

THE SAVAGE KILLER

by Rick Lai

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Two millionaires named Savage were murdered. One victim died in Britain and the other in Canada. Although the deaths were described by different writers, there is reason to believe that the two killings were the work of the same master criminal.

The murder of a wealthy Englishman, John Savage, was recounted in Agatha Christie's *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* (1933, also published as *The Boomerang Clue*). While returning to England by ship from a business trip to the United States, John made the acquaintance of Rose Emily Templeton, the beautiful leader of a morphine smuggling ring. John made the fatal blunder of accepting an invitation to be Rose's guest at her cottage in Britain. When John was drugged by Rose, a solicitor was summoned to the cottage. Rose's partner, a master of disguise and a skilled forger, impersonated John and instructed the solicitor to draw up the millionaire's will leaving 700,000 pounds to Rose and the rest to charity. The bequest to charity was done to divert suspicion. After forging John's signature and bidding the solicitor farewell, the impostor manufactured a phony suicide note. John was then given an overdose of chloral. The coroner's verdict was that John took his own life. One year later, Rose's partner killed Alan Carstairs, John's best friend, because he was searching for the truth. Amateur sleuth Lady Francis Derwent exposed Rose's crimes, and the murderess was arrested. Rose's partner eluded capture by fleeing the country. In a letter to Lady Francis, the unrepentant felon boasted that he was creating a new identity for himself in South America. Agatha Christie did not elaborate on this criminal's subsequent activities in any later novels.

If we critically examine a novel by Lester Dent (alias Kenneth Robeson) from Street and Smith's *Doc Savage* magazine, the fate of this cunning crook will be discovered. In *Brand of the Werewolf* (January 1934), Alex Savage, Doc's uncle, was slain with poison gas by a criminal gang. Alex perished because he refused to surrender an ivory cube to the leader of the evil band. The cube was the key to the location of a fabulous treasure.

During the sack of Panama by Henry Morgan in 1670, a galleon loaded with treasure escaped into the Pacific. The crew mutinied and sailed north. They anchored off the coast of western Canada. An earthquake buried the ship in a cavern. A dozen crew members survived the catastrophe. Hostile Indians prevented them from salvaging the treasure from the wreck. One survivor was an expert cutter of ivory. He made a map which folded into a cube. This map detailing the location of the galleon was lost under a rock ledge during an Indian attack. The last remnant of the crew journeyed southwards towards the Spanish colonies. Centuries later, the ledge became part of Alex's vast estate. He stumbled upon the cube.

Descendants of one of the survivors arrived in Canada in pursuit of the legendary galleon. Lester Dent describes these people as "Castilian." It would be logical to assume they came from Spain, except for the fact that Lester Dent used "Castilian" to refer to the aristocracy of a Central American republic in *The Man of Bronze* (March 1933). Therefore, these treasure hunters came from Central or South America. The sailors' descendants were befriended by a fellow countryman. He was actually the

leader of a criminal gang. Known as the Werewolf, he left the picture of a half-human half-wolf face at the scenes of his crimes. This man slew Alex Savage with poison gas.

The deadly gas utilized by the Werewolf also suggests that he and his dupes came from Central or South America. The fatal vapor produced symptoms akin to heart failure. This gas is probably a derivative of curare, a poison found in Central and South America.

There are significant similarities between Rose Templeton's partner and the Werewolf. Both were tall slender men in their early thirties. Neither gave the impression of a forceful violent man. Rose's partner possessed an indecisive face that looked like it needed a toothbrush mustache and a monocle. The Werewolf's visage was almost like a girl's face. Rose Templeton's drug ring had branches in Canada and South America, territories which can be connected to the Werewolf. Rose's partner had intensive blue eyes that would be consistent with Lester Dent's statement that the Werewolf's eyes were hard. Rose's partner was a master at sending false messages to mislead his opponents. The Werewolf tried to trick Doc with a false telegram from his uncle. The Werewolf ordered one of his henchmen to pose as Alex Savage to fool the Castilians. This stratagem recalls how a bogus John Savage received a solicitor.

If Doc's foe was really a native of Latin America, then his use of the sobriquet of Werewolf would be very odd. The Latin American nations are not noted for indigenous legends dealing with lycanthropes. There are many such tales in France, and Canada has a substantial population of French descent. Rose's partner spent considerable time in Canada following a scandal during his student days at Oxford. He was probably christened Werewolf by French-Canadian crooks in recognition of his vicious nature.

Is it mere coincidence that two victims of this brutal killer were named Savage? Evidence that Alex and John Savage were relatives can be gleaned from Philip Jose Farmer's *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life* (1973, revised in 1975). According to Farmer's genealogy of Doc's family, Alex's grandfather was named John. A solicitor in *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* believed that John's only relatives were distant cousins in Australia. Farmer cites a false report (prepared by agents of Sherlock Holmes) which asserted that Doc's father settled in Australia rather than America. The solicitor must have seen the report and based his erroneous conclusion upon it.

In *The Complete Chronology of Bronze* (1999), I revealed that Victor Savage, the murder victim of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Dying Detective," was the half-brother of Alex Savage. I mentioned that Victor was survived by a widow. I neglected to mention that Victor had a son, John Savage.

My chronology placed *Brand of the Werewolf* in December 1932. *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* is set during October and November of an unspecified year. It was published in 1933. Alan Carstairs was murdered on "October the third" (chap. 19). The villains tried to poison Bobby Jones, the boy friend of Lady Francis Derwent, on a Saturday (chap. 6). This attempted poisoning was also referred to as transpiring on the sixteenth (chap. 13). The month was clearly October when Bobby was almost murdered. October the sixteenth fell on a Sunday in 1932, and a Friday in 1931. The date of October the sixteenth is clearly a mistake. Since the novel can be dated in either 1931 or 1932, I choose 1931 to give time for Rose's partner to become the Werewolf. The murder of John Savage actually transpired in November of the year before the novel's events. Therefore, this is the probable chronology:

1930: November	Death of John Savage
1931: Oct.-Nov.	<i>Why Didn't They Ask Evans?</i>
1932: December	<i>Brand of the Werewolf</i>

Here is a theoretical construction of how the murders were closely related. John Savage was something of an amateur explorer. His best friend was Alan Carstairs, the noted big-game hunter and naturalist from Canada. During a trip with Alan to his uncle Alex's estate, John learned of the discovery of relics belonging to a Spanish sailor. Their existence prompted Alan and John to travel to Latin America to ascertain if any Spanish galleons had landed in western Canada. The pair stumbled upon the Panamanian legend. Alan and John then separated. Alan left on an African hunting trip, and John went to the United States on business.

News of John's inquiries reached the ears of Rose Templeton's operatives in South America. They informed their chief who proceeded to intercept John on the transatlantic voyage to England. Her initial intention was to charm John into disclosing information about his researches, but she then saw a way to profit from John's death. One year after John's murder, Alan decided to investigate. He was killed by Rose's partner. Following Rose's arrest, her partner decided to revive the project of finding the lost gold of Panama. Acting on information imparted by John to Rose, the ruthless criminal was able to find descendants of a survivor of the ill-fated 1670 voyage in Latin America. He gained their confidence by posing as a fellow countryman. From the gullible Castilians, the master of deception learned about the ivory box and traced it to Alex Savage's property.

The murderer of John and Alex Savage found the gold from Panama, but he did not live long to profit by his discovery. The Werewolf and his underlings perished in an explosion. The human predator that had plagued the Savage family finally met his just reward.