

## CHINESE CHIMPO WANGO IN

# FALLING ASLEEP IN THE DEN

*by Greg Hildebrand*

A Chinese Chimpo named Wango laid his head on the pillow in the Den and watched the smoke as it slowly rose up and melded with the cloud that had already filled the Den that morning. The wall of smoke in the Den which was almost as thick as the layers and layers of fog which had settled overnight upon the city of San Francisco. Wango smiled as he closed his eyes and cupped his paw around the heavy leather pouch in his pocket.

After many months of struggling to find enough gold to keep himself in supplies, Wango had decided his luck had run out and it was time to call it quits. Wango traded his claim for some venison jerky and had just started to walk down out of the mountains towards San Francisco, when he happened upon a horse tied to a tree that was just off the trail. He could hear, just off in the bushes, the panicked and pained cries of someone who was obviously very ill, likely at death's door. And, Chimpos being a charitable sort, Wango was concerned for the well being of said horse, so he untied the horse and continued down the mountain trail. After days of riding, just outside the city, Wango let the horse go free and it was only then that he looked into the saddle bags. When he looked closely inside the saddle bags, he nearly passed out. . . more gold than he had ever even allowed himself to dream about. He had found the mother lode, and saved a horse in the bargain. His mother would be so proud.

The first thing Wango did when he got into Frisco was to head straight to the assayer's office to sell enough gold to afford first class passage back to China, not just for himself, but for a few others, on the off-chance he might run into a Chimpo pal or two who might also want to return to China.

Wango treated himself to the finest tailored suit in Chinatown. Then he ate breakfast in the restaurant that was just upstairs from the opium den. During his

meal he occasionally pinched himself to hold back the overwhelming desire to shout “Whoopee!” for being the luckiest Chimpo on the planet.

After he’d stuffed himself with the most enjoyable meal of his short life (due to his newfound monetary capabilities) he sat back in his chair and afforded himself a few moments for a long, broad smile. The ship wouldn’t even begin boarding until later in the afternoon, so for dessert, Wango found himself downstairs in the opium den, where he sat up and once again tipped the opium pipe toward the candle’s flame, slowly savored a long draw from the pipe, then laid back down. By the time his head had hit the pillow, he was dreaming.

In this dream he saw himself at a distance, walking very quickly through what seemed to be endless darkness, yet, for some reason, he could see himself and he could see that he was still in his new clothes. He was carrying a golden cricket cage, which was empty. As he was watching himself run, and run, and run, something else was happening that he hadn’t noticed at first. The golden cage seemed to be growing, and the faster he ran, the faster the cage seemed to grow. He could also see that he was yelling something off into the darkness, but he could only hear what sounded like a drunk Mel Blanc, shouting obscenities, as Taz (decorum prevents them from being repeated here).

For no particular reason, Wango decided to stop running and he turned around to look back towards where he had come from, and far off in the distance, he saw a light, so he decided he’d walk back toward the light, even though he was very tired, and the cricket cage had become so heavy that he had to pull it along.

Wango realized, in a brilliant flash as he was walking toward the light, that the light was moving towards him, and it stopped him dead in his tracks. He gasped as he realized that the light coming towards him was a fire, and this fire was burning up the darkness. He turned to run, as quickly as he could while still dragging the golden cage. In a heartbeat, as a shot of adrenaline turned his panic to resolve, and his resolve into an anger to save the cage, or at least try to keep it from the flames, but the flames were burning up the darkness just a little bit faster than he could run. He gave up, resigning himself to his sorrowful fate, and he just started walking, dragging the huge cage behind him. When he did, the flames also slowed their pace, to match his. Wango slowed his pace even further, and the fire’s approach slowed as well. Wango wondered if this might be his opportunity to

trick the flames or catch them unawares. So, he grabbed one of the cricket cage's bars and slowly he began to pull it away from the flames as