Peace Child

By Don Richardson

Part 2

Chapter 7 THROUGH THE IRONWOOD CURTAIN

John McCain's 26-foot river launch the *ebenezer* (named for ebenezer vine), rolled easily at the dock as we loaded fuel and supplies in the predawn darkness. Nearby, the friendly light of kerosene lamps gleamed inside the McCains' aluminum home, where Glenna and Carol were packing food supplies for our journey. Further away, the black shapes of Kayagar longhouses hulked in two long rows beside the starlit path of the Cook River.

By 5:30 A.M. we were underway. The launch's Volkswagen engine roared to life, and John pointed her prow downstream. Our wives waved good-bye from the dock. Carol was holding baby Stephen, who had just awakened. His tiny face was barely visible in the pale blue of early dawn as he snuggled close to Carol's blond hair. Beside them stood Herep, the Kayagar headman who in the past had proved to be a faithful protector of John's family and property whenever John had had to leave them in this isolated outpost. A second protector was the McCains' fierce watchdog, Patches. In addition, a radio transmitter in the McCains' home would enable the two women to call for help if trouble developed.

The full light of dawn found us threading the narrow channel of the Cook westward toward Pirimapun. Around us a shimmering panorama of emerald grasslands, graceful palms and dense sago thickets formed a vast, windswept concourse for the swarms of snowy egrets, pastel ducks, and black-throated geese constantly flushed into the sky by our passing. Still higher overhead, spectral hordes of giant fruit bats drifted unveeringly southward as if controlled by a single sinister mind. Weary from a night of foraging under the stars, they would soon hide their freakish heads inside the voluminous, leathery membranes of their wings to sleep out the day, hanging by the thousands in some distant thicket of the jungle.

Four hours later we reached Pirimapun, where TEAM's Dr. Ken Dresser was waiting to join us in our attempt to contact the Sawi tribe. We took his fiberglass skiff and outboard motor in tow, in case the *Ebenezer* developed engine trouble in some remote sector of the wilderness. Leaving Pirimapun, we veered north across the Arafura Sea, looking for the mouths of rivers that would lead us back into Sawi territory.

Three days later the *Ebenezer* turned into the mouth of the Kronkel and began to follow the same tortuous course the Dutch riverboats had followed approximately two years earlier. In the intervening period we had explored the Au River and contacted three Sawi villages named Mauro, Hahami and Ero. In all three villages, women and children had fled into the jungle at our approach, but some of the men remained to meet us on the shore. I was able to elicit a number of Sawi words from these brief encounters, a small start on a language that probably contained several thousand terms.

In a fourth village, Sato, the treehouses stood empty at our approach, all inhabitants having fled in terror. I climbed up into one of the treehouses and left a small gift in the center of the floor, as an indication of good will. Later we learned we had missed two other villages, Mosi and Tamor, because they were hidden deep in the recesses of the jungle. But we had ascertained the existence of a sizable Sawi population along the Au River.
Now we hoped to find an even larger population along the Kronkel. Following the bends of the Kronkel quickly used up the remaining hours of daylight, so after we had passed a safe distance beyond the two large Asmat villages

situated in the lower part of the river, we dropped anchor in the middle of the channel and cooked our evening meal.

Next morning we decided to leave the slower *Ebenezer* at anchor and make a quick strike toward the headwaters of the river in Ken Dresser's sixteen-foot skiff. Cutting the bends at about twenty-five knots we quickly left the Asmat region far behind and soon saw a few scant evidences of Sawi population in the form of abandoned treehouses rotting on their stilts.
Presently we passed the mouth of the Hanai tributary, which led back to the hideaway where, still unknown to us, Haenam had killed and devoured the four men from Wasohwi a few months earlier. Swinging north around a sharp bend we came to the old village site where the two Dutch riverboats had startled Haenam and Kamur two years before. It was now so overgrown with trees that we hardly noticed it.

Next the long expanse of the straight stretch of river, which I later learned was called the *kidari*, opened up before us. I remarked to John
McCain, "This stretch of river would make an excellent landing site for the MAF float plane."

At the far end of the *kidari* we discovered more rotting treehouses of still another abandoned village. We knew that if we pressed on much further we would enter Kayagar territory, so we beached the skiff at the abandoned village site, right where another tributary flowed into the Kronkel from the north. We stepped ashore onto the same knoll of high ground where Kigo, Hato and Numu, two years earlier, had come out into the open and faced the advancing riverboats in an act of monumental courage.

But there was no one to welcome us now. The brooding jungle stood tall against the sky, walling in the overgrown clearing as if to create an arena for an impending contest. I listened to the wind soughing through the derelict structures, rustling the smoke-blackened, rotting thatch. I watched a fish cleave the limpid surface of the quiet, tree-shadowed tributary.

The wildness of the locale seemed to taunt me. Something in the mood of the place seemed to say mockingly, "I am not like your tame, manageable Canadian homeland. I am tangled. I am too dense to walk through. I am hot and steamy and drenched with rain. I am hip-deep mud and six-inch sago thorns. I am death adders and taipans and leeches and crocodiles. I am malaria and dysentery and filariasis and hepatitis.
"Your idealism means nothing here. Your Christian gospel has never scrupled the conscience of my children. You think you love them, but wait until you know them, if you *can* ever know them! You presume you are ready to grapple with me, understand my mysteries and change my nature. But I am easily able to overpower you with my gloom, my remoteness, my heedless brutality, my indolence, my unashamed morbidity, my total *otherness!*

"Think again, before you commit yourself to certain disillusionment! Can't you see I am no place for your wife? I am no place for your son. I am no place for you. . . . "
The voices of the leafy arena seemed to swell and then fade into the masses of creeping tendrils and twisted vines. I turned and looked back at John and Ken waiting by the skiff. Beyond them that appealingly straight stretch of river glimmered in the sun. The ground on which I stood seemed reasonably high. The rotting treehouses were evidence of population hidden in the jungle around us. The little tributary might prove to lead close to other centers of population further north.

It's only a bluff, I thought. This swamp also is part of my Father's creation. His providence can sustain us here as well as anywhere else. Then the peace of God descended on me and suddenly this strange place became home! My home! I turned to Ken and John and said, "This is where I want to build!"
They nodded in agreement. The die was now cast! And high overhead, a white cockatoo glided up onto a girder-like limb of an ironwood tree and cocked his head at the unaccustomed sight of three clothed strangers and a skiff. Unfurling his yellow crest, he promptly swooped down again and away, shrieking as if to warn the jungle that its bluff had been called.

But deep among the vines and tendrils a young man named Seg crouched, watching our movements apprehensively. Then as we embarked again in the skiff, Seg turned and hurried away into the shadowed vaults of the forest to warn the village called Kamur of our presence.
Before returning to the *Ebenezer* we proceeded further upstream in search of still other signs of Sawi population. But here again we found only rotting houses or overgrown village sites.

Then we met two Kayagar men in a dugout. They recognized John McCain from visits they had made to the Cook River area. With his knowledge of the Kayagar language, John was able to learn from them that there were no other Sawi villages located upstream. We discovered also that the abandoned village we had just left was called Kamur. They advised us also that Kamur had recently relocated near the source of the tributary we had seen.

We requested them to guide us to the new site of Kamur. They hesitated, but when we offered them payment, they agreed. We told them to sit down in their canoe and then threw a rope around its pointed prow. Ken started up the Johnson outboard motor, and soon we were racing back downstream with two wide-eyed Kayagar hanging on for dear life to the sides of their little craft.
When we reached the mouth of the tributary, the tide had dropped, revealing masses of fallen trees nearly blocking the channel. It was obvious the skiff could never navigate in such a tangle of logs, but we thought the Kayagars' small craft might be light enough to skim over most of the barriers. John and I fitted ourselves precariously into the narrow canoe and started up the tributary while Ken stayed by the skiff. Before we had proceeded a hundred yards it became clear, however, that even the Kayagar craft could not find enough water to float, so we abandoned the attempt and returned to Ken and the skiff on the main river.
After paying the two Kayagar for their help, we started back downstream toward the *Ebenezer*. We were disappointed at not having made contact with a single Sawi person on the Kronkel River. But, our disappointment was to be short-lived!

Kani and thirty-nine other warriors from Haenam and Yohwi villages warily needled their black dugouts through the winding, vegetation-walled tunnel which was the course of the Hanai tributary. Packs of fresh sago flour and toasted beetle grubs filled the spaces between the feet of the paddlers. A number of lori parrots fluttered on the end of their tethers like little bursts of red, blue and green color. Native chickens likewise looked out over the sago packs.
The forty men were embarking on a new kind of adventure—a trading journey to the new government outpost called Pirimapun. For almost two years they had been hearing fabulous stories about Pirimapun from the Kayagar and from Atohwaem villages along the Cook River. Many times they had almost worked up enough courage to make the dread journey, but fear had restrained them. Now it was do or die!

On the previous day they had hidden their womenfolk and children and their valuable possessions deep in the jungle in the care of the older men of the village. Then just after sunrise they had rendezvoused near the source of the Hanai tributary where their four new canoes were ready. Now they were approaching the mouth of the Hanai at the end of the first leg of their journey. Kani crouched down on the sleek tip of the lead canoe, and peered out through screening branches at the bright expanse of the Kronkel. It would be fatal to burst out into the open and find oneself face to face with a flotilla of Asmat war canoes. The Kronkel was clear, so Kani struck his paddle deep and moved out into the open. The other paddlers followed suit.

With the tips of their spear-paddles scissoring over their heads, they turned upstream toward the Kayagar area, taking the long way to Pirimapun in order to avoid the still hostile Asmat villages who guarded the lower Kronkel. They knew it was possible to reach the Cook River by cutting through the flooded Kayagar grasslands, and the Kayagar recently had become increasingly friendly toward their former enemies, the Sawi. The travelers were not expecting any trouble from the Kayagar, but just in case, the inside walls of their canoes were lined with forty palmwood bows and hundreds of barb-tipped arrows.

The adventurers had already committed themselves to the long expanse of the *kidari* when suddenly their newly mustered courage was tested to the limit. Straight ahead of them, and just out of sight around the bend at the far end of the *kidari*, a strange sound like the wine of an angry hornet split the quiet of the morning. It grew rapidly louder, droning straight toward them!
Suddenly a pale yellow craft darted into sight, streamers of spray flaring behind it. In the craft were three figures covered in bright-colored skins. Tuans! Pandemonium broke loose in the four canoes.

As we turned into the *kidari*, Ken suddenly pointed straight ahead. Turning, we saw four canoes full of men who could only be Sawi. My heart stirred within me at the sight of them.
The appearance of our skiff had thrown them into complete disorder. Some leaped from their canoes and plunged in among the reeds, while others waved their paddles frantically trying to maintain their balance in the confusion. Those who remained in their canoes had no time to flee.

Within a few seconds we were drawing up beside them and John was calling to them in Kayagar, encouraging them not to be afraid. Among them was the Atohwaem warrior, Hadi, who was fluent in both Kayagar and Sawi as well as his own mother tongue. Hearing John's words of reassurance, Hadi quickly translated them into Sawi with a clear, ringing voice, easily heard above the confused uproar of forty disquieted warriors.

All were lithe, wiry, hard-muscled men, naked except for their armbands and ornaments. Most of them were actually trembling, which caused their fragile dugout canoes to tremble with them. The canoes in turn made the dark surface of the Kronkel shiver in resonance with the feelings of the forty, giving the impression that the men, their canoes and nature were all in harmony.

Drawing our skiff alongside one of the canoes, we touched fingertips with the nearest warriors, using the Sawi greeting, *"Konahario!"* which had worked so well in the villages we had visited on the Au River. Hearing it, these men of the Kronkel also responded exuberantly. To release their nervous tension they shouted *"Konahario!"* back at us so loudly as to be almost unnerving.
One by one, those who had hidden themselves among the reeds swam out of hiding and climbed back into their canoes. We then passed out a dozen or more empty tin cans which we had saved for such an occasion. They quickly snapped them up. Tin cans are highly prized by these people whose only water containers were lengths of hollow bamboo. Not one of those tin cans would fall as litter in the jungle. They would be used and re-used until they rusted away.

John then learned from Hadi that the expedition was bound for Pirimapun. Ken Dresser exclaimed, "This is a big adventure for them! It will probably be the first time in their history that they have ventured outside their own territory to meet with civilization. And God has providentially timed our survey to meet them in the first few miles of their journey!" Ken was right, for if we had started on our return journey a few minutes earlier, we would have passed the mouth of the Hanai before the expedition emerged from it.

Our attention was drawn, not to men like Kani, Mahaen, and Maum, but to Hadi. His bright personality and apparent fearlessness, plus his facility as an interpreter, persuaded us that he would be a valuable help in my future contacts with the Sawi. John invited him to make the journey with us by outboard back to the *Ebenezer* and then to Pirimapun and Kawem, where he would join the party of travelers again on the morrow. During the journey I would have time to establish personal rapport with him and perhaps learn more of the Sawi language as well.

Hearing our invitation, Hadi, in spite of his dark skin, turned pale! We could almost see his stomach churning under his tense skin as he weighed the implications of our offer. To accept would not only mean committing his life to the uncertain mercy of three bizarre and possibly nonhuman aliens. It would also mean traveling with them into the dread region of the fiendish Asmat cannibals. If he made it past the Asmat, he would still have to brave traveling on the ocean, an experience completely unknown to him.

Although Hadi had lived all his life only twenty air miles from the Arafura Sea, he had never once laid eyes upon it. He had, however, heard several awe-inspiring second- or third-hand reports of what it was like. Often during the season of westerly monsoon storms, he had heard the distant thunder of thousands of mighty breakers pounding night and day on the Arafura mud flats and trembled to think how terrible it would be if one were close to the source of that formidable sound!

On the other hand, what an adventure the journey would be! And how great would be his prestige among his people if he returned safely! The story of his odyssey would enthrall at least three tribes, for Hadi could speak three languages! His journey would mark a major turning point in the history of his people, for he would learn much about the Tuans which would prepare the way for future contacts with them.

The potential benefits, Hadi decided, outweighed the potential dangers. "I'll go with you!" he said to John, tremblingly. We rejoiced, while Hadi's friends stared at him with evident concern for his safety. They had not yet had time to make the same evaluation Hadi had made.

John then wisely decided to invite a second person to accompany Hadi, to help allay pangs of misgiving or loneliness which he might feel during the journey. The one chosen was a smiling youth named Er (bird). Following the lead of Hadi, who was his elder, Er courageously accepted our offer.

We took them both on board, hopefully assuring the other wayfarers that they would find Hadi and Er well and happy at Kawem when they passed that way on the morrow. Then with a final *"Konahario!"* we left them standing somewhat bewildered, gazing after us through the spray kicked up by the outboard motor. Within seconds we had left the *kidari* behind on our return journey to the Arafura Sea still forty winding river-miles away.

Thirty minutes later we found the *Ebenezer* just as we left it, tied the skiff to its stem, and resumed our seaward journey. Hadi, Er and I sat down on top of the cabin and I continued plying Hadi for more Sawi terminology, with help in the Kayagar language from John McCain, who stood below us at the wheel.

When at length we came within sight of the first Asmat village, Hadi and Er grew tense with fear. They could no longer concentrate on the questions I was asking, so I had to let the language study wait until we were well past the dreaded presence. The Asmat, a lean, hungry-looking people, simply lined up along the shore and stared blankly as the *Ebenezer* left its wake at their feet.

As we rounded the last bend of the Kronkel and faced the open sea, Hadi and Er gasped. Stretched like a taut wire between the mangrove swamps on either side of the river mouth was the horizon line of the Arafura Sea. Burnished by the late afternoon sun, it gleamed so brightly it hurt our eyes to try to focus on it. To Hadi and Er it must have seemed that we were journeying into nothingness itself, as the *Ebenezer* boldly ventured far out toward the ever-receding, glittering seam of sky and sea, and then veered south toward Pirimapun.

Once the *Ebenezer* began to roll on the ocean swell, Hadi and Er gripped the handrails apprehensively, fearing the launch might capsize. I laid my hand on Hadi's shoulder and calmly whispered to him two Sawi words he himself had taught me a few hours earlier, *"Tadan nom!* Don't be afraid!"

Hadi looked at me, and slowly a smile of returning confidence brightened his countenance. He replied, *"Tadan haser!* I'm not afraid!" and let go of the handrail to prove it. Er followed suit.

Turning into the mouth of the Cook River at Pirimapun, Ken Dresser disengaged his skiff and took leave of us, while John and I pressed on through descending darkness, following the bends of the Cook by spotlight.

At one o'clock in the morning the familiar outline of the McCain's home stood out against the stars. Our first journey to the Sawi was ended. I stepped up onto the dock and felt Carol's welcoming arms enfold me in the darkness.

"Is everything all right?" I whispered in her ear.

"Just perfect!" she replied enthusiastically.
"Guess what—we have two Sawi on board!" I said, still not aware that Hadi belonged to the Atohwaem tribe.
I could feel a thrill of joy well up within her as she peeked curiously past my shoulder at the shadowy figures of Hadi and Er, barely visible in the glow of the *Ebenezer's* cabin light.

Once accommodations for Hadi and Er had been arranged, Carol and I stole quietly into the room where Stephen was sleeping in the screened cot John McCain had so carefully fashioned for him. Turning our flashlight close enough to reveal his rounded cheeks and wispy, golden hair, but not close enough to awaken him, we stood hand in hand and gazed wistfully upon this vision of cherubic serenity which was our son. Whatever destiny awaited us among the Sawi, Stephen would share it, for better or for worse. We were sure it would be for the better.

Our confidence in God was running at a high level and getting higher. Exhilarated with a buoyant spirit of trust, we never seriously considered that some dread disease of the swamps might steal the blush of health from our baby's cheeks, or that any other danger might seriously threaten any of us. "If God be for us, who can be against us!" was the watchword that uplifted us night and day.

It seemed, furthermore, that this bracing excitement was not our own, but was being communicated to us through the presence of God—as if God Himself had been waiting such a long, long time to do whatever He was going to do for the Sawi through us, and was delighted that at last the time had come! It had never occurred to me before that God could feel *excited*, that the One who is omnipresent in time as well as space could actually, as it were, isolate part of His consciousness on a single world-line and anticipate the future as if He were not already experiencing it!

It's true, I thought—God is excited and we, like children, are getting excited along with our Parent's contagious joy! This intuition only served to heighten still further our eager expectation of whatever God was preparing for us and for the Sawi.
With earnest longing we pleaded with God that the message of redemption in Christ might quickly break through all barriers, satanic or cultural, and spread this blessed contagion of joy to those strange, fearful men we had encountered that morning on the Kronkel River. How long it would take, I could not even guess. I only knew my life would not be complete until it happened!

A shout went up at the far end of Kawem village. "The Sawi are coming!"
Hadi, Er and I broke off language work and walked out to the end of the McCains' dock. There they were! Four canoes advancing in single file, giving Kawem a wide berth by keeping close to the reedy north shore of the Cook. Hadi and Er raised their arms to catch their attention, and all four dugouts quickly veered straight toward us.

The thirty-eight paddlers seemed tense and brooding as they beached their canoes around the dock. Now far from their own territory, they were feeling the strangeness of it all very keenly. And they still had another forty miles to paddle before they reached Pirimapun! Herep, the Kayagar headman, came running from Kawem and greeted the wayfarers. Two or three of them gave Herep several sticks festooned with toasted beetle grubs, a sort of safe passage fee.

By this time, Hadi and Er had agreed to stay with us at Kawem for further language work, and so the travelers continued on without them. Two days later they were back, having sold their wares in the "big city" of Pirimapun. Bone-weary and solemn after paddling forty miles upstream, they rested by sitting on their paddles or on the sides of their canoes, while Hadi and Er gathered together the goods we had paid them for four days of language work.
As Hadi and Er resumed their places in two of the dugouts, John McCain gave Hadi one last cryptic message before the four canoes departed. "You and your people should spend some time fishing on the Kronkel for a few days!"

Hadi smiled knowingly and translated the message to the Sawi. It meant they should keep lookouts posted for us, because we intended to return, but couldn't say exactly when it would be.
As yet we had said nothing to either Kayagar or Sawi about our intention to reside on the Kronkel, because of the inter-village or intertribal rivalries this news might engender if made known too early. For the Kayagar were quite determined that Carol and I should stay within their territory.

As the four canoes departed, Hadi and Er stood looking back at us, waving—two enthusiastic, outgoing optimists in a crowd of grim, determined men. It had been easy to win the friendship of Hadi and Er, but what about the others? It was too early yet to know what the underlying attitudes of the majority would prove to be. But we would soon find out.

Chapter 8 THE END OF AN AEON

By 7 a.m. that day in June, 1962, the two Kayagar dugouts were loaded and the six paddlers ready. One dugout wobbled uncertainly under the weight of two empty 55-gallon steel drums. The other was neatly packed with a large mosquito net and bedroll, a week's supply of food, tools for building, and trade goods to pay workers. These were all loaned to me by the McCains, as our own equipment had not yet arrived from North America.

I kissed Carol and Stephen good-bye and embarked in the latter canoe, as Glenna handed me a container of boiled water for drinking and a lunch for midday. I thanked her as we pulled away from the shore, while John gave final instructions to the Kayagar paddlers.

Our plan was for me to take a shortcut by dugout through the swamps to the Kronkel River, renew contact with the Sawi, and begin construction of a temporary home, while John returned to Pirimapun with the *Ebenezer* to complete construction of a storage house we had been building there. Five or six days later, John planned to continue north along the coastline to the Kronkel River, and then follow the river up to join me in completing the temporary house on the Kronkel.

As we struck out across the flooded grasslands, the silence of the wilderness closed in upon us, disturbed only by the swish of paddles and the lisping voice of kunai grass caressing the dugouts. Overhead, occasional halos of sunlight gleamed through a brooding overcast, shedding a misty glow on the dense sago forests looming beyond the grasslands.

Soon we penetrated the sago thickets, and the watercourse rapidly grew narrower. For about two hours we followed a sharply twisting channel and then broke out onto the grasslands which drain into the Kronkel River. At this point three canoes crowded with boisterous Kayagar men intercepted us. Hemming us in on all sides, they bent down and gripped my arms, shouting loudly and pointing ahead.

They had obviously surmised by the kind of equipment I was transporting that I intended to build a home somewhere in the Kronkel area, and they were determined that it should be built at the site of their own village, Amyam.

They seemed to be saying something like, "Tuan, don't go to the Sawi! They kill and eat people! Come to our village! In our village there is lots of high ground. We will help you build a real good house! Come to our village! Come to our village! Come to our village!"

Their shouting swelled to a tumult as we floated on toward the Kronkel. I tried in vain to quench their hopes. Using my sparse vocabulary of Indonesian and Kayagar, I urged my own paddlers to explain to these strangers that I was heading for the Sawi village called Kamur. My paddlers, however, were clearly halfhearted in passing on my message.

I began to sense a conspiracy. The paddlers also were Kayagar, after all, and were not eager to see the Sawi obtain the steel axes, machetes, and other

trade goods which I was sure to dispense over periods of time. I began to realize that a major campaign to pressure me into choosing the village of Amyam was building up around me.
John McCain had earlier warned that before long the people of the area would test my will to see if I could be intimidated, and that it was of the utmost importance that I pass the test, otherwise Carol and I would be swamped with troubles from then on, and would end up broken in health or discouraged. So this is it, I thought, and steeled my will.

For another two hours the shouting and the pressure continued. Still other canoes joined our entourage, swelling the tumult. Unable to reason with them in any language they could understand, I simply sat quietly, waiting. Unfortunately, they took my silence for submission, and began exulting and shouting in unison, proclaiming far and wide that fortune had smiled upon them and given them a Tuan of their own to make them all rich.

Then I looked up and saw what must be the village of Amyam straight ahead. The Kayagar in the canoes around me now began to thump their paddle blades on the sides of their canoes to announce the triumphal arrival of Amyam's Tuan to his splendid new capital city! As we came abreast of the village, my paddlers looked at me enquiringly, pointing to Amyam and urging that we stop there.

I said determinedly in mixed Kayagar and Indonesian, *"Sevi terus ke Kamur!* Go straight on to Kamur!"
Dejectedly, they resumed paddling, and then it happened!
A large, swift Kayagar dugout came rushing from the right-hand side, curving in front of us and forcing our canoe over to the shore in front of the village. Meanwhile people from the village itself came running, calling to me, waving, beckoning, pleading.

I hated to disappoint them, but straining every muscle to keep my balance in the narrow dugout, I rose to my feet, towered up to my full six-foot-two, and roared, "GO STRAIGHT ON TO KAMUR!!!"

Silence fell. For a few seconds it was not clear whether they would accept my demand or react with bitter resentment. Then, very sulkily, the men in the dugout which was barring our way moved it aside. We slowly paddled back into midstream and continued our journey.
I had passed the first test, yet I felt very sad, as a messenger of Christ, to have to refuse such a hearty invitation from so needy a people. Yet I knew that Amyam would later hear the gospel in their own language from the lips of John McCain, and this fact made their need less pressing than that of the Sawi, who still had no messenger who could speak to them in their own tongue. Still, Amyam earned a special place in my heart that day, and through the years I would pray for them more earnestly than for any other Kayagar village.

Borne along by the Kronkel's steady current, we passed quickly through a region which in more troubled times had been the no-man's-land separating the Kayagar and Sawi tribes. As we entered Sawi territory, my Kayagar paddlers pointed to various tributaries emptying into the Kronkel, and cited the names of Sawi villages which could be reached by following each of those tributaries to their sources in the sago swamps.
One such tributary was called the Sumdu. "It leads to Wiar," they informed me. Next on the left, they said, was the Baitom, which leads to Hadi's village, called Yohwi.

"Hadi's village?" I repeated. "Quick! Turn in to the Baitom and take me to Hadi. I want to see him before we go on to Kamur."
We turned into the shadowed course of the Baitom and followed it for about a mile into the thickening jungle. Suddenly we broke through into a clearing and saw six longhouses ranged on either side of the river.
My Kayagar paddlers called out, "Hadi! Tuan Don is here!"

There was a rapid scurrying inside the longhouses as some of the occupants, awakened from their afternoon naps, prepared to flee, while one or two others took the time to see who was coming. These recognized me and came down excitedly from their homes to welcome us to their village. Hadi was working in

the jungle, but messengers soon found him and brought him back. It was like a reunion of old friends.
Hadi invited me up into his home and we sat down to talk, using the still meager Sawi vocabulary I had learned from him. I still had no idea what grammatical rules might govern word order in this never-before-analyzed language, but still he seemed to understand most of what I said.
At this point I mentioned for the first time that I was on my way to Kamur's old village site to build my home. Hadi sat stunned in disbelief, wondering if perhaps he had misunderstood my mutilated Sawi. I repeated the statement emphatically, and it got through. Hadi translated it for the others gathering around and immediately a chorus of little whistles and exclamations signaled the excitement running through the village.

"I want you to come to Kamur and help me build my home, Hadi," I said.
"*Der*! Good!" he replied, breaking out in a wide smile, "I'll come tomorrow!"
As I rose to leave, Hadi laid a hand on my shoulder and pointed to the other end of the longhouse where a young man lay sick, too delirious to share in the excitement of the moment.

"My son Amwi is very sick," he said. "Can you help him?"
I made my way to the emaciated youth, ducking under overhead racks heavy with bows, arrows, spears and the sago-sifting tools used by the swamp-dwellers. Not yet experienced in reading the symptoms of tropical diseases, I took a guess that it was malaria, and administered the appropriate drug.

Hadi and I then embraced each other as a gesture of farewell, and I left Yohwi. Hadi followed us along the swampy edge of the Baitom, assuring me over and over that he would meet me at Kamur as soon as he could gather sago to last him for a few days. Then the jungle hid him from view.

At five o'clock that evening we reached the site of Kamur's old, rotting village, which was about to undergo a dramatic rejuvenation. There was still no sign of any Sawi at the location. Nor did we have time to go looking for them, with only an hour of daylight left. We chose one of the least dilapidated of the longhouses and hoisted our goods up into it. The floor was stiff strong enough to support our weight, with the exception of a few gaping holes. We cooked our evening meal and spread out our grass mats for the night.
Just before dawn next morning we awakened to hear a wall of rain advancing upon us. Within a few seconds it struck the old longhouse with such force the building seemed to sway. Not until mid-morning did the rain allow us to begin the day's work.

I appointed the six workers at my disposal as follows: two were to travel up the tributary to try to find Kamur, bearing gifts to the chiefs of the village and inviting them to come out and meet with me. Three others were to set out with axes and cut ironwood piers for the foundation of my home. The one remaining worker stayed to help me clear the land.

Soon the five were gone, leaving a young man named Hedip and myself to tackle the formidable tangle of vines that ensnarled the proposed location of our home. We plunged in, flailing with our machetes. The jungle began to yield ground, slowly and reluctantly, but it was all low ground! I knew if we built our home on land like that we would have water standing under our floor for months at a time during rainy seasons.

We slashed in deeper until Hedip pointed his machete in among the twisted roots at his feet. I looked, and sure enough, the land was sloping upward! We concentrated our energies to follow the slope and, to our intense delight, saw it rise to the unbelievable height of four feet above the surrounding swampland! A knoll of ground as high as that was a rarity in the area and would probably not yield to flooding more than a few weeks out of every year.
Stephen would have dry ground to play on after all!

About two hours later our clearing operation was interrupted by the return of the two gift-bearers I had sent to search for Kamur. They beamed happily and said, "We found them, Tuan."

I said, “Where are they?”
A Kayagar raised his paddle and pointed back upstream. I looked and saw five or six dugouts inching closer beyond a screen of foliage. I still could not see the men who stood in the dugouts, but I knew they were watching me.
The two Kayagar called to them, and presently one canoe and then another and another inched forward through the foliage screen, revealing two or three dozen taut-muscled, wary Sawi warriors. Their eyes were fixed upon me and they made no sound, as they gradually responded to the Kayagar’s coaxing and came closer. Their palmwood bows lay strung and ready at their feet as they stood naked in their dugouts.

I stood near the water’s edge and said, “*Konaharioʼ!”*
No answer. Their canoes nudged the shore and still they stood staring. Now that they were closer, I could detect the trembling of their limbs and the nervous twitching of their eyebrows. I was trembling a bit myself but managed to keep it inside where it couldn’t be seen. This time there was no John or Ken to give advice, no *Ebenezer* or skiff for a hasty retreat if the situation took a bad turn.

A meeting of culturally similar strangers is one thing, but a meeting of culturally dissimilar strangers is something else! Representing opposite ends of humanity’s wide-ranging cultural spectrum, we faced each other, and the very air between us seemed to crackle with tension.
Hoary millenniums earlier, their ancestors and mine had been one people, living together, using the same tools and weapons, pursuing the same goals, speaking the same language. Then they had wandered apart, not merely into differing climes, but into steadily diverging life-styles as well. Genetic variations in metabolism, skin color, hair, and body proportions had emerged and become distilled through mutual isolation. Linguistic change had obliterated the original mother tongue, leaving orphaned the various offspring languages, which continued to diverge until they could no longer recognize each other as siblings.

And now, after aeons of change had metamorphosed us both until we appeared totally alien to each other, providence had brought us together again to demonstrate. . . .

While the younger men remained in their dugouts, three of the more mature strangers cautiously stepped ashore and approached me. The Kayagar, having failed in their attempt to prevent me from coming to the Sawi, now seemed to have changed their attitude completely. I could see they were taking great pleasure and pride in their role as the facilitators of this new encounter. Fussing like nursemaids, they coaxed the Sawi closer, gently chiding them for their almost rude reticence.

One of the three men suddenly stepped right up to me. His right eye had earlier been pierced by an arrow and had rotted out, but his left eye held me with a sagacious gleam. I raised my hand toward him. He responded.
For a brief moment we took one another’s measure, and then we touched fingers. Gradually the emotional static diminished, the feeling of fiery strangeness subsided. We were equally human . . . flesh and blood . . . men.

He smiled at me and said, “I am Hato!”
Gripping his hand, I replied, “I am Don!”
The other two men crowded in and touched my hand also. They said in turn:
“I am Kigo!”
“I am Numu!”

The three heroes had emerged again!
Their companions then thronged up from the canoes, and the air rang with *Konaharios!* I pointed to the newly cleared ground and indicated my intent to build a house and live there. They responded, *“Der! Der! Der!*
Good! Good! Good!” I asked them to bring split palm tree bark for the floor, and they promised to return with it the next day.
Suddenly their cries and exclamations grew louder, swelling in a unified wave of rejoicing which crested and broke in a mighty, deep-chested shout called

hahap kaman. It was a shout in which no one expressed his joy fully until all expressed it together. It aroused in me such a feeling of mingled strangeness and hope that my scalp began to tingle. They made me feel as if someone had just hit a home run in a world series ball game. And as every eye was fixed upon me, I gathered that I was the one! I could hardly keep my feet on the ground!
As the great shout began to subside, another sound welled up beneath it. I swung around to see the Kronkel black with the canoes of Amyam and Yohwi. Hadi and all his band were skimming toward us, rumbling their paddle blades loudly on the sides of their dugouts. The sight and the sound of them immediately triggered another ecstatic response in the men of Kamur. Before Kamur's second *hahap kaman* died down, Yohwi and Amyam suddenly ceased their rapping and thundered forth their own *hahap kaman*, waving their paddles and springing in their canoes to make waves.
The vocal cannonades resounded again and again, hurling volley after volley back and forth between the shore and the river. It was the Sawi equivalent of a twenty-one gun salute. And it signaled the end of an aeon of isolation, the dawn of an era of interaction.

If I had not been there that day to trigger that salute as an emissary of Christ, someone else's emissary would have triggered it later, possibly with quite different motives and results. Those who advocate that the world's remaining tribal groups should be left to themselves do not realize how naive their notion is! The world just isn't big enough anymore for *anyone* to be left alone! It is a foregone conclusion that even if missionaries do not go in to *give*, lumbermen, crocodile hunters, prospectors, or farmers will still go in to *take!* The issue is not then, should anyone go in, because obviously *someone* will! The issue is rather, will the most sympathetic person get there first?
As the one who got there first to live among the Sawi, it was my aim to combine faithfulness to God and the Scriptures with respect for the Sawi and their culture. The crucial question was, would Sawi culture and the Scriptures prove so opposite in their basic premises as to render this twoway loyalty impossible? I intended to find out. But first I had to build my home.

Chapter 9 GODS FROM THE SKY

With more workers available we soon completed the clearing of the land. By that time the Kayagar had returned with a canoeload of ironwood piers and stringers, so I lined up the location of the house in the center of the knoll of high ground and began setting piers in place. I am not a trained carpenter, but working with John McCain on the construction of a small storehouse at Pirimapun had taught me some of the basic principles of building with cut poles which is quite different from building with sawn timber.
Before long the canoes of Haenam also arrived. Word of my coming had reached them at their retreat deep in the jungles south of the Kronkel. I now became a lone, white speck in the midst of a milling crowd of about two hundred Kayagar, Atohwaem and Sawi, three tribes which had often regarded each other as enemies and seldom as friends. Every man among them was capable of flying into a rage at the mere drop of a word. Most of them carried their spear-paddles or had bone daggers stuck in their armbands. Their bows also were strung and ready in their canoes. It was difficult to concentrate on building, as I kept looking over my shoulder to try to detect any brewing of trouble before it broke out. Still I managed to square the house reasonably well.

As the hours passed, I was amazed at the deep-seated composure God was breathing into me. I seemed to be sealed inside a capsule of peace, which cushioned every alarming development and added a note of authority to my voice, making the few words I knew go a long way. These wild men of the swamps responded to my requests as if they had no choice but to obey them.
Once the sixteen piers were all in place at five-foot intervals, I set up a pile-driving operation to drive them deeper into the clay. I called upon various groups of men to take turns climbing up on a makeshift platform to raise the pile driver and let it fall. This proved to be a splendid diversionary tactic; their attention was transfixed by it. Laughter and excitement filled the air.
But once the pile driving was over, the murmurings started again, and hard looks began to dart back and forth. Just then a tall Kayagar chief named Yae broke forth in a rumbling torrent of words. I was hard pressed to tell whether

he was exhorting the assembly to keep the peace or simply venting feelings of resentment against the Sawi. Fearful that it might be the latter, I stepped up behind him and laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. Since I knew no Kayagar words profound enough for the occasion, I simply talked to him soothingly in English. Yae immediately quieted down, as did others who were beginning to get excited.

But before long mutterings of tension began to seethe again. I was concerned lest the day of my arrival should forever become associated in the minds of the Sawi with memories of bloodshed. And feeling that there was nothing more I could do to forestall an impending conflict, I laid down my tools and simply asked God to intervene. At that moment the hum of an aircraft engine sounded from the heavens, quelling instantly the tumult of disquieted warriors.

Of course! In the excitement of the afternoon I had completely forgotten that John McCain had arranged by radio for the Missionary Aviation Fellowship pilots to attempt a first float-plane landing on the Kronkel that very day and bring me a load of kerosene. Earlier in the day I had tried to forewarn the assembly that the aircraft would soon arrive, but as far as I could tell, they had not understood what I was saying.

Thanking God for His perfect timing, I took off my shirt ready to wave a signal to the pilots when they flew overhead, and then settled back to observe the reactions of my tempestuous companions. All of these tribesmen had, of course, seen or heard aircraft passing over at great heights. Many of them also had memories of aircraft making low passes over some of their villages years earlier, probably Australian military aircraft searching for signs of Japanese incursion, or vice versa. They were convinced that all aircraft were supernatural beings in their own right, and had not yet learned to associate them with Tuans.

Their standard reaction to the approach of an aircraft was to flee into dense underbrush and cower in terror. In fact, years earlier, some dreamer had successfully propagated the notion that *aramaso*, “aircraft,” were allergic to thorns. This notion was perfectly true, of course, since no airplane does want thorns in its tires. But it also caused the people much suffering, for after an aircraft had passed by, they would first pick themselves up out of the thorns and then spend several days picking the thorns out of themselves. It had, however, been many years since an aircraft had made a low pass, and never in the history of the area had one been known to actually land!

Wild-eyed, the warriors scanned the white-and-blue checkerboard of cloud and sky for some sign of the droning intruder, hoping against hope that it would pass by in the distance. Suddenly there it was, low and black against the clouds, whining along over a distant bend of the Kronkel, and then abruptly turning to follow another bend straight toward us! Quavering cries broke out all around me, swelling together in a uniformly high-pitched scream of sheer panic. Men and boys stampeded in waves toward the jungle. How glad I was that there were no women and children present to suffer this severe fright.

As the aircraft zoomed over on its first pass I waved my shirt and saw the wing dip in acknowledgement. Then I walked down to the riverbank to await the landing and found to my surprise a small group of men huddled together, trembling in fear, yet refusing to flee.

Kigo and Hato were among them, but Numu apparently had decided that this was too much! The others were a number of chiefs who seemingly had understood my earlier attempt to explain the coming of the aircraft and so assumed that the *aramaso* meant them no harm, but was simply coming to meet the Tuan.

They wanted to see what sort of wondrous transactions took place when the god from the sky met the god on the ground!

Crew-cut Hank Worthington eyed the long black ribbon of the *kidari*, searching for deadheads or other obstructions that might disqualify it as a float landing

site. Satisfied that it was clear, he next buzzed the surface and then roared out again over the treetops to try to ascertain the clearance for takeoff. Beside him sat blond Paul Pontier, also a veteran of many hazardous first landings in remote areas of Netherlands New Guinea.

The two pilots glanced at each other and nodded in agreement. Hank swung the Cessna 180 around again and shoe-horned it down between towering walls of jungle. The soaring ironwood trees and ramshackle longhouses on the far bend loomed rapidly closer, as if seen through a zooming telescopic lens.

I glanced at Hato. His whole body was streaming with sweat as with his one good eye he followed the downward swoop of "Mike Papa Bravo." Kigo and the others shuddered and began to back away as twin plumes of white spray poofed under the floats. At that point Hank Worthington gunned the engine in order to keep the aircraft up "on the step" for an easy approach to the shore. Hato's muscles melted into water and he cowered behind me for refuge.

For a brief moment I seemed to absorb the feelings of the frightened men around me! I found myself looking at the float plane from the viewpoint of the stone age, and I shuddered! Then the feeling passed and I became once more a twentieth century man waiting for a float plane to bring a load of kerosene.
As Hank cut the engine, the shouting of the multitude took over in full force. Looking back over my shoulder, I saw dozens of men half-hidden at the edge of the forest. Many held their arms outstretched toward the Cessna, writhing their fingers as if to keep it at bay.

Suddenly Hank and Paul swung open the doors on either side of the Cessna, triggering another explosion of alarmed cries. Then they climbed down onto the floats and gasps of amazement went up on all sides. In that moment a great mystery was cleared up—the *aramaso* were only vehicles of the Tuans! Still, the friendly, English-speaking voices which greeted me from the floats seemed to them to come from another world.

The floats struck ground about ten feet out from shore, so I waded out and brought Hank ashore on my back, while Paul Pontier unloaded jerry cans of kerosene. At first none of the Sawi would come near to help us, but gradually I coaxed Hato and Kigo to come closer. They touched hands with Hank and saw he was an approachable being.

After that they were willing to wade out under the shadow of those great stretching yellow-and-black wings and bring the jerry cans ashore. We opened one of the two 55-gallon drums I had brought from Kawem and funneled about ten jerry cans of kerosene into it. While the kerosene was flowing Hank gazed at the leaping, shouting swarm of slightly reassured warriors emerging from the bush.

Then he looked at me inquisitively and asked, "Is everything all right?"
"Just fine," I replied. I didn't tell him his arrival had possibly just averted an outbreak of fighting between mutually antagonistic groups among the people.
"We've just come from Kawem. Your wife and son are well. She sent you a letter," Hank explained, handing me an envelope with Carol's handwriting on it.

Paul joined in, "And here's a package she sent you!" He tossed it from the plane and I caught it.
When they were ready to leave, Paul Pontier leaned on a wing strut and shook his head. The sun was getting low, and wild-eyed, stringy-haired men with curved pig tusks jutting from their nostrils were crowding closer again.
"Just from the natural look of things, I'd say, 'Get in this plane and let us whisk you out of here!' " Paul said. "But I guess you wouldn't want to leave, would you?" He was testing me, in case under the surface I had lost my nerve and needed rescuing.
"Nothing doing, Paul," I replied. "I'm just getting started."
"Okay," he said. "You take care now and we'll be praying."

Paul climbed up into the cabin as Hank waved good-bye and slammed his door shut. One tip of the Cessna's wing was within reach, so I laid hold of it and swung the airplane around to face the open channel of the Kronkel.
The prop flicked once and then the engine roared to life. Spray whipped up from the Kronkel struck us like driving rain, scattering tribesmen like leaves in the wind. Standing alone by the river, I watched "Mike Papa Bravo" race furiously down the *kidari*, lift above the trees and vanish among the clouds.

It was now late afternoon and most of the tribesmen present dispersed in their canoes to reach their respective villages before dusk. As they left, I gave them instructions on the type of jungle building materials they should return with on the morrow, if they intended to return. A few others resorted to the dilapidated longhouses for shelter, so as to be on hand for work first thing in the morning.

The last problem I faced that day was how to take a bath! I was too wary of crocodiles, poisonous snakes and leeches to risk a plunge into the Kronkel, so I simply stood by the river in my shorts and scooped up buckets of water, poured them over me, soaped myself and then used more bucketfuls to wash the soap off.

Of course everyone around left his cooking fire untended to come and observe this unique operation. It was the first time they had ever seen soap or its use. I could feel their eyes devouring my white skin, and wondered at the excited murmur of conversation buzzing around me.
Later I learned that it was not only my white skin they were commenting on—they were also concerned as they watched the soap suds flowing from my skin down into the Kronkel. For they knew that with those soap suds a new foreign element of great potential consequence was being introduced into their river—my skin-grease!

"What will the spirits think?" they were asking. "How will they react?"

For better or for worse, I had indeed placed my skin-grease in the Kronkel River, not knowing that in the eyes of the people, this was equivalent to throwing a gauntlet in front of the demons who claimed control of the Sawi universe!
The challenge had been given. The struggle could begin at any time.

I saw myself standing among flaring buttresses of gigantic ironwood trees, feeling very small, oppressed with dread and sinking to my ankles in the soft jungle floor.

I was not alone. From among the buttresses a host of Sawi men slowly emerged. First among them was Hato. He came and stood before me, his one eye probing my being with unspeakable solemnity. His lips moved in speech, but I could hear no voice. He seemed to charge me with some intensely urgent responsibility.

Then Kigo stood beside Hato, speaking more words I could not hear, his black eyes pleading inexorably. Husky Tumo, Numu's son, was next to fix me with his gaze, followed by Hadi, Er, and others whose names and faces I was just beginning to know. Some of them pointed to themselves and then gestured toward their women and children, who were watching concernedly from the borders of the swampscape surrounding us.

I found myself becoming totally sensitized to the intrinsic humanity of each individual. Uncouth, misshapen, scarred, facially peculiar, or covered with flaking fungus infections as some of them were, they were all intensely appealing in their mute acknowledgement of some deep, inexpressible need.
Their urgency was like that of doomed men seeking reprieve. And they were charging me with responsibility for that reprieve. The pressure of that responsibility became an intolerable burden.

Suddenly I awoke, sweating, heaving with desire to bring solace to those grimly anxious men and to their women and children. For about an hour I lay desolate

with longing before God, pleading with Him that the reprieve written in blood so long ago might soon be made effective for these lost sheep of the swamps. Just before sunrise He breathed in the assurance I was seeking.

The dawn first whispered the secret of its coming to the *Haragu* birds, who bugled it to the birds-of-paradise, who fluted it to the cockatoos, who blared it to the loris, who fifed it to all the twittering, trumpeting, warbling denizens in the teeming attics of the forest. Together they brought forth a swelling opus of sound as opulent as the dawn-glow itself.

We started work early, wrestling heavy ironwood stringers into position atop the piers and then spiking them in place. Later John McCain arrived with the *Ebenezer* and a load of mangrove poles for the floor joists. Together we laid the floor with split palm bark and framed the walls and the roof with cut poles. Then we worked on porches, doors, windows, stairs and kitchen counters while Sawi and Kayagar workers thatched the roof and filled in the walls with sago fronds.

On July 10 we paid the workers, and I set out for Kawem, leaving the Sawi with one brief message: “In three days’ time I’ll return . . . with my wife and child.”

Chapter 10 DESTINY IN A DUGOUT

Broad-shouldered, lean-hipped, the six Kayagar men dipped their spear-paddles in rhythmic unison, impelling our narrow craft across mile after sweltering mile of flooded grassland. Ahead, a troupe of spindly egrets studied our approach from the branches of a lone island of *ahos* trees. As the sharp prow of our dugout sliced rapidly closer, they suddenly took flight, wafting weightlessly to the next island of *ahos* trees, where they settled until we overtook them again. In this manner, like albatross accompanying a ship at sea, they led our dugout across the sundrenched ocean of grass.

From under the shade canopy I had rigged in the center of the canoe, two intensely communicative blue eyes peeked over Carol’s shoulder. Seeing me, they first softened in intimate recognition, and then popped wide with wonder at the white flash of an egret skimming by. A tiny hand reached out to touch the swishing *kunai* grass. A clear voice, tinkling with baby delight, exclaimed over the headlong flight of a flock of whistling ducks. A puckish face looked up in awe at the rasping passage of a pair of grotesque hornbills.

With the keen awareness of a seven-month-old child, Stephen was beginning to respond to his new environment. He found it utterly delightful. He could sense no danger in it. He reveled in its beauty until, fulfilled by myriad new sensations of light and sound and texture, he settled back to nurse and then to sleep, lulled by the gentle rocking of the canoe.

Far ahead a horizon lined with dark green jungle shimmered in the heat of noon. Gradually it loomed nearer, and then suddenly we left the grasslands behind, gliding under the shade of overhanging trees into the main course of the Kronkel. Borne along by the westward flow of the river, we soon passed Amyam, where men, women and children stared incredulously at their first vision of a golden-haired woman and the equally golden-haired child reclining in her lap.

The sun was now well past the zenith. Our paddlers grew weary as the breezeless torpor of late afternoon lay heavy on the swamp. Carol wet her handkerchief in the river to cool Stephen’s forehead. The intense heat and humidity cast their spell over our perceptions—time appeared to slow down until even the fish were jumping in slow motion, and the long bends of the Kronkel stretched ever longer as we traversed them.

I was concerned that we reach our destination before dark.

Standing in his canoe, Narai thrust the point of his paddle deep into a clump of elephant grass. Next he placed the blade of the paddle across the walls of his canoe and sat on it. Thus anchored by the elephant grass, he waited, gazing steadily upstream.

Narai's pulse quickened as he reflected on the strange events of past months, events unprecedented in Sawi history. The terrifying intrusion of two riverboats . . . the sudden encounter with three Tuans on the *kidari* . . . the spellbinding odyssey of Hadi and Er . . . the first Sawi journey to Pirmapun . . . the return of one of the Tuans to build a home beside the Tumdu . . . the landing of the *aramaso* . . . the coming of the Kawem Tuan a few days later to help finish the house and finally . . . the departure of both Tuans, one of them promising to return three days later with his wife and child.
Or had they misunderstood his sign language?

It was now the third day. Three miles downstream, the combined populations of Haenam, Kamur and Yohwi were massed and ready. Spaced at intervals along the intervening bends of the river, other watchers were waiting to relay whatever signal Narai might give.
Time and the Kronkel drifted by.

Narai glanced over his shoulder at the lowering sun. Perhaps the Tuan who for incomprehensible reasons had appeared out of nowhere to build beside the Tumdu had decided that. . . .
Far upstream, a flash of sun on wet paddles caught Narai's attention. The sleek black line of a Kayagar dugout swept into view, dipping through shimmering reflections toward the lone watcher. Narai crouched forward in his canoe, slowly disengaging his paddle from the elephant grass.
But still he waited. Then he saw an auspicious gleam of color among the Kayagar paddlers. Standing tall in his dugout, he raised a bamboo horn to his lips and blew a long, low-pitched blast.
Within a few seconds the signal was relayed to the distant village. Smiling expectantly, Narai prepared to escort the approaching craft to its destination.

The sun was already only a mass of incandescent points sinking beyond a bamboo screen.

Suddenly a lone Sawi was there, paddling beside us.
"Konahari!" I called.
"Konahari!" he replied, smiling.
Soon a second and later a third escort materialized out of the blue haze of the evening, skimming over the Kronkel in miniature dugouts hardly more than twelve feet long. By the time we rounded the last bend, six or seven of the small craft were added to our convoy, their occupants calling ahead in their mysterious, flowing language, and ending each sentence with a long emphatic ". . . oooooo!"

Down the last stretch, Carol and I peered ahead through legs and paddles, trying to catch a first glimpse of our home and of . . . ? We were not prepared for what we saw! About two hundred armed warriors thronged the shore, looming into stark silhouette against a red-gold horizon. Feathers bristled from their hair and fluttered from their spears. Further back, and closer to the small cut-pole house John and I had completed three days earlier, an equal number of women and small children watched us, exclaiming in hushed tones over our strange appearance.
Our paddlers grew silent as we glided in and struck shore at the feet of the armed multitude.

Chapter 11 A BAPTISM OF STRANGENESS

"Look at them!" Carol breathed.
Closer now, we could see garish white and ocher paint smeared on their faces in such a way as to make their eye sockets, by contrast, look like gaping black holes. We could see in detail the spiny ridges of barbs tapering up to the points

of their spears. We could hear the thin sizzle of their whispering, rising in pitch as excitement welled up within them.

It was hard to believe they were the same people who only days before had so meekly gathered materials for our home. Then it had been easy to forget that behind their friendly mannerisms and disarming enthusiasm, they were *still* headhunters and cannibals. Now they really looked the part.
Had I misread their intentions? Was this their way of expressing welcome, or was it something else? Had I missed God's leading in bringing Carol and Stephen here so soon? I could hear my heart pounding as if in an echo chamber.

Some of the Sawi stepped into the water and gripped the sides of our dugout. "Lord God, have I been a fool? These men have never even learned to respect a policeman, let alone honor You—and here we are: man, wife and child, sixty-five river-miles from the nearest government post—defenseless except for Your Spirit surrounding us.

"Is it only human presumption, instead of Your peace, that has been sustaining us?"
As the Sawi drew our dugout higher onto the mud bank, the answer came from within my own heart. That peace, if it was only human presumption, still had one essential thing in its favor—in the moment of crisis *it was still there!* Surely, I thought, if it was not from God, it would have deserted me now! Unimpressed by the alarm of my senses, amused by the warnings of mere reason, that peace kept reinforcing my inmost core.
But what about Carol? And Stephen?

Kneeling, I reached under the canopy and lifted Stephen from Carol's lap. From my arms, he beamed a cherubic smile at the war-painted host, reaching toward them with his own chubby arms. Carol slipped out from under the canopy and stood beside me. She was awed, excited, but revealed no trace of anxiety.

Warily, the Kayagar paddlers in the front part of the dugout stepped ashore, clearing our way. We proceeded to the tip of the canoe and stepped off into the midst of the crowd. The other three paddlers followed, shouldering our equipment.

Someone seized my right arm. Hadi! He was intoxicated with excitement. Another hand gripped my shoulder. Hato! His one eye gleamed with a light of its own. Older Sawi women were fondling Carol and Stephen incredulously. Men were crowding closer as dusk fell.

I handed Stephen to Carol that my arms might be free to clear a way through the crowd toward our home, still fifty yards distant. The warriors, however, were now packed so tightly around us it was impossible to move. We could do nothing but submit to their will and stand waiting.
Suddenly the suppressed whispering around us began to swell into a cry of *esa! esa! esa!* From somewhere behind me, a loud voice shrieked a high-pitched command. A signal. For what?

Carol's gaze met mine, while Stephen quickly searched both our faces. Her clear, blue eyes were still radiant, trustful, without the slightest suggestion of, "Why have you brought us here?" Seeing her look, Stephen relaxed again on her shoulder, and I knew as before I had chosen the right woman.
The test was not yet over, however.
Triggered by the loud signal, a heavy fusillade of drumbeating exploded around us, making us shudder involuntarily. Peering through the crowd, I saw one of the drums. Thin-waisted, flared at both ends, both its body and its full-length handle were engraved with exotic ancestral designs. The drumhead itself was of speckled black lizard-skin glued on with human blood, dark rivulets of which had been allowed to trickle down the sides of the drum, drying to form part of its decoration.

Gradually the drummers synchronized their rhythms into a steady, booming thunder, whereupon the entire host erupted in a paroxysm of wild shouting, leaping in the air, jabbing their spears up and down. Standing at the heart of

the tumult, we studied the wildly animated faces of the celebrants, awed by the fierce intensity of their emotion, their absolute involvement in the meaning of the moment.

Presently the shouting became chanting, the leaping gave way to dancing. Wave after wave of warriors swirled closer, as if to engulf us. It's like a baptism, I thought. A baptism of primitive spirit. Of strangeness.

Suddenly, in the blue glow of twilight, a Presence stronger than the presence of the multitude enveloped us. The same Presence that had first drawn us to trust in Christ, and then wooed us across continents and oceans to this very jungle clearing. Before that Presence, every superficial thought and feeling fled away, and I felt a deep probe go through my motives.

"Missionary," He was asking, "why are you here?"

It was a question I had often fielded from the lips of unbelievers. Now my Lord was asking it, and there was no escape from the question. The eyes of every Sawi dancer seemed to ask it. Their voices seemed to chant it, their drums to echo it.

I reviewed answers I had used in the past, discarding them one by one. Secondary, incidental reasons no longer mattered. Nor could ulterior ambitions endure the four-dimensional reality our task had now assumed.

The descent to new bedrock took a few minutes. Then I breathed my answer:

"Lord Jesus, it is for You we stand here, immersed not in water but in Sawi humanity. This is our baptism into the work You anticipated for us before creation. Keep us faithful. Empower us with Your Spirit.

"May Your will be done among these people as it is in heaven. And if any good comes to them through us, the honor is Yours!"

And He replied, "The peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall garrison your hearts and minds through Christ."

It was all right now. Our relationship was renewed. I could feel a fresh spring welling up inside.

Suddenly the multitude was moving through the deep shadows, bearing us toward our home. They parted to allow us access to the rough steps I had fashioned earlier. We climbed together up onto the crude front porch and turned toward them. A tremendous shout made the air quiver. Men and boys were leaping up and down, drumming and chanting with great force. Beyond them, the women were dancing separately, their long grass skirts tossing like waves of the sea.

It was clear now, as we looked down into the upturned faces of the warriors, that they had not intended to frighten us. They carried their spears in the same way a military honor guard carries bayonets. Every motion, every dab of paint and every cadence of sound was for our pleasure.

The Kayagar somehow made their way through the crowd with our supplies. I took a flashlight from one pack and led the way into the house, Carol following with wide-eyed Stephen. Seeing us enter, the Sawi began to dance slowly around our dwelling until they surrounded it on all sides. The tumult of voices, drums and stamping feet seemed about to break in through the thin, sago-frond walls of the small home.

Together we surveyed the interior of our new residence by flashlight. Around our feet scores of black crickets scurried to hide from the beam, while overhead a large, green tree-frog with bulging eyes leaped frantically from rafter to rafter. But the frog's were not the only black eyes watching us. Turning, I saw that a number of dancers had left the singing and crowded onto our porch to stare at us through the window screen.

Under their close scrutiny, I pumped up a kerosene pressure lamp and turned it on, forgetting that this was the first time I had used such a device among the Sawi. There was a mad scramble as the unexpected burst of light struck their eyes. No one took the time to find the stairs—they simply abandoned ship by

leaping over the railings. Fortunately the level of our porch was only five feet above ground.

Outside, the drumming came to a sudden halt, and the chanting boiled over into a wail. There was an unmistakable sound of hundreds of feet stampeding into the night. Setting the lamp on a counter, I hurried outside to reassure the people.

Then I saw why they had fled. Our entire home was agleam with light like some gigantic, awesome jack-o-lantern. Through hundreds of cracks in sago-frond walls, through every door and window, the blinding light of the little five-hundred-candlepower silk mantle was stabbing into the darkness.
We were not the only ones being baptized with strangeness.
"Tadan nomo! Tadan nomo! Kee nawain!" I called. "Don't be afraid! Come back!"

Slowly, Hadi, Hato and others returned, reassured to see that the intense light was only from an instrument and did not mean that Carol, Stephen and I had suddenly transformed ourselves into gods radiating awesome supernatural power.

Minutes later the drums began to throb again, as the dancers regained their composure and returned to encircle our house—though at a slightly wider radius. While Carol cooked a simple meal on a primus, I spread our bedroll in a comer and hung a mosquito net over it. As soon as possible, all three of us were under the net. In spite of the thunder of drums just outside our wall, Stephen fell asleep in a few minutes, breathing softly beside us. Carol and I took a little longer.

Some of the dancers were now bearing torches, which glowed eerily through our sago-frond walls. "Close your eyes, honey," I whispered, "and tell me what you see."

She said, "I see miles of grassland slipping by, and egrets flying around us. I feel the canoe rocking. Now I see the sunset, and all those people dancing around us. But I'm not afraid. I feel so different, as if God has
given me new emotional responses to enable me to live here."
He had indeed, and to me also.

That tight enclosure of human bodies—a throbbing womb of alien sound and psyche—had been a mold of God to transform us into creatures who could breathe, without toxic effect, the atmosphere of this primeval world, so that we might serve Him in this world also.
Provided, of course, we could first master its language and penetrate its mysteries.

Chapter 12 PATRIARCH OF THE TUMDU

Hulking darkly through the shadows, the wild boar caught a scent of fresh sago pulp and veered toward it. Wedging his long snout under barriers of vegetation, he pressed on easily, letting tangles of vines and branches slide up the inclined plane of his bristling neck and down the steep slope of his back. He broke through into a small clearing awash with moonlight. Across the far side of the clearing lay a felled sago palm, its trunk gashed open on the side facing him. He lumbered toward it.

At the center of the clearing he halted abruptly, bracing all four hooves in the oozing jungle floor, ready for instant fight in any direction. A new scent was mixed with the sour tang of sago pulp—human scent.
With a brisk snort the boar swung his massive head from side to side, scanning warily. There was no movement except the shadow-drift of giant bats across the stars, no sound except the ringing of cicadas and the jangling of frog choirs in a nearby swamp.

The boar was no stranger to human scent. He had often encountered it, especially in clearings like this where humans had been working sago. But humans worked by day. The night belonged to him.
Emboldened, he sniffed closer to the aromatic gash in the sago trunk. He found that the pulp just inside the gash had already been hollowed out. To reach more he would have to thrust his head inside.

He scanned the underbrush one last time, moonlight gleaming on his curved tusks. Then he thrust his head inside the sago trunk and began to feed on the rich, flour-laden pulp. The hole was just the right size.

Immediately a long bamboo arrow slid forward through a gap in a nearby blind of sago fronds. From beyond the blind came a faint *tik* of a vine bowstring being stretched almost to the breaking point. The pig did not detect it. His ears were full of the sound of his own munching. But suddenly he felt himself spitted by a straight line of pain that led right through his heart. The arrow had gone clear through him.

Even before the hard vine bowstring stopped rattling, the pig had lurched free of the sago trunk, thunderous blasts of air exploding from his lungs. Squealing, he bolted toward the far side of the clearing, blood pouring from his body as if from two taps.
Suddenly he whirled to face whatever was tormenting him, but still no adversary was in sight. Then, his forelegs folded under him. Coughing blood, he rolled on his side and lay still.

Minutes later, the hunter emerged from behind the frond-screen, a second arrow fitted to his bow. He took his time approaching the pig and touched it with his foot, relaxing his bowstring when he saw the pig was dead.
Hato stalked back to the pig blind, and then returned bringing from it six of the shorter fronds. Spreading the fronds in three overlapping pairs around his prey, he knelt on the ground and began to weave together the overlapping leaves of each pair. The weaving completed, he took a narrow bamboo razor from a satchel, crouched over the dead pig and commenced the long task of butchering.

As he worked, an eerie nimbus of soft light encircled his naked body— the play of moonlight on the wings of hundreds of mosquitoes whining about him. Overhead, fireflies shimmered among towering liana trellises, while in black recesses of the jungle, patches of phosphorescence gleamed from rotting vegetation like a host of luminous eyes.

That the universe might somewhere offer man anything other than a swamp environment had never occurred to him. And even if it had occurred to him he could not have conceived of an environment more suitable for human habitation than this one which now bathed his senses.

Dividing the carcass into three heaps of pork, intestine and bone, he placed one part in the center of each of the pairs of interwoven sago fronds he had prepared. Then he folded the yet unwoven leaves over the meat and wove them together also, forming three strong packs, each containing about sixty pounds of pork and bone. Lastly, he tied shoulder straps of vine to each end of the various frond stems in each pack and then hoisted one onto his own back.
By this time dawn was breaking. Bending under the weight of the pack, Hato gathered together his bow and arrows, including the bloody one that had gone through the pig. Standing in the dim light of early dawn, he could have been mistaken for any one of his ancestors in every respect. Except one.
Returning to the pig blind, Hato reached down and picked up the new steel machete he had earned by helping the Tuan build his home, and which he had used to cut the fronds for his pig blind. The only difference, but it was a big one.

As the jungle awoke to the orchestrations of myriad forms of bird life, Hato headed for his treehouse dwelling near the source of the Tumdu. Two of his many sons would retrieve the other packs later.

Sirowi and Imati, two of Hato's four wives, took their places on opposite sides of a tall sago palm. Stolidly, they battered both sides of the palm with stone axes until the fibers in its heavy black casing grew weak. The giant tottered and crashed, burying one-third of its bulk in the soft jungle floor.
While Imati pried open the casing on one side, Sirowi set up the sago processing trough. Once the heart of the palm was exposed, both women commenced cutting out the fibrous, flour-bearing pulp with stone adzes. Next they would wash the fibers in the trough, draining off the lifesustaining sago flour in solution.

To one side Imati's two-week-old baby lay blinking at the brightening sky, cushioned on a soft bed of leaves. Yami, one of Hato's granddaughters, waved a leaf over the baby to keep the jungle's omnipresent flies away from its face.
High overhead, a young boy named Badep clung to the topmost branches of a *kabi* tree, keeping watch lest Asmat raiders seeking human heads should be drawn toward the women by the sound of their chopping. He especially kept an eye on flocks of cockatoos circling here and there above the forest. Any unusual disturbance among them might indicate the approach of an enemy. It was not without basis that the Sawi often called the cockatoo *ragedep*, "the revealer."

Another of Hato's offspring, a lithe-limbed teen-age boy named Amio, slipped noiselessly through the swamp glades which were the main source of the Tumdu tributary. Above him eighty-foot-tall sago palms towered toward the sun, their great fronds arching together to form a many-vaulted ceiling over shadowy pools below. Weightlessly, Amio skirted the main pools, leaping from one grotesque root formation to another.
Suddenly in one pool the leap of a catfish arrested his attention. Amio squatted on a root and waited, bow and arrow in hand. A second fish jumped and then a third. Amio stood up and scanned the trees around him.
Finally, among the pillar-like palms he located an *os* tree. Drawing a new steel knife from his woven grass belt, the only item of clothing he wore, Amio stripped several slabs of bark from the side of the chosen tree. The inner side of each slab gleamed with thick, white sap. Amio carried the slabs to the side of the pool, held them under the surface of the water and began rubbing them together.
Soon a white cloudiness spread out toward the center of the pool, and down into its tea-dark depths. Amio repeated this operation on various sides of the pool until all of the white sap was dissolved in the water. Then he cast the bark aside, picked up his bow again and fitted a fish-arrow to the vine. He did not have to wait long.

Soon a fish broke the surface, gaping with pain, its eyes clouded over with the whitish substance. Amio's first arrow pierced its body; the fish thrashed about, still at the surface, dragging the arrow with it. When it passed close enough, Amio caught the end of the arrow and lifted his prey out of the water.
By this time several more blinded fish were cleaving the surface. He caught them all. Then he too made a pack out of sago fronds and wrapped the fish up inside it. But not until he had first removed the poisonous spines from the dorsal fins of the catfish. It would not do to hoist the pack onto one's back only to feel such a spine jabbing into one's flesh through the leaves.
Amio headed for the treehouse. He reached it about the time his two older brothers, Hanay and Wagay, returned with the two packs of fresh pork their father, Hato, had left in the jungle. Two other of Hato's wives, meanwhile, were cooking the pork Hato himself had earlier carried back from his night's hunting.

Kimi and Sayo, two of Hato's older daughters, conversed softly as they made their way through a thicket of young sago palms, their long grass skirts swaying as they gracefully avoided the masses of six-inch thorns which guard the bases of such palms in their earlier stages. Stooping by the edge of one of the Tumdu's limpid pools, they reached down into the water and lifted out two sacks made of woven fronds, which they had deposited two days earlier.
Each of the two sacks was filled with a mass of soft, cottony fibers consisting of embryonic leaves the girls had taken from inside the tip of a felled sago palm. As the water slowly drained out of the two sacks, the girls noted with delight the wiggling movements of a number of freshwater shrimp that had

taken shelter in the two masses of fiber. Shrimp never could resist such ideal hiding places.

Kimi and Sayo deftly broke off several six-foot-long blades of elephant grass, wrapped up the live crustaceans, and then lowered the two shrimp traps again into the murky shallows of the Tumdu. They proceeded from pool to pool in this way until they completed a circuit to the point where they had left their carrying bags and digging sticks. Depositing the bundles of shrimp inside the voluminous sacks, they next took their sharpened palmwood digging sticks and cut a path into a lush forest of elephant grass, breaking off the thick stems just below water level. Stripping the massive leaves, they bared the edible core of each plant, heaping these inside their packs.

Shouldering their packs, they headed toward the treehouse, stopping here and there to pluck edible new leaves from the branches of a *sinaham* tree, or to shake ripe fruit from an *akakor*. Occasionally they would stoop to pluck a blood-sucking leech from their feet or ankles, tossing it aside without even a break in the flow of their conversation.

Meanwhile Sirowi and Imati had washed about seventy pounds of sago flour through the trough. Once this had settled out of solution, they drained off the water and burned the outside of each sago lump with flaming torches to make the gooey exterior congeal. The congealed exteriors were then peeled off and divided among all present for a wholesome midday snack.

A number of children had come from the treehouse for this special treat. Their laughter rippled as they stretched the rubbery *du rayp*, "sago mucous," until it broke and snapped back into their hands. While the children chewed the sago, Sirowi and Imati wrapped the moist loaves into packs to carry home.

As the various food-gatherers reached the base of the treehouse, they first deposited their bundles of provisions in the family's three dugouts beached among the reeds by the Tumdu and then climbed up into their lofty home. Hato had given word that today they would all return to the village, so there was no point in lifting the heavy loads up into the treehouse.
The provisions were bountiful indeed. Besides pork, sago, fish, shrimp, elephant grass cores, edible leaves and fruit, there were also bundles of squirming beetle grubs, a death adder Hanay had killed with an arrow while returning with the pork, and a bird which Badep had shot while keeping watch for Asmat raiders. Some of the younger boys had also bagged a number of frogs and a lizard.

Assembled on a level with the treetops, the members of the family chewed on cuts of roasted pork while they listened to Hato's account of the killing of the boar. Now refreshed after a morning's rest, the one-eyed elder held one of the boar's ears in his hands as he talked. A wood tick looking for a new home crawled from the ear onto his hand. Hato casually flicked it into the fire smoking beside him.

Using a bamboo razor, he carved a circular piece of hairy flesh out of the middle of the boar's ear, and then cut a hole in the center of a piece of flesh, making it into a ring. Fitting this ring on the end of his bow, he worked it down to join similar trophies of pigs he had killed earlier.

All the while a blood-stained, four-foot-long, cane-shafted arrow lay beside him on the grass mat. It was only an occasional arrow that found its way through the entire breadth of a pig's body without striking bone. And even then, only a rare bowman could shoot an arrow with sufficient force to drive it all the way through.

Hato was that kind of bowman, with four wives who lived at peace with him, the reverence of eleven living sons and daughters, the delights of a growing covey of grandchildren, and the dread of his enemies on all sides. Hato, the patriarch who lived at the source of the Tumdu.

What more did he need? He looked down at the new machete. He ran a finger along its gleaming edge. What more *did* he need?
More machetes, axes, and knives, to be sure. His own machete and Amio's knife were a beginning. Hato hoped eventually each of his wives and children would possess at least a machete, an axe and a knife. This would take time and work, for it was already clear the Tuan had no intention of showering these things as gifts. That was fine with Hato. He and his family were accustomed to work.

But was there something more? That the Tuan and his Nyonya intended to re-orient the Sawi universe was already clear, but Hato still could not guess what form that new universe would take. Yet he was burning with curiosity to learn more of their intentions.
"Es aphaem ke hafem! Let's go to the village!" he called, rising to his feet.
Cooking fires were extinguished with water sprinkled from bamboo cruses. Grass mats were rolled up. Memorial skulls of relatives were tied to rafters to await a later return of the clan to the treehouse. Babies were fitted into carrying bags and swung onto their mothers' backs. Then the long procession descended the stairpoles to the waiting dugouts.

After an hour of paddling down the Tumdu's twisting course, Hato and his family approached the tributary's junction with the Kronkel. They could see the Tuan's little square house in its clearing, and to either side the various larger clearings in which the people of Kamur, Haenam and Yohwi had erected their temporary homes, preparatory to building more permanent dwellings later. Gray smoke curled lazily over the russet brown of newly dried thatch.
Suddenly Hato's one eye noticed that more than just smoke was arcing over the settlement. Shafts of white cane flashed like needles in the sun as they criss-crossed just above the treetops before falling back to earth. Just then a distant sound of shouting became audible. And wailing.
"Hurry!" Hato shouted. "There's a battle raging in the Tuan's yard!"

Chapter 13 WAR AT MY DOOR

"Carol!" I shouted above the din that suddenly surrounded me. "Keep the baby away from the windows!"
Grabbing up my language notes I dashed toward the house, ducking in and out among the armed men who had suddenly appeared from the direction of Kamur. Meanwhile my Sawi language informant, Narai, vanished into the forest in the opposite direction.

As I ran, I looked in the direction of Haenam, where a second mass of angry men were already releasing arrows toward the attackers. I saw three of the arrows arcing high overhead and tried to guess their trajectory. They all seemed to be falling straight toward me, so I leaped behind our house and under the shelter of the roof. One, two, three, they sliced into the ground within a forty-foot radius of our home. Not as close as I had expected.
A steady rattling of vine bowstrings mixed with the outcry of battle as I climbed the back steps on the lee side of our home and hurried inside. Carol, heeding my warning, had caught Stephen up from his afternoon nap and taken him to our storeroom, where an interior wall would help to impede any random arrow that might come through a screen window or a gap in the exterior walls of our home. While Carol stayed beside Stephen, I went to the front door and looked out.

Most of the men of Kamur were now spread out across the open ground we had cleared between our home and the Kronkel. Others had taken up positions on the far side of the little shelter I had been using for language study. The advance guard of Haenam were stretched out in a long line on the far side of an intervening swampy area. No one was trying to hide behind anything. It was obvious they preferred to fight in the clear.

Those who had brought spears to the battle thrust them point up in the ground, freeing their hands for their bows. Fixing the enemy with a deadly glare, they began to weave from side to side, stretching to full height to release

an arrow, crouching again to provide as small a target as possible, leaping to avoid the lightning shafts flashing toward them. Their absorption in the lethal business was total—with arrows volleying at speeds in excess of one hundred miles per hour, even a split second's inattention could be fatal.

The more experienced fighters formed the frontal fines on each side, shooting and dodging at a range of about fifty yards. The less experienced, most of them teen-age boys, stood further back, lofting their arrows high in the air to rain on the enemy position from above. Thus each combatant, while compelled to give his full attention to the shafts coming toward him with greater force and accuracy at near ground level, labored also under the unnerving prospect of being struck in the head or shoulders by a barbtip falling from above. As each man exhausted the supply of arrows he had brought with him, he simply grabbed others lodged in the ground around him and fired them back at the enemy.

In the background of both sides of the battle, women waved their sago pounding sticks threateningly, shouting curses at the enemy over the heads of their menfolk, stamping their feet in rage or wailing in apprehension. Still further back, children climbed up on logs or stumps of trees to improve their view of the spectacle.

Tension soared as combatants and spectators alike waited for the first arrow to strike human flesh, knowing that as soon as one man was hit, his enemies would immediately concentrate a volley of arrows directly at him, hoping to inflict still more wounds upon him while he was momentarily distracted or disabled. Determined not to be the first man, the numerous antagonists maneuvered with reflexes sharpened to the limits of human acuity.

I moved out onto the front porch, full of adrenalin and poised for action, yet benumbed with indecision. It took a few seconds for one thought to get through: *This is real*. Condition yourself, man, you're not watching a cinema, nor are you dreaming.

Those are real men and they're really trying to kill each other. Every one of them is dangling like a tempting morsel over the hungry maw of death.

Right now one of these living, breathing personalities you've just begun to interact with may be snuffed out for eternity. Just when you're getting ready to share the message they've never heard.

Act, man! Do something! But while you're doing it, don't let yourself forget—*this is for real!*

I moved forward to the head of the stairs. I opened my mouth to shout at them to stop, but then I hesitated. If I shouted, I might distract someone just when an arrow was coming straight at him. I could be a secondary cause of someone getting wounded or killed.

Maybe it would be better to just run out there waving my arms. Surely they would all stop shooting then. Surely they know if they kill me, the horizon is not crowded with Tuans waiting to come in and take my place. On the other hand, maybe winning this battle means more to them than having a Tuan around.

Then an echo of advice someone had given me came back: "Be careful about trying to act the peacemaker—it takes only one arrow in the right place, and your ministry, if not your life, will be ended."

That's right, I thought. Look at those men—they know how to handle themselves down there among those flying arrows. I don't. Probably if I just pray and wait no one will get hurt. Surely God doesn't expect me to intervene when I don't even know the lang. . . .

A mighty shout rocked the arena. Haenam thought one of their arrows had struck Tumo, but, their whoop of exultation was premature. At the last split second Tumo had leaped in the air, the arrow passing under his thigh. Tumo, one of those whose salvation I had yearned for in my dream.

Emotion welled up within me as Haenam tried to take advantage of Tumo's temporary loss of balance, sending arrow after arrow speeding toward him. If

they killed him, I reasoned, Kamur will not give up until they even the score. It is crucial that this battle be stopped before blood is shed!
"Blessed are the peacemakers," a voice within me seemed to whisper, "for they shall be called the children of God." Peacemaking *is* one of my tasks, I concluded, and what basis do I have to expect such a profound obligation to be easy, painless, riskless? Perhaps every genuine act of peacemaking must of necessity entail risk for the peacemaker.

Besides, the real battle here is not between Kamur and Haenam—it is between this savagery and my gospel. Everything I do among these people establishes a precedent. If I just stand here I'll be setting a precedent of noninvolvement. I need to set a clear precedent now at the beginning, a precedent I can gradually reinforce and strengthen in days to come.

I leaped from the steps shouting that handiest of all Sawi words I would ever learn: *"Es!* That's enough!" Crouching low and praying hard, I moved closer to Kamur's end of the field of fire, waving at Haenam to stop shooting. The firing stopped on the flank of the battle nearest me, but still continued in the center and on the far side. Taking courage, I moved in closer still. Some of the men on both sides tried to wave me back, but I kept inching closer.

I could feel charisma from God rushing through me. Disconcerted, the Kamur men moved toward the river to draw Haenam's fire away from my position, but I had already interrupted the momentum of the battle. Its crescendo had passed. I was suffused with joy.

The shooting ceased, and in its place, shouting broke out on all sides. Men began to wave their bows rather than draw them. They were all still plenty angry, however.

Now that I had interrupted the shooting, how could I settle whatever grievance had caused the fighting in the first place? Clearly the same quarrel could flare up again if some civil settlement were not provided. Now words were needed, and there I stood wordless at the edge of the throng.

A strong hand gripped my left elbow. I turned and found myself looking into Hato's one eye, and it was very stern.
His chest was heaving. "Tuan," he seemed to be saying, "you wait back here. I'll take care of this."

I heaved a sigh of relief as he strode past me and planted himself in front of the Kamur warriors, his back turned fearlessly toward Haenam. Raising his voice above the din he began to chide his friends in thundering Sawi. Restrained, the men of Kamur lowered their weapons.

Haenam, however, was still in a foment of rage. Surely, I thought, there must be someone over there I can appeal to. I quickly skirted around the swamp to Haenam's position, searching for someone . . . anyone.
Then I saw Hadi standing on a stump with his arms folded, calmly watching the proceedings. Hadi! Of course!
"Hadi!" I roared, groping for words. "You . . . you TALK!"

For a moment he gaped as if stunned by my command, then he leaped from the stump and placed himself directly in front of the Haenam mob, shouting them down with his marvelous voice.

Joining three villages into one was an experiment the Sawi had tried only rarely in living memory—it was the kind of experiment that so readily ended in bloodshed! Even the recent attempt to join just two villages together at the far end of the *kidari* had ended in the battle which cost Hato his right eye. Little wonder Sawi communities preferred to leave several miles of empty jungle as buffer zones separating them from even their fondest neighbors.

In the present case, the strong inducement which had drawn Kamur, Haenam, and Yohwi together was the novelty and practicality—and perhaps a certain prestige—of living beside two extremely rare beings believed to be a source of potentially limitless supplies of axes, machetes, knives, razor blades, mirrors,

fishline, fishhooks, and who knew what else! The people of Kamur knew they had a right to live beside the Tuan for the obvious reason that he had chosen to build his home on their land! Haenam and Yohwi likewise claimed proximity rights because they had made first contact with him.

And so they had agreed to share, to experiment. During the three days it had taken for me to return from Kawem with Carol and Stephen, the men who had helped me build my home had decided they would bring *their* wives and children also, gathering them out of the deep sago swamps where they normally lived. Working together as whole families, they had hastily erected *saurai*, "temporary" houses on the ground. These they would use as shelters while they celebrated our arrival, and also while they erected permanent *anep*, "high" houses before the monsoon rains flooded the swamps.

Thus we were delighted when, after that first drum-shattered night among the Sawi, the light of a new day revealed the evidence that three entire villages intended to reside permanently around us. We knew this would greatly facilitate our interaction with the tribe, and also increase our ability to provide the medical help they so desperately needed.

For the better part of three days and nights the entire populace had continued their drum-beating, singing and dancing—save for one memorable interruption when the MAF float plane returned for its second landing on the Kronkel, bringing, among other things, a small radio transmitter, our only means of immediate communication with the outside world. Once the marathon celebration ended, most of the people had, like Hato, returned to their jungle dwellings to gather supplies of food prior to beginning work on their permanent homes at the new village site.

It was now about a week since our arrival, and the people had just returned from the jungle in good spirits, their canoes laden with fresh provisions—but almost immediately the camaraderie they had enjoyed during the three days of dancing had vanished as Kamur and Haenam clashed in front of our home. We marveled at how quickly their attitudes could change.

Prospects for the future of our newly assembled community looked grim indeed. If only we could restrain them from actual bloodshed until we had time to learn their language, we thought, then perhaps we could hold the three villages together. It was to prove a futile hope.

Chapter 14 THE TUAN EATS BRAINS

The cluster of curious Sawi boys crept slowly closer to the lighted window, venturing where formerly only elders of the tribe had dared to approach. At first the Tuan's lamp both blinded them with its glare and unnerved them with its hissing, but gradually their eyes became accustomed, their courage steady. They looked inside. Only the sago-frond walls were familiar. Everything else, from the lamp itself to the glowing yellow curtains, could hardly seem more alien. Counters, a table, chairs, tablecloth, plates and bowls, knives, forks and spoons, pictures on the wall, a kerosene-burning stove were all strangely puzzling to the inquisitive swamp urchins.

Clinging together for moral support, they watched the Tuan and the Nyonya sit down with their baby. They observed closely as the Tuan lifted a steaming bowl of food and began serving some of it onto his plate, their eyes growing wide with mingled fascination and horror. They glanced at each other and trembled. Then one of them put into words what they were all thinking, *"Asem mohop ke manken!"*

Abruptly they bolted from the porch and fled through the darkness to Kamur village, spreading with hushed tones an incredible report from house to house. From inside various longhouses, the elders called back to them,
"You must be mistaken!"
"Go quick and see for yourselves!" the boys urged.
Their curiosity aroused, the elders of Kamur thronged immediately to the Tuan's front porch. Looking up, we saw just the whites of their eyes gleaming out of the blackness. We greeted them, but they did not respond. Their eyes were riveted upon the food we were eating.

"It's true!" one of them exclaimed in words unintelligible to us. "It's true indeed! The Tuan is eating brains!"
Wondering what the excitement was all about, I lifted another forkful of macaroni to my lips.

As I was about to turn out the lamp for the night, we heard the sound of a woman crying in great distress. Taking a flashlight, I picked my way among stumps and roots toward Kamur's smoke-haloed longhouses.
"Why is that woman crying?" I called from the edge of the village.

A man named Asyman looked out of the doorway of his home and tried to wave me away. I stood my ground and asked again. "Why is that woman crying?"
Asyman replied with words I did not understand, except for the last one, *"Amynahai!* Go away!"
Others also were now standing in their doorways waving me away. The woman, meanwhile, stopped crying.

Feeling somewhat self-conscious over my apparently unwelcome intrusion, as well as my inability to understand their explanations, I finally returned home, still none the wiser. From time to time, before we fell asleep we heard the woman cry out again. Then just before daybreak we were awakened by loud wailing from Kamur.

In the morning we learned that the woman, Maso, died giving birth to twins. The twins also died. Even if they had both lived, their own father would have killed one of them, in line with Sawi belief that the second twin born is actually an evil spirit trying to invade the community by impersonating a truly human child and being born along with it. In the demon-pervaded world of the Sawi, not even the womb of a mother is safe from satanic intrusion.

Sorrowing with the Sawi over Maso's death, we groaned with longing for the day when the Sawi would realize we could help them even in such private matters as childbirth, and would trust us to give what help we could.

Carol was trying to train Haimai as a houseboy. After he had dutifully filled our gasoline-powered washing machine with steaming hot water, she showed him how to add soapsuds. Then, while gathering clothes for the washing, she happened to see a used teabag lying by the sink. She handed it to Haimai, telling him in broken Sawi to take it out and throw it in the garbage can. Looking confused, he carried the teabag outside.

A few minutes later Carol called me to start the washing machine engine. Once the engine was running, she pulled the lever to start the agitator. Just as she was about to plunge the first load of laundry into the churning suds, she gasped, "Don, what are all those black specks in my nice clean washing water?"
I dipped out a handful of suds and examined the black specks. Tea leaves!

Earlier in the day, the tall Atohwaem named Yakub had announced his intention to take the widow Fasaha as his third wife. One end of Haenam was in favor of the transaction, but Nair in the other end of the village protested that the widow should be given to him instead.

At midday, when Fasaha's relatives decided against his proposal, Nair, supported by his brother Paha, stormed out of his house shouting threats at Yakub. Two of Yakub's friends, Mavu and Sinar, came out to face the two furious men. The four rapidly closed in combat, while the shrieking of their womenfolk rose like a warning siren above the village.
The fight lasted only a few seconds. Mavu was first to strike. Lunging in with his *kafam*, a multiple-warhead spear featuring a cluster of barbed points bound together with vine, he impaled Paha in the hip. Nair, seeing his brother trailing a stream of blood, launched a bamboo-bladed pig arrow at Sinar. The shaft sliced easily through the muscle of Sinar's upper arm and even

penetrated a short distance into his rib cage. Mavu in turn retaliated by burying the entire blade of a pig arrow in Nair's thigh.

When I arrived on the scene, Mavu was still raging but there was no one left to answer his challenge in the bloodstained village clearing. Seeing the extent of the wounds, I called to Carol to bring bandages and penicillin, while I stood by to make sure Mavu did not try to take further advantage of his two opponents in their weakened condition. Our hands were stained with blood by the time we finished cleaning and binding wounds and giving injections of penicillin.
As we were leaving, I gazed straight into Mavu's eyes, burning with desire to say something to him, but what could I say? I knew if I upbraided him for nearly killing two men, he would only shrug his shoulders as if to say, "So what?" So instead I said cryptically, "You have made my wife's hands bloody."

The remark took him by surprise. He glanced quickly at Carol's hands and a sudden realization of the inappropriateness of the scene he had helped to create seemed to startle him. Mavu winced, fearing he had unwittingly committed some dark impropriety of cosmic consequence.
I longed to tell him of Someone else's hands that had been made bloody for his sake, and that with truly cosmic significance, but the words just weren't there. Not yet. So I had to leave him, as he would later confess, trembling inwardly.

With repeated injections of penicillin to prevent infection, the three patients recovered quickly from wounds that might otherwise have proved fatal. By keeping death at bay, we had again forestalled a blood feud which, once initiated, could have gone on for years. This time the danger had existed between opposing clans within Haenam village itself. An even greater concern was to forestall a blood feud on a larger scale between Haenam and Kamur.
With this sense of the life-and-death urgency of our task heavy upon us, we decided to delay building our permanent home for one year, in order to launch an all-out campaign to crack the code of the Sawi language in the shortest possible time. With a few improvements here and there, and careful use of space, the little twenty-by-twenty-foot "thatch-box" would prove livable enough, provided we could endure the armies of insects and other forms of wildlife which occasionally found their way under and over wall plates and through cracks in sago-frond walls.

We sprayed the piers supporting our home with residual spray which served to ward off invasions of termites and other kinds of crawling insects which require contact with ground moisture in order to survive. But flying insects such as cockroaches, crickets, flies and mosquitoes waged a constant campaign of harassment against us and our basic supplies.

Certain varieties of wildlife seemed to be in league with each other. For example, under cover of darkness, crickets would eat holes in our mosquito nets, allowing mosquitoes laden with debilitating payloads of malarial parasites, dengue viruses or filarial larvae to penetrate our defenses. Rats also would chew holes in plastic food containers, enabling hordes of ants and cockroaches to spoil the contents.

We were not without our allies, however. Tiny jumping spiders and iridescent green lizards haunted our walls and window screens, hunting flies by day, mosquitoes and moths by night. In addition, hordes of night birds and bats flitted around our home each evening, devouring mosquitoes and moths drawn to our home by the lamp.

At certain times of the year hordes of flying ants would hatch by the thousands in the jungle around us and then converge upon our home as soon as the lamp was lit at dusk. Swarming into our brightly lit living room, they would first dash themselves against the lamp glass and then rain down stunned or dying to cover the pages of a book as one of us read, or to clog the keys of the typewriter as one of us worked.

They would get tangled in our hair or tickle their way up our shirt sleeves.
They helped us develop the habit of retiring early.

My goal each day was to gain ten hours of exposure to the Sawi language. This included three or four hours of interaction with language informants, struggling to isolate new words, phrases and grammatical constructions. I devoted the rest of the time to visiting the Sawi homes or manhouses, traveling with them to the jungle or to other villages, listening to their conversation by the river in the evening, trying to enter in with meaningful questions and responses.

With no interpreters to help us, we often had to track down the meaning of words by sheer guessing. I step on a pole and it breaks. A Sawi exclaims, *"Getar haser!" Haser* I already know means "not," so I guess that *getar* means "strong," and the man is saying the pole I stepped on is "not strong."
To check this, I point to something else that is not strong and describe it as *getar haser*.

My informant may agree, replying, *"Esawab! O tai getar haser—inapi!"*
I then will hazard guesses that *esawab* means "true,"*o tai* means "that also," and *inapi* means "weak." The total utterance, by this theory, emerges as, "True! That also is not strong—it is weak!"
This approach was tenuous at best, especially in the early stages when we had so few clues to guide our guessing. Often a confused look or an incredulous outburst of laughter would tell us it was time to backtrack and try another guess.

Once, while learning to paddle standing up in a narrow Sawi dugout, I lost my balance and fell in. My Sawi escort shook his head sadly and said, *"Tuan, go nigi kabi mar jah!"*

I guessed he was saying, "You should have leaned the other way!" or "Watch out for crocodiles!" But months later when I returned to my notes, I realized that he had said, "Tuan, you have a bad relationship with our canoes!"

Day by day, word by word, we enlarged our linguistic beachhead. Eventually, we discovered the Sawi words for "joyful," "sad," "stubborn," "foolish" and "angry." We could now describe our emotions!
Later, with the aid of other Sawi words that meant "think," "repent," "forgive," "to judge," and "love," we began to penetrate into the language's inner sanctum of abstract expression. We were ranging more freely . . . gaining confidence . . . getting ready. The nirvana of total communication looked a little closer.
Or was it really just as far away as ever?

Chapter 15 MEETING IN THE MANHOUSE

The tattered remnants of an all-night rainstorm were still scudding above the ironwood trees, as i slowly approached the Haenam-Yohwi man house, notes in hand, walking in an early morning world of puddles, drips and luminous mist. The man house stood apart by the river, a grim guardian of the twin rows of longhouses recently erected by the people of Haenam and Yohwi. To an outsider, a man house appears little different from the usual Sawi dwelling—just a longhouse that somehow got left out of line, with perhaps a few human and animal skulls festooning its doorposts to indicate the prowess of its occupants.
But to the Sawi eye, a man house is no mere dwelling. It is the Parthenon of Sawi culture. A banquet hall for honoring distinguished guests. A thinktank for hatching schemes of war. A forum for oratory, ribald humor or strident boasting. A covert for occasional homosexual liaisons. A slaughterhouse for cannibalistic feasts.
I planned to make it an Areopagus for proclaiming the Son of the living God. A portal through which the gospel would eventually reach every smoky fireplace in the longhouses of Haenam and Yohwi. But it would not happen without a struggle.

The first obstacle was language. Speaking Sawi was proving far more than an exercise in stringing simple terms together. Often a single word turned out to

be only a stem to which a seemingly limitless number of suffixes or chains of suffixes could be attached.

Each verb, for example, has nineteen tenses in its indicative mood alone. So far I had isolated the functions of only one-third of those nineteen tenses. Also, each of the nineteen tenses occurred in both a first-person and a non-first-person form, making a total of thirty-eight verb endings to choose from every time I wanted to make a simple indicative statement in Sawi.
Another group of verb endings were slowly emerging as the subjunctive mood of the language, a system for expressing "if," "could have," "would have," and "should have." Further, I was getting glimmerings of an imperative mood, a brace of suffixes which say "let me," "let us," "let him," as well as give commands in the second person.

Apparently concrete verb stems became etymological phantoms which could assume any one of fifteen different shapes even before one began extending them with suffixes. One form of the stem proclaimed the subject as singular, another as plural. Still others indicated action aimed at either a singular or plural object. Other forms signified operations which were either customary, progressive, repeated, reciprocal, experimental, conclusive, partial, excessive or obstructed.

In Sawi, every sequence has to be in correct time order with no steps omitted. The grammar is correspondingly set up to handle long action sequences in a smooth, flowing manner.
Every statement has to be classified as either firsthand or second-hand information. Sawi won't let you take credit for someone else's thoughts. Nor will it let you avoid responsibility for your own utterances. It abhors indistinctness. It tolerates no nonsense. It would resist a translation of *Alice in Wonderland* like oil resists water. Surgically precise, transistorized description is its goal.

Sometimes I felt like my brain circuits would get shorted before I mastered Sawi. And yet learning it was a great adventure. I often felt like a mathematician must feel as he tackles problems and breaks through into new formulas which work like magic.
Sawi is so enchantingly specific in its vocabulary. In English you open your eyes, your heart, a door, a tin can or someone's understanding, all with one humdrum verb "open." But in Sawi you *fagadon* your eyes, *anahagkon* your heart, *tagavon* a door,*tarifan* a tin can, and *dargamon* a listener's understanding.

If someone had shown me a statement of Sawi grammar and asked me to guess the type of persons who developed it, I would have guessed a race of pedantic-philosopher types obsessed with fastidious concern for handling masses of detail efficiently.

And yet, looking deeper, I would have guessed they were also poets—an entire subclass of Sawi verbs is devoted to personifying inanimate objects as speaking! If a flower has a pleasant scent, it is saying *fok! fok!* to your nostrils. Is it also beautiful? It is saying *ga! ga!* to your eyes. When a star twinkles it is whispering *sevair! sevair!* If your eyes twinkle they are calling *si! si!* If mud squishes around your feet, it is murmuring *sos! sos!* In the Sawi universe, not only man, but all things are communicating.

Climbing up a notched pole, I entered the manhouse and sat down on the grass mat among the men of Haenam and Yohwi. They didn't look like the philosopher-poets their language suggested they were. I felt I was sitting in the presence of a mystery. How did a culture addicted to barbarism develop such a refined, logical and efficient language? Perhaps the swift thought and keen reflexes needed to survive in a violent context served to produce linguistic efficiency also.

Or was their language an artifact pointing back to an earlier age of more complex aspirations? I had already noticed that the Sawi had a deep, almost

compulsive esteem for their ancestors. Perhaps there was more than just a sentimental basis for it.

For a few minutes I sat quietly among them, conditioning myself anew to the strangeness of the men with whom I must communicate, and to the brooding atmosphere of the manhouse itself, with its gloomy-eyed skulls, weapons, grass mats, flickering fires, and cobwebs heavy with congealed smoke.
In spite of the many aspects of their lives which made me shudder, it was impossible not to respect the men around me. Every one of them was an accomplished naturalist, versed from childhood in the names and ways of hundreds of species of flora and fauna. Any one of them could survive independently in a wilderness where I, cut off from outside help, would waste away.

They were obviously men of great courage and strong wills. They could move easily through a rain of arrows or risk disembowelment from the tusks of horrendous wild boars. Even more remarkable, they could transform a seemingly hostile wilderness into a bountiful supermarket where goods were free for the taking without destroying the wilderness in the process.
Basically, there were two presuppositions I shared with the Sawi—belief in a supernatural world and in the importance of interaction between that supernatural world and men. The Sawi believed in a hierarchy of disinterested, if not malicious, demons and departed spirits of the dead. I trusted in an infinite yet personal God who loves justice and mercy.

The Sawi were convinced that no misfortune happened by accident, but was invariably caused by demons who could be either activated or restrained by witchcraft. I was persuaded that all things were either commanded or permitted by a divine Providence which in turn could be influenced by prayer.
Beyond this point, there was little common viewpoint in our respective world views. Here was a barrier even greater than that of language. Somehow I must bridge the gulf in a meaningful way.

I laid out a few notes on the mat in front of me and started in. First I coined a name for God in Sawi—*Myao Kodon*, "the greatest Spirit." Then I tried to describe Him. I explained that He didn't live in just one submerged log or one sago palm, like Sawi *hamars*, but instead filled the whole sky and the whole earth.
"In fact," I added, "we're sitting here inside Him right now!"

They looked around involuntarily, startled at the thought.
"In the case of *hamars*," I continued, "you use witchcraft to keep them from entering your villages, your homes, your very bodies. But there is no charm, no fetish that can keep *Myao Kodon* away. He respects no witchcraft. He is everywhere and no one can ever get away from Him." A look of defenselessness crossed several faces.

"And because everything—the sun, the moon, the weather, rivers, jungle, animals and people—are all inside Him, He knows all about everything. He knows what everyone is saying, doing and thinking. We cannot see Him, but He sees us!

"He also controls everything, just as easily as you control the movements of your own muscles. Without Him the wind cannot blow, nor the rain fall. The sun cannot shine, nor the moon rise without His power. Neither could plants grow, nor babies be conceived without His provision."
Kani and others leaned forward, listening. Previously they had received only hardware from the outside world. Now they were hearing ideas. They seemed excited.

As I continued, a man named Gar came and sat facing me. After absorbing each sentence, he turned to his fellows and carefully repeated what I said. Often he rephrased my words into clearer Sawi, adding interpretive comments of his own—some of which were humorously far astray.

It was a mark of politeness, and at first I found it disconcerting, but later I became profoundly thankful for this custom. Listening to Gar rephrase my

thoughts gave me priceless insights into the Sawi mind. It also allowed me time to work out the syntax for my next sentence. More important, every time Gar repeated what I said, he was steadily reinforcing the message in a way which did not create boredom.

Line by line, I expanded the contrast between the petty, cynical spirits whose dread shadow lay over every aspect of Sawi life, and the infinite, creative God whose love for justice and mercy has involved Him in a profoundly sacrificial pursuit of lost men. I wanted to give them a wide, clear basis for making a free choice between those spirits and God. Some of the men seemed disinterested. Others listened in open-jawed amazement, as if startled to hear their language express concepts which they, the owners of the language, had never dreamed of.

I spoke of God creating man in the midst of a beauteous, bountiful world, the advent of evil into the human community, the age-old promise of a Deliverer, and finally the wondrous appearance of that Deliverer. I was approaching the climax of my narrative, describing the ministry of Jesus among the Jewish people, when suddenly Maum yawned out loud and reached for his knife and a piece of split vine lying on the mat beside him.

Gripping one end of the vine between his toes, he pulled it taut and began trimming it with his knife. He was making a new bowstring. He seemed to have tuned out completely.

Others likewise resumed little conversations of their own. I sensed that if I had been talking about the Asmat, the Kayagar, or the Auyu instead of the Jews, they would have kept on listening. At any rate, I had reached the end of their attention span. Whoever the Jews were, they sounded awfully far away.

On subsequent visits I expanded further on the life and ministry of Jesus, trying to establish His reality and relevance to their lives, but without apparent success. The Sawi were not accustomed to projecting their minds into cultures and settings so forbiddingly dissimilar from their own.

Only once did my presentation win a ringing response from them. I was describing Judas Iscariot's betrayal of the Son of God. About halfway through the description I noticed they were all listening intently. They noted the details: for three years Judas had kept close company with Jesus, sharing the same food, traveling the same road.

That any associate of Jesus would have conceived the idea of betraying such an impressive figure was highly unlikely. And if anyone *had* conceived the idea, one of Jesus' inner circle of trusted disciples would have been the least likely to choose such a course. And yet Judas, one of Jesus' disciples, had chosen to betray Him and carried out the dreadful act alone, without any of the other disciples suspecting his plot.

At the climax of the story, Maum whistled a birdcall of admiration. Kani and several others touched their fingertips to their chests in awe. Still others chuckled.

At first I sat there confused. Then the realization broke through. *They were acclaiming Judas as the hero of the story!* Yes, Judas, the one whom I had portrayed as the satanically motivated enemy of truth and goodness!

A feeling of coldness gripped my spine. I tried to protest that Jesus was good. He was the Son of God, the Savior. It was evil to betray Him. But nothing I said would erase that gleam of savage enjoyment from their eyes. Kani leaned forward and exclaimed, "That was real *tuwi asonai man!*" Whatever *tuwi asonai man* meant.

I got up and left the man house, oppressed with a feeling of hopelessness. I looked across the swamp to the little home we had built. It looked like a monument to futility. Carol was dispensing medicine from the porch, while Stephen played on a mat behind her. Was this the limit of the good we could do for the Sawi? Bringing health to their physical bodies while the core of their beings remained remote and unreachable?

The men were still discussing the story and laughing over it as I headed home. Alone in my study, I began to pray. But as I prayed, Kani's mysterious phrase

kept going through my mind. After a while, I took a pen and wrote the strange expression on a three-by-five card.

Tuwi asonai man! Its basic parts were simple enough. *Tuwi* means "pig."*Ason* is "to catch," and with the *-ai* ending, "having caught." *Man* means simply "to do."

"Having caught a pig, to do. . . . " To do what?

I went to the door and called one of my language informants, Narai. When he arrived I asked him to explain *tuwi asonai man*. Narai looked through the window and pointed with his chin to a young pig which Hato had earlier captured in the jungle. Tamed, it was now roaming freely around the village yard.

"Tuan, when Hato first caught that pig, he kept it in his own home, fed it by hand, and protected it from the village dogs. Now that it is roaming about, he still throws down scraps of food for it every day. The pig feels secure, protected, well-fed. He is free to come and go as he pleases. But one day when the pig is mature, what will happen to it?"

"Hato and his family will butcher and eat it," I replied.

"But does the pig have any warning now of that coming event?"

"Not the slightest."

"Right!" Narai agreed. *"Tuwi asonai man* means to do with a man as Hato is doing with that pig—*to fatten him with friendship for an unsuspected slaughter!"*

Narai sat watching the effect of his words working on my countenance.

"Does this actually happen?" I asked naively.

"Indeed it does," he replied quickly, and began to relate the account of a stranger who used to visit Haenam frequently. On his first visit, he had been feasted royally, flattered with praise, and invited to return again and again. The story ended when the man's patrons became his butchers, the fed became food.

Narai continued with the story of Kani's and Mahaen's treachery against Mahaen's relatives in Wasohwi. The conclusion left me sitting in astonished silence.

"But if Mahaen committed a crime like that," I ventured, "why is he such a popular man? Why have so many men promised their daughters in marriage to him?"

The look in Narai's eyes told me he just didn't see the point of my question. And that was an answer in itself.

As Narai continued relating still other examples of classic Sawi treachery, I was thinking hard. I saw now that the Sawi were not only cruel, but *honored* cruelty. Their highest pleasure depended upon the misery and despair of others. They had long ago passed beyond what they would consider a layman's concept of murder into a far-out lifestyle where treachery was idealized as a virtue, a goal of life.

Overt killing no longer held real pleasure for them. They would even risk letting an intended victim escape in order to pursue the more sophisticated ideal expressed in *tuwi asonai man*. That was why the story of Judas Iscariot had aroused them. It had touched the core of their psyche, awakening a deep, almost subliminal response.

Judas was a super-Sawi! And Christ the object of Judas' treachery meant nothing to the men in the manhouse.

My task was to reverse that situation totally. On the basis of Scripture, there could be no compromise, no easy counting of converts who still harbored this tragic philosophy. But how could one man and his wife reverse the world view of an entire people, a world view which had already been entrenched in their collective psyche for perhaps thousands of years?

I knew deep inside that mere recitation of the gospel would not be enough. Nor would I resort to the "schooling" method used by some, in which one simply writes off the present generation as unteachable, concentrating instead

on enrolling hundreds of children in schools, where a steady Christian influence over many years aims at a second- or third generation victory.
I wanted to win *this* generation of Sawi. And I wanted to win them on their own ground and by their own fireplaces. If the gospel could not win men like Mahaen, Kani, Hato and Kigo, it was not the message it claimed to be.
I was game, but I was also stymied. I didn't know how to tackle a cultural enigma like this. I headed home for lunch, groaning inwardly. "Lord, in all of time and space has Your message ever encountered a world view more opposite than this one? Could there be a world view more opposite to the gospel? And has any man ever faced a communication problem bigger than this one You've assigned to me?"

Take John the Baptist. His communication problem was a cinch compared to mine. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to a people already acquainted with the rite of baptism and with concepts like repentance and forgiveness of sins.
He proclaimed the coming of Messiah to a people who had been waiting thousands of years for Messiah to appear! And when Messiah appeared, John had only to shout one sentence and every Hebrew within hearing was made aware of the purpose of Messiah's coming: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

John shouted it once, waited a day, and then said a second time, "Behold the Lamb of God!" His communication was so effective two of his own disciples left him immediately and followed Jesus!
From hoary history, the lamb sacrifice had been an integral part of Hebrew culture. Something the people were already intellectually and emotionally committed to. But the Sawi had never heard of a lamb, nor, as far as I could tell, had they ever entertained the thought of an innocent substitute dying for the sin of the guilty.

Consider the case of Jesus Himself. On the surface, one would think anyone embarking on a ministry as unique as His would face a tremendous communication barrier. In actual fact, He enjoyed the same communication advantage John the Baptist had exploited before Him.

For Nicodemus, Jesus likened Himself to the serpent of brass which Moses once hoisted on a pole, so Hebrews then dying of snakebite could look at it and be healed. Nicodemus could hardly miss the point. Jesus is the object of faith to whom we must all look or else we perish.

For Nathaniel, He likened Himself to the ladder the patriarch Jacob saw in a dream, the ladder with angels of God going up and down on it. Nathaniel could hardly miss the point: Jesus is the means of communication between God and Man.

For a Jewish multitude seeking miraculous supplies of food, He became the true manna from heaven, saying, "Moses gave you not the bread from heaven. . . . The Bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Clearly, a great deal of groundwork had already been done to prepare Hebrews to recognize their Messiah. The sovereign God had laid that groundwork millenniums before by incubating within Hebrew culture scores of redemptive analogies pointing forward to Him. John the Baptist and Jesus made a dramatic impact by explaining who was the perfect, personal fulfillment of those redemptive analogies. They had, after all, been placed there millenniums earlier to be exploited at the right moment and in this very manner!

The gospel, coming as a message from another world, achieved its first ethnic conquest, not only by the demonstration of miracles, but even more significantly, by dynamic appropriation of Hebrew redemptive analogies. It had been God's chosen strategy for introducing the Christ.

By that strategy John the Baptist's communication problem, and that of Jesus and His apostles, had been reduced to a minimum. Then came the writer of

the New Testament letter to the Hebrews to develop that strategy in still greater depth.

And even when the gospel came to the Greeks, John the Apostle was able to introduce Christ to them as the *Logos*, lifting a term right out of their own Hellenistic philosophy: "In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God! . . . The *Logos* became flesh and dwelt among us."

But to me, as I gazed wistfully across the swamp toward the Haenam man house, it seemed that God had not troubled Himself to prepare the Sawi in any similar way for the coming of the gospel. Hebrews . . . yes! Greeks . . . yes! And even my own Anglo-Saxon forefathers were found with the pagan term *god*, a term which someone kindly appropriated to teach us something better than worshiping trees and rocks.
But the Sawi had no name for God. Nor even the concept of Him. No lamb sacrifice to teach the need for an atonement. No redemptive analogy I could use.

It looked as though God had led me to the end of the earth and left me alone to grapple with a communication problem greater than any He had ever required prophets or apostles to face. Or was I misreading the situation?
Surely His grace would find a way to break through to the Sawi also. There must be a way, but what could it be? "Lord," I prayed aloud as I walked along. "I need Your help!"

Carol listened with concern as I explained the nature of our problem over our lunch. "Do you think there's any chance they're. . . ."
". . . fattening *us* with friendship for a slaughter?" I said. "Quite likely the thought has crossed their minds, but the fact that we are their only source of steel axes probably weighs heavily in our favor, at least for the time being. My main concern is, how do we crack this idealization of treachery before it cracks us?"

"God always has a way," Carol said meaningfully. "There must be a way."
I agreed that if Jesus were physically present in that Haenam manhouse, He would not be stymied. Even if there was only one solution, He would find it unerringly. But Jesus was not there in physical manifestation.

There was only a man and a woman who hoped to qualify as His representatives, who trusted that the Spirit of Jesus was living and working in them. So that Spirit would have to reveal to them the same key their Lord would have used, or else there was no hope.

Reduced to utter dependence upon God, we set ourselves to *hope* for that key. We could not guess what form it would take. We only knew that it would be from God and would have His blessing.
The next day, really serious fighting broke out again between Haenam and Kamur.