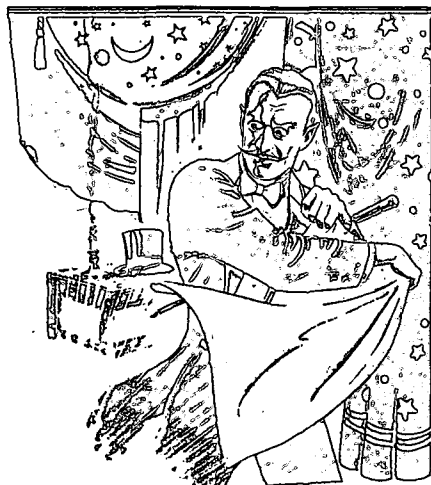


The Haji's Miracle

(An Argosy Oddity)

By GARNETT RADCLIFFE

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NAY, *sahib*, don't tell me that story. Try it on the young men and perchance you will find one or two to believe such foolishness. But I have been *haji*, holy man, of this village for more than three score years, and I know that it is impossible for men to fly.

Why am I so certain? *Sahib*, the matter is very simple. Listen, and I will explain out of the wisdom Allah has given me. If I lift a stone in my hand—so—it returns quickly to the earth, does it not?

The *sahib* says he knows that—yes, but has the *sahib* ever pondered the reason?

I will tell the *sahib*. When I lift the stone all the air that is between it and the sky is lifted also. When, therefore, the stone is released it presses on it, causing it to return to earth. And as it is with that stone, so it is also with a man. No man can leave the earth by reason of the weight of air that lies between the top of his head and the sky.

Having that knowledge then, how am I going to believe the foolishness you were speaking about machines that flew higher and faster than birds carrying men in their insides? And those tales of men sitting in the sky and dropping bombs upon their enemies beneath!

Ho, ho! I'm sorry to have spoiled your joke, *sahib*, but I am an old man and I have acquired a vast store of knowledge during my life. Men cannot fly, and these

tales of devil-birds called aeroplanes are all lies. I, the *haji* of Piran, have spoken . . .

The *sahib* asks have I then never seen a man flying? Assuredly I have. But he was not flying as the *sahib* means flying; he was seated in a box of silver cloth larger than this hut and he was borne aloft by ten evil djinns with the heads of snakes, who were invisible to all eyes save mine.

I could see them by reason of my piety, but to the other men of the village it seemed as if they were not there. Ho, ho! In their foolishness they thought it was some devil device sent by the British Raj to punish the village.

And when they heard the voices of the evil djinns, like swarming bees, they ran into the caves to hide.

Did I run too? Nay, *sahib*. A man of holiness such as mine has nought to fear from evil djinns! I went into a cave with the others—not to hide myself, but that I might pray undisturbed that the evil djinns would lose their footing and fall, thus causing the unbeliever they were carrying to descend into our hands.

That was why I went into the cave. There were a few who had got there before me and they were huddled in their foolish terror at the farthest end. When I had got past them I rebuked them for their fears and I told them to raise a barricade of

stones at the mouth of the cave that I might pray in greater quietness.

And while I was speaking to them one of the djinns spat fire on the village, and there was a noise as if a mountain had fallen down, and two of our huts disappeared in a cloud of smoke.

THOSE others thought it was a bomb. They cast themselves on their faces, and in their terror they cursed me—yes, me who am the holy *haji* of Piran they cursed in their foolish fear, asking what manner of *haji* I was if I could not protect them from the bombs of the unbeliever!

I could easily have stopped it then and there, but it was necessary that the foolish people suffer somewhat, to prove their strength.

Like madmen they were in their fear. When a djinn spat a second time three or four of them laid hands upon me where I knelt at the farthest end of the cave, praying with my face to the rock and my arms covering my head, and lifted me to my feet and pushed me out of the cave telling me to use my holiness to protect them.

Yes, *sahib*, they did that to me who am the most holy and the wisest *haji* in Asia.

Naturally I feared neither the djinns nor the unbeliever. I should gladly have walked in the open, save that within the cave, in its cool gloom, I could pray the more peacefully.

The *sahib* says he wonders I did not curse them so that they fell down dead. I did. But when I saw them falling dead, I quickly relented and gave them their life again. They were only young and foolish in their fear. . . .

The *sahib* says I am as merciful as I am wise and holy. There is truth in the mouth of the *sahib* . . . sometimes. . . .

Ay, I brought them back to life and I even suffered them to push me outside the cave; for I was full of pity for their ignorance. Nor had I any fear of the evil djinns who were carrying the silver box in circles above out village and howling while they carried it.

Why should I for whom all the angels in Paradise are waiting eagerly with garlands of flowers and pitchers of milk and honey to reward me for my piety on this earth—why should I be afraid of death?

So I suffered those witless ones to whom I had restored their life to push me out of the cave, and I ran to another one.

Did I say I ran, *sahib*? Then I used the word in error. I went slowly without fear; but when I got to the cave there were other foolish ones who refused to let me enter. In their madness they drove me away with stones, telling me to prove my holiness by bringing down the unbeliever and delivering him into their hands.

WHAT did I do? I cursed them so that they were immediately transformed into tailless monkeys; and then of my great mercy I quickly relented and blessed them so that again they became men with no memory of what I had done.

And I went to a third cave—walking very slowly and praying aloud as I walked; but a stone moved under my foot so that I fell prone upon my face, hurting myself greatly in the fall.

A sign from Allah that because of my great piety and wisdom I was under his protection!

The flame bursts came more and more swiftly—rocks flew through the air and the people screamed aloud in their terror. But I did not stir or turn my face skyward. A great trembling seized me and I knew that the spirit was powerful within me.

I lay where I had fallen, not heeding the laughter of those foolish ones watching from the caves; and I covered my head with my arms that I might pray the better.

There was no fear in me for I knew that I had but to give the command, and the evil djinns would carry down the unbeliever, for they could not resist the will of such a holy *haji* as myself.

Presently I said the word still lying upon my face and the djinns ceased their howling and carried the unbeliever down into our midst as I had ordered.

Sahib! Do you doubt my word? Beware lest I change you into a camel! By the beard of the Prophet I speak the truth. In this village there are three hundred men who will bear witness to what happened.

At my command the djinns brought down the unbeliever. They carried him only a few feet above the spot where I lay, howling no longer but whistling as the wind whistles when it blows through reeds . . .

Nay, *sahib*, it is the djinns I speak of. I was lying silent, praying with my arms around my head. And the djinns whistled as they passed above.

There was a stretch of level ground alongside the village. In obedience to my commands the djinns carried the silver box in which the unbeliever sat as it were in a half circle over the huts and then brought it gently down upon this level ground.

There were small wheels beneath the box, and they ran the thing along the level ground for a distance of perhaps a quarter of a *koss* until I ordered them to stop.

And when they had obeyed me I rose to my feet and spoke winged words to those witless cowards who came running and shouting from the caves where they had been hiding while I alone had remained outside to protect the village.

NAY, *sahib*, it was not in anger that I spoke to them. Where there is so much wisdom and holiness how can there be anger also?

I spoke to them after the manner of a father, promising them that if those who had pushed me outside the cave and those who had pelted me with stones were tied up and flogged and fined a half of their possessions I would spare the remainder of the village.

Was I not merciful?

Their reason had come back and they shouted that it would be done, praising my wisdom, my holiness and my mercy. They had seen the miracle I had worked on their behalf, and they knew that Allah

had blessed them with a *haji* more holy than a saint.

Then we rushed across the plain to where the unbeliever still sat in the silver box, with only his head visible.

There was a tat-tat gun such as the unbelievers use on the side of the box, and when he saw our charge he ceased praying to the djinns for aid and fired at us. But I told the young men to have no fear, for in response to my prayers Allah would turn his bullets into drops of milk.

They went on while I stayed, kneeling behind a rock and protecting them with my prayers. Allah hearkened to me again and after a few had been killed or wounded, the gun ceased firing and they captured the unbeliever though he fought hard to escape.

They brought him to me with blood running down his face. He was a young *sahib*, very tall and very strong. And he showed no sign of fear until he looked upon my countenance, and heard my name and who I was from my own lips.

Then he trembled! Ho, ho! Unbelieving dog as he was tales of my holiness had reached even his ears. When I cried to him that I was the great *haji* of Piran, equal of saints and the most holy man in Asia, he bowed his head and trembled like a tree smitten by a high wind.

Wah, that unbeliever knew his djinn, could not protect him against the power of my holiness! He spoke our language well, and when I bade him confess he had been carried by evil djinns with snakes heads invisible to all eyes save mine, he answered loudly that it was so in very truth.

THEN I asked him had not an army of angels from Paradise come in answer to my prayers and compelled the djinns to set him down beside the village. He dare not lie in my presence. With his eyes fixed on mine he cried that that also was the truth.

Sahib, had he not been an unbeliever I could have felt sorry for the young man. I tell you his behavior was a lesson to

certain base ones in our village how to treat a holy man with due respect.

He shook before me. When I raised my hand he fell flat upon his face. He shielded his eyes from my countenance as if it had been the sun.

Terror is a giver of wisdom. Such was his fear that presently his eyes were opened and he too saw the angels who were standing all around.

He shrank from them, waving his arms and calling loudly to me for deliverance. The others of the tribe marveled for in their ignorance they could not see the angels and it appeared to them as if he wrestled with empty air. But I have the eyes of holiness and I could see.

Sahib, I wish you had been present to behold that miracle. I am an old man and only once or twice have I performed a greater.

The white man walked backwards, straining at every step as if he were being pulled by ropes. As he went he howled to me for mercy. But I had no mercy for he was an unbelieving dog who deserved the punishment.

Back he went till he stood beside the silver box in which the djinns had carried him. Had I given a sign the angels would have released him. But I hardened my heart, and though he shouted as if he were being burned with fire, they made him climb upon the accursed thing and seat

himself inside. He deserved no less.

None save me dared to approach. Standing a little way off lest my shadow might vex the angels I cursed him so that my words rose above his cries. And then Allah sent me the power and I worked yet another miracle.

We heard a crackling sound as if lightning had smitten rocks asunder. Then the wings of the angels made as it were a halo of light upon the silver box; there was a great wind and the sound like the roaring of a thousand streams, and then the angels whirled the silver box across the plain faster than a bullet could fly.

When it had reached the edge of the plain I raised my arms and they carried it up and up till our eyes could follow it no longer.

That was the punishment I, the holy *haji* of Piran, have meted to the unbeliever. They are still carrying him higher and higher. When I give the order they will drop him upon a rock I have marked with the blood of a barren she-goat, and he will be dashed into more pieces than there are grains of sand in Asia.

As a proof, *sahib*, this is the very rock . . . Beware lest your shadow should defile its holiness . . . Return to this place in three or five years' time and you will see the unbeliever fall upon it.

I, the holy *haji* of Piran, have spoken, and the *sahib* is at liberty to depart.





And suddenly the world
breathed flame

Maker of Shadows

By JACK MANN

CHAPTER XXIII

MAKER OF DREAMS

A THING thought at Gees' inner self and wakened it. It used no words, but its form was: "We tried to warn you against the crimson liquid, but you were drowned in the scent, and would drink."

He thought in answer: "It is too late, now."

"She was bidden not to drink, but to keep watch. The lure of the liquid was too strong for her, and she drank. See her now!"

Gees saw her lying among the cushions of the divan, wonderful in sleep, with her outflung arm across his shoulder and her lips parted in a smile. Her alluring dark eyes were closed, and her breast rose and sank evenly. And in this dream he saw

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