

Cocos Island (continued)

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checking out," opined Freebie.

They checked the location of the X, and found it to be in one of the supposed caves, about halfway between the coast and the center of the island. Maria traced the line of the cave, and found that it ended near Wafer Bay.

"I'll bet that's the cave I found underwater," she declared.

"That's great, but how do we get our treasure-hunting equipment through the bay without ruining it?" Freebie asked.

"There's probably another entrance to the cave," suggested Sam. Sure enough, there was one marked: just a stone's throw away from the bum's hut. "So much for that idea. What say we waterproof our equipment?"

"Looks like we don't have another choice," Freebie concurred.

"Hey, what'll we do if that creep decides to inspect his hoard?" put in Maria. "You know what misers these hermits are."

"Now hold on a minute," objected Sam. "You haven't even met the guy. For all we know, he could be the silt...I mean, salt of the earth!"

"Well, in that case, why don't we just ask him to take us to his treasure?" countered Maria.

"Great idea, but if we want to meet him on his terms we'll probably need a sawn-off shotgun, some World War II hand grenades, and a pint of tear gas."

"He's right," agreed Freebie. "That guy has a regular arsenal of weapons, just waiting to be deployed."

"You mean he's one of those Japs who thinks the war's still going on?" asked Maria in disbelief.

"No, but he's the next worst thing," explained Freebie. "Sam and I think he's a mercenary from Latin America, who's hiding out here."

"Where on earth did you get that idea?" Maria asked incredulously.

"Take a look at this," said Sam, holding up a raggedy newspaper. On the cover was a picture of Our Villain, next to a headline reading: "Wanted For Treason: Cal Igula."

"That's him, is it?" asked

Maria. Sam nodded soberly.

The article went on to explain how Igula has assisted in Castro's takeover of Cuba in the late fifties, and had gone on to the greater glories of infiltrating Angola with Castro's Cubans, helping Idi Amin come to power, and more recently working with the Sandanista guerillas.

"Sounds like one fantastic guy," said Maria, after she had read the article. "Guess you were lucky to find him drunk."

"Darn right," agreed Freebie, vehemently. "If there were only a way to disarm him, somehow..."

"There is," interjected Subliminal Sam, as if he had known all along. "The way to disarm this guy is to offer him something he hasn't got."

"Are you kidding? We haven't got a penny to our names!" exclaimed Freebie.

"I'm not talking about money," Sam replied mysteriously.

"You mean...?" began Freebie. Slowly, both of them turned to look at Maria. Puzzled, she returned their stares. Then it dawned on her.

"Now, wait a minute. I refuse to have anything to do with this. Just what do you take me for?"

There was a pregnant pause before Sam continued, "Oh well, I guess we'll have to forget about the treasure, and leave it behind..."

"No, wait..." interrupted Maria. "Let's not be too rash. Just what did you have in mind, Sammo?"

A heated discussion followed. Eventually, the trio retired. The following morning, they arose to an early breakfast, and then set off up Ship Creek to Cal Igula's hut. They hoped to catch the mercenary before he roamed away from home. In about an hour's time, the trio found themselves on the verge of the clearing where Igula's hut was located. From there, Sam and Freebie sunk into the undergrowth, and worked their way to the rear of the hut. Meanwhile, Maria slipped behind a tree and changed into her bikini.

Then, after bracing herself and almost backing out, she tip-toed up to the door of the hut, like Little Red Riding Hood (in a pink

bikini), and knocked three times.

"Who is it?" called out a voice from inside.

"Special delivery for Mr. Igula!" Maria replied.

Instantly, the door swung open (evidently, it had been rehinged by the occupant), revealing one tough cuss-tomer.

"What do you..." he began indignantly. Then he looked startled at the sight of the strategically-dressed Maria, and examined her with a gleam in his eye.

"Say, just what is a knockout girl like you doing on this forsaken island?"

"I came here to visit you," she answered seductively.

"I heard what a heroic guy you were, and figured you'd need some company out here. How about it, Cal?"

The mercenary had taken the bait - hook, line and sinker.

"I could sure use a swell babe like you around this dump!" he enthused. "Do you wanna come in...?"

"Uh...I've got a better idea," stalled Maria. "Why don't we go take a dip at that lovely waterfall I saw on the way up?"

"Sounds fine with me," he answered fervently. He started to we get to the falls!" advised Maria, with a sly grin. Taking the merce by the arm, she led him down the jungle path.

When the coast was clear, Sam and Freebie entered the clearing and stole into the hut. There, they uncovered the crates which contained Cal Igula's weaponry and began to haul them out into the jungle, where they concealed the crates beneath the thick vegetation. As Freebie was lugging a particularly heavy box of grenades from the hut, one tumbled out and rolled through the doorway, into the hut. In panic, Freebie dropped his box and raced for cover. He was just in time. In an instant, there was a massive explosion,

and the humble hut disintegrated into a million fiery fragments. A nearby palm tree crashed to the earth, and the imperata grass in the clearing caught fire, and burned to a crisp.

Down at the waterfall, the mercenary was taking it off in hopes of getting it on. Maria had other ideas. While Senor Igula changed into his nouveau bathing suit, she took a place beneath the falling cascades and prepared to fend him off. Then a colossal boom resounded through the jungle. Igula echoed it with a verbal explosion of his own. In a flash, he leaped out of the bushes and scaled the cliff like a half-crazed ape.

Maria followed as quickly as she could in her get-up. Like a raging bull, the mercenary burst into the clearing, only to be ambushed by Freebie and the very-much alive Sam. Before he could react, they had him hogtied to a napalm tree.

"Let's see you escape

from that, Igula," scoffed Freebie.

"You'll never get away with this!" growled the prisoner.

"Famous last words..." Sam remarked astutely.

"If you don't let me go, I guarantee that the Panamanian government will be at your throats in two days' time!" threatened Igula. Then he clamped his mouth shut, as if he'd said too much. But the trio had already heard what he said.

"Just what did you mean by that?" asked Freebie suspiciously. The mercenary glowered fiercely, and refused to reply.

"We have ways of making you talk," Sam intoned, as he inauspiciously drew a machete from behind his back. "It's been a while since I sliced some bologna." He flourished the blade momentarily as he slashed the surrounding vegetation.

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