rain against the sago-frond walls of the Haenam man house. The entire grassy plain around the village was flooded. Maum smiled as the words of the dirge were repeated to him. His only comment was barely audible above the roar of the wind, "Who indeed can overcome us?"

Then he yawned and stretched out for a midday nap on his grass mat, pulling half of it over him as a shield from the damp, cool air gusting through the frond wall. Yae's jawless skull, already polished to a smooth sheen, rolled against Maum's shoulder as he drew the mat over him. He took it and placed it under his head as a pillow and was soon asleep.

Chapter 3 SHADOW OF THE TUANS

The men of Haenam eventually gained respite from their Kayagar problem by renewing an old alliance with two other Sawi-speaking villages, Yahamgit and Yohwi. Together these three inflicted heavy losses upon the Kayagar who live near the headwaters of the Kronkel, thus persuading the latter to sue for a period of peace. Mauro, similarly, successfully formed an alliance with Esep, Sanapai, Tiro and Wasohwi and managed to even their score against the Asmat-speaking villages near the mouth of the Kronkel.

To avenge the death of Yae, the men of Mauro made still further use of their alliance with Esep. They persuaded the men of Esep to use their good standing with Haenam to lure a group of men from Haenam to an all-night dance at Esep. Nine men accepted the honeyed invitation.

As the dance waxed on through the black and peaceful night, the warriors of Mauro came like phantoms up the Aym River in their canoes and then fanned out in the darkness, forming a circle around Esep. At the first greying of dawn they moved into close positions, and when it was light enough to distinguish between their friends in Esep and their enemies from Haenam, they charged.

Suddenly the chanting of the dancers and the throbbing of the drums faded to nothingness under the screaming crescendo of Mauro's attack. The men of Esep quickly climbed up into their houses and prevented anyone of Haenam from taking refuge in them. The nine intended victims tried to scatter through the shadows, as the sickening thud of spears striking flesh resounded through the village.

Five of the nine managed to escape, though all of them left livid trails of blood glistening behind them under the rising sun. Those who did not escape were Huyaham, Sao, Asien and Yamhwi. Esep and Mauro feasted royally on the flesh of the four victims, while Haenam spent several days and nights in rampant wailing for the dead.

After this the men of Haenam made foray after foray into Mauro and Esep territory, hoping to surprise some small group of men, women or children working at sago in the jungle. Unsuccessful, they later decided on a more indirect way of taking revenge. But in the meantime, three completely unforeseen developments occurred.

Once fairly peaceful relations with the Kayagar and Asmat were established, the various Sawi villages began to have frequent dialogue with their upriver and downriver neighbors. In the course of these dialogues, the Sawi noticed a new term they had never heard before. Both the Kayagar to the east and the Asmat to the west were beginning to jabber excitedly about something or someone called a *Tuan*. Since hardly more than half a dozen Sawi could make much sense of either of the two foreign languages, a long period of time passed before the Sawi were able to piece together a reasonable impression of what a Tuan was supposed to be like.

The consensus of reports seemed to indicate that Tuans were extremely large beings.

How frightening!

They were also known to be generally friendly.

This was reassuring!

Nevertheless, they were said to possess weapons capable of spurting fire with a sound like a thunderclap.

Seasoned warriors trembled!

They also were reported to be very much opposed to headhunting and cannibalism.

How fortunate that the headhunting Kayagar and the cannibal headhunting Asmat were being exposed to that kind of influence!

Their skin was said to be as white as new sago flour. . . .

How unsightly they must look!

. . . and very cool to touch.

Could it be that they are not really human at all?

Their hair, furthermore, was straight or wavy, but never kinky, and they covered themselves with strange skins so completely that their actual persons were hardly visible!

How difficult it must be to know them as they really are!

Most informants affirmed that no female Tuan had ever been seen, though more distant sources claimed a few such existed.

How they must have to fight to obtain wives if there are so few women!

Almost as strange as the Tuans themselves were the objects they were said to dispense in trading. Chief among these were superior types of cutting instruments called *kapaks* for felling trees, *parangs* for slashing through bush, and *pisais* for butchering meat. There were also tiny sticks called *korapi* which were excellent for starting a fire. Their *sukurus* could shave one's whiskers much better than bamboo knives! *Mata kail*, "fishhooks" and *kawas*, "fishline" made it possible to catch fish even in the main rivers, instead of having to wait until the water was low in the smaller rivers, when it was possible to spear fish or shoot them with bows and arrows.

Reportedly there were also *rusi*, in which one could see one's soul far more clearly than on the surface of a quiet pool of the swamps. Of special interest was a sheer white substance called *garam*, said to be far saltier than the charred residue of burnt sago fronds which the Sawi used to season their food. Still further, the Tuans were said to dispense *sabun* which, when mixed with water and applied to one's skin, could remove not only loose dirt but even skin-grease! Finally, the Tuans were believed to have various types of witchcraft called *obat* which could prevent fever and heal sores far more efficiently than Sawi witches could.

As more and more of this spellbinding talk about Tuans passed from village to village the Sawi were not sure whether they would ever want to meet one or not. The material benefits were enticing, but what if unforeseen supernatural repercussions should develop? Long ago the forefathers of the Sawi had developed rapport with the spirits who lived in the rivers and in the jungle. "The spirits have accepted our skin-grease in their rivers," they would say. As long as this tenuous coexistence of spirits and people was maintained, the universe was in balance. True, terrible epidemics sometimes ravaged the villages, but the spirits kept them spaced out at wide enough intervals so that communities could survive.

But if a Tuan having no rapport with the spirits were to intrude strange skin-grease in the rivers and on the trails, the balance of the universe might be upset. The spirits might retaliate against the Sawi for this bold, unaccustomed intrusion into their domain, and the elders would have no methodology worked out for appeasing the spirits in such a unique situation. Possibly the Tuans themselves were spirits who would have to be appeased, and oh, it would take so long to try to discover the methodology for appeasing another set of spirits! It was demanding enough to survive in a dualistic spirits-and-people universe—how would the villages fare in a new tripartite spirits-Tuans-people universe?

This was the crucial question which began to occupy the minds of the Sawi, the more so as the Kayagar and the Asmat continued to expostulate on the strange wonders called Tuans. It was an entirely new kind of question, one their ancestors presumably never had to face. For this reason there was nothing in

Sawi legends which could guide this present generation in its approach to the Tuan question. They were on their own, and they felt themselves trembling under the responsibility of a decision which could dramatically affect their own destinies and the fate of their little ones.

The crisis deepened very suddenly the day the second unforeseen development caught the Sawi by surprise. Haenam had moved to a new location on the tributary called Sagudar which was very close to the region of the Kayagar. One day a canoe loaded with husky, heavy-jawed Kayagar came down the river with an Atohwaem warrior named Hadi on board. Hadi was fluent in three languages: Atohwaem, Kayagar, and Sawi.

As the canoe approached Haenam, Hadi called out excitedly in Sawi. "These Kayagar men have something very special to show you!"

The warriors of Haenam came down slowly out of their houses as Hadi leaped ashore. Behind him a Kayagar named Hurip bent down and picked up a strange object lying at his feet in the canoe. His eyes gleamed with amusement as he observed the astonishment on the faces of the Sawi. He raised the object over his head. Then he opened his large mouth and spoke in the deep-chested, rumbling Kayagar language.

Hadi translated. "This is a *kapak*!"

The Sawi quickly crowded around, gaping. They stared at the object with the same degree of wonder an astronaut would feel upon discovering an artifact from an extraterrestrial civilization. The *kapak* was about as long as a man's hand with a shiny blade about four inches wide. The other end was rounded into a thick ring into which Hurip had fitted one end of a tapered ironwood handle.

Only vaguely did the wonderers see the object as having any resemblance to their own stone axes. That was until Hadi pointed to a young tree near the rivet's edge and urged Hurip to demonstrate what the strange object could do. Hurip stalked over to the tree, raised the axe far back over his right shoulder and struck a mighty blow deep into the base.

Hadi chuckled as the onlookers recoiled suddenly from the strangesounding crack of steel piercing wood. Hurip wrenched the axe out, and with three more blows sent the tree toppling into the Kronkel. It was fully three minutes before the people of Haenam stopped shouting their amazement. Four blows with that object had felled a tree which would have required more than forty blows with a typical stone axe.

The Sawi invited Hadi, Hurip and the other Kayagar up into the manhouse. After all were seated, the wondrous *kapak* was passed around from hand to hand. Respectfully the Sawi caressed the fabled instrument, exclaiming over its hardness, sharpness and weight. They could hardly believe that a blade four times as thin as an average stone-axe blade could be used with such force and not snap or chip.

Hurip, puffed with pride at being the first to introduce an entire community to this totally alien wonder, then related how he had traded one of his children to another Kayagar far to the southeast in Araray village so as to obtain his *kapak*. The people of Araray had many such axes because they actually had a Tuan living among them, he said. Now all the Kayagar villages were traveling to Araray or to Kepi, he said, taking pigs or children to trade for axes and other Tuvian treasures. Some of the Sawi were about to ask Hurip if he was willing to trade his axe, but when they heard he had given a child for it, they desisted. After a moment's breathless silence, a muscular young Sawi warrior named Kani spoke up from the back of the manhouse. "Hurip, why did that Tuan come to live in Araray?"

When the question was relayed to Hurip, he shrugged his hulking shoulders. "You must think the Tuans are the same as us!" he exclaimed. "If one of us moves to a certain place, you can know it is because he has much unharvested sago there, or because he is moving further away from his enemies, or because he wants to live where his father used to live.

"But the Tuans care little for sago. They seem to have no enemies. They are not tied to the land of their forefathers. They come where they want to come; they

go where they want to go; they stay where they want to stay! No one ever knows what they will do or why. All we know is wherever they go, their canoes are heavy with axes like this one!”

The Sawi whistled to express their wonder, but Kani pursued his question. “If a Tuan were to come here, what would happen to us?”

When Hadi translated, Hurip answered immediately. “You Sawi are still cutting off human heads and eating human flesh. If a Tuan comes here, it’s for sure you will have to stop that sort of thing. If you don’t, he’ll shoot fire at you! You will do *karia* instead! Then for your *karia* the Tuan will give you lots of *kapaks*, *parangs* and *pisau*s.”

None of the Sawi understood that *karia* meant “work.” Some of them resumed their amazed whistling anyway. Others became suddenly quiet at the thought of never eating human flesh again, never cutting off heads and the possibility of being burned with fire.

Kani was one of these who did not whistle. He was reflecting upon the fact that he and his people had not yet taken revenge against Mauro for the slaying of his older brother Huyaham and the other three who had been speared with him in that nightmare trap at Esep. If Haenam was going to take revenge, it had better be swiftly, otherwise a Tuan might appear, in which case it might no longer be possible to take revenge.

Hurip, Hadi and their friends soon returned upstream, after promising the Sawi that if ever they had any spare axes to trade, they would let the men of Haenam know about it first.

Hurip and his friends had come for only one reason: to entertain themselves with the spectacle of an entire community stunned by its first vision of a steel axe. Unwittingly, they had accomplished far more!

First, they had settled “the Tuan question” once and for all for the men of Haenam. Now at last these particular Sawi knew what they would do if a Tuan

ever came their way. By sunset that evening they had arrived at a consensus of opinion which would soon find support in all eighteen villages of the Sawi tribe. Second, they had persuaded the young man named Kani that it was time for Haenam to stage another enactment of the ancient theme called *tuwi asonai man*. More “pigs” must be “fattened for slaughter” to avenge the death of Huyaham before the Tuans appeared, just in case it should prove impossible to take vengeance after they appeared. And since frontal assaults against Mauro had failed, the fattening ingredient once again would have to be *friendship*. But before Kani’s murderous intentions found fulfillment, a third unexpected development was to rock the Sawi cosmos to its very foundations.

Chapter 4 THE TUANS ARE COMING

as a seminomadic people, the Sawi never had to repair their houses. Whenever the long poles supporting their homes began to rot, they simply moved to a new location and built new homes.

When their residences on the Sagudar tributary began to decay, the men of Haenam entered into an agreement with another Sawi village named Kamur and established a new village together at the mouth of the Antap tributary on the northern side of the Kronkel, normally not Haenam territory. About four hundred people resided in the new community.

The various longhouses and two treehouses of the village were scattered along several hundred yards of shoreline, commanding a view of the longest straight stretch of the Kronkel to be found in Sawi territory. The people called it the *kidari*, which might be translated “the freeway.” Elsewhere the Kronkel twisted and turned so tortuously that it was seldom possible to see more than half a mile of river in any one direction. Here on the *kidari*, one could stretch one’s eyes along nearly a mile and a half of unobstructed channel.

It was here in this new location that Kani finally worked out the details of a master plan of ingenious treachery which he hoped would settle his obsessive grievance against Mauro. He knew the plan would fail, however, if he did not win the support of his peers in Haenam. Carefully he turned over and over in his mind the arguments he must use to win support. He weighed also the problem of who in his village could be trusted with knowledge of the plan. He sensed the danger that some would not favor the plan and would betray it to the enemy.

One morning as Kani sat puffing tobacco smoke through his long bamboo pipe, his daughter, Norom, announced, "*Navo, Kabi sai!* Father, a canoe is coming!" Kani turned and looked down the *kidari* as the approaching dugout veered toward the village. In it were eight of his closest fellow clansmen. Kani's heart began to pound with excitement for he had been waiting for these very men to return from their pig-hunting trip. Now at last they had come. Quickly he decided that on this very day he would confide his ingenious plan to them. As his clansmen's canoe nudged in among the reeds at the Kronkel's edge, Kani lifted his pipe to his lips again. His eyes squinted slyly as he pulled the smoke into his lungs. No one in the smoky longhouse noticed that the corners of his lips were smiling around the mouthpiece of the pipe. Suddenly the smile froze. At the river's edge, Kani's clan-brother, Sauni, lifted his spear-paddle to thrust it downward among the reeds into the mud. Then Sauni's arm froze. Kani's other clan-brother, Mavu, having just stepped out of the canoe into the shallow water among the reeds, was bending down and gripping one side of the canoe, ready to heave the slim craft further in among the reeds. Mavu never completed the action. Instead his body suddenly tensed as he stooped, staring down into the reflections among the reeds.

Near the middle of the canoe, Maum, Yamasi, Haero and Sinar had also stepped into the shallow water and were starting to lift the heavy packs of freshly butchered wild pork they were bringing from the jungle. But the blood-red pork slipped from their hands and fell back into the canoe.

Naked brown children playing with bows and arrows fell quiet and stood staring with fear-filled eyes. The chattering of women died. The splitting of firewood ceased. The coughing of the sick sputtered to a halt. In the entire village only the crying of a single baby and the buzzing of myriad flies could now be heard.

There was a sound! A distant sound. A strange sound. A pulsing sound! Kani frowned in alarm. It was as if somewhere a gigantic heart had begun to beat, causing the entire universe—the air, the water, the trees, the ground—to throb with its booming pulse.

At the shore, Maum's brain raced back over all his memories in vain. He had never heard anything like this before. If the sound were a steady, sustained thunder, he might have said it was caused by thousands of gigantic breakers, stirred up by an unusually violent monsoon storm, pounding on the remote mud flats along the Arafura Sea. Or if its fluctuations had been irregular, he might have assumed that a distant thunderstorm was brewing.

But this steady pulsing boom defied any plausible explanation. Surely it could not arise from any natural phenomenon. It was too low-pitched to be the throb of man-made drums from a celebration in a distant Sawi village, and no animal known to the Sawi could sustain such a sound. Only one explanation was left to Maum—the sound had a supernatural origin.

Such a possibility could inspire only one feeling in the Sawi heart—terror! And Maum felt now the icy fetus of that terror swelling monstrously in the pit of his stomach, crowding the very breath out of his lungs, exerting a pressure that seemed about to cut off the beating of his heart.

Then the words Hadi had translated from the lips of Hurip came to him and he shrieked a warning to the village. "*Yot gwadivi saido!* It's coming to shoot fire!" Kani dropped his pipe and leaped to his feet, tobacco smoke exploding from his lungs. He snatched up his bow and arrows with one hand and swung one

of his children onto his back with the other. His wife passed another child to his older daughter, Norom, and swung still another child up onto her own back. All around they could hear the tumult of scuffling, calling and crying which marked the beginning of a Sawi evacuation procedure. Longhouses swayed and creaked as occupants rushed to the exits and clambered down stairpoles. Small children hung from their parents' necks as the latter carried grass mats and stone-age utensils bundled under their arms.

The people of Haenam and Kamur had been through this procedure many times before. The first sight of a flotilla of Kayagar or Asmat war canoes always produced the same frantic yet organized rush to the safety of the jungle. The difference was that on those occasions only the women and children fled, while the men remained to face the enemy.

Now, however, the men were joining the women in their flight to the jungle, because of the assumed supernatural nature of the approaching phenomenon. In addition to their children and their weapons, they carried also as many grass mats as they could manage. They were prepared to sleep in the wilds, if necessary.

While the women and children fled deeper into the jungle, Kani, Maum and the other men of Haenam and Kamur took up positions just inside the underbrush behind the village. Nervously they peered up at the scudding clouds above, at the quiet river, at the depths of the forest behind them, ready to flee deeper into the jungle at a moment's warning. Not far away a daring young Kamur boy named Isai disobeyed his older brother's command to flee and climbed a tree to look out over the underbrush at the river.

Once the screaming of women and children had faded into the distance behind them, the hidden warriors were able to hear again the pulsing sound. It was much louder now. The soft earth of the very swamp itself seemed to tremble in time to it. At first it seemed to originate on all sides, reverberating through the entire forest, but gradually they noticed that the sound was coming from the west. Yet its point of origin was also moving southward, and this suggested

a dreadful thought to Kani. The source of the sound must be following a southward bend of the Kronkel River. If that were the case, rounding the next bend would lead it back northward again within sight of the watchers!

Presently the moving source reached the point where, Kani realized, it ought to turn northward again and grow rapidly louder as it approached their position. Tense fingers fitted arrows to rattan bowstrings, though none of the Sawi were sure they would ever dare to release an arrow at the approaching doom. Then, all at once the sound grew so loud that some of the warriors panicked and fled. Those who remained felt their skin turning cold, while the hair on the back of their necks seemed to stand out straight.

Then, before their unbelieving eyes, waves larger than any that had ever been seen on the jungle-sheltered bends of the Kronkel swept out from behind the screening foliage at the south bend of the river. *Ahos* trees, struck by the waves, began to sway and toss violently. In another second, the monster force creating those waves would sweep into view! Kani's heart almost stopped.

The two canopied riverboats churned around another bend of the Kronkel, their twin diesel engines throbbing almost in unison. Each advanced under a fluttering red, white and blue flag of the Netherlands. They had begun their voyage several days earlier at Agats, the nearest Dutch government post, located on the coast of the Arafura Sea about fifty miles north of the mouth of the Kronkel River. Their mission: to explore the little-known southern extremity of the Agats administrative district, which until now had been left without any kind of government supervision. They were also seeking a site for a new Dutch administrative post in the area, a center from which the Dutch police hoped to put an end to the ceaseless headhunting and cannibalism known to be rife in this wild area.

The probe had already spent several days following the serpentine switchbends of swamp-embedded rivers like the Kronkel, trying to locate

centers of native population beyond the already known Asmat area. So far they had been quite unsuccessful. The savage inhabitants of this ungoverned inland area were generally far too wary to risk building their villages within sight of main rivers. Hopelessly fragmented into small units by their internal conflicts, most villages could not count on numbers for protection against outsiders, resorting instead to the camouflage of deep jungle hideouts. The Dutch military commander in charge of this exploratory mission could not know that already that morning he had passed near the secluded hideaways of four downriver Sawi villages, imparting terror to every soul who had heard the sound of his twin diesels.

As the two ships swung north again, the impressive treehouses of a new village suddenly loomed into view. Here is an exception, the commander thought, as he peered at the odd-shaped treehouses of one village which had dared to locate on a main river. Smoke still drifted up through the arching thatched roofs, but there was no sign of any inhabitants. They've fled into the jungle, he thought. The commander gave the order for the probe to continue upstream past the village. Perhaps by the time they had followed the Kronkel as far as it would allow and returned on the morrow, the people of this village would have recovered their composure enough to show themselves.

Meanwhile, the watchers in the underbrush were certain that the village they had just evacuated was about to be destroyed and that there was nothing they could do to protect it. What good would bamboo arrows do against two swift-moving monsters so immense that they make the mighty Kronkel seem barely wide enough to contain them?

As the two monsters drew nearer, Kani squinted in unbelief, for he could see several dozen men, their bodies sheathed in strange coverings, looking out from under canopies. Some of the men were black-skinned like himself, but a few had faces that shone like fresh, pink sago loaves glistening in the sun. Kani drew the inevitable conclusion and exclaimed, "Tuans! The Tuans are coming!"

Wallowing in their own waves, the ships swept on past the twin villages and threaded their way down the long expanse of the *kidari*. Little Isai, perched among the branches of his lookout tree, felt his breath returning. Straining his ears, he detected the sound of low-pitched human voices mingled with the roar of the engines.

Then a man sitting on top of one of the canopies stood up beside the flag and waved toward the bushes, on the likely chance that human eyes would be watching. Isai felt that the man must be able to see him in spite of his camouflage of leaves and branches, and he cringed trembling behind the main trunk of the tree. How could their eyes be so keen?

That night the two ships stood at anchor under the stars, moored along the banks of the Kronkel, deep in the Kayagar grasslands. There hundreds of the people of that area—more accustomed to the comings and goings of the Tuans—gathered around the riverboats to trade fish, sago and pork for matches, razor blades, beads and tobacco. Yet even the Kayagar found the glaring kerosene pressure lamps unnerving and the blaring transistor radios incomprehensible.

And at the same time, further downstream, the elders of both Haenam and Kamur conferred well into the night. Surmising that the two "super canoes" must be overnighing among the Kayagar and would be coming back through the Sawi area on the morrow, they were debating whether they should try to make some sort of contact with the awesome strangers, or just let them pass by as they had come.

Finally three elders of Kamur named Kigo, Hato and Numu volunteered to try to make a friendly contact. "Years ago we lived among the Auyu people far to the east," they said, "and we still remember much of the Auyu language. Perhaps some of these strangers speak Auyu. When they return downstream, we will stand by the mouth of the Tumdu tributary and wave to them. If they pull over, we will try to talk with them in the Auyu tongue."

The next day, while hundreds of Sawi eyes watched from the assumed safety of the jungle, Kigo, Hato and Numu stood fearfully by the mouth of the Tumdu tributary, trying desperately to control the knocking of their knees as the roar of the twin diesels came pulsing out of the east. It seemed like an age before the two monsters finally roared into view and came bearing down on the three men. Struggling to hide their timidity, the naked trio stood trembling with gifts of food in their hands, wondering if they themselves might end up becoming food for the approaching giants.

The three almost collapsed in relief when the first of the ships swirled past them, hurling its mighty wake at their feet. But then, as they stood waving tremulously, the second craft suddenly cut its engines and swung toward them! Nervously, Kigo started jabbering in Auyu, while Numu and Hato kept nodding their heads in support. Government officers peered at them curiously from under the canopy.

Then from inside the ship a friendly voice greeted them in Auyu, and the three felt every muscle in their bodies relaxing. Perhaps now there was hope they would survive this dreadful encounter! Friendly hands reached over the side of the boat, accepted the gifts of food and returned payment. In addition to the black faced Auyu speaker, Kigo, Hato, and Numu were aware of incredibly large, white-faced men uttering equally incredibly strange sounds with even more incredibly deep, bass voices.

These must be the Tuans! Their white faces seemed so terrible to look upon that the three savages could not bear to give them more than an occasional glance. But in another moment the boat reversed its engines, pulled away from the shore and was soon chugging noisily down the *kidari* after its brother. Kigo, Hato and Numu, feeling somewhat faint from nervous strain, turned toward the jungle and saw the men of Kamur and Haenam emerging furtively from the bushes. Then when it was apparent that the two ships were already a safe distance away, the Sawi all ran excitedly toward the three heroes.

Proudly, Kigo, Hato and Numu held up the razor blades, the matches, the fishline and the fishhooks for all the wondering eyes to see. They still had no idea, of course, what these things were or how they could be used.

It would be several days yet before a well-informed Kayagar would come down the river and, in a most ostentatious manner, show them how to remove the red paper wrapper in order to discover the gleaming new razor blade inside! He would also show them how to slide the matchbox open, take out a match and strike it against the side of the box in order to produce fire! Then he would explain very condescendingly that it was necessary to put some bait on the barbed hooks in order to catch a fish! Then he would return upstream to laugh for days at the simplicity of the Sawi in not knowing such obvious details, forgetting that it had been only a few months since he himself had learned the same lessons.

To Kigo, Hato and Numu, however, the main value of these treasures was not so much their practical uses, but the fact that these were tangible trophies of their encounter with beings whom they regarded as belonging to a completely different race. The little curios were more than that. They were also concrete evidence that three brave Sawi had touched hands across a culture gap equal to several thousand years of human development.

Chapter 5 THE LEGENDMAKER

So dramatic was the encounter with the two river boats that few of the Sawi could talk about anything else for weeks. Not long after, the villages heard a rumor that the same patrol had established a post among the Asmat at Pirimapun and this occasioned still further talk! Even Kani was completely distracted from pursuing his plans for treachery against those he regarded as his enemies. But not for long. The memory of the two ships soon began to fade. The old longings regained priority.

One day Kani's two wives went off along the mud banks of the river to search for shrimp at low tide. Finding himself alone, Kani invited Maum, Mavu and

Sauni up into his home. He stuffed his pipe full of tobacco, lit it, and passed it around to them. As the sweet, humid smell of the tobacco smoke spread through the longhouse, Kani began to disclose his thoughts.

“So! The Tuans are coming among us already, and still we have not avenged the death of our brother, Huyaham. How do you feel about that?”

The others grew quiet, feeling slightly ashamed for having let all thought of that solemn obligation slip from their minds for so long.

Kani continued, “Perhaps you have long ago forgotten Huyaham. But as for me, I cannot forget. I say we must avenge him, even if we have to do it in the shadow of the Tuans!”

Kani breathed on his pipe while the three men searched his face.

“You want us to make another foray into Mauro territory?” asked Maum.

“We’ve tried that often enough,” said Kani. “I have a better plan.”

Sauni was first to reply. “Tell us your plan, older brother!”

Kani waved his pipe toward the south, in the direction of a distant Sawi village called Wasohwi. “The men of Wasohwi,” he said softly, “are brothers to those who killed Huyaham. They also have a few friends among the Kangae people in the other end of our own village. Does that suggest anything to you?”

All three listeners smiled slyly at the obvious connection, but then Mavu frowned. “How can we get them to come?” he asked.

Kani replied, “We will announce an all-night dance and send them an invitation.”

“But who will take the invitation to them? The Kangae men are friends with Wasohwi, to be sure, but they are not accustomed to going there on visits. Besides, they would surely refuse to cooperate in this.”

“Our brothers of the Kangae clan must know nothing of this!” said Kani firmly.

“We must allow them to think this is a sincere invitation. Not until they see the corpses of their Wasohwi friends lying on the ground will they know what we have in mind.”

“Then who will go and bring the victims to us?” queried Mavu.

“Have you forgotten,” Kani said slowly, “that one of our own clan is related to Wasohwi through his mother, and goes there freely to visit?”

All three listeners whistled in astonishment. “You must mean Mahaen!” Maum exclaimed. “How can you possibly persuade him to betray his own mother’s people?”

Kani was ready with the answer he had prepared long before. “There is no possible way we can persuade Mahaen to do this thing,” he said matter-of-factly, and then added in a mysterious whisper, “but there is a way we can compel him to do it.” After another pause he continued, “Someone will have to impose the *waness* bind on him. Then he will do what we say.”

The eyes of his three listeners grew round with awe at Kani’s words. Had anyone ever proposed such a thing before, that the ancient custom of *waness* be invoked to compel a close relative to betray his own mother’s people?

It seemed to Maum, Sauni and Mavu that Kani was carrying the Sawi idealization of treachery to a new refinement beyond anything the ancestors had ever dreamed of, even in their most subtle moments. This meant that Kani was a potential legendmaker in his own right, and he was offering them the privilege of sharing with him in the making of this new legend!

The three men found themselves mesmerized by the uniqueness of Kani’s proposal. Of course, the very fact of its uniqueness greatly enhanced the chance it would succeed. It had been a long time since Mauro had struck that traumatic blow against Haenam by killing and devouring Huyaham and his three friends. The men of Wasohwi by now had probably almost forgotten the event. Even if they did think of it, they would hardly suspect that Huyaham’s relatives might sublimate their desire for revenge against Mauro into a covert plot against Wasohwi! They would feel certain that their friends in the Kangae section of Haenam would warn them of any danger there. And in the other end of Haenam, the division called Kubhai, they would be counting on Mahaen as their protector. Thus it was virtually certain they would accept an invitation if

it were delivered to them personally by Mahaen. There was nothing in the legends to warn that a man might betray his own mother's relatives!

The crucial ingredient in the plan was, of course, the use of the old *waness* custom to compel Mahaen's compliance. The three co-conspirators were eager to hear Kani's ideas as to how this might best be accomplished.

Maum was first to express his curiosity on this matter. "Older brother, tell us; which of us do you intend should impose the *waness* bind on Mahaen?"

Kani smiled, proud of the ease with which he had drawn them into his web of intrigue. Now he was truly master of their attention, and he chose his words carefully as he proceeded to exploit their complicity. "It will not be one of us, my brothers," he said slowly, his black eyes darting from face to awestruck face. He paused to let their curiosity reach a still deeper intensity, and then continued. "No, it will not be one of us. It will have to be your mother, old Wario!"

Mavu sat thunderstruck. Maum touched his fingertips to his chest and whistled a long, low, descending note, a characteristic Sawi expression of extreme amazement. Sauni leaned his head back and moaned, "Wooooooooooo," expressing sympathy for Mahaen, because of the shock that was in store for him.

All three men now looked at each other in mute acknowledgement of Kani's genius. Old Wario was none other than the mother of Waib, the beautiful young girl who had been promised to Mahaen, and who would later become Mahaen's fourth wife. If old Wario, as Mahaen's future mother-in-law, were to impose the *waness* bind upon Mahaen, the unfortunate fellow would be bound with an obligation more solemn than any other obligation imaginable within the Sawi universe.

Nothing could be more sacred to the mind of a male Sawi than his relationship to those who gave him their daughter or daughters in marriage. So great was a Sawi man's respect for his parents-in-law that he would not allow himself even to utter their names out loud. He would refer to them only by their title of *tade*. He would lavish gifts of fresh wild pork, or beetle grubs upon his

parents-in-law with faithful regularity, often at the expense of his own family. In fact, his debt to his parents-in-law ranked higher in his mind than his debt to his own parents, or to his wife, or to his children.

In an almost totally barbaric society, there was always the danger that mutual hostilities would cut off the free exchange of marriageable daughters between opposite clans, thus threatening the existence not only of individuals but of the very society itself. Hence the collective instinct for self-preservation required that the highest priority be given to the parent-inlaw/son-in-law relationship. Whatever other ties might be shipwrecked in the tides of savagery, the *tade-asen* relationship, as it was known in the Sawi language, must be preserved intact. For only as the social rewards of giving a daughter were secure would parents continue to give their daughters in marriage.

And Kani was now proposing that this noble ideal, which was intended for the preservation of Sawi society, should, through the medium of the *waness* bind, be subverted to the task of compelling a man to betray his own mother's relatives to death! Like a chess master inventing a new combination of moves in an old, old game, Kani was deliberately toying with diverse elements of his own culture and recombining them into a startling new variation of the ancient theme of *tuwi asonai man*.

Mavu, Maum and Sauni could not disguise their awe. They sensed they were sitting in the presence of a new culture hero, that if Kani's plan worked, a new saga would be born, a saga which, over a long period of time, would eventually be assimilated into the main corpus of Sawi legends. They knew also that as co-conspirators, their own names would surely be connected with that legend! Kani himself felt a deep personal gratification in the prospects of his plan. His father Sauwai before him had been a legendmaker, a man whose exploits in treachery were often recounted around the night fires in many villages. Now the son was fulfilling, if not surpassing, the ideal established by the father. Maum and Sauni, who also were two of old Wario's many children, and as such, future brothers-in-law to Mahaen, immediately gave their permission for Kani to approach their mother with his bizarre proposal.

Among the savage tribes of southwest New Guinea, women were no mere bystanders to the arts of cruelty. Whenever Auyu warriors, for example, returned from a headhunting raid, their womenfolk would welcome them by beating with sticks anyone who failed to bring back a human head! Among all the tribes, it was often the women who kept goading the men until they had avenged the death of loved ones slain in earlier outrages. Always it was the women who supplied that gratifying adulation which made the risking of one's life seem worthwhile.

Sawi warriors were especially fond of dragging wounded victims back to their villages in order that the women might have the pleasure of clubbing them to death with their sago-beating sticks. (It was forbidden, of course, for women to use or even touch a bow or a spear. If women ever became proficient in using weapons of *that* caliber, their own menfolk would be in danger! The various Amazon legends which abound everywhere in New Guinea were sufficient warning on that score!)

Finally, the Sawi *eren* ceremony, in which a girl or a woman was allowed to wear the jawbone of a freshly killed victim around her neck and dance in the manhouse, was the ultimate evidence of female emotional involvement in the practice of headhunting.

Whenever, on rare occasions, a woman played a significant or unique part in an enactment of the *tuwi asonai man* ideal, this was sure to be remembered in each narration of the story concerned. Old Wario was as knowledgeable as any Sawi woman in such matters, and Kani was certain she would not deny herself the place in the sun he was about to offer her.

Old Wario, her head shaven in the manner of Sawi widows, sat nervously on the grass mat, weighing the suggestion which the four men, two of them her own sons, had just whispered to her. They waited.

She raised a pair of tongs and turned over the sago loaves she was baking among the hot coals of a firebed. She looked out through the gaps in the sago-frond wall at the slender, beautiful form of her daughter Waib, who was standing in a dugout on the dark surface of the Kronkel, gleefully using the blade of her paddle to splash water on a playmate standing in another canoe. Wario laid down the wooden tongs and looked straight into Kani's expectant face. "I have always felt very sorry over Huyaham, to be sure!" she said, and then added the fateful words: "Call Mahaen!"

Mahaen climbed up into Maum's longhouse and took his place on the grass mat spread for him. He was a slender, wiry man whose tense, knotted muscles, pig-tusk bracelets and gleaming *sudafen* necklace warned of his considerable prowess in fighting and hunting. Maum, Sauni, Mavu and Kani sat down in front of him to draw his attention, while old Wario crouched behind him, pretending to mind the fire. Near her feet lay one of the sago loaves she had just finished baking.

Taking the loaf, she came up behind Mahaen and stooped beside the naked man on the pretense of offering the loaf to him. Distracted, Mahaen raised his hand to accept the sago. He did not notice the sudden gleam in the eyes of the four men who sat watching him and old Wario. Nor did he have time to notice their conversation had stopped abruptly in midsentence.

There was a sudden quick blur of movement as Wario, avoiding his outstretched hand, reached down and touched the sago loaf lightly against Mahaen's genital area. Quickly she leaped back out of Mahaen's reach, knelt facing him, and raised the loaf to her lips. Stark horror flooded into Mahaen's large black eyes as he saw Wario bite into the end of the sago which had touched him. Like an animal who suddenly sees it is trapped, Mahaen cringed.

Waness!

By this one dread act, Wario had abruptly shifted Mahaen's destiny in some new direction as yet unknown to him. There was no escape for him. By subjecting herself to the utter humiliation of eating sago which had touched Mahaen's private parts, Wario had imposed a formidable debt upon him, a debt infinitely compounded by the fact that she was his mother-in-law.

There was only one way Mahaen could cancel the debt he now owed to Wario. First he must ask her what he must do to atone for her humiliation, and then he must do it, no matter what it cost him. If he did not, Wario would continue to bear her shame and the entire community would be eternally offended at him. That the command she had in mind would be obnoxious to him was already clear, otherwise she would not have used the extreme measure of *waness*. It was the revulsion he would feel in obeying that still unknown command that would balance Wario's humiliation.

The five conspirators waited in silence as Mahaen stared blankly at the grass mat on which he sat. Hot waves of shame swept over him at the thought of his mother-in-law's humiliation. Finally, after several minutes, a curious, lost expression contorted his features as he looked at Wario's feet and uttered in a broken voice the words they were waiting to hear: "What do you want me to do?"

The news spread like fire. First it burned the ears of the villages along the Kronkel River and then razed a path south to the banks of the Cook and over to the Juliana. Northward, it seared its way to the Sawi and Asmat along the Yeem. Finally, after it had spread its pall across the Faraes, it dwindled to a faint rumor and died on the banks of the Au.

It was shouted in Sawi, babbled in Atoхваem, thundered in Kayagar, twittered in Auyu, and mumbled in Asmat. It was the news of Mahaen's treachery against his own mother's people. For Haenam it was a new crown of infamy; for Wasohwi, a hell burning with sorrow and fiery indignation. Fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters rolled in ashes, their voices hoarse with wailing, their eyes reddened with scalding tears.

Eight men from Wasohwi had trustingly accepted Mahaen's invitation to the all-night dance at Haenam. They arrived by dugout at sunset, just as the young men of Haenam, resplendent in paint and plumes, were beginning to rattle their drums for the dance. A large group of the most prestigious men of Haenam, led by Kani, welcomed the visitors at the shore.

Kani himself singled out a man named Fusuman and invited him to eat sago and beetle grubs. Fusuman obediently followed Kani up into the tall treehouse. Sauni, Warahai, Mavu, Maum, Boro, Yamasi and Paha likewise singled out their choice of the guests and led them to separate houses. There was not a hint of the treachery to follow. Even some of the occupants of Haenam itself were totally unaware of the terror already coiling around the eight visitors.

The sun withdrew its light beyond the jungle horizon. The full moon lifted its pale amber face to stare woefully through gray cloud fingers and spreading ironwood branches. The dancers clustered together under the treehouses, shouting unearthly minor cadences at the stars. The end of each cadence died out in a long, descending "oooooooooooo" while the drums maintained their steady beat.

Occasionally a sudden increase in the tempo of the drums would trigger a climax of wild exultant shouting. Out of the midst of each resounding tumult a single warrior would raise his voice to a high pitch and scream in rapid oratorical Sawi the details of a murder he had committed. The others would suddenly fall silent to listen.

The speaker would complete the story in five or six sentences, leaping straight up and down with spear poised, tossing his head from side to side. At the conclusion of his oration the entire assembly would break forth into shouting again, in commemoration of the slaying described. Then the drums would resume their ominous booming, portraying the long intervals of plotting and waiting which separate realizations of glorious treachery. Five, six or seven minutes later, the drums would trigger still another outburst of glory to conceive and bring to birth still another warrior's shrill boast of blood-thirstiness.

The chanting itself consisted entirely of nonsense syllables. The Sawi never used music to convey a message; they used it only to impress the senses. For them the medium was the message. The chains of colorful-sounding nonsense syllables were but one of several voice effects blended into the total pageant. And so the chanters chanted while the starscape drifted and cooking fires gleamed red through cracks in sago-frond walls. The visitors ate merrily with their various hosts, enjoying compliments and hearty laughter, never dreaming that the real feast was to begin later, and that their own kinsman, Mahaen, had betrayed them to be the food for that feast.

Kani was the first to strike. He and Fusuman had climbed down to join the dancing for an hour or so. During a lapse in the chanting and drumbeating Kani had detected the echo of a *Haragu* bird's call, a sure signal that dawn was near. So he had invited Fusuman back up into his house to smoke tobacco.

Once Fusuman was comfortably seated and drawing deeply on the long bamboo pipe, Kani came up behind him in the darkness with a steel machete he had recently obtained in trade from a Kayagar. Kani tensed his muscles and struck a hard, deep blow to the base of Fusuman's skull. He had hoped the blow would at least paralyze his victim, if not kill him outright, but the machete was very dull. The Kayagar always kept the sharp ones for themselves. Fusuman lurched forward, gagging. Kani reached for his other newly acquired possession, his steel axe. Fusuman rolled over on his back and looked up at Kani looming over him in the flickering, light.

"Ave! Ave! Older brother! Older brother!" he cried.

But Kani replied, *"No ke ave don nom! Ukeden!* Don't call me older brother! I am killing you!"

The axblade struck again and again. The sound of it awoke Kani's two wives, but his children slept on. Kani's oldest wife Yae excitedly fanned her fire to life to see what happened. She saw her husband bending over Fusuman in the act of beheading him. His legs were red with Fusuman's blood.

Kani laid Fusuman's head beside his corpse and quickly descended from his house. The drums were still throbbing, though somewhat more lazily. *Haragu* birds were sounding on all sides of the village now, as the first gray hint of dawn paled the east.

Kani ran to Maum's house and climbed up the ladder. Maum met him at the doorway. Kani whispered to him, "Have you killed yours yet?" Maum scratched himself lazily and replied, "Not yet."

Kani said, "What are you waiting for? I've already beheaded mine."

Maum whistled a tiny birdcall of admiration and turned back into his house. Kani hurried back down the ladder. By the time he reached the ground he heard the thud of a spear and the strangled cries of Maum's victim, a man named Aidon. As Kani hurried on to Mavu's house, he did not notice Aidon scrambling down the same ladder he had just descended himself. By the time Maum found a second spear and started down after him, Aidon had vanished in the darkness, leaving only a trail of blood that would not be visible for another quarter hour.

Mavu, likewise, hearing of Kani's successful slaying, tried to kill his guest, Eseger, but only wounded him, being hindered by the presence of his own wives and children in the same house. Eseger fled bleeding into the night, the thunder of the drums masking his cries of warning to any of his friends who might still be alive.

Hani and Warahai managed to kill and behead their victim, a young man named Seg. Tausi and Mahaeri likewise were slain, while Iri and Meramer escaped with wounds.

The light of dawn revealed four headless victims laid out for butchering. The other four, by some superhuman effort of the will, managed to struggle

homeward through miles of dense swamp and jungle, only to die from their wounds as they reached the stairpoles of their respective longhouses.

Through the weeks of celebration that followed, the people of Haenam fawned openly upon Kani and Mahaen. The fact that four of their eight victims had escaped beheading and cannibalization did not detract from the honor of the moment. What mattered, after all, was not the number of heads taken, but the quality of the treachery that secured them.

Together Kani and Mahaen had started a unique new legend on its way. Mainly through Kani's genius, they had given a vastly more daring expression to an ancient ideal of the Sawi people, an ideal which unnumbered generations of their forebears had conceived, systematized and perfected over millenniums of time. It was the ideal of using friendship to fatten one's victims for the slaughter, of finding comfort and delight in the misery and destruction of others. It was the ideal symbolized inadvertently by the occasional act of pillowing one's head on the skull of a victim—even though the skulls of relatives were more commonly used in this way, simply because the skulls of cannibalized victims were too often covered with black char from the cooking fires used in their annihilation.

As every philosophy, once its basic tenets have been accepted, draws its adherents irresistibly toward certain ultimate conclusions, so also the Sawi world view had at last found what was possibly its ultimate expression in the treachery of Kani and Mahaen. Men, women and children now looked to them as the epitome of Sawi manhood.

Their place in the sun, however, was about to be challenged. And not only their place in the sun, but also the very idealization of treachery which they espoused was about to be engaged in something the Sawi had never heard of before—a contest of values!

Kani and Mahaen were not yet aware that some two thousand years earlier a supremely different kind of Legendmaker had launched a new world view based on love. It was a world view diametrically opposed to the Sawi mind, as it was also to the minds of millions who considered themselves much wiser than people like the Sawi.

It had taken nearly two thousand years for the message of that new value system to range from Galilee to the miasmal swamps of southwest New Guinea. On its way, that message had already challenged, engaged and conquered barbarity in many forms in the minds of millions of people, for it was an extremely *mettlesome* message. It was not cowed by earthly obstacles, for its strength was supernatural. It could not be intimidated, for it was itself the ultimate antidote to fear.

The message would not back away from any form of darkness, for it was light itself! It was not embarrassed if its bearers were sometimes plain, homely or even untaught—in fact it was fond of executing its most subtle strategies through such! To the consternation of its enemies, it could triumph even when its adherents were being decimated by sword or spear. That message was the gospel of Jesus Christ. Its purpose was nonnegotiable—to persuade men from “every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation” to repent and be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. That message was now about to invade the Sawi world, about to confront their idealization of treachery eye to eye in a relentless spiritual struggle for the souls of men, women and children. It would match prayer and preaching against spear and barbed arrow; faith and hope against systematized barbarity; love and compassion against entrenched fear and evil.

That invasion was about to be launched, that match to take place, that reconciliation to begin. For even now the first of the Legendmaker's message-bearers were about to come and dwell among the Sawi.

Chapter 6 GENESIS OF A MISSION

The angular seventy-one-year-old Englishman gripped the pulpit in his large bony hands and scrutinized the seven hundred students waiting in silence. His white hair was combed straight back. His spectacles rested halfway down the bridge of his nose. From under tufted brows his grey eyes shone with an intensity not yet dimmed by age.

Something in his presence seemed to transfix the assembly seated before him in the large auditorium. Three words rumbled, deep-voiced, from the old man's lips—three words weighted with his own unique blend of dignity and fervor: "Netherlands New Guinea. . . ."

With those three words Ebenezer G. Vine, secretary of the Philadelphia council of an international mission society called the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (RBMU), introduced his subject. The year was 1955. His audience was the student body of the Prairie Bible Institute, a sprawling campus located on the wintry plains of Alberta, Canada, adjacent to a small town named Three Hills. Behind him L. E. Maxwell, the noted principal of this partially self-supporting Christian community and missionary training school, leaned forward in his chair. Equally white-haired, with a set jaw and determined countenance, he epitomized the rugged idealism of the school.

Mr. Vine felt a strong sense of purpose as he addressed this particular student body. Other campuses on his itinerary might boast more scholarly, more polished graduates than he would find here, where the motto was plainly and unaffectedly *training disciplined soldiers for Christ!* But even as he sounded the call for Christian pioneers to plant the banner of the gospel among isolated and potentially hostile stone-age tribes in interior Netherlands New Guinea, Mr. Vine knew it was not primarily scholarship and polish that would be required, though these were by no means excluded! Unwavering faith, self-denial, and an intimate communion with God were the crucial qualities that must be present, and these were the main qualities which Prairie's faculty and staff,

both by example and life-centered biblical instruction, strove to impart to its students.

Mr. Vine knew well the story of Prairie's growth. Since its inception in a farmhouse with eight students in 1922, it had grown to be the largest Christian training institution in Canada. Because of its strong emphasis on foreign missions, already more than eleven hundred of its three thousand graduates had entered foreign missionary service, while hundreds of others were active as pastors and Christian workers in their home countries. On this basis, Mr. Vine knew that approximately 35 percent of the students before him would find their way to foreign fields under various mission societies. The Christless tribes of Netherlands New Guinea desperately needed some of them, he reasoned, as with great force and inner burden of heart he described the land and its violent, unpredictable people.

"Netherlands New Guinea," he continued, "is the western half of a 1400-mile-long island stretched along the edge of the Pacific Ocean north of Australia. It lies in the torrid zone, just south of the equator, yet within its vast watery area of 110,000 square miles, you will in some areas find yourself facing jagged mountain ranges hoary with ice at altitudes of more than fifteen thousand feet. In other areas, you may find yourself entangled in miasmal lowlands, where torrential rains combine with sweltering heat to sustain an enervating humidity.

"You may be called upon to make the first advance into the midst of entire tribes that have never known any kind of governmental control, where people are a law unto themselves and where savagery is a way of life. You must learn to make yourself and your message understood in the medium of languages never before learned by any outsider. There will be no dictionaries, grammars or primers to help you—you must produce your own.

"You will encounter customs and beliefs which will baffle you, but which must be understood if you are to succeed. You will try to treat loathsome tropical diseases and run the risk of being blamed for the death of your patient if you

fail. You must prepare to endure loneliness, weariness and frustration with fortitude. Most of all, you must be prepared, in the strength of the Lord, to do battle with the prince of darkness, who, having held these hundreds of tribes captive these many thousands of years, is not about to give them up without a fight!”

The old man paused, and silence hung heavy under the great, arched ceiling of the auditorium.

“It was seven years ago,” he continued, reminiscing, “that Paul Gesswein, a serviceman returned from the New Guinea war theater, approached me on this very campus and said, ‘Mr. Vine, I have two questions to ask you. The first is, does the Regions Beyond Missionary Union realize there are tens of thousands of tribespeople isolated without the gospel in the interior of Netherlands New Guinea?’

“I said to him, ‘How do you know they are there?’

“He replied, ‘A military aircraft was missing on a flight over the interior. I took part in the search operations. As we flew over many uncharted areas of the interior, we were amazed to find valley after valley dotted with villages surrounded by extensive garden areas.’

“I said to him, ‘What is your second question?’

“He replied, ‘Will the Regions Beyond Missionary Union help me take the gospel to those people?’

“Awed by all that a positive answer to his question would entail, I first informed him we were already heavily committed to five fields—India, Nepal, Congo, Peru and Borneo—and then, caught up in the excitement of it all, I added, ‘I’ll see what I can do!’

“Not many months later, after much prayer and deliberation, I had the pleasure of writing Paul Gesswein to say: ‘RBMU Council has given approval! We are making application to the Netherlands government for permission to enter the interior of Netherlands New Guinea!’

“We soon found, however, that the Netherlands government rejected our request, arguing that their law enforcement agencies could not accept the

responsibilities of protecting our missionaries from the cannibals! We kept applying again and again. Eventually I even made three trips across the Atlantic to plead our request in person at the Hague! Only recently has the necessary permission been given.

“Now the way is open to the interior! Missionary Aviation Fellowship of California has already put one single-engine aircraft into operation flying men and supplies for our own and other missions into a major base camp called Bokondini, deep in the interior highlands. Paul Gesswein and our other volunteer, Bill Widbin, have already assisted in establishing Bokondini and are now preparing an advance over the mountains to a people called the Black Valley Danis. Their wives, meanwhile, are helping with logistics on the north coast until they can safely join their husbands.”

At this point the speaker extended his right hand toward the students and continued:

“I cannot believe that God has brought RBMU to this great new threshold in order that two men and their wives should cross it alone! There must be others whom God will call to join them! There may be some such seated here before me now! If God has set you aside for this special task, not to build on another man’s foundation, but to preach Christ where the sound of His name has not once fallen upon the ears of men, then RBMU will prayerfully consider your qualifications.

“How much longer must those lost tribes wait to hear of Him who died for their salvation and rose again nearly two thousand years ago? For the past one hundred years the messengers of Christ have been content to occupy only the accessible areas of the coastal fringe. Now new marching orders have come—*to the interior!*

“Our Lord is impatient to establish His kingdom of love in those dark places which are now the habitation of cruelty. Two men and their wives have gone ahead to establish a beachhead, and they are listening eagerly for word of reinforcements. Who will go and help them enlarge that beachhead?”

It was enough. God did not intend to frustrate the vision He had given to the elderly mission leader. One of the young men listening was Bill Mallon. Less

than three years later, Bill and his wife, Barbara, joined Paul and Joy Gesswein and Bill and Mary Widbin among the Black Valley Danis. For four years Bill studied the Dani language, helping to discover the secrets of its grammar and preparing language lesson materials for others who would follow.

In another part of the auditorium David Martin, the youngest member of his class, felt the finger of God touching his own life, as did Margaret Colton, who later became David's wife. Together with Bill and Barbara Mallon, they later beheld thousands of Black Valley Dani warriors burning their fetishes and weapons of war in response to the message of the gospel.

To one side a young immigrant from Holland listened eagerly. He was John Dekker, who later with his wife, Helen, led a new advance into a branch of the Black Valley called Kanggime, which in Dani means "the place of death." Under their ministry the "place of death" abounded with new life as thousands of the inhabitants received Christ into their hearts.

Also two young single women, Judith Eckles and Winifred Frost, began to sense that their destinies were somehow related to what the speaker was saying. Within a few years they also joined the RBMU team in the Black Valley, teaching, healing, and counseling as the Dani church came to birth and began to grow before their eyes.

Elsewhere in the auditorium a young couple from rural Iowa listened intently—Philip and Phyliss Masters. They too soon shared in the limitless opportunities of ministry in the Black Valley and then pressed on to open Korupun among the testy Kimyal people. Thirteen years later, Phil Masters died on the bank of the Seng River, his body pierced by a hundred arrows of the Yali tribe, while Phyliss, his widow, through the comfort of the Holy Spirit, returned to the Black Valley with her five children to continue her ministry there.

There was also Richard Hale, who later, with his wife, Wanda, ministered for three years in the Solomon Islands before reaching Netherlands New Guinea, where health problems cut short their ministry after one year.

In addition to these, other volunteers from Christian campuses in North America, England, Germany, and Australia soon joined hands to swell the ranks of RBMU's task force of career missionaries in Netherlands New Guinea to more than thirty by 1965. By that time the lives of some fourteen thousand stone-age Papuans were already deeply transformed by their ministry of preaching, teaching and healing.

Five years later, in 1971, the total number of adherents climbed to twenty-one thousand as a still larger missionary band joined forces with 176 newly-trained tribal Christian leaders to establish more than one hundred congregations and numerous schools and clinics in high mountain valleys and across lowland swamps.

Entire populations found dramatic release from an age-long oppression of savagery and superstition. They began to enjoy not only the blessings of spiritual wholeness through the gospel, but also of social peace and security such as they had never known. Education came in to fortify them against ruthless exploiters who might otherwise take advantage of their simplicity, as has so often happened to unprepared primitive peoples in other parts of the world.

Doctors and nurses operating from bush hospitals and clinics soon eradicated the terrible scourge of yaws and also helped to stem the severe epidemics of influenza, measles and whooping cough which for so long ravaged these tribes in their isolated state. In the midst of it all, the missionaries found themselves at times almost overwhelmed by the sheer intensity of the gratitude expressed by thousands who knew, better than any outsider could ever appreciate, how greatly their lives had been transformed by their acceptance of the gospel.

All of this, of course, did not come about without a great deal of work! Over the years, hundreds of thousands of missionary man-hours were invested in discovering the hidden rules of tribal languages, compiling dictionaries, inventing alphabets for previously unwritten languages; building houses, schools and clinics; carving out airstrips in jungle-covered terrain; trekking over cold mountain ridges; exploring serpentine rivers; probing the customs and

beliefs of exotic tribes; preaching to thousands and teaching those who respond to read and write; translating the Scriptures; healing the sick and binding their sores; arbitrating between warring factions; hiring, supervising and paying workers; repairing generators, washing machines, outboard motors and tape recorders; maintaining correspondence with supporters in the homelands; keeping financial records; encouraging the despondent; pacifying the enraged; comforting the bereaved; entertaining visitors; ordering supplies months in advance; praying for needed funds; and thanking God for the fantastic privilege of sharing in it all!

All that can be said of the ministry of the Regions Beyond Missionary Union can be repeated concerning the work of the Unevangelized Fields Mission (UFM), The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM), the Asia and Pacific Christian Mission (APCM), the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), the Australian Baptist Mission Society (ABMS), and the Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF). The resourceful flying ministry of the MAF enables the other six missions to maintain adequate logistics while crossing the formidable swamp and mountain barriers of the land. West New Guinea soon grew to become MAF's largest field of operations, requiring the full-time use of as many as eight single-engine and two twin engine aircraft.

Gesswein, Vine and other pioneers of this new frontier estimated the population of the interior in terms of tens of thousands. In actual fact, close to 300,000 "stone-agers" would be discovered even before all areas were fully explored! The six, church-planting missions, supported by the flying services of MAF, by the sum of their respective ministries, saw about 125,000 of these nearly 300,000 individuals express their own personal adherence to the Christian faith before the end of 1971.

Many of these converts matched, if not actually surpassed, the faith and devotion of the missionaries themselves. Some of them, like Yali Christians Bingguok and Yeikwarahu, suffered martyrdom, triumphant and uncomplaining, calling upon their murderers to receive Christ. Stan Dale, an RBMU missionary from Australia, sustained five arrow wounds trying to rescue them.

Two years later Stan himself died beside Philip Masters in a further uprising of the Yali people. Within a few months after their martyrdom, the attitude of the hostile Yali people began to change. Soon dozens of villages welcomed Christian evangelists from the Black Valley Dani church. Still later hundreds began to turn to Christ, including many of the murderers of the four martyrs. But all of this, of course, was still hidden in the mystery of the future back in 1955 when Ebenezer Vine unburdened his soul before the student body of the Prairie Bible Institute. Nevertheless, as one of the seven hundred students listening that day, it seemed to me that God had suddenly come among us with a plan, looking for the people He would use to make that plan come to fruition. I also had the unmistakable feeling that I was one of those He was scrutinizing. With that feeling strongly upon me, I returned from the chapel service to my room in the dormitory. I could hardly wait to get alone before God in prayer and ask, "Is this it? Is this what You want me to do?"

I was twenty years old at the time. Three years earlier I had experienced for the first time the new life, the love, the joy of knowing Jesus Christ in a personal way. A crisis came, I called upon Him, and suddenly He was there, alive! In fact, two thousands years had not aged Him a bit! I found He still had the same power to transform men's lives and hold their loyalty that He had manifested in the Gospels two millenniums before.

Now the old, threadbare, archaic-sounding chapters and verses began to explode with new meaning, as God gave me a heart to understand what they had been saying all along. With Christ at its center, the universe began to make sense. By serving Him, life could have eternal meaning. Knowing Him and sharing Him with others would henceforth be my consuming purpose! And if sharing Him where His name was already known was a privilege, sharing Him where His name had never been heard must be an immeasurably greater privilege!

With these thoughts in mind, I had begun to study the map of the world. I also began to search for a Christian campus which could impart to me the kind of biblical knowledge and spirit I would need to communicate Christ effectively

to men and women of another culture. Guided by the peace of God, I had enrolled at the Prairie Bible Institute in the fall of 1953.

There the dynamic teaching, the fellowship with other students of like purpose, and the exposure to visiting missionary speakers from almost every part of the world, served to confirm still more deeply the conviction that God was calling me to serve Him abroad. Still, there were so many options, so many fields pleading for workers, so many needy people waiting for a chance to hear. Thus the question loomed ever larger: where in this great, wide world does God want me to serve Him?

For three years, the answer had eluded me. At last, in 1955, as I pondered Ebenezer Vine's message, my heart had begun to pound as an inner voice seemed to say, "This is it!" Both the call and my resolution to follow it would be severely tested. Disappointments and delays would at times seem to block the way, but still that call would remain—beckoning, drawing.

Still another Prairie Bible Institute student who was present when Ebenezer Vine delivered that stirring call to Netherlands New Guinea was lovely, blond Carol Soderstrom from Cincinnati, Ohio. First separately and later together we began to pursue the opportunity of serving God with RBMU in New Guinea. For three years after graduating from Prairie, Carol trained as a nurse while I gained further experience as a pastor and a youth worker.

Then in August 1960, we were united in marriage. The following summer found us both attending a linguistic course offered by the Summer Institute of Linguistics at the University of Washington in Seattle. In November of 1961 our first child, Stephen, was born. Soon afterwards our visas to Netherlands New Guinea were granted. We sailed from Vancouver on the *Oriana* on March 19, 1962, and on April 13 arrived at Sentani, an airfield on the north coast of Netherlands New Guinea. Seven days later MAF pilot Dave Steiger took us on our first flight into the interior. We landed at Karubaga, RBMU's main station in the Black Valley.

Here we saw nearly naked tribesmen sporting stone axes, and string-skirted women digging with wooden sticks in their sweet potato gardens. Surrounded by hundreds of the Dani people, Philip and Phyliss Masters, former classmates David and Margaret Martin and Winnie Frost, and other RBMU colleagues welcomed us at the airstrip.

After greetings and introductions, David Martin and I walked out across the countryside while he explained to me much concerning the culture of the Dani people and the brief history of RBMU's work among them. Eventually we came to the subject of what part Carol and I might expect to have in the future of this work.

David stopped and gazed out across the grassy Karubaga plateau to the mountainsides dotted with Dani villages. "There is still much to be done here in the Black Valley, but in our recent field conference we had a great deal of discussion about the needs of other tribes that are still unreached. In fact, we have already entered into an agreement with TEAM giving us responsibility for a large area of the vast swampy plain that extends from the southern slopes of these ranges to the shores of the Arafura Sea.

"John and Glenna McCain from Florida have already gone down to that area. For five months they have been working among a people called the Kayagar. From their reports, the area is anything but hospitable. Many of the tribes in that region are still practicing both cannibalism and headhunting and are generally not to be trusted. And the climate is as hot, humid, and unhealthy as it can possible be.

"Nevertheless we agreed to ask you and Carol to consider the area. We realize you may have apprehensions about taking little Stephen down to a place like that, and if you would rather work somewhere else, feel free to say so. But if God gives you peace about going to one of the other tribes in our southern area of responsibility, the way is open for you." After two days of waiting upon God in prayer, we gave David Martin our answer. "Yes, we are happy to go to one of the tribes in the south! How soon can we leave?"

On May 19 MAF pilot Hank Worthington flew us from Karubaga to the southern lowlands. We watched in awe as the mighty ranges in the area of Mount Wilhelmina suddenly dropped from altitudes of more than fifteen thousand feet down to sea level. Ahead of us shimmering, emerald swamps, veined with turgid streams, lush with endless sago thickets, stretched as far as the eye could see. Somewhere in the midst of it we were to build a home and live in the midst of a cannibal-headhunter tribe.

At last the coastline of the Arafura Sea swam into view as Hank Worthington nosed the Cessna toward our destination, a tiny Dutch government outpost called Pirimapun. There TEAM missionaries, Dr. Ken Dresser and his wife, Sylvia, had established a new beachhead among the southern Asmat people. Our RBMU colleagues, John and Glenna McCain, were also there. They had journeyed out of the swamps in their 26-foot riverboat to meet us and take us with them to their home among the Kayagar.

That afternoon as the six of us sipped a cool drink in the living room of the Dressers' prefabricated aluminum home, Carol and I were able to become better acquainted with these two resourceful couples who had preceded us to this "uttermost part of the earth." John and Glenna were no strangers to swamp country, having grown up near the Everglades along Florida's western coast. A quiet, determined couple, they were deeply dedicated to the task of bringing Christ to the Kayagar people, who had already sent one missionary couple home with broken health.

Ken Dresser, an ingenious Canadian physician, had already faced difficulties and frustrations that many would have considered insurmountable. And he knew he would face many more, yet his calm eyes radiated a peace and contentment that never seemed to leave him. His wife, Sylvia, shared his fortitude, laboring cheerfully beside her husband in the operating room of their bush hospital and caring for her home and children. Many years would pass before the Asmat people would begin to show a genuine response to their ministry of spiritual and physical kindness.

During the course of the conversation, Ken Dresser acquainted us with the history of this remote location. Nearly two hundred years earlier British Captain James Cook had anchored his ship near this very point and sent a lorry ashore to search for fresh water. Yet as far as Dr. Dresser could determine, the Asmat people retained no memory of the history-making event!

They told us of the tragic and mysterious disappearance, only seven months earlier, of Michael Rockefeller, son of the former Governor of New York State, at a point just twenty-two miles north of the Dressers' home. And both the McCains and the Dressers spoke intensely and informatively of their own interesting experiences among the Kayagar and Asmat people.

At length I questioned John McCain as to which of the other tribes in RBMU's area of responsibility he judged Carol and I should enter. John replied, "After giving thought to all the factors involved, Glenna and I both recommend you go to the tribe living to the northwest of our Kayagar people, the tribe called the Sawi."

After years of preparing and waiting, just to hear the name of the people we would devote our lives to was exciting! The Sawi! I turned the name over in my mind. I could almost taste its savor on the tip of my tongue. It had the same tang of inscrutable mystery that pervaded even the very jungle outside the Dressers' back door.

The next morning we said good-bye to the Dressers and left Pirimapun, following the bends of the Cook River toward John and Glenna's home in the Kayagar village called Kawem, forty miles deep in the sago swamps.