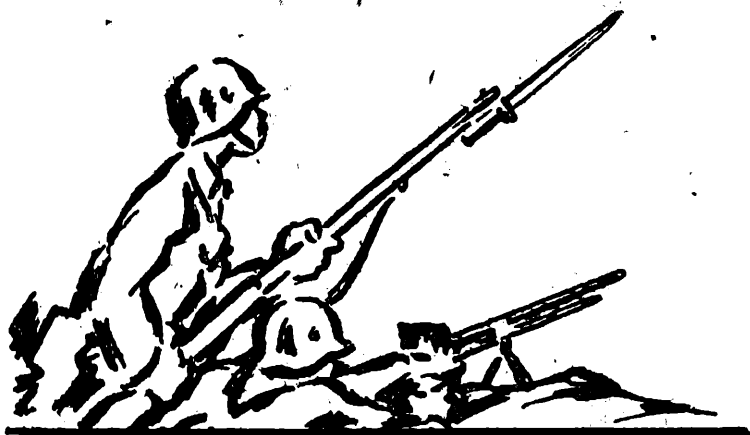


Dramatics for National Defence

**FOUR COMRADES
AND
ROAR CHINA.**

*Published by
The Indian People's Theatre Association
(BOMBAY)*



FOUR COMRADES & ROAR CHINA

A NOTE

These two anti-Fascist plays should always have a simple explanation given to the worker and peasant audience before their performance. This explanation can be given by one of the actors, and should give the audience a clear short background of each play, and the political events which brought this about. This is very important, otherwise the full significance of the play will be lost. At the end, perhaps, there can be a few words said to them which will link up the play with India and what it means to us to have a Fascist invader in this country.

FOUR COMRADES

ACT I

A CELL IN SINGAPORE JAIL

[Four convicts—two Chinese (Chin and Zee), one Malay (Omar) and one Indian (Ratan)—occupy the cell. They are all Trade Union Workers, who were imprisoned for labour agitation. They are talking ; Ratan sits rather quiet and sad.]

Chin : “ Three years—it is a long time we have spent in this jail”.

Zee : “ But what are three years in the long story of mankind ? Many more will have to remain in jail for much longer periods—even to die—before we can put an end to man’s exploitation by man. . . Eh, Ratan, what are you thinking ? Dreaming of your beloved India ? ”

Ratan : “ Yes—but not India of yesterday or today but the India of the future, a future in which the masses of both China and India will be free. I have spent 15 years working in China and have as much love for China as for India.”

Zee : “ I wonder how the war has been going on. Even my beloved Canton, I believe, has fallen to the Japanese. ”

Omar : “ But don’t worry, it no longer is a war of China against Japan. It is a war between the decent

people of the world and the Fascist aggressors. Now that Russia has joined forces with the democracies, we can expect the masses of all countries to rise together to overthrow the three Fascist powers—Germany, Italy and Japan.”

Chin : “ Japan !—but Japan is taking jolly good care not to involve herself. And we the Chinese alone have to fight this big bully.”

Zee : “ But that won't be for long. Japan must enter this war on the side of her Axis partners. . . . ”

Chin: (Interrupting) “The gang of thugs they are—Do you think Japan's ambitions are confined to China? Personally I think Japan is making plans to conquer Burma as well as India. That is how the three robbers want to divide the world.”

Omar : (Joyfully) “ Oh, how I wish Japan is involved in a war with the western powers. Then the swaggering bully will learn the lesson of his life. It is one thing to overrun defenceless, peaceful China and quite another thing to challenge Britain and U.S.A. Oh, how I wish. ”

(The sound of the door being unlocked is heard and Omar stops abruptly. A warder enters and throws some bread wrapped up in a Chinese paper for the convicts to eat. Then he leaves).

Zee : (Picking up the pocket) “ Our delicious supper has arrived, comrades. Let's postpone our discussion and concentrate on food.” (*They all squat round to have their meal. Zee opens the packet. Chin*

takes the paper wrapping, looks at the news. He gives a howl of joy).

Chin : “ Hurrah ! Japan and America are at war. (They all stop eating and crowd round him).

Zee : “ Let me see. Let me see.” (starts reading quietly).

Ratan : “ Read it aloud, Zee, so that I can also follow.”

Zee : “ Japan has put her hand in the hornet’s nest. They had actually the impudence to attack the Pearl Harbour. America and Britain both have declared war upon Japan.”

Omar : “ But when ? When did all this happen ? ”

Chin : (reading the date) “ Oh, it happened—weeks ago and we never knew anything about it.”

Ratan : “ Several weeks !—But do you know what that means ? ”

Zee : “ What ? ”

Ratan : “ That even Singapore may be attacked by the Japanese. We are only a few miles from Japanese occupied territory. (Slowly and movingly) And you know what they would do to us if they found us here.”

Omar : “ Yes, indeed, the British don’t like us but the Japs—why, they simply shoot down all labour agitators.”

Chin : “ Shoot down ?—that is only if they are merciful ! The Japanese capitalists hate Socialists,

Communists, Radicals and Labour agitators like poison. They are never satisfied with merely killing them..”

Zee : “ Yes.....you remember what they did to our comrades in Korea and Manchuria.”

(A sound as of the bursting of a shell is heard in the distance.)

Omar : “ What was that ? ”

Ratan : “ The music of war. (standing up) Well, comrades let us make ready to leave this place, at least I am not willing to be caught in this hole like a rat.”

All (in one voice) “ Nor are we.”

Chin : “ But what shall we do ? How can we escape ? ”

Ratan : “ We must think of something (the sound of the door being unlocked is heard). Wait. Someone is coming. *Zee*, you engage the warder in talk and I will gag him with my shirt (taking off his shirt)....this is no time for hesitating.....” (The warder enters).

Zee : (extra polite) “ Hello, Mr. Warder, to what do we owe this kind visit ? (Ratan approaches stealthily from behind) we can assure you, we are duly honoured

Warder : “ You are free ! ”

All : (astonished) “ What ? ” (Ratan drops his shirt).

Warder : “ Yes—you see, the island is being invaded by the Japanese. So it has been decided to release all the prisoners. You are free to go.” (Goes out, leaves door open).

Zee : “ I can hardly believe it.” (Sits down, exhausted by the sudden turn of events. They all sit down.)

Omar : “ What shall we do ? ”

Chin : “ Do ? Fight the Japanese of course ! (Looking at Ratan) Ratan’s case is different. He may not like to fight the Japs. After all his country has not been attacked by them. . . . ”

Ratan : (Interrupting). *Zee*, what are you talking Do you imagine for a moment I will betray you to the Japs who are as much enemies of China as of India ? Moreover, we are not narrow nationalists. We must do what is best for the workers of the world, for the defeat of Fascism is of urgent importance. Without that there is no hope for the toiling masses. (Gets up).

Zee: “ What do you suggest we should do ? ”

Ratan : “ We must immediately issue a manifesto to our comrades.”

* * * *

From behind the curtain the manifesto is read out by Ratan:—

Comrades !

After three years in jail we have come out to find an entirely changed world situation. A world wide war is in progress. The three Fascist countries—Germany, Italy and Japan—have menaced the freedom of every country in the world including the workers’ fatherland—the Soviet Union. That means they have threatened the hope of the workers of the world for greater freedom.

You know what victory of Fascism means—the destruction of all that the conscious proletariat holds dear. We will, therefore, resist the fascist aggressor with the last drop of our blood. We will transform every street, every house, every room into a fortress. We will fight the invading Japanese from street to street, from house to house, from room to room.

CURTAIN GOES UP

ACT II

[*A Room in Singapore* : Part of the room has been demolished by a bomb. The four comrades have been defending the room against the Japanese invaders. Zee and Omar are wounded already. Chin and Ratan are trying to dress their wounds. There is a shot and Chin falls down. Ratan sees his comrade die, is infuriated, takes his rifle and carefully taking aim, shoots through the window. The shriek of a dying Jap is heard.]

Ratan : “The dirty dog. Take that also.” (shoots again).

Omar : (trying to dress Chin’s wound and finding it useless) : “Chin, Chin, please speak. Comrade, are you going to leave us? (Chin’s head rolls to one side as he breathes his last. Zee covers his face). Gone. My comrade is gone. (Hysterically) The dirty scoundrels. I will show them. I will kill them all. (Rushes towards the door - Zee and Ratan try to stop him but he frees himself and rushes out. A volley of fire is heard.)

(Omar’s voice is heard from outside—evidently he has been riddled with bullets.) “Ah—Ah—They got me

—I am coming, Chin, I am coming. . . . (His voice dies out. Ratan and Zee bow their heads in grief. Then they take up their rifles and take up their positions. They talk as they fire).

Zee : “ Look they are coming too near.” (fires).

Ratan : “ Our guns are silent. I am afraid the battle of Singapore is over. Anyway, it is not over for us.” (fires)

Zee : “ Strange, isn’t it, that I, a Chinese, and you, an Indian, should be fighting shoulder to shoulder like this, against the Japanese.”

Ratan : (Fires) “ That is for Omar, you scoundrels! (Replying to *Zee*). Before long I expect our entire countries will be fighting together like this against the common enemy.”

Zee : “ Long Live India. Long Live China. Long Live The Working Class of all countries. (Exposes himself before the window, forgetting to take cover. There is a shot and he falls down with a groan).

Ratan : (Bending down) “ *Zee*, my comrade. They got you after all.”

Zee : “ *Ratan*—(speaks with difficulty)—you better run away—Go back to India and tell your people about the danger that faces them—It is Malaya today—It will be Burma tomorrow—and then India—Farewell *Ratan* ” (Dies).

Ratan : (closing *Zee*’s eyes and covering his body) “ Farewell, comrade. (Goes to the window, takes his rifle, aims and fires). Come on, you dirty dogs. I will take you on alone. (Tries to fire again. But the

cartridges are finished. The rifle is useless. He throws it in disgust. Japanese are heard approaching.)—“Alright, let them come.” (The Jap soldiers and one officer enter).

Jap Officer : (Aiming pistol at Ratan) Hands up !
—So we got you after all—(Coming nearer)—An Indian ? What are you doing here ?

Ratan “ Yes, an Indian. I am here to fight the people’s war against the Japanese Fascism and barbarism. (At this insult, a Jap soldier takes up his rifle to shoot down Ratan but the officer stops him).”

Jap Officer : (To the soldier) No, No. Just wait a minute—(Turning to Ratan) Now, look here—You are an Indian and we have no quarrel with Indians. Why should we kill you ? We will not only spare your life but also arrange to send you back safely to India if only”

Ratan : “If only ? ”

Jap Officer : “ If only you would be friends ! (extends his hand).

Ratan : “ Keep away your dirty hand. I am no friend of cut-throats and robbers.”

Jap Officer : (Annoyed) “ So you won’t go back to India and tell them how a Japanese officer spared your life and that the Japanese are soon coming to India to free your people from the British.”

Ratan : (Laughing) “ The Japs coming to free India. That would be a good joke. Ha. Ha. Just as you freed Manchuria and Korea and China—No, we

Indians are not such fools as to exchange our present bondage for a worse slavery."

Jap Officer : (Turning to his soldiers) "Take aim. (They obey) Do you know at one word from me, you will be dead ? "

Ratan : " We never die. The force that makes me fight will never die, it stands for something deep and great, you can never kill this force. There is a bond that has grown up between men of all nations. That bond you cannot break. Moreover there are 400 millions, to take my place."

Jap Officer : " You seem to forget that we have made sure that the masses of India will welcome us, when we land our forces on the Indian soil."

Ratan : " You have no idea of how warm a reception you will get—Just try to land in India and you will soon find out—The story of China will be repeated in India."

Jap Officer : " There is only one minute for you to die."

Ratan : " But I shall not die. I will live again. I will be reborn in the spirit of every Indian who will take up arms against you. I will be everywhere you go in India. in Calcutta and in Bombay, in Madras and in Karachi. You will not escape me. . . . (Jap Officer signals to soldiers) I shall not die ! " (There is a volley of fire and Ratan falls down ; for a moment there is silence. Then the Japanese Officer hears Ratan's voice and many voices mocking him. He looks around, sees the dead body and is frightened by the ghost voices).

Crowd's Voices : (rising at the end) " I will live again. I will be reborn in the spirit of every Indian who will take up arms against you I will be everywhere you go in India—in Calcutta and in Bombay, in Madras and in Karachi. You will not escape me (Japs start running). I shall not die ! "

CURTAIN.

ROAR CHINA

PROLOGUE

(To be read from behind the screen by two men, one voice alternating with the other with each line).

China! Our valiant neighbour, China !

China ! the land which, through the centuries,
has been famous for its wise men, for its
litterateurs, for its artists and craftsmen, for
its poetry, music and art.

China has never sent its armies to enslave other
countries

China never taught the lesson of war and imperial-
ism

Hers has always been a message of peace ! Peace !
And yet to-day every Chinese man, woman and child
Is ready to shed blood for the motherland
China is roaring.

For a hundred years the Chinese people groaned
under the tyranny of foreigners

Their big cities, Shanghai, Canton and Hongkong
were under the rule of the foreigner—

And they said nothing !

The foreign traders plucked the wealth of China
so that their countries might be enriched—

And they said nothing !

Japanese Imperialists marched on with their blood-
stained feet—

Japan occupied Korea—

And after Korea Manchuria.

But the Chinese remained Non-violent !

But there is a limit to Non-violence and peace

When the waves of tyranny and injustice rise high

The oppressed, the hungry, the poor, the workers
the peasants—all take arms to resist it.

This drama reminds us of some such happening.

The Japanese battle-ships sail up the Yangtse

There are guns on these ships

The ships are full of Japanese Soldiers

Wherever the Chinese take courage

To protest against the foreign tyrants

They are slaughtered to death.

The gun-powder reduces their villages to ashes.

There is a village by the banks of the river

This village is the abode of poor fishermen and
boatmen

A Japanese battle-ship is anchored in mid-stream.

An officer of this ship falls from the boat and is
drowned in the river.

The Japs think that the Chinese boatmen have
killed him.

So the forces of tyranny and destruction are let
loose and they sweep this land with all their
fury.

The Japs order that :

For one Japanese two Chinese boat-men will be killed.

And now a Japanese police official is about to arrive any moment to arrest the boatman.

The poor boatmen have been awaiting all night
Who knows what is in store for them ?

Life or death ! Hope or despair ! Justice or injustice !

Who knows which of these forces will be victorious today.

Every few minutes a boatman goes near the window and peeps out anxiously

Even if there is the slightest noise they jump to their feet and cry out :

“They are coming”

CURTAIN GOES UP BEFORE THE LAST WORDS

SCENE I

The Eating House : It is not dawn. The people are stiff and weary from a sleepless night. From time to time one of them goes to the door and listens attentively, then sits down again where he was.

1st Boatman (at the door) : They’re coming.

3rd Boatman (joining him, while the others all look up) : No . . it’s nothing. (They come back to the hearth).

2nd Boatman : Surely he will relent (then he goes to the door). Look ! the sun is coming up. The river

is very quiet. The boat is asleep. (Coming back). My son is asleep too. Surely the Captain has a son.

Old Boatman : In twenty years' time his son will bring his guns against yours.

Stoker : No ! You are wrong. In twenty years' time his son will be under this boy's feet. (3rd Boatman goes to the door again).

3rd Boatman : They're coming.

(Fei, his wife and another woman come in. Fei's wife has a handkerchief—a fine silk dress with a shawl in her hand. The other woman is dressed in a rough printed cotton jacket and carries a child in her arms. She is the wife of the 2nd Boatman).

1st Boatman : (to Fei) Well ?

Fei (angrily) : The filthy swine.

3rd Boatman : You mean he

Fei : Two men must be put to death.

(The women sit moaning, swaying to and fro. Fei's Wife has a handkerchief—the other wipes her tears away with her hand).

1st Boatman : Who ?

Fei : We must choose.

3rd Boatman infuriated : Let them come and take them. We won't send our comrades to death.

Fei (quietly) : Yes, we will. We shall choose, and we shall remember. A day will come when we shall remind them, and they will remember the boatmen of our town.

Old Boatman (knocks out his pipe, puts it in his belt, spits and gets up) : Send me.

2nd Boatman (in a low voice) : Who will be the second ?

(*There is silence except for the moaning of the women*).

Fei (determined) : I shall go.

Fei's Wife (shrilly) : Why—why should you go ? Why you ? Did you kill ? (She rushes to him).

Fei (to the *Old Boatman*, pushing her aside) : Come along, father, to save the town.

Fei's Wife (hysterically rushing between them) : No—No—Why should you ? They will cut off your head. No,—no—you can't go—you cannot—you can't.

1st Boatman (to *Fei* and the *Old Man*) : No, it won't do. We are all equal.

Fei : Who shall go then ?

1st Boatman : We'll draw lots. (He takes a bundle of chop sticks from beside the cook, and breaks two of them).

2nd Boatman (to his wife, not daring to look at the others) : Give me my son. (takes him.)

Fei (to *1st Boatman*) : Are you ready ?

1st Boatman : Long and short ones. Two short.

3rd Boatman (Ironically) : They're beheaded already.

Fei (pointing to the *Stoker*) : Give them to him to hold. (The *Stoker* takes them.)

1st Boatman : Come on.

There is a long pause while they stand mesmerised, staring at the sticks. The Old Man who sat down again with his back to them, when they stopped him, suddenly starts to hum in a thin falsetto, gets up and goes to the Stoker. Slowly he draws a stick and looks at it.)

Old Boatman (quietly) : A short one—I knew.

1st Batman (draws) : A—a long one. (Almost choking with joy he automatically turns to share it with the old man before he remembers and stops).

Fei (draws, looks at it and throws it away) : Not me.

(Two more draw long ones in silence and the suspense increases.)

2nd Boatman (to himself—pressing his son to him and shuddering) : I can't. (The Stoker comes up to him. the boatman puts out his hand but draws it back quickly as if he had been burned). I can't (pushes his son at the Stoker.) Let him draw. He may bring me luck.

(The boy draws and shows it to his father. He stares at it, clutching his son in his arms, then falls heavily on the floor.)

Stoker (picking up the stick) : Short.

A Boatman (at the door) : Here¹are the police.
(The Policeman comes in.)

Policeman : Are you ready ?

Fei (turning his back on him) : Yes, we're ready!

Policcman : Who am I to take ?

(The Boatmen stand to one side, leaving the two who are doomed. The old Boatman embraces the 2nd Boatman and pats him on the back encouragingly. The Policeman takes him by the sleeve).

Old Boatman : I am coming.

2nd Boatman (shrinking back) : No, No ! I won't go. My son ! I won't !

(The two assistants who have stood in the doorway bind him and carry him out screaming and struggling).

(Fei and the women follow them).

1st Boatman : When—when will they come ?

Stoker : Who ?

1st Boatman : They over there who drove out their masters.

Stoker : They are here.

1st Boatman : Show me one of them.

Stoker (pointing to the audience) : He is one—and he is another and you are one. We don't need to wait for others. We must fight ourselves, gun in hand. We must raise all the towns together. Do you know what is written on the chests of the Canton workmen, "Die for the people."

SCENE II

The Wharf : On the left two 7 ft. pillars have been erected. The sound of a drum can be heard, coming nearer, and the procession, headed by the condemned men chained together with policemen in front and behind,

comes in. Behind the policemen come the hangmen in turbans, and with sticks and sacks stuck into their belts. After them the boatmen come carrying their oars, and the women crowd in.

2nd Boatman (screaming) : I worked, and they kill me. I have a son, and they kill me. Why? What are they killing me for?

Student : Because you are Chinese.

(*The procession stops in front of the pillars. The police push the crowd back.*)

Captain (to Assistant) : Are the guns trained?

Assistant : Yes, sir. Ready, sir.

(*The Student comes up to the Captain.*)

Captain : Well. What do you want?

Student (imploing him desperately) : Your religion teaches that you should forgive your enemies.

Captain : There is no such paragraph in the Naval Regulations.

Student : But your religion. . . .

Captain : My religion is my own affair (looks at his watch). You have three minutes left.

(*The Police unchain the condemned men.*)

Old Boatman : Kill only one and let the young one go.

Student (sardonically) : He does't understand Chinese.

Captain (looking at his watch) : Two mintes (To Asst.). When I wave my handkerchief, begin the bombardment of the town. (He pulls out his handkerchief)

Asst. : Yes sir ! (He goes to the radio station).

(The Hangmen take the two men who kneel with their backs against the pillars and tie the rope in a loop round their necks and the posts. Then they insert a stick in the loop behind).

Old Boatman : Comrades ! Am I a criminal ?

The Crowd : No ! (A pause, and more loudly.) No !
No !

Old boatman : Then, comrades, you will not forget me ?

The Crowd : No ! No !

(The Hangman puts a sack over his head and slowly turns the stick, forcing the old man's neck against the post. The other hangman tries to throw a sack over the 2nd Boatman).

2nd Boatman (struggling) : No—no ! I won't—
Wait—Let me speak. I want to say—

Student : Let him.

2nd Boatman (shouting to his wife) : Show me my son !

(She lifts the child up above her head—he stares at the boy, and then turns abruptly to the hangman).

2nd Boatman : Now you can strangle me.

(He is strangled in the same way.)

The Hoshang [monk] (giving the wife one of his prayers) : Give this to your son. No bullet will harm

him. When he grows to be a man, he will wipe out the whites.

Voice of the Stoker behind the crowd : You cannot conquer with that.

(The Journalist moves towards the pillars.)

Captain : Where are you going ?

Journalist : Just to take a photograph of the bodies. It'll be quite a scoop. Just a minute. (He walks towards the scene, focussing the camera, and moving people out of the way with his foot).

1st Boatman : Why should he photograph our grief ?

Several Voices from the Crowd : Don't let him, stop him—Cover our comrades.

(They form a wall between the bodies and the Journalist).

Journalist : All right, keep quiet, please keep out of the way.

Journalist (still looking in his camera) : Get out of the way, all of you.

(The crowd parts, mechanically obeying the movement of his hand, and the Stoker stands straight in front of the camera.)

(He is dressed in the uniform of the Canton Workers' Militia, blue trousers, a blue blouse with a turn-down collar, and a red ribbon across his chest).

(The Journalist sees him first in the camera, looks up scared, and moves back a step).

Journalist : The Canton militia.

Captain : What's wrong ?

Journalist : There's Canton militiaman. A com
missar !

Captain : Where ?

Journalist : Over there !

(But the crowd has already closed round the Stoker.)

Captain : Those are only boatmen.

(The Stoker appears again in another place.)

Journalist : Look, there he is.

Captain : Where ?

Journalist : There !

Captain : You're seeing hallucinations, man. (But he walks grimly towards the boatmen.) What's all this ?

Student (barring his way) : Haven't you had enough yet, Captain ?

Captain : Get away.

Student : The show is over. You should go now.

Captain : We'll see first if "the show" was sufficient. (To the boatmen.) I want a boat, to the "Chinon" one dollar !

(The Boatmen come one step forward, leaning on their oars.)

Come on !

(The Boatmen lift their oars and crush them on the ground again. The Captain immediately draws his revolver from his pocket, and some sweets fall out too. He takes a step back covering the crowd with his revolver. The son of the 2nd Boatman crawls up to a sweet.)

Captain : So two are not enough. You must have thousand !

(The crowd comes a step forward. The child tries to get up with a sweet in its hand, but



tumbles and clutches the Captain's leg. The Captain, started, jumps aside and automatically aims at the child. The mother rushes up, seizes her son, and snatches the sweet from him.)

2nd Boatman's Wife : Leave it alone ! Don't touch it ! It's poisoned. Don't take anything from the Japanese. There—(she throws the sweet at the Captain's feet and wipes the boy's hands and mouth.)

Captain (turning his revolver away, embarrassed) : You idiot, we don't fight children.

(The woman comes forward, her son in her arms. She forces him to look at the Captain).

2nd Boatman's Wife : Look into his face. Remember it—remember it for ever. Remember his eyes of iron, and the gold in his teeth. He killed your father. If ever he asks you for food, don't give it him. If he gasps for water, refuse. If he comes to buy, do not sell to him: Grow up quickly to kill him. Kill him, and kill his sons and all his family.

Student (shouting from the crowd) : Leave us ! Go away from here !

Captain (his revolver still in his hand) : I am here, and no power on this earth can force me to go.

(The Asstt. comes down the steps of the radio station.)

Asstt. : An urgent wire, sir from Shanghai. (Gives him a telegram.)

Captain (reading it, annoyed) : Couldn't they find a more suitable time ? (He crumples it and drops it on the ground.)

Journalist (suddenly seeing the Stoker again) : There's one of the Canton men again. Arrest him—over there.

Captain : No time for that now. (Shouts to the river). We must go.

(*Covering the crowd with their rifles they retreat. The Chinese rush forward.*)

Captain (raising his revolver) : Get back, we have not gone yet.

Stoker (picking up the telegram and reading it with the Student, shouts after the Captain) : You will very soon. (To the Chinese jumping up on the steps.) They have got to go. Their guns are wanted down the river. The aliens are collecting all their strength at Shanghai. In Shanghai there is revolution. Look ! They're running. (He snatches a gun from a policemen, jumps on to the wharf edge and shouts after them). Run.

The Crowd : Run ! Run !

Stoker (brandishing the gun) : I swear, by this gun—you shall not come back ! Count your hours. Your end is near. China is roaring. Oh, you can see me at last. Shoot ! I may fall, but ten will rise in my place.

Student (shouting) : Roar over the whole earth ! Roar China in the ears of all the world ! Roar China the story of this crime (to the river). Out of our China.

The Crowd : Out ! Out ! Out !

CURTAIN