



HIGH STAKES IN SHANGHAI



HOWARD TURK



Shanghai, 1941. Jake Greenberg, an American expatriate, owns a casino in the International Settlement. Certain Japanese officers want it. Jake barely escapes a bombing, one of his casino people is murdered by the Japanese, and a newspaper friend is kidnapped. He strikes back, working secretly with American intelligence and the Chinese underground. Then, one night in December, the Japanese invade. Jake has only hours to save his friends and escape.

High Stakes in Shanghai

by Howard Turk

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First Edition

High Stakes in Shanghai

For Karen, my wonderful wife and editor

Howard Turk

Three

It was raining harder when Jake left the barber shop and the umbrella did little more than protect his head and shoulders. He was about to cross Baikal Road when a Japanese patrol car splashed through the street at high speed followed by a big covered army truck. Is something up? Jake wondered as he pushed on toward Jews Park.

Li was waiting under the awning of a candy store. He was in his wet weather rig. Over his hot weather outfit of a T-shirt, shorts, and straw sandals, he had on a large conical coolie hat and a woven straw cape. Jake stepped up into the seat of the pedicab. The top was up and a rubberized blanket could be rolled down from the top. But Jake was so wet it didn't matter.

"Anyone know Lily Cohen?"

Li shook his head. "Some say they will ask. I say you give reward. That you rich."

"And you? How many rickshaws do you rent out?"

"Only three. Not capitalist like you." Many of Li's friends in the Rickshaw Guild were communists. They were fighting the Japanese now, but ready to battle Chinese Nationalists as soon as the Japanese threat ended.

Jake mentioned the Japanese patrol car and army truck, but Li just shrugged as if to say, who knows what they are doing.

"We go back same way, Chapoo Bridge," Li said over his shoulder as he pulled out into the street. "Rain good, keep pygmy soldiers inside."

They passed street vendors lined up along the curb on Ward Road. Under their big umbrellas they were selling everything from chicken and pork on rice to a chipped dessert called "red ice," which Li loved and Jake had no intention of ever trying. Unlike almost every Westerner he knew, Jake didn't mind

eating from vendor carts. Li knew all the best ones. But the idea of colored frozen water from the Whangpoo sounded like instant death to him.

The smell of frying meat, spicy hot and sour soup, and cooking rice drifted over them as they turned on to Seward Road. "Have you eaten?" Jake asked.

Li shook his head. "Better in Settlement."

Jake leaned back against the leather seat, wondering what else he could do to get in touch with the elusive Lily Cohen. Maybe an ad in the personal page of refugee newspapers? There were a handful of them—some in German, one in English, and a couple in Yiddish. That, he decided, would be Plan B.

*

Li had just turned from Tiendong Road, a street of tall, relatively expensive apartment buildings near Soochow Creek, on to Chapoo Road. They were no more than 50 yards from the bridge, when Jake heard a gunshot and saw a swarm of Japanese soldiers at the bridge. It was more than a check of papers. Through the rain, Jake could see soldiers pulling people out of a line of cars waiting to cross into the Settlement and beating them with rifle butts. Someone was down behind the soldiers. If it wasn't for an arm outstretched in the gutter, it was could have been a bundle of clothes someone had dumped on the sidewalk.

At the bridge some of the soldiers began shouting and pointing at them. Li stood on his brakes. "Ai, big trouble. We go, Boss."

"Fast as you can."

As Li began pulling around the corner on to Tiendong Road going west, Jake lifted the back of the pedicab's hood enough to see behind them. A single shot rang out, followed a moment later by three or four more. Jake could see a Japanese Army car starting to move.

"Oh, shit," he whispered to himself. What the hell is going on? "Jap car starting up," he shouted to Li.

Li was zig-zagging around slow moving carts and trucks. Jake knew he was looking for an alley too narrow for an automobile. He took his Army Colt .45 from his shoulder holster and laid it on the seat beside him. The last thing he wanted was a gun fight with the Japanese army, but they didn't seem to be in a talking sort of mood.

Jake lifted the back of the hood again just as the Japanese patrol car was skidding around the corner, its siren screaming. Traffic began pulling to the side, leaving them exposed. He sighed, picked up the .45 and put a round into the chamber. "Japs coming fast."

They went past the glass covered portico of the Shanghai General Hospital, past the Chinese Post Office with its gull wing roof, before Li turned into a smaller street to their right so suddenly that the pedicab lurched dangerously on to two wheels. Jake knew now that Li was trying to get to the alleys around the Fokien Road Market. It would be a near thing, he thought.

The Japanese car followed, its rear wheels breaking away on the wet pavement into a skid. The driver slowed, corrected, and came back to speed.

A man in the passenger seat leaned out the window and began firing at them with a handgun. Li didn't need any urging to move the pedicab from side to side. The Japanese car was getting closer. Jake wiped the sweat from his forehead.

He got down on the floor of the pedicab and lifted the back of the hood. He wanted to slow up the Japanese without killing anyone. That would really stir them up. But it was hard to aim with Li jerking back and forth and the pedicab reacting to every bump in the road. The man in the passenger seat was firing wildly, but they were closing fast. Jake took aim as best

he could at their radiator and fired three booming rounds. At least one hit, exploding their radiator in a geyser of steam. Another shattered their windshield.

"Oh shit," Jake said, wondering if he had killed anyone.

The Japanese car kept coming, but slower now, like a badly wounded but determined rhino.

They're going to run that thing until the engine blows, Jake thought. After a pause, the man in the passenger seat fired again.

This time he got lucky and a bullet ripped through the top of the pedicab's hood.

Li turned again. Jake looked over his shoulder. The Fokien Market was a block away. Behind them, the Japanese car wallowed around the corner and shuttered to a stop. A moment later two men in army uniforms were out of it, one firing his pistol at them. Jake fired two "stay down" shots and the two soldiers scrambled behind their car.

Jake felt Li turn again. With a huge sigh, he returned the Colt to his holster, got back up on the seat, and hung on as they entered a foul smelling, muddy alley so narrow that the bouncing pedicab barely had enough clearance. At the end of the alley, Li stopped and slumped over his handlebars, breathing hard. Jake leaned forward and patted him on his back "That was a hell of a go, fella."

Li shook his head. "Too old for this," he managed to gasp out.

"Aren't we all."

*

Fifteen minutes later, Li slowly pedaled into a small square that was a gathering place for rickshaw men. Li was spent, but there was nothing Jake could do to help him except get him food and drink. The square was in a poor section called Chapei, in what once was Chinese Shanghai, but was now under the

Japanese. It was far enough from the Chapoo bridge that the almost certain Japanese sweep of the area would not be a problem. Being with the rickshaw men was also one of the safest places for them. Anyone suspected of being a Japanese agent did not live long in the rickshaw community.

Since it was still raining and there were only a few vendor carts in the square, Jake decided on an open-front noodle shop for lunch. Any other white man would have caused a stir, but Jake and his connection with Li was well known to Guild members.

Jake waited, nursing a bottle of Clover Beer, until Li had drunk most of a pot of Oolong tea. (Bottled beer with the top removed at the table and hot tea were the only safe drinks in this part of town.) Finally Li sat back and smiled. Lifting his empty tea cup, he said, "This b'long number one," in Pidgin English, one of the street languages of the city. As an old rickshaw man, he, of course, could speak Shanghai dialect, fairly good English, a little French, and enough of the dialects of several nearby provinces to get along. He also could read, which was not so common among Guild members.

"What do you think is going on with the Japs?"

Li started on his bowl of flat noodles with chicken, mushrooms and water chestnuts, shoveling the food into his mouth with chopsticks in the Chinese style. "First class," he said with a grin, putting down his bowl. "Pygmies do that. Scare people by and by. Maybe this time more. I ask." He got up and held whispered conversations with several men in the restaurant, then went outside.

When he came back and sat down, he nodded knowingly. "Our men try kill Big man Chinese work for Jap. Maybe dead, maybe no. Make Pygmies mad."

"They're always angry. Hear anything about what the Japs are going to do about the Settlement?"

Li puffed up his cheeks and made a rude sound. "Only Jesus know and he no tell." Li was not a Christian, but had gotten what little formal education he had at a missionary school.

They finished their meal with dessert. Li had his beloved red ice, and Jake had hot sesame balls. Then they crossed into the Settlement using a little "two-penny" ferry over Soochow Creek favored by rickshaw men who wanted to avoid Japanese harassment at the bridges.



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