

But the mare stretched her magnificent, long body. She was a thoroughbred—like the man who rode her.

Again a burst of sound, to the north this time, thundering to a portentous, smashing, roaring climax, and just for a moment Tom felt something clutch at his heart with clay-cold fingers.

Fear? Yes!

He owned up to it like the brave man he was, and, just because he owned up to it, an immediate reaction came to him as the shots plopped far out into the night, finding their target far away; and he said to himself that there was no danger.

Yet, a few minutes later, the whistle, the shrieking, the crack and clank, enveloped him with an intolerable sense of loneliness, of insecurity, of stark powerlessness. For a second, that was like an eternity, nothing seemed to matter except the plomp of the shells.

It seemed the end of the world! A world dying in a sea of hatred and lust and blood!

But, whatever the fantastic thoughts in his subconscious self, his conscious self was cool, collected. It communicated the warning of treacherous ground, of slippery timber fall, of turbulent little wayside stream, of crumbling rock slides, to his brain, the nerve center, and the nerve center sent the messages on to eye and hand and leg . . . And he rode, like a Centaur—on, on, away from the Web!

Then silence, but for the thud of the horse's feet—silence again torn by the rumble of distant guns.

Another mile, and the sun rose slowly, with haggard, indifferent, chilly rays, immediately shrouded by a thick slab of mist.

Here and there a tree stood out, spectral, lanky, like a sentinel of ill omen. The rumble and grumble of