

GRAND YARN OF THE DANDY COWBOY—INSIDE.

# Boys' Magazine

2¢  
EVERY SATURDAY

## THE Camping Cowboys

TELLING OF THE  
AMAZING MANNER  
IN WHICH BUD  
MALONE, THE FAT  
COWBOY, CAME TO  
JOIN THE FAMOUS  
BAR EIGHT RANCH.





## THE CAMPING COWBOYS—

(Continued from page 12.)

With widely dilated eyes the cowboy stared. The shadow was that of a huge grizzly bear, rearing up on its hind legs.

Desperately Bud manoeuvred the knife and slashed at his bonds again and again. The knife was a sharp one. And even as the bear stared at him inquisitively he gained his freedom.

And then, as he reached for his guns, which, alas! were not in their holsters, the bear seemed to realise that this was legitimate prey, and was escaping him. And with a mighty roar he sprang.

Meanwhile Domingo Pablo was spurring his horse across the plain. The bandit was fiercely exultant. The truth was that one of his men had discovered Firefiend tethered up to a tree, and thus Pablo had guessed that a spy had penetrated his lair. But he had quickly discovered Bud, and he had loosed upon him the savage grizzly which he kept in captivity and generally goaded into a state of savage rage by way of amusement.

Bruin would make short work of Bud Malone.

Domingo Pablo now had another scheme in his mind by which to finish off Rex, who was still his prisoner. Arrived at a round fence corral, the resplendent bandit chief swung out of the saddle and placed a whistle to his lips, blowing a shrill blast. Swarthy Greasers came rushing to answer his call, and he snarled orders in Spanish, then strode inside the corral.

There was the Dandy Cowboy.

He was well, for the bullet had torn in and out of the fleshy part of his arm, merely making a hole, and the other had merely grazed his temple, stunning him. But inside the corral he was roped up hands and feet to a heavy stake. He could scarcely move a muscle.

His guns were gone, and for some reason or other they had forced him to change into the spare red shirt which he carried in his pack.

Pablo swaggered up, drawing two guns, a scornful and evil smile on his face. He was the braggart now, for he had a man at his mercy.

"Ha, Gringo! So you have heard the news?" he said in Spanish. "Your cowboys have left the ranch to a man to search for you, leaving it for me to occupy."

A spasm crossed the Dandy Cowboy's face.

"What is more," continued the bandit chief, peering closely and enjoying his discomfiture, "I have got the so fine horse and so I am satisfied."

"We have put you in a red shirt," he went on. "Soon we shall send two of our wildest Andalusian

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bulls, who are in fighting mood, into this corral. Then, poof—what'll become of you?"

Rex paled a little. Desperately, but calmly, he spoke.

"Si, signor; then if I am to die, you will not deny me a last boon. Release my hands, and—for Heaven's sake let me have a smoke."

The Mexican grinned, and taking out a knife, snapped at the lower bonds so that Rex's arms were free. Rex appeared to be stricken with terror at the prospect of his fate. But it was all—a gigantic bluff.

With trembling hands he took out his gold cigarette case, opened it, and extracted a cigarette. The grinning Mexican lit a match for his victim, speaking in swift and fluent Spanish, and telling Rex of the fate that awaited him.

But indeed, there was no need for words. Outside with rope and quirt the Mexicans were trying to urge two huge and enraged bulls into the corral. Rex listened to the din of them, and listened to the biting, sneering tones of the Mexican chief, and all the while he puffed at his cigarette.

His brain was asking a desperate question. Would he be in time?

Coolly he smoked as the Mexican bandit continued to brag. Three seconds more—Heaven grant him them. He was watching a certain mark on his cigarette.

"I could shoot you like the dog you are," the Mexican spat at him softly. But that was the crucial moment. In a flash Rex removed the cigarette from his mouth, and tossed it in the bandit's face.

There was a stentorian explosion, and as the Mexican, in utter amazement, staggered, the Dandy Cowboy, like a flash grabbed both his guns.

The trick bomb-cigarette he kept in his case had allowed him to turn the tables. He was master of the situation.

Under the whip-lash of his tongue, the cowed Mexican cut his bonds. In a moment Rex was free, fighting free, and darting out of the corral with a gun in each hand, peering this way and that, and ready to shoot at provocation.

He gave an amazed whistle all at once as a black shape moved swiftly through the darkness towards him.

"Firefiend, by Jove!"

He was in the saddle and hurtling over the plain. Free, free! But suddenly as he came to the Mexican town he pulled up his horse abruptly. Screams for help, in a man's voice, were coming from the big *hacienda*.

Rex recognised that voice. He spurred his horse towards it.

And inside the *hacienda* a dreadful scene was taking place. The great grizzly had made one bound at Bud Malone and caught his prey. He was now taking the fat cowboy step by step down the broad stairs to the cell in which he lived—where he devoured what meals were given him.

Suddenly the bear seemed to sense danger, and looked round.

At the top of the stairs, on the landing, was a plunging black horse, with a grim-faced man in the saddle. Rex had entered through the window. And now, before the bear could recover his poise, Rex steadied his horse, and leapt straight for his back.

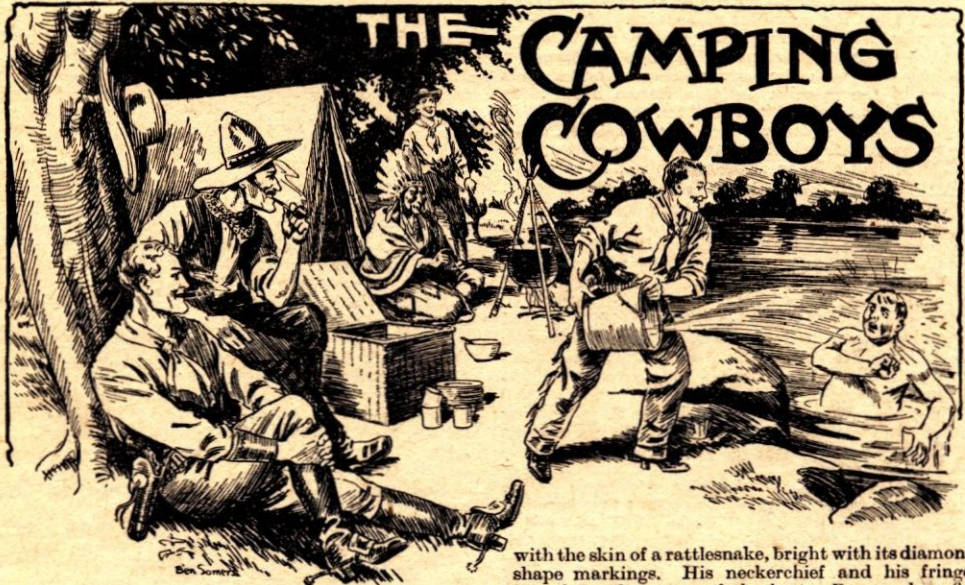
The bear with bullets tearing into him, advanced, one—two—three paces. Then suddenly dropped all of a heap. The Dandy Cowboy bent and lifted Bud Malone over the saddle of his horse.

"Now for it, Firefiend, old chap," he murmured. "Take us back to the boys in record time."

And Firefiend did.



Chaps—A Glowing and Colourful Long Yarn of the Rugged West, and of Your Favourite, the Dandy Cowboy. A Prairie Tale that will Cause you to Laugh, then Gasp—and then Some.



**SPECIAL NOTE FROM YOUR EDITOR ABOUT THIS MAGNIFICENT STORY.**

All old and loyal readers of Boys' Magazine, and particularly the hundreds of thousands of fellows who eagerly follow the fortunes of the Dandy Cowboy, and his famous punchers of the Bar Eight ranch, will be acquainted with that amusing and picturesque personality, Bud Malone, the fat cowboy. He has appeared in many fine tales with his companions, Deroc the Red, Tex McNaughten, Jack Jakers and others. But this magnificent long complete yarn is specially written to tell how the fat cowboy came to join the Bar Eight Ranch. It is at once amusing and mysterious, and it is a grand and stirring epic of the Wild West. Your Editor is sure that all Magites will read and treasure the tale.

**Rustlers.**

**T**HOUGHTFULLY Rex Remington rose from the cane chair on the veranda, and sauntered with a musical jingle of spurs down the steps into the sunshine.

Tall and lithe, his cowboy dress suited the young English rancher. He wore chaps of the purest white hair, and soft Mexican boots with extremely high heels. Two black .45 guns hung low over his hips. He wore a coloured shirt, and a waistcoat, open as all cowboys' waistcoats are.

Rex's sombrero hat was the finest one could buy in Kansas City, and it was belted round the crown

*All the characters in the stories printed in this paper are fictitious: the names do not refer to any living person or persons.*

with the skin of a rattlesnake, bright with its diamond-shape markings. His neckerchief and his fringed gauntlets, also, were of the best. Rex made a fine picture of "the soldier of the prairie" as he stood there in the sun glare puffing thoughtfully at his pipe.

In far-away England Rex, the son of a peer who took his seat in the House of Lords, would not have dreamed of wearing anything save the conventional black morning coat, top hat and grey trousers. But since he had made his life out in the lonely plains of the cow country he had allowed his inborn love of the artistic to have full sway. So fastidious was he in dress that men in that wild and adventurous country had come to know him as the Dandy Cowboy.

He removed his pipe, and watched a thin wisp of smoke curl away. And his eyes, usually dreaming blue eyes, were hard as steel.

He turned and looked round at the ranch house—the headquarters of the Bar Eight Ranch which he and his cowboys had made famous on every winding trail in the Bad Lands.

In some ways it was quite unlike any other ranch house in all that vast, semi-arid area of the south-west, where the earth is a-tremble under the hot sun, heaving and writhing visibly.

It was set against the blue and grey San Miguel Mountains far in the distance. That was why the ranch house was there—because of those mountains. In this land of heat, of endless grey prairie, water is a jewel. And it so happened that a strong spring of fresh water from the San Miguel Mountains surged up here about a mile from the ranch house in a great shallow expanse of pool under the shadow of cottonwood and spruce trees.

To this great watering pool the cattle bearing the Bar Eight brand were led to be watered. Here, also, at times came swarms of wild fowl, and in the mud along the banks one might see the footprints of the



cougar, the wild deer, the wild turkey and the peccaries.

All around stretched the dazzling, dancing heat haze, and the endless vista of cactus and mesquite, except that as Rex turned he saw the white ranch house against the grey-blue mountains.

It was different from any other ranch house because of its pretensions to beauty. Here was a straight wall with the curving corners and cupola towers of the Spanish *hacienda* (ranch house). It was, of course, built of "dobe," the native, sun-dried brick, through which no heat can penetrate. But the Dandy Cowboy had painted the grey walls white, and so he had a home of beauty as well as of use.

A long, covered-in arch led to the cowboys' bunkhouse and the cookhouse, these two necessary adjuncts both being in one building. The bunkhouse was grey 'dobe, with slit windows through which to shoot Indians or other invaders. In truth the Bar Eight boys were in a strong position here in front of the San Miguel Mountains.

Yet there was a frown on Rex's boyish face, and as he stared around him with narrowed eyes, he muttered to himself: "It's a bally nuisance—absolutely. I wish I could meet the fellow and fight it out."

He replaced the curved pipe in his mouth, biting rather harder than usual on the stem, and all the while his narrowed eyes swept the winding trail to the mountain range.

He was expecting someone—a newcomer to the ranch, but not the fellow to whom he had referred in his muttered soliloquy. The two had connection with one another and were mixed up in his thoughts, however. Rex had engaged a new cowpuncher who was expected to arrive at the ranch that day. He had engaged him because of certain things that portended, and because of a certain letter he had received from his old friend, Dick Martin.

Now Dick Martin sat at his desk in a certain Sheriff's office at El Paso, and on his shirt he wore the silver star. A man with a dark, tanned face and a short moustache bleached fair by the suns and winds of the prairies. He had a fine-shaped head covered sparsely with hair brushed back, and bird-like eyes with the heavy-lidded droop of mastery.

Dick Martin was not only the Sheriff, and a veteran frontiersman, but he was an officer of the Secret Service, and one of its brainiest men.

His job was to watch the border, to peer even beyond the Rio Grande into old Mexico itself. And in those days before telegraphy and wireless, when the locomotives were only just beginning to forge their way across Continent, he did his job remarkably well. At El Paso his finger felt every vibration along the Rio Grande, and news came to him mysteriously.

Dick Martin, Secret Service chief, had felt a violent if secret agitation up in the San Miguel Mountains, a hundred and fifty miles away from the Bar Eight Ranch. That was why he had sent his urgent communication to the Dandy Cowboy.

He had heard of a certain high table-land among the San Miguels, eight thousand feet above the sea level. A secret ranch, where wild horses ran free in herds. There was also a secret Mexican city of grey 'dobe buildings where had situated himself Domingo Pablo, the Mexican outlaw chief.

Domingo Pablo was a broncho buster, turned horse thief and rustler. But that does not adequately describe him. He was a commanding force. He was the most dangerous menace that had ever crept out of Old Mexico, where evil stalks unchecked.

Upon that secret plain he had gathered round him a band of Mexicans, slim, dark silent fellows, each with a very large, high-peaked hat and small cigarette,

each with tight trousers, silver-spangled waistcoat and red sash. Each man a dangerous killer and robber.

Ostensibly Domingo Pablo was pursuing his profession of broncho buster, at which he was a crack. He could "bust" the wildest, most "bronch" horse that ever had roamed wild, free and untamed on the prairies. But Dick Martin of the Secret Service had heard other things of Domingo Pablo, and his band of sinister, silent Greasers, and so one day he wrote a letter to the Dandy Cowboy on the far-away Bar Eight Ranch, and then he rang the bell in his office, and a short, very fat little man with a moon-like, owlish face was brought into him. With this little fat man the Secret Service chief talked long and earnestly.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE Dandy Cowboy, waiting outside the white ranch house, suddenly took his pipe from his lips, and gave an ejaculation:

"Hallo, here he comes. And, by heck, he's in a deuce of a hurry!"

He could see a cloud of white alkali dust moving down the mountain trail, and he guessed that it was the newcomer he expected.

Soon, through the moving dust-cloud, he saw a buggy, the man on the driving seat apparently pulling with all the strength at his command at the reins of his runaway horse, a small mettlesome, shaggy-coated pinto pony.

Rex smiled. His new cowboy was certainly arriving in "some style."

"The silly ass," Rex murmured; "he's evidently bought that buggy at Duggan's stores."

The Dandy Cowboy guessed what had happened. In the nearest town of Ace High, the storekeeper, Duggan, had a buggy for sale, but no one would buy it. A cowboy rides his horse. He never drives a cart. If he wants a log of wood to build a fire he will ride in, dragging it at the end of his lariat. But the new cowboy had evidently bought that buggy, and placed his pinto between the shafts. And the cow pony was evidently feeling very insulted about it all.

They were coming down the trail now, the buggy cart swaying and jumping like a rock dislodged down the slope of a precipice.

The pinto between the shafts had its shaggy, ill-kempt head right down, and was shooting over the rough ground as if after a cow. Sometimes it would pause to kick out with its hind hoofs. The light buggy was being broken up as if it were a match box attached to that angry little pinto.

And again Rex smiled as he saw the occupant of the buggy, for he was a very short, fat little man dressed as a cowboy. And his small mouth and little chunk of a nose were screwed up in agony as he pulled unavailingly at the reins. Rex ran forward to help.

"Whoa, thar, you coyote!" screeched the fat cowboy. "Hold up, I say, you son of mischief. You big, fat loosed cat, you—Ooooh!"

The buggy cart looked like overturning all of a sudden, and the fat cowboy clung desperately as it tilted up on its back wheels. But the Dandy Cowboy was running in, and his lariat was twirling in a circle over his head in tune with his supple wrist. Suddenly it snaked out, and the rope settled over the pinto's head. Instantly that wild cow pony came to an abrupt standstill, and stood with ears flattened down and a meek, dejected look on its face. It knew the rope very well. The touch of the cowboy's rope was a sign that it must submit, unless it wished to be dragged down ignominiously in the dust.

The fat cowboy got down perspiring at every crease, and nopping at his face with a lurid red handkerchief.

"Doggone it, he purty near busted up that buggy



cart," he said aggrievedly. "And I on'y jest paid fifty dollars for it in th' town. He's a bronch, arright, that pinto is. Yep, sir; he runs a-plenty!"

The Dandy Cowboy laughed, and held out his hand. "You're Mr. Bud Malone, our new cowboy, aren't you?" he asked. "Well, I'm Rex Remington, and I'm pleased to meet you."

"Aw, say," protested Mr. Bud Malone, with a feeble smile, as one who, not feeling up to a great occasion, nevertheless tries to rise to it. He shook hands, puffing and panting and mopping at his face.

Secretly Rex was amused, but concerned. Sheriff Dick Martin had surely made some awful, tragic blunder. He had promised to send along to the Bar Eight Ranch an emissary of big calibre. He had hinted at an old scout of the Buffalo Bill type, a realist—a cynic in life and death—a genius with a Colt's .45. The occasion certainly called for stern measures. And here was this podgy little cowboy blowing like a grampus.

It was not good enough. Not nearly. And Rex

grass on which the cows feed. They came in sight of the horse corral, the rounded fence enclosure in which the horses are "busted" or broken in. And there, squatting on a fence, smoking and discussing some matter with considerable animation, were eight or nine of the Bar Eight cowboys.

Their discussion was suddenly suspended as they saw Rex and the fat cowboy.

Rex on foot swung along with easy gait. He had not acquired the bowlegged gait of the cattleman who is always in the saddle. But Bud Malone had. He trotted manfully to keep pace with the Dandy Cowboy, and incidentally presented a very funny figure, so that all the punchers on the fence burst out laughing.

"Wal, say; here comes Humpty Dumpty."

"It's th' new fellow."

"An' he reckons he's a cowboy, by jingo!"

What amused them was that the fat little man was all dressed up to kill in a regular cowboy's outfit—chaps, a broad-brimmed Mexican sombrero, yellow shirt with blue spots and a blue neckerchief. He



DUCKED.—The uproarious cowboys seized Bud Malone, and with a mighty heave sent the shouting cowboy into the river.

metaphorically shook his head over it all. The real need was for a scout who would show them the way into the San Miguel Mountains in case of any need to take punitive measures against the Mexicans. And Rex doubted whether the newcomer could show anything except his avoirdupois.

Nevertheless Rex could not help liking the look of the fat, plaintive cowboy. Mr. Bud Malone tickled him immensely.

"Well, come along," he drawled, good humouredly, "and I'll introduce you to the boys."

"Sure thing," said Bud Malone, eagerly. "I aims to meet up with th' boys. This hyar Bar Eight outfit has kinda made a noise. Wal, I certainly will show yore bunch that I'm one helluva feller. Yessir."

And he threw out his chest and tapped his gun butt proudly. Rex only smiled in a tired way.

Together they walked over the baked ground, which nevertheless held the short, curling gramma

packed two guns, too, for they saw the butts of the Colts in the shiny leather holsters at his hips.

"Say, fireworks shore will be a-popping now," chuckled Ted McNaughten. "This yare ranch's got the cutest li'l thing they ever run outer town in disgust."

A roar of laughter greeted this sally, and as the Dandy Cowboy came up he frowned a little.

"Shut up, boys," he reproved.

As for Bud Malone, his round face was one huge, heavy scowl, and as red as a turkey cock's.

"You boys got some kinda joke?" he screeched. "I'd be tickled to death to have you tell me."

The cowboys laughed more. They draped themselves all over the fence in attitudes of weary exhaustion consequent upon their hilarity. When a Bar Eight cowboy laughs the distant coyotes start howling thinking it to be the rivalry of the hyenas. The air was filled with machine-gun explosions of mirth.

"Joke," stammered Shorty Blanco. "Ha, ha, ha!"



Oh no, thar ain't no joke round hyar. We's jus' plumb foolish, tha's all. The cook, he done made a puddin' outer bird seed or something. And we's growing feathers and tickling one another."

At this piece of humour, which the others evidently thought priceless, Bud Malone's guns came as if by magic into his hands. Those hands did not appear to move down to his holsters, yet there they were, holding up two heavy Colts before Rex could interfere.

"That's right, smile, dern you," he screeched. "Me, I ain't et no blame bird seed. I'm just plumb full of grouch, and I gotta gun-itch—like that."

On the final word there came the roar and crash of his guns. The cowboys stiffened as if petrified as twelve heavy shots racketed out, and then each stared at a hole and a little wisp of smoke in the fence near him. Then they stared at the fat cowboy. Bud Malone, wreathed in smoke, was smiling complacently. He certainly had shown the Bar Eight that he could shoot.

"Your gunplay is good," drawled the Dandy Cowboy, glancing approvingly at the fat cowboy. "Mr." Bud Malone had revealed unexpected depths to him.

"Oh, it ain't nothing," depreciated the fat cowboy, but as he spoke he was reloading swiftly. "F'rinstance," he went on, "I don't hardly think I could take off that guy's mask."

As he spoke he raised the two heavy guns swiftly. And as Rex, looking up, saw that they were directed at a flaring Sheriff's poster pasted on the fence of the horse corral.

The Dandy Cowboy had not seen the poster before. It showed a sinister-looking gunman, with a black neckerchief tied round his face, concealing all except the sharp, angry eyes. A long, blue-barrelled Colt was in the hand, and the muzzle seemed to point right at Bud Malone.

The fat cowboy fired—not one, but twelve jarring shots in quick succession. And an astonishing thing happened. Part of the mask round the man's face in the poster was shot clean away. And it seemed to reveal much. The white of the sky through the bullet-holes indicated the form of a chin, a black moustache and a little black, pointed beard. Instead of being masked, the man on the poster seemed to leap to recognisable life. It was a marvellous piece of shooting. All the cowboys gaped at the poster, for they had never seen a pistol artist before.

Underneath the poster in big, bold lettering, were the words:

#### HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.

*This will be paid for the body, dead or alive, of the Unknown Nevada—murderer, rustler and horse-thief.*

"Looks like that might be the guy they want," Bud Malone murmured, with an idiotic grin.

Indeed, it was this poster the cowboys had been discussing so animatedly before Rex and Bud Malone had arrived on the scene. Who had put it there? And what was the object? The Bar Eight boys resented it.

Even the Dandy Cowboy had resented it on that first moment of seeing it.

He was used to seeing such posters painted up in the townships, but here on a law-abiding and prosperous cow-range it struck Rex as having some sinister meaning.

And as they stared at the poster now, the man robbed of his mask, the cowboys had a shock. For they recognised that bearded and moustachioed face as belonging to one of their number. A man named Wolf Dalgreen, and he was a newcomer to the Bar Eight Ranch. They called him Wolf because of his bushy eyebrows, pointed black beard and sharp, yellow teeth.

Rex had only taken the fellow on temporarily at the ranch because of the extra work on the round-up.

He had the look of a tough customer. He carried two guns low down on his hip in Texas fashion, and he had shown that his gun-play was good. Suddenly the Dandy Cowboy's eyes met the man's.

Never had he seen a look so villainous on the face of any man as that on the Wolf's just then. As he caught Rex's eye he jerked a thumb at the poster.

"That's gotta come down," he said thickly. "Us boys don't like it."

Did he see the resemblance that Bud Malone's shooting had brought out? It seemed doubtful. But the other cowboys were looking at Wolf thoughtfully, and from him their gaze wandered to the little fat cowboy. This was something more than they could understand. It was just coincidence, no doubt, that the shooting away of a piece of black on the poster should make a resemblance. In Texas there were plenty of dark, bearded men.

But Rex, in his own mind, was sure that this Wolf was the unknown Nevada.

In the prairie lands of the West it is a grave offence to ask too many questions about a man's past. Men come and go. Life is transient—and very cheap freight. Still, Rex's punchers were a happy family on the Bar Eight Ranch, and the Dandy Cowboy did not want an intruder of this sort. Rex determined that as soon as possible he would get rid of Wolf Dalgreen.

Even though his suspicions might prove correct, it was not Rex's business to hand the man over to the Sheriff. Besides, he thought Bud Malone might be able to manage that end of the business. He was looking quite innocently at Wolf Dalgreen.

"Why, it looks like you!" Bud Malone giggled, all of a sudden.

Wolf's gun was out. He crashed down from the fence.

"Meanin'?" he snarled.

The fat cowboy looked surprised. "I hope I haven't offended you in any way," he said.

"Wolf!" cried Rex, in angry protest. "He didn't mean anything. What the dickens are you up to?" Wolf Dalgreen's scowl faded. After all, it was only a fat little man who, after long practice, had become a crack revolver shot. He had nothing to fear.

"I reckon I was hasty, yer little runt," he said slowly.

But at that moment, when he might have smoothed matters over, Bud Malone showed that there actually had been a deadly meaning in his actions and words.

He spoke slowly, his voice metallic. "You was so hasty you came near never getting over it. Put down th' gun."

"I'm a mite touchy——" Wolf began doubtfully.

"If you has anything to say—put—down—that—gun."

"Eh?" Wolf was startled again.

"For th' third time, put—down—that—gun!"

It was an amazing situation—the fat little cowboy ordering a desperate gunman about in the very teeth of his six-shooter. Wolf snarled, and nearly fired in answer to the glint he saw in the little cowboy's eyes. But a vestige of cunning saved him. His face distorted by malevolence and hate, he slipped the gun in his holster, and turned away.

But he had branded himself as Nevada. And that afternoon Rex wrote out a cheque for his pay up to date, and with a note of dismissal at the end of that week, sent it round to him at the bunkhouse.

The note was delivered, but many things were to happen before the next few days were out. Wolf Dalgreen, more menacing and cunning than Rex guessed, did not plan to leave the Bar Eight Ranch just yet.



**Captured.**

THAT afternoon activity commenced on the range, for Rex ordered the boys to round up the cattle which were grazing on the winter ledge. There must be many calves there now, which, of course, would be unbranded.

Things were in full blast early in the afternoon. The midday meal was eaten, and the cowboys were ready in the saddle, waiting for Rex.

They sat straight as ramrods in their large, deep-sunk saddles, yet withal there was an easy grace about these cowboys. Suddenly each man pulled up his horse, with a sudden jerk upwards of his hand. The cow ponies reared, with their heads tossed high by the sudden pull. Rex had just come out, down the steps of the veranda, and this was his cowboys' salute to him. As he leapt into the saddle of his magnificent black horse, Firefiend, the cowboys turned and raced their mettlesome steeds over the prairie, yelling the famous Bar Eight Ranch cry:

"Whoop-a-looo-roo!"

Riding after them, the Dandy Cowboy came alongside Bud Malone, the fattest and most ridiculous cowboy he had ever seen. He seemed even more corpulent on the back of his fiery little pinto.

"Are you all right?" asked Rex, with a smile. "Do you think you can manage this punching game sufficiently to deceive the boys?"

Bud Malone's reply was to wink solemnly—a wink that mystified and amused the Dandy Cowboy.

the cows wandered with their young, and Rex had no doubt that there would be many mavericks (unbranded cattle) to come out in the round-up.

At a signal from the Dandy Cowboy, the boys of the Bar Eight spread out in a thin line and moved forward on their cow ponies to round up the cattle against Rock Creek, the natural barrier.

With some amusement the Dandy Cowboy watched Bud Malone on his pinto pony.

The fat cowboy was next in line with Wolf Dalgreen, but he was not riding like a man who knew his job. Wolf was making those short, irregular rushes on his horse, and the cattle were coming up from their knees before his assault, popping from draws, brushes and coulees as if by magic.

But all Bud Malone appeared to be able to do was to fire his gun whenever he chanced to ride near a cow, and try to drive it into the gathering herd with his quirt, or whip.

Suddenly, however, the fat cowboy swung off his pinto pony, and was bending down amongst the brushwood.

"Gee!" he shouted loudly. "Looka hyar, boys! What's this?"

The Dandy Cowboy rode forward and followed the fat cowboy's gaze. "By the great maverick—I know," he muttered.

It was the carcass of a cow. And looking further the punchers discovered others. Altogether they found twelve cows that had been killed and skinned, their carcasses left to rot on the ground. No doubt many other cattle had disappeared alive. The rustlers had been at work, and they had made a good haul.

"Aw, say," exclaimed Bud Malone in his squeaky, high-pitched voice. "I'll tell the world something. That looks like one of Nevada's jobs—the thieving snake. He's the kind to kill, and skin, and allow good meat to rot when he can't take it away with him.

Momentarily startled, Rex looked over to where Wolf Dalgreen was sitting his horse, and he had quite a shock. Wolf's stabbing glare at the fat cowboy was murderous.

The round-up went on. The well-timbered country shed cattle before the advance. A five-year-old outlaw bull, crusty and fierce, rose to its feet, bellowing blue murder. It was a monstrous brute, fully enraged.

Suddenly Wolf Dalgreen, with a



**IN THE GRASP OF THE GRIZZLY.—** Steading his horse, the Dandy Cowboy leapt straight for the back of the giant grizzly bear.

"It's one of the sorrows of my life I can't always punch cows," he said.

The cowboys rode far out on to the range, to the winter ledge, where the ground was rough with brushwood, fallen timber and thickets. It was here that



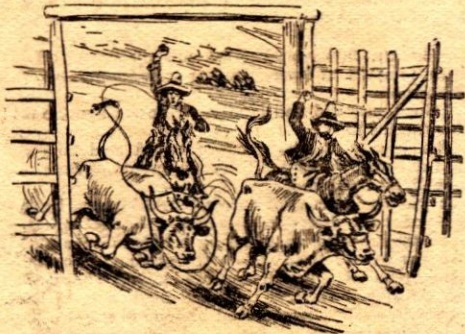
skilful rush round him, exploded his revolver just behind.

The result was startling. The bull with a mad bellow, switched its head a quarter-circle—and saw Bud Malone. Lowering his sweeping horns, the bull charged straight for the cowboy, who was not thirty yards distant.

Wolf Dalgreen could not have put the fat cowboy in greater peril if he had planned for months, and Rex expected to see the inexperienced horseman tossed to his death by the fierce old mosshead.

But what actually happened surprised all the Bar Eight boys.

Bud Malone avoided the bull's rush like an old hand, and yelling almost in its ear to confuse it, he rushed



FIGHTING BULLS.—The Mexicans with quirt and rope urged the enraged bulls into the corral.

his horse on, then turned abruptly at the same moment as the bull. His lariat swung out and settled over the horns. There was a blurr of overturning bull, a bellow of rage, injury and surprise and a resounding thump. The fierce old mosshead had been thrown to the ground for his impudence.

"Next time I'll break your laigs if you rile me," muttered the fat cowboy, and he went on with his work.

The Dandy Cowboy, laughing softly, rode on. But all at once the smile left his handsome, tanned face, for he had seen something. He turned in the saddle. "All right, boys," he shouted, "get on with the job."

His black horse, Firefiend, broke into the smooth electric stride that was the wonder and admiration of all horse lovers in Texas.

The open prairie in summer time is a breezy, brilliantly warm place. But Rex was not riding Firefiend like the wind merely for pleasure. He had seen a rider hunched up with stirrups very short, and he knew from those signs of the slovenly, bad horseman, that it was a Mexican.

Now the Dandy Cowboy made it a rule not to employ Greasers. He found them avaricious, cunning and spiteful—fond of the knife and dark ways of killing. And no Mexicans were allowed on his range.

The horseman ahead was threading his way through the chaparral, and Rex glimpsed him properly now—a sallow-faced, striking-looking Mexican, smoking the inevitable cigarette. Rex rode up and overtook him as he emerged from the chaparral.

At the Dandy Cowboy's hail the Greaser pulled up, his glittering eyes registering fear. He seemed uncertain whether to reach for his gun or not, but Rex's smiling face apparently disarmed him, albeit there was a cold glint in the Dandy Cowboy's eyes.

Rex pleasantly passed the time of the day in

Spanish, and then, still smiling, he said: "Senor, you are just passing this way. Si?"

"Si, Senor," muttered the Mexican sullenly. "Where is ze harm in zat, eh?" Then, staring at Rex's wonderful black horse, his fierce eyes suddenly glowed with interest. "Perhaps I buy ze caballo of ze cowpunch, eh? He will sell for much money. Quien sabe?"

The Dandy Cowboy shook his head, still smiling. Many people had wanted to buy his horse. But this was evading the point.

"Nope. Sure not," he said, succinctly. "I want to know, my dear, dark friend, what you're up to?"

"And what you doing asking me questions?" the Greaser demanded with sudden truculence. "I ain't insinuating nothing, cowpunch, but yore ways is too flip-flop and sugary to please me."

Rex smiled again. Evidently the Greaser could speak good enough American when he wanted to. That was a confirmed habit of Greasers; to pretend ignorance of the English language. It served many purposes.

"Aw, I reckon I've come up this way to look for rustlers," the Dandy Cowboy bantered.

"Meaning—?"

The Greaser's teeth had suddenly gritted, and the word came out like a bark. Rex pretended to look surprised.

"Meaning nothing personal," he hastened to explain. "I was just asking you—you haven't seen anything of a low-down, Greaser of a cow-thief. The reports round this part of the country say that the infamous and cursed outlaw, Domingo Pablo, is operating with his band of cut-throats."

Instantly an awful expression crossed the Mexican's face, and at sight of it Rex's guns leapt to his hands.

"Bail up, Greaser—pronto," he said, cheerfully, and found himself staring into eyes that were like live coals. Slowly the Mexican lifted his hands.

A sudden interruption—the crack, crack of a rifle from behind, and Rex wheeled his horse like lightning. He saw half-a-dozen Mexicans coming out of a chaparral, advancing towards him swiftly on horseback, their guns belching smoke. He had been trapped.

Rex's blood flared. A deliberate trap set to catch him! That was why the Greaser had ridden alone in the chaparral. The Dandy Cowboy's guns crashed and the Mexican nearby toppled from the saddle. Then he was firing at those advancing. But their rifle range was longer, and they spread in a circle, picking him off.

"Crack, crack, crack!"

Rex felt a burning, tearing pain in his shoulder, and knew that the odds of the fight were too great for him. He set Firefiend to bucking and jumping madly, in order to present a more difficult target, whilst he clung like a burr, low down on one side, firing from the hip.

"Crack, crack, crack!"

Rex suddenly let go, and crashed toppling to the mesquite, and his wonderful horse, Firefiend, with a sudden whinny of fright, took to his heels at a phenomenal speed. The Greasers raced in, yelling madly. Amongst them was Domingo Pablo, easily distinguishable amongst all his oily rabble by his good looks and easy grace in the saddle. A handsome ruffian was the bandit chief, his dress a-glitter with Mexican pesos and other silver and gold ornaments.

Now he ignored the Dandy Cowboy lying on the prairie. All his efforts, and those of his men, were concentrated on catching Firefiend.

Every nerve was strained to that end. The bandit chief had a look of eager fire and enthusiasm on his face. One trait that was confusing about him was



that he had instinct for horses, but no love. He was abominably, fiendishly cruel to them.

His Mexicans tried to surround the racing black horse.

But Firefiend, robbed of his beloved master, had become a wild, untamed mustang.

The word "mustang" is used in its most particular sense. Firefiend was direct descendant of the Spanish horses of old who roamed free and unfettered with mane flowing over the Western prairies. A mustang is a leader, or king of a herd of wild horses. The true mustangs of the prairies have been known to invade a ranch and persuade every horse in the herd to break captivity for the wild freedom of their native plains.

Such a horse was Firefiend now. Splendid in its action and with terrific stamina, it moved like the wind over the buffalo grass, easily outpacing the inferior horses of the Mexicans. Domingo Pablo, the bandit chief, had recognised its wonderful breed, and knew it for a horse of great worth. He reined in, his dark face evil with thwarted desire, and turning to his men he spat orders at them.

They spurred back in a body to where the Dandy

the Mexicans, and easily enough they had read the signs of that skirmish.

They had been unable to follow the trail, however, for the ground was hard as brick, and a hot, dry wind was blowing. It was moaning now eerily over the cactus.

Tex McNaughten stared out into the night, the glowing sparks flying in a stream from his pipe; and round him were grouped two or three other silent, tense cowboys.

Inside the bunkhouse under the flaring lamp, Bud Malone's huge bulk was hunched over the table, while he abstractedly played Patience with a greasy pack of cards. But more often than not his narrowed eyes were staring out at the dark, mysterious prairie lands.

Suddenly he jumped up violently, knocking his chair over.

"Looka thar, fellows," he cried hoarsely. "If that ain't a prairie fire . . ."

Just a creeping, glowing light out there in the dark. But it galvanised the cowboys. With shouts of rage, they made for the interior of the bunkhouse, snatching up saddles, revolver belts and lariats from



#### REX'S LITTLE SURPRISE.

—The Dandy Cowboy was coolly smoking as the Mexican bandit bragged. Suddenly, at the crucial moment, he removed the cigarette and tossed it contemptuously in the bandit's face. There was a stentorian explosion.

Cowboy lay unconscious on the trembling, heaving plain.

"Take him up," ground out the Mexican. "We will hold him to ransom. The ransom of that fine *caballo*. *Si*. That is so. One of the things I want is that horse."

Rex was picked up, and roughly thrown over one of the horses. Then in a cavalcade the Mexicans galloped away for their secret city in the heart of the San Miguel Mountains.

#### Bar Eight to the Rescue.

NIGHTTIME, with the stars glittering steely blue in the dark canopy of the sky.

The Bar Eight cowboys stood at the open door of their bunkhouse, lounging and silent. All were oppressed with a sense of menace. For the young "boss" of their ranch had mysteriously vanished, and the punchers knew that there had been foul play.

Growing alarmed about the Dandy Cowboy's prolonged absence, Jack Jakers, the foreman, had led a search party. The Bar Eight riders had come upon the scene of Rex's ill-starred encounter with

their separate hooks. Then they were racing in their long Mexican boots for the horse corral.

Jack Jakers snapped orders, his face grey and creased. Everything was done with admirable efficiency. In a few minutes, grim and erect in the saddles, the mounted cowboys came racing back to the bunkhouse. There Deroc the Red, the Indian member of the outfit, was handing out dripping blankets from a large tank of water. Each man took his blanket, his horse plunging and rearing, and made off into the night.

Someone had done this, and Heaven help them if the Bar Eight boys discovered them. The cowboys had heard of the menace of the Mexican bandits, ensconced in the San Miguel Mountains nearby, and they could make a pretty good guess at the perpetrators. They had two matters now for which to settle—the fire and their leader's capture. But vengeance could wait. The immediate matter on hand was the fire creeping towards the ranch buildings.

Bud Malone, for all his weight, rode his pinto pony like a born horseman. Yet curiously enough, as the cowpony hurtled over the hard ground, the fat



cowboy seemed to sheer away from the fire. His eyes were straining through the gloom.

Ahead of him Wolf Dalgreen was riding like a madman. Nor was Wolf making for the fire. The mystery man of the ranch was riding hell-for-leather towards the dark sheen of the watering pool.

A mile or more in diameter was that boggy pool, and Bud Malone could see it through the trees glistening under the night stars. His brow darkened, for a herd of cattle were knee-deep in the mud drinking greedily.

And there were men watering the herd—the dark shapes of Mexicans.

Bud Malone knew certain things: first that the Dandy Cowboy had given orders that the cattle were to be watered sparingly until the rains came. Second, that that dark pool was drying up under the heat. Rain was needed badly, and this was sheer malice—this action of watering the herd.

Bud did not know how malicious and cunning it really was. All he knew for certain now was that Wolf Dalgreen, *alias* Nevada, killer, rustler and thief, was in league with the Mexican bandits.

He paused and turned his pinto to race back to where the hard-worked Bar Eight men were working on the fire, galloping to and fro with their soaked blankets at the ends of their lariats, so that thus they acted as trailers over the prairie grass.

But then, just as he would have urged his horse into a run again, Bud's gauntleted hands tightened on the reins. He pulled the pinto up dead, jumped off and threw the reins over its eyes, so that the pinto, thinking it was a cowboy's rope, stayed perfectly still.

The fat cowboy had seen another horse, riderless, coming through the dismal oaks. And he recognised the horse as Firefiend. Evidently Rex's horse, badly in need of a drink, had come from sheer habit to water, and seeing men there at the pool had dashed off again in a frenzy of panic.

Firefiend was a hundred yards away, and Bud Malone gathered himself. As the horse whirled past his lariat snaked out, and the noose flew over both of poor Firefiend's hind legs, and he went over on his back in a cloud of dust.

He was up again, demon-like, using his head as a leverage against the ground. But Bud Malone's left foot was in the stirrup, and as the horse came up the fat cowboy swung with a vicious jolt into the deep saddle.

All the hate, the terror and rage of this poor beast who had lost his beloved master, now manifested itself in an appalling viciousness.

Firefiend had fought wolves, rattlesnakes . . . He'd unseated this demon above him. No man had ever ridden him but his master.

Down went his head, and he bucked sheer into the air again and again in a series of wild twisting and stiff-legged antics. Each time he came down with a concussion that seemed to shake the ground, yet the fat man in the saddle sat stiff and erect, holding the bridal with an iron hand.

Firefiend started "pitching a-plunging"—that is, jumping forward about six hundred yards, in a series of leaps, coming down with stiff legs, head lowered and nose between his knees.

Still the hated rider sat him. Bud Malone's face was pale now, glistening with tiny beads of perspiration. But he was proving that as a broncho-buster he was—to use a Western vernacular—"no slouch."

Now Firefiend was, of a truth, living his name. He was "sky fishing"—springing clear up into the air, and coming down, headed in the direction opposite to that he had occupied the leap before. He danced under a tree and sprang up so that the flattened cowboy was crushed and felt a crack of one of his

ribs going. Bud's round face bore a thin, malevolent smile, his lips tight and his eyes burning as they struck the ground. Savagely he lashed Firefiend with his quirt—away from that fateful tree.

Bounding like a great ball from the tree's shadow, the now trembling and thoroughly enraged black horse, stopped dead. Deliberately Firefiend dropped to his knees, then quietly rolled over to one side. Bud Malone was held a prisoner by the leg which lay under the horse's body.

With clenched teeth the fat cowboy endured the crushing weight. His leather chaps, and the big wooden cowboy stirrup in a measure protected his leg, yet the pain was fearful.

How long Bud Malone lay there, he never knew. He was thinking in agony of the Mexican rustlers down at the watering hole. They would get away.

It was a battle of waiting. At last with a snort and a swift bound Firefiend was up on his feet, and away again in a madder, fiercer series of buck jumps than ever before.

Bud Malone, exerting every atom of will power, and all his failing strength, sat stiff and erect in the saddle, his knees gripping like a vice. Then just as everything was becoming red before his eyes and he felt himself swooning, Firefiend stopped. His ears relaxed from the side of his head, and that head drooped. The dilated eyes became normal, and the ugly, vicious mouth was used only to breathe out clouds of steam. The fat cowboy had triumphed.

He did not know how. Not until long afterwards did he remember that he had been talking to Firefiend, and, indeed, was talking to him now, soothingly, in a peculiar tone that he had heard Rex Remington use.

At last they moved forward, the victorious rider with blood coming from his lips, owing to internal injuries, with one leg badly crushed, the other bitten by the horse. But Bud Malone rode also with a heart that was savagely exultant.

Near the ranch house, in the glowing, velvety night he saw the moving shapes of the Bar Eight riders returning. Blackened and begrimed they greeted him, and he told his tale.

Jack Jakers and Tex McNaughten, Shorty Lane, and Hank Peters—all commenced talking angrily at once. It appeared that they had put the fire out, but only after great effort. The bandits, however, had succeeded in driving great herds of their cattle on to the "loco grass"—tall green grass that may appear—and does appear—resistlessly inviting in all that burned land of Texas, but grass that in reality is infested with flies and is deadly poisonous to cows.

That "loco grass" had been fenced round. And significant of the malicious and deliberate intent of the bandits was that the fence had been cut down, and the herds of cattle driven on to die.

They were dying now, thousands of them, dying in agony. And the once genial Bar Eight cowboys sitting their horses there amidst the tragedy of the night were filled with a hate and rage that was almost terrifying.

"Lissun," screamed Bud Malone, suddenly. "Lissun, you lotta big polecats. I got a swell idear—I sure have. Now lissun: we wanna kill these durned snakes of Greasers, don't we? Sure tjing, Wal—"

He paused impressively. And they listened, all anxiety. They were beginning to have a great deal of faith in the fat cowboy.

"I made fer to get this hoss," went on Bud Malone, "because I know one thing durned well. I know he's a mighty intelligent hoss, sir. And if he don't know where Rex is, and if he can't show us the trail—wal, fellers, I'll eat my sombrero!"

The next moment Bud felt his hand grasped on all



sides and nearly wrung off. For the time being he was unquestionably the "big cheese" of the Bar Eight Ranch.

### Encamped.

"HSSST!" It was Bud Malone who uttered the warning in a thrilling whisper. The Bar Eight cowboys all grinned very broadly, spite of the tensity of the situation.

They were sitting in the partial shadow of a belt of silver birch trees, the air cool and sparkling all around them, and only a few feet away from them flowed the shining *Rio San Miguel*, as the Bar Eight boys had named it.

The *Rio!* How wonderful it was to see it—the river. The miracle had happened. Firefiend had led them through a hot trembling desert where the mirage beckoned, through precipitous mountain paths until they had come upon this secret—a flooding, tumbling river right in the stronghold of the San Miguel Mountains.

They guessed that the Mexican bandits' lair must be somewhere near, and that where it was there also was the Dandy Cowboy—a prisoner. But the trouble was to cross that tumbling river.

None but Bud Malone, the fat cowboy, could ride Firefiend. The horse was still proud and insolent, and still mourning his master greatly. The trouble was that Bud either could not or would not swim. He was apparently terrified of the water.

The cowboys had been telling him that they would throw him into the water, when he had leant forward and given that agonised "hssst."

They only grinned. They were coming to know Bud by this time. Whenever the conversation had become too embarrassing with reference to swimming that river, the fat cowboy had pretended to hear someone approaching—presumably Mexican bandits.

An hour before, after much argument, he had agreed to try a lesson in swimming. The cowboys, worried beyond measure, had pointed out that he had only to cling to his horse's back. But Bud Malone would have nothing of that. He must first learn to swim.

Eventually the cowboys, realising that the best thing to do was to live for the moment, had entered into the joke with great gusto. They realised they could do nothing to help Rex until night, anyhow.

They had persuaded Bud to disrobe for his swimming lesson, but now, with only his shirt on, he commenced to back out.

"I'm sure I heard someone," he said, in a squeaky agitated voice. "Now lissun." He turned round and wagged an argumentative finger. "Honest, you fellers don't wanna drown a guy, I—"

He got no further. At a word from Jack Jakers they seized him, and carried him down to the log raft which they had roped together, and which now lay pushing against the mud of the bank.

Tex McNaughten and Jack Jakers pushed the raft out until they were in midstream. Then the uproarious cowboys seized Bud Malone and with a mighty heave, sent the cowboy into the river.

The others all crowded to the edge of the raft, waiting for him to come up and ready to dive in to his assistance should the fat cowboy appear to be in any difficulty. But moments passed, and became minutes, and yet Bud Malone did not appear. The cowboys looked at one another in consternation. The waters were fairly swift, and they feared the worst. By common consent they all dived in to search for one whom they now looked upon in the light of a good comrade.

They were all struggling in the water when at last a huge bulk pushed up amongst them. It was Bud, looking half drowned. With shouts of relief, the Bar Eight men seized him and between them bore him to the raft.

"Yer coyotes!" panted Bud in anger as he struggled up on the slippery logs. "Yer knew durned well I couldn't swim."

But Jack Jakers suddenly ceased laughing and grabbed at something in the fat cowboy's hand. "Wal, by th' great horn-toad! Whatja got that, Bud? Why, it's quartz rock-bearing gold,!"

The rock in Bud Malone's hand became the

(Continued on next page.)



It's a New Kind of Thrill Tale, Featuring Jimmy Brent, Gentleman Crook. Commencing Next Week. See Editor's Chat.



## THE CAMPING COWBOYS—

(Continued from previous page.)

cynosure of all eyes. It was, indeed, quartz, glinting dully with the yellow of pure gold.

The fat cowboy's face suddenly changed, and he grinned broadly.

"Found it down at the bottom of the river bed," he explained succinctly. "It's milling down thar, boys—breaking up by th' action of th' water as if it were in a machine. An', funny thing, th' gold itself is being dragged through the earth, and it's being washed up miles away in that mud swamp whar you water yore cows. That's why Pablo and his gang was after you—to clear you off the range, so as they could wash fer th' gold. I happen to know all that because I'm working for Captain Dick Martin of the Secret Service."

Dumbfounded, they stared at him. It was some time before their minds could comprehend it all. Nature's extraordinary freak. And so there was gold on their ranch, and it was for them to seek at their own convenience! Why, this would balance all the slaughter of the cows done by the bandits! They were dazed, lost in wonder at the glittering prospect before them.

At last they broke into excited babble.

"But remember, y'ave deserted the ranch, boys—in search of Rex Remington," Bud Malone reminded them, his owlish face very grave. "Th' Greasers are thar, reaping the harvest. But yer wouldn't go back on yer job, boys? Yer wouldn't desert Rex?"

There came shouts of fierce denial from the Bar Eight boys. But they were impatient for action. They wanted to be doing something. To all their rapid, eager questions and ejaculations, however, Bud Malone only smiled and shook his head.

"Aw say, leave it to me, boys."

He retired to the tent on the banks and slept like a huge snoring pig. And nothing seemed to disturb him. The Bar Eight boys were driven almost frantic by his inaction and phlegmatic calm. But what could they do? Nothing save go to bed and to sleep when the stars at length appeared in the sky. Most of them slept badly, yet for all that the bulky figure of Bud Malone was unseen and unobserved when at midnight he crept from the camp and, untethering Firefiend, Rex's horse, stole down to the river.

They crept in, the horse swimming quietly but strongly to the further bank, where giant rocks and hills reared up almost at the water's edge.

What need to follow their slow, tortuous progress through the most rugged and wild mountain scenery possible, into the very heart of the San Miguel's—to the bandits' lair?

It was nearing daybreak when at last horse and rider topped the rise of a great table-land and came upon a vast plain, set like a jewel amongst the mountain tops—a plain that seemed to stretch illimitably before Bud Malone's eyes.

Grey, wavering patches were streaking the dark sky. Bud Malone, spurring Firefiend behind a long clump of high boulders, strained with narrowed eyes, and at last glimpsed that for which he had been looking. Adobe huts, a broad, white *hacienda* or Mexican ranch-house—this was the secret city of the bandits.

The fat cowboy dismounted and, tethering the splendid black horse to a tree, he crept forward towards the white *hacienda*, in which he discerned the glimmering of a light. He guessed that this place was the habitation of Domingo Pablo, the bandit chief—the man he wanted to see.

Somehow, even if he had to strangle the life out of the Greaser, he would get news of Rex.

As he crept up he discovered to his delight that the lower windows of the *hacienda* were open to admit

the cool little night breezes that danced up from the river, and cautiously he squeezed his huge bulk through one of the windows, tip-toed across the room and, turning the door handle, was out in the broad hallway.

Step by step he crept up a wide, twisting staircase, and then stopped, alert and tense, outside a room. On the other side of the door he heard voices speaking in Mexican.

It quickly became evident that one of the voices belonged to Domingo Pablo, the sinister Mexican chief. He was speaking to his lieutenant, evidently over cigarettes and a flagon of wine. The bandit's spy had reported to him that the Bar 8 Ranch was deserted by its cowboys and Pablo was saying that it was the opportune time to make a swift raid on the ranch for the gold.

"We will ride to-night," he said in Mexican. "But not until I have put that Gringo fool they call the Dandy Cowboy to death. I have prepared a very pleasant death for him—between the Andalusian bulls."

What exactly the last sentence meant Bud Malone had no time to discover. He drew back hastily along the wall and round the corner as a swarthy Greaser in high sugar-loaf hat came hurriedly towards the room in which the bandit chief sat.

He knocked and entered, evidently in some agitation. Bud Malone waited with fast-beating heart. Some instinct warned him of swiftly impending danger.

He could not distinguish now what was being said in the room, could only hear the hum of voices. But the imperative warning instinct dinned in his brain. So insistent was it that with fast-beating heart, he made a move to withdraw.

It was fatal. At that precise moment the door flew open and the bandit chief, together with Wolf Dalgreen, came hurrying out. Bud's revolvers leapt to his hands, and he fired. Wolf went staggering, and the fat cowboy, with berserk rage, jumped at him and punched him flush on the jaw as he fell. It was a blow that knocked the bearded killer and rustler senseless, and Bud smiled grimly as he saw the huge form slither over the staircase and go tumbling grotesquely down. The Wolf, at any rate, was out of the world for hours, perhaps days.

But he turned the next moment to deal with his oncoming enemies. Mexicans came at him from all sides, and in a moment he was the vortex of a struggling mass. A few moments later and he was completely overpowered, and being dragged into the room recently occupied by the bandit chief and the Wolf for their conference.

Domingo Pablo ordered him to be bound up, and this was done. He was then set back roughly into a chair, and with an evil smile, the bandit chief laid a long Mexican knife on the table just out of the fat cowboy's reach.

"Adios, Señor, I leave you to your own salvation," he leered. "Soon you will have a visitor—one of my pets."

And with that mysterious message he left the room, leaving the door wide open.

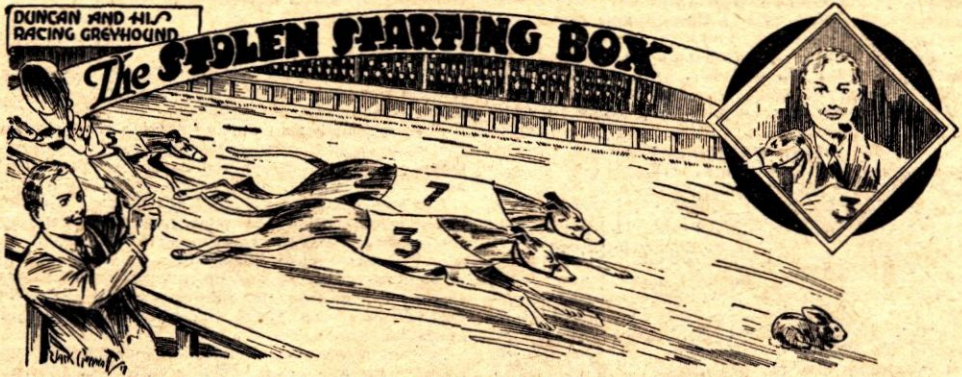
Bud Malone, with unreasoning fear at his heart, strained at his bonds; he exerted all his strength as never had he done before. That knife on the table! It was so near and yet so far. He might just reach it with his bound hand.

He strained forward, fell out of his seat, and somehow dragged himself up to the level of the table, his fingers clawing at the knife. He had just got it when he slewed his head in sharp fear. A shadow had fallen athwart the threshold of the room

(Continued on page 2.)



Hectic, Electric Excitement in the Air. The Noble Greyhounds are After the Hare. The Race—What a Pace! But, What's Most Amazing, You'll Find Mystery There.



**CHUMS, YOU'LL CHORTLE WITH GLEE WHEN YOU READ HOW, AFTER FIGHTING FEARFUL ODDS, DUNCAN, THE BOY DOG TRAINER, HAS A BIG WIN WITH HIS WHITE GREYHOUND.**

"GREAT pip—look at that!"

Duncan Grey gave an exclamation of horror as he saw the two-seater car in front of Squire Branscome's place start forward with a jerk. A child's cry rang out in alarm, and alone in the passenger-seat Duncan saw little Mildred, the Squire's daughter.

In a flash the youngster realised what had happened. The Squire had forgetfully left the engine running, and the child must have mischievously fiddled about with the controls until she engaged a gear and set the car moving.

Next instant Squire Branscome himself appeared at the gate and, seeing what had happened, let up a yell as he started to race after the car.

Meanwhile, Duncan had been swift to act. Pulling the old horse he had been leading with a load of hay to his father's farm close into the side of the road, he scrambled up on to the very top of the hay on the cart, and then crouched ready to spring into the car as it flashed past him.

Now it was level and, with a vibrant leap, Duncan dropped clean into the seat beside the frightened child. He understood motors well enough to grope for the ignition switch and push it over, and to then jam on both foot and hand brake, and a few moments later he had the car at a standstill.

The Squire came puffing up to grip Duncan warmly by the hand.

"Well, Duncan, my lad," he said jovially. "I don't quite know how to thank you—"

"That's all right, sir, I only—" commenced Duncan shyly, when the Squire held up his hand.

"Listen, my boy," he said kindly as he laid his hand upon Duncan's shoulder affectionately. "You're fourteen now, if I remember rightly, and when I was your age I used to have a new ambition once a day. Now tell me, Duncan, just what is it you want most in the world—quick now. Don't stop to think; out with it straight away."

"A greyhound!"

The words slipped from Duncan's lips before he was hardly aware of it, and he tried to excuse them a moment later, but the Squire cut him short.

"Turn the cart about and come back to my kennels," he ordered. "You shall have the pick of 'em all."

Duncan was still dazed at this unexpected luck when they reached the cobbled courtyard of what had once been the stables, but which the Squire had turned into the most up-to-date kennels in the country.

"You know young Duncan Grey, Higgins." That worthy addressed was his head kennelman. "He just saved Miss Mildred from being smashed up—and I've promised him he shall have any hound he likes out of the kennels—why, he may even take Great Oak himself, if he likes!"

The kennel-man's face dropped at mention of the most precious of his charges, but Duncan did his best to reassure him a moment later.

"I'd rather have a bitch than a dog, sir, if you don't mind. I'd like to breed greyhounds. You see, things aren't too good at the farm, and I thought if I had a bitch I could breed and perhaps sell some of the puppies to help Dad."

"Good lad," remarked the Squire appreciatively. "Well that leaves your precious Great Oak quite safe, Higgins," he added. "Let him choose what he likes, and help him all you can—and now I must be off. Good day to you, Grey," and Squire Branscome extended his hand to Duncan. "And good luck to you with the greyhound."

The next moment the Squire was gone, leaving Duncan and Higgins looking at each other in the yard.

"I was afraid you were going to swipe Great Oak," exclaimed Higgins, laughing. "He's the apple of my eye. But I tell you what, youngster, I can let you have a bitch-puppy with Great Oak as the sire! Come on, I'll show her to you."

The next moment Duncan was led away to that part of the kennels where the younger dogs were kept, and Great Oak's daughter was pointed out to him.

"There you are, Duncan, my lad; there's a beauty for you. Just look at her head—sleek as a needle, but plenty of room for brains. And those shoulders on her—my word, but she should be a world-beater!"

Duncan merely gazed in speechless admiration at the beautiful hound.

He looked at others, but his allegiance did not



waver; and so Higgins led the bitch-puppy out of the kennel and placed the lead in Duncan's hands.

"She's yours, then," he announced. "I'll look her full pedigree out and let you have it. She's as pretty a picture as was that famous racehorse, Pretty Polly," he added thoughtfully.

"Pretty Polly?" repeated Duncan. "By Jove, that's just what I'll call her. Come on, Pretty Polly."

And that was how Duncan Grey came to own his first greyhound.

### Left To Hang!

**P**LOINK! Squelch!!

Dunk Grey awoke with a start and dashed the sopping wet sponge from his face, at the same time springing out of bed.

For some nights past Dunk had thought he had heard footsteps uncomfortably near his kennels and he had rigged up a patent burglar alarm of his own—one which would be silent in action, but effective. He had fastened a thin fishing-line to the door of the kennels and then run it up the side of the farmhouse and in through his window, finally tying it on to a sponge full of water which he balanced upon a small shelf over his bed.

Anyone opening the door of the kennels would dislodge the sponge, which would fall plumb upon his face.

In a trice Dunk was at the window, peering out over the erstwhile farmyard—now converted into up-to-date kennels. For the youngster now had a number of dogs in training—three months had elapsed since the day that he had become the proud owner of Pretty Polly, and already she had had her first litter of pups.

Dunk now snatched up a water-pistol which he had filled with a strong solution of ammonia and, thrusting his bare feet into a pair of felt slippers, crept silently down. He was just in time to see the figure of a man

emerging from the kennels leading a greyhound upon a length of rope.

In a flash, Dunk recognised it as his great treasure! It was Pretty Polly!

The boy now no longer preserved caution, but with a yell he burst out into the yard—his pistol raised.

The man, suddenly hearing his cry, turned and made a run for the gate, Pretty Polly trotting along at his side.

A second man was waiting outside the gate, and the man—behind whom Duncan was now only a couple of yards—thrust the rope into the other's hand.

"H'yar—beat it—quick!" Dunk heard him cry. The other snatched the rope, jerked Polly through the doorway, and the next instant Dunk heard the sound of a motor-car racing off.

The first man snatched up a motor-cycle and was about to leap into the saddle when Dunk pulled the trigger of his pistol and sent a jet of liquid ammonia through the air.

It caught the man full in the face as he swung round with a snarl in Dunk's direction. With a howl of rage and agony he dropped the motor-cycle and clutched his hands to his eyes.

There was no need for a second dose from Dunk's pistol. Thrusting it into his pocket, Dunk flung himself upon the fellow as he lay writhing, face downwards, in the road.

Dragging him over on to his back, Dunk was able to look into the scoundrel's face.

"Jim Kemp!" he cried in amazement.

Mr. James Kemp was one of the under-kennelmen in Squire Branscombe's establishment.

"You'll never get your dog back!" hissed Kemp. "Serves you right for entering her in the Champion Stakes at the White City. Great Oak's got to win that!"

A sudden chill smote Duncan Grey.

Great Oak! The Squire's dog! But surely Squire Branscombe was not party to this outrage.

"Get up—and clear," cried Dunk savagely. "I'll see the Squire about this—and get the strength of it."

The man's eyes were smarting less now, and he struggled to his feet and bathed them in the water in the ditch. Then, with a final curse, he mounted his motor-cycle.

Duncan Grey slept very little the rest of that night, and he was up early the next morning and called upon the Squire as soon as he reasonably could.

Squire Branscombe listened attentively to the whole story and then rang the bell for Higgins.

"Where's Kemp?" demanded the Squire.

"That's just what I want to know," returned Higgins. "He's

not turned up this morning. But I'm glad to see the back of him—he's been totting round with Harry Saunderson's gang lately."

Harry Saunderson was one of the biggest bookmakers who laid against the greyhounds on the tracks, and who owned dogs of his own.

Dunk quickly told Higgins how Pretty Polly had been stolen the previous night.



**HOUNDS OF DOOM.**—Dunk, standing on the box with the noose around his neck, was forced to look on at the snarling conflict. Any moment the enraged dogs would bowl over the box and the youngster would swing to death.



"Then Saunderson's at the back of it—mark my words," the old kennelman said. "You'd got Polly entered at Bedchester to-day, hadn't you?"

Dunk nodded. "Then you and me are going up to Saunderson's kennels this morning with a search warrant," announced Higgins. "Bet you we find Pretty Polly there!"

A COUPLE of hours later, Duncan Grey, Higgins, and an alert police constable, also a greyhound enthusiast—pulled up outside Saunderson's kennels.

There was only a kennelman in charge, and the sight of the search warrant struck the fear of the law into his heart; but, at first, no trace of Pretty Polly was to be found.

"No good, young 'un," remarked the constable; but Dunk raised his finger for silence, let up a curious double shrill whistle, and then listened.

In answer, a sharp bark came—as if from under the very ground they stood upon—and at the sound the kennelman's face changed colour.

"Lead the way to that cellar," ordered the constable, and the fellow hesitatingly obeyed.

There they found Polly! Tied up short and without even food or water!

Dunk freed her and then hugged her to him like a child.

"All right, son—you get back in the car with her," said the constable kindly. "I'll stick around and wait for Master Saunderson."

THE warning bugle for the big race at the Bedchester Track had just sounded, and Dunk Grey was busy tying Pretty Polly's numbered cloth over her sleek back.

He was "No. 3" on the card—and the jacket was accordingly white in colour.

Now he led her out and took his position amongst the five other greyhounds to compete in the big race, to be paraded before the grand-stand.

The parade over, Dunk led Polly round to the rear of "The Bogey Box" and, lifting the sliding panel, gently coaxed her into the narrow compartment.

"Good girl," he murmured. "Win for me again!"

He patted her gently and the greyhound licked his hand; then Dunk closed the door.

The other competitors were now all housed in the starting-box, and the starter gave his signal to the man in the control tower.

A touch of the lever which controlled the electric hare, and that comical little dummy popped out from its trap and made its appearance. A humorous little creature it was, too, with its great big eyes—electrically illuminated from within—and its ridiculous long whiskers.

The hare set off upon its preliminary canter of once round the track, and the crowds in the stand started to laugh and cheer.

Then above the roar of the spectators came the unmistakable sound of an aeroplane above.

Dunk Grey shot a glance up into the sky and perceived a swift biplane swooping down over the ground, and gave a cry of alarm. Hanging from below the machine itself were two lengths of cable and, on the end of this, the great steel claws of a pair of grappling irons.

"Look out!" cried Dunk, yelling to the starter. "There's some devilry afoot!"

But it was too late! Already the machine had



DOG-PILFERING BY 'PLANE.—The 'plane zoomed down and the grappling irons caught around the starting box. Then, before the startled gaze of the spectators, the contraption, which contained half a dozen valuable racers, was whisked into the air.

All seemed spellbound for a moment, then an angry roar went up from the stands, followed by a cheer as they saw Dunk Grey leap into the saddle of a motor-cycle he had snatched haphazard from beside the track.

After covering some twenty miles or so, at a speed which defied all limits, the youngster saw the 'plane land in a field, ominously near Saunderson's kennels.

Breasting a hill he was able to look down into the field.

The starting-box had now been lowered to the ground and some half-dozen men were now rapidly unhitching the grappling irons and pushing the box on its rollers over the turf towards the open doors of Saunderson's kennels.

Flinging caution to the winds, Dunk sped down on the machine and went crashing pell-mell through the gates after the men.

He had hardly shot through before the gates were slammed to after him, and a couple of ruffians flung themselves upon him.

Dunk felt a rag reeking with the sickly sweet



odour of chloroform clapped over his mouth and nostrils.

For a moment or so he struggled; but, realising that he was powerless in the men's grip, he desisted, and played another card.

Holding his breath to prevent inhaling the overpowering fumes, Dunk let his limbs go slack and relaxed his muscles.

"He's all in," cried one of the men, removing the rag from Dunk's mouth, and the lad slumped to the ground in a heap. "Sling him into one of the kennels."

But Dunk was very far from being "all in." Luckily he still retained his senses, and he felt himself lifted up and carried across the yard, and then flung upon a heap of dirty straw.

He lay there quiet and still until he heard the men's voices fading in the distance, and then he opened his eyes and gazed round.

He found himself in one of the dog-kennels and, rising stealthily to his feet, he proceeded to take stock of his surroundings; and, as he did so, he realised that the six greyhounds had been taken from the starting-box and placed in the kennels nearby. Amongst them, then, would be his own treasure, Pretty Polly.

Dunk whistled softly, and an answering bark came to him.

In ten seconds the boy had climbed over the railings of the run of Polly's kennel and had his arms about her slender neck.

Then a desperate plan occurred to him. Whipping out a stub of pencil, he scribbled in a page of his notebook:

*Am a prisoner in Saunderson's kennels—come and rescue me.* DUNCAN GREY.

The he tore the leaf out and, winding it about Polly's collar, opened the small door—just big enough for the greyhound to wriggle through.

"Home, Polly," he whispered; and the greyhound, seeming to understand, sped off.

Then came a shout from without as some of the kennel men saw Polly streaking out of the place, but they were not in time to stop her.

Dunk turned about and snatched up a dog-chain lying amongst the straw, but not a second too soon.

The next instant he found himself fighting some three or four men, swinging the chain round like a flail.

But they were too much for him, and soon it was wrenched from his grasp and used to pinion his wrists behind his back, whilst his ankles were strapped together.

Then he heard a voice which he recognised as that of Jim Kemp.

"We'll put an end to him, lads," he snarled. "Put this round his neck and string him up to that rafter—then we'll set the dogs loose on him!"

A flimsy box was dragged out and Dunk forced to stand upon it, a noose was made in the end of the stout length of rope and slipped over his head, then drawn tight about his neck.

The other end was passed up over a beam in the roof and drawn almost taut!

Jim Kemp had looked on with malicious satisfaction as he watched his orders being carried out.

"Good!" he chuckled. "Now let those other five hounds in that we got out of the starting-box. Take their muzzles off and let 'em scrap in here. Sooner or later one of 'em'll barge into the box and knock it away—and then, Master Grey, you'll finish with a nice little jerk at the end of that rope. Savvy?"

The men nodded and obeyed. Five unmuzzled greyhounds were set loose, and the next instant a free fight was in progress.

Dunk, standing there with a hangman's noose about his neck was forced to look on with eyes wildly dilated with terror at the ghastly spectacle.

Then suddenly the end came! Two snarling, snapping hounds came crashing against the box, to knock it flying from under Dunk's feet. He felt a hideous jerk at his neck as the box was knocked from under him—and then all went red and, finally, black.

DUNCAN GREY sat up with a cry.

A ghastly pain smote him in the neck.

That was his first sensation. The next instant the voice of his father came to his ears.

"Thank God—we got here in time!" cried Hesketh Grey. "Polly delivered your note—and I came here with the police, only just in time to cut you down."

Dunk nodded weakly.

"And Polly? Is she all right?" he murmured; and then, as he felt something licking his hand, he glanced down and saw the beautiful creature at his side—her faithful brown eyes shining with an almost human light.

"There's your answer, Dunk, old chap," said his father. "And we got all the scoundrels here—with the exception of the ringleader, Jim Kemp."

Dunk nodded.

"Pretty Polly won't be safe until you've got him, too," he said weakly, and then once more slid off into unconsciousness.

Another Spiffing Yarn of Duncan, the Boy Racing Greyhound Trainer, Next Week, Chums.

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## Chaps! The Grandest News Ever About The Mag.

**JIMMY BRENT**, the Elusive Gentleman Crook, is Going to Appear in a Spiffing New Series of Stories of Sport and Adventure in the Wilds—

### THE BIG GAME CRICKETERS.

Commences Next Week. Wow!—Don't Miss Your Mag.

#### MY DEAR CHUMS,

Spiffing, spanking—likewise clinking. That's what you'll say about our big Wild Adventure Number next week. Chaps, I've got some real treats in store for you.

I know you welcomed the exciting reappearance of Jimmy Brent, the Amazing Man about Town and Gentleman Crook in the long complete story that appeared the week before last. But that was only a prelude, chums, to the thunderous thrills and laughable fun that is coming in our new serial in which elusive Jimmy Brent makes the biggest sensation ever known in the realms of Crookdom and the sporting world.

Lads, here's the big idea. Jimmy's a sporting crook to his fingertips. Nothing mean or shabby about the great clean fellow who stars in our serial-series of big-game hunting and cricket. As you know, Jimmy has a playful habit of pitting his wits against the grasping and rich. He robs them so that the poor children of our slums shall see something of the sunshine and the green fields. All right.

Now Jimmy gets right up against the Hardest Man in the World. A rich, unscrupulous financier, one of those men who manipulate markets and grind the faces of the poor. Jimmy doesn't like this man. Not a little bit. And the Gentleman Crook goes after him.

The chase leads to the South American jungle. A tale of terror, it is, chums, with big issues at stake. I can't explain it all to you. You must read the yarn for yourselves. But I will tell you this. The Hardest Man in the World is, in reality, at the head of a great criminal gang, and to attain his purpose he intends to betray all the little crooks in the Underworld who serve him—just as he might crush beetles under his heel.

Jimmy Brent, Amazing Man about Town, steps in. He sees the awful injustice of it. And so he gathers these men who are to be sold to the police and forms an amazing team of crooks—

#### The Big Game Cricketers.

They go out to the jungle where wild, terrific adventure meets them. And sport. Chaps, if you like good, stirring cricket, a tale of idols in tropical jungles, sacrifices and cannibals—then read the story of the Gentleman Crook's latest adventure.

I know I have got several chums who have never

plucked up courage to write to me. Chaps, I am going away soon for a week's holiday, and I shall live for that time on a rather dilapidated old yacht that has been lent to me—fishing, golfing a little, reading and thinking. A lonesome holiday, amidst lonesome rugged scenery, chums. I rather think I shall be lonesome away from this big office where magazines and newspapers are produced; where the air is vibrant with the click of typewriters, the clang of telephones, and the bustle of printers hurrying to and fro with proofs damp from the press. So bung in your letters so that I can take a great batch away with me, read them and answer them and so feel that I have not got out of touch with my great circle of chums. Address your letters, chums, to THE EDITOR, *Boys' Magazine*, 200, Gray's Inn Road, London, W.C., and they will be forwarded to me. Gee whizz, chaps, but I'm a terror for yarning away. I want to tell you about that great and intrepid adventurer, Sir John Champion, the millionaire of the Wilds. You must read the first yarn about him next week—

#### Champion of the Congo.

Spiffing adventures on the great globe-trotter's yacht on the hot, lazy rivers of the Congo, where lurk the alligator, the sly hippopotamus, and the savage denizens of the dark, impenetrable forest. Some doings in this tale next week, chums. You'll like Champion and his pals.

A great long complete yarn of mystery and invention appears next week. It tells of

#### The Marvel 'Plane.

invented by a famous Professor, and stolen by a German crook who plans to turn out thousands in a new war against Great Britain. This tale also introduces new chums—an English boy, an Irish lad, and a Scottie. Hal Daring is the English boy, and his two pals—who are for ever quarrelling, but the best of friends—are "Squat" Maguire and Sandy McNab.

Well, lads, there's a terrific flame-fighting tale of Firefighter Fred, the Pride of the London Brigade, and it is entitled

#### "The Raid on the Fire Station."

So look out for a sensation. This rounds off a ripping programme—except for one surprise which you'll discover next week.

Your sincere friend,  
THE EDITOR.

#### JOKE RESULT NO. 267.

Cricket bats to: O. Dedersen, 397, Spring Bank, W.; Jull; W. Dowsett, 42, King's-road, Barking, Essex. Fountain pens to the following: P. Johnston, 9, Chapel-rd., Northenden, Manchester; A. Horner, 31, Columbus-st., Jersey, C.I.; T. Dowd, 25, Tilton-rd., Wavertree, Liverpool; C. Martin, Olney-rd., Lavendon, near Turvey, Beds.; J. Cox, 10, Johnston-ter., Cricklewood, N.W.2; L. Gibbs, 19, Austral-st., E.C.11; L. Edge, Woodview, Meadow, Godalming, Surrey; —, 371, Kensington-st., Duckworth-lane, Bradford, Yorks.; A. Haines, 6, Chestnut-cres., Southcourt, Aylesbury, Bucks.; H. Head, 19, Vineyards, Bath; M. Cowan, 7, Russell-st., Chesham; E. M. Hall, 4, Pretoria-ter., Carnarvon, N. Wales.

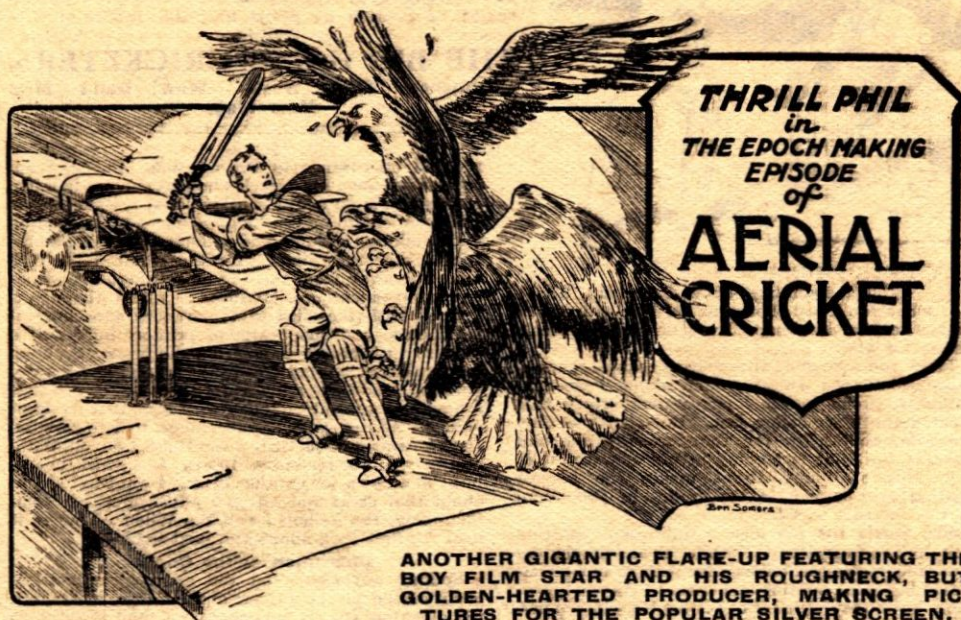
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**Cricket Above the Clouds! Roughneck Harry's Latest Stunt is a Scorcher. It makes a Tale Agog with Hectic Happenings and a Dramatic Denouement!**



**ANOTHER GIGANTIC FLARE-UP FEATURING THE BOY FILM STAR AND HIS ROUGHNECK, BUT GOLDEN-HEARTED PRODUCER, MAKING PICTURES FOR THE POPULAR SILVER SCREEN.**

**H**I! Come here, you boiled-eyed son of a poor fish!"

The rough voice of Thrill Phil's producer, "Roughneck Harry," so called for his great bull-like neck, came down to the boy film star on the clear air of the prairie.

Standing before a wicket erected upon the prairie, Phil was batting away courageously as a perfect hurricane of balls came flying at him from a strange contrivance at the other end of the impromptu pitch.

Actually it was an apparatus used by crack baseball teams to improve their play, and consisted of a mechanical arm which shot one ball after another through the air at the batter.

Roughneck Harry had produced it mysteriously from a wooden case which had come from New York a few days earlier.

"This'll chuck cricket balls at you at the rate of one every ten seconds, you little runt," he had announced, "and I want you to practise hitting 'em."

Without quite understanding the object of this strange command, Phil had just completed five minutes rehearsal with the automatic bowler. His recent acquisition, Karell, the wolf dog, acted as cover-point and retrieved the balls ready to be released into the uncanny contrivance.

At the camera man's call, Phil slung the cricket bat under his arm, patted Karell and then lounged off towards where Roughneck Harry sat upon an empty case.

"Yep? What's up?" queried Phil as he joined his mentor.

"Up's right! Up's the word, you bleary-eyed boob," returned Harry, and he took the cigar from between his lips and jerked it in the direction of the

clouds drifting above the Rocky Mountains in the distance.

Phil shaded his eyes and gazed in the direction of the purple heights.

He could just distinguish what at first glance he took to be a couple of mountain eagles, but as they swiftly grew larger he realised that they must be a pair of aeroplanes.

"Planes!" he ejaculated.

"Your name ought sure to be Falcon Swift!" remarked Harry banteringly. "Yep—they're 'planes' all right. I cabled back to the Boss to send me a couple out, with two good pilots, from Los Angeles." Not another word would he say in answer to Phil's eager questions until the 'planes had landed and two figures in flying kit and goggles climbed from the cockpits and came across to Harry.

The taller of the two handed the producer a letter from the president of Moonlight Pictures, Inc., which he glanced rapidly through.

"Good! So you're Mick Hudson and Bud Henderson?" he remarked as he ran a critical eye over the youths who stood before him. "S'pect you know my pard. Phil of the Thrills, eh?"

Everyone connected with Moonlights knew Phil, of course, from his daring exploits upon the silver screen, and the two pilots shook hands with him warmly.

Then they got busy unloading the huge consignment of petrol which they had brought in cans in their machines.

At length a great dump of two-gallon petrol tins mounted high in a shaded spot upon the prairie, and the last tin was chucked to Phil, who stood upon the top, stowing them together.

His task completed, the youngster leaped down



from the stack of petrol tins and stood before Harry.

"Now perhaps you'll open up and spill the beans?" he asked. "Just what is my next stunt? Want me to be a second Lindberg and fly the Atlantic, maybe?"

"Can the gab, an' I'll tell you," retorted Harry. "Guess you've been kind o' wondering why you've been doing the Jack Hobbs stuff out there with that baseball gadget, eh?"

Phil nodded.

"Well, that's all part of it," went on Harry, warming to his subject. "The only difference from your practice an' the real thing'll be that you're goin' ter do the last-named on top of an airplane up there!" and he jerked the stub of his cigar towards the blue heavens.

Phil drew in his breath.

"Gee! That'll make a picture! Then that's what the 'planes are for?"

"You bet your sweet young life, they are! One: fer you. We'll fix the stumps up one end on the top wing, and that darned infernal machine," jerking his head towards the automatic bowler, "further end. It'll sling the pills at you, son, and you'll slog 'em up there in the air. I'll be in the other machine, turning the organ. Got me?"

Phil nodded enthusiastically.

"Great!" he cried, then, anxiously, eagerly: "When do we start?"

"Terroreer—providin' the light's right!"

### The Lake Of Fire.

**C**UMMON off the hay!"

Thrill Phil awoke suddenly to find Roughneck Harry's boot prodding his ribs.

Harry had already aroused the two pilots and they were busy at their aeroplanes. A set of stumps had been erected at the extreme end of one of the machine's upper planes—the stumps bolted through the framework, and the balls glued on. A crease had also been marked out in white paint upon the novel pitch. At the other end of the plane the patent automatic bowling device was affixed, and a wire ran along from the catch to start the clockwork mechanism, so that Phil could bend down and tug at it to start up the bowling when he was ready.

In the other machine Roughneck's movie camera was already in place.

A few moments later Phil appeared, garbed in spotless flannels.

"Up you get," ordered Harry, and Phil clambered up on to the topmost plane and took up his stance in front of the wicket. Strong straps, under which he now fitted his feet encased in white buckskin cricket boots, had been securely bolted through the stays.

"Get a good grip," advised Roughneck. "There's going to be some breeze upstairs."

Phil strained at the straps and found they held O.K., and then a cricket bat was handed up to him.

"Right—when you like!" he cried, and his pilot climbed into the driving-seat.

The prop. was swung—and the engine roared into life—and, as soon as it was warmed up to its work, the pilot opened up the throttle and taxied across the prairie.

Once Roughneck had seen the 'plane soar into the air, with Phil standing upon the topmost wing, he sprang for the second machine, in which the pilot was already seated with his propeller revolving.

"All right—let her rip!" he yelled, and with a roar the second 'plane took the air.

Steadily the two machines climbed until an altitude of about two thousand feet was reached.

Then Harry came up alongside Phil's machine—focused his camera—and signalled for Phil to start operations.

Gripping his bat in one hand and straining against the hurricane of wind which threatened any second to sweep him from his perilous position, Phil bent down and pulled at the wire near his left foot.

A whirl sounded from the machine at the other end of the plane, and Phil gripped his bat for the first ball.

It came whizzing through the air towards him and with a perfect forward drive, Phil sent the leather hissing away.

So intent was the boy film star on not missing a single ball, that he was oblivious of all else, otherwise he would have been amazed to see a second aeroplane



ABOVE THE BLAZING LAKE!—Floating to the cauldron of flame below him Phil seemed doomed. And then a pistol cracked and the youngster saw Roughneck Harry firing at the main strand of the net that imprisoned him.



racing to a spot alongside him upon the opposite side from where Harry was frantically cranking his camera.

But Roughneck Harry saw it, and his quick eyes also perceived a camera being turned by a dark-skinned man in the cockpit.

"That darned dago, Luigi!" he gritted. "How'd he get on to it? Rustling my picture. And what the blue Heck has he got in that barred box behind him? Gee, it's a couple of birds! What the...?"

Still cranking his camera, Harry kept one eye upon the second aeroplane in which Luigi—the representative of the rival picture company, which had already done so much towards the ruining of Moonlights, Inc.—had so suddenly appeared.

Then, as Phil swiped the last of the balls to be hurled at him from the automatic bowler, Harry saw Luigi turn in his machine and wrench open the door of the barred box in which a couple of huge birds were imprisoned.

As the dago did so, he ducked down to be clear of the great flapping wings as the two giant birds shot out of their prison.

Harry gave a gasp as he saw them—and recognised their species.

They were a pair of mountain eagles—that in itself was enough, for Harry knew the vicious nature of the brutes. He would have been even more concerned had he known that the ferocious birds had been purposely kept without food or water for days after their capture!

Now the two eagles circled for an instant in the air, and then made straight for Phil standing there—bolted by the straps over his boots to the top of the plane.

With his cricket bat gripped firmly, the young actor struck again and again at those flat heads with the gleaming, red-rimmed eyes, as they made to attack him.

At length he caught one of them a beautiful "sixer," which must have smashed its head to pulp, for the next instant the huge bird of prey fell downwards like a stone—its wings limp and dragging after it through the air.

But the second still came at Phil with renewed vigour, and the youngster fought desperately as he lunged and parried with the bat as his only weapon.

Roughneck Harry, his professional instinct ever uppermost, had slammed a fresh spool of film into his camera and was busily cranking this unrehearsed incident. After all, he saw no way in which he could help his protégé—and so, he thought, he might as well record the great fight upon his strips of celluloid.

"If Phil comes through all right," he breathed between clenched teeth, "I'll have that infernal dago, Luigi, to thank for this extra thriller. Yes, I'll thank him—at the end of a six-shooter, if ever I get the chance."

But still he cranked—and still Phil fought!

It was making a great picture. Then as Phil's muscles felt as if they would burst from the strain, he saw his chance.

*Crack!* the blade of the bat flashed in, and the second eagle went hurtling to the earth thousands of feet below.

Then the bat slipped from Phil's nerveless fingers, and he sank into a heap upon the plane.

It was only the supporting straps about his insteps which kept him from being swept off by the terrific force of the wind.

For a few seconds Phil lay panting and gasping for breath—then a voice came up from below, as the pilot switched off the engine for a moment to shout to him.

"Unbuckle the straps and crawl round into the

cockpit, Phil," cried the pilot, "and I'll land as soon as can be."

Phil nodded and, groping for the straps, proceeded to unbuckle them.

Now both feet were free, and he started to work his way slowly towards the centre of the wing-span so that he could climb round and drop into the seat behind the pilot.

He had only reached half-way when he suddenly found himself enmeshed in a great net, which seemed to have fallen from nowhere, and was now rapidly drawing tight about him.

Frantically he fought to free himself—bewildered and amazed. But the net was suddenly jerked tight and he felt himself dragged bodily from off the top of his machine. As he gazed upwards through the meshes, he saw that it hung from a rope which ran from a second aeroplane—and over the edge of the machine was the leering face of the dago, Luigi!

Then it was that Phil realised that he had been kidnapped in mid-air. Snatched from off the other 'plane in a net like so much fish!

The net was drawn upwards, and his face came level with the edge of the cockpit.

"So we meet again, huh?" hissed the voice of Luigi. "You kill the birds, heh? But you not escape me, my friend. You make one beeg picture for me and then you die."

"Just you wait till I get out of this and I'll smash your ugly face in, you dirty dago!" hissed Phil.

Luigi only returned an oily smile.

"Yes—when you get out," he snarled, "but I do not let you out—oh, no! You die in that net, my fren'. Listen, I will tell you what you do for me."

Drawn tight in the folds of the net, Phil was forced to listen to the most inhuman plot he had ever heard.

"Soon I fix a parachute to the net, yes," went on Luigi. "And then I let you go—but not yet, my friend. But when we are over that—look!"

Jerking his head round, Phil looked in the direction in which Luigi was pointing.

Below, shimmering in the sunlight, he could see the great expanse of a lake—but as he gazed at it, his eyes contracted with horror.

The machine which had kidnapped him was flying low enough now for him to be able to discern a couple of figures emptying the contents of petrol tins—stolen from the Moonlight dump—on to the surface of the water.

"Ah, I see you understand!" hissed Luigi. "Soon they light that—and then we drop you in the parachute. And when I have the picture of your death, I think I set the world on fire with it, heh? Ha! Ha!"

Luigi's laugh was hideous to hear. Phil tried to close his ears to it, and to think—to think some way out of this ghastly predicament.

What of Roughneck—where was he? Phil asked himself.

But although both the other 'planes—Harry's and the one from which Phil had been kidnapped—were hovering nearby, none of the occupants could think of a means of rescuing Phil.

True, Roughneck had a revolver—had it gripped now in his hand—but dared not fire for fear of hitting either Phil or the pilot of Luigi's 'plane—or of piercing the petrol tank and setting it afire.

And so Roughneck waited, gun in one hand, whilst the other was unconsciously turning the handle of his movie camera.

A cry of horror came from the boy's lips as he saw the waters of the lake suddenly burst into one great blazing sheet of flame.

Above him he perceived Luigi fastening a parachute



on to the rope run through the net, and the next instant the stunt actor felt himself falling.

Like a stone he went down for the first few hundred feet, and then he heard the ripping of silk as the folds of the parachute opened and broke the speed of his descent.

The next instant he was sailing through the air—but ever downwards into that seething inferno of fire below.

For a moment Phil lay there bereft of movement. If only he had his knife and could slash his way through the meshes of the net! Then he could drop plumb down and the speed at which he would strike those flaming waters, would carry him through the fire in a flash and below the surface of the water.

But, drifting slowly down as he was, the great leaping tongues of flame would have ample time to do their ghastly work.

Suddenly Phil heard the crack of a pistol-shot and the next instant saw the set and determined face of his pal Harry as he leaned out over the cockpit of his machine.

Harry was firing with his pistol in Phil's direction! He had left off cranking now.

Had Harry gone mad? thought Phil. Or was he firing to kill him outright rather than let him suffer the tortures of being burned to death?

A moment later, Phil realised the actual truth! Harry was firing at the rope which connected the great net to the parachute above.

Already one bullet had cut through a strand of the rope, which was now fraying and tearing away.

Crack! another shot severed the last strand and Phil felt himself falling like a stone.

But as he fell, the meshes of the net gave and Phil felt his limbs released. Harry had shot through the rope, just above where its noose ran through the edge of the net, and the net had burst open.

With a gasp of relief, Phil realised that he was free, only to feel and see the great tongues of flame all about him as he dropped dead into the centre of the blazing lake.

But he suffered the torture of the heat for but the fraction of a second, and a moment later he felt the cool, refreshing waters of the lake close over him as he sank down many feet beneath the surface.

The sudden immersion in the cold water cleared Phil's brain, and he swung over on his back and opened his eyes beneath the water—gazing upwards.

It was an eerie sight which met his gaze. He could see the flames of the blazing lake above. If he could only hold his breath long enough he could swim along under the surface of the water, until he got beyond that portion upon which floated the burning spirit!

It was his only chance, and so he took it.

Swinging over on to his chest once more, Phil swam quickly forward but with all the time a downward push of his hands to keep himself below the surface.

On, on he swam with great strong strokes. His

lungs seemed to be bursting for want of air, but he knew it would mean certain death to allow himself to come to the surface yet.

Then he felt he could hang out no longer, he was forced to allow himself to rise.

His head broke through, and he heaved a prayer of thanksgiving as he perceived that he was just a yard from the edge of the blazing petrol.

Taking in a great gasp of air, he struck quickly away from the fire. Fortunately the slight wind that there was blew the tongues of fire away from him.

At length his feet touched bottom, and he half-crawled, half-staggered towards the bank, clutching at the roots of trees growing at the edge.

Then as he reached the scrubby bush at the side of the lake, he crumpled into a heap—unconscious!

WHEN Phil opened his eyes again he found himself lying upon his own camp bedstead in the tent of the Moonlight Pictures Company.

"Feel better?" asked Harry, and his voice could not have been gentler at that moment.

Phil nodded weakly and stretched a feeble hand to fondle the huge wolf dog that bounded joyously to his bedside.

Karell had been missing for some time and his return had only synchronised with Phil's waking from unconsciousness.

"Great Pip! What's he got in his mouth?" exclaimed Roughneck, and he took the flat, square-shaped box from Karell's jaws.

It was a cinema-film box, and stamped upon it was the name of the Moonlight's most bitter rival—the firm represented by the scoundrel, Luigi!

"By the turkey's tonsils!" cried Harry. "That durned dog's almost human. He's swiped a box of film from Luigi's bunch! What if it should prove to be . . ."

But Harry was already speeding off to the tent rigged up as a dark room, with the intention of developing a specimen strip of the film in the box.

It was some twenty minutes when he returned to Phil's tent, to find that unbeatable young man sitting up in bed, being fed with brandy and milk by one of the pilots.

"Hallo, Harry—what happened?" cried Phil weakly. "I don't remember anything much after I dropped into the burning lake. Did you get Luigi and his gang?"

Harry shook his head.

"No," he cried, "but by Heck, we've got his film—the one he took of your drop into the lake! Look!" and he thrust the developed section of the film into Phil's trembling hands.

"How'd you get it?" gasped Phil amazed.

"Karell got it! Came back with it in his mouth!"

"There! I told you he was a good dog!"

"Good dog?" exclaimed Roughneck Harry.

"He's the conger's back collar stud in dogs!"

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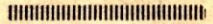
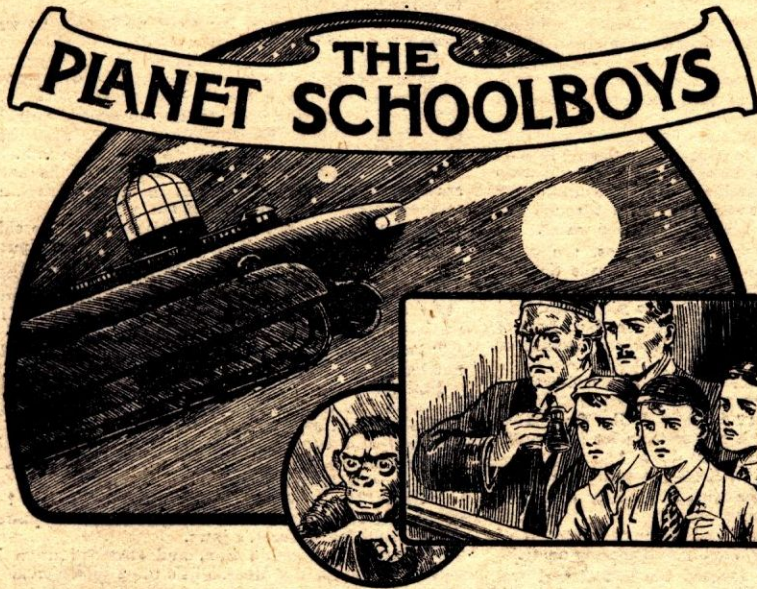
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### The Great Invention.

IT came down from the stars—a thing of gleaming metal, bristling with strange, scientific contrivances yet possessed of neither planes nor propellers. A crowd of schoolboys gasped at the magic of the wonder machine's flight and when it reached *terra firma* came in a bunch to investigate the phenomenon.

Professor Roxley Drewe and Sir Clarence Bagshot met them on board and chatted with Mr. Jerome Mannering, the popular Fourth Form master, while Barry Drewe, the Professor's nephew, proudly conducted his chums, Don Masters and the Hon. Freddie Trevor, on a tour of inspection.

"But—but how does the blessed thing work?" demanded George Freeman, leader of "The Firm" at Castleton School. The Firm consisted of Jack Willis, Leonard Hardy, and their truculent leader.

The question was permissible, for the wonder flyer was opposed to all the accepted rules of flying, yet the Professor had already been a trial flight, five thousand miles from the earth's surface, and he now planned to visit the planets.

He was now explaining to Sir Bags and Jerry, as the knight and the schoolmaster nicknamed each other, the secret of the monster's motive power.

"By harnessing wonderful forces from the ether, I can reduce the earth's attraction to nil and travel in any direction I care to direct," he was saying, when there came a dramatic interruption. Count Popandos, a sinister-looking foreigner, appeared, and, before any of the three could stop him, he dragged at a lever near the Professor's hand. It snapped off short. Simultaneously the aerial monster gave a tremendous lurch and shot heavenwards, throwing the juniors gathered on her decks to their faces. Count Popandos appeared from below and, without hesitating, cast himself into space.

The startled youngsters crowded to the rails—in time to see the billowing folds of a parachute arrest

the miscreant's seeming fall to destruction and bear him gently down to firm ground.

White-faced and dishevelled, the Professor and his two companions came out on deck and herded the juniors into the inside of the vessel.

"At the present moment," he told them gravely, "we are heading straight for the planet Venus at many thousands of miles per second!"

Hours passed, and to the voyagers' intense joy, they were able to make a safe landing on the planet. Strange, bewildering country surrounded the vessel, which had come to rest in a forest glade—and the forest was composed of gigantic nettles!

Flying in the air around them they discerned a flock of bat-like animals with eerie, almost human faces. These animals disappeared, however, and, after equipping all with breathing-suits, the Professor opened a door of the flying monster.

Freeman, anxious to be the first human to land on a planet, jumped to the Venusian ground first, and the others saw him disappear through some undergrowth.

They found him held fast in a huge spider's web, and creeping towards him across the powerful strands came the denizen for his prey—a monstrous spider!

In the nick of time the erstwhile leader of The Firm was rescued, and everybody journeyed back to the *Solar Rover*. Shouts of anger and amazement left their lips when they found Count Popandos, who had stowed away on the vessel (one of his accomplices had performed that spectacular parachute descent at the beginning of the voyage through space), in command of the wonder flyer.

With a mocking wave of the hand Popandos sent the *Solar Rover* hurtling upwards—but not before Barry Drewe and Freeman had managed to clutch at one of the great tractors and so gained the deck.

They leapt upon the Count, but bribed members of the crew overpowered the daring youngsters, and they were incarcerated below. And then, when they had become used to the darkness, they found they



were not alone. Three queer forms confronted them. They were Puggy Dibble, Royce and Hoskins—stowaways from Castleton School!

**H**ERE the stowaways were—actually on Venus, with all the other members of the party! Stowaways—and they had succeeded in their scheme. Not that they seemed very happy about it. A more miserable-looking trio could not have been found in a day's march.

And yet, such was their extremity, Barry Drewe and George Freeman welcomed the sight of these three Castleton rotters. For it seemed very probable that they might make themselves useful—for about the first time in their lives!

George Freeman assumed his most aggressive air.

"Well, speak up!" he said sternly. "What have you got to say for yourselves, you rotters?"

"That's not the way to speak to us!" moaned Puggy Dibble. "We're nearly dead, and we want to get out of this beastly ship! We've had enough of it!"

"More than enough!" said Royce, miserably. "We thought it was going to be great fun at first, but we didn't think that we should be imprisoned like this for days and days on end! It's a wonder we're still alive!"

"How did you get on board?" asked Barry.

"Why, we—we were invited on board," said Dibble. "We saw Professor Drewe, and he asked us to explore the ship."

"Oh, did he!" said Barry, grimly. "He asked you to look round, eh?"

"Yes," said Puggy, "and so we thought it would be rather a good idea. And while we were down in the passages we went into a kind of storeroom, and had a look round."

"And then?"

"Well, we went into that inner room there, and

that idiot of a Hoskins let the door close on him."

"I didn't!" said Hoskins. "You came in last, Puggy, and you—"

"It doesn't matter about that," interrupted Freeman. "Why didn't you call for help, or something?"

"We did, but nobody heard us!" said Dibble indignantly. "It's a fine thing—being invited to examine the ship, and then being deserted like that!"

"Rats!" said Barry, curtly. "You're lying—as usual, Dibble!"

"I'm not!" shouted Dibble. "Your uncle invited us—"

"Rats again!" said Barry. "My uncle never invited you three rotters on board. You knew that we fellows were going for a trip, and so you thought you'd come for one, too!"

Dibble grunted non-committally.

"A sort of retribution!" said Freeman, with a weak grin. "It jolly well serves you right, you rotters! You sneaked on board—just the same as you always sneak everywhere—and before you knew where you were that door had snapped on you, and you were prisoners."

"We meant to come up after about half-an-hour—after the ship had got into the air!" said Royce, unhappily. "But then we couldn't get out."

"How did you manage to live?" asked Barry.

"Why, that inner room is stacked with grub," said Dibble. "My hat! We've been living on biscuits and oatmeal and all sorts of stuff. If we hadn't found a big case of some filthy tonic water, though, we should have died of thirst. I can taste that rotten water now—bitter as the dickens, and with a taste like Epsom salts! Anyhow, it kept us alive!"

"Well, you three, you may be able to make yourselves useful," said Barry grimly. "You'd better understand, straight away, that we're in a tight corner. We're prisoners here."

"Prisoners?" yelled Puggy. "Why, have you idiots got locked in, too?"

"It's not quite as simple as that," said Barry. "We've been put in here by Count Popandos—the rotter who has been trying to steal my uncle's invention. If we can only get out, we might be able to recapture the ship, and go to the rescue of all the rest."

The dishevelled trio looked bewildered.

**THE GIANT ANTS!**—With the ungainly deliberation of the insect tribe the great horde of ants advanced upon the awe-struck adventurers. How could the Professor and his friends defeat their teeming foes?





"But—but where are they?" asked Royce, startled. "Go to their rescue! What do you mean?"

"Why don't you talk sense!" asked Puggy. "If your uncle is in any danger, why can't he go to the police?"

Freeman uttered a kind of gurgling sound.

"The police!" he yelled. "Where do you think we are then?"

"How should I know?" growled Dibble. "After all this time, the airship might be in London."

"London!" said Barry, grimly. "We're on Venus!"

"On which?" asked the three stowaways, in one voice.

"Venus!" said Barry. "It's a planet, you know."

"You've gone crazy!" said Dibble. "Or else you're trying to be funny!"

Freeman started talking, but Barry choked him.

"It's no good, old man," he said. "They'll never believe us. We can't expect them to. It's too staggering—too stupendous! They'll never credit that we're on Venus until they get on deck—and see the place for themselves."

And this was certainly true. Puggy Dibble and his companions had an idea that Barry Drewe and Freeman were lightheaded. So it was no good talking to them. There was only one thing to be done.

Escape! That was the great question of the hour. If they could only escape they might be able to recapture the *Rover*, and then— But the possibilities were so enormous that they hardly liked to give their imaginations play.

### Aboard the *Solar Rover*.

**P**UGGY DIBBLE, of the Fourth, looked decidedly scared.

"What's the matter with you chaps?" he asked, plaintively. "Why can't you tell me the truth? What's all this rot about us being on a planet? You can't fool me like that!"

Barry Drewe turned, and looked at Puggy grimly.

"The less you can say, Dibble, the better!" he snapped. "But you'd better understand that we're in a tight corner, and that if we get out of this storeroom, there'll be fighting!"

"Fighting?" faltered Puggy.

"Yes, fighting!" put in Freeman, aggressively. "And if you three fellows don't come up to the scratch, you'll hear from me—later. There's just a chance that you three rotters may be able to make yourselves useful. By jiggery! If you do make yourselves useful, it'll be the first time it ever happened in your miserable lives!"

"Here, steady!" said Hoskins.

He and Royce were of very much the same type as Puggy Dibble himself. All three were regarded as rotters by the other Castleton juniors. And it had come as something of a shock to Barry Drewe and Freeman to find these cads on board the *Rover*. But now that they were here there was a possibility that they might be of some use.

And Barry thought it just as well to tell them the truth, straight from the shoulder.

"A little while ago I said I wasn't going to explain things," said Barry tensely. "But I've changed my mind. You fellows had better understand the real situation. This ship isn't on the earth any longer—it's on Venus! Do you understand. It's on the planet Venus!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Royce, incredulously.

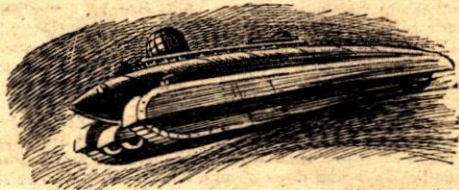
"I tell you we're on Venus!" insisted Barry. "But that isn't the real point. You'll believe it later on, when you see things for yourselves. But here's the important item. We're prisoners here, in this storeroom, and the *Rover* is being held by Count

Popandos and his men. They're only a handful—three or four, all told. But they're relentless, and they threaten to shoot down any members of the crew who thwart them."

"Oh, crumbs!" muttered Puggy, terrified by Barry's grim tone.

"Freeman and I were pushed into this storeroom, and we've been left here as captives," went on Barry Drewe. "Popandos and his rotters have probably forgotten us by this time. But if we can escape, there's a hope that we might be able to turn the tables, and go to the rescue of Sir Bags and the Professor and the other chaps. So everything depends on us. Do you understand that?"

"But what can we do—even if we do escape?" faltered Hoskins. "You say that this Count fellow is armed, and—"



The *Solar Rover* became a speck at last—until she completely vanished.

"We can fight, can't we?" put in Freeman, aggressively.

"Yes, but they'll shoot us down!" wailed Puggy.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Freeman. "What's the use? They're only three worms—three insects! We can't expect any help from these jellified cowards!"

"Yes we can—and we're going to have help from them, too!" said Barry grimly. "When the right moment comes, Dibble, you've got to fight! All three of you! It may mean salvation for us, and for every other member of the party."

Puggy Dibble and his companions were rather dazed. It was difficult to make them believe the acute nature of the situation. And at last Barry Drewe and George Freeman gave it up. These stowaways would probably be convinced later on—when the time for action came. At the moment, the first thing to do was to find some method of escape.

"It's no good trying to get out through this doorway," said Barry, as he went to the end of the storeroom, and examined the metal door. "It's as hard as steel—and there are great bolts on the other side. Don't you remember them being shot home?"

"Couldn't we smash it down with something?" asked Freeman.

"We might be able to smash it down—if we had a charge of dynamite, or a battering-ram," replied Barry. "But not being provided with these trifles, we must think of something else. Let's go through into the inner compartment, and see if there's any hope there."

"Oh, don't be mad!" said Puggy, sulkily.

"There's no escape here. Haven't I told you that we were imprisoned for days? We couldn't get out—"

"Anyhow, we'll have a look," said Barry, crisply.

In a moment of crisis he was always the leader. Freeman liked to picture himself as a great man—as a leader of the others. But, actually, Freeman was too impulsive—too forceful in his methods. Barry's coolness and level-headedness were of great use in all times of stress.

He walked through into the inner compartment, and it wasn't long before he found a switch, high up on the wall. And a flood of subdued light filled the store-chamber.



"Well, I'm blessed!" said Royce, staring. "And we were in the dark all the time! We might have had that light!"

And yet there was some excuse for them—for they had not known where the switch was, and the blackness had been pitchy during the whole time of their imprisonment. Moreover, Puggy Dibble & Co. were not the kind of fellows to fend for themselves.

"H'm! Not very promising!" said Barry, as he looked round. "There's no other doorway here—nothing but these metal plates all the way round, above us and below us."

"Didn't we tell you so?" said Puggy. "There's no escape from here!"

"Why not shift some of these cases?" suggested Freeman. "They're not too heavy, if we all work hard. And there might be another doorway, for all we know. Isn't it worth trying?"

"Yes, it is," agreed Barry. "I was going to suggest the same thing. I don't suppose for a moment that it'll be any good—but it'll be a lot better than standing here, idle."

And they set to work, pulling the store cases from one side of the chamber to the other. There was not much space for them to work in, and before long they were perspiring freely. And they were all hopeless, too. It was too much to expect—

"What's that?" gasped Freeman, suddenly.

They had just shifted a big packing case, and he pointed to the floor with a quivering finger. There, in clear view, was a metal ring—and the particular plate to which it was attached was hinged on the opposite side.

A trap-door!

### Amid Unknown Perils.

**E**XASPERATION was the chief emotion which surged through Sir Bags as he stood staring up at the *Solar Rover*. There she was, hovering only a thousand feet above the ground. Yet she might have been a hundred miles away, for all the chance there was of getting aboard.

Anxiety was written on every face. The Hon. Freddie Trevor and Don Masters were doubly anxious—and so, for that matter, were Hardy and Willis.

For these four juniors knew that their respective leaders were in the hands of Count Popandos, and they trembled to think of what was happening on board.

And there was their own position to consider, too. As yet, scarcely any of these boys had quite realised the true nature of the situation. They felt that things were serious, perhaps, but they did not quite appreciate the appalling tragedy of it all.

The *Rover* seemed so near—was so near. Count Popandos was a rascal and a traitor, but surely he could not be so base as to fly away, and to leave them all stranded? For that would be nothing short of wholesale murder. There could be no hope for these marooned human beings on this Venusian waste. Sooner or later, a deadly peril would arise, and the humans would find it too big for them to cope with. That early experience with the giant spider had proved that this was no ordinary land.

It was natural, perhaps, that the three men should group together, and that the boys should gather in another group. Professor Roxley Drewe was talking to Jerry Mannering and Sir Clarence Bagshot. They were talking in low tones. And, a little distance away, the ten boys were clustered together, talking, too.

"Do you think he means it?" Jerry was saying.

"We shall have to go on the assumption that he does mean it, old man," said Sir Bags quietly. "I don't know much of the fellow, I must confess, but he seems to be a determined sort of rat."

Professor Drewe wrung his hands.

"That man has been an accursed nuisance for weeks—months!" he said fiercely. "You have only known him recently, Clarence—during the past few days. But throughout the construction of my ship Count Popandos has pestered me. In some manner he got to know of my secrets—although he never actually discovered anything of value. Always, he was trying to buy my inventions."

"At the instigation of some foreign government, believe?" asked Mr. Mannering.

"Yes—but there is no question as to the motives now," said Professor Drewe. "He was doing it for himself. On the earth, he was merely the agent of this unknown government. But what will he do to us here, on Venus? Surely, he



THE GENUS ON VENUS.—With strange clicking cries they dropped, fluttering, and the next moment a score or more were on the ground, and flapping their way towards the explorers.



return to earth, and then will he sell this airship of mine as his own invention. The cur—the unmitigated hound! What fools we were to leave the ship—

"Steady, Prof.!" interrupted Sir Bags. "We didn't know that the Count was on board, did we? I am generally a cautious sort of fellow, but I never dreamed there was any danger on board. I thought we were all friends—I thought that every man was to be trusted."

"And so did I!" said the Professor fiercely. "But I am a fool, nevertheless. I underestimated the cunning and cleverness of this Greek rascal. I dismissed him lightly, never thinking that—"

"Look!" went up a sudden shout from the boys. "She's moving!" said Bags. "By gad! She's rising higher!"

"My ship—my wonderful ship!" muttered the Professor, in agony.

They could sympathise with him. This great airship was the darling of his heart—the child of his brain. Acute as their own anxiety was, it could be nothing compared to that of the Professor. And there, before their eyes, the *Solar Rover* was rising higher and higher into the air. Count Popandos came to the rail, and leaned over.

"Farewell, my friends!" he called mockingly.

And his voice carried down with surprising clarity. Perhaps there was something in this atmosphere which helped to amplify the tones of the human voice. At all events, those on the ground could hear distinctly.

"I do not fancy you will last long!" went on the Count, in that same mocking voice. "I shall not return to earth just yet. Why should I? There is plenty of time. I have a mind to tour round Venus, and to explore various points of interest. Later I may return—although I do not suppose that I shall see any further sign of you."

He laughed in a crazy kind of way, and then vanished from the rail. A chorus of angry shouts came from the boys, and Mr. Mantering shook his head into the air.

When the *Rover* commenced moving rapidly—she was travelling in a forward direction. A silence fell upon the adventurers as they watched her going. Their last and only link with anything earthly was disappearing in front of their eyes. Somehow, the *Solar Rover* seemed to be like a bit of old Mother Earth herself. Once she had gone, there was nothing left to remind them of home. Here they were, in a strange land—a new and terrifying world. And they were surrounded by unknown perils. Fearful dangers lurked on every side.

They were so appalled, indeed, by their position that words seemed useless.

The *Solar Rover* was lost to sight in the sky. She became a speck at last—until she completely vanished.

### Captured by the Bat-men.

SIR CLARENCE BAGSHOT assumed a cheeriness which he was by no means feeling.

"Well, boys, we're in a bit of a fix," he said briskly. "But we're not giving up hope, yet, eh?"

"Rather not, sir!"

"That's the spirit!" said Bags, with approval. "Never say die! All the same, there's no sense in pretending that we're having a picnic. There are all sorts of dangers round us, and we must be ready for trouble. Keep your rifles handy, and if any beetles or earwigs come trotting along, just give them a dose."

Bags made no mention of the fact that he was fearful of something worse than insects. For if the Venusian insects could be so formidable in size, what would the mammals be like? True, there was just a possibility that Venus contained no animals. But it was hardly likely. At any moment, indeed,

Bags half-expected to see a mountainous monstrosity of some sort, breaking through the gigantic trees. The prehistoric creatures of earth would be as nothing compared to the Venusian animals if only they were proportionately large to Venusian insects.

Truth to tell, the adventurers were feeling at a loose end. It seemed to be useless to make any kind of move. This spot, by chance, happened to be fairly open, and there was no danger of a swift attack. They would have ample warning.

And they could not lose sight of the fact that the *Solar Rover* might come back. Although nobody said anything, they had a feeling that Count Popandos had been bluffing. It seemed incredible that he could really have marooned them. He would come back, surely, if only to make terms.

Professor Roxley Drewe was the only one who actually believed the worst. He had gauged the Greek's character perfectly, and something within him made him believe that they had been really deserted on this planet. Popandos did not mean to return. He had gone—for ever.

But the others kept looking into the sky—hoping against hope that the glittering bulk of the *Rover* would appear in sight. Not, however, that they were allowed to think of the airship for long.

For there came a sudden alarm.

Robin Hardy, of the Third, was the first one to see the ants. The cheery fag could hardly believe his eyes at first, and when he was convinced he acted with characteristic coolness.

"Better look out, you fellows," he said, pointing. "There's trouble coming. Look over there!"

He pointed, and many shouts of dismay went up. Ants were appearing from great gaping holes in the ground. They bore a striking similarity to the earth's ants—although their bodies were much longer, and they were of a curious green hue. And these insects were as big as dogs! Hundreds of them were appearing—and they were advancing towards the explorers!

"Gad!" muttered Bags, glancing at the other two men. "We'd better not try conclusions with these brutes! Men have been killed in the tropics by ordinary ants—tiny things, no bigger than your finger-nail."

"Yes, if these Venusian ants are poisonous, they'll wipe us up in less than a minute!" said Jerry Mantering, quickly. "But what can we do? There's no cover here. And what's the good of running? We might go into worse dangers!"

They stared at those oncoming ants with fascinated horror. As yet, the monstrous things were several hundred yards away. But they were massing into a kind of formation—just as the ordinary earth ants will. There was something uncannily concerted in their movements.

But then, with surprising abruptness, the ants vanished. Scuffling hurriedly, scurrying here and there, they turned tail, and disappeared with incredible speed—into holes, behind patches of undergrowth.

"They must have had an alarm of some kind!" said Professor Drewe, with a puzzled frown. "But why? I cannot understand—"

"Look!" shouted Don Masters, his voice rising shrill with a new alarm. "Oh, look!"

They all swung round, startled by Don's tone. And then a chorus of further consternation went up. For Don was pointing into the sky.

And there, wheeling menacingly, were scores of bat-like forms!

They had come up unnoticed—while the adventurers had been watching the movements of the ants. And here, perhaps, was an explanation of the ants' sudden retreat.

"Good heavens!" said the Professor. "Like a



flock of vultures! Look at them—amazing! A remarkable sight, indeed! As a scientist, I am overwhelmed with eagerness and joy to see this wondrous spectacle. But as a man I am deeply alarmed."

"They're coming down!" said Billy Ward. "Oh! They're coming down to attack us!"

Nearer and nearer came those bat-like creatures. They were swooping up and down, swinging round this way, and sweeping off in wide curves that way. But they were growing inevitably nearer and nearer, their wings flapping with a curious, leathery kind of sound.

"Look out!" shouted Bags, clicking his revolver. His warning was well-timed. For the bat-men—undoubtedly the "human beings" of Venus—were sweeping to the attack.

They were the same extraordinary monstrosities that had been seen earlier. Enormous things, ten or twelve feet in height, with furry bodies, and with great spreading wings.

With strange clicking cries, they dropped, fluttering, and the next moment a score of them were on the ground, and flapping their way towards the explorers in the most startling jumps and hops.

*Crack! Crack! Crack!* Rifles and revolvers spurted fire and lead, but the effect was almost nil. Nothing could stop the rush of these Venusian bat-men!

Nearer and nearer—until they swept round the desperate humans, smothering them—encircling them in a deadly ring.

### In the Hands of the Venusians.

PROFESSOR ROXLEY DREWE and his companions expected nothing but death.

They were overwhelmed by the Venusian bat-men—smothered by the very enormity of their numbers. And firearms, it seemed, were useless against these extraordinary creatures.

At the moment of the attack, many of the Castleton boys had fired their rifles, and Sir Clarence Bagshot had repeatedly pulled the trigger of his revolver. But there had been no effect. The Venusians continued to swarm round, and to close in on their victims.

"It's all up, you chaps!" shouted Don Masters.

"They've got us! We're doomed!"

"Never say die!" yelled Robin Hardy, of the Third. "Castleton for ever!"

Sir Bags and the Professor managed to exchange an agonised glance. It gave them heart to hear these schoolboys cheering so lustily—keeping their peckers up in spite of this dreadful disaster.

But what was the use?

Ordinary fighting methods were hopeless against these Venusians. At such close quarters the rifles and revolvers could not be used. And fists were equally hopeless. For these bat-men were nine or ten feet in height. Some of them, indeed, towered up to twelve feet. And they were powerful in proportion. Once in the Venusians' grip, it was impossible to get free.

But, strangely enough, none of the adventurers had been hurt. They all expected to be smothered—crushed—killed. But for some extraordinary reason the Venusians did no harm to their victims. They held them tightly, but they did not injure them.

Was it possible that they were to be spared?

So it seemed. The Venusians, after that first rush, had seized all the adventurers. They were now helpless—gripped by these monstrous bird-men. And the Venusians were evidently talking to one another—for they made strange clicking sounds, and there could be no doubt that they were carrying on a kind of conversation. This was evidently the Venusian language.

"Well, we're safe so far!" panted Billy Ward, breathlessly. "We're not dead yet!"

"I don't believe they mean to kill us, either!" said Jefferson. "I don't believe—Hi! Steady! What the dickens—"

He broke off in alarm. The Venusian who had seized him was now performing a peculiar act.



THE BAT MEN TAKE THEIR PREY.—One after another fluttered down to a particular ledge, and gently deposited his human burden there.

Jefferson, in fact, was being bound up—by some curious silken cord which the Venusian was producing from some hidden receptacle. This cord was sticky—glutinous. It seemed even possible that the monster was producing it from its own body—after the fashion of a spider. At all events, Jefferson found himself bound so thoroughly that he could not even move an arm or a leg. And the others were being treated in exactly the same manner.

"It's a good sign!" said Sir Bags coolly. "Don't worry, boys! These Venusian people evidently regard us with awe and respect. They're not going to kill us yet. They'd never go to the trouble of binding us up like this if they meant to polish us off, out of hand."

"That is certainly true!" said the Professor, taking a deep breath. "Upon my soul! How extraordinary! Where is this cord being produced from? Do you notice, Mannering? It is a kind of silken substance—not unlike gossamer. Very remarkable! Very singular!"

But Jerry Mannering was not particularly enthusiastic.



"Yes, I've noticed that, Professor," he said. "But I'm more interested in the fact that we're all helpless. By Jove! There's no getting free from these bonds. They're like elastic—and we're so encircled by the ropes that—"

He broke off, startled. Exclamations were coming from the other prisoners, too. For preparations were now being made for another move. Many of the Venusians were standing round, looking at the prisoners out of their strange, luminous eyes. They turned round like creatures out of a nightmare. There were hundreds of them, all told.

And they kept up that continuous clicking sound, and it was impossible to look at them without staring in awe. They were so different from anything on earth—and yet, so familiar! In a grotesque sort of way, they bore a vague resemblance to human beings. And yet nothing less like a human being could have been imagined. It was very peculiar.

"Hi!" yelled Willis, in sudden alarm. "Look out! What the— Oh, corks!"

The Venusian monster which had charge of Willis suddenly opened his great wings, and flapped them ominously. And then he scared off into the air—laboriously, slowly, with the unhappy Willis bound securely to the creature's lower limbs—resting there in a sort of satchel.

And a moment later all the other Venusians acted in the same way.

The prisoners were being carried off—not along the ground, but through the air. It was an uncanny experience—a terrifying adventure.

Up they rose, higher and higher, wheeling and turning. And it could now be seen that the Venusians were arranging themselves into a kind of formation. Those with the prisoners were in the centre, in one group. And outside came flocks of the other bat-men, taking up their positions on the flanks. A further number went in advance, and led the way.

And then, after further wheeling and turning, the entire flock set off across the great forest lands—flying swiftly, and accompanied by that strange croaking, leathery sound as the bat-like wings fluttered on the air.

Where were these prisoners being taken to? What horror awaited them?

### The Great Tunnel.

**B**EWILDERMENT was the chief emotion of the schoolboy adventurers as they were being carried through the air by those Venusian bat-men. They were bewildered by the fact that they were still alive—and bewildered by the novelty of their present experience.

And they knew how utterly at the mercy of these Venusians they were.

Bound and helpless, they would crash down to certain death if these bat-men released their grip.

Any sort of conversation between them was impossible, for they were flying some distance apart. Each Venusian kept his own place, and they flew strangely like a great formation of aeroplanes. Before long, the adventurers were feeling cramped and aching. There was no relief for them. And they wondered how long this journey would last. Where were they being taken to? What was the fate which these Venusians had in store for them?

Now and again they would look at the sky—hoping against hope that the *Solar Rover* would appear. But there was no sign of her. Sir Bags, indeed, was praying that the vessel would not show up. For he had an idea that if she suddenly came into view, the bat-men would release their prisoners. And that would mean death, for a certainty.

At last it seemed that the objective could be guessed

at. Somewhere in the distance a great towering cliff arose. It was a cliff which filled the humans with awe when they looked at it. Never had they seen such a cliff as this on earth.

It rose sheer from the plain, towering up for thousands and thousands of feet, straight into the air. On earth its summit would have been lost in the clouds. But here, on Venus, the clouds were much higher. Everything in connection with this extraordinary planet was immense.

These Venusians were making straight for that cliff. They were flying towards it now, making no effort to rise. The cliff top was still thousands of feet above, but the bat-men were not intent upon surmounting it. Their objective, evidently, was the cliff face itself. And here the schoolboys could see deep, gaping holes. There were caves here—perhaps tunnels which led into the heart of the rock.

And in due course the cliff face was reached. At close quarters it was found that there were great ledges everywhere—wide shelves all along the cliff face, in serrated profusion. And, at intervals, there were the black tunnel entrances. Far, far below stretched the plain, with rivers and lakes, and those towering forests. But for the fact that they were prisoners in the hands of these bat-men, the explorers would have been vastly interested in this wondrous panorama. But how could they feel any interest in the scenery now? Their thoughts were all for their own safety.

The Venusians now acted with remarkable precision, proving clearly that they were intent upon some settled plan. One bat-man after another fluttered down to a particular ledge, and gently deposited his burden there. The prisoners were dumped down with scarcely a jar, until they were all in a row, against that cliff face.

"Well, we're getting somewhere, aren't we?" asked Sir Bags coolly. "We can't do much for ourselves—with these sticky cords round us. But we're still alive—and that's something to be thankful for."

"What are they going to do to us, Bags?" asked Mr. Mannerling.

"Goodness only knows!" said the sporting baronet. "I expected to be dead long ago. Let's be thankful for small mercies, old man. These queer creatures don't seem to be in any hurry to polish us off, so there might be some chance for us, after all."

The next move was significant.

The Venusians landed upon the ledge, and collected in great numbers. And as they landed, their wings folded up so cunningly and compactly that it was difficult to believe that they could fly. With those curious hops and jumps of theirs, they came round the prisoners, and seized them with their long, talon-like arms, or feelers.

"Here we go again!" said Sir Bags, cheerily.

And this time they were led straight into the blackness of a vast tunnel. There was no attempt at order or formation now. They were thrust in, in twos and threes, and sometimes in single file. And soon the blackness swallowed them up, and they found themselves walking on in Stygian darkness.

### The Pool of Molten Fire.

**D**AYLIGHT! After an interminable time, the Venusians and their prisoners emerged from the black tunnel and came out into the full daylight. The solar adventurers had thought that they were never going to see the sun again. They had believed, in fact, that they were being led along into a great subterranean cavern. They had concluded that these bat-men lived underground.

But they were wrong.

(Continued on page 38.)



## Shock-Headed, Daredevil Rip O' The Flying Mounted In Breathless Detective Work For Scotland Yard.



### RIP O'FARRELL OF THE FLYING SQUAD ON THE TRACK OF **THE SECRET GANG**

IF A STORM HITS YOU—ALL RIGHT. HURRICANE, WHIRLWIND, EARTHQUAKE—ALL RIGHT. BUT RIP O'FARRELL WELL, WHEN THE SPEED POLICEMAN'S ABOUT . . . IF YOU CAN'T BE GOOD, BE CAREFUL.

#### The Man in the Check Suit

**R**IP O'FARRELL, of the Horse Power Police, fingered the ten-shilling note that had been given to him among his change.

"Don't remember who gave you this, I suppose?" he inquired of the assistant behind the shop-counter.

It rustled in Rip's fingers—an excellent imitation of the real thing, and if Rip had not been on the *qui vive* he might have been deceived himself. But there had been word at headquarters of an intensive counterfeiting campaign on the part of some person or persons unknown—someone expert at the game.

"As a matter of fact," said the salesman, "I do remember who gave it to me—a man who was in here only a minute ago. I wouldn't have taken much notice of him, except for two things. When he opened his raincoat to give me that note, he displayed a check suit that made me wish for a pair of smoked glasses; and when he handed it across the counter I couldn't help seeing his cuff-links. There was some ugly Chinese design on them—"

A sudden commotion rose in the street outside. Under the rumble of the traffic the two in the shop heard a voice shouting angrily, then a motor-engine started up, and an instant later a big, powerful touring-car streaked past. By then Rip O'Farrell was hastening towards the door.

On the pavement, a few paces to the left of him, sprawled the figure of a man. Rip ran to him and helped him to his feet.

"They've got my car," the man was babbling. "I saw them climbin' into it as I came out of a shop—"

He checked, for the first time realising that the stalwart youngster who had helped him to his feet was a police constable.

Rip was in the act of turning from him towards a solo motor-bike that stood by the kerb a yard or two away—the big Paramount Super-Eight that was almost a pal to the red-haired cop.

"I'll get your car back for you," the youngster shouted over his shoulder.

He sprang into the saddle of the bike, and as he did so he realised that the victim of the robbery was beside him—a big man, with a heavy, brutal face that had gone curiously flaccid all at once.

"Don't bother, constable," he said hoarsely. "Guess I can afford to lose the car, and those fellows might do you some harm, anyway."

Rip laughed, a little grimly. "Good of you to be anxious on my account," he jerked out, "but I've got my duty to do!"

With that he kicked the starter and slid away in low gear.

There was a bump on the pillion behind him that set the machine swaying wildly, so that Rip had his work 'out out to avoid a crash. Then a voice sounded in his ear, the voice of the man he was out to help.

"I'm coming with you!" it said, and Rip realised that the fellow had sprung on to the back of the machine.

It was not Rip's wish to carry him as a passenger, but already the stolen car was lost in the stream of traffic ahead, and any further delay might mean a clear getaway for the thieves.

Higher up the street Rip contented himself, in passing, with a few words of instruction yelled to a policeman who stood on a corner, thereby starting the machinery of officialdom.

Through the traffic ahead he glimpsed, every now and then, the big tourer he was pursuing. It was being driven at a crazy pace through the busy



streets by a man who rivalled Rip as far as road-sense and skill were concerned.

Defly, Rip twisted and swayed through the stream of cars, buses and vans, overtaking vehicle after vehicle, but as defly the driver of the tourer wound his way forward, counterbalancing the advantage which the smaller machine possessed.

They left the suburbs for the open country beyond South London; and here, on a wide road that was almost empty, a test of speed was begun.

The touring-car was fast. As the "speedo" on Rip's handle-bars registered sixty he saw that he was not gaining an inch. Gradually he opened the throttle and watched the needle creep round to *sixty-five—seventy—seventy-five*.

He was gaining now—slowly, but steadily—and the crooks knew it. With his eyes on the swaying, rocking car, Rip saw the driver's confederate glance round anxiously.

Then the man levelled a compact fistful of blue steel—a heavy automatic. Almost simultaneously there was a stab of flame and a bullet whined above Rip's head.

"I told you they were desperate!" the man on the pillion yelled.

Rip did not answer, but he kept the throttle open to the limit and continued to gain. There were only fifty yards between them now.

A second shot, aimed for the front tyre, spurted the dust under the left foot-rest. Other bullets, fired at the machine proved as harmless. Clearly the marksman found it impossible to keep a steady gun-hand in a car that was doing close on seventy miles an hour.

Scarcely thirty yards separated them when Rip raised his voice above the roar of the engine and yelled to his passenger.

"This is where you make yourself useful, after all!" he bawled. "If you can drive the bike."

"Drive anything—from a nail to a bargain!" came the answer, in a harsh, brazen voice that grated on the youngster's ears. He decided that he did not care a great deal for his companion, and preferred to think he was merely doing his duty, rather than helping the fellow.

Rip stood up on the foot-rests. "Can you get into the saddle?" he yelled. Then, as the man, after a long hesitation, made an attempt that set the machine wobbling perilously: "Careful! You'll have us over!"

The man succeeded, and drew a breath of relief as he took his place in the saddle.

In the fugitive car the gunman was busily replenishing his automatic with a fresh clip of cartridges.

Rip, gripping the broad, flat, petrol tank, lifted himself carefully till he was standing upon it, sharing the balance of his body between his hands and feet.

The wind, dragged at him, threatening to tear him from his perilous position and hurl him on to the road; his companion's control on the stroaking bike was desperately shaky; but, stooping there like some little animal poised for a spring, Rip was sphinx-like in his immobility.

They were close to the tail of the touring-car—within five paces—three . . .

The gunman had jammed the clip of cartridges home, was raising the weapon to fire at point-blank range. A light of cruel exultation struggled in his eyes with awe and admiration as he sighted the automatic on the youngster.

Rip jumped, launching himself with all his strength and weight. He seemed to stop dead in mid-air suddenly with the pressure of the howling wind.

Came a stab of flame; the bark of the automatic

that had been levelled at his head. Something hot zipped past his temple.

The gunman knelt on the front seat; his arm was extended rigidly.

But he had no time for another shot. Rip's hurtling form cracked full upon him and sent the gun flying from nerveless fingers.

Swiftly the youngster snatched up the weapon, and an instant later he was covering the crook.

"No tricks!" said Rip grimly. "And you can tell the driver to pull up, unless he wants a bullet in the back of his skull."

The tourer drew to a standstill, and as it did so the Paramount Super-Eight, with Rip's companion in the saddle, pulled in, alongside it.

The crooks descended, with their arms aloft. Rip made to follow them—and it was as he fumbled with the door that the ruffians saw their chance.

The gun in Rip's hand had wavered when the one who had driven the auto sprang at the youngster. A huge brute of a man, gross and gigantic; but he moved swiftly enough and, jumping to the running-board, he lashed out with all his might.

The blow took Rip unawares, and he went reeling back into the car.

On the other side of the vehicle Rip's companion had lifted the Paramount on to its stand, and now with a snarling cry he turned. But the crooks ignored him. Satisfied that no shot would follow them, they wheeled and darted into a thick range of gorse on the right of the road.

They had vanished entirely when Rip recovered—to find the owner of the car studying him with eyes that were oddly narrow.

Shakily, Rip descended. "I guess we've lost those birds—for the time being," he began, then paused.

He had caught sight of something under the dashboard of the car—a queer, box-like arrangement with a number of insulated leads connecting it, presumably, to the engine. Curiously, Rip bent over to study it.

"Yes, the birds got clean away. But why worry?" It was the voice of the car's owner, and, glancing at him, Rip saw that his thin lips were twisted into a grin.

"I reckon you got my auto back for me all right, constable," the man went on, "an' I'd like to give you something for yourself."

"No tips, thanks," said Rip; but the fellow, unbuttoning his top-coat, thrust a hand into his trouser-pocket.

And then Rip stared, for underneath the light raincoat the man was wearing a loud check suit.

"No tips?" he was saying. "No. . . . But what about a tap—with this!"

Like lightning his hand came free with a stocky length of lead piping. Rip O'Farrell tried to fling himself backward; but, before he could move, the weapon had crashed down on his head, and with a moan he crumpled.

### The Clue of the Flash Cuff-Link

GRADUALLY, Rip became conscious of a furious throbbing at his temples and the prickly discomfort of a clump of gorse into which he must have been dragged bodily.

He struggled from the tangle of vegetation, and almost immediately found himself standing by the roadside. The touring-car had gone, which did not surprise him; but his Paramount Super-Eight had vanished also, and that was an unlooked-for blow.

A search for it proved fruitless, and Rip resigned himself to "hoofing it." Yet he had taken only half-a-dozen paces when something lying on the ground caught his eye.



It was a small enamel disc bearing a Chinese design—obviously part of a broken cuff-link; and as he looked at it Rip recalled that shop-assistant's words.

He recalled something else—vaguely. As he had fallen under the car-owner's treacherous blow he had clutched blindly, and his grip must have fastened on the man's sleeve. The cheap, flashy link had probably broken to the strain.

Rip pocketed his "find" and started on his way once more.

It was evening now and the road was almost deserted. He had been walking for twenty minutes before he heard a motor-engine and, glancing back, saw a big lorry swinging round a bend.

He stopped it for a lift, and the man at the wheel cheerfully obliged.

The big, lumbering vehicle seemed to travel at a snail's pace in comparison to Rip's Paramount Super-Eight, but though the youngster chafed at their slow progress he had reason to be thankful for it before they had gone ten miles.

through to my headquarters the first chance you get and give them a message."

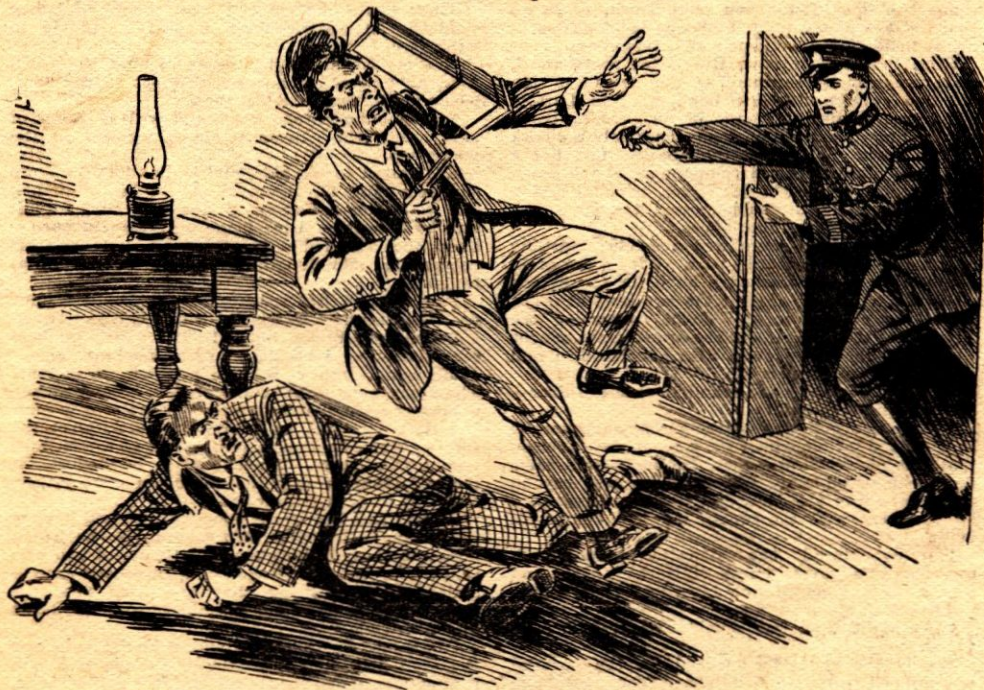
A minute later the lorry was lumbering on its way once more, while Rip was returning to the side-road.

He started along it. The surface of the by-way was loose and registered numberless cart-tracks, but among them were the marks of a car.

Rip also noticed the tyre-marks of a motor-bike, and he drew a breath as he saw that they corresponded to the pattern of those on his own machine.

Scanning the ground he went forward at the double, and he had covered a distance of no more than a mile when he came to a pair of dilapidated iron gates. Beyond them was a weed-grown drive, leading to the front door of a gaunt, rambling house, and, half-screened by a tangle of shrubbery that fringed the drive, the youngster glimpsed the outlines of the touring-car.

The gloom was deepening now and, keeping to the shrubbery, Rip made his way towards the house. As he did so he saw a light start up in a top-floor window.



**RIP'S RIOTOUS REVERSAL!**—Gambling everything Rip flung the pedestal full at the armed crook. Harker went cannoning helplessly back against the table.

For, as they laboured past a side-turning on the left, Rip saw something that gleamed amid the dust.

He told the driver to pull up, and, dropping from the lorry, he darted down the side-turning—and picked up the other half of that broken cuff-link.

It was easy for Rip to figure out what had happened. The man in the check suit had branched off here in his car, hanging his arm over the edge of the car to signal his intentions to following traffic, perhaps. The broken link had dropped before he had got his arm inside again. . . .

Rip ran back to the lorry-driver. "There's something you might do for me," he said. "Phone

He stood listening for a moment outside the shattered pane of a ground-floor window. Then very cautiously he raised the sill and slipped inside.

Warily he examined the ground floor, but the rooms were obviously empty. He made his way up a broad staircase, and at the top of the lofty flight he paused as he heard the sound of a voice.

It came from a room on his left, and the door of that room was slightly open. In the light of an oil-lamp standing on a table Rip saw the figures of two men—the flashy individual who had struck him down with the length of lead piping and the gigantic ruffian who had driven the stolen auto.



The former was seated. The latter stood over him with a levelled revolver, and he it was who spoke.

"Thought you'd got away with it, Blanchard, did you—after you'd 'outed' the cop," he snarled. "Well, that's where you made your mistake, for we doubled back in time to see you drive off in the car, an' we followed you on the cop's bike. You know the rest—an' you know what to expect! You heard me tell Seth to head for Town an' bring the gang. Well, they're goin' to see how I deal with you, so that none o' them will care to follow your lead an' double-cross Mike Harker."

At the sinister meaning in the giant's voice Blanchard's face was suddenly drained of colour. Harker went on.

"You can start sayin' your prayers, Blanchard, for I ain't the one to overlook what you done. I made you my right-hand man after the 'bulls' nabbed Barton for murder an' hanged him, an' how did you play up to me? Deserted the gang an' pinched Barton's invention!"

He glanced around the room. "Pretty nifty hang-out you chose," he went on. "We never thought o' lookin' for you outa Town. But we heard o' the phony notes that was bein' passed in South London, an' we kept watch there."

Close to the door now, Rip heard every word, and the mystery surrounding the events of the afternoon was a little less baffling. And Barton. The name recalled the case of an inventor-crook who had met his death on the gallows only a month or two back. It seemed that Barton had left a legacy to his underworld companions in the shape of something evolved by his cleverness, criminal brain; and Blanchard had double-crossed the gang and taken that something unto himself.

Within the room there was a sudden startling movement—on Blanchard's part. With a desperate impulse the crook streaked a hand for the other's gun-wrist, and in an instant the two were at grips. Yet there was never any doubt concerning the outcome of the struggle, for the armed giant caught Blanchard about the waist with his free arm and flung him clean over his hip.

Twisting, Harker came round to face the door—and saw Rip O'Farrell!

The crook's gun was covering the youngster all at once, and for a moment the three made a tableau that was almost statuesque. Harker near a table that held an oil-lamp, Rip crouching just beyond the threshold of the door, and Blanchard crumpled on the floor, with the breath knocked out of his body.

Rip considered the situation—considered, especially, the steady barrel of Harker's gun—and then a sidelong glance drew his attention to a little pedestal that stood nearby.

Rip's right arm was outside Harker's line of vision.

Warily the youngster reached for the pedestal and gripped it by one of its rests. Then, gambling everything, he flung it with all his force through the doorway.

It struck Harker full in the face, and back he went to cannon against the table. The table went over and Rip heard the explosion of the oil-lamp—muffled under the crook's gross body.

In the black darkness, Rip dived for the spot where Harker's gun had fallen from nerveless fingers. He grabbed it and sprang back to the door as a scrambling movement told him that Blanchard was rising to his feet.

He made out the ruffian's dim shape, and: "Get back to your chair, Blanchard!" he jerked. "I've got you covered—"

He broke off. There was a sudden commotion below and a swift rush of feet on the stairs. Desperately, Rip glanced about him, but before he could make a definite move men were bundling into the room.

A voice sounded behind him. "We heard a crash, Boss! What happened?"

In the darkness they took him for Harker. Rip realised that he had got to play up to the deception to gain time.

He mastered his voice, lending it a hoarseness that was a fair impersonation of Harker's.

"I've got you covered, Blanchard," he ground out. "One movement—one word from you—an' it's your last!" He was warning Blanchard that he would be the first to die if he called his bluff.

Through the darkness Rip could just make out the upturned table. It hid Harker, lying there amid the fragments of the oil-lamp. To Harker's men Rip said:

"Blanchard tried to make a getaway—"

He stopped short. From the direction of the upturned table came a heavy groan, followed by a curse, in Harker's voice.

There was a moment of tensest silence, and then suddenly an electric torch flashed startlingly in Rip's face.

Rip moved like lightning—snatching the torch from an unseen hand and dashing it to the floor, where it shattered and went out.

Pandemonium broke loose, and with a chorus of angry yells the gangsters surged forward at the young cop.

Rip darted to the side, and as he did so a figure slid past him, the figure of one of his assailants. The youngster lashed out at the man, and felt his bunched knuckles drive home on flesh and bone—knew that the fellow went staggering among his companions and flung them into momentary confusion.

Pantherishly, Rip sprang towards the door, but near the threshold he whirled with a cry.

"Come on, Flying Squad! The gang's all here for a clean-up! Lock the door and wade into 'em!" Bluff again, but it worked flawlessly this time. The angry yells of the counterfeiter became shouts of consternation; and for sixty wild, riotous seconds Rip darted to and fro round the outskirts of the surging, dim-seen bunch, lashing out at a man here and a man there. Then, with a last effort, he plunged clean through the mix-up of men, hitting out right and left as he went.

There was a key in the door. Rip turned it upon the yelling mob. But before he did so he had a notion of them fighting tooth and nail—of two who rolled upon the floor locked in each other's arms—and of a gross figure that rose from near the upturned table and launched himself into the heart of the struggle.

Rip turned for the stairs, and as he did so he saw the front door open—saw the dim shape of a man running out across the threshold. It was Blanchard.

At top speed the youngster raced down the stairs, but as he pelted on to the drive he saw Blanchard vanishing through the gates in his tourer.

Another car stood nearby—the car that had brought Harker's gang from Town—but Rip ignored it, for resting on its stand alongside the automobile was his own Paramount Super-Eight.

An instant later Rip was in the saddle and streaking along the drive.

At the iron gates he glanced back towards the window of the room where he had left the tricked gangsters, and he grinned as he thought of them fighting there in the darkness. They were behind

(Continued on Page 36.)



**A Topping Tale of a Terrific Invention. Special to Chaps Who Laugh!**



Mike made it out of an Old Bike, some rusty nails, a few old tomato cans, and what not. But talk of Major Seagrave's Sunbeam, he fed it on petrol, and it was a demon to go.

### The Runaway.

MICHAEL FARADAY WATTS beamed through his thick lenses at his chum, Bob Nugent. "Here," he said, proudly, "is my greatest triumph."

The chums were standing in the doorway of the small shed which served the boy inventor as a workshop. Within was a weird machine which bore a faint resemblance to a motor-cycle. But it was far bigger than the normal motor-bike, having a bulging cylindrical body. There was a propeller in front, and in addition to the ordinary driving and steering apparatus there was a bewildering array of levers and knobs the mere sight of which gave Bob Nugent a headache.

Michael Faraday gloated over the monstrosity, and explained: "It is a combination of a motor-cycle, a flying machine and a mechanical navy. As an instrument of war it would be exceedingly deadly, for it could dash through the enemy's ranks, firing a machine-gun as it went, fly over their heads and bomb them, or trench itself in next to no time."

"What are you going to do with it?" asked Bob faintly.

"Present it to the War Office," Mike answered, and beamed with gratification. "But first I must thoroughly test it. So far it has not left my laboratory. You shall accompany me on a trial run."

Bob Nugent had had enough experience of Mike's inventions to make him wary, for they usually ended in disaster. He hastily declined the honour which the boy inventor proposed to bestow upon him.

"Thanks, old man, but I'd rather not," he said. "I . . . I'm not feeling very well. I'm rather bilious this morning, and . . ."

"Tut, tut!" Mike said, severely. "You astonish me. Here is an invention which may be of incalculable value to our country, and when I desire your assistance in perfecting it you refuse merely because of a slight indisposition. I insist upon your co-operation."

He spoke so firmly that Bob Nugent gave way to him, as he usually did. But it was with a premonition of disaster that he climbed into the seat which Michael Faraday indicated, and strapped himself to it.

Mike mounted in front of him and busied himself with the controls. For several minutes nothing happened, except that the boy inventor got very

red in the face and rather flustered. Then there was a terrific explosion that nearly jerked Bob out of his seat. The next instant the machine hurtled through the doorway, dashed ruthlessly across a bed of choice geraniums, and hauled itself at the wooden fence at the end of the garden. The flimsy fence crashed down, and a piece of paling smote Bob smartly over the head, temporarily dazing him.

When he recovered sufficiently to realise what was happening he found that they were on the main road leading to Market Hunstan, flying along at a pace that made it difficult for him to breathe.

"Slow her down a bit, or you'll be arrested for dangerous driving!" he yelled.

Mike turned a worried, perspiring face to him for an instant, and screamed back in a breathless voice: "That is what I am endeavouring to do, but the controls refuse to act."

"You burbling idiot!" Bob roared. "Do you mean to say you can't stop the thing?"

"I . . . I fear that is the case," Mike answered, nervously.

Bob uttered a groan, and hung on to his seat for grim life, fervently wishing that he had been more firm in his refusal to take part in the trial run.

Down the steep hill that leads to the crowded little town of Market Hunstan they swooped, leaving flustered, indignant passers-by yelling angrily after them. They were near the bottom of the incline when Mike and Bob uttered simultaneous gasps of dismay. Where the country road joins the High Street a broad, blue-coated back was turned to them, and a podgy hand held out. It was P.C. Sludge on point duty. There was rarely any need for him to control the traffic in the sleepy little country town, but P.C. Sludge was a conscientious officer, with an eye to promotion, and periodically he held people up under the impression that thereby he was controlling the traffic passing into the town.

"Stop the brute!" Bob yelled.

"I . . . I can't!" Mike screamed back.

"Hey, hey, hey! Get out of the way!" Bob yelled, desperately.

The P.C. treated them with a lordly disdain, imagining they were merely insolent motorists who objected to being stopped. In fact he did not so much as look round, until the machine was almost on him. Then, glancing over his shoulder and perceiving his danger, he uttered a yelp of horror and tried to leap clear. But it was too late; the machine butted him violently in the rear, and, turning a somersault, he landed in a deep ditch.



The accident caused Mike to lose control of the steering, and the monstrosity swerved aside and hurled itself into a duck-pond by the side of the road. It was a shallow pond, covered with a scum of green slime, and the machine ploughed its way through it without a halt and climbed out the other side, scattering a host of squawking ducks.

A young tidal-wave of foul water swept over the chums and drenched them to the skin. Being strapped in they retained their seats, and, dripping slime and water, sped on obliquely across a small common that encircles Market Hunstan. Then Mike made a last effort to stop the machine, but only succeeded in turning it back to the road, and it went roaring along the High Street.

### The Monster Runs Amok.

TO say that their progress along the narrow, winding High Street of Market Hunstan created a sensation is to give no adequate idea of what happened. People crossing the road skipped out of the way with yelps of fright; drivers of vehicles had the shock of their lives as the Monster flashed by with a roar and rattle of machinery; and a dozen times Mike narrowly avoided colliding with other vehicles.

They flashed into the Market Square, where farmers were engaged in leisurely bargaining one with another. Instantly pandemonium reigned. The crowd scattered in all directions, chickens fluttered wildly, sheep, pigs and cattle stampeded. The Monster added to the confusion by overturning a stall of vegetables and fruit, shooting the wares high into the air, whence they descended like fantastic hailstones.

When the Monster roared out of the market-place it left behind an angry, bellowing mob.

Near the outskirts of Market Hunstan they came to a big mansion, which was the property of Mr. Silas Swales, one of the town's most prosperous tradesmen. Mr. Swales was a Town Councillor, and he had hopes of being elected mayor. In furtherance of this civic ambition he was giving a garden party in the extensive grounds of his house. The road outside was crowded with motor cars, at the sight of which Mike's eyes nearly popped out of his head with horror. He made another effort to stop the machine, and produced a nerve-shaking roar and a cloud of pungent fumes. Then the Monster swerved and dashed through the open gates of the mansion and ploughed its way across the broad, level lawn, which was the apple of Mr. Swales' eye.

The guests who had been strolling politely about the lawn, or sitting beneath small sun-shades erected over tables, scattered with yelps of fear.

Across the lawn the Monster streaked, its passage marked by two broad ruts, as though a tractor had passed that way. And then Mike uttered an exclamation of horror, for they were heading for a big marquee which Silas Swales had had erected as a refreshment bar for his guests. The boy inventor pulled frantically at his levers and knobs, and at last the Monster was partially responsive.

A pair of planes swung out from its bloated body, and it soared off the ground like an overgrown chicken trying to fly. But it did not rise sufficiently high to miss the marquee, and crashed into the top of it, bringing it down in ruin.

Strapped to their seats, the chums were helpless, and almost smothered in the folds of canvas. Fumbling wildly among his controls, Michael Faraday Watts pressed the knobs which converted the machine into a mechanical navy, and two big spades thrust out from the forepart of its body and slashed out

energetically, cutting the marquee to ribbons. In a short while the machine had fought its way free of the debris, and went staggering on its way.

A very dishevelled Mike pulled at the controls again, and the machine suddenly halted and started to entrench itself in the middle of one of Mr. Silas Swales' most treasured flower-beds. The spades worked furiously, hurling plants and earth to right and left. Silas Swales, who was rushing forward shouting wrathfully at the sight of the destruction, received a moist clod in the middle of his face, and it spread out, blotting out his features. He sat down abruptly, and the Monster hurled a continuous shower of earth over him, as though determined to bury him. Mr. Swales roared feebly, until a mouthful of geranium roots choked his further utterance.

Some of the guests endeavoured to run to his assistance, but the machine put up such a barrage of earth that they were driven back, bruised and dishevelled. Mr. Swales struggled amid the soft earth rather like a bloated fly trapped in a pot of jam.

"Stop it!" Bob panted, hysterically. He had a horrible vision of being tried for the murder of Mr. Swales. "Stop it, you chump!"

Michael Faraday tugged at a lever, the shovels disappeared, there was another terrific explosion, and a cloud of blue fumes enveloped the Monster. Then, with a triumphant roar, it dashed forward once again and plunged into a big rhododendron bush. Mike and Bob Nugent had a painful ten seconds; then the Monster broke through the bush, dashed on, and escaped from the grounds by a rear gate.

Hunstan Woods were a quarter of a mile away, and the machine headed for them along a narrow road, with Mike still vainly trying to stop it. Into the woods it blundered, swerved suddenly off the roadway, plunged through some thick bushes, and slithered into a fairly deep hole. Then, as though the shock had deranged the machinery, it suddenly ceased working.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE chums unstrapped themselves, and scrambled clear of the machine.

"You blithering chump!" Bob said ferociously as he felt his many bruises. "We're jolly lucky to have escaped alive. You . . . you oughtn't to be allowed to be at large. You're a public danger! If I ever mix myself up with your blessed inventions again I'll deserve all that I get."

Michael Faraday Watts blinked reproachfully at him.

"Dear me!" he murmured, sadly. "You are most unreasonable. I admit that the trial run has not been a complete success; nevertheless . . ."

"Complete success!" Bob hooted. Then he broke off abruptly and stared along the road towards Market Hunstan. An inspector and three constables had just come in sight.

"Jemini!" Bob gasped. "They're after us. Quick! Get back into the hole out of sight."

Mike needed no second exhortation, and they both dived back into the hole and crouched there, peering through the screen of bushes at the police officers.

They approached to within about twenty yards of the chums' hiding-place. Then the inspector pointed to a fallen tree that sprawled down a steeply sloping bank which overhung the road. Followed by his men, he mounted the slope, and together they rolled the trunk down into the road, so that it was almost completely blocked to traffic.

As Bob and Mike continued to watch this



unexpected behaviour, sorely puzzled by it, they heard the inspector say: "The bank-thieves are desperate men, remember. They'll almost certainly have firearms, and they won't hesitate to use them. The gang has been responsible for three murders already, so give them no chances."

"Jove!" Bob said in an excited whisper to his companion. "They must be waiting for those motor thieves who have committed several bank robberies in broad daylight lately, and got away in a fast car. Perhaps they have carried out another raid in Wyckby, and the police there have telephoned to Hunstan to say they are coming this way."

Scarcely had he finished speaking when the chums heard the hum of approaching motor engines, and shortly afterwards a powerful touring car swung into view round a bend in the road, and raced towards the ambush."

It was almost upon the tree trunk before the driver pulled up with a jerk. There were four men in the car.

The moment it stopped the police rushed out of their hiding-places, and threatening the crooks with revolvers, tried to board the car. But the desperadoes ignored their threats, and snatching out revolvers themselves, fired. The inspector dropped to the roadway, and a constable was knocked back stunned and bleeding as he tried to climb aboard. Then the thieves poured out of the car and hurled themselves upon the officers. In less time than it takes to tell, they had knocked another man senseless. Then, whilst two of them assaulted the remaining constable, the others tried to shift the trunk.

Up to this instant events had happened so swiftly the chums had been too startled and horrified to intervene. But now Bob Nugent scrambled up to the roadway, and ran forward. Mike also took a hand, and his faith in his fighting-machine not having been shaken by the series of disasters which had attended the trial spin, he scrambled into the driver's seat, and jerked the starting lever.

With an explosive roar, and amid a cloud of poisonous smoke, the monstrosity shot up out of the

hole, and on to the roadway. Straight at the thieves it rushed.

In his excitement Mike pulled the lever which converted the thing into a mechanical navy, and instantly the shovels came into operation and began to hurl stones and earth at the desperadoes.

It must have been an unnerving experience for them to be thus attacked in the rear by a monster that was enveloped in clouds of choking blue smoke. They fled, uttering startled cries—all except one, that is, who was knocked half-senseless by a stone which smote him over the head. The inspector, who had not been seriously injured, also pounced on another and collared him.

Thereafter, roaring like a steam engine, Mike's Marvel set to work excavating with such a will, it appeared to have an ambition to dig its way through to the Antipodes. It didn't stop until it had nearly buried itself.



**MICHAEL'S MONSTER GETS GAY.**—The strange machine began to entrench itself in one of Mr. Swales' flower beds, and the irate councillor rushed forward. He received a clod of earth full in the face.

**WITHOUT** their car the bandits were helpless, and the whole gang was rounded up within a short time. Mike and Bob became heroes of the hour, and people took a tolerant view of their previous escapades in Market Hunstan. In fact, wisacres predicted a brilliant future for the boy inventor.

Nothing further has come of the Monster. Its remains were unearthed and removed to Mike's workshop, and some day he intends to reconstruct it. But for the time being he is too busy with other brain-waves.

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**THE SECRET GANG—***(Continued from page 32.)*

a door that would take some battering down when eventually they discovered how they had been fooled, and a thirty-foot drop from the window to the hard, stony drive was something that called for a second thought.

Beyond the gates Rip swung to the left after the fugitive Blanchard.

He could see the tail-light of the tourer a couple of hundred yards ahead, but inside ten minutes the distance had been decreased to fifty yards, and, a few seconds later, touching sixty-five, Rip drew level.

They were in open country now, and to the right the ground fell away in a sharp decline of a hundred feet or more. Rip, racing along on the off-side, yelled to Blanchard.

"Pull up, you scug, I've got you covered!"

In his right hand he carried Harker's automatic, and even as he spoke he trained it on the crook.

Blanchard looked at him sidelong, with a desperate gleam in his eyes, and then all at once he yawed on the steering in a murderous attempt to crowd Rip over the drop.

With a split second to spare Rip anticipated the move, and switched the throttle open to the limit. The Paramount Super-Eight answered faithfully—streaking clear ahead even as the car's bonnet swerved out to hurl her off the brink.

Behind Rip there was a queer, strangled scream, and in a swift backward glance he saw Blanchard. With the needle on the sixty mark the tourer was beyond his control, and suddenly her offside wheels were over the edge.

Toppling, she went to her doom, hurtling over and over on the steep slope. . . .

When Rip reached the foot of that slope he found the battered machine lying on her side, with Blanchard crushed and lifeless beneath her.

He was on the point of turning away when he realised that the engine was still running, and almost in the same instant he realised something else; the meaning of that box-like arrangement he had noticed under the dashboard.

A shutter in the front of it had sprung open to reveal a mass of complicated machinery that was moving, piston fashion, with the revolutions of the engine; and into a kind of till underneath the machinery crisp, brand-new treasury notes were rapidly falling.

Barton's invention. A counterfeiting machine run off the car's engine and turning out phony notes by the dozen. That had been Barton's legacy to the garg. . . .

Fifteen minutes later Rip found himself back at the gates of the house Blanchard had rented, and he was passing those gates when a familiar voice hailed him from the drive—the voice of a member of the Flying Squad.

"Hello, O'Farrell," its owner greeted Rip, as the youngster pulled up. "Where the deuce have you been? We got your message and came looking for a regular rough-and-tumble; but when we broke in we found half of a lively gang of murderous ruffians fighting among themselves, and the other half lying on the floor k.o.

Whereupon Rip grinned knowingly. "Just a little bluff, old-timer, and it came off better than I expected."

Jimmy Brent in the Jungle Next Week.

**THE PLANET SCHOOLBOYS—***(Continued from page 28.)*

For once again they had come out into the sunlight, and they stared about them in wonder and awe. What was this place? Where were they? What was the nature of this new world?

They seemed to be in a vast rock basin—an unbelievably great cup in the mountain. On every side towered up the rock walls, reaching up and up into the illimitable heavens. And such was the effect of this Canyon-like place that the daylight was only weak. At one spot the sunshine slanted in, but everywhere else there were shadows. And all round those rock walls were holes—cave entrances. Bat-men were there by the score—and, perhaps, bat-women, too. Who could tell?

At all events, the explorers were forced to a startling conclusion.

This was a Venusian township!

On the far side of the rock floor there was a big assembly of the Venusians. There must have been thousands of these strange creatures. But one of them was very different from all the others. He was bigger—towering twenty feet in height. And he was of a lighter colour, too—a strange, brownish-greenish hue. And he stood apart, on a kind of circular platform. Evidently, he was a superior being to the others.

But between the explorers and this Venusian monarch there was something which caused the schoolboys to stare in wonder and apprehension. In the centre of the rock floor a great pool bubbled and glowed. Yes, glowed. For this pool was of liquid fire—flaming, smoking, molten fire!

As the prisoners approached, in the grip of their captors, they felt the heat surging upon them like something solid. It was well-nigh unbearable—suffocating, deadly. The Venusians, however, did not seem to notice this heat. They were not affected by it in any way.

"We shall be killed if they take us much closer!" panted Billy Ward, in alarm. "Oh! Can't we tell them? It's blinding me—it's scorching my face! This heat is— Oh! I can't bear it!"

The others were crying out, too, for they were getting closer and closer to that volcanic pool. It was like going near to a blazing building, only the intensity of the fire was a hundredfold worse.

Perhaps the Venusians realised that this heat was distressing the prisoners. At all events, they suddenly altered their course, and took a much wider circle round the molten pool.

"Thank goodness!" panted Don Masters. "I thought we were going to be burned alive!"

"Absolutely!" said the Hon. Freddie Trevor. "I mean to say, this thing is getting a bit too steep, what? I'm a bit of a lad for excitement, but one can have rather too much of a good thing."

"They're going to kill us!" muttered Don, huskily. "What's the good of trying to fool ourselves, Freddie? They've only brought us here, so that they can kill us."

And the others felt the same way. What chance had they of escape? What possibility was there that they could ever reach home again? Home! It was a mockery to even think of dear old Mother Earth—and England—and Essex—and Castleton School!

Can it be that death at the hands of these awful animal hordes is going to end the Professor and his comrades' wonderful mission? Don't miss next week's marvellous instalment.