

CHAPTER III.

IN PERIL.

JED STIFFENS had been caught in some of the most perilous situations conceivable during his long and adventurous career, and more than one of his escapes bordered on the marvellous; but he was forced to confess to himself, on the second day succeeding the interview with General Sullivan, just narrated, that he was so close to death that all hope dwindled to a shadow which threatened to vanish at any moment.

With the approach to the Indian country, the lax discipline of the invading army diminished, and every precaution against blunder and disaster was taken. The commander of the American forces kept his scouts well in advance, under orders to exercise sleepless vigilance, and especially to guard against ambuscade, since there was no doubt that the Iroquois would call into play all the wonderful cunning they possessed to bring about the ruin of the invading force, which was too strong for them to meet in open battle.

A runner had arrived from General James Clinton,