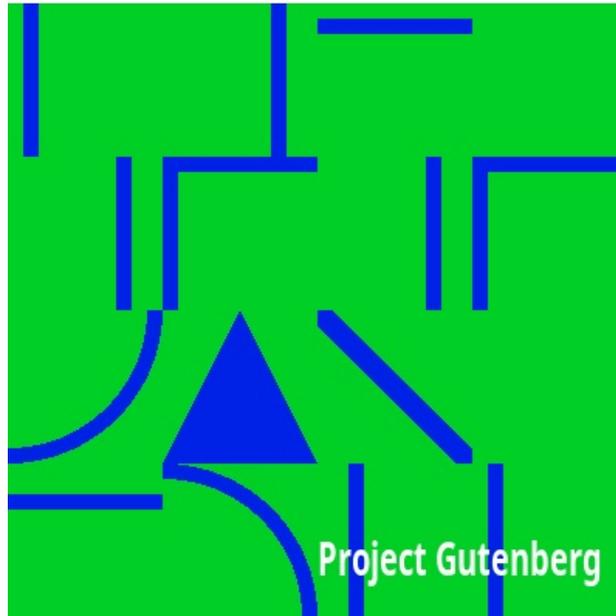

The Hohokam Dig

Theodore Pratt



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Title: The Hohokam Dig

Author: Theodore Pratt

Release Date: August 24, 2009 [EBook #29793]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HOHOKAM DIG ***

Produced by Greg Weeks, Stephen Blundell and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

From where had these attacking Indians come? Out of a long forgotten and dim past? Had their medicine man seen the one supreme vision?

**the
hohokam
dig**

by ... Theodore Pratt

At first they thought the attack was a joke. And then they realized the truth!

AT FIRST the two scientists thought the Indian attack on them was a joke perpetrated by some of their friends. After all, modern Indians did not attack white men any more.

Except that these did.

George Arthbut and Sidney Hunt were both out of New York, on the staff of the Natural History Museum. George was an ethnologist who specialized in what could be reconstructed about the prehistoric Indians of North America, with emphasis on those of the Southwest. He was a tall, lean, gracious bald man in his early sixties.

Sidney was an archeologist who was fascinated by the ruins of the same kind of ancient Indians. Medium-sized, with black hair that belied his sixty-five years, he and George made an excellent team, being the leaders in their field.

They had come west on a particular bit of business this spring, trying to solve the largest question that remained about the old cliff dwellers and the prehistoric desert Indians, both of whom had deserted their villages and gone elsewhere for reasons that remained a mystery.

One theory was that drought had driven them both away. Another theory ran to the effect that enemies wiped them out or made off with them as captives. Still another supposition, at least for the Hohokam desert people, the builders of Casa Grande whose impressive ruins still stood near Coolidge, had to do with their land giving out so they could no longer grow crops, forcing them to go elsewhere to find better soil.

No one really knew. It was all pure guesswork.

The two scientists meant to spend the entire summer trying to solve this riddle for all time, concentrating on it to the exclusion of everything else. They drove west in a station wagon stuffed with equipment and tracking a U-Haul-It packed with more.

George drove, on a road that was only two sand tracks across the wild empty desert between Casa Grande Monument and Tonto National Monument where cliff dwellers had lived. It was here, not far ahead, in new ruins that were being excavated, that they hoped to solve the secret of the exodus of the prehistoric Indians. The place was known as the Hohokam Dig.

They topped a rise of ground and came to the site of the dig. Here the sand tracks ended right in the middle of long trenches dug out to reveal thick adobe walls. In the partially bared ruins the outline of a small village could be seen; the detailed excavation would be done this summer by workmen who would arrive from Phoenix and Tucson.

George stopped their caravan and the two men got out, stretching their legs. They looked about, both more interested in the dig, now they were back at it, than setting up camp. They walked around, examining various parts of it, and the excitement of the promise of things to be discovered in the earth came to them. "This summer we'll learn the answer," Sidney predicted.

With skeptical hope George replied, "Maybe."

It was early afternoon when they set up camp, getting out their tent from the U-Haul-It. They took out most of their gear, even setting up a portable TV set run on batteries brought along. They worked efficiently and rapidly, having done this many times before and having their equipment well organized from long experience. By the middle of the afternoon all was ready and they rested, sitting on folding chairs at a small table just outside the opening of their tent.

Looking around at the dig Sidney remarked, "Wouldn't it be easy if we could talk to some of the people who once lived here?"

"There's a few questions I'd like to ask them," said George. "I certainly wish we had some to talk with."

He had no more than uttered this casual wish than there sounded, from all sides of where they sat, screeching whoops. The naked brown men who suddenly appeared seemed to materialize from right out of the excavations. As they yelled they raised their weapons. The air was filled, for an instant, with what looked like long arrows. Most of them whistled harmlessly past the two scientists, but one hit the side of the station wagon, making a resounding thump and leaving a deep dent, while two buried themselves in the wood of the U-Haul-It and remained there, quivering.

George and Sidney, after the shock of their first surprise at this attack, leaped to their feet.

"The car!" cried Sidney. "Let's get out of here!"

They both started to move. Then George stopped and grabbed Sidney's arm. "Wait!"

"Wait?" Sidney demanded. "They'll kill us!"

"Look," advised George, indicating the red men who surrounded them; they now made no further move of attack.

George gazed about. "Oh," he said, "you think somebody's playing a joke on us?"

"Could be," said George. He ran one hand over his bald head.

"Some dear friends," Sidney went on, resenting the scare that had been thrown into them, "hired some Indians to pretend to attack us?"

"Maybe Pimas," said George. He peered at the Indians, who now were jabbering among themselves and making lamenting sounds as they glanced about at the ruins of the ancient village. There were eighteen of them. They were clad in nothing more than a curious cloth of some kind run between their legs and up and over a cord about their waists, to form a short apron, front and back.

"Or Zunis," said Sidney.

"Maybe Maricopas," said George.

"Except," Sidney observed, "none of them look like those kind of Indians. And those arrows they shot." He stared at the two sticking in the U-Haul-It. "Those aren't arrows, George—they're atlatl lances!"

"Yes," said George.

Sidney breathed, "They aren't holding bows—they've got atlatls!"

"No modern Indian of any kind," said George, "uses an atlatl."

"Most of them wouldn't even know what it was," Sidney agreed. "They haven't been used for hundreds of years; the only place you see them is in museums."

An atlatl was the weapon which had replaced the stone axe in the stone age. It was a throwing stick consisting of two parts. One was the lance, a feathered shaft up to four feet long, tipped with a stone point. The two-foot flat stick that went with this had a slot in one end and two rawhide finger loops. The lance end was fitted in the slot to be thrown. The stick was an extension of the human arm to give the lance greater force. Some atlatls had small charm stones attached to them to give them extra weight and magic.

Charm stones could be seen fastened to a few of the atlatls being held by the Indians now standing like bronze statues regarding them.

George whispered, "What do you make of it?"

"It isn't any joke," replied Sidney. He gazed tensely at the Indians. "That's all I'm sure of."

"Have you noticed their breechclouts?"

Sidney stared again. "They aren't modern clouts. George, they're right out of Hohokam

culture!"

"They aren't made of cloth, either. That's plaited yucca fibre."

"Just like we've dug up many times. Only here ..." George faltered. "It's being worn by—by I don't know what."

"Look at their ornaments."

Necklaces, made of pierced colored stones, hung about many of the brown necks. Shell bracelets were to be seen, and here and there a carved piece of turquoise appeared.

"Look at the Indian over there," George urged.

Sidney looked to the side where George indicated, and croaked, "It's a girl!"

It was a girl indeed. She stood straight and magnificent in body completely bare except for the brief apron at her loins. Between her beautiful full copper breasts there hung a gleaming piece of turquoise carved in the shape of a coyote.

At her side stood a tall young Indian with a handsome face set with great pride. On her other side was a wizened little old fellow with a wrinkled face and ribs corrugated like a saguaro.

Sidney turned back and demanded, "What do you make of this? Are we seeing things?" Hopefully, he suggested, "A mirage or sort of a mutual hallucination?"

In a considered, gauging tone George replied, "They're real."

"Real?" cried Sidney. "What do you mean, real?"

"Real in a way. I mean, Sidney, these—I sound crazy to myself saying it—but I think these are—well, Sid, maybe they're actual prehistoric Indians."

"Huh?"

"Well, let's put it this way: We asked for them and we got them."

Sidney stared, shocked at George's statement. "You're crazy, all right," he said. "Hohokams in the middle of the Twentieth Century?"

"I didn't say they're Hohokams, though they probably are, of the village here."

"You said they're prehistoric," Sidney accused. He quavered, "Just how could they be?"

"Sid, you remember in our Indian studies, again and again, we meet the medicine man who has visions. Even modern ones have done things that are pretty impossible to explain. I believe they have spiritual powers beyond the capability of the white man. The prehistoric medicine men may have developed this power even more. I think the old man there is their medicine man."

"So?" Sidney invited.

"I'm just supposing now, mind you," George went on. He rubbed his bald pate again as though afraid of what thoughts were taking place under it. "Maybe way back—a good many hundreds of years ago—this medicine man decided to have a vision of the future. And it worked. And here he is now with some of his people."

"Wait a minute," Sidney objected. "So he had this vision and transported these people to this moment in time. But if it was hundreds of years ago they're already dead, been dead for a long time, so how could they—"

"Don't you see, Sid? They can be dead, but their appearance in the future—for them—couldn't occur until now because it's happened with us and we weren't living and didn't come along here at the right time until this minute."

Sidney swallowed. "Maybe," he muttered, "maybe."

"Another thing," George said. "If we can talk with them we can learn everything we've tried to know in all our work and solve in a minute what we're ready to spend the whole summer, even years, digging for."

Sidney brightened. "That's what we wanted to do."

George studied the Indians again. "I think they're just as surprised as we are. When they discovered themselves here and saw us—and you must remember we're the first white men they've ever seen—their immediate instinct was to attack. Now that we don't fight back they're waiting for us to make a move."

"What do we do?"

"Take it easy," advised George. "Don't look scared and don't look belligerent. Look friendly and hope some of the modern Indian dialects we know can make connection with them."

The two scientists began, at a gradual pace, to make their way toward the old man, the young man, and the girl. As they approached, the girl drew back slightly. The young man reached over his shoulder and from the furred quiver slung on his back drew an atlatl lance and fitted it to his throwing stick, holding it ready. The other warriors, all about, followed suit.

The medicine man alone stepped forward. He held up a short colored stick to which bright feathers were attached and shook it at the two white men. They stopped.

"That's his aspergill," observed Sidney. "I'd like to have that one."

The medicine man spoke. At first the scientists were puzzled, then George told Sidney, "That's Pima, or pretty close to it, just pronounced differently. It probably shows we were right in thinking the Pimas descended from these people. He wants to know who we are."

George gave their names. The medicine man replied, "The man who has white skin instead of red speaks our language in a strange way. I am Huk." He turned to the young man at his side and said, "This is Good Fox, our young chief." He indicated the girl. "That is Moon Water, his wife."

George explained what he and the other white man with him were doing here. Huk, along with all the other Indians, including Good Fox and Moon Water, listened intently; they seemed greatly excited and disturbed.

When George was finished Good Fox turned to Huk and said, "You have succeeded, wise one, in bringing us forward, far in the future to the time of these men with white skins."

"This is the truth," said the wrinkled Huk; he did not boast but rather seemed awed.

Moon Water spoke in a frightened tone. She looked about at the partially excavated ruins and asked, "But what has happened to our village?" She faltered, "Is this the way it will look in the future?"

"It is the way," Good Fox informed her sorrowfully.

"I weep for our people," she said. "I do not want to see it." She hung her pretty face over her bare body, then, in a moment, raised it resolutely.

Good Fox shook the long scraggly black hair away from his eyes and told the white men, "We did not mean to harm you. We did not know what else to do upon finding you here and our village buried."

Ignoring that in his excited interest, Sidney asked, "What year are you?"

"Year?" asked Good Fox. "What is this word?"

Both Sidney and George tried to get over to him what year meant in regard to a date in history, but Good Fox, Huk, and Moon Water, and none of the others could understand.

"We do not know what you mean," Huk said. "We know only that we live here in this village—not as you see it now—but one well built and alive with our people. As the medicine man I am known to have extra power and magic in visions. Often I have wondered what life would be like in the far future. With this group I conjured up a vision of it, carrying them and myself to what is now here before us."

George and Sidney glanced at each other. George's lips twitched and those of Sidney trembled. George said softly to the Indians, "Let us be friends." He explained to them what they were doing here. "We are trying to find out what you were—are—like. Especially what made you desert people leave your villages."

They looked blank. Huk said, "But we have not left—except in this vision."

In an aside to George, Sidney said, "That means we've caught them before they went south or wherever they went." He turned back to Huk. "Have the cliff people yet deserted their dwellings?"

Huk nodded solemnly. "They have gone. Some of them have joined us here, and more have gone to other villages."

"We have read that into the remains of your people, especially at Casa Grande," Sidney told him. With rising excitement in his voice he asked, "Can you tell us why they left?"

Huk nodded. "This I can do."

Now the glance of Sidney and George at each other was quick, their eyes lighting.

"I'll take it down on the typewriter," Sidney said. "Think of it! Now we'll know."

He led Huk to the table set in front of the tent, where he brought out a portable typewriter and opened and set it up. He sat on one chair, and Huk, gingerly holding his aspergill before him as though to protect himself, sat on the other.

Good Fox, Moon Water and the other Indians crowded about, curious to see the machine that came alive under Sidney's fingers as Huk began to relate his story. Soon their interest wandered in favor of other things about the two men with white skin. They wanted to know about the machine with four legs.

George opened up the hood of the station wagon and showed them the engine. He sat in the car and started the motor. At the noise the Indians jumped back, alarmed, and reaching for their atlatls. Moon Water approached the rear end of the car. Her pretty nose wrinkled at the fumes coming from it and she choked, drawing back in disgust. "It is trying to kill me," she said.

Clearly, she did not approve of an automobile.

George cut off its engine.

Over Good Fox's shoulder hung a small clay water jug hung in a plaited yucca net. George asked for a drink from it and when he tasted it and found it fresh it was wondrous to him that its water was hundreds of years old. He brought out a thermos, showing the Indians the modern version of carrying water. They tasted of its contents and exclaimed at its coolness. Good Fox held the thermos, admiring it.

"Would you like to have it?" asked George.

"You would give it to me?" the handsome young Indian asked.

"It's yours."

"Then I give you mine." He gave George his clay water jug and could not know how much more valuable it was than the thermos.

George then took them to the portable television set and turned it on. When faces, music, and words appeared the Indians jerked back, then jabbered and gathered closer to watch. A girl singer, clad in a gown that came up to her neck, caused Moon Water to inquire, "Why does she hide herself? Is she ashamed?"

The standards of modesty, George reflected as he glanced at the lovely nude form of the prehistoric Indian girl, change with the ages.

Of the people and noises on the TV screen Good Fox wanted to know quite solemnly, "Are these crazy people? Is it the way you treat your people who go crazy?"

George laughed. "You might say it's something like that."

A shout came from Sidney at the card table near the tent where he was taking down Huk's story. "George! He's just told me why the cliff people left! And why the desert people will have to leave in time. It's a reason we never thought of! It's because—"

Just then a big multi-engined plane came over, drowning out his words. The Indians stared skyward, now in great alarm. They looked about for a place to run and hide, but there was none. They held their hands over their ears and glanced fearfully at the TV which now

spluttered, its picture and sound thrown off by the plane. Awesomely, they waited until the plane went over.

"We fly now in machines with wings," George explained.

"To make such a noise in the air," Moon Water said, "is wicked, destroying all peace."

"I'll agree with you there," said George.

"You have this," Good Fox observed, indicating the TV, which was now back to normal, "and you send the other through the sky to make it crazier than before." He shook his head, not comprehending.

George shut off the TV. He took up a camera of the kind that automatically finishes a picture in a minute's time. Grouping Good Fox, Moon Water and the other warriors, he took their picture, waited, then pulled it out and showed it to them.

They cried out, one man shouting in fear, "It is great magic!"

George took a number of photographs, including several of Huk as he sat talking with Sidney. No matter what happened he would have this record as Sidney would have that he was taking down on the typewriter.

Next he showed them a pair of binoculars, teaching them how to look through them. They exclaimed and Good Fox said, "With this we could see our enemies before they see us."

"You have enemies?" George asked.

"The Apache," Good Fox said fiercely.

George handed him the binoculars. "It is yours to use against the Apache."

Solemnly the young chief answered, "The man with white skin is thanked. The red man gives in return his atlatl and lances." He held out his throwing stick and unslung his quiver of lances. George accepted them with thanks; they would be museum pieces.

Finally George showed them a rifle. He looked about for game and after some searching saw a rabbit sitting on a mound in the excavations. As he took aim Good Fox asked, "You would hunt it with your stick?"

George nodded.

"This cannot be done from here," stated one warrior.

George squeezed the trigger. Instantaneously with the explosion of the shell the rabbit jumped high and then came down, limp and dead. The Indians yelled with fright and ran off in all directions. Huk jumped up from the table. Then all stopped and cautiously returned. One went to the rabbit and picked it up, bringing it back. All, including Huk who left the table, stared with fright at it and at the rifle.

Moon Water expressed their opinion of it. "The thunder of the killing stick is evil."

"Moon Water speaks the truth," said Huk.

"It would make hunting easy," said Good Fox, "but we do not want it even if given to us."

He drew back from the rifle, and the others edged away from it.

George put it down.

Sidney held up a sheaf of papers. "I've got it all, George," he said exultantly in English, "right here! I asked Huk if they can stay with us in our time, at least for a while. We can study them more, maybe even take them back to show the world."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't have a chance to reply when you shot the rifle."

George put it formally to the Indians, addressing Huk, Good Fox, Moon Water and the rest. "You have seen something of the modern world. We would like you to stay in it if it is your wish. I don't know how long you could stay in Huk's vision, but if you can remain here permanently and not go back to your time and—well, not being alive there any more—we hope you will consider this."

Huk replied, "It is possible that we could stay in your time, at least as long as my vision lasts, which might be for as long as I lived." He glanced at Good Fox.

The young chief in turn looked at Moon Water. Her gaze went to the station wagon, to the TV, then up at the sky where the plane had appeared, at the rifle, the camera, the thermos, and all else of the white man. She seemed to weigh their values and disadvantages, looking dubious and doubtful.

Good Fox announced, "We will hold a council about it. As is our custom, all have words to say about such a thing."

Abruptly he led his people away, into the excavations and over a slight rise of ground, behind which they disappeared.

Sidney murmured, "I don't like that so much."

"They must do as they want." George led the way to the card table and they sat there. On it rested Huk's aspergill.

"He gave it to me," Sidney explained.

George placed Good Fox's netted clay water jug and his atlatl and furred quiver of lances on the table, together with the pictures he had taken of the ancient Indians. They waited.

Sidney, glancing at the low hill behind which the Indians had gone, said, "What they're doing is choosing between living in modern civilization and remaining dead. What do you think they'll do?"

"I don't know," said George. "They didn't think so much of us."

"But they couldn't choose death and complete oblivion!"

"We'll see."

They waited some more.

"At least," said Sidney, indicating the articles on the table, "we'll have these for evidence." He held up the sheaf of papers containing Huk's story. "And this, giving the real reason the cliff dwellers left. I haven't told you what it was, George. It's so simple that—"

He didn't complete his sentence, for just then Huk, Good Fox, Moon Water, and the other warriors made their choice. It was announced dramatically.

The water jug, the aspergill, and the atlatl and quiver of lances disappeared from the table. In their places, suddenly, there were the thermos and the binoculars.

Sidney stared stupidly at them.

George said quietly, "They've gone back."

"But they can't do this!" George protested.

"They have."

Sidney's hand shook as he picked up the sheaf of papers holding Huk's story. Indicating it and the photographs, he said, "Well, they haven't taken these away."

"Haven't they?" asked George. He picked up some of the pictures. "Look."

Sidney looked and saw that the pictures were now blank. His glance went quickly to the typewritten sheets of paper in his hands. He cried out and then shuffled them frantically.

They, too, were blank.

Sidney jumped up. "I don't care!" he exclaimed. "He told me and I've got it here!" He pointed to his head. "I can remember it, anyway."

"Can you?" asked George.

"Why, certainly I can," Sidney asserted confidently. "The reason the cliff dwellers left, George, was that they ..." Sidney stopped.

"What's the matter, Sid?"

"Well, I—it—I guess it just slipped my mind for a second." His brow puckered. He looked acutely upset and mystified. "Huk told me," he faltered. "Just a minute ago I was thinking of it when I started to tell you. Now ... I can't remember."

"That's gone, too."

"I'll get it!" Sidney declared. "I've just forgotten it for a minute. I'll remember!"

"No," said George, "you won't."

Sidney looked around. "There must be something left." He thought. "The atlatl lances they shot at us!" He looked at the U-Haul-It. The lances no longer stuck in its side. Nor were those that had fallen to the ground to be seen.

Sidney sat down again, heavily. "We had it all," he moaned. "Everything we'd been working for. And now ..."

"Now we'll have to dig for it again," said George. "Do it the hard way. We'll start tomorrow when the workmen come."

Sidney looked up. "There's one thing!" he cried. "The dent in the car made by the lance! It's still there, George! However everything else worked, that was forgotten. It's still there!"

George glanced at the dent in the side panel of the station wagon. "It's still there," he agreed. "But only to tell us this wasn't a dream. No one else would believe it wasn't caused by a rock."

George groaned. He stared at the rise of ground behind which the Indians had disappeared. "Huk," he pleaded. "Good Fox. Moon Water. The others. Come back, come back ..."

No one appeared over the rise of ground as the cool desert night began to close in.

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